

## DEMOGRAPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

Research paper/Түпнұсқа мақала/Оригинальная статья

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755\\_SSADH\\_2026\\_1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755_SSADH_2026_1_10)

IRSTI 03.81.35

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## Demographic Features of Kazakhstan: Historical Aspect (1959-1989)

**ABSTRACT.** This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the regional features of demographic development in the Republic of Kazakhstan from 1959 to 1989, based on historical and statistical data. Major processes such as the Virgin Lands campaign, industrialization, collectivization, and internal migration had a significant impact on the ethnic composition of the population, the level of urbanization, and the socio-economic profile of the regions. The study utilizes census data from 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989 to examine in detail the urban-rural population ratio, changes in ethnic structure, natural population growth, and migration dynamics. Based on ethnodemographic characteristics, the territory of Kazakhstan is conditionally divided into four major regions: North-East, Central, Western, and Southern, with specific attention given to each region's developmental traits. The article highlights trends such as the increasing share of ethnic Kazakhs, the gradual decline of Slavic groups, and the uneven pace of urbanization. The causes and consequences of these demographic shifts are scientifically analyzed, emphasizing their role in shaping the modern social structure of Kazakhstan. The findings serve as a valuable source for policymakers in the development of effective regional strategies and in maintaining interethnic stability.

**KEYWORDS:** demography, ethnic composition, urbanization, migration, population census, social transformation, natural growth, regional disparities, historical demography, industrialization, virgin lands campaign, collectivization, social structure, interethnic relations, regional development strategy.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FUNDING:** The study had no sponsorship support (own resources).

**DISCLOSURE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE:** In the preparation of this study, the author utilized ChatGPT to process statistical data and to generate Figure 1 for visualization purposes. Following the use of this tool/service, the author carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and assumes full responsibility for the substance and conclusions of the publication.

**FOR CITATION:** Makhmetova, N.A., (2026). Demographic Features of Kazakhstan: Historical Aspect (1959–1989). *Social Sciences & Digital Humanities*, 1(1), 155-170. [https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755\\_SSADH\\_2026\\_1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755_SSADH_2026_1_10)

### Article history:

Received: 26.01.2026

Accepted: 23.02.2026

Published: 31.03.2026

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## Қазақстанның демографиялық ерекшеліктері: тарихи аспект (1959-1989 жж.)

**АҢДАТПА.** Бұл мақалада Қазақстан Республикасының 1959–1989 жылдар аралығындағы демографиялық дамуының аймақтық ерекшеліктері тарихи-статистикалық деректер негізінде кешенді түрде талданады. Кеңестік кезеңдегі тың және тыңайған жерлерді игеру, индустриализация, ұжымдастыру, көші-қон процестері халықтың этникалық құрылымына, урбанизация деңгейіне және аймақтардың әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайына елеулі ықпал етті. Зерттеу барысында Бүкілодақтық халық санағының 1959, 1970, 1979 және 1989 жылдардағы деректері негізінде облыстардың қалалық және ауылдық халық үлесі, этникалық құрамның өзгерісі, халықтың табиғи өсімі мен көші-қон динамикасы жан-жақты қарастырылды. Этнодемографиялық ерекшеліктер негізінде ел аумағы төрт негізгі аймаққа: Солтүстік-Шығыс, Орталық, Батыс және Оңтүстік болып бөлініп, әрбір аймақтың өзіндік даму ерекшеліктері сараланды. Сонымен қатар, қазақ халқының үлесінің артуы, славян этностарының біртіндеп азаюы, урбанизация процесінің әркелкілігі сияқты үрдістер анықталды. Мақалада демографиялық өзгерістердің себептері мен салдары ғылыми тұрғыда түсіндіріліп, бұл процестердің қазіргі Қазақстанның әлеуметтік құрылымының қалыптасуына әсері нақты көрсетіледі. Зерттеу нәтижелері өңірлік саясат пен этносаралық тұрақтылықты қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған шараларды әзірлеу үшін маңызды дереккөз бола алады.

**ТҮЙІН СӨЗДЕР:** демография, этникалық құрылым, урбанизация, көші-қон, халық санағы, әлеуметтік өзгерістер, табиғи өсім, өңірлік айырмашылықтар, тарихи демография, индустриализация, тың игеру, ұжымдастыру, әлеуметтік құрылым, этносаралық қатынас, аймақтық даму стратегиясы.

**МҮДДЕЛЕР ҚАҚТЫҒЫСЫ:** Автор мүдделер қақтығысының жоқтығын мәлімдейді.

**ҚАРЖЫЛАНДЫРУ ЖӘНЕ АЛҒЫС:** Зерттеуге демеушілік қолдау көрсетілмеді (жеке ресурстар).

**ЖАСАНДЫ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАРЫН ПАЙДАЛАНУ ТУРАЛЫ ХАБАРЛАМА:** Осы зерттеуді дайындау кезінде автор статистикалық деректерді өңдеу және визуализациялау мақсатында 1-суретті жасау үшін ChatGPT пайдаланды. Осы құралды/қызметті пайдаланғаннан кейін автор мазмұнды мұқият қарап, қажет болған жағдайда өңдеді және жарияланымның мазмұны мен қорытындылары үшін толық жауапкершілікті өз мойнына алады.

**ДӘЙКЕСӨЗ ҮШІН:** Махметова, Н.А. (2026). Қазақстанның демографиялық ерекшеліктері: тарихи аспект (1959-1989 жж.). *Social Sciences & Digital Humanities*, 1(1), 155-170. <https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755 SSADH 2026 1 10>

## ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ КАЗАХСТАНА: ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ (1959-1989 ГГ.)

