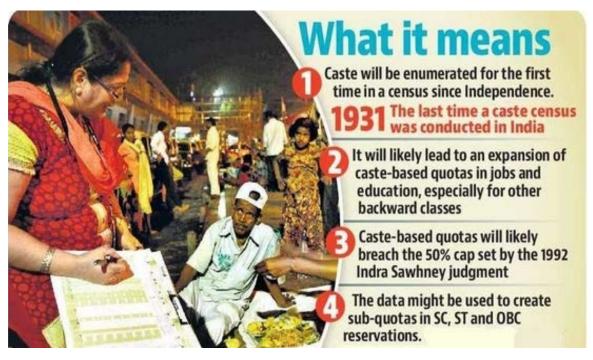
CASTE CENSUS: Empowerment or Political Agenda?



Context:

• The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved the enumeration of castes in the upcoming Census.

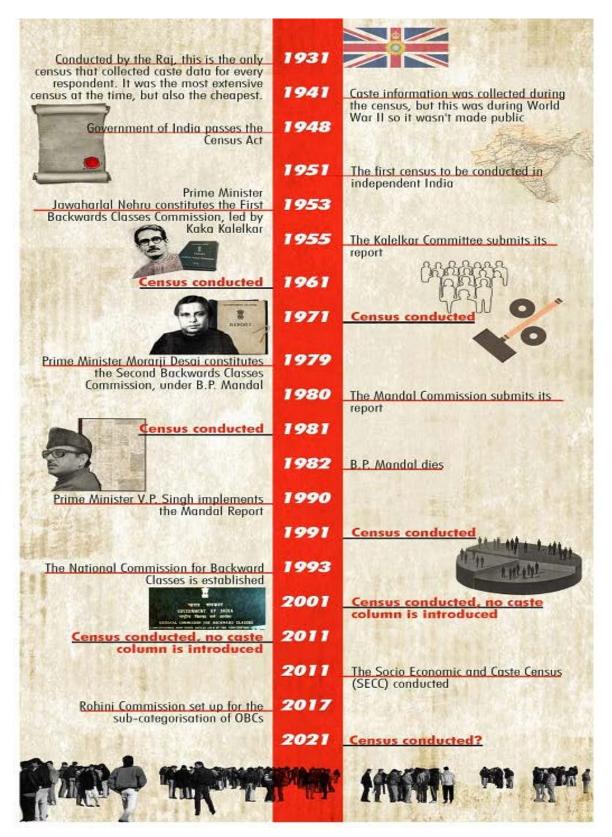
1. What Is Caste Census?



- A caste census systematically collects data on individuals' caste identities during a nationwide census.
- It is nothing but an **official survey** conducted by the Central government.
- The government will collect data on the population, details of caste, sub-caste, and socio-economic status, etc.
- It is different from the general census that counts total population, literacy, etc.
- The collected data helps the **people in power to understand the distribution and conditions** of different social groups.
- In short, the caste census gives **granular data on caste groups** which could **reshape political strategies** as the parties will try to woo numerically larger groups.



2. What is the history of Caste Census?



- Caste enumeration was a regular feature of census exercises during British rule from 1881 to 1931.
- However, with the **first census of independent In**dia in 1951, the government chose to **discontinue the practice**, except for **Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.

NUMBERS GAME

1881-1931: British Raj included caste enumeration in Census

1951: Junked in independent India's first Census, except for SCs and STs

1961: States allowed to conduct surveys to prepare their OBC lists

2011: UPA undertakes caste enumeration as a part of Socio-Economic & Caste Census 2016: SECC data published, caste excluded

2018: Rajnath Singh, then home minister, speaks about OBC data collection in Census 2021

2023: Cong demands an 'up-to-date' caste census

2024: Bihar, Telangana publish caste survey data. Karnataka undertook survey, yet to release data

History of Caste Census	Description
British India (1881–1931)	 Caste enumeration was a regular feature of censuses in British India, conducted every decade between 1881 and 1931. The colonial government collected detailed information on caste, religion, and occupation to better understand and control India's diverse society.



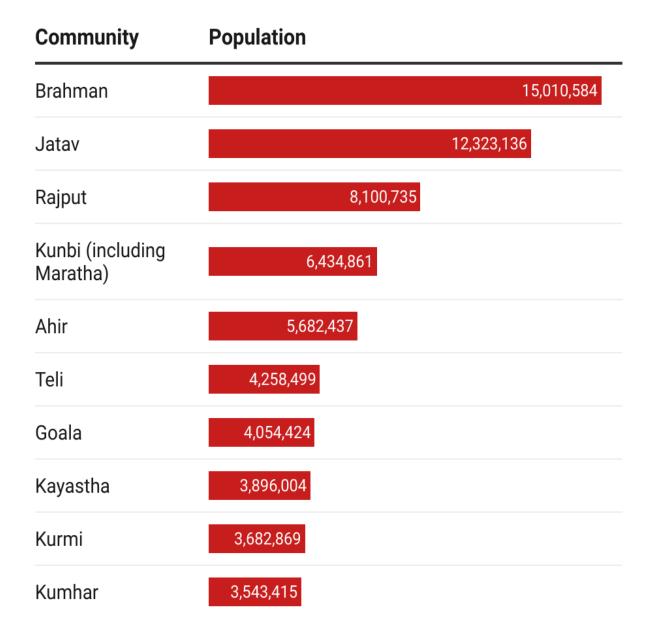
Post- Independence Changes (1951)	• In India's first census in 1951, the government, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to end caste enumeration except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) to promote national unity and avoid reinforcing caste divisions.
1961 Directive to States	• Although the central government refrained from conducting caste censuses, it allowed states in 1961 to prepare their own lists of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), supporting affirmative action efforts at the state level.

