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Q8(a)

The decision to conduct Population Census-2027 has reopened the debate on consultation in India. Discuss its various aspects

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss aspects of the consultation debate reopened by the decision to conduct **Census 2027**
- Include federal consultation with states, caste enumeration, delimitation and reservation, NPR, and digital method
- Treat consultation as the political-science theme, not a technical census manual

Revision summary

Census 2027 is a political institution because it will affect delimitation, finance, and recognition after a delayed 2021 count.

Federal consultation is required in spirit even though **Census** is a Union subject, especially for southern states that fear seat and fund losses.

Caste enumeration and the NPR reopen debates on identity, privacy, and citizenship trust.

Women's parliamentary reservation is legally tied to post-census delimitation, so consultation on the formula is part of the census debate.

A digital method needs consultation on exclusion and data security, or legibility will be mistaken for consent.

Introduction

The Union's decision to conduct the long-delayed population **Census**, announced for the 2026-27 cycle as **Census 2027**, reopened a debate that in India is never only demographic. A census is a political institution. It distributes seats, funds, and recognition. Consultation - with states, communities, and Parliament - is therefore the true subject: who is asked before the count, and about what.

Body

Federal consultation

Census is a Union subject in the **Seventh Schedule**, yet its consequences are borne by states: **Finance Commission** weights, linguistic school policy, and the map of constituencies. After the 2021 **Census** was postponed through the pandemic, states especially in the south asked whether a new count would punish them for lower fertility. Consultation here means whether terms of reference for the next delimitation and for fiscal devolution are talked through in an Inter-State Council or only notified. **Austin's** cooperative federalism is tested when the Union owns the enumerator and the states own the political shock.

Caste, NPR, and what is asked

Whether the 2027 **Census** will enumerate caste beyond SC and ST became a national argument among parties that already mobilise jatis. A genuine consultation would set definitions, privacy, and the public statistical product before the house-listing, not after a leak. The National Population Register, linked in earlier exercises to identity and to a possible citizenship filter, reopens a different consultation: with migrants, with states that resisted the NRC-NPR sequence, and with the Supreme Court's privacy doctrine in Puttaswamy. A census that feels like a citizenship trial will not be trusted, and trust is a census's first infrastructure.

Delimitation, women's reservation, and digital method

The constitutional freeze on Lok Sabha territorial seats was tied to the first census after 2026. **Census 2027** therefore sits on the fuse of delimitation. The **106th Amendment's** women's reservation in Parliament and state assemblies is itself timed to delimitation after a census. Without consultation, the south versus north seat-share fight, and the sub-quota fight inside women's reservation, will explode as faits accomplis. Consultation means a publicly argued formula - perhaps a mixed rule that protects federal balance, as some political scientists have sketched - not a surprise gazette.

A digital census promises speed and may reduce some enumerator discretion. It also raises questions of exclusion where connectivity and literacy are thin, and of data security. Parliamentary committees and state governments are the proper rooms for those questions. **James Scott's** warning about state projects of legibility applies: seeing like a state can serve welfare or it can serve control. Which it is depends on who was consulted when the questionnaire and the architecture were fixed.

The debate's aspects are thus federalism, identity, citizenship, representation, gender quotas, and technology. **Census 2027** is a constitutional event disguised as a statistical one.

Flow diagram

Census 2027 -> State consultation
Census 2027 -> Caste table
Census 2027 -> NPR / identity / identity
Census 2027 -> Delimitation and 106th
Census 2027 -> Digital method

Conclusion

Census 2027 reopened consultation because the count will redraw power. States want a say in delimitation and fiscal fallout; social groups want a say in caste and NPR questions; women and parties want a say in how reservation is triggered. A Union subject still needs a federal conversation, or the census will be accurate on paper and explosive in politics.

Facts & figures

Census delay

The 2021 **Census** was postponed; the Union later scheduled the next census exercise around 2026-27, popularly discussed as **Census 2027**.

Delimitation freeze

Territorial seats in the Lok Sabha were frozen with reference to the first census after 2026, which is why this census is constitutionally charged.

106th Amendment

Women's reservation in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies is to take effect after delimitation following a census, linking gender quotas to this count.

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