



Uncertainty Regarding India's Next National Census

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the deadline to **freeze administrative boundaries for the Census** expired without a new date announced. Thus, creating uncertainty around the timing of the Census exercise.

What are the Recent Updates Regarding the Census Exercise in India?

- **Deadline Extensions:** The deadline for freezing administrative boundaries necessary for the Census has been extended **nine times since December 2020**.
- **Impact of Recent Extensions:**
 - **On Census Timeline:**
 - This extension effectively postpones the commencement of the Census to at least **1st October 2024** as it typically takes three months to prepare enumerators for the task. This lack of clarity adds to the uncertainty surrounding the Census schedule.
 - **On Women's Reservation Act:**
 - The implementation of the [women's reservation](#), which **reserves 33% of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for women**, hinges on the completion of the Census and subsequent [delimitation exercises](#).
 - **Delimitation based on the new Census data** is necessary before the reservation can be enacted.
- **Additional Considerations:**
 - Few political **parties** has demanded the **inclusion of a caste census in the upcoming Census exercise**. This demand underscores broader discussions on social categorisation and representation within Indian society.

DECENNIAL POPULATION CENSUS

A process of collecting, compiling, analysing and disseminating demographic, economic and social data (at a specific time) of all persons in a country.



BRIEF HISTORY

- Earliest mentions: **Rigveda** (800-600 BC), **Arthashastra** (300 BC) & **Ain-i-Akbari** (16th century)
- 1st Non-synchronous Census (held in a few places): **1872** under **Gov. Gen. Lord Mayo**
- 1st Synchronous Census (held all over British India): **1881** by **W.C. Plowden** (Census Commissioner of India) under **Lord Ripon**

RESPONSIBLE BODY

- Until 1951, Census Organisation was set up on an ad-hoc basis for each Census
- Since 1951, Office of the **Registrar General and Census Commissioner** (MHA)

LEGAL BACKING

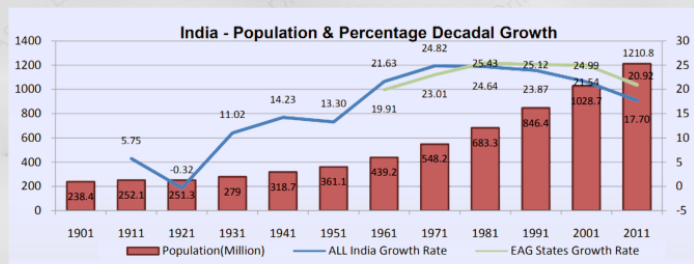
- A Union list subject under **Article 246**
- Conducted under **Census Act (CA), 1948**

CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION COLLECTED

- Guaranteed under CA 1948
- Information not even accessible to the courts of law

SIGNIFICANCE

- Largest single source of statistical information about people of India
- Used for good governance purposes
- Demarcation of constituencies & representation in Legislature



Census	Major Event
5 th (1921)	Only census to witness a decadal population decline (0.31%) Hence, called the year of " The Great Divide "
11 th (1971)	Added information on fertility for currently married women
13 th (1991)	Concept of literacy changed to children aged 7+ (previously 4+)
14 th (2001)	Leap in tech front; usage of Intelligent Character Reading (ICR)
15 th (2011)	Notable fall in case of Empowered Action Group (EAG) States noticed first time

Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)

ABOUT

- Conducted in **2011** for the **first time since 1931**

COMPONENTS

- Economic status** (to define a poor/deprived person)
- Specific caste** (to evaluate caste groups that are economically worse/better off)

CONSTITUTIONAL BACKING

- Article 340** mandates the **appointment of a commission** to investigate the conditions of socially/educationally backward classes

Census v/s SECC

- SECC **identifies beneficiaries** of state support (Census - national population data)
- SECC **data open for use** by govt depts (Census data - confidential)

SIGNIFICANCE

- Better inequality mapping
- Quantifiable data to support existing reservation levels

SOME KEY FINDINGS OF SECC 2011

- Total Households - 24.49 crore
 - Rural - 17.97 crore
 - SC/ST Households - 3.87 crore (21.56%)
- Households with no literate adult (age >25) - 23.5%

What is the Census?

Historical Context and Frequency:

- India's first synchronised census occurred in 1881 under **W.C. Plowden, the then Census Commissioner of India**. Since then, it has been conducted every decade without interruption.
- While the Census of India Act of 1948 provides the legal framework, it doesn't specify a mandatory frequency.**

- The decennial pattern is a convention rather than a constitutional requirement.
- The **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India**, operating under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, oversees the responsibility

of conducting this decadal enumeration exercise.

▪ **Objective:**

- The Census provides a **snapshot of the nation's population**, serving as a foundation for reviewing progress, evaluating government schemes, and planning future initiatives.

▪ **Methodology:** The Census is conducted in **two main phases:**

- **Houselisting/Housing Census:** This initial phase records details of all structures, including their type, amenities, and assets.
- **Population Enumeration:** This more comprehensive phase collects detailed information about each individual in the country, regardless of nationality.

▪ **Global Perspective:**

- While India follows a 10-year cycle, similar to countries like the US and UK, some nations like **Australia, Canada, and Japan conduct their censuses every five years.**

Census Data 2011

- **Population:** Grew by **17.7% to 1.21 billion**, with female growth outpacing male growth.
- **Literacy: Rose to 73%**, with women's literacy improving more than men's.
- **Population Density:** Increased to **382 people per square** kilometer.
- **Sex Ratio:** Improved to 940 females per 1000 males.
- **Religious Demographics:** Hindus at 79.8%, Muslims at **14.23%** of population.
- **New Category:** "No religion" option introduced, with 0.24% identifying as such.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

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. Two parallel run schemes of the Government, viz the Aadhaar Card and NPR, one as voluntary and the other as compulsory, have led to debates at national levels and also litigations. On merits, discuss whether or not both schemes need run concurrently. Analyse the potential of the schemes to achieve developmental benefits and equitable growth. **(2014)**

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/uncertainty-regarding-india-s-next-national-census>