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** В данной статье комплексно анализируются региональные особенности демографического развития Республики Казахстан в период с 1959 по 1989 годы на основе историко-статистических данных. Такие процессы, как освоение целины, индустриализация, коллективизация и миграция, оказали значительное влияние на этническую структуру населения, уровень урбанизации и социально-экономическое положение регионов. В ходе исследования использованы данные Всесоюзной переписи населения 1959, 1970, 1979 и 1989 годов, на основе которых детально рассмотрены соотношения городского и сельского населения, изменения в этническом составе, естественный прирост и миграционная динамика. На основе этнодемографических признаков территория страны была условно разделена на четыре основных региона: Северо-Восток, Центр, Запад и Юг, и проанализированы особенности развития каждого из них. Особое внимание уделено росту доли казахов, снижению доли славянских этносов, а также неравномерности процессов урбанизации. В статье научно объясняются причины и последствия демографических изменений и их влияние на формирование современной социальной структуры Казахстана. Полученные результаты представляют собой важный источник для разработки эффективной региональной политики и обеспечения этнополитической стабильности.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** демография, этнический состав, урбанизация, миграция, перепись населения, социальные изменения, естественный прирост, региональные различия, историческая демография, индустриализация, освоение целины, коллективизация, социальная структура, межэтнические отношения, стратегия регионального развития.

**КОНФЛИКТ ИНТЕРЕСОВ:** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**ФИНАНСИРОВАНИЕ И БЛАГОДАРНОСТИ:** Исследование не имело спонсорской поддержки (собственные ресурсы).

**УВЕДОМЛЕНИЕ ОБ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИИ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ ИСКУССТВЕННОГО ИНТЕЛЛЕКТА:** При подготовке данного исследования автор использовал ChatGPT для обработки статистических данных и создания рисунка 1 для визуализации. После использования этого инструмента/сервиса автор тщательно проверил и отредактировал содержание по мере необходимости и принимает на себя полную ответственность за содержание и выводы публикации.

**ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ:** Махметова Н.А. (2026). Демографические особенности Казахстана: исторический аспект (1959-1989 гг.). *Social Sciences & Digital Humanities*, 1(1), 155-170. [https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755\\_SSADH\\_2026\\_1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.51885/3107-2755_SSADH_2026_1_10)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The demographic development of the population of Kazakhstan constitutes one of the key factors directly influencing the formation of the country's economic, social, and political trajectories. In particular, the large-scale socio-economic processes that took place in the second half of the twentieth century—such as industrialization, urbanization, the development of virgin and fallow lands, collectivization, and migration—substantially transformed the demographic structure of the country. During this period, not only did the total population size undergo significant change, but its ethnic composition, the ratio between urban and rural populations, as well as prevailing social roles, were also subject to considerable transformation.

The period from 1959 to 1989 is characterized as one of the most intensive phases of demographic transformation in the history of Kazakhstan. During this interval, the social structure of the republic began to acquire new features, while processes of urbanization and migration intensified significantly compared to earlier decades. As a result of internal and external migration implemented under Soviet policies, substantial transformations occurred in the ethnic composition of the population. At the same time, regional demographic disparities became more pronounced, leading to the formation of distinct ethno-demographic profiles across individual oblasts and regions.

This article analyzes the quantitative and qualitative demographic changes of the specified period on the basis of historical and statistical data, and examines, from a scholarly perspective, the causes and consequences of regional disparities. The objective of the study is to characterize demographic processes within the territory of Kazakhstan in a regional context and to determine their impact on the contemporary social structure and interethnic relations.

One of the primary issues influencing the study of the history of any region is the historical formation of its population. The conclusion of the demographic crises of the 1950s–1980s contributed to the subsequent advancement of demographic development and facilitated the emergence of a modern sovereign demographic system. Population growth, changes in demographic and functional structures, as well as the formation of architectural and aesthetic characteristics, directly affected the development of urban planning systems. These processes were driven not only by local factors but were also connected to broader global dynamics occurring beyond specific settlements.

The underlying causes of these transformations include the region's economic, social, and physical-geographical characteristics, its connections with other settlements, and the historical features of territorial settlement. In general, despite their heterogeneity and diversity, these factors were shaped within the broader phenomenon of settlement formation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The official statistical materials of the All-Union Population Censuses of 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989 were utilized as the primary sources of data for this study. On the basis of these materials, a comprehensive analysis was conducted of population dynamics across various regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including the ratio of urban to rural residents, changes in ethnic composition, as well as indicators of natural population growth and migration.

In addition, the study draws upon demographic research and regional analytical works by domestic scholars, including Zh.S. Aubakirova, A.B. Yesimova, N.L. Krasnobaeva, Z.M. Dzhanpaizova, and others.

The findings of the research are grounded in the objectivity of historical sources and the reliability of statistical data. In the course of data analysis, attention was paid not only to quantitative indicators but also to their qualitative interpretation and contextualization within the broader historical framework. This approach makes it possible to reveal the deeper historical causes and consequences of demographic processes and to provide a scientifically grounded characterization of regional specificities.

The socio-demographic development of the population is widely recognized as exerting a substantial influence on multiple aspects of societal development. At the same time, environmental, economic, and socio-political factors significantly affect population growth indicators. Kazakhstan has historically exhibited pronounced regional specificities. However, during the Soviet period, each

republic was positioned as a distinct territorial unit. Following independence, the regional differentiation of Kazakhstan became increasingly evident, placing on the agenda not only the need for revised research approaches but also the development and implementation of effective regional policies.

