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EMPOWERMENT

# India to count its population in 2027, after six-year delay

Caste information to be included in the census for first time since 1931

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi

**After a six-year delay, India is set to count its population in the 2027 census, the government said on Monday, as it prepares to also record caste data for the first time in nearly a century.**

One of the world's largest administrative undertakings, India's population census was originally scheduled for 2021, but has faced multiple delays — mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a gazette notification, declaring that the census "shall be taken during the year 2027."

The ministry did not specify when the process of counting India's population — currently estimated at nearly 1.46 billion — would begin, but the process of house listing and enumeration

is set to be complete before March 1, 2027, for most of the country, and by Oct. 1, 2026, for snow-bound and remote regions such as Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

The last census was conducted in 2011 and provided critical data for planning welfare schemes, allocating federal funds, and drawing electoral boundaries.

In 2027, for the first time since 1931 — when India was still under British colonial rule — caste details will be collected as well.

India's caste system, which is rooted in Hindu scriptures, historically divided the population into a hierarchy that dictated people's occupations, living areas, and marriage prospects based on their family of birth. While originally a Hindu practice, many non-Hindu communities in India also identify with

## HIGHLIGHTS

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certain castes today.

For centuries, those in the lowest ranks of the hierarchy have faced marginalization and social restrictions.

After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India banned caste-based discrimination and created specific caste categories for affirmative action policies.

"Once you count the number

of people of various castes, it is going to lead to a political empowerment because of those people who are underrepresented in politics, in elections, in jobs, in the private sector," Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, political commentator and Narendra Modi's biographer, told Arab News.

"India's policy of reservations — which is otherwise known as positive discrimination in other countries like the US — is going to become more widespread and more systemic, and thereby it is going to lead to some amount of friction between various castes."

India has specific caste categories for affirmative action policies, reserving up to 50 percent of government jobs and educational seats for marginalized groups. The census containing caste details may lead to altering the rate, as the number of lower caste Indians is much higher.