3. Enlist key findings of 1931 Caste Census?

- The 1931 Census that counted castes was conducted by the colonial British government, and was the first such exercise after the 1901 Census.
- The caste section put the numbers of **Other Backward Classes** (**OBC**) at 52% of the then total 271 million population of the country.
- J H Hutton, the Census Commissioner at the time, countered those who argued against adding caste to the Census exercise saying that "the mere act of labelling persons belonging to a caste tends to perpetuate the system".
- Hutton's logic was that "it is impossible to get rid of any institution by ignoring its existence like the proverbial ostrich".



1931 Census: Largest communities across British India

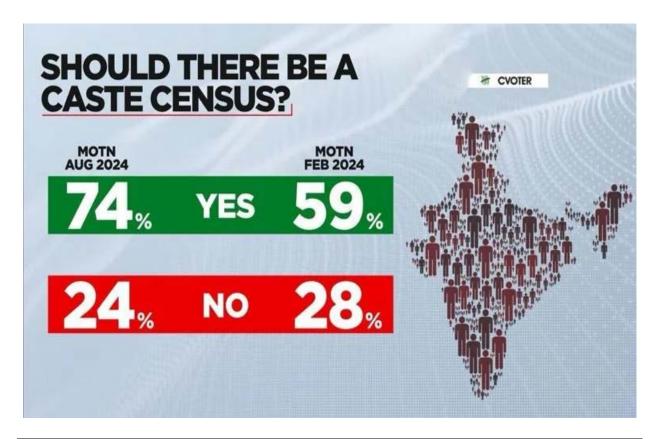




1931 Census: Largest community by province

Province	Community	Population ▼
Bombay	Kunbi (including Maratha)	6,434,861
United Provinces	Chamar	6,312,203
Bihar and Orissa	Goala	3,455,141
Bengal	Kaibartta	2,733,338
Madras	Brahman	1,473,836
Assam	Kayastha	1,365,590
Punjab	Arain	1,334,629
Mysore	Vakkaliga	1,312,264
Central Provinces and Berar	Mehra	1,307,962
Hyderabad	Jatav	1,281,092
Central India Agency	Jatav	929,847
Rajputana Agency	Brahman	854,634
Baroda	Kanbi	502,888
J&K	Rajput	256,020
North West Frontier Province	Arora	61,402
Coorg	Kodaga	41,026
Ajmer-Merwara	Gujar	35,063
Sikkim	Bhotia	15,192

4. What is the need for Caste Census?



Key Points	Analysis
Accurate Representation	• India's last full caste census was in 1931 (British era) and the current policies rely on outdated data, leading to inaccurate reservation quotas and welfare schemes.
Better Policy- Making	 Helps identify most backward castes (OBCs, SCs, STs) needing affirmative action. Ensures resources reach the truly disadvantaged, not just dominant groups. Reveals which castes dominate certain sectors (e.g., manual labor vs. white-collar jobs). Helps design job quotas, scholarships, and welfare schemes more effectively.



Reforms in Affirmative Action and Welfare Policies	 Accurate caste data will allow for a reassessment of reservation policies and welfare schemes. There will be strong pressure to align reservations in education, jobs, and political representation with the actual population share of marginalized groups. This could lead to demands for increased quotas and targeted welfare measures, making social justice a central electoral issue.
To Tackle Social Inequality	 Caste-based discrimination still exists in many regions of India. A caste census helps identify marginalised communities that need more support. With accurate data, governments can design targeted schemes to uplift those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.
To Evaluate Affirmative Action Policies	 Policies like reservations for OBCs and other backward classes aim to ensure equal opportunity. But to assess whether these policies are working, we need accurate caste-based data. A caste census helps monitor their impact and allows for better planning and adjustments.
To Understand India's Social Structure	 Caste plays a major role in shaping India's society, economy, and politics. A caste census gives a deeper understanding of the population's composition. This helps researchers, social scientists, and policymakers analyse how different communities interact and where inequalities lie.

To Fulfill a Constitutional Purpose

- The Indian Constitution supports the idea of identifying backward classes.
- Article 340 empowers the government to appoint a commission to examine the conditions of socially and educationally backward groups.
- A caste census is a step in fulfilling this constitutional directive.

5. What are the legal requirements for caste enumeration?

- To include **caste enumeration** in the next Census, the **government** does **not need to amend the Cen**sus Act.
- The Registrar General and Census Commissioner (RG&CC) is already empowered under existing law to design the census proforma and the standardised forms used during the house listing and population enumeration phases to collect information from households and individuals, respectively.
- While finalising the questions for the second phase (population enumeration), the RG&CC can simply add a question that goes beyond the existing categories of General, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) to ask whether a person belongs to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), and if so, which specific class within that category.
- This addition would have to be **included in the final proforma**, which is notified through a **formal gazette notification**.

