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**1. The next Census****Introduction**

The Centre, it seems, is finally preparing to conduct the Census which it could not carry out in 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Though an official announcement is yet to be made, sources have indicated that the exercise might begin next year.

This Census is linked to two other important outcomes — the delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies, which has been on hold for the last five decades, and the implementation of women's reservation in Parliament.

The year 2021 marked the first time India's Census missed its decadal schedule since it was first carried out in 1881. But the pandemic was very much over by 2022, and that could have enabled the start of the Census process in 2023 or 2024. The government seems to have deliberately delayed starting the Census to ensure that the delimitation or reorganisation of Parliamentary constituencies is carried out immediately after it. However, a Census completed by 2026, or earlier, might not allow for an immediate delimitation.

**The delimitation angle**

Delimitation, a Constitutional mandate, is supposed to happen after every Census. The process adjusts the number of constituencies of Parliament and state Assemblies in accordance with the latest population figures, to ensure that the number of people represented by any Member of Parliament or Member of Legislative Assembly is roughly the same. However, this exercise has been suspended since 1976 due to a lack of political consensus.

If the standard logic of delimitation were to be followed, the wide divergence in population growth trends in various states would mean that some would see the number of Parliamentary constituencies reduce, while others would see an increase. Southern states have argued that this would amount to punishing them for successfully meeting population control objectives. A delimitation exercise in 2002, following the 2001 Census, involved only the redrawing of existing boundaries of constituencies, and not a change in the number of constituencies.

As of now, delimitation is suspended till at least 2026. The 84th Constitutional Amendment of 2001 said that the next delimitation can be held only based on the Census conducted after 2026. Therefore, even if the 2021 Census had been held on time, or in 2023 or 2024, delimitation could have been done only after the 2031 Census. If the Census, which takes two years to complete, begins next year, delimitation can theoretically happen immediately thereafter.

## Starting Early 2025

**Centre looking** to complete census by 2026 | **Census to change** future cycles completely

**Decision on** caste census 'to be taken at top level'

**Registrar General holding consultations with stakeholders & state govts, around 30 questions prepared for citizens**

**Govt contemplating conducting delimitation following census which would require Constitution amendment**

**BJP allies have demanded caste census as govt is still finalising modalities**

**Several southern** states apprehensive over possibility of losing out on Lok Sabha seats

**Country's population** count conducted every 10 years since 1951

**Last census** was in 2011, 2021 Census delayed due to COVID-19



### Once in a decade

The Census has happened in the first year of every decade since it was first held. There is a Constitutional mandate to carry out a Census — it is mentioned as item 69 on the Union List of subjects, meaning only the Central government is empowered to undertake the exercise.

There are repeated references to the Census in the Constitution of India in the context of the reorganisation of constituencies for Parliament and State Assemblies. But it does not say when the Census has to be carried out, or what the frequency of this exercise should be. The Census of India Act of 1948, which provides the legal framework for it, also does not mention its timing or periodicity.

Therefore, there is no Constitutional or legal requirement for a Census every 10 years. However, the British administration carried it out in the first year of every decade, and this convention was maintained after Independence. Most other countries also follow a similar cycle for their Census. Some, like Australia, carry out a Census after every five years.

### Schedule for delimitation

India's Census is a two-step process involving a house-listing and numbering exercise, followed by population enumeration. House-listing and numbering are done in the year before the Census year, usually between April and September. Population enumeration happens between the second and fourth weeks of February in the Census year.

The numbers revealed represent the population of India as of midnight on March 1 in the Census year. To account for the births and deaths during the enumeration period in February, the enumerators return to the households in the first week of March to make revisions. The preliminary results of the Census, particularly population totals, are released within a few months, usually in the same year the Census is carried out. The full results take one to two years to come out.

Interestingly, a Census that begins in 2025 and is completed in 2026 might not enable an immediate delimitation. The language of the 84th Constitutional amendment says delimitation can happen only on data from the first Census "taken after the year 2026".

This would suggest that the population enumeration part of the Census has to be carried out after 2026. Therefore, if the Census exercise has to begin next year and the government wants to begin the delimitation process afterwards, in time for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, an amendment to the existing provision may be required.

