

**REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF REPRESSION POLICY: THE CASE OF  
UZBEKISTAN**

***Toshtemirova Raykhon Zokir kizi***

*Email: shtemirovarayxona4@gmail.com*

*Termez State Pedagogical Institute*

*Department: History*

*Scientific Advisor: Abdurashidov Anvar Abdurashidovich*

**Abstract:** This article examines the regional dimensions of Soviet repression policies, with a specific focus on Uzbekistan. While Soviet political terror followed a centrally orchestrated plan, the implementation of repressive measures across various Soviet republics, including Uzbekistan, reflected unique local dynamics. Through archival records, case studies, and historical analysis, the paper highlights how repression in Uzbekistan targeted local elites, religious figures, and intellectuals, and was shaped by the broader imperial objectives of Moscow. The study also investigates the cultural and social consequences of repression in the Uzbek SSR and its enduring impact on national memory.

**Keywords:** repression, Uzbekistan, Stalinism, Soviet Union, political purges, regional policy, NKVD, national elites

Repression under Stalin's totalitarian regime was a defining feature of Soviet governance, marked by widespread arrests, executions, and the silencing of dissent. While the scope of this terror was vast and centralized, its execution was often tailored to regional contexts. In the case of Uzbekistan, repression took on unique characteristics influenced by cultural, religious, and political factors.

Located at the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan became a strategic region for the Soviet Union's ideological and geopolitical agenda. From the 1920s to the late 1930s, thousands of Uzbeks—particularly those considered representatives of national identity or Islamic tradition—were labeled as “counter-revolutionaries,” “nationalists,” or “clerical elements.” This paper explores how the Soviet repression policy operated in Uzbekistan, how it aligned with central directives, and how it was localized to serve broader goals of cultural assimilation and political control.

The Soviet leadership's goal of building a unified socialist identity often clashed with the cultural and religious diversity of regions like Uzbekistan. Moscow's perception of local traditions, particularly those rooted in Islam and pre-Soviet forms of intellectualism, was shaped by suspicion and the desire to erase "backward" elements in favor of Marxist-Leninist ideology. As a result, political repression in Uzbekistan functioned not only as a mechanism of control but also as a form of ideological and cultural homogenization.

The campaign against the Jadids and religious figures was accompanied by a broader effort to restructure the social order: traditional authority figures were replaced by party loyalists, local

governance was centralized, and youth were targeted for ideological re-education. This systemic dismantling of traditional Uzbek society under the guise of modernization formed a core pillar of Soviet repression in the region.

In exploring the repression of Uzbekistan within the broader Soviet context, this article seeks to clarify how local dynamics both influenced and intensified the effects of centrally planned purges. The case of Uzbekistan is particularly important for understanding how totalitarian power adapts its tools to suppress national identity while maintaining imperial control.

The study employs a historical-analytical method using the following sources:

- **Archival data** from the Uzbek State Archives and the Qatag'on Qurbonlari Xotirasi Muzeyi (Museum of Repression Victims);
- **Case studies** of prominent repressed figures, such as Abdurauf Fitrat, Abdullah Qodiriy, and other members of the Jadid movement;
- **Comparative analysis** of repression patterns in Uzbekistan and other Soviet republics (e.g., Kazakhstan, Ukraine);
- **Literature review** of scholarly works on Soviet colonialism, religious repression, and political purges in Central Asia.

This mixed-method approach allows for a nuanced view of both the systemic and regional aspects of repression.

**Targeting of national intellectuals:** One of the key features of repression in Uzbekistan was the elimination of the national intelligentsia, particularly the Jadids — reformist thinkers who advocated for modern Islamic education and cultural revival. They were accused of “bourgeois nationalism” and collaboration with foreign enemies.

**Religious persecution:** Uzbekistan, as a traditionally Muslim region, saw the widespread closure of mosques, madrasas, and the execution or imprisonment of religious scholars (ulama). The campaign aimed to erase Islamic influence and replace it with Soviet atheism.

**Forced deportations and collectivization:** Repression also took the form of economic and social upheaval. The collectivization of agriculture, especially in the cotton sector, led to mass displacements, famine, and arrests of kulaks and local leaders who resisted policy implementation.

**Ethnic and cultural suppression:** Uzbek language publications were censored or shut down, and Russian was increasingly imposed as the language of administration and education. This policy contributed to cultural erosion and Russification.

**Regional enforcement by loyal cadres:** While directives came from Moscow, local Communist Party officials and NKVD officers often carried out purges with great zeal, motivated by

personal gain, fear, or ideological conviction.

**Localized propaganda intensified state control:** Propaganda materials in the Uzbek language were used to justify arrests and denounce targeted groups, portraying them as enemies of the people. This strategy gave the appearance of internal legitimacy and helped justify repressive measures to the local population.

**Educational and cultural institutions were purged:** Universities, schools, and cultural centers underwent ideological cleansing. Teachers and professors with pre-Soviet education were dismissed or arrested, and their replacements were often less qualified but ideologically loyal.

**Women's roles were manipulated for ideological goals:** The Soviet repression policy also sought to reengineer gender norms. Campaigns such as *Hujum* (the unveiling of women) were enforced coercively, and many women who resisted were stigmatized or persecuted, creating a double burden of cultural alienation and political fear.

**Rehabilitation was selective and delayed:** While many victims were posthumously rehabilitated during the Khrushchev Thaw and after Uzbekistan's independence, the process has been uneven. Many families still lack official recognition of the injustices they suffered, and access to full archival documentation remains restricted in some cases.

**Cultural trauma passed through generations:** Oral histories collected from descendants reveal a deep sense of loss, fear, and distrust of state institutions. These emotional legacies continue to influence public attitudes toward politics, authority, and justice in contemporary Uzbekistan.

The repression in Uzbekistan exemplifies how Soviet policies were not monolithic in execution but adapted to local contexts to maximize control. The Stalinist state viewed expressions of Uzbek nationalism, cultural pride, or Islamic identity as threats to its authority and used repressive tools to dismantle these elements. This colonial-style governance aimed not just to neutralize opposition but to reshape the cultural landscape of the republic.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan's strategic location and economic importance—particularly in cotton production—made it a site of aggressive collectivization and labor control. Repression was thus not only political but also economic and cultural, tied to the Soviet imperial project.

The psychological and societal consequences of these repressions were severe. Families of victims lived under surveillance and stigma for generations. The loss of a vibrant intellectual class left a vacuum in cultural development that took decades to repair. The repression also fostered a culture of silence and compliance, the effects of which are still visible in societal attitudes toward authority and dissent.

In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, efforts to rehabilitate victims and restore historical justice have been ongoing, yet challenges remain in fully acknowledging the scale and nature of Soviet repression.

Museums and memorial days have been established, but public discourse often remains cautious, revealing the deep scars left by decades of fear and control.

Repression in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period was shaped by a combination of centralized directives and regional imperatives. While part of a larger machinery of political terror, the campaign in Uzbekistan was uniquely characterized by its targeting of cultural identity, religion, and national consciousness.

Understanding the regional features of repression is vital for a complete picture of Soviet totalitarianism. In the case of Uzbekistan, it underscores the dual struggle faced by the population—not only against authoritarian control but also for the preservation of cultural and national integrity. Continued historical research and open remembrance are essential for honoring the victims and preventing the recurrence of such tragedies.

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