



Census , Caste Census and Delimitation Commission in India

11.10.2025

Census in India

- The **last Census in India** was conducted in **2011**.
- The **next Census**, originally scheduled for **2021**, was **postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic**.
- Now, after a gap of **17 years**, the new **Census will begin on March 1, 2027**, which will also include a **caste-based census**.



Importance of Census

- The Census provides vital data on the **size, distribution, socio-economic and demographic characteristics** of the population.
- The data is used for:
 - Determining the **number of seats** in Parliament, State Assemblies and local bodies.
 - **Allocating SC/ST reservations** and fixing their proportions.
 - **Policy formulation and development planning**.
 - Implementing the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act)** effectively.



Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act, 2023)

- The Act reserves **33% of seats for women** in the **Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and Delhi Assembly**.
- It is the **106th Constitutional Amendment Act (2023)**, passed and approved by the President.
- The **Delimitation Commission**, based on the new Census, will determine the reserved seats for women.

Legal Framework

- **Census Act, 1948:** Conducted by the **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner**, under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- **Census Rules, 1990:** Define procedures, appointments and administrative guidelines.
- As per the Act:
 - The **Central Government** can conduct the Census whenever it deems necessary.
 - **Citizens are legally required** to provide accurate information.
 - **Census data remains confidential**.

Constitutional Status

- Under the **Seventh Schedule**, Census is listed in the **Union List (Entry 69)**.
- Therefore, **only the Central Government** has the authority to conduct it (**Article 246**).
- **Articles 341 and 342** deal with the identification and enumeration of **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.

Historical Background of Census in India

Period	Description
Rigvedic Period (800–600 BCE)	References to population enumeration found.
Chanakya's Arthashastra (3rd century BCE)	Population data used for taxation policy.
Akbar's Ain-i-Akbari	Recorded data on population, industries and wealth.
1872	First Census under Lord Mayo (non-synchronous).
1881	First synchronous national Census under Lord Ripon; conducted every 10 years thereafter.

Key Features of the 2027 Census

(a) Two-Phase Process

- **Phase 1 (October 2026):** Himalayan states – Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.
- **Phase 2 (March 2027):** Rest of India.

(b) Inclusion of Caste Data

- For the first time since independence, caste data will be included.
- This will help in **social justice and evidence-based policymaking**.



(c) Use of Digital Technology

- Mobile apps, digital platforms and **GIS mapping** will be used.
- Ensures **transparency, accuracy and efficiency** in data collection.

Caste Census: Historical Context

- The **first Census** in British India was in **1872** under **Lord Mayo**.
- **Regular Census** started in **1881** under **Lord Ripon** and caste enumeration was included.
- Caste data was collected **regularly till 1931**.
- **1941 Census** also included caste data, but it was **never published**.
- **1951 Census** recorded caste data **only for SCs and STs**.
- Following the **Mandal Commission (1990)**, **27% reservation** was implemented for **OBCs** in government jobs.
- The **2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC)** collected caste data after independence, but **the results were not made public**.

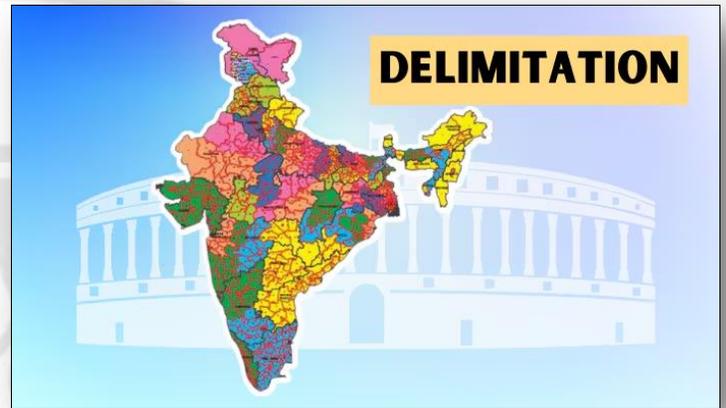
Need for a Caste Census

1. **Policy Transparency:** To make policies scientific and evidence-based.
2. **Reservation Review:** To rationalize reservation according to the actual socio-economic status.
3. **Identification of Marginalized Groups:** To design targeted welfare programs.
4. **Reduction of Social Inequality:** To promote equal opportunities through accurate data.

