



Caste based Census

For Prelims: Census, SECC, OBC

For Mains: Caste-based Census and related issue, Population and Associated Issues

Why in News?

Recently, **Bihar government** has announced that it will **undertake a socio-economic survey of all castes and communities (SECC)**.

What is the Difference between Census and SECC?

- **Census:**
 - The origin of the Census in India **goes back to the colonial exercise of 1881**.
 - Census has evolved and been used by the government, policymakers, academics, and others to capture the Indian population, access resources, map social change, [delimitation exercise](#), etc.
 - However, as early as the 1940s, W.W.M. Yeatts, Census Commissioner for India for the 1941 Census, had pointed out that “the census is a large, immensely powerful, but blunt instrument unsuited for specialized inquiry.”
- **SECC:**
 - The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) **was conducted in 2011** for the first time since 1931.
 - SECC is meant to **canvass every Indian family, both in rural and urban India**, and ask about their:
 - **Economic status**, so as to allow Central and State authorities to come up with a range of indicators of deprivation, permutations, and combinations of which could be used by each authority to define a poor or deprived person.
 - It is also **meant to ask every person their specific caste name** to allow the government to re-evaluate which caste groups were economically worse off and which were better off.
 - SECC has the **potential to allow for a mapping of inequalities at a broader level**.
- **Difference Between Census & SECC:**
 - The Census provides a **portrait of the Indian population**, while the SECC is a tool to identify beneficiaries of state support.
 - Since the **Census falls under the Census Act of 1948**, all data are considered confidential, whereas according to the SECC website, “all the personal information given in the SECC is open for use by Government departments to grant and/or restrict benefits to households.”

What are the Pros and Cons of Conducting Caste based Census?

- **Pros:**
 - **Helpful in Managing Social Equity Programmes:**

- **India's social equality programmes** cannot be a success without the data and a caste census would help fix that.
- Due to the lack of data, there is **no proper estimate for the population of OBCs, groups within the OBCs and more.**
 - The **Mandal Commission** estimated the OBC population at 5% while some others have pinned the OBC population from 36 to 65%.
- The census would **'besides resolving the needless mystery'** about the size of the OBC population, census enumeration would yield a **wealth of demographic information** (sex ratio, mortality rate, life expectancy), educational data (male and female literacy, ratio of school-going population, number of graduates) and policy relevant information about economic conditions (house-type, assets, occupation) of the OBCs'.
 - **Bring a Measure of Objectivity on Reservation:**
 - A caste-based census **could go a long way in bringing a measure of objectivity** to the debate on reservations.
 - According to the **Rohini Commission**, which was formed to look into equitable redistribution of the 27% quota for OBCs, noted that there are around 2,633 castes covered under the OBC reservation.
 - However, the Centre's reservation policy from 1992 doesn't take into account that there exists within the OBCs, a separate category of Extremely Backward Castes, who are much more marginalised.
- **Cons:**
 - **Repercussions of a Caste Census:**
 - Caste has an **emotive element and thus there exist the political and social repercussions** of a caste census.
 - There have been concerns that counting caste may help solidify or harden identities.
 - Due to these repercussions, nearly a decade after the SECC 2011, a sizable amount of its data remains unreleased or released only in parts.
 - **Caste Is Context-specific:**
 - Caste has **never been a proxy for class or deprivation in India**, it constitutes a distinct kind of embedded discrimination that often transcends class. For example:
 - People with Dalit last names are less likely to be called for job interviews even when their qualifications are better than that of an upper-caste candidate.
 - They are also less likely to be accepted as tenants by landlords. Thus, difficult to measure.
 - Marriage to a well- educated, well-off Dalit man still sparks violent reprisals among the families of upper-caste women every day across the country.

Way Forward

- A caste census may not sit well with the goal of a casteless society, but it **may serve as a means of addressing inequities in society.**
- Caste data will enable independent research **not only into the question of who does and does not need affirmative action** but also into the effectiveness of this measure.
 - Impartial data and subsequent research might save the bona fide attempts of the uplift of the most backward classes from the shadow of caste and class politics and be informative to people on both sides of the spectrum – for and against reservation.
 - It is **not reservation that creates the current divide in our society** but the misuse or the perceived misuse of reservation.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Q. Consider the following statements: (2009)

1. Between Census 1951 and Census 2001, the density of the population of India has increased more than three times.
2. Between Census 1951 and Census 2001, the annual growth rate (exponential) of the population of

India has doubled.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Exp:

- One of the important indices of population concentration is the density of population. It is defined as the number of persons per square kilometre.
- The population density of India in 2001 was 324 persons per square kilometre and in 1951 it was 117. Thus, the density increased **more than twice, but not thrice**. Hence, statement 1 is not correct.
- At the beginning of the twentieth century, i.e., in 1901 the density of India was as low as 77 and this steadily increased from one decade to another to reach 324 in 2001.
- The average **Annual Growth Rate in 2001 was 1.93 whereas in 1951 it was 1.25**. Thus, it increased, but not doubled. Hence, statement 2 is not correct. Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.

[Source: TH](#)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/printpdf/caste-based-census>