Various approaches may be employed in the regionalization of the country, including demographic, economic, and ecological frameworks based on patterns of interaction and territorial proximity. Demographic indicators constitute one of the key factors in the conditional division of the country into regions. Zh.S. Aubakirova conducted a demographic regionalization of Kazakhstan for the period 1979–1999 by applying cluster analysis using the fuzzy class program and incorporating statistical indicators. As a result, two megatypes were identified and further divided into five classes:

1. The North-Eastern ethno-demographic region: Akmola, East Kazakhstan, Kostanay, and North Kazakhstan oblasts.
2. The Central ethno-demographic region: Karaganda and Pavlodar oblasts.
3. The Southern ethno-demographic region: South Kazakhstan, Atyrau, and Kyzylorda oblasts.
4. The South-Western ethno-demographic region: Aktobe, Almaty, Zhambyl, and West Kazakhstan oblasts.
5. The Western ethno-demographic region: Mangystau oblast (Aubakirova, 2010).

The principal classificatory criterion in the proposed demographic regionalization was the ethno-demographic indicator. As noted, “Regional features of demographic development in Kazakhstan are shaped by the influence of high ethnic differentiation. It is precisely this pronounced ethnic stratification in the regions that imparts a distinctive character to population processes in the republic” (Yesimova, 2015).

At the same time, geographically adjacent regions do not necessarily demonstrate similar development indicators. For example, the southern part of the country is commonly understood to include South Kazakhstan, Kyzylorda, and Zhambyl oblasts. In the article “Contemporary Socio-Demographic Trends in Population Development in Southern Kazakhstan,” Z.M. Dzhanpaizova and A.B. Yesimova analyze the development of the population in these oblasts through the prism of fertility, mortality, marriage, and divorce processes. They conclude that “regional differentiation is clearly observable in the development of Kazakhstan’s population. Statistical analysis demonstrates that different models of demographic development may coexist within a single region” (Dzhanpaizova, 2011).

The task of territorial regionalization is further complicated by the fact that administrative-territorial units—namely, oblasts—are themselves internally heterogeneous. For instance, in her study of East Kazakhstan oblast, N.L. Krasnobaeva demonstrated that the historically formed administrative-territorial division and the specific features of population formation during the Soviet period determined a pronounced geographical and economic ethnic differentiation within the region. She substantiated the analytical division of the oblast into “Northern” and “Southern” subregions (Krasnobaeva, 2009).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The period from 1959 to 1989 represents a phase of profound socio-economic transformation in the history of Kazakhstan. During these decades, the republic underwent a new stage of industrialization, accompanied by the expansion of urban centers and the establishment of major industrial enterprises. However, these transformations did not proceed uniformly across all regions. In certain areas, urbanization intensified significantly, whereas in others the proportion of the rural population increased. Substantial changes occurred in the distribution of urban and rural populations across oblasts and their respective ethno-demographic regions (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Dynamics of the Urban and Rural Population of Kazakhstan, 1959-1989 (%)

Oblasts	1959		1970		1979		1989	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Akmola	71,2	28,8	65,43	34,57	43,0	57,0	47,2	52,8
Aktobe	69,69	30,31	68,98	31,02	46,9	53,1	54,1	45,9
Almaty	82,7	17,3	84,44	15,56	28,8	71,2	32,7	67,3
Atyrau	64,02	35,98	60,2	39,8	59,2	40,8	60,3	39,7
West Kazakhstan	77,07	22,93			37,1	62,8	42,5	57,5
Zhambyl	73,58	26,42	71,25	28,75	44,5	55,5	47,3	52,7
Karaganda	56,09	43,91	55,21	44,79	82,4	17,6	81,7	18,3
Kostanay	79,1	20,9	70,29	29,71	45,5	54,5	50,5	49,5
Kyzylorda	68,26	31,74	64,67	35,33	61,4	38,6	60,2	39,8
Mangystau					87,1	12,9	88,6	11,4
Pavlodar	77,57	22,43	67,26	32,74	56,6	43,4	64,0	36,0
North Kazakhstan	74,5	25,5	72,43	27,57	32,2	67,8	35,9	64,1
South Kazakhstan	73,44	26,56	71,99	28,01	39,1	60,9	40,5	59,5
East Kazakhstan	65,08	34,92	63,54	36,46	54,6	45,4	58,4	41,6

*Source: (Statistical, 1991)*

Based on this table, it is possible to conduct an analysis by grouping the oblasts into broader regional categories. On the basis of statistical data, the oblasts were classified into four principal regions according to their geographical location and demographic characteristics: the Northern and Eastern region, the Western region, the Central region, and the Southern region. Each of these regions will be examined separately below.

The Northern and Eastern region includes the following oblasts: Akmola, Kostanay, North Kazakhstan, Pavlodar, and East Kazakhstan. During the Soviet period, these regions were characterized by a high proportion of Russian and other Slavic populations. The development of virgin lands, primarily oriented toward agriculture, was accompanied by the expansion of urban centers. In 1959, many oblasts within this region already exhibited a relatively high share of urban population.

For instance, in Pavlodar oblast, the proportion of urban residents remained consistently high, reaching 64% in 1989. This stability can be attributed to the presence of heavy industries such as electric power generation and aluminum production. In Kostanay (79.1%) and North Kazakhstan (74.5%) oblasts, urban residents constituted the majority of the population in the earlier period. However, by 1989, these figures had declined significantly: to 50.5% in Kostanay and to only 35.9% in North Kazakhstan. This shift can be associated with demographic growth in rural areas as well as a slowdown in the rate of rural-to-urban migration.

In East Kazakhstan oblast, although the proportion of urban residents slightly decreased, a comparatively high level of urbanization was maintained. Between 1970 and 1989, the share of the rural population gradually increased; nevertheless, the urban population continued to predominate. In North Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan, the urban share in 1989 remained within the range of 35–58%, which can still be considered relatively high.

Overall, urbanization in these regions began at an early stage and was closely linked to industrial development. However, in subsequent years, population growth in rural areas became increasingly evident.

