

CENSUS: ECONOMY

NEWS: Next Census to conclude by March 2027, says government

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Government of India will conduct Census-2027, India's first fully digital census, between 2026-2027, including caste data collection for the first time since 1931. This move has significant implications for social justice, federalism, and political representation but also raises challenges around data accuracy and political sensitivities.

About Census-2027

- The Population Census-2027 will be India's 16th decennial census.
- Aims to collect comprehensive demographic, social, economic, and caste data.
- Conducted by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Governed under the Census Act, 1948 and Census Rules, 1990.

Key Features

- First digital Census in India.
- Use of mobile and web applications for data collection.
- CMMS Portal for management and monitoring of Census activities.
- Two-Phase Process:
 - *Houselisting and Housing Schedule (April 1 – September 2026)*: Information on housing and household amenities.
 - *Population Enumeration (February 27 – March 1, 2027)*: Counting individuals, socio-economic data, caste data (first time post-independence).
- Self-enumeration option available through NPR online updates.
- Caste Enumeration:
 - First time since 1931 caste data beyond SC/ST to be collected.
 - Drop-down caste directory in mobile app to avoid duplication.

Historical Overview of Census in India

Pre-Independence Census

- Ancient mentions:
 - Rig Veda and Arthashastra mentioned population counts.
 - Ain-e-Akbari (1595) was the first detailed census by Akbar.

- British era attempts:
 - 1800 first census attempt, partial data.
 - 1830 first complete census by Henry Walter in Dacca.
 - 1871 first nationwide census under British rule.
 - 1881 first synchronous census of British India.
 - 1931 Census recorded 4,147 castes; basis for Mandal Commission.

Post-Independence Census

- 1951 Census: First after independence, excluded caste enumeration beyond SC/ST.
- Subsequent milestones:
 - 1961: Migration, literacy, employment.
 - 1971: Two-phase system, fertility rates.
 - 1981: Housing amenities, public health data.
 - 1991: Ex-servicemen, economic status.
 - 2001: Use of ICR, disability, transport.
 - 2011: Computers, internet, mobile access.

Key Shifts in Census Over Time

- Caste Enumeration:
 - Pre-independence: comprehensive caste data.
 - Post-independence: only SC/ST recorded.
 - 2027: OBCs to be counted.
- Technological Evolution:
 - Manual to digital via ICR.
 - 2027: first fully digital Census.
- Scope Expansion:
 - Early: age, sex, religion, literacy.
 - Now: disability, assets, housing, transport.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Constitutional Mandate

- Article 246: Union government has Census authority.
- Article 81 and 82: Delimitation and seat allocation linked to post-2026 Census.

Legal Framework

- Census Act, 1948: Authorizes Census, defines penalties and procedures.
- Census Rules, 1990: Ensure confidentiality and proper procedure.
- 84th Constitutional Amendment (2002): Froze Lok Sabha seat count until post-2026 Census.
- Delimitation Act, 2002: Constituency redrawing based on Census.

What is a Caste Census?

- Collection of caste identity data during enumeration.
- Last done in 1931.
- Over 2,650 OBCs, 1,170 SCs, 890 STs currently in lists.
- SECC 2011 attempted caste data but faced classification issues.

Significance of the Population Census

- Policy Planning:
 - Identifies rural-urban gaps.
 - Supports targeted welfare.
- Delimitation:
 - Post-2026 delimitation to use 2027 Census.
 - Enables 33% women's reservation.
- Social Justice:
 - Guides affirmative action.
 - Aids sub-categorization of OBCs.
- Socio-Economic Development: Informs education, health, employment policies.
- Infrastructure Planning: Data-driven planning for amenities.
- Addressing Inequality: Identifies socio-economic gaps.
- Research and Analysis: Basis for NSS, NFHS, academic studies.

- **NPR and Security:** If integrated, strengthens demographic databases.

Challenges in the Population Census

- **Data Accuracy:** Coverage gaps in remote areas.
- **Political Sensitivities:** Caste and religion data controversial.
- **Logistical Difficulties:** Massive scale, need for trained enumerators.
- **Public Reluctance:** Fear of data misuse.
- **Technological Barriers:** Rural digital literacy and connectivity gaps.
- **Caste Classification Issues:** SECC 2011 saw 46 lakh caste name variations.
- **Resource Constraints:** Funding and manpower delays.

Inclusion of Caste Data: Pros and Cons

Positive Aspects

- **Targeted Welfare:** Better affirmative action.
- **Accurate Representation:** Helps allocate resources fairly.
- **Policy Planning:** Data-driven decisions.
- **Tracking Inequalities:** Enables monitoring of disparities.

Negative Aspects

- **Political Manipulation:** Vote-bank politics risk.
- **Social Fragmentation:** Deepens caste divides.
- **Overemphasis on Caste:** May ignore economic factors.
- **Data Accuracy Challenges:** Classification inconsistencies.
- **Community Resistance:** Fear of discrimination.

Impact on Federalism

- **Redistribution of Political Power:** Delimitation alters state representation.
- **Unequal Representation:** Southern states risk losing seats.
- **Resource Allocation:** Potential inter-state disputes.
- **Regional Tensions:** Northern vs. southern concerns.
- **NPR Controversy:** Past opposition by states.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Accurate data aids equitable policy.

Way Forward for Census-2027

- Improved Technology Integration: AI for validation, cloud-based systems.
- Standardization of Caste Data: Clear guidelines needed.
- Awareness Campaigns: Build public trust, ensure participation.
- Inclusive Data Collection: Focus on reaching marginalized groups.
- Clear Legal Framework: Data protection to ensure privacy.
- Continuous Monitoring: Real-time issue resolution.
- Addressing Regional Concerns: Dialogue with states, possible Lok Sabha seat increase.

Conclusion

- The 2027 Census will transform India's policy and governance landscape through digital innovation and comprehensive caste data.
- Success depends on managing logistical, political, and social challenges to ensure equitable outcomes.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/centre-announces-population-census-caste-to-be-counted/article69656894.ece>