Census 2027: The Tangled Question of the Religion Column and the Start of Self-Enumeration



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Why in the News

According to The Hindu's report dated 16 November 2026, the self-enumeration portal (se.census.gov.in - where citizens can fill in their own details) for the Population Enumeration phase of Census 2027 went live for four States - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Punjab. These are the States where Assembly elections are due in 2027; the portal will open for the rest of the country in January 2027. The same day, a drop-down list of 287 names appeared under the 'Others' option in the religion-related question, over which a controversy arose; after the Union Ministry of Home Affairs was asked about it, the drop-down list was removed the same day.

What Appeared on the Portal and What Happened

- **What the list contained:** apart from the six major religions - Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain - the 'Others' category had 287 options such as 'ISKCON', 'Ramakrishna Paramahans', 'Sanatan', 'Balmiki', 'Bishnoi', 'Sarna', 'Tantric', 'Shia', 'Sunni', 'Gorak Nath', 'Basaveshwara' and 'Dev Samaj'. Several of these names had earlier been recorded in previous censuses as sects within the major religions or as entries under 'other religions and persuasions' (ORP), and some names had never been recorded before.
- **Official clarification:** a representative of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (RG&CCI) said that apart from the six major religions, in the 'Others' category "the respondent is free to write any other religion as in previous censuses", and that it is "incorrect to say the mentioned terms have been shown as other religions". According to an official, these names had been prepared as "predictive text entries" (a list that auto-completes a name as it is typed) to avoid spelling variations and mistakes; how they appeared as a drop-down is being inquired into.

Key Facts of Census 2027

- **After a long gap:** the last Census was held in 2011; this one is taking place after a delay of six years.
- **Three firsts:** this is India's first digital Census, the first comprehensive enumeration of all castes in independent India's decennial Census, and the first facility of self-enumeration.

- **Open column for caste:** the RG&CCI has decided to keep an open column for caste enumeration; the reason given is that there is no single official list of all castes apart from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists.
- **40 questions:** the 40 questions for the Population Enumeration phase were notified on 14 August, of which 13 questions or data fields were added for the first time - such as spouse's name, nationality, particulars of father and mother, digital literacy, permanent residential address, place of Covid-19 vaccination, number of bank accounts, passport, driving licence, and mobile, Aadhaar and voter ID numbers (if available).

The History of Religion Classification and the Sarna Demand

The Indian Census has had seven main categories of religion; in 2001 and 2011, the classification of sects within the major religions and of ORP entries was done after the enumeration was completed. A long-pending demand is connected with this: tribal communities in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal have been demanding a separate religion column for their faiths, including Sarna, arguing that their faith is distinct from Hinduism. The appearance and removal of the 287-name list reflects this very sensitivity: the decision on classification is not merely technical but social and policy-related as well.

Way Forward

Standards will become clear once the inquiry report on the portal arrives. For the examination, remember: self-enumeration is beginning in phases, caste enumeration will be through an open column, and the final shape of the religion question will be decided only by the RG&CCI's official notification.

Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. With reference to Census 2027, consider the following statements:

Statement 1: It is India's first digital Census
Statement 2: All castes will be comprehensively enumerated in independent India's decennial Census for the first time
Statement 3: It has no provision for self-enumeration

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (a)

Statement 1: Correct - Census 2027 is the first digital Census
Statement 2: Correct - it includes the first comprehensive enumeration of all castes in independent India's decennial Census
Statement 3: Incorrect - a self-enumeration portal has been provided for the first time

Question 2. With reference to the Census self-enumeration portal recently in the news, consider the following statements:

Statement 1: In this recent phase the portal opened for Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Punjab
Statement 2: The religion question has an 'Others' category apart from the six major religions
Statement 3: The questions for the Population Enumeration phase are notified by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer and Explanation

Correct answer: (d)

Statement 1: Correct - the portal opened on 16 November 2026 for these four election-bound States; the rest of the country in January 2027
Statement 2: Correct - besides the six major religions there is an 'Others' category, where the respondent may write in the entry
Statement 3: Correct - the RG&CCI issued the notification of the 40 questions on 14 August

Related Articles (internal links)

- Caste Census 2027: ~40 questions notified, the challenges of open enumeration
- Digital Census: data quality beyond close monitoring

Sources

- The Hindu's report: the 'other' religions list on the Census portal and its removal (16 November 2026)
- Census self-enumeration portal (RG&CCI)
- Business Standard: comprehensive caste enumeration since 1931, 14 August 2026

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Summary answer: The Census 2027 self-enumeration portal opened for four States on 16 November 2026; a 287-option list under the 'Others' religion category appeared and was removed the same day after questions.

Question: What are the 'first-time' features of Census 2027?

It is India's first digital Census, it proposes the first comprehensive all-caste count in independent India's regular decennial Census (SC/ST enumeration has taken place earlier), and it offers self-enumeration for the first time. The last Census was in 2011, so this one comes after a delay of six years.

Question: When did the self-enumeration portal open, and for which States?

On 16 November 2026, for Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Punjab - the States where Assembly elections are due in 2027. The portal will open for the rest of the country in January 2027.

Question: What was the 'Others' religion-list row, and what is the official clarification?

Besides the six major religions, a drop-down list of 287 names - including 'ISKCON', 'Sanatan', 'Sarna', 'Bishnoi', 'Shia' and 'Sunni' - appeared under 'Others'; it was removed the same day after the Union Ministry of Home Affairs was asked about it. An RG&CCI representative said the respondent is free to write any other religion as in previous censuses; an official said the names were "predictive text entries" meant to prevent spelling mistakes, and how they appeared as a drop-down is being inquired into.

Question: What is new in the questions of the Population Enumeration phase?

The 40 questions notified on 14 August include 13 questions or data fields added for the first time - spouse's name, nationality, particulars of father and mother, digital literacy, permanent address, place of Covid-19 vaccination, number of bank accounts, passport, driving licence, and mobile, Aadhaar and voter ID numbers (if available). Caste enumeration will be through an open column.