The Western region includes the following oblasts: Atyrau, Mangystau, West Kazakhstan, and Aktobe. In these regions, the oil and gas industry played a decisive role in socio-economic

development. Mangystau oblast, established later in 1973, became the most highly urbanized region in Kazakhstan. In 1979, the share of urban residents reached 87.1%, increasing to 88.6% by 1989. This exceptionally high level of urbanization was driven by the region's dependence on the oil and gas sector and the rapid development of urban centers such as Zhanaozen and Aktau. The rural population accounted for only 11.4%, the lowest proportion nationwide.

In Atyrau and Aktobe oblasts, the share of the urban population in 1959 stood at 64% and 69%, respectively; however, in subsequent decades, the proportion of rural residents increased somewhat. In West Kazakhstan oblast, by 1989 the urban population constituted 42.5%, while the rural population accounted for 57.5%. Although urbanization levels in Aktobe and West Kazakhstan were initially relatively high, the pace of urban growth slowed over time.

The demographic situation in Atyrau oblast differed from that of the other western regions. A distinctive feature of this oblast was the predominance of the rural population. In this regard, its demographic profile can be classified as closer to the "southern type," characterized by the dominance of a single ethnic group. These processes were directly associated with economic policy, the spatial distribution of industrial enterprises, patterns of rural-to-urban migration, and fertility rates.

Thus, within the Western region, Mangystau demonstrated an exceptionally high level of urbanization, whereas the remaining oblasts exhibited a moderate and comparatively unstable urbanization pattern. The regional economy remained strongly dependent on industrial production, particularly the oil sector.

The Central region is represented by Karaganda oblast. Karaganda is the center of the coal industry and was considered a flagship of Soviet industrialization. What distinguishes this region from others is the pronounced growth of urbanization. This trend is particularly evident in Karaganda oblast: whereas in 1959 the urban population accounted for 56%, by 1989 this figure had increased to 81.7%. This substantial rise was closely linked to the rapid development of the coal and metallurgical industries and the corresponding growth in labor demand.

At the same time, the Central ethno-demographic region is characterized by a marked decline in population dynamics. It may be described as a region experiencing persistent population loss. During the last two intercensal periods, the population decreased by 303.2 thousand persons. In terms of the rate of population decline, it ranked second after the North-Eastern region.

Thus, the Central region followed a distinct trajectory of ethno-demographic development, characterized by continuous population outflow. Karaganda remains one of the most highly urbanized oblasts in Kazakhstan, where rural-to-urban migration was particularly intensive.

The Southern region includes Almaty, Zhambyl, Kyzylorda, and South Kazakhstan oblasts. In these regions, the Kazakh population constituted the majority, and the predominance of the rural population was largely preserved.

For example, in Almaty oblast, although the share of the urban population stood at 82.7% in 1959, it had declined to only 32.7% by 1989. This significant change can be explained by the administrative separation of the city of Almaty into an independent territorial unit. In Zhambyl oblast, the urban population accounted for 47.3% in 1989, while the rural population constituted 52.7%. In South Kazakhstan oblast, the share of the urban population remained relatively low, reaching 40.5% in 1989. In Kyzylorda oblast, although the proportion of urban residents increased slightly (to 60.2% in 1989), rural lifestyles continued to predominate.

The economic profile of these regions was primarily oriented toward agriculture, including cotton production, rice cultivation, and livestock breeding. Consequently, the rate of rural-to-urban migration remained comparatively low, and rural settlement patterns persisted. In addition, these oblasts were characterized by relatively high fertility rates.

Although the process of urbanization in Almaty and Zhambyl oblasts was initially relatively high, it gradually slowed over time. In Almaty oblast, this indicator declined sharply—from 82.7% in 1959 to only 32.7% in 1989. This dramatic decrease can primarily be attributed to administrative changes, particularly the separation of the city of Almaty as an independent administrative unit, which developed separately from the oblast.

In Zhambyl oblast, the share of the urban population decreased from 73.5% in 1959 to 47.3% in 1989. Here, the active development of rural areas and high natural population growth also played a significant role. This region may therefore be classified among those characterized by steady population growth.

Between 1979 and 1999, the population did not merely increase; it grew substantially, by 509.9 thousand persons. Such a rate of population growth was not observed in any other ethno-demographic region. This dynamic can primarily be explained by the relatively homogeneous ethnic composition of the population, high fertility rates, the influence of strong ethnocultural ties, a comparatively “young” age structure, and relatively low levels of out-migration beyond the republic. The Southern region may therefore be classified as an area characterized by rapid natural population growth.

In the Southern region, the share of the rural population has traditionally remained high. The process of urbanization proceeded at a slower pace due to the predominance of agriculture and the influence of ethnocultural factors.

Overall, a comparative analysis of the regions in terms of their levels and characteristics of urbanization allows the following conclusions to be drawn (Table 2):

**Table 2.** Regional Classification by Level and Characteristics of Urbanization

Region	Level of Urbanization	Key Characteristics
North–Eastern	High	Virgin land development, industrialization, Russification
Western	Moderate–High	Oil industry; Mangystau – the record-holder in urbanization Urban predominance;
Central	Very High	A region of miners and industrial workers Agriculture;
Southern	Low	Traditional lifestyle of the Kazakh population

The proportion of urban and rural populations reflects the regional ethno-demographic profile of Kazakhstan and demonstrates the trajectory of historical and economic processes. It was precisely during this period that the country’s regional demographic configuration began to take shape. Cities evolved into industrial centers, while rural areas preserved their cultural, social, and labor foundations. This interval represents a pivotal historical stage during which the foundations of Kazakhstan’s contemporary social structure were established.