Delimitation Commission of India: Balancing Representation and Federal Fairness

Why in News?

- Recently, the Union Home Minister assured that the process of *delimitation* (redrawing of constituency boundaries) will be carried out **without reducing the representation of southern states** in the Lok Sabha.
- He emphasized that southern India would not be “penalized” for successfully controlling population growth and that any increase in Lok Sabha seats would ensure **justice and balance** between the north and the south.



This statement has reignited an important national debate:

- *Should political representation be based purely on population?*
- *If yes, will it unfairly disadvantage for states that performed well in population control and human development?*

What is Delimitation?

- **Delimitation** refers to the act of **redrawing the boundaries of electoral constituencies** in a country to ensure fair representation for all citizens.
- The primary aim is to make sure that each constituency has, as far as practicable, **an equal population**, ensuring that every vote carries equal value — “*One Person, One Vote, One Value.*”
- In India, this responsibility rests with an independent body — the **Delimitation Commission of India**, a *quasi-judicial institution* established under the Delimitation Act.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

The legal and constitutional foundation for delimitation in India lies in the following provisions:

1. Article 82 – Delimitation after each Census

- After every Census, Parliament is empowered to enact a new *Delimitation Act*.
- The President of India then constitutes a **Delimitation Commission** to carry out the exercise.

2. Article 170 – Delimitation for State Assemblies

- Deals with the division of states into territorial constituencies for legislative assemblies.

3. Key Constitutional Amendments

Amendment	Year	Significance
42nd Amendment	1976	Suspended delimitation until after the 2001 Census (to encourage population control).
84th Amendment	2001	Extended the freeze on seat allocation until 2026; only SC/ST reservations could be adjusted.
87th Amendment	2003	Allowed use of 2001 Census data for redrawing boundaries, without changing the total number of seats.

Result:

No change in the number of Lok Sabha or Assembly seats since 1971, though population has grown enormously and unevenly across regions.

Composition of the Delimitation Commission

The Commission is formed by the **President of India** in consultation with the **Election Commission of India**.

<p>Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court – <i>Chairperson</i> 2. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or his nominee 3. The State Election Commissioner of the concerned state(s) 	<p>Nature and Authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a quasi-judicial body, independent of political control. • Its orders are final and cannot be challenged in any court of law. • The Election Commission is responsible for implementing these orders.
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Judicial Exception:

In the *Kishore Chandra Chhaganlal Rathod vs. State of Gujarat* case, the Supreme Court observed that although its orders are final, **judicial review is possible** if recommendations are arbitrary or violate constitutional principles.

Functions and Powers of the Commission

- Fix boundaries of **Lok Sabha** and **State Assembly** constituencies.
- Maintain near-equal population across constituencies within a state.
- Identify **Scheduled Caste (SC)** and **Scheduled Tribe (ST)** reserved constituencies.
- Consider **public suggestions and objections** before finalizing.
- Once notified, its report **cannot be altered** by Parliament or the government.

It is, therefore, often called a “**Powerful Commission.**”

Historical Evolution of Delimitation in India

Commission	Year	Chairperson	Census Used	Key Highlights
1st	1952	Justice Fazl Ali	1951	First exercise after independence.
2nd	1963	Justice K.N. Wanchoo	1961	Updated constituencies after population rise.
3rd	1973	Justice J.L. Kapur	1971	Last before seat freeze; boundaries redefined.
4th	2002	Justice Kuldeep Singh	2001	Implemented after long gap; J&K excluded.
Special	2020	Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai	—	Conducted for J&K, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland & Arunachal Pradesh.

