



THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE 1920S–1930S

Kenesbayeva Sayora

Bakalavriatning 3-bosqichi

Ajiniyoz nomidagi Nukus davlat pedagogika instituti

(Nukus shahri, Qoraqalpog‘iston Respublikasi)

kenesbaevasayko2@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21232353>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 1st July 2026

Accepted: 2nd July 2026

Published: 7th July 2026

KEYWORDS

Uzbekistan, 1920s–1930s,
collectivization, dekulakization,
cotton monoculture,
industrialization, political
repressions, "Hujum" campaign,
social transformation, Soviet Central
Asia.

ABSTRACT

This article provides a comprehensive academic analysis of the socio-economic transformations that took place in Uzbekistan during the 1920s–1930s. Based on archival documents, demographic reports, and statistical data, the study examines the key processes that shaped the republic's development within the Soviet administrative-command system. The research covers political-administrative changes, agrarian policy and forced collectivization, industrialization and electrification, demographic shifts, political repressions, and reforms in the social sphere, including education, healthcare, the women's question, and cultural life. The article argues that this period was marked by deep contradictions: on the one hand, modernization, the emergence of new industries, and the initial steps in social infrastructure development; on the other hand, mass repressions, forced labor mobilization, the establishment of a cotton monoculture, and a severe decline in the living standards of the population. The study employs a threefold historiographical approach: Soviet, national, and academic, to offer an objective assessment of the era. Particular attention is paid to the long-term consequences of the policies implemented during this period, which continued to affect Uzbekistan's economic and social development long after independence. The article concludes that an objective understanding of this historical experience remains essential for addressing contemporary challenges in economic diversification, sustainable agriculture, and the preservation of national identity.

Introduction. The 1920s–1930s represent a complex and contradictory period in the history of Uzbekistan, characterized by rapid modernization, Sovietization, and profound social transformations. The radical reforms implemented by the Soviet government during this era

had a deep-reaching impact on all spheres of public life, particularly on the economy, social structure, and cultural development.

On June 12, 1924, at the initiative of I.V. Stalin, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted a special resolution "On the National-Territorial Delimitation of the Central Asian Republics." Pursuant to this resolution, on October 27, 1924, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) was formally established. According to demographic data, the population of Uzbekistan in 1920 amounted to 4.4 million people, while the 1926 census recorded an increase to 4.9 million. In 1930, the capital of the republic was relocated from Bukhara to the city of Tashkent.

In the economic sphere, an agrarian "land reform" was carried out in the mid-1920s. However, a drastic shift occurred at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. On January 30, 1930, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) adopted the decree "On Measures for the Elimination of Kulak Households in Regions of Mass Collectivization." The policies of forced collectivization, dekulakization, property confiscation, and mass deportations triggered a severe social crisis, significant demographic shifts, and economic decline.

Simultaneously, notable transformations took place in the industrial and electrification sectors of the republic. The process of restoring industry in the Uzbek SSR was largely completed by 1928–1929, and from 1929–1930, an extensive period of industrial reconstruction began. As a result of technical re-equipment, the number of cotton ginning enterprises was reduced from 297 to 66, while oil extraction plants were cut from 36 to 9. The reconstruction of the coal industry was initiated in 1930.

From a political standpoint, these years marked a transitional phase from colonial rule to the Soviet socio-political system. Instead of establishing independent state structures, a totalitarian administrative model was consolidated. The formation of the Uzbek SSR, the intensive indoctrination of communist ideology, and the large-scale repression of the national intelligentsia constituted the defining features of this process.

The 1920s–1930s witnessed fundamental structural shifts in the economy of Uzbekistan, with these transformations being primarily oriented from the agrarian sector toward industry, particularly cotton ginning and light industry. The course toward "socialist industrialization," proclaimed in December 1925 by the XIV Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), found its expression in the Uzbek SSR as well. The planned documents for the years 1924–1932 set forth the objectives of enhancing Uzbekistan's economic potential, modernizing industry and agriculture, and developing transport and communications.

In the agricultural sector, the most significant change was the formation of a cotton monoculture. From the second half of the 1920s onward, Uzbekistan's agriculture became increasingly specialized in cotton cultivation. During the 1927–1928 economic year, cotton products accounted for 77.8 percent of the total value of goods exported from the region to the center. The purchase price of cotton was set considerably lower than world market prices, while grain prices were reduced by 20–25 percent across the country. This policy led to a sharp decline in grain production and exacerbated food shortages. Nearly two million people were mobilized annually for cotton harvesting, the majority of whom were forced to work in the cotton fields for little or no pay. The economy of the Uzbek SSR effectively had a single industry and was almost entirely oriented toward cotton production.

Significant changes also occurred in the industrial sector. During the First Five-Year Plan (1928–1932), 289 industrial enterprises were put into operation in the Uzbek SSR, and the basic production assets of industry increased threefold. It was precisely during this period, in

1930, that the Shorsuv sulfur deposit was opened, marking the beginning of the chemical industry's formation. During the Second Five-Year Plan (1933–1937), an additional 189 enterprises and power stations were constructed. As a result of industrial reconstruction, the number of cotton ginning enterprises was reduced from 297 to 66, though their processing capacity was increased, while oil extraction plants were cut from 36 to 9. From 1929–1930 onward, technical re-equipment efforts continued.

