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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Credible Statistics for Evidence-Based Governance

 **THE HINDU**

29 June 2026

**REPORTS & SCHEMES****GS3****GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

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 **The Hindu**

29 June 2026

GS3

GS2

 Source: [ujyari.com](http://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped


## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"If two credible surveys disagree on the poverty number, should a government publish both and explain the gap, or pick the figure that fits its narrative? What does that choice reveal about institutional integrity?"*

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Hindu](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

**June 29, 2026** is **National Statistics Day**, marking the birth anniversary of **P.C. Mahalanobis** and the **75th year of the National Sample Survey (NSS)**. The occasion arrives amid live debates over the **GDP back-series**, a delayed **Census**, the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** and the long-gap **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)**. For an aspirant, this is a **GS3 and GS2 case on data as a public good, institutional autonomy and evidence-based governance**.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Reliable statistics are a **public good**: every policy, market and accountability claim rests on them. Mahalanobis built India a world-class **sampling system**. But disputes over **timeliness, methodology and autonomy**, from the GDP back-series to PLFS and HCES, have dented trust. The cure is not better optics but **independence, transparency and investment**, so the numbers can be believed.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Statistics as a public good</b>	Non-rival, non-excludable data anyone can use	Bad data corrupts every downstream policy
<b>National Sample Survey (NSS)</b>	Mahalanobis's large-scale socio-economic survey (1950)	Backbone of poverty, jobs and consumption estimates
<b>Methodological transparency</b>	Publishing method and microdata	Lets independent scholars replicate and verify
<b>Institutional autonomy</b>	Data agency insulated from political pressure	Prevents suppression or selective release of figures

## THE ANALYSIS

- 1 Data is infrastructure, not decoration.** Inflation targeting, fiscal transfers, the Finance Commission (<https://ujjayari.com/terms/finance-commission/>)'s devolution formula and welfare targeting all depend on credible numbers. Weak data is weak governance.
- 2 The credibility gap is about trust, not just accuracy.** The damage from the GDP back-series and shelved surveys was less about fabricated figures and more about perceived politicisation and broken comparability.
- 3 The Mahalanobis legacy is an asset to defend.** The NSS gave India global standing in survey statistics; capacity erosion and delayed surveys squander that inheritance.
- 4 Modernisation and trust are different problems.** A monthly PLFS and a new CPI base modernise the plumbing, but they do not by themselves restore confidence in the system's independence.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

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**P.C. Mahalanobis** (born 29 June 1893), father of Indian statistics; founded the **Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)**, Kolkata, 1931 (Institution of National Importance); created the **National Sample Survey** in 1950; **National Statistics Day** observed since 2007. **The bodies:** **MoSPI** (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation); **NSSO** and **CSO**, merged into the **National Statistical Office (NSO)** (<http://ujjiyari.com/terms/nso-mospi-statistical-architecture/>); the **National Statistical Commission (NSC)** (Rangarajan Commission, 2000). **The contested datasets:** **GDP back-series**; **decadal Census**; **PLFS** (employment); **HCES** (consumption); **CPI base revision**. **Concept:** public good; data autonomy; methodological transparency; evidence-based policy.

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for urgent reform:** A democracy cannot be accountable if its numbers are doubted. Delayed surveys, a postponed Census and the back-series controversy signal a trust deficit that only autonomy and transparency can close.

**Argument for reassurance:** The system has genuinely modernised, with faster monthly data, digital collection and a refreshed CPI. Critics often mistake legitimate methodological revision for manipulation, unfairly impugning honest statisticians.

