

Next Census to conclude by March 2027, says government

The delayed population count will be India's first digital Census and will include an enumeration of castes for the first time in Independent India; dates of the two phases to be notified on June 16

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VIJAITA SINGH

Serial Number	Name of the person (start with head of household)	Relationship to Head	Sex	Date of birth and Age	Current marital status	Religion	Scheduled Caste (SC) / Scheduled Tribe (ST)	Disability	Mother tongue	Other languages known	Literacy status	Status of attendance in educational institution	Highest educational level attained
	Prabir pal Choudhary	Head		1968									
	Manueta pal Choudhary	Wife		1970									
	Payal pal Choudhary	Daughter											
	Pritham pal Choudhary	Son											

The last Census of India was conducted in 2011 in two phases. The 2027 exercise will be the first digital Census. | Photo Credit: AP

India will count its population by March 1, 2027, in a census to be held after an unprecedented 16-year gap, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs announced on Wednesday (June 4, 2025). This will be the country's first digital census, and the first in independent India to include an enumeration of castes as well.

The census will be conducted in two phases by February 28, 2027 and the data will have a reference date of 12 a.m. on March 1, 2027. However, the government has not yet notified the date of commencement of the exercise. The notification of the Centre's intention to conduct the census, and the dates of the two phases will be

“published in the official gazette tentatively on June 16 as per provision of section 3 of the Census Act 1948.”

As per the constitutional mandate, the first census after 2026 can be used as the basis to redraw Lok Sabha constituencies. The next general election is expected to be held in 2029.

The last census was held in 2011 and the subsequent exercise scheduled to take place in 2021 was delayed indefinitely, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 30, the Union Cabinet had decided to include caste enumeration as part of the next census exercise.

EDITORIAL | Cast of characters: On the caste census

Two-phase process

For the Union Territory of Ladakh and the non-synchronous snow-bound areas of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and the States of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the reference date for the population count will be 12 a.m. on October 1, 2026.

India's census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948 and the Census Rules, 1990, and will be completed in two phases: first, the house listing and housing schedule; and then, the population enumeration. Both phases usually span a period of 11 months from April 1 to February 28 the following year. This time around, caste will be enumerated in the second phase.

The last census was conducted in 2010 and 2011, with the first phase completed between April 1 and September 30, 2010, and the second phase from February 9 to February 28, 2011.

A senior official said that the process of the census begins with the issuance of the notification in the gazette of India. “The second and final phase will begin on February 27 and conclude on March 1, the same year,” the official added.

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Retraining enumerators

The 24 lakh enumeration blocks that were finalised for the planned 2021 census are likely to be used for the 2027 exercise. Around 30 lakh enumerators, including a sizeable number of government school teachers, will be trained afresh on the mobile application that has been readied for the exercise.

“A significant addition to the training manual would be the enumeration of caste. Another drop box to record the castes is likely to be added next to the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) tables, the only two categories counted so far,” a senior government official said.

No mention of NPR updation

There was no announcement on updating the National Population Register (NPR), which already has a database of 119 crore residents. The population register was to be updated during the first phase of the planned 2021 census.

Citizens may also get an opportunity to “self-enumerate” as the Office of the Registrar General of India, which conducts the census, had developed a self-enumeration portal in English for the planned 2021 census. This option, however, will only be available to those households that have updated the NPR online.

According to the Citizenship Rules 2003, the NPR is the first step towards compilation of a National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC/NRC). The collection of these details has been opposed by several Opposition-ruled States in the past.

Redrawing constituencies

The census will impact the next delimitation of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats and the proposed 33% reservation for women in Parliament and Assemblies. A Delimitation Commission will have to be set up and intense deliberations will be needed given the opposition expressed by several southern States against a delimitation exercise based on population count alone.

According to the 84th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2001, the redrawing of constituency boundaries is to be carried out on the basis of population data of the first census after 2026. The current seats are drawn on the basis of 1971 census data.

According to the women’s reservation law, one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies shall come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken based on the relevant figures of the first census recorded after the Act has commenced.