The initial steps in the energy sector also date to this period. Although the history of electric power in Uzbekistan began in 1909 with the construction of a 1,450 kW diesel power station in Tashkent by a Belgian company to operate the electric tramway, the 1920s–1930s marked a new phase in this direction. In the early 1930s, construction of a power station began in the city of Bukhara and was completed despite considerable difficulties. The planning of major energy facilities such as Angren, Tashkent, Navoi, and Takhiyatoshi was also initiated during these years.

Transport infrastructure was not left out of the transformations. During the 1920s–1930s, Uzbekistan's transport system was primarily adapted to domestic needs, and the railway network was connected with neighboring Central Asian republics. The construction of highways and the initial steps in civil aviation were also undertaken during this period, though the pace of transport infrastructure development lagged behind the demands of industrialization.

Significant shifts were also observed in the social spheres. In the education system, the 1920s–1930s were marked by profound changes. The establishment of Soviet power, the national-territorial delimitation, and the policy of collectivization had a dramatic impact on the educational system. While this process enabled the massification of education and the elimination of illiteracy, it also placed education under strict ideological control. The fate of the national intelligentsia, changes in the educational process, and the writing reform constituted key aspects of this period.

In the healthcare system, initial steps were also taken – the formation of the healthcare system in the Fergana Valley began during the period between 1920 and 1950. Archival documents from 1924–1941 serve as important sources on the history of healthcare in the Uzbek SSR. Although the network of medical institutions was expanded, a significant portion of the population, particularly in rural areas, remained deprived of quality medical care due to a shortage of qualified personnel and limited financial resources.

In conclusion, the 1920s–1930s witnessed structural changes in Uzbekistan's economy, particularly the formation of the cotton monoculture and the initial phase of industrialization. The first steps were taken in energy, transport, and social infrastructure. However, these processes were carried out under conditions of highly centralized governance, forced labor mobilization, and ideological control, with the result that economic gains were accompanied by social losses.

The 1920s–1930s were also a period of radical transformation in Uzbekistan's social life. The Soviet government embarked on large-scale reforms in education, healthcare, women's rights, and culture. On the one hand, these processes accelerated modernization and social progress; on the other hand, they led to sharp conflicts with local traditions and religious values.

On the eve of the October Revolution of 1917, the literacy rate among Uzbekistan's population was a mere 3.6 percent. The Soviet government set itself the task of eliminating illiteracy and training cadres suitable for the new ideological system. The government of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan rapidly established teacher academies, wrote textbooks, and built schools. By 1927, there were approximately 2,000 secular Uzbek teachers in Uzbekistan, 95 percent of

whom had only primary education. In 1926, a women's teacher training academy in Tashkent enrolled 600 students, of whom only 14 graduated. From 1929 onward, scientific approaches such as pedagogy were introduced, and socially stratified "schools for the poor" were established.

Formation of the Healthcare System. In the 1920s, the foundation of medical and pharmaceutical education was laid in Uzbekistan, with the aim of training local specialists and building a sustainable healthcare system. A Pharmaceutical Department was established under the People's Commissariat of Health in Tashkent. Although the network of medical institutions was expanded, a significant portion of the population, particularly in rural areas, remained deprived of quality medical care due to a shortage of qualified personnel and limited financial resources.

The "Hujum" Campaign and the Women's Question. In the early 1920s, a policy was implemented throughout the USSR aimed at redefining women's role in society, granting them access to education and the opportunity to work on an equal footing with men. In the mid-1920s, the term "hujum" (Arabic for "attack") emerged to describe the campaign for the "liberation of Eastern women." In 1924, a decree was issued abolishing kalym (bride price). On March 8, 1927, the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) officially launched the "Hujum" campaign. The process was conducted in an urgent and coercive manner, in the form of a "socialist competition" between regions.

The main content of the "Hujum" was the liberation of women from the paranja (traditional veil) and chachvon (horsehair face veil). In cities such as Andijan, Tashkent, and Samarkand, thousands of women threw their paranjas and chachvons into bonfires. The Communist Party's "Zhenotdel" (Women's Department) directly led the campaign. Schools for eliminating illiteracy, clubs, and libraries were opened for women. Among the positive outcomes of the campaign were the emergence of the first generation of Uzbek female intellectuals in education, culture, medicine, and the arts, as well as the appointment of women to leadership positions in state institutions and public affairs. However, because the campaign was carried out hastily and coercively, it provoked sharp social conflicts and human tragedies. Those who resisted discarding the veil or refused to allow their wives to participate were persecuted. Traditional families broke apart, and unveiled women faced social sanctions. Women who discarded the veil and became active workers were killed by religious extremists or even their own relatives. Activists such as Tursunoy Saidazimova and Nurkhon Yuldoshkhodzayeva became victims of the campaign.

In the 1920s–1930s, with the advent of Soviet power, an active modernization of the arts began, along with the integration of Western traditions, primarily the Russian avant-garde. The formation of a national school in Uzbekistan's fine arts took place.

