UPSC Mains practice – reference note

GS-I · 12-11-2026 · 15 marks · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-mains-practice/2026-11-12-caste-enumeration-census

Census 2027 will record the caste of every person – the first count of all castes since the Census of 1931 – and population enumeration has already been carried out in Ladakh and the snow-bound areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Discuss how caste data can advance social justice, and examine the risks it poses to social cohesion. (15 marks, 250 words)

1. The news hook (as of 11 November 2026)

- On 30 April 2025 the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs decided that caste would be enumerated in the next Census. Census 2027 has two phases: Houselisting and Housing Census (April–September 2026) and Population Enumeration (February 2027), when caste is recorded.
- Reference date: 00:00 hours on 1 March 2027; for Ladakh and the snow-bound areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, 00:00 hours on 1 October 2026 – enumeration there was held in September 2026, after a self-enumeration window (17–31 August 2026).
- It is the 16th Census (8th since Independence) and the first digital Census – mobile apps for enumerators and a self-enumeration portal; the Union Cabinet approved ₹11,718.24 crore for it.

2. Key facts to quote

Fact	Detail	Use in the answer
Last full caste count	Census of 1931; since 1951 only SCs and STs are enumerated	Shows the 95-year data gap
SECC 2011	Socio-Economic and Caste Census – caste data never released	Classification problem
Census law	Census Act, 1948 and Census Rules, 1990; Census is Union List entry 69 (Seventh Schedule); Section 15 keeps individual records confidential	Privacy safeguard
Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)	Upheld 27% OBC reservation; 50% ceiling in normal circumstances; creamy-layer exclusion	Need for data; ceiling debate
M. Nagaraj (2006)	Reservation in promotion needs quantifiable data on inadequate representation (the backwardness-data test for SCs/STs was dropped in *Jarnail Singh*, 2018)	Courts want evidence
Rohini Commission	Set up in October 2017 for sub-categorisation of OBCs; report submitted in July 2023	Equitable sharing

State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024)	Seven-judge bench: States may sub-classify Scheduled Castes	Equitable sharing
Bihar caste survey (2023)	EBCs about 36% and BCs about 27% of the population; the law raising the quota to 65% was struck down by the Patna High Court in 2024	Risk of competitive demands
Tamil Nadu	69% reservation under the 1993 State Act, placed in the Ninth Schedule by the 76th Amendment (1994)	State angle

3. Sociology to use (GS-I)

- Dominant caste and Sanskritisation (M.N. Srinivas); caste as a basis of political mobilisation (Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian Politics*, 1970).
- B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) – the aim is a society without caste hierarchy; data should serve that aim.
- Caste and class overlap but are not the same – hence caste data are most useful when crossed with education, assets and occupation.

4. Answer method (15 marks, 250 words)

- Introduction with the news hook and the 1931 gap (about 40 words).
- Benefits table → risks table with safeguards → short flowchart for the way forward.
- Conclusion that balances social justice and social cohesion.

5. Value-add terms

- Quantifiable data, sub-categorisation, creamy layer, dominant caste, Sanskritisation, identity politics, evidence-based policy, census confidentiality, social mobility, annihilation of caste.

Official sources

- Press Information Bureau – Census 2027 backgrounder (phases, reference dates, caste enumeration, Census Act) – https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2026/apr/doc2026425856601.pdf
- Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India – https://censusindia.gov.in/
- All India Radio News – Government decides to include caste enumeration in the forthcoming Census (30 April 2025) – https://newsonair.gov.in/govt-decides-to-include-caste-enumeration-in-forthcoming-census-exercise

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