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Census opens the door for National Population Register update

While the NPR is likely to be updated during the house listing phase of the Census next year, government yet to take a call on NRC



Sources said that while the NPR would likely be updated during the house listing phase of the Census next year, taking it forward to the NRC remains the government's decision. (File photo)



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The announcement of Census, to be conducted in two phases in 2026 and 2027, opens the doors to not only delimitation and the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill but also paves the way for the National Population Register (NPR) to be updated and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise.

Sources said that while the NPR would likely be updated during the house listing phase of the Census next year, taking it forward to the [NRC](#) remains the government's decision.

The issues of NPR and NRC earlier led to widespread protests from the public as well as Opposition parties in the wake of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019. As many as 10 states — Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, [Tamil Nadu](#), West Bengal, Kerala, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh — and the Union Territories of [Delhi](#) and Puducherry passed resolutions in their Assemblies in 2020 against NPR and NRC.

While the government's announcement on Wednesday made no mention of either NPR or NRC, Census enumeration and updating the NPR were cleared back in December 2019 by the Cabinet. It was then supposed to happen in 2020 along with the housing listing phase of the Census, but was postponed due to the [Covid-19](#) pandemic. The government has already allocated a [budget](#) of close to Rs 4000 crore for the exercise.

What the rules say

The NPR is the precursor to the NRC and the same stands enshrined in law. The NPR, which is an enumeration of the “usual residents” of the country and is a data collection exercise based on voluntary disclosure of information by people, is governed by the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. The rules were framed under sub-sections (1) and (3) of Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

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Under Rule 3, which provides for NRC, sub-rule (4), says, “The Central Government may, by an order issued in this regard, decide a date by which the Population Register shall be prepared by collecting information relating to all persons who are usually residing within the jurisdiction of Local Registrar.”

Sub-rule (5) of the Rule then says, “The Local Register of Indian citizens shall contain details of persons after due verification made from the Population Register.”

Under Rule 4, titled “Preparation of the National Register of Indian Citizens”, sub-rule 4 says, “During the verification process, particulars of such individuals, whose Citizenship is doubtful, shall be entered by the Local Registrar with appropriate remark in the Population Register for further enquiry and in case of doubtful Citizenship, the individual or the family shall be informed in a specified proforma immediately after the verification process is over.”

Under Rule 7, the head of the family is supposed to provide correct information to enumerators during the NPR exercise, failing which he shall be penalised (under Rule 17) with a fine extending up to Rs 1,000.

The data for NPR was first collected in 2010 along with the house listing phase of the 2011 Census. In 2015, this data was further updated in a door-to-door survey.

However, with the [Narendra Modi](#) government in 2016 picking out Aadhaar as the key vehicle for the transfer of government benefits and putting its weight behind it, the NPR took a backseat. Through a notification on August 3, 2019, the Registrar General of India (RGI) revived it. Sources said the RGI had already prepared the NPR proforma and the digitisation of the 2015 data is complete.

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The decision had come against the backdrop of a nationwide stir against the CAA, the proposed nationwide NRC, and the NRC process in Assam that excluded 19 lakh people. This exacerbated anxiety around the idea of citizenship in the country. At the time, Union Home Minister [Amit Shah](#) repeatedly said there would be a nationwide NRC. He also tried to explain a certain “chronology” in which the CAA would come first and the NRC would follow.

However, following protests against the CAA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in December 2019 that the government had not yet decided on conducting the NRC. It was a stand that Shah and the MHA subsequently reiterated on multiple occasions.

Conducting the NRC had been inserted in the Citizenship Act of 1955 through an amendment in 2003 under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. The government at the time, among other amendments, inserted Section 14A into the principal Act that says, “The Central Government may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card to him ... The Central Government may maintain a National Register of Indian Citizens and for that purpose establish a National Registration

Authority ... On and from the date of commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003, the Registrar General, India, appointed under sub-section (1) of section 3 of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 (18 of 1969) shall act as the National Registration Authority and he shall function as the Registrar General of Citizen Registration.”

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Census

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