An increase in the urban population was observed in two ethno-demographic regions: the North-Eastern and the Central. The Central region may be classified as highly urbanized, with approximately two-thirds of its population residing in urban areas. A decline in the share of the urban population occurred in two regions: the Southern and the Western. Despite a 9% decrease in the urban population in recent years, Mangystau oblast has remained one of the most highly urbanized regions of Kazakhstan.

The process of urbanization had a particularly strong impact on Aktobe and North Kazakhstan oblasts, where the proportion of urban residents increased by 20% and 17%, respectively, during this period. Overall, Kazakhstan has been developing in line with the general global trend toward increasing urbanization (Aubakirova, 2010).

A significant feature of the period under analysis is that, by this time, the ethnic groups of the republic had accumulated the potential of distinctive demographic, cultural, historical, and geographical development. The accumulation of this potential occurred over a prolonged historical timeframe as a result of natural development processes—primarily those based on natural population movement and its inherent patterns—as well as under the influence of the state, which intervened in population dynamics.

The state directly or indirectly monitored and regulated certain demographic processes, including population distribution, size, and migration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to identify the contemporary trends of demographic development in Kazakhstan, a historical retrospective analysis of ethno-demographic processes is of considerable importance. Statistical data indicate that during the period between the population censuses of 1959 and 1989—effectively spanning a single demographic generation—the population increased by 1.77 times (77.14%) over the forty-year interval.

Turning now to changes in the ethnic composition during this period, the following figures can be observed (Table 3):

**Table 3.** Population Size and Ethnic Composition of Kazakhstan According to the All-Union Population Censuses of 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989 (thousand persons)

Ethnic Groups	1959		1970		1979		1989	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Total population	9294,7	100	13008,7	100	14684,3	100	16464,5	100
Kazakhs	2787,3	30,0	4234,2	32,5	5289,3	36,0	6534,6	39,7
Russians	3972,0	42,7	5521,9	42,4	5991,2	40,8	6227,5	37,8
Ukrainians	741,3	8,2	933,5	7,2	898,0	6,1	956,2	5,8
Germans	659,8	7,1	858,1	6,6	887,4	6,1	957,5	5,8
Other ethnic groups	1134,3	12,2	1461,0	11,2	1618,4	11,0	1788,7	10,9

*Source: (Statistical, 1991)*

The period from 1959 to 1989 represents one of the most significant stages in Kazakhstan's ethno-demographic development. Over these three decades, the population of the republic increased from 9.3 million to 16.5 million. However, this growth was not uniform across all ethnic groups. The transformations observed during these years were the direct result of Soviet migration policies, large-scale socio-industrial projects, the natural population growth of the indigenous population, as well as the consequences of repression and deportations (Aubakirova, 2022).

The share of Kazakhs increased from 30% to 39.7% over the thirty-year period. The primary reason for this growth was the high natural increase, as Kazakhs were predominantly concentrated in rural areas where fertility rates remained relatively high. At the same time, Kazakhs gradually adapted to education and urban life; during the 1970s–1980s, Kazakh youth increasingly pursued higher education and began migrating to urban centers. It was also during this period that the Kazakh population, which had declined as a result of repression and famine, began to recover from the 1950s onward.

Nevertheless, certain factors limited the growth of the Kazakh share within the total population. One such factor was the Virgin Lands campaign (1954–1965), which led to the mass influx of Russians and other ethnic groups, thereby constraining the relative increase of the Kazakh population. Another limiting factor was the predominance of a Russian-speaking environment in urban areas, which likely contributed to the comparatively slow pace of Kazakh urbanization.

The share of Russians declined from 42.7% to 37.8%, although their absolute number increased. One of the principal reasons for this dynamic was the Virgin and Fallow Lands campaign: during the 1950s–1960s, millions of Russians migrated from the European part of the USSR to Kazakhstan. Another significant factor was industrialization. In the 1960s–1980s, the majority of engineers and industrial workers who arrived to build factories and plants were Russians.

At the same time, certain downward trends were also observable within this ethnic group. Among the specific causes were the relatively slower natural population growth compared to the Kazakhs and the beginning of migration processes in the 1980s, when some Russians started relocating to their historical homeland.

The next largest ethnic group in terms of population share in Kazakhstan was Ukrainians, whose proportion declined from 8.2% to 5.8%. The primary reason for this decrease was that many Ukrainians had arrived during the Virgin Lands campaign. However, a significant portion of them migrated on a temporary basis and subsequently returned to their historical homeland or relocated to other union republics.

Another significant ethnic group was the Germans, whose share declined from 7.1% to 5.8%, although their absolute number increased. This dynamic was influenced by several key factors. First, during the Stalinist period (1941–1945), large numbers of ethnic Germans were deported to Kazakhstan. Subsequently, from the 1950s to the 1980s, they settled permanently and developed as a distinct community. Owing to their high labor participation and relatively strong fertility rates, their population continued to grow in absolute terms.

However, a decline in their proportional share was also observed. One of the principal reasons was the beginning of ethnic repatriation in the late 1980s, when many Germans initiated migration to their historical homeland, Germany.

As for other ethnic groups (including Uyghurs, Tatars, Koreans, Chechens, Kurds, and others), their combined share remained at approximately 11–12%. This proportion largely reflects the deportations and forced resettlements of various ethnic groups to Kazakhstan for political reasons during the 1930s–1950s. The majority of these communities settled in the southern and eastern regions of the republic, where they established national-cultural centers and preserved their ethnic identities.

