



CASTE CENSUS: POLITY/ GOVERNANCE

NEWS: Is the caste Census a useful exercise?

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The caste Census aims to provide data for proportional representation but faces challenges like caste misclassification, mobility, and impracticality in reservations. Critics argue it is regressive and disproportionately excludes smaller, marginalized groups.

Caste Census Debate

What is a Caste Census?

- A caste Census aims to collect detailed data on caste populations to enable proportional representation in jobs, land, and wealth.
- It has been advocated by opposition leaders, NGOs, and even the RSS.

Historical Background

- Initiated in 1871-72, covering regions like North-Western Provinces, Bengal, and Madras.
- The 1931 Census identified 4,147 castes, highlighting regional variations in caste identity.
- The SECC 2011 recorded over 46.7 lakh caste categories, with 8.2 crore acknowledged errors.
- Recent efforts like Bihar's 2022 caste Census stirred debates over inclusion criteria.

Caste-based census		Commissions dealing with issues related to OBCs	
YEAR	OUTCOME		
1872	Classified population into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Rajputs, other castes based on profession, native Christians, Aboriginal tribes, semi-Hindooised tribes	Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1953)	Identified 2,399 backward castes, including 837 most backward castes. Recommended caste-based census in 1961. Report rejected. Government says no objective tests for identifying backward class.
1901	1,642 castes	Mandal Commission (1979)	Identified OBCs comprise 52% of India's population, granted 27% reservation in government jobs.
1931	4,147 castes		
1941	Census curtailed due to World War II		
2011*	Over 46 lakh caste names, sub-castes, surnames and gotras. Caste numbers withheld citing inaccuracies.	Rohini Commission (2017)	Recommends 27% reservation for OBCs be divided into four sub-categories. Finds 97% of jobs and educational seats went to 25% sub-castes. 10% of the 2,633 OBC communities cornered 25% of these jobs, while 983 communities had zero representation.

*socio-economic and caste census



Challenges in Accurate Caste Data Collection

1. **Upward Caste Mobility:** Communities claim higher caste positions for perceived social prestige.
2. **Downward Caste Mobility:** Groups claim lower caste status to avail reservation benefits.
3. **Caste Misclassification:** Confusion arises due to similar-sounding surnames or lack of comfort discussing caste.

Proportional Representation and Its Issues

- Proportional representation aims to reserve positions based on a caste's population percentage.
- **Flaws:**
 - Small castes may wait centuries for a reserved vacancy.
 - Excludes the least populous and marginalized groups disproportionately.
 - Impractical and regressive in addressing true social inequalities.

Conclusion

- While proponents highlight equity, challenges in accurate caste data and the flawed proportional representation model make a caste Census contentious and difficult to implement effectively.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/is-the-caste-census-a-useful-exercise/article68946495.ece>