



By: TA | AP Brief

India has begun its long-delayed population census



India has begun the world's largest national population count, which could reshape welfare programs and political representation across the country.

The previous census in 2011 recorded a population of 1.21 billion. It's now estimated to be more than 1.4 billion, making India the **most populous nation**.

The new census had been planned for 2021 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and logistical challenges.

The first phase of the count started Wednesday and will roll out around the country through September.

The workers will spend about a month in each area collecting information on homes and available facilities and will document housing stock and living conditions.

The exercise will blend in-person surveys with a digital option where residents can submit information through a multilingual smartphone application that integrates satellite-based mapping.

The second phase to be conducted from September to next April 1 will record more detailed information like people's social and economic characteristics, including religion and caste.

More than 3 million government workers are expected to be deployed over the course of the year. In 2011, nearly 2.7 million enumerators surveyed more than 240 million households nationwide.

A politically sensitive caste count

The second phase of the census will attempt a broader accounting of caste beyond historically marginalized groups.

Caste is an ancient system of social hierarchy in India and is influential in defining social

standing and deciding who gets access to resources, education and economic opportunity.

There are hundreds of caste groups based on occupation and economic status across India, particularly among Hindus, but the country has limited or outdated data on how many people belong to them.

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The last attempt to gather detailed caste information through a census dates to 1931, during British colonial rule.

Since independent India's first census in 1951, it counted only Dalits and Adivasis, members of marginalized groups known as scheduled castes and tribes.

Successive governments have resisted conducting a full caste count, arguing it could heighten social tensions and trigger unrest.

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It could also prompt a redrawing of India's political map, as seats in the lower house of Parliament and state legislatures may be increased to reflect population growth.

A 2023 law reserves one-third of **legislative seats for women**, so any expansion would raise the number of seats set aside for female representatives.