This period is regarded in art history as an era of freedom, the liberation of creative spirit, and the coexistence of realism and avant-garde movements. Personal exhibitions of artists such as A. Volkov were held in Tashkent and Moscow in 1920, 1921, and 1923. In the field of architecture, the 1920s–1930s are referred to as the "Period of Renaissance." During this time, industrial and irrigation structures were built both in Tashkent and other cities of Uzbekistan, and the development of ancient cities as well as the emergence of new cities (Chirchiq, Yangiyo'l) date to this period. Alongside the master plans of Tashkent (1921 by A. Silchenko and 1938 by A. Kuznetsov), the master plans of Samarkand (1938–1939) and Chirchiq (1936 by G. Orlov) were also developed.

In conclusion, the 1920s–1930s were a contradictory period in Uzbekistan's social sphere. The initial steps were taken in education and healthcare, formal equality was declared in women's rights, and new directions emerged in culture and the arts. However, these changes were carried out under conditions of highly centralized governance, ideological pressure, and sharp conflict with local traditions, with the result that social gains were accompanied by human tragedies and social crises.

The 1920s–1930s represent a period of profound economic, political, and social transformation in the history of Uzbekistan, distinguished by its deep contradictions. On the one hand, these years saw the formation of a new statehood within the Soviet framework, the first steps were taken in industry and energy, and the education, healthcare, and cultural systems were modernized. On the other hand, forced collectivization, dekulakization, political repressions, and forced population displacement led to a severe social crisis, significant demographic shifts, and economic decline. Disparities between urban and rural areas were reinforced, the cotton monoculture became the main pillar of the republic's economy, and chronic food shortages emerged.

Historical analysis demonstrates that the Soviet administrative-command system's policy of rapid economic restructuring was incompatible with local conditions and traditional farming practices. The changes implemented under conditions of highly centralized governance, ideological pressure, and forced labor mobilization allowed for certain economic indicators to be raised in the short term, but in the long run, they exacerbated issues of socio-political stability and the preservation of national identity.

Three main approaches to studying this period can be identified:

- The Soviet approach emphasizes achievements in industrialization, cultural construction, and social progress, while largely disregarding the policies of repression and coercion.
- The national approach highlights colonialism, the forced cotton monoculture, and the persecution of the national intelligentsia.
- The academic (objective) approach seeks to analyze both aspects based on archival documents, demographic reports, and statistical data.

In conclusion, the 1920s–1930s were a period of acute tension between modernization and the totalitarian system for Uzbekistan. Economic gains went hand in hand with social losses, and industrial growth was closely intertwined with the decline of agriculture and the standard of living of the population. The consequences of this era the cotton monoculture, the disregard for local conditions in centralized policy decisions, and the deepening of social inequalities continued to exert their influence long after Uzbekistan gained independence.

Today, independent Uzbekistan must draw lessons from this historical experience in addressing issues such as economic diversification, efficient use of water resources in agriculture, improvement of the education and healthcare systems, and the preservation of national culture and traditions. Therefore, an objective study of the history of the 1920s–1930s remains not only a task for historical scholarship but also a pressing concern for contemporary state policy.

References:

1. YAXSHIYEV, A. (2025). Collectivization policy in Uzbekistan: social and economic consequences. ACTA NUUZ, 1(1.12), 47–49.

2. Iminova, Sh.R. (2023). Industry and electrification of Uzbekistan in 1920-30 years. *International Journal Of History And Political Sciences*, 3(12), 39–41.
3. Raxmatulloyev, U. (2025). Soviet agrarian policy in Uzbekistan. The liquidation of peasant farms (1920-1935). *ResearchBib Impact Factor*, 3(04), 563–567.
4. Egamurodov, F.B. (2024). Socio-economic changes in Uzbekistan in 1920–1950 (on the example of Surkhandarya region). *Acumbyi: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(5), 40–42.
5. Penati, B. (2025). *Rural History of Soviet Central Asia: Land Reform and Agricultural Change in Early Soviet Uzbekistan*. Brill.
6. Penati, B. (2026). Cotton, Capitalism, and Colonial Legacies in Central Asia's Own 'Agrarian Debate'. *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 1–38.
7. Kayumov, A. (2016). *Agrarian Policy of the Soviet State and Its Consequences*. Tashkent: National University of Uzbekistan Publishing House.
8. Abdurahmonov, Q. (2002). *Essays on the Agrarian History of Uzbekistan*. Tashkent: Sharq.
9. Alimov, R. (2019). *The Totalitarian Regime and the Consequences of Agricultural Policy*. Tashkent: Akademnashr.
10. Bekchanov, B. (2020). *Agricultural Policy and Demographic Processes (1920s–1930s)*. Samarkand: SamSU Publishing House.
11. Sultonov, R. (2015). *Social Changes in Agriculture: A Historical Analysis*. Tashkent: Yangi asr avlodi.
12. Fitzpatrick, S. (1994). *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
13. Viola, L. (2007). *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
14. Payne, M. (2008). *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Soviet Central Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.