In general, the demographic and political factors that influenced changes in the ethnic composition during this period may be summarized as follows (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Demographic and Political Factors Influencing Changes in the Ethnic Composition

Factor	Description
	Led to the mass influx of Slavic populations into Northern, Central, and Eastern Kazakhstan
Virgin Lands campaign (1954–1965)	Germans, Koreans, Chechens-Ingush, and other ethnic groups were forcibly relocated to Kazakhstan
Deportations (1930s–1950s)	Resulted in the large-scale migration of Russian-speaking populations to cities such as Karaganda, Pavlodar, Ust-Kamenogorsk (Oskemen), Semey, and Zhezkazgan
Industrialization	Contributed to the growth of the Kazakh population and began altering the ethnic balance
High natural increase of the Kazakh population in rural areas	Hindered the ability of Kazakhs to function in urban environments in their native language and slowed the process of urbanization

Between 1959 and 1989, Kazakhstan experienced complex and dynamic transformations in its ethnic composition. This period was marked by the numerical strengthening of the Kazakh population through natural increase, alongside the prolonged predominance of Russians within the overall population structure. It was also characterized by the significant presence of other ethnic groups, including Germans, Ukrainians, Uyghurs, and Tatars.

This period constitutes an important historical foundation for understanding the national and ethnic policies of contemporary independent Kazakhstan. Between 1959 and 1989, the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan’s regions underwent substantial transformations. The principal drivers of

these changes included Soviet migration policies, industrialization, the Virgin Lands campaign, and broader demographic processes.

If the ethnic composition of individual oblasts is analyzed in greater detail, they may be classified into four groups according to their shared characteristics.

The first group consists of regions with a Slavic predominance (Northern, Eastern, and Central regions). This group includes North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Akmola, Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan, and Karaganda oblasts.

In general terms, in 1959 the ethnic composition in these regions was characterized by Kazakhs constituting 20–35%, Russians 45–60%, and Ukrainians and Germans 10–20%. By 1989, the proportion of Kazakhs had increased to 30–40%, while Russians accounted for 37–51%.

The principal trends were shaped by the Virgin Lands campaign and industrialization policies. Millions of people migrated from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Kazakhs were largely concentrated in rural areas and remained a minority in urban centers. Beginning in the 1980s, the share of the Kazakh population gradually increased; however, in many regions they continued to constitute a minority.

The second group includes regions where Kazakhs constituted the majority, but with a significant Slavic presence (Western and Central-Western regions). This group comprises Aktobe, West Kazakhstan, and Mangystau oblasts.

In general terms, in 1959 Kazakhs accounted for 40–70% of the population, while Russians constituted 25–45%. By 1989, the proportion of Kazakhs had increased to 55–78%, whereas Russians represented 15–35%.

The main trends were shaped by the development of the oil and gas industry during the Soviet period, which attracted Russians and other ethnic groups to these regions. Nevertheless, the Kazakh population maintained its predominance due to high natural growth rates and rural concentration. In the 1980s, migration of Russians and other Slavic populations to their historical homelands contributed to a further increase in the share of the Kazakh population.

The third group consists of regions with a clear predominance of the Kazakh ethnic group (Southern and parts of the Western region). This group includes Atyrau, Kyzylorda, Zhambyl, and South Kazakhstan (currently Turkestan) oblasts.

In general terms, in 1959 Kazakhs constituted 70–90% of the population, while other ethnic groups accounted for 10–30%. By 1989, the proportion of Kazakhs had increased to 80–95%.

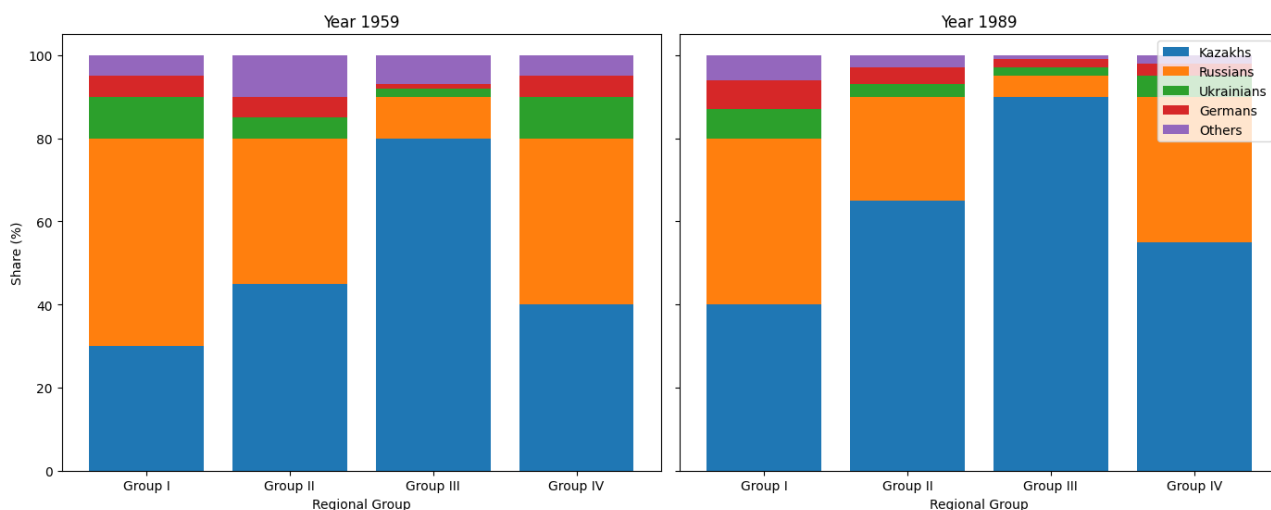
The main trend was that these regions historically represented the traditional settlement areas of the Kazakh population. Other ethnic groups—such as Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Dungans, Tatars, and Russians—were primarily concentrated in urban centers. The predominance of rural lifestyles and relatively high fertility rates enabled the Kazakh population to maintain its demographic dominance.

The fourth group consists of regions with a mixed ethnic composition, where the share of the Kazakh population was steadily increasing. This group includes Almaty oblast and the city of Almaty.

