

