

Q3. A credible Census is the cornerstone of inclusive governance, equitable development and democratic representation. (300 Words)

Introduction

A credible Census is the statistical backbone of a modern State, providing the demographic foundation for governance, planning and representation. In a diverse and populous democracy like India, reliable Census data is essential for ensuring that public institutions remain responsive, inclusive and accountable.

Census as the cornerstone of inclusive governance, equitable development and democratic representation

Inclusive governance:

1. **Evidence-based policymaking:** Census provides comprehensive demographic, social and economic data, enabling governments to design targeted and need-based interventions for different population groups.
Eg: Schemes such as PM Poshan, National Health Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission rely on population-based estimates for planning and resource allocation.
2. **Identification of vulnerable groups:** Census data helps identify marginalized communities, migrants, elderly persons, women-headed households and persons with disabilities for focused policy attention.
Eg: Data from the 2011 Census informed policies relating to urban slums, disability welfare and senior citizen welfare programmes.
3. **Strengthening local governance:** Accurate population data assists local bodies in planning civic services such as water supply, sanitation, housing and waste management.
Eg: Urban Local Bodies use Census-based population figures for preparation of City Development Plans and infrastructure projects.
4. **Improving welfare delivery:** Census provides the baseline for beneficiary identification, service coverage assessment and monitoring developmental outcomes.
Eg: The NITI Aayog's SDG localisation framework uses demographic indicators derived from official statistical systems including Census data.
5. **Facilitating cooperative federalism:** Uniform and credible

data enables coordinated planning between the Union, States and local governments.

Eg: Recommendations of successive Finance

Commissions have relied significantly on population data for inter-governmental fiscal transfers.

Role in equitable development

1. **Rational allocation of public resources:** Population data helps distribute financial resources according to developmental needs and demographic realities.
Eg: The 15th Finance Commission used population-related indicators while recommending grants and devolution criteria.
2. **Reducing regional disparities:** Census identifies backward regions lacking access to education, healthcare, housing and infrastructure.
Eg: Aspirational district planning uses demographic and socio-economic indicators to bridge developmental gaps.
3. **Infrastructure planning:** Reliable population projections support planning of schools, hospitals, roads and public transport systems.
Eg: Expansion of metro rail networks and urban infrastructure projects considers population density and settlement patterns.
4. **Monitoring social justice outcomes:** Census data enables assessment of socio-economic progress across different sections of society.
Eg: Data on literacy, workforce participation and housing conditions informs interventions for disadvantaged communities.
5. **Supporting sustainable development:** Accurate demographic information helps balance developmental priorities with environmental and resource constraints.
Eg: Population distribution data is used in disaster management planning by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Role in democratic representation

1. **Basis for delimitation:** Census forms the constitutional foundation for redrawing electoral constituencies to ensure equal representation.
Eg: Articles 82 and 170 provide for readjustment of

Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies after every Census through a Delimitation exercise.

2. **Strengthening electoral democracy:** Accurate population figures help ensure fair representation of citizens in elected institutions.

Eg: The Delimitation Commission (2002) used Census data to rationalise constituency boundaries across States.

3. **Reservation in local bodies:** Population statistics assist in determining reservation of seats for disadvantaged groups in local governance institutions.

Eg: Articles 243D and 243T provide reservation for SCs and STs in Panchayats and Municipalities based on population proportions.

4. **Enhancing political inclusion:** Census captures demographic changes that influence representation needs of growing urban and migrant populations.

Eg: Rapid urbanisation in cities such as Bengaluru and Hyderabad highlights the need for updated population data for representative governance.

5. **Ensuring constitutional equality:** Fair representation based on accurate demographic realities upholds the democratic principle of political equality.

Eg: In *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India* (2006), the Supreme Court emphasised that representative institutions are integral to democratic governance under the Constitution.

Conclusion

A robust Census transforms demographic realities into informed public action and democratic legitimacy. As India moves towards Census 2027, ensuring accuracy, transparency and public trust will be critical for building a more representative, equitable and future-ready governance framework.