In general terms, in 1959 Kazakhs accounted for 25–50% of the population, Russians for 35–60%, and Uyghurs for 5–8%. By 1989, the proportion of Kazakhs had risen to 45–60%, while Russians constituted 30–50%, and Uyghurs 7–8%.

The principal trends were shaped by the status of Almaty as the capital, which attracted a large Russian-speaking intelligentsia and skilled professionals. In Almaty oblast, Kazakhs and Uyghurs lived in mixed settlement patterns. During the 1980s, Kazakhs increasingly migrated to urban areas, leading to a rise in their proportion within the overall population structure.

Ethnic Composition by Regional Groups in 1959 and 1989



**Figure 1.** Ethnic Composition by Oblast Groups in 1959 and 1989

As can be seen from the diagram above, during the period 1959–1989, Russians and other Slavic ethnic groups constituted a high proportion of the population in the northern and central regions of Kazakhstan, whereas Kazakhs predominated in the southern and western regions. However, over the course of these three decades, both the number and the proportion of Kazakhs gradually increased across all regions. The principal factors contributing to this trend included:

1. The high natural population growth of the Kazakh population;
2. Rural-to-urban migration;
3. The gradual weakening of Soviet migration policies;

4. The beginning of repatriation processes, as certain ethnic groups (notably Germans and Russians) started migrating to their historical homelands.

Statistical data indicate that during the 1950s–1960s the Kazakh population experienced a demographic boom. It should be noted that, in our view, the ethnic stratification of the socio-economic conditions formed during this period played a decisive role. Industrial and manufacturing functions were largely performed by “non-titular” ethnic groups, while the majority of Kazakhs remained rural residents.

The preservation of high fertility traditions—supported by state social preferences (including free healthcare and education, state allowances, support for large families, and related measures)—led to qualitative changes in the demographic characteristics of the ethnic group. Against the backdrop of sustained fertility rates, the rapid decline in mortality—particularly infant mortality—resulted in accelerated population growth.

The number of Kazakhs began to increase; however, they were predominantly concentrated in rural areas. In urban centers, the share of the Kazakh population remained relatively low. At the same time, the number of Russians and Ukrainians grew, and in northern Kazakhstan the proportion of Russian-speaking populations remained particularly high. Kazakhs were primarily settled in the southern and eastern regions and continued to constitute a minority in most cities.

During this period, the share of Russian-speaking populations increased significantly, particularly in industrial regions. However, in the 1970s–1980s, the natural population growth of the Kazakh population, together with the increase in the number of Kazakhs returning to the republic, contributed to changes in the national composition.

During the 1950s–1980s, Kazakhstan experienced profound socio-economic transformations, particularly industrialization, urbanization, agricultural collectivization, and internal migration processes, which shaped distinct demographic structures across different regions. The demographic dynamics of each region varied depending on local natural resources, the level of industrial development, the condition of agriculture, and patterns of migration.

The Northern and Central regions—particularly Pavlodar, Karaganda, Kostanay, and Kokchetav (Kokshetau) oblasts—experienced population growth as a result of rapid industrial development. A defining demographic characteristic of these areas was the predominance of Russians and Ukrainians. Their numbers increased over time due to the growing demand for labor in industrial enterprises. In North Kazakhstan, Russians and other Slavic populations significantly outnumbered Kazakhs, in some cases by several times.

In major industrial cities such as Karaganda and Pavlodar, the proportion of Russians was particularly high. Urban life was largely conducted in the Russian language, and a mixed national-cultural environment gradually emerged.

Southern Kazakhstan—including Shymkent, Taraz, Kyzylorda, and Almaty oblasts—was primarily characterized by an agricultural orientation. These regions were predominantly inhabited by Kazakhs, which explains the high proportion of the Kazakh population. State farms (sovkhozes) and collective farms (kolkhozes) were established, leading to an increased demand for labor.

The population of urban centers in Southern Kazakhstan, particularly in Almaty and Shymkent, grew steadily. During the Soviet period, the city of Almaty developed into the cultural and economic center of Kazakhstan. It was home to various ethnic groups, including Kazakhs, Russians, Ukrainians, Uyghurs, and Tatars. Cultural interaction among these ethnic communities was evident; however, the proportion of Kazakhs remained relatively high.

In East Kazakhstan, the number of Russians and Ukrainians also increased; however, Kazakhs continued to constitute a significant, and in many areas predominant, share of the population. In major urban centers such as Semey and Ust-Kamenogorsk (Oskemen), Russians were particularly numerous. At the same time, rural areas remained predominantly Kazakh. Thus, while Kazakhs were largely concentrated in villages, Russians and Ukrainians were primarily concentrated in industrial zones and urban settlements.

In Western Kazakhstan, the Kazakh population remained predominant, while Russians and other Slavic groups constituted a smaller share. These regions were traditionally characterized by agriculture and livestock breeding as the principal economic activities of the Kazakh population. However, the development of the oil and gas industry attracted workers to the region, contributing to demographic shifts associated with industrial expansion.

Kazakhstan's demographic history in the twentieth century underwent several significant transformations. The country's demographic structure and regional characteristics were substantially shaped by socio-economic factors such as industrialization, agrarian reforms, migration processes, and the collectivization of agriculture. These developments exerted a profound influence on the size and composition of the population across different regions, giving rise to new social and ethnic features.

During this period, the industrial sector expanded rapidly, while the process of agricultural collectivization continued. As a result, fundamental changes occurred in Kazakhstan's economic structure, and regional disparities in demographic patterns became increasingly pronounced.

Industrialization from the 1950s onward was implemented within the framework of a large-scale policy aimed at strengthening Kazakhstan's industrial potential. The development of industry led to the creation of new employment opportunities and attracted population inflows to the country's industrial regions. As a result, the population of major industrial cities—particularly Karaganda, Pavlodar, Shymkent, and Almaty—experienced significant growth.

