Measuring Caste in India

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What we do: Generate a foundation of facts to enrich public dialogue and support sound decision-making. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and data-driven social science research.

Find our data: www.pewresearch.org/indiasurvey
About the Religion in India survey

- Nearly 30,000 interviews conducted nationally with population 18+
- Fieldwork conducted November 2019 to March 2020 (before the first wave of COVID-19)
- Interviews conducted in 17 Indian languages
- Kashmir Valley, Sikkim and Manipur were not accessible
- Interview lasted 45 minutes on average

Note: These regions reflect zonal council divisions. Population shares based on adults ages 18 and older and exclude the union territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. Fieldwork could not be conducted in the Kashmir Valley due to security concerns. Fieldwork could not be conducted in Manipur or Sikkim due to the outbreak of COVID-19. No locations in Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, or Ladakh were selected for inclusion in the survey. Fieldwork was not conducted in Andaman and Nicobar Islands or Lakshadweep. Source: Census of India, 2011.
Castes in India
Castes in India

- (as asked on Pew Research Center survey)
- General Category
- Scheduled Caste
- Scheduled Tribes
- Other Backwards Classes
Castes in India

- General Category
  - Also known as: General Class or Forward Caste
  - Mostly not eligible for reservation benefits

- Scheduled Castes (SCs)
  - Often known as “Dalits”
  - Pejoratively known as “untouchables”

- Scheduled Tribes (STs)
  - More geographically isolated
  - Additional laws in place to protect ST land

- Other Backward Classes (OBCs)
  - Similar political and economic disadvantages as SCs and STs
  - No history with “untouchability”
  - Most recent category to receive government recognition
Note: All survey respondents, regardless of religion, were asked, “Are you from a General Category, Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class?” Other Backward Classes (OBC) includes a small share of people who volunteered they belong to Most Backward Classes (MBC). Don’t know/Refused responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.
Caste’s role in Indian society

% of Indian adults who say ...

- All/most of their close friends are members of the same caste: 70%
- Very important to stop women marrying into another caste: 64%
- Would not be willing to accept a Scheduled Caste as a neighbor*: 21%
- Felt personally discriminated against due to caste in the past 12 months: 14%

*Members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were not asked this question.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.
% Scheduled Caste inconsistent between the Indian Census and various surveys

2011 Census 17%
Pew Research India Religion 2020 25
Pew Research Global Attitudes 2019 24
Pew Research Global Attitudes 2017 23
Indian Human Development Survey 2005 22
National Family Health Survey 2015-2016 21
National Election Studies 2019 19

DIFFERENCES IN QUESTION WORDING
2011 Indian Census

[ALL] Is this person SC/ST?

1 SC
2 ST
3 NO

[If SC/ST] Write name of SC/ST from the list supplied.

Note: SC can only be among the Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists.
ST can be from any religion.
2019-2020 Pew Research Center Survey

[ASK ALL]
QCASTE Are you from a ...?

1  General Category
2  Scheduled Caste
3  Scheduled Tribe [OR]
4  Other Backward Class
5  Most Backward Class (DO NOT READ)
96  I do not/my religion does not recognize a caste system (DO NOT READ)
97  Not a member of any caste/category/class (DO NOT READ)
98  Don’t know (DO NOT READ)
99  Refused (DO NOT READ)
Differences between Pew Research and India Census

India Census (2011)

- SC can only be among Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. ST can be from any religion.
- Respondents had to provide caste or tribe name, back checked against government list of thousands of castes and tribes.
- OBC not an option.

Pew Research Center (2019-2020)

- All religions can answer any option
- Only top level “Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, etc.” used without back checking.
- OBC available as an option.
Most Indians say they belong to a Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class

% of Indian adults who identify as ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Category</th>
<th>Scheduled Castes (SC)</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes (ST)</th>
<th>Other Backward Classes (OBC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General population</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhs</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jains</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Source: Survey conducted Nov. 17, 2019-March 23, 2020, among adults in India.
DIFFERENCES IN SURVEY DESIGN
% Scheduled Caste inconsistent between the Indian Census and various surveys

2011 Census 17%

Pew Research India Religion 2020 25%
Pew Research Global Attitudes 2019 24%
Pew Research Global Attitudes 2017 23%
Indian Human Development Survey 2005 22%
National Family Health Survey 2015-2016 21%
National Election Studies 2019 19%

Conclusions

• Despite it being a highly political issue, no consistent measure of caste in India.
• How the question is asked has effect on caste distribution
• Survey design choices also have effect on caste distribution
Further Reading

www.pewresearch.org/indiasurvey – Full India survey (Chapter 4: caste attitudes)

https://pewrsr.ch/indiacaste – Decoded blog post “Measuring Caste in India”