However, Constitutional requirements are likely to be the least of the problems encountered in conducting delimitation. The suspension of delimitation was caused by sharp disagreements among the political parties, which continue to date. Southern states, which would see their seats in Parliament reduced if current populations are accounted for, might want to put off delimitation again — unless they are compensated in some other way.

The recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission might be a crucial element here. The Finance Commission, a body constituted every five years, recommends the devolution of financial resources between the Centre and states. The 16th Finance Commission is supposed to submit its report by the end of next year.

Further, the Parliament approved the 128th Constitution Amendment last year, reserving 33 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. However, it is supposed to come into effect only after the seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are modified, following the delimitation exercise.

### **Caste Census demand**

There is also an expectation that the next Census may collect caste data as well to eliminate the need for a separate caste census, which has been demanded by some political parties in recent years.

The collection of caste data in the Census would not be unprecedented. Some information related to caste was obtained until the 1941 Census and the practice was discontinued only in independent India. In some earlier years, information on caste or sect of people belonging to all religions was obtained in the Census. In other years, only the caste data of Hindus was collected.

The practice was discontinued from the 1951 Census onwards, and only data on Scheduled Castes or Tribes has been collected since then.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

## 2. What is the UN agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has banned?

### Introduction

Israel's parliament on Monday passed two Bills to ban the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) from operating in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The Knesset also voted to designate UNRWA a terrorist organisation, cutting all ties with the agency.

The vote could result in the collapse of the already fragile aid distribution mechanism in Gaza, where almost 2 million Palestinians have been displaced, and food, water, and medicine are in short supply.



### What is the UNRWA, and what role does it play?

The UNRWA was established in 1949 to provide aid to about 700,000 Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

UNRWA began operations on May 1, 1950. It operates in Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, as well as in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan — where Palestinian refugees took shelter after their expulsion.

According to the UNRWA's website, it runs education, health, relief and social services, microfinance and emergency assistance programmes inside and

outside refugee camps in these areas.

An estimated 5.9 million Palestinian refugees — most of whom are descendants of the original refugees — currently access the UNRWA's services.

The UN agency is funded mostly by voluntary contributions from donor states such as the United States, Germany, the European Union, etc. It also gets a limited subsidy from the UN, which is used only for administrative costs.

UNRWA employs some 30,000 Palestinians. More than 200 of its staff members have been killed in Israeli attacks over the past year.

### So why has Israel acted against the UNRWA?

Israel has argued for decades that the UNRWA's role is obsolete, and its work to aid Palestinian refugees and their descendants has been an impediment to a peace settlement. However,

critics have blamed Israel's own actions, such as not meaningfully recognising the foundation of a Palestinian state, as having perpetuated the longstanding territorial conflict.

Israel has also accused some of UNRWA's 13,000 employees in Gaza of participating in the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel by Hamas that triggered the war. Israel has given the US a dossier identifying 12 UNRWA staffers who it says took part in the October 7 attacks. According to Israel, most of these alleged attackers worked as teachers in UNRWA schools. It claims to have evidence that UNRWA employed 190 Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants. Although UNRWA fired nine employees after an investigation, it has denied that it aids armed groups on purpose — the agency has been sharing the list of its employees with Israel for a long time.

### **What are the two Bills that Israel has passed?**

One of the Bills bars UNRWA from operating any representative office, providing any service, or conducting any activity, directly or indirectly, in Israel's sovereign territory.

The second Bill cuts all ties between government employees and UNRWA, and takes away the legal immunities of the agency's staff.

Together, the Bills are likely to stop UNRWA from operating in Gaza and the West Bank as Israel controls access to both these Palestinian territories. They could also force the agency to relocate its headquarters from East Jerusalem, according to a report by the Associated Press.

The Bills were passed by overwhelming majorities in the 120-member parliament. Lawmakers from at least two centrist parties joined Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition in voting for the Bills, demonstrating broad support for the measures.

### **What can be the impact of these measures?**

Most of the provisions in the Bills will take effect after three months. Since the beginning of the war, almost all of Gaza's 2 million people have been reliant on UNRWA for basic necessities, including food, water, and hygiene supplies.

Along with the Palestinian Red Crescent, UNRWA handles almost all UN aid distribution in the territory.

