



# Complexities of Bihar's Ongoing Caste Survey

[Source: TH](#)

**For Prelims:** [Socio-Economic and Caste Census](#), [Census in India](#), [Supreme Court](#), Caste-based Survey, Indra Sawhney Case, Article 16(4) of the Constitution.

**For Mains:** Purpose of the Caste-based Survey, Positive and Negative Aspects of Caste Based Survey.

## Why in News?

The **ongoing caste-based survey in Bihar** has garnered significant attention, leading to legal battles and debates surrounding its **constitutionality, necessity, and potential implications**.

## What is the Purpose of the Caste-based Survey?

- The caste-based survey was initiated by the **Bihar government** on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The government stated that detailed information on socio-economic conditions would help create better **policies and schemes for disadvantaged groups**.
- The survey encompasses the recording of **economic status alongside caste information**, with a target population of **12.70 crore in Bihar's 38 districts**.

**Note:** In 2011, the Union government undertook a [Socio-Economic and Caste Census \(SECC\)](#); however, due to data inaccuracies, the raw data collected from almost **1.3 billion Indians** was never disclosed.

## Why is the Caste-based Survey Facing Legal Challenges?

- **Critics' Opposition to the Caste-Based Survey:**
  - The survey was challenged by several petitioners in the Patna High Court on various grounds, such as **violating the Constitution, infringing on privacy, being beyond the competence of the state government, being politically motivated**, and being based on unreliable methods.
  - The petitioners assert that the State government lacks the legal competence to **appoint District Magistrates and local authorities for data collection without a notification under Section 3 of the Census Act, 1948**, issued by the Central government.
    - Also, **assigning a caste identity to all citizens**, regardless of whether they intend to use State benefits, goes against the Constitution.
    - This is against the **right to identity, right to dignity, right to informational privacy, and right of choice guaranteed by Article 21**.

**Note:** The **Constitution's Entry 69 in the Seventh Schedule's Union List** gives the sole authority to the **central government** to conduct a census.

- **Halt on the Second Phase by High Court:**
  - The first phase of the survey involved listing houses. The government was in the midst of the second phase when the **survey was stopped due to a High Court order on May 4, 2023.**
- **High Court's Validation of the Survey:**
  - However, with the recent High Court verdict **dismissing all petitions opposing the move**, the government **resumed work on the second phase of the survey.**
    - In the second phase, **data related to castes, sub-castes, and religions of all people is to be collected.**
  - The Court relied on the ruling in [Indra Sawhney Case](#) to rule that there is **no fault with the identification of caste in a bid to ameliorate social backwardness** as envisioned under **Article 16(4) of the Constitution.**
- Numerous petitions have also been submitted to the [Supreme Court](#), contesting the verdict of the Patna High Court that upheld the ongoing caste survey.

## What are the Positive and Negative Aspects of Caste Based Survey?

- **Positive:**
  - **Informed Policy Making:** Accurate and up-to-date information about caste-based disparities can help policymakers design and implement more effective policies and programs to **uplift marginalized communities and reduce social inequalities.**
    - The last caste-based census that is openly available to the public dates back to **1931.**
  - **Addressing Intersectionality:** Caste intersects with other factors such as **gender, religion, and region**, leading to compounded disadvantages.
    - A survey can reveal these **intersections**, leading to more **nuanced policy approaches** that target multiple dimensions of marginalization.
- **Negative:**
  - **Potential Stigmatization:** Disclosure of caste identities **could lead to individuals being stigmatized or discriminated** against based on preconceived notions associated with certain castes.
    - This can **deter honest responses** and undermine the survey's accuracy.
  - **Political Manipulation:** Caste-based data can be **exploited by politicians for short-term gains**, leading to **identity-based vote bank politics**. This can divert attention from genuine policy issues and perpetuate divisive politics.
  - **Fluidity of Caste Identities:** Simplistic interpretations might overlook **intra-caste variations and historical changes**, leading to policies that fail to address the nuances of contemporary caste dynamics.
    - Also, **caste identities are not static**; they can **change due to factors like inter-caste marriages.** A survey might struggle to capture these dynamic changes, leading to inaccurate representations of reality.

## Conclusion

A balanced approach to conducting a caste-based survey should involve establishing a clear **ethical framework that prioritizes participant privacy and dignity.** Ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality.

Public awareness campaigns, regular reviews, and capacity-building initiatives can contribute to a long-term vision of **reducing inequalities and fostering social integration** aligned with the principles of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal-10](#).

**UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question**

## **Prelims**

### **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)**

### **Mains:**

**Q.**How do you explain the statistics that show that the sex ratio in Tribes In India is more favourable to women than the sex ratio among Scheduled Castes? **(2015)**

**Q.** Though there have been several different estimates of poverty in India, all indicate reduction in poverty levels over time. Do you agree? Critically examine with reference to urban and rural poverty indicators. **(2015)**

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