6. Which list will be used for OBC enumeration?

- The most crucial question the government must now address is which list to use while enumerating OBCs.
- In the last Census, for SCs and STs, the proforma relied on the official lists notified under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

- These lists currently comprising 1,170 castes under SC and 890 communities under ST are periodically updated through amendments passed by Parliament.
- However, for **OBCs**, there is no single, consolidated list.
- A central list maintained by the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** is used for **reservations in central government jobs** and **educational institutions.**
- Separately, each state maintains its own OBC list, which often differs from the central list and in many cases, includes many more communities.
- The key decision now before the government is **whether to rely solely on the central list**, which currently includes **2,650 communities**, or to **merge it with the various state lists**, thereby significantly expanding the **scope of enumeration**.
- Either way, the choice is likely to be politically sensitive.

7. What will be the impact of caste census on Indian politics?

Key Points	Analysis
Intensification of Caste-Based Political Mobilization	 Parties may increase caste-based outreach, promising proportional representation and welfare benefits to win over key groups. This could intensify identity politics, leading to both greater empowerment for marginalized communities and concerns about deepening social divisions. The Bihar caste census, for example, had triggered demands for similar exercises nationwide, sparking political upheaval and energizing marginalized voter blocs.

Increased Transparency and Accountability in Governance	With comprehensive caste data, policymakers will be better equipped to identify gaps in governance and resource allocation, potentially leading to more effective and equitable government interventions.
Mandal Commission	 The Mandal Commission's recommendations to reserve 27 percent of central government jobs for OBCs highlighted the need for updated caste data. However, the absence of comprehensive figures complicated the implementation of policies aimed at social justice.
State-Level Surveys	 With no national caste census available, states like Bihar, Telangana, and Karnataka conducted their own caste surveys. Bihar's 2023 caste survey notably revealed that OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) made up over 63 percent of the state's population.
Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011	 In 2011, the UPA government initiated the SECC, aiming to gather extensive caste-based data. However, the caste data was never fully released or officially utilized, drawing criticism from opposition parties and social organizations.

8. How is Caste Census different from Caste Survey?

- A survey is a method of collecting data from only a portion of the total population.
- It selects a **sample** to **represent the entire population**.
- On the other hand, in a **census**, information is **collected from every single member of the population**.
- Since a census includes everyone, the collected data is more precise and detailed.

9. Which states have conducted a caste survey?

States	Caste survey
Bihar	 The Bihar caste survey was the first in independent India to successfully enumerate all castes and subcastes. The survey, conducted in 2023, found that OBCs comprise 63.13% of the state, SCs formed 19.65% and STs 1.68%. "Upper" castes were found to be 15.52% of the population.
Andhra Pradesh	• On January 19, 2024 the Andhra Pradesh government kick started an exercise aimed at creating a comprehensive database of people based on their castes.



20K STAFFERS TO BE DEPLOYED

- ➤ Entire process will be done through online (mobile) including taking biometrics of people
- ➤ Village/ward volunteer of the respective locality will lead the teams
- ➤ There are 15 questions in section-1 mostly about family details
- ➤ Anyone of the family members can authenticate the survey by using the following options 1) Biometric 2) IRIS 3) Facial 4) OTP

- The questions include name, village/mandal/district, total number of family members, & relationship with the family head
- ➤ They will also enter information about the type of house (thatched/RCC/duplex/flat) and whether its own or rented
- They will also collect information whether the household owns a LPG



Question 9 in section 2 is about the caste of the individual household
The caste column has a list of about 726 castes one of which the volunteer will select

Telangana

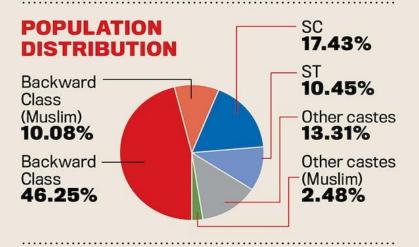
- In November 2024, 3.54 crore people in Telangana were surveyed to determine their Social, Economical, Education, Employment, Political and Caste statuses.
- The survey also had "no caste" and "no religion" categories.
- Released this year, the survey revealed that **Backward** Classes (BCs) make up 56.33% of the state's population.
- The survey also suggested that Scheduled Castes (SCs) account for 17.43%, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 10.45%, and other castes make up 15.79%.



