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# Census 2027 Phase I Under Way -- India's First Digital Census and Self-Enumeration

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# Census 2027 Phase I Under Way -- India's First Digital Census and Self-Enumeration

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## WHY IN NEWS:

India's **Census 2027** – the first fully digital census and the world's largest enumeration exercise – is currently in **Phase I (House Listing and Housing Census / HLO Phase)**, running since April 2026 through September 2026 in rolling 30-day state windows. Several states including Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chandigarh are in their active HLO window in the May 14-30, 2026 period. For the first time, Indian citizens can **self-enumerate digitally** via the portal **se.census.gov.in** before the enumerator visits. Phase II (Population Enumeration) is scheduled for **February 2027**.

## INDIA'S DECADAL CENSUS – CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

### Constitutional Basis

India's census is conducted under:

- **Census Act, 1948** – the primary legislative authority
- **Union List, Entry 69** of the Seventh Schedule – "Census" is a Union subject
- **Article 246** – Parliament has exclusive legislative power over Union List subjects

### Nodal Authority

FEATURE	DETAIL
Conducting authority	<b>Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (ORGI)</b>
Ministry	Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)
Census Commissioner	Mritunjay Kumar Narayan (current, 2026)
Frequency	Every <b>10 years</b> (decadal)
Legal compulsion	Citizens are <b>legally obligated</b> to respond (Census Act, 1948, Section 11 – penalty for obstruction)

## CENSUS 2027 – BACKGROUND AND DELAY

India’s census follows a **decadal cycle**:

CENSUS YEAR	NOTABLE FEATURE
2001	First computerised census; house-listing digital capture
2011	Last completed census; population: <b>121.09 crore</b>
2021	<b>Postponed</b> – COVID-19 pandemic (originally planned March-April 2020)
2027	<b>Census 2027</b> – rescheduled; <b>16-year gap</b> since last census

The 16-year gap is unprecedented in India’s post-Independence census history. The delay has affected:

- **Delimitation exercise** (constituency boundaries based on 2001 data still)
- **OBC reservation** (political demand to count OBCs in census – unresolved)
- **Welfare scheme targeting** (Aadhaar-linked beneficiary lists based on 2011 SECC data)

## CENSUS 2027 – STRUCTURE AND INNOVATION

### Two-Phase Structure

PHASE	NAME	PERIOD	WHAT IS COUNTED
<b>Phase I</b>	House Listing and Housing Census (HLO)	Rolling state windows (since April 2026 through September 2026, 30 days per state)	Buildings, households, ownership, amenities, assets
<b>Phase II</b>	Population Enumeration	<b>February 2027</b>	Population headcount, age, sex, literacy, occupation, religion, SC/ST status, language

### Digital-First Approach

Census 2027 introduces four technological innovations:

- 1 **Self-Enumeration Portal (se.census.gov.in)**: Citizens can fill their HLO data digitally in a **self-enumeration window** (approximately 3 weeks before the enumerator’s scheduled visit). If submitted online, the enumerator verifies rather than re-collects.

- 2 **Mobile App for Enumerators:** Field enumerators use a **dedicated Census App** (Android-based) on government-issued smartphones, replacing paper schedules entirely.
- 3 **Geo-tagging of structures:** Every building/household is geo-tagged using GPS coordinates, creating a **National Building Register** for the first time.
- 4 **Real-time monitoring dashboard:** ORGI has a live dashboard tracking enumeration progress across districts, enabling course corrections.

## CENSUS – KEY DATA POINTS (2011 – LAST COMPLETED CENSUS)

INDICATOR	2011 CENSUS
Total population	<b>121.09 crore</b> (1,210.9 million)
Decadal growth rate	17.64% (2001-11)
Sex ratio (overall)	<b>943 females per 1,000 males</b>
Child sex ratio (0-6 years)	<b>919 per 1,000</b> (alarm)
Literacy rate	<b>74.04%</b> (males: 80.9%; females: 64.6%)
Urban population	<b>31.2%</b> (urban population crossing 400 million)
Scheduled Castes	<b>16.6%</b> of population
Scheduled Tribes	<b>8.6%</b> of population

## THE OBC ENUMERATION DEBATE

**Background:** The census has counted SC, ST, and religious populations since Independence, but **Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have not been counted** in the decadal census since 1931.

### The political demand:

- Multiple political parties (SP, JDU, BJD, DMK) demand that OBCs be counted in Census 2027
- The Mandal Commission (1980) estimated OBCs at ~52% of population based on 1931 census data
- A fresh count would enable **policy-based OBC reservation design** and settle the debate on OBC population share

### Government position:

- The NDA government agreed in principle to include OBC enumeration

- The **Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)** of 2011 collected caste data but was never released in full
- As of 2026, the government has not announced whether caste (OBC) enumeration will be part of Census 2027

## NPR – NATIONAL POPULATION REGISTER (CONNECTION TO CENSUS)

The **National Population Register (NPR)** was to be updated alongside the census:

- NPR is a register of every **usual resident** of India (not restricted to citizens)
- Updated during the HLO Phase of the census
- Governed by **Citizenship Rules, 2003** (under Citizenship Act, 1955)
- NPR was controversial in 2019-2020 due to its perceived link with the NRC (National Register of Citizens); the government has since delinked the two processes

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### GS Paper 1 – Indian Society and Geography

- India's demographic profile; literacy; sex ratio; urbanisation trends (2011 data)
- OBC enumeration debate; caste and demographic data

### GS Paper 2 – Polity and Governance

- Constitutional basis of census; Union List Entry 69; Census Act 1948
- Digital governance; self-enumeration and citizen participation
- NPR, NRC distinction; census and citizenship

**Keywords:** Census 2027, ORGI, Census Act 1948, Union List Entry 69, self-enumeration portal, HLO Phase, Population Enumeration, OBC enumeration, NPR, National Building Register, decadal census, 2011 census data.

*Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India; under MHA; conducts Census and maintains NPR; also conducts Sample Registration System (SRS) for vital statistics between censuses.*

*Section 3: Central Government may direct census; Section 8: duty to answer questions; Section 11: penalty for obstruction; the Act empowers the census commissioner to require information.*

*“Census” – Parliament has exclusive power; no State can conduct a rival census (some states like Bihar and Telangana conducted their own caste surveys – legally these are socio-economic surveys, not censuses).*

*Annual data on births, deaths, Total Fertility Rate (TFR) between censuses; latest data shows India’s TFR at 2.0 (below replacement level of 2.1) – confirmed by NFHS-5 (2019-21).*

*Redrawing of constituency boundaries based on latest census population data; the 84th Constitutional Amendment (2002) froze delimitation until the first census after 2026 – meaning Census 2027 data will trigger the next delimitation exercise, significantly reshuffling political representation.*

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