The UN agency also recently helped implement an emergency polio vaccination campaign in Gaza to prevent the infectious virus that can cause paralysis from spreading.

In the West Bank, UNRWA currently provides services for 19 refugee camps, more than 90 schools, and several health services, including prenatal care, according to a report by CNN.

In a post on X, UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on Monday that the ban set "a dangerous precedent" and would "only deepen the suffering of Palestinians".

"This is the latest in the ongoing campaign to discredit UNRWA," Lazzarini said.

**Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations**



Source: Indian Express

### 3. How the United States' electoral college works

#### Introduction

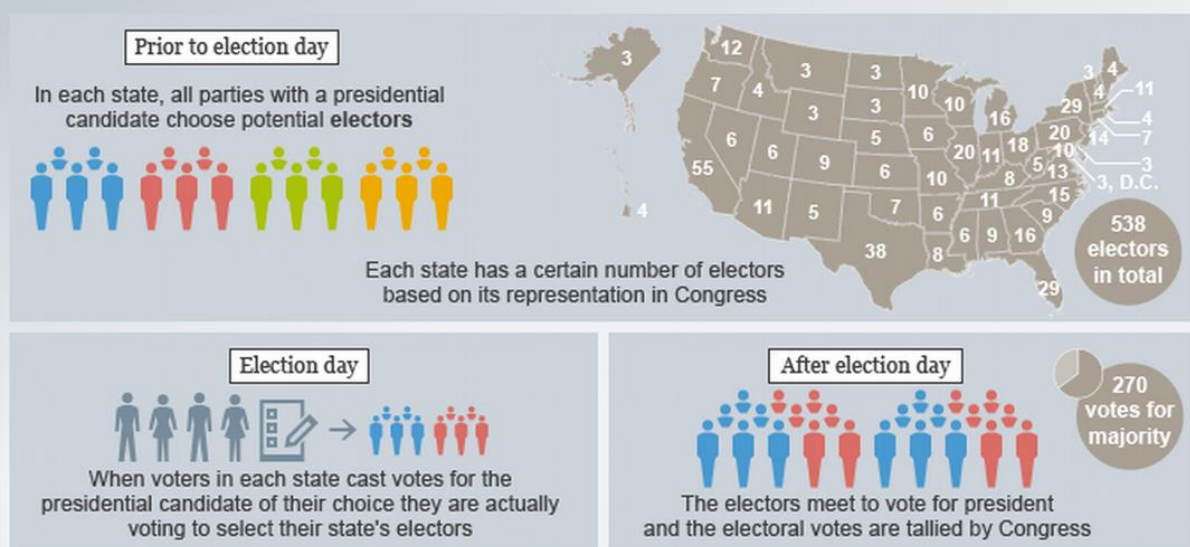
The United States is the only democracy in the world where a presidential candidate who wins the highest number of (popular) votes may still lose the election. This has happened at least four times in the past, including twice — in 2000 and 2016 — in this century. The reason is the role played by the Electoral College in the American system.

#### What is the Electoral College?

In US's unique electoral system, votes cast by the public in favour of a presidential candidate (the popular vote) are actually meant to elect that candidate's preferred electors. These electors then vote for the President after the election. The Electoral College is a process comprising the selection of these electors, the meeting where they vote for the President and Vice President, and the counting of the electoral votes by Congress.

#### How many electors are there in the Electoral College?

##### US Electoral College



The Electoral College comprises 538 electors, and a candidate needs to secure a majority of 270 electoral votes to be elected.

The number of electors varies from state to state. Each state has the same number of electors as the size of its Congressional delegation — one for each member of the House of Representatives plus two for the two Senators.

California, with 54 electors, has the largest allocation in the Electoral College. Six states — Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming — and the District of Columbia are allocated three electors each, the smallest delegations in the college.

#### Who are these electors?

Prior to the election, the two political parties select a slate of preferred electors in each state. The selection is based on established conventions that vary from state to state and party to party. A party's slate generally comprises long-time members and workers, or people with a personal or political affiliation with the party's presidential candidate.

There are very few provisions in the US Constitution regarding who is qualified to be an elector. Members of Congress or any person "holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States" cannot be an elector.

