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)**.

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**.

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)**.

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.

Inclusion of Caste Data

- **First caste enumeration since 1931**.

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

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.