Karaganda oblast became a principal destination for labor migration due to the establishment of coal mines and metallurgical plants. In Pavlodar, the petrochemical industry also developed rapidly. A significant proportion of workers in these regions migrated from other Soviet republics, particularly from Russia and Ukraine.

At the same time, internal migration from rural areas to urban centers intensified. The primary drivers of this migration were labor shortages in agriculture and the growing demand for employment opportunities in cities.

The period of agricultural collectivization led to the widespread establishment of collective farming enterprises across many regions of Kazakhstan. However, the collectivization process was

not uniformly implemented and was primarily concentrated in Southern and Eastern Kazakhstan. In these regions, the organization of state farms (sovkhozes) and collective farms (kolkhozes) significantly altered the living conditions of rural workers and, in certain areas, contributed to population resettlement.

The primary objective of collectivization was the mechanization of agriculture and the establishment of a production system based on collective labor. As a consequence, a substantial portion of the rural population was compelled to relocate to industrial towns and newly organized rural settlements.

One of the significant transformations in Kazakhstan's demographic structure was the process of migration. Migration played a crucial role in reshaping the ethnic composition of the northern and central regions of the republic. Under Soviet internal migration policies, large numbers of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Tatars, Moldovans, and other ethnic groups were resettled to Kazakhstan's industrial regions. This was particularly evident in areas such as Karaganda, Pavlodar, Kokshetau, and Kostanay.

During the specified period, the number of Russians and Ukrainians in the northern and central regions of Kazakhstan increased significantly. The expansion of industry attracted numerous workers and their families to urban centers in these regions. This process particularly affected northern oblasts, including Pavlodar, Kokshetau, and Semey. In addition, the migration of industrial workers and their families to Karaganda substantially altered the demographic composition of the city's population.

Germans, Koreans, Crimean Tatars, and other ethnic groups were also resettled to Kazakhstan. This process was particularly evident in Southern Kazakhstan and Almaty oblast. For example, the German diaspora increased in the vicinity of Shymkent and Almaty, while Koreans and Tatars settled in Zhambyl and Karaganda oblasts. These populations were initially employed predominantly in agriculture, but later contributed to urbanization through migration to cities.

At the same time, Kazakhstan experienced rapid urbanization. The expansion of industrial production and infrastructure development in industrial regions stimulated urban growth. Major cities such as Almaty, Karaganda, Pavlodar, and Shymkent witnessed significant population increases. Almaty emerged as the largest city in Kazakhstan, and its demographic structure underwent substantial transformation. In industrial centers such as Karaganda and Pavlodar, the growth of the labor force altered the composition of the urban population and led to an increase in the number of Russian-speaking residents.

Alongside urban expansion, a number of transformations also occurred in rural areas. Many individuals who migrated from rural settlements to cities relocated to industrial zones, thereby accelerating the urbanization process. For instance, the city of Shymkent expanded rapidly due to the development of agriculture and light industry. The creation of new employment opportunities in these cities contributed to further population growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The demographic development of 1959-1989 exerted a complex and multifaceted influence on Kazakhstan's regional structure, ethnic composition, and level of urbanization. During this period, the population grew rapidly—over the course of thirty years, the republic's population increased by approximately 77%. However, this growth was not uniform across all regions. In certain areas, urbanization and industrialization led to the predominance of urban populations, whereas in other regions the share of the rural population remained high, and traditional patterns of life were largely preserved.

During the course of the study, the territory of the republic was conditionally divided into four major regions according to their ethno-demographic characteristics: North-Eastern, Central, Western, and Southern. The demographic specificities of each region were closely interconnected with historical development factors, economic policies, migration flows, and ethnic composition.

In the Northern and Central regions, Slavic ethnic groups constituted a significant share of the population, accompanied by intensified industrialization. In contrast, the Southern region was characterized by the pronounced natural growth and relative ethnic homogeneity of the Kazakh

population. The Western region, distinguished by its oil and gas production, demonstrated a pattern of urbanization combined with a mixed ethnic composition.

Significant changes also occurred in the ethnic composition. The share of Kazakhs in the total population increased from 30% to 39,7%. This growth was associated with high natural population increase in rural areas, the expanding access of Kazakh youth to education and their migration to urban centers, as well as shifts in migration policy.

Although the proportion of Slavic populations gradually declined, their influence remained substantial in certain regions. At the same time, the shares of Germans, Ukrainians, Uyghurs, Koreans, and other ethnic groups changed for various reasons, including repatriation to their historical homelands, limited integration into urbanization processes, or adaptation to new economic conditions.

Thus, the period under study constituted a decisive historical stage in the formation of Kazakhstan's contemporary demographic profile. Processes of urbanization, migration, ethnic restructuring, and social transformation intensified regional disparities and laid the foundations for present-day social, economic, and ethno-political stability. The findings of this research should be regarded as an important scientific and practical basis for ensuring demographic security, developing regional development strategies, and harmonizing interethnic relations.

Between 1950 and 1980, industrialization, agricultural collectivization, and migration processes exerted a significant influence on the formation of regional demographic specificities in Kazakhstan. Northern and Central Kazakhstan, as industrial regions, experienced substantial growth in urban populations, whereas Southern Kazakhstan, as an agrarian region, was characterized by the predominance of the Kazakh population. East Kazakhstan attracted labor migrants due to the development of industry and mining, while Western Kazakhstan, endowed with natural resources, remained distinguished by the predominance of Kazakhs. The demographic structure of each region was shaped by its economic profile and historical trajectory, factors that continue to play an important role in Kazakhstan's regional development to the present day.

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