



Census

For Prelims: [Census](#), [Covid-19](#), [Census of India Act of 1948](#), [Demarcation of Constituencies](#), **Migration**, **PDS**.

For Mains: Census, its significance and implication of its Delay in framing Policy.

Why in News?

The 2021 [Census](#) in India had to be postponed for the first time in the past 150 years due to the [Covid-19 pandemic](#). Despite the pandemic ending and the return to normalcy, the Census is still pending.

- It was initially proposed to be **an entirely digital exercise**, with all the information being fed into a mobile app by the enumerators. However, owing to **'practical difficulties'**, it was later **decided to conduct it in 'mix mode'**, using either the mobile app or the traditional paper forms.

Note: According to the State of [World Population report 2023](#) released recently by the [UN Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#), India will overtake China to become the world's most populous country by the middle of 2023.

What is the Census?

- Definition:**
 - [Population Census](#) is the total process of collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, **at a specific time, of all persons in a country or a well-defined part of a country.**
 - Census is the basis for **reviewing the country's progress in the past decade**, monitoring the ongoing schemes of the government and plan for the future.
 - It provides an instantaneous photographic picture of a community, which is valid at a particular moment of time.
- Phases:** The Census Operations in India are carried out in two phases:
 - Houselisting/Housing Census** under which details of all buildings, permanent or temporary, are noted with their type, amenities, and assets.
 - Population Enumeration** where more detailed information on each individual residing in the country, Indian national or otherwise is noted.
 - It is carried out after making a list of all households that are surveyed.
- Frequency:**
 - The first synchronous census was taken in 1881, by W.C. Plowden, Census Commissioner of India. Since then, **censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every ten years.**
 - The [Census of India Act of 1948](#) provides the legal framework for carrying out the

Census however, **it does not mention its timing or periodicity.**

- Hence, a Census is **Constitutionally mandated in India but there is no Constitutional or legal requirement** that it needs to be conducted decennially.
- The 10-year frequency is followed in many countries (Ex. the US and the UK) but some countries like **Australia, Canada, Japan conduct it every five years.**
- **Nodal Ministry:**
 - The decennial Census is conducted by the [Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner](#), Ministry of Home Affairs.
 - Until 1951, the Census Organisation was set up on an **ad-hoc basis for each Census.**

What is the Significance of Census?

- **Primary and Authentic Data:**
 - It generates primary and authentic data that **forms the foundation of various statistical analyses.** This data is essential for planning, decision-making, and development initiatives in various sectors, such as administration, economy, and social welfare.
 - It is **not the legal requirement but the utility of the Census** that has made it a permanent regular exercise. **Reliable and up-to-date data is vital** as it influences the accuracy of indicators used in different aspects of India's progress.
- **Demarcation:**
 - Census data is utilized for [demarcation of constituencies](#) and allocation of representation in government bodies.
 - It plays a crucial role in determining the number of **seats to be reserved for [Scheduled Castes \(SCs\) and Scheduled Tribes \(STs\)](#)** in Parliament, State legislatures, local bodies, and government services.
 - In the case of panchayats and municipal bodies, the reservation of seats for SCs and STs is based on their proportion in the population.
 - This ensures proportional representation and promotes inclusivity in the political and administrative systems.
- **Better Access for Businesses:**
 - The census data is also important for **business houses and industries** for strengthening and planning their business for penetration into areas, which had hitherto remained, uncovered.
- **Giving Grants:**
 - The [Finance Commission](#) provide grants to the states on the basis of population figures available from the Census data.

What can be the Consequences of Delaying Census?

- **Challenges in Framing Policy:**
 - A break in the Census periodicity can result in data that is not comparable to previous sets, creating **challenges in analyzing trends and making informed policy** decisions.
 - Lack of reliable data - 12-year-old data on a constantly changing metric is not reliable - has the **potential to upset every indicator on India** and affect the efficacy and efficiency of all kinds of developmental initiatives.
- **Political Misrepresentation:**
 - Delaying the Census has consequences for the reservation of seats for SCs and STs in various governing bodies.
 - The data from the 2011 Census **would continue to be used**, which may result in inaccurate seat reservations.
 - This is particularly problematic in **towns and panchayats where there have been significant changes** in population composition over the last decade.
- **Unreliable Estimates on Welfare Measures:**
 - The delay will impact government schemes and programmes, and would result in **unreliable estimates from other surveys** on consumption, health and employment, which depend on census data to determine policy and welfare measures.
 - As many as 100 million people are likely to be excluded from the government's

food subsidy programme—the **Public Distribution System (PDS)**—as the population figures used to calculate the number of beneficiaries are from the 2011 census.

▪ **Impact on Houselisting:**

- Houselisting takes nearly a year to complete, **as it requires enumerators to locate addresses and gather relevant information.** In India, houselisting is particularly crucial because the country lacks a robust address system.
- Delaying the census means that the **list becomes outdated, as changes in households, addresses, and demographics occur** over time.
 - This can result in **incomplete or incorrect information, leading to a less reliable foundation** for subsequent population enumeration and data collection

▪ **Lack of Migration Data:**

- The outdated 2011 Census data couldn't provide answers to important questions regarding the numbers, causes, and patterns of migration.
 - During the Covid lockdown, the sight of migrant workers leaving cities and walking back to **their villages highlighted their challenges.**
- The government lacked information on **the stranded migrants and their requirements for food relief and transportation** support.
 - The upcoming Census is expected to capture the scale of migration towards smaller towns in addition to major cities, shedding light on healthcare and social service needs specific to migrants.
 - This data can help in identifying the necessary support and services required by migrants and their locations.

Way Forward

- The government should prioritize conducting the Census at the **earliest possible time.**
- Efforts should be made to **leverage technology and innovative methods to streamline the data collection** process.
- The government should allocate necessary resources and manpower to ensure a smooth and **efficient Census operation.**
- Timely completion of the Census is crucial for **accurate data, informed policy decisions, effective governance,** and inclusive development in various sectors.

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)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/census-30>