TELANGANA CASTE COUNT FINDINGS

96.9% Households surveyed 35,477,554

Individuals covered



THE OBC NUMBERS

There has been no nationwide caste census since 1931. Bihar did a survey in 2023

Census 1931

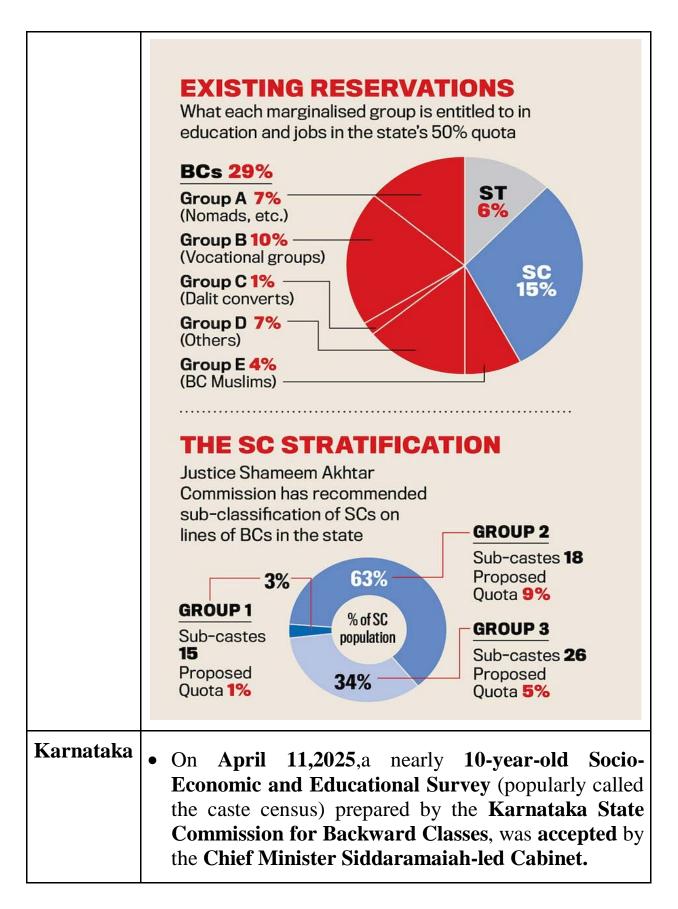
1931 st

Bihar caste survey

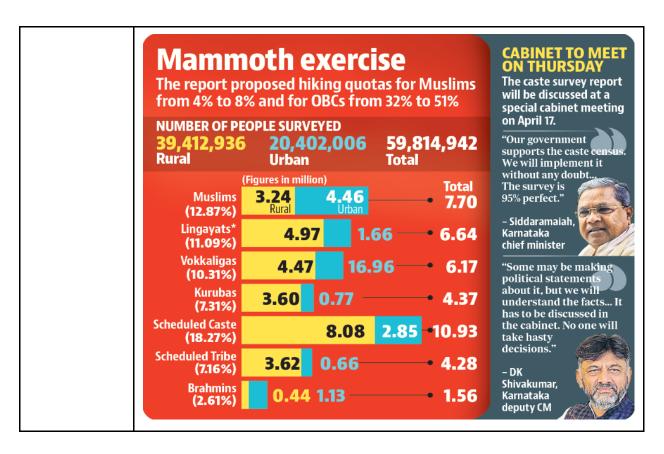
te Telangana caste survey* 5 **56 3**%

*including BC Muslims

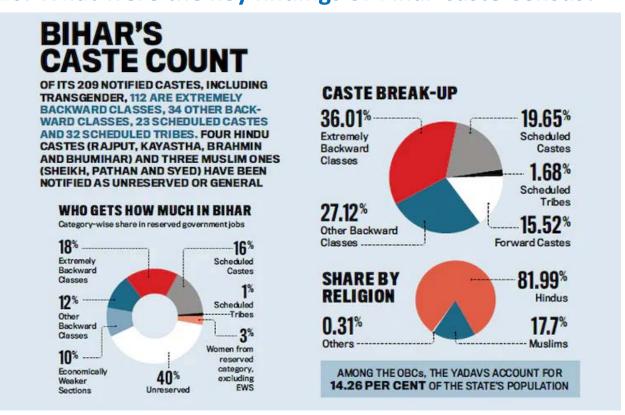




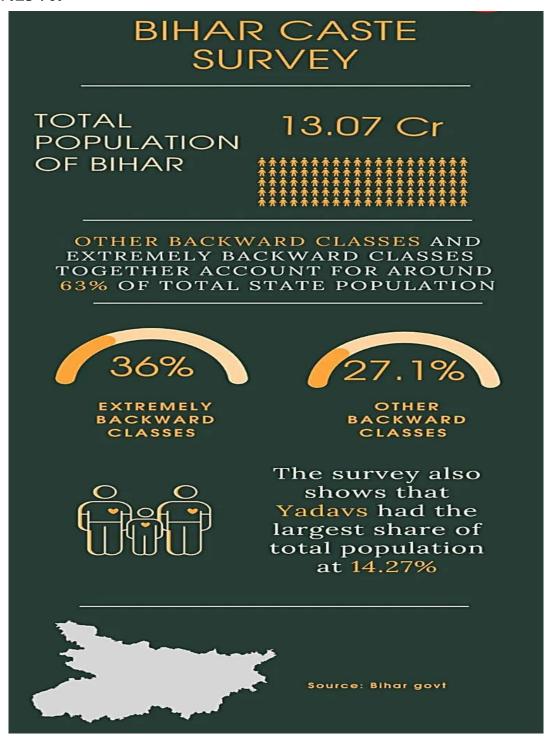




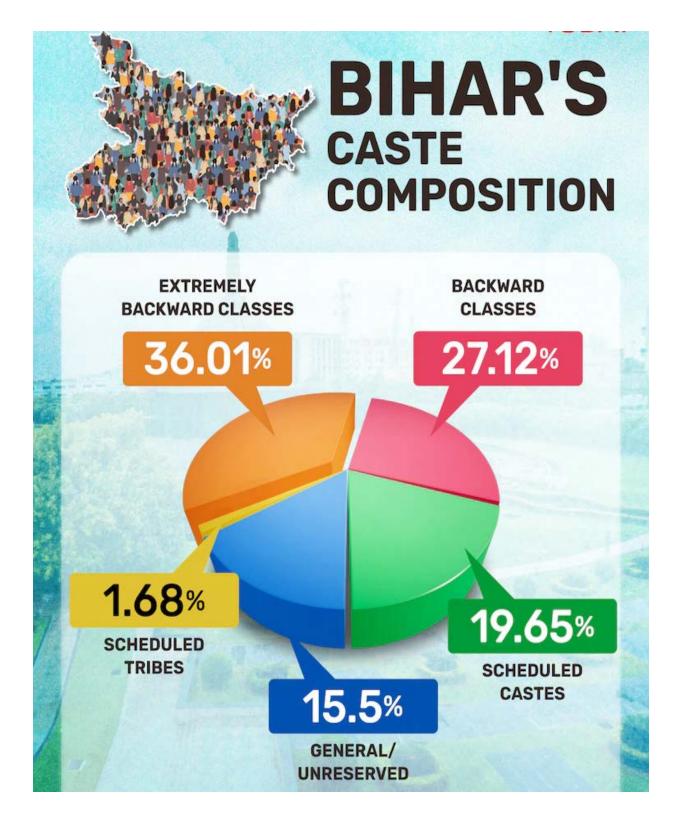
10. What were the key findings of Bihar Caste Census?



