



**URBANIZATION IN THE TASHKENT AGGLOMERATION AND
OTHER MAJOR CITIES OF UZBEKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE
HISTORICAL-DEMOGRAPHIC APPROACH**

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Abstract: This thesis compares the historical and demographic trajectories of the Tashkent agglomeration and Uzbekistan's other major urban centres, with Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Fergana Valley cities as comparative cases. It argues that Tashkent's primacy reflects its role as the political and economic capital, Soviet-era industrial and administrative investment, and continued concentration of services. Secondary cities, by contrast, combine long-established regional functions with population growth across wider provincial territories. The comparison also highlights a methodological issue: administrative population counts do not necessarily measure the functional extent of an agglomeration, while changes in settlement classification can alter reported urbanization independently of physical urban growth. Official statistics show that Tashkent city's permanent population passed three million in 2023; this figure describes the city proper and should not be treated as the population of the whole metropolitan area. The study concludes that urban policy and research should compare cities at consistent spatial scales and distinguish demographic growth from administrative and morphological change.

Keywords: urbanization; Tashkent agglomeration; historical demography; secondary cities; Uzbekistan; spatial planning.

Introduction



Urbanization in Uzbekistan is uneven in scale and form. Tashkent is the national capital and the country's dominant metropolitan centre, while Samarkand, Bukhara, Namangan, Andijan, and Fergana serve as important regional centres with distinct historical, economic, and demographic settings. Comparing them requires more than ranking city populations: historical functions, migration, natural increase, administrative boundaries, and links between a city and its surrounding settlements all shape measured urban growth. This thesis uses a comparative historical-demographic approach to identify these differences and to clarify what official population figures can and cannot show.

The analysis is based on published historical scholarship and official statistical series. It treats "Tashkent city" as an administrative unit and "Tashkent agglomeration" as a wider functional urban area whose precise boundary depends on commuting, built-up continuity, and data availability. The distinction matters because the two terms are not interchangeable.

Main body

Tashkent's modern expansion was shaped by successive political and economic transformations. Its pre-Soviet role as a major Central Asian city was followed by incorporation into the Russian imperial and then Soviet administrative systems. During the Soviet period, industrialization, state administration, transport investment, and large-scale reconstruction altered the city's built environment and social composition. Stronski's archival study of 1930–1966 shows how Soviet planning and state priorities reshaped Tashkent into a major regional metropolis [1]. The 1966 earthquake and the subsequent reconstruction further accelerated planned redevelopment. After independence, the capital retained a strong advantage through the concentration of government, higher education, specialized services, and investment. Thus,

Tashkent's growth is not explained by natural population increase alone; it also reflects its position within national institutions and migration networks.

The demographic scale of the capital is clear in official statistics. The Statistics Agency reported a permanent population of 3.0205 million in Tashkent city on 1 October 2023, noting that the city had crossed one million residents in 1960 and two million in 1985 [2]. These milestones document the long-term expansion of the administrative city. They do not, by themselves, establish the population of a wider agglomeration: suburban settlements and commuting links may extend beyond the city boundary. Consequently, any direct comparison between Tashkent and provincial cities should state whether it uses city-proper, district, regional, or functional urban-area boundaries.

The comparison with secondary centres reveals a different urban system. Samarkand and Bukhara have long histories as centres of trade, crafts, learning, and regional administration; modern growth has layered new educational, service, industrial, and tourism functions onto these inherited roles. In the Fergana Valley, a dense network of cities—including Andijan, Namangan, and Fergana—supports a more polycentric pattern than the capital-centred system. These cities are not simply smaller versions of Tashkent: their growth is connected to provincial population concentration, local employment, intercity links, and the demographic dynamics of their surrounding regions. The official statistical information system's urban-population series provides a basis for tracking these territorial differences over time [3].

Two cautions are essential for historical comparison. First, “urban population” may be defined by administrative status rather than by continuous built-up form or economic integration. A settlement's reclassification can increase the official urban share without an equivalent immediate change in its physical landscape. Second, boundaries and statistical categories can change, so apparent growth rates across decades may combine real population change



with changes in measurement. The World Bank's urban-population indicator, sourced from UN estimates and national definitions, is useful for national trends, but its definition should be checked before it is compared with city-level counts [4]. For this reason, the present comparison uses population figures as evidence of scale while interpreting them alongside historical context and settlement geography.

Taken together, the cases suggest a differentiated model of urbanization. Tashkent exhibits strong metropolitan primacy, sustained by national-level functions and cumulative infrastructure investment. Secondary cities retain regional centrality and may experience rapid demographic and spatial expansion, but within a network of several centres rather than a single dominant metropolis. Their trajectories are influenced by local natural increase, migration, economic specialization, and the structure of the surrounding settlement system. This distinction has practical significance: national investment and transport planning should recognize both the capital's metropolitan pressures and the role of regional cities in distributing jobs and services.

Conclusion

The historical-demographic comparison demonstrates that urbanization in Uzbekistan has followed more than one path. Tashkent's growth reflects its transformation into the political, administrative, and economic centre of the country, while Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Fergana Valley cities combine historical regional functions with contemporary demographic and economic change. The capital's 3.0205 million residents in October 2023 refer to Tashkent city proper, not the full agglomeration; this distinction should be maintained in research and planning. A robust comparison therefore requires consistent boundaries, transparent definitions of "urban," and attention to the difference between population growth and changes in administrative

classification. Further research using harmonized census, migration, commuting, and built-up-area data would allow a more precise measurement of the Tashkent agglomeration and its relationship with Uzbekistan's secondary urban network.

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