

India's 16th Census

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India's 16th Census: Timeline, Features, and Reforms

Context :

India's **16th Census** has been officially announced after more than a decade. It will be **the first digital Census** and the first to collect **caste-wise data since 1931**. The exercise is crucial for **policy-making, welfare targeting, and administrative planning**.

Timeline and Structure

- Conducted in **two phases**:
 - **House-listing**: Expected in **2026**.
 - **Population Enumeration**: Scheduled for **February 2027**.
 - **Reference Dates**:
 - **October 1, 2026** – Snow-bound areas.
 - **March 1, 2027** – Rest of India.
 - Gazette notification issued under **Census Act, 1948 (Section 3)**.
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Key Phases Explained

House-listing Phase

- Details on building use, construction material, rooms, sanitation, electricity, assets like TV, phone, vehicle.

- Assesses **housing quality and basic amenities**.

Population Enumeration

- Data on **name, age, sex, education, occupation, religion, caste/tribe**, migration, and **disability**.
 - Includes even **homeless individuals**.
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Digital Transformation in Census 2027

- First **fully digital** Census using mobile apps and cloud-based tools.
 - **Self-enumeration** introduced through a government portal/app.
 - Enumerators to use **smart devices**; paper option available but discouraged.
 - Monitored via **Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS)**.
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Key Differences from 2011 Census

- **Digital-first approach** vs paper-based in 2011.
 - **GPS-tagging and geofencing** for better coverage.
 - **Real-time error detection** and data validation.
 - **Standardised digital codes** to avoid inconsistency and delays.
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Inclusion of Caste Data

- First caste enumeration since 1931.

- Will enhance **targeted welfare policies** and **socio-economic analysis**.
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Challenges and Solutions

- **Digital illiteracy**: Addressed through training and local-language interfaces.
- **Connectivity issues**: App works **offline**, syncs later.
- **GPS/location errors**: Manual checks by supervisors.
- **Respondent hesitation**: Soft-skill training for enumerators.
- **Data quality**: Automated checks and supervisory audits ensure reliability.



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