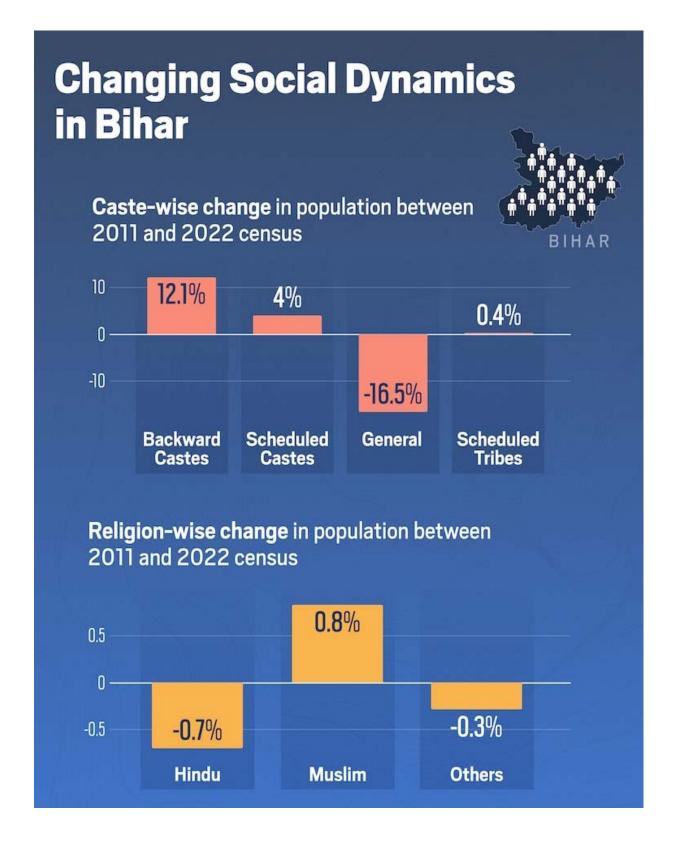
- According to data released by **Development Commissioner Vivek** Singh, Bihar's total population now stands at a little over 13.07 crore, up from 10-odd crore in the 2011 Census.
- The EBCs make up 36.01% of this and OBCs an additional 27.13%.











11. What was the controversy over the Karnataka caste census?

Karnataka reservations at present

Backward Classes

CATEGORY I - 4% - Backward Classes

CATEGORY-II (A) - 15% - Other Backward Classes

CATEGORY-II (B) - 4% - Muslims

CATEGORY-III (A) - 4% - Vokkaligas, etc

CATEGORY-III (B) - 5 % - Lingayats, etc

Total Backward classes quota - 32%

SCs - 15 %

STs - 3 %

Total SC/ST - 18%

Total reservations - 50 %

With the addition of 10 % EWS quota - 60 %

SC ceiling on reservations - 50 %

- The survey, which cost Rs 165 crore, ran into controversy in 2016 with a purported leak of its findings.
- The leaked data suggested that the **populations of large caste groups**, such as **Lingayat** and **Vokkaliga**, were **smaller** than what had been **previously extrapolated**.
- Lingayats and Veerashaiva (a sub-sect) together have a population of about 77 lakh while Vokkaligas have a population of about 62 lakh.
- Since these two dominant communities have also been categorised as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) along with Muslims, the total number of OBC population now stands at 70 per cent of Karnataka's total population.

- The SCs are about 1.10 crore and the STs are about 43 lakh, according to leaked data.
- The general category, including **Brahmins**, is 30 lakh.
- The Muslim population, which is about 76 lakh, is higher than the Lingayats and Vokkaligas.
- These new revelations have ruffled the **feathers of Lingayat leaders**, who fear it will **threaten their political dominance**.
- The Vokkaligas have voiced the same concerns.

Recommended reservation	ns after caste survey			
CATEGORY I (A) 6% - Backward Classes	Population - 5.84 % - Most Backward			
CATEGORY I (B) (New category) 12% - Backward Classes	Population - 12.35 % - (from II A for backwardness)			
CATEGORY-II (A) 10% - Other Backward Classes	Population – 13 %			
CATEGORY-II (B) 8% - Muslims	Population – 12.56%			
CATEGORY-III (A) 7% - Vokkaliga, etc	Population – 12.2%			
CATEGORY-III (B) 8% - Lingayat, etc	Population – 13.6 %			
Total Backward Classes quota - 51%	Population – 69.60%			
SCs - 15% - Population - 18.27 % STs - 3% - Population - 7.15%				
Total SC/ST quota - 18% With the addition of 10% EWS quota - 79% SC ceiling on quota - 50%				

12. How will the Centre's Caste Census differ from the State's Caste Survey?

- Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced the Centre's decision to include caste data in the forthcoming census.
- The Caste Census by the Centre and Caste Surveys by States differ primarily in authority, scope, legal backing, and political implications.