The post-Civil War 14th Amendment also barred state officials "who have engaged in insurrection or rebellion" against the US, or "given aid and comfort to its enemies" from serving as electors.

### **How are the electors elected?**

The Electoral College is chosen by popular vote. This is essentially what the election on November 5 is for. Ballots in many states even mention the names of the respective candidate's slate of electors.

Most states have a "winner takes all" system, meaning whoever wins the popular mandate in the state secures its entire allocation in the Electoral College. This is central to how electioneering works in the US. Candidates tend to focus on states where the race is close — the so-called "swing states" — and have limited incentive to allocate their campaign's time and resources to states where they are either firmly winning or losing.

Two states — Maine (4 electors) and Nebraska (5 electors) — are exceptions to the winner-takes-all system. Both employ a specific form of proportional representation in which the state winner receives two electors, and the winner of each congressional district (who may or may not be the same as the state winner) receives one elector.

### **What do the electors do?**

Electors meet in their respective state capitals on the Tuesday after the second Wednesday in December to cast their electoral votes on separate ballots for the President and Vice President. This is by and large a formality as electors seldom vote for someone other than their party's candidate.

That said, there is no federal law or constitutional provision that requires electors to vote according to the result of the popular vote in their state. But some states require electors to pledge allegiance to the party — failure to honour which can result in their replacement by the party with substitute electors — or bind them by law to honour the popular mandate.

More than 99% of electors in US history have voted as pledged. The 2016 election was the last time a spate of so-called "faithless electors" refused to vote for their party's candidate. Many were disqualified and replaced, and/ or fined according to specific state provisions.

### **How did Electoral College come about?**

While drafting the constitution, the so-called founding fathers debated how the "National Executive" (now referred to as the President) should be elected.

One proposal was for the President to be elected by Congress, on the lines of the Westminster model which is followed in Britain and most of its former colonies, including India. Those in favour of this system felt that voters could not be trusted with a direct vote, and that a system of direct elections could lead to the President pandering to the “democratic mob”.

The other proposal was to hold direct elections in which the chief executive would be chosen by popular vote. Such a system had not been seen yet, but many Constitution framers believed it would prevent corruption and collusion between the executive and legislature.

Ultimately, the founding fathers arrived at a compromise. “They were tired, impatient, frustrated. They cobbled together this plan because they couldn’t agree on anything else,” political scientist George Edwards III told History.com.

### **What is the argument in favour of adopting the Electoral College?**

Founding father Alexander Hamilton argued that “the process of election affords a moral certainty, that the office of President will never fall to the lot of any man who is not in an eminent degree endowed with the requisite qualifications” while ensuring that “the sense of the people” still operates in the system.

Another stated reason for having an Electoral College was to prevent populous states/ regions from dominating unfairly. “Proponents argue that the Electoral College system contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring a distribution of popular support to be elected president. Without such a mechanism, they point out, presidents would be selected either through the domination of one populous region over the others or through the domination of large metropolitan areas over the rural ones,” William C Kimberling wrote in *The Electoral College* (1992).

### **And what are some of the major criticisms of the system?**

✚ The Electoral College reduces the value of each individual vote in bigger states. For instance, California has roughly 68 times as many people as Wyoming — but only 18 times as many Electoral College votes.

Jesse Wegman, author of *Let the People Pick the President: The Case for Abolishing the Electoral College* (2020), told NPR: “...Representative democracy in the 21st century is about political equality. It’s about one person, one vote — everybody’s vote counting equally.”

✚ The winner-takes-all mechanism inflates the importance of swing states in the eventual result, and does not reflect the votes of millions of Americans who vote for the non-dominant party in a traditionally Red (Republican) or Blue (Democratic) state. Thus, in 2020, Donald Trump got only 68.62% of the popular vote in West Virginia, but secured all four of its Electoral College votes. And Joe Biden won 63.48% of the popular vote in California but all 54 of its Electoral College votes.

✚ The system effectively binds electors to vote for their party, nullifying the intended purpose of preventing unsuitable candidates from getting the top job. Critics argue that the Electoral



College has no place in a modern representative democracy — indeed, the system has been scrapped by all other democracies in favour of direct elections for the President.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

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