**Balanced verdict:** Both are partly right. The plumbing has improved, but trust has not. Modernisation is necessary yet insufficient; without visible independence, full methodology and replicable microdata, even accurate numbers will be doubted. The reform agenda is institutional, not merely technical.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*When a dataset is attacked, ask two distinct things: is the number wrong, and is the institution that produced it trusted? Many governance failures are trust failures around correct data. Distinguishing the two stops you from defending a number when the real problem is the credibility of the body behind it.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Mahalanobis + NSS (1950) -> India's data public good -> feeds GDP, jobs, prices, welfare targeting -> BUT delays + back-series + autonomy doubts -> trust deficit -> autonomy + transparency + investment -> credible evidence-based governance

## THE WAY FORWARD

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- 1 **Insulate the statistical machinery.** Give MoSPI and the NSC genuine autonomy from the departments whose performance the data measures.
- 2 **Publish method and microdata.** Release full methodology and anonymised unit-level data so independent scholars can replicate official estimates.
- 3 **Restore the survey calendar and Census.** Fix periodicity for HCES and PLFS and conduct the decadal Census to rebuild comparable series.
- 4 **Invest in capacity.** Fund field staff, training and digital systems so quality and timeliness rise together.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*Credible official statistics are a public good and a precondition (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/precondition/>) for evidence-based governance; protecting them needs autonomy, transparency and investment, not better optics.*

*“A democracy is only as accountable as its numbers are honest.”*

*P.C. Mahalanobis; ISI Kolkata (1931); NSS (1950); National Statistics Day (since 2007); MoSPI; NSO; National Statistical Commission; PLFS; HCES; CPI base.*

*When two credible surveys disagree, integrity means publishing both and explaining the gap, not choosing the convenient figure.*

*UPSC has asked on data quality, the reliability of GDP estimation and evidence-based policy; this links the Mahalanobis legacy to live data debates.*

*Finance Commission devolution (<https://ujivari.com/terms/devolution/>), inflation targeting, welfare targeting, transparency and accountability, institutional design.*

**Sources:** *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion>), *DD News* (<https://ddnews.gov.in>), *PIB* (<https://www.pib.gov.in>)

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**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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**India's statistical system, a public good built by Mahalanobis and the National Sample Survey, is under strain over timeliness, methodology and perceived autonomy; restoring trust requires institutional independence, methodological transparency and sustained investment.**

 **SUPPORTING**

- Statistics are a public good: credible data on growth, jobs and prices underpins every policy decision, and corrupted data corrupts policy itself.
- Recent disputes over the GDP back-series, delayed Census, the PLFS jobs data and the long-gap HCES have eroded confidence in timeliness and comparability.
- The Mahalanobis legacy of the NSS, now 75 years old, gave India a global reputation for sample-survey science that current capacity gaps threaten.

 **COUNTER**

Officials argue the system has modernised with faster monthly PLFS, a revamped CPI base and digital collection, and that critics confuse genuine methodological revision with political manipulation.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Strengthen the autonomy of the statistical machinery, publish full methodology and microdata, restore survey periodicity, conduct the Census, and invest in capacity so India's data remains a trusted public good.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*"Reliable official statistics are a public good and a precondition for evidence-based governance." In light of recent debates over India's GDP back-series, PLFS and HCES, examine the challenges to the credibility of India's statistical system and suggest reforms. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

Statistics Day honours Mahalanobis, but the better tribute is a statistical system citizens can trust. Evidence-based governance is impossible if the evidence itself is contested.

**BODY**

Official statistics are a classic public good: non-rival, non-excludable and foundational to policy, markets and accountability. Mahalanobis gave India the National Sample Survey in 1950 and the Indian Statistical Institute, earning a global reputation for sampling science.

Today that inheritance is under strain. The GDP back-series revisions raised comparability questions; the decadal Census has been delayed; the leaked and later shelved consumption survey, then the long-gap HCES, broke a continuous series; and PLFS employment numbers are contested on definitions.

The problem is rarely raw falsification. It is timeliness, comparability and the perception that inconvenient data is delayed or buried, which is corrosive in its own right.

Defenders point to real modernisation: a monthly PLFS, a refreshed CPI base and digital field collection. Both can be true.

A system can modernise its plumbing while losing public trust in its independence. The fix is institutional, not cosmetic: insulate the statistical machinery from the departments it measures, publish methodology and anonymised microdata for independent replication, restore fixed survey calendars, and fund capacity. Trust, once lost, is expensive to rebuild.

**CONCLUSION**

A democracy is only as accountable as its numbers are honest. Protecting the autonomy and transparency of India's statistical system is not a technical chore but a constitutional safeguard for evidence-based governance.


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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/th-statistics-credibility-evidence-governance-2026/>

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