пприсаци	
Caste Census	Key Differences
Centre's Caste Census	• The census at the national level will be conducted through the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and governed by the Census Act, 1948.
	• It will have a strong legal backing and will be applicable across the entire country.
	• It will offer a uniform and comprehensive dataset across states.
	• It would likely influence nationwide reservation policies , welfare programmes, and social justice measures.
	• Being conducted under a central law, it will be recognised for policy formulation at the Central level.
State Caste Surveys	• Caste surveys conducted by states are carried out using administrative machinery and are limited in scope to that specific state.
	• They act as administrative exercises to guide regional policy making.



•	They	vary	in	terms	of	me	ethodo	ology,	detail,	and
	accura	acy,	dep	ending	3 (on	the	reso	urces	and
priorities of the individual state.										

- They aim to capture detailed caste data within a single state, but their findings are not standardised or comparable across states.
- State caste surveys, while influential within a state, may face legal challenges regarding their jurisdiction or methodology.

13. What are the Challenges associated with conducting a Caste Census according to Social Scientists?

Social scientists	Views
H. H. Risley (Census Commissioner, 1901)	 Tried to rank castes using varna hierarchy, which triggered protests and identity movements. It Led to people trying to move up the social ladder via Census claims. It Created long-lasting confusion for future Census officers.
J.H. Hutton (1931 Census Commissioner)	 Argued against the idea that recording caste perpetuates the system; rather, ignoring caste doesn't eliminate its impact. Highlighted that caste plays a central role in Indian society — influencing occupation, marriage, and social life. Faced serious disruptions during the Census due to the Salt March, non-cooperation, and Congress-led boycott.



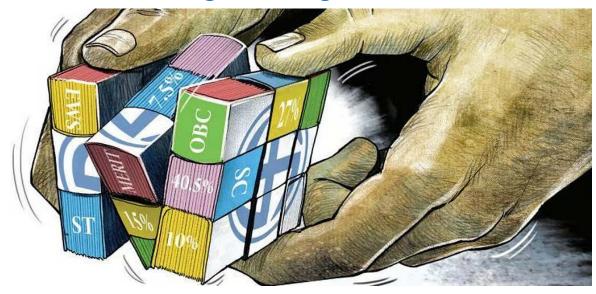
	• Rejected the earlier varna-based classification (introduced by Risley in 1901), calling it flawed and politically sensitive.
	• Adopted an occupation-based classification , but this had problems:
	 Same occupation had different caste associations in different regions.
	 Many castes had multiple or non- traditional occupations, which didn't fit neatly into categories.
	 The approach couldn't capture the fluidity and regional variations of caste identities.
Sekhar Bandyopadhyay	• Census was not just a demographic tool , but a social and political exercise.
(Historian)	• Communities saw it as a way to assert or upgrade their social status .
	 This led to widespread agitation, both organized and spontaneous
R. B. Bhagat (Demographer)	• Many lower-caste individuals claimed higher caste identities during the Census in hopes of improving social standing.
	• Census became a tool for aspirational identity formation .
Ayan Guha (Research Fellow,	• It's hard to define what counts as a caste — the traits that make a group a caste vary.
University of Sussex)	• Caste identities can change between Censuses (e.g., a group calling itself Rajput earlier might now claim to be Brahmin).



•	Same	caste	can hav	ve diffe	rent	nam	es across
	region	s, an	id grou	ps ma	y c	laim	different
	identit	ies in	different	t provin	ces.		

- Classification was left to the subjective judgment of provincial Census commissioners, so there was no uniform approach.
- If a caste census were held today, similar issues would arise such as **caste fusion**, **fission**, **and groups shifting identities** (e.g., Meiteis wanting tribal status or communities merging into 'Yadavs').

14. What are the arguments against caste census?



Arguments	Analysis
Political Competition	• Detailed caste data may prompt political parties to recalibrate electoral strategies to woo specific caste groups , especially among OBCs (Other Backward Classes).

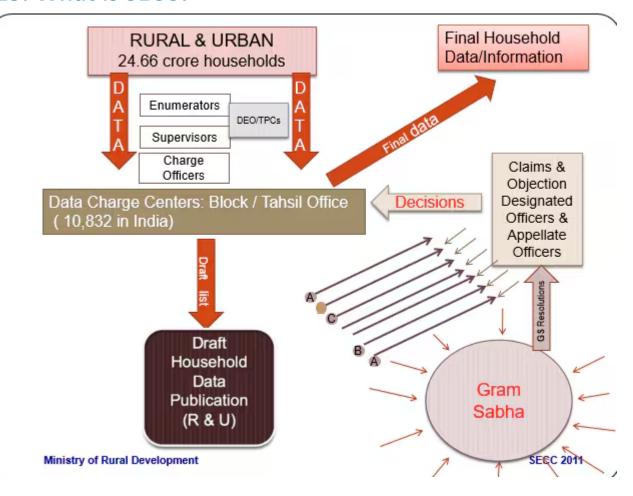


	 This could result in identity-based populism, where policy decisions are guided more by electoral gains than by real socio-economic needs. It may marginalize smaller or less politically active castes, as larger or more vocal groups dominate attention. It could fragment the political landscape, making governance more about caste appeasement than inclusive development. 	
Social Tension	• Publicly categorizing and ranking people by caste could reinforce caste consciousness instead of diminishing it.	
	• Groups may start demanding greater privileges , reclassification (e.g., from OBC to SC/ST), or even claim higher status based on historical narratives.	
	• This could weaken social cohesion , especially in mixed communities or states with a history of caste-based conflict.	
	• It may undermine efforts towards casteless identity, pushing people back into rigid social categories.	
Logistical Burden	India's caste system is extremely diverse and region-specific , with thousands of jatis (subcastes), many of which have multiple names or overlapping identities.	
	• Accurate enumeration would require massive training of enumerators,a well-defined and standardized classification framework .	



