

Caste in the Census

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Caste in the Census: A New Chapter for India's Governance and Social Justice

The **Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA)** has approved the inclusion of caste data in the upcoming population census, a significant decision given the **2021 Census** was postponed due to **COVID-19** and remains indefinitely delayed. This move revives debates on caste-based enumeration's role in governance, social justice, and politics, making it a critical topic for UPSC aspirants under **Polity**, **Governance**, and **Social Justice**.

Below is a concise yet comprehensive analysis, tailored for UPSC preparation, with key data in **bold**, structured pointwise where needed, and relevant to the exam.

Overview of Population Census

The Population Census provides vital data on demographics, culture, and economic structure, guiding policymaking at all levels.

- **Purpose:** Collects data on population, literacy, employment, and housing for evidence-based governance.
- **History:**
 - First census in **1872** (non-synchronous); first synchronous census in **1881** under British rule.
 - Conducted every **10 years** by the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- **UPSC Relevance:** Key for **Polity** (Union List) and **Governance** (data-driven planning).

Legal and Constitutional Basis

- **Constitutional Provision:** Census is a **Union subject** under **Entry 69, Union List, Seventh Schedule**.
 - **Legal Framework:** Governed by the **Census Act, 1948**; **Collection of Statistics Act, 2008** allows state-level surveys (e.g., **Bihar 2023**).
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Tested in **Polity** (federal structure) and **Governance** (administrative law).
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History of Caste Census

- **British Era:** Caste data collected from **1881 to 1931**; last full caste census in **1931**.
 - **Post-Independence:**
 - Discontinued after **1951**, except for **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.
 - States advised in **1961** to conduct **OBC** surveys; **Karnataka (2015)** and **Bihar (2023)** did so.
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Relevant for **Social Justice** (reservation policies) and **Polity** (Centre-State dynamics).
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Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011

- **Objective:** Collected socio-economic and caste data.
 - **Execution:**
 - Conducted by **Ministry of Rural Development** (rural) and **Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation** (urban).
 - **46 lakh caste names** recorded due to open-ended format, compared to **4,147 castes** in **1931**.
 - **Outcomes:** .Private
 - Socio-economic data published in **2016**; caste data withheld.
 - Raw data given to **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**; **Arvind Panagariya**-led group formed, but no public report.
 - **Lessons:** Highlighted need for a standardized caste directory.
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Case study for **Governance** (data challenges) and **Social Justice** (caste equity).
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Key Highlights of Caste Census Decision

- **Digital Mode:**
 - Census in **digital mode** using a **mobile app**.
 - New **"Other"** column with **drop-down caste code directory** alongside SC/ST columns.
 - **Caste Directory:**
 - Merges Central lists (**2,650 OBCs, 1,170 SCs, 890 STs**) with state OBC lists.
 - **Pre-test** planned to ensure accuracy.
 - **Policy Shift:** First comprehensive caste enumeration since **1931**.
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Key for **Governance** (digital transformation) and **Social Justice** (affirmative action).
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Challenges and Historical Context

- **Challenges:**
- **Data Issues:** Overlapping caste names, migrant identities, and varying state OBC lists complicate classification.

- **Historical Context:** Caste data excluded post-1951 to promote a casteless society; **Mandal Commission's 52% OBC** estimate used since.
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Central to **Governance** (data accuracy) and **Social Justice** (reservation policies).
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Implementation Plan

- **Scale:** 30 lakh officials to be retrained for digital format.
 - **Phases:**
 - **Phase 1:** House listing (31 questions, notified 2020).
 - **Phase 2:** Population enumeration (28 questions, tested 2019).
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Relevant for **Governance** (public administration) and **Science & Technology** (digital governance).
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Significance for Governance

- **Delimitation:** Data will redraw **Lok Sabha** and **State Assembly** constituencies.
 - **Women's Reservation:** Enables 33% reservation in legislatures per 2023 Act.
 - ****Deb Debate:**
 - **Pros:** Enables targeted welfare and equitable representation.
 - **Cons:** Risks entrenching caste divisions and political misuse.
 - **UPSC Relevance:** Key for **Polity** (electoral reforms) and **Social Justice** (equity).
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Conclusion

The inclusion of caste data in the Census is a pivotal step for governance, social justice, and political representation. For UPSC, it spans **Polity** (constitutional provisions), **Governance** (data-driven policy), and **Social Justice** (caste and gender equity). The **digital mode** and **standardized directory** aim to address past issues, but challenges like data accuracy and caste politics persist. Aspirants should focus on its constitutional, administrative, and socio-political dimensions.

