

Estimated Deaths Attributed to Socialism and Communist Regimes

There is **no single definitive number** of people killed by socialism, because the term is broad, definitions vary, and historical records are incomplete. Most scholarly and historical estimates focus on **state socialist or communist regimes** in the 20th century, as these are the only systems that have systematically implemented state control over the economy and society.

Scholarly and historical estimates

- **Rudolph J. Rummel’s “democide” data** (1900–1987) estimates that **17 communist regimes** killed about **168.76 million people** through executions, purges, forced labor, and famine-related deaths [Reason.com](#).
- **Courtois and others** in *The Black Book of Communism* and related works place the total at roughly **94–100 million** victims of Leninist and Marxist–Leninist regimes [factually.co](#).
- **Factually.co** and Wheaton College summaries note that while some high estimates approach or exceed 100 million, others (using more conservative criteria) place the toll at **65–110 million**, depending on whether famine deaths, war-related fatalities, and demographic excesses are included [factually.co+2](#).
- Some popular accounts and polemical writing round the figure to **“around 100 million”** as a headline number [Wheaton College](#).

Why the numbers differ

- **Definition of “socialism”**: Some include all socialist states; others focus on communist regimes.
- **What counts as a death**: Direct executions vs. famine deaths, forced labor mortality, or policy-related starvation.
- **Time period**: Most estimates cover the 20th century, but some extend into the 21st.
- **Attribution**: Whether deaths are counted as “socialism”-related or as the result of war, mismanagement, or other factors.

Key examples

- **Soviet Union** (1917–1991): Estimated 70–85 million deaths under Stalin, plus later purges and famines [factually.co](#).
- **China under Mao** (1949–1976): Estimated 15–45 million deaths from famine, forced labor, and purges [Reason.com](#).
- **Cambodia under Pol Pot** (1975–1979): Estimated 1–2 million deaths from mass executions and forced labor [Reason.com](#).
- **Other regimes**: North Korea, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and others also contributed to the totals.

Conclusion

While there is no universally agreed figure, **most credible historical and demographic studies place the number of deaths caused by state socialist and communist regimes in the 20th century between roughly 65 million and 110 million**, with many sources citing **around 100 million** as a common approximation [factually.co+2](#). The exact number depends on the criteria used for inclusion and attribution.