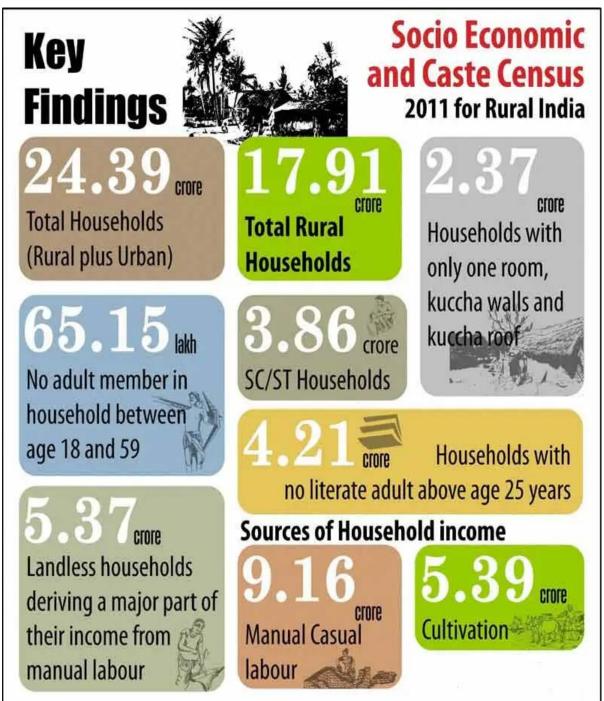
	 The effort would involve huge costs, delays, and potentially controversial outcomes, especially if communities are unhappy with how they're categorized. Past attempts (like the Socio-Economic and Caste Census, SECC 2011) faced delays, inconsistencies, and rejection by several state governments and experts.
Data Sensitivity	• Comparisons between caste groups (e.g., population size, poverty levels, literacy) could spark tensions if one group appears disadvantaged or disproportionately benefited.
	• Data can be politicized, misused in media or public discourse, or interpreted as a basis for increasing or denying reservations.
	• There is also a risk of fake narratives being built using selective or manipulated data, undermining trust in the state.
	• In societies where caste pride and hierarchy still matter, such comparisons could reignite intercaste rivalries .

15. What is SECC?



- In September 2010, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh-led Union Cabinet decided on a separate Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC).
- The data from the SECC, which cost around ₹4,900 crore, was published by the Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development in 2016, but the caste data were excluded.

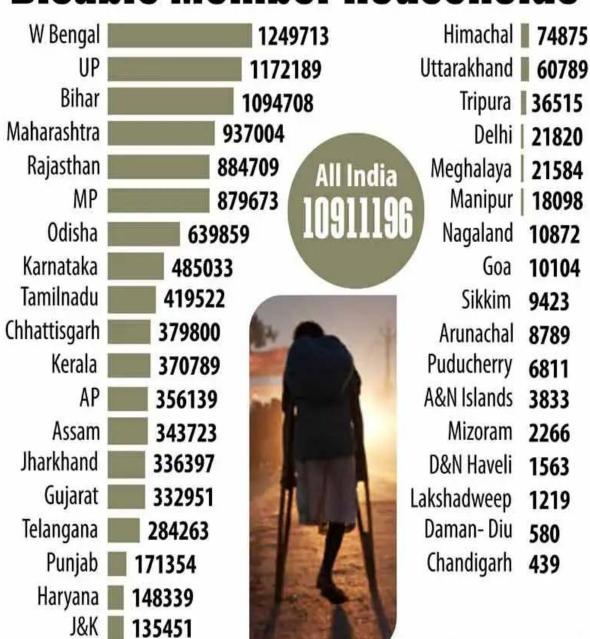
16. Enlist key findings of SECC 2011?





Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 Rural India

Disable Member Households



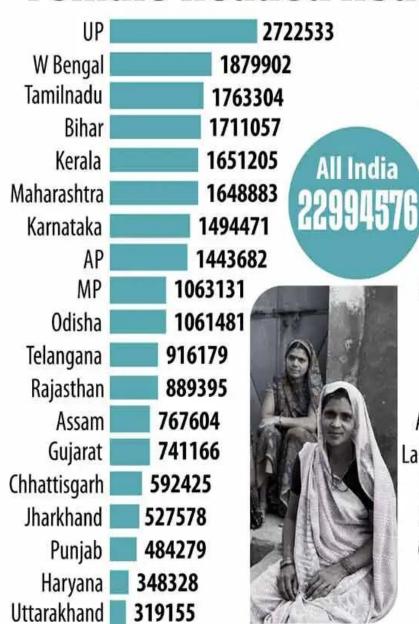
Delhi | 21820

Goa



Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 Rural India

Female Headed Households





All India

Himachal **271599**

J&K 149590

Meghalaya | 118635

Tripura | 94471

Delhi 94353

Manipur | 58813

Goa | 54654

Nagaland 34434

Puducherry 22776

Arunachal 22274

Mizoram 14575

12253 Sikkim

A&N Islands 9108

Lakshadweep 4441

D&N Haveli 3114

Daman-Diu 2800

Chandigarh 928

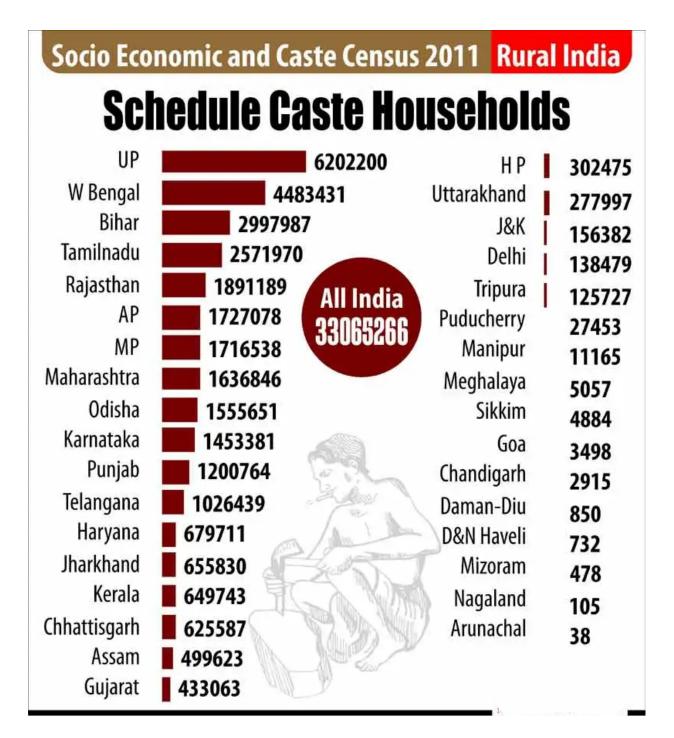


Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 Rural India **Households owning irrrigated land** UP 13068741 Kerala 364422 Bihar 5057805 Chhattisgarh 276019 Rajasthan 3386205 Nagaland 75066 MP 2848640 Delhi 62587 W Bengal 2699692 Meghalaya 51488 **All India** Maharashtra 2697613 Arunachal 42446 45920265 Karnataka 2129750 Sikkim 29816 Gujarat 2013957 Manipur 24472 Telangana 1633653 Tripura 20123 AP 1531846 Goa 8936 **Jharkhand** 1457859 Mizoram 7303 Tamilnadu 1218191 D&N Haveli 6080 Haryana 1175529 Puducherry 4899 Assam 1052341 A&N Islands 4339 Orissa 863342 Daman-Diu 1282 Punjab Lakshadweep 609773 421 J&K 531396 Chandigarh 334 Himachal 492707 Uttarakhand 471192



Socio Economic and Caste Census 2011 Rural India Household which **Kissan Credit Card** don't own land but have Tripura Orissa 127096 6388 Manipur Lakshadweep 86705 4345 Rajasthan Chhattisgarh 73496 3218 Gujarat 44326 Kerala 2425 Himachal Chandigarh 36759 2273 All India Delhi Assam 36279 1770 Tamilnadu Karnataka 34624 1478 Bihar Haryana 33564 986 J&K 30286 Nagaland 846 Telangana 26296 Maharashtra 713 पी.एन.वी. कृषि कार्ड पास वुक P.N.B. KRISHI CARD PASS BOOK Meghalaya Mizoram 20736 493 AP Sikkim 20626 382 Arunachal Punjab 20364 233 Uttarakhand 19170 UP 157 Goa 17099 Jharkhand 44 Daman And Diu A&N Islands 14341 30 पंजाब नैशनल बैंक punjab national bank W Bengal MP 13237 16 D&N Haveli 11524 Puducherry 6849





17. What is the relevance of the topic for UPSC CSE?

- For Prelims: Census, Socio-Economic and Caste Census, Rohini commission.
- For Mains: Significance of Caste Census, Challenges Related to Caste Census, Sub categorisation of OBCs.

Some previous years prelims questions.

- Q1. 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)

Some previous years mains questions.

- Q1. Intercaste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss. (2024-10 Marks)
- Q2. Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static? (2023-15 Marks)
- Q3. Analyse the salience of 'sect' in Indian society vis-a-vis caste, region and religion. (2022-15 Marks)

Some questions from this year and previous years interview transcripts.

Board Suman Sharma mam:

• What are your views on Caste census in Bihar?

Board B B Swain sir:

- Why is the census needed?
- Do you favour caste census? Why?

Board Sheel Vardhan Singh sir:

- What is the frequency of census in India?
- What kind of data will we get through the Census?
- Should caste census be conducted?
- What's the use of caste census?
- Should reservation be continued?
- What changes would you suggest to make it more effective?

Board Lt Gen Raj Shukla sir:

- What is socio economic caste census?
- Why do we need it?
- What are the underlying challenges?

Board Dinesh Dasa sir:

• What is your view on the Caste census in Bihar?

Some questions for QUIZ.

- Q1. Justice G Rohini commission is related to which of the following.
 - (a) Border Management
 - (b) Urban Forestry
 - (c) Sub Categorization within Other Backward Classes (OBCs)
 - (d) Reforms in the agriculture sector.

Ans: (c)

Some questions for POLL.

- Q1. Should there be a Caste Census in India?
 - (a) YES
 - (b) NO
 - (c) Can't say.
- Q2. Will Caste Census make our society more inclusive?
 - (a) YES
 - (b) NO
 - (c) Can't say.