Recent Case: Jammu & Kashmir (2020–2022)

- After the abrogation of **Article 370**, the **Delimitation Commission for J&K** was set up.
- **Report (2022):**
 - Total seats: 114 (including 24 reserved for PoK).
 - Effective seats increased from 83 to 90.
 - Jammu: 43 seats | Kashmir: 47 seats.
 - Introduced SC/ST reservation for the first time.
 - Aimed to enhance regional and demographic balance.

Why Delimitation is Crucial

1. **Ensures Equal Representation:**
Prevents under- or over-representation of regions with unequal population growth.
2. **Maintains Electoral Fairness:**
Aligns representation with demographic realities and migration trends.
3. **Adapts to Urbanization:**
Rapidly growing cities and shrinking rural populations need new constituency boundaries.
4. **Strengthens Democracy:**
Upholds equality of vote and citizen participation.

Challenges and Controversies

1. Population Freeze and Imbalance

- Since seat allocation has been frozen since 1976, constituencies in fast-growing states like **Uttar Pradesh** or **Bihar** now represent far more people than those in **Kerala** or **Tamil Nadu**.
- This violates the ideal of equal vote value.

2. Political Gerrymandering

- Though the Commission is independent, political parties often lobby or influence public consultation phases to shape boundaries favorable to them.

3. North–South Divide

- **Southern states** (Tamil Nadu, Kerala andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana) have achieved lower fertility rates and better governance.
- **Northern states** (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan) continue to have high population growth.
- A population-based seat reallocation could **increase northern dominance** in Parliament and **reduce southern representation**.

Example:

- **Uttar Pradesh:** 1 MP = ~25.3 lakh people
- **Tamil Nadu:** 1 MP = ~18.4 lakh people
This means a Tamil Nadu voter's vote is worth more in relative terms.

4. Impact on Federalism

- A larger number of MPs from populous northern states could lead to **policy bias** toward their regional needs.
- This might weaken **cooperative federalism** and increase political alienation in the South.

5. Administrative Complexity

- Implementing new boundaries requires redrawing thousands of polling stations, updating electoral rolls and reorganizing administrative units.

Possible Solutions and Policy Options

1. Increase Total Lok Sabha Seats

- Expand the House to accommodate proportional increases without taking away representation from any region.
- India currently has **543 elected MPs** — this could be expanded to 700+ as per population growth.

2. Adopt a Multi-Criteria Formula

- Use not only population but also indicators such as **development, governance quality, education and efficiency** to determine seat allocation.

3. Weighted Representation

- Introduce a system where population and performance (like fertility rate control) are both considered.

4. Promote Consensus and Dialogue

- Encourage **Centre–State consultations** and **bipartisan consensus** before 2026 to avoid political polarization.

5. Regular Delimitation

- Conduct delimitation after every Census (every 10 years) to ensure timely adjustments rather than massive shifts after decades.

6. Public Participation and Transparency

- Publish draft maps, encourage public feedback and make the process transparent to avoid perceptions of bias.

The 2026 Challenge

- The **next delimitation** after 2026 will be one of the most critical in India's democratic history.
- It will decide the **future political weight of states**, redefine **Centre-State power relations** and test the strength of India's **federal structure**.

Key Question:

How can India ensure fair representation **without punishing** states that have achieved population control and high human development?

Conclusion

Delimitation lies at the intersection of **democracy, demography and federalism**.

Its primary goal — *equal representation for equal citizens* — must coexist with India's plural and federal character.

- On one hand, the **principle of equality** demands that representation reflect current population realities.
- On the other, **federal fairness** demands that development and population control efforts not be discouraged.

As India prepares for the post-2026 delimitation, policymakers must balance:

- **Demographic justice** with
- **Developmental incentives** and
- **Representation equality** with **federal stability**.

Ultimately, the Delimitation Commission is not just redrawing boundaries it is **reshaping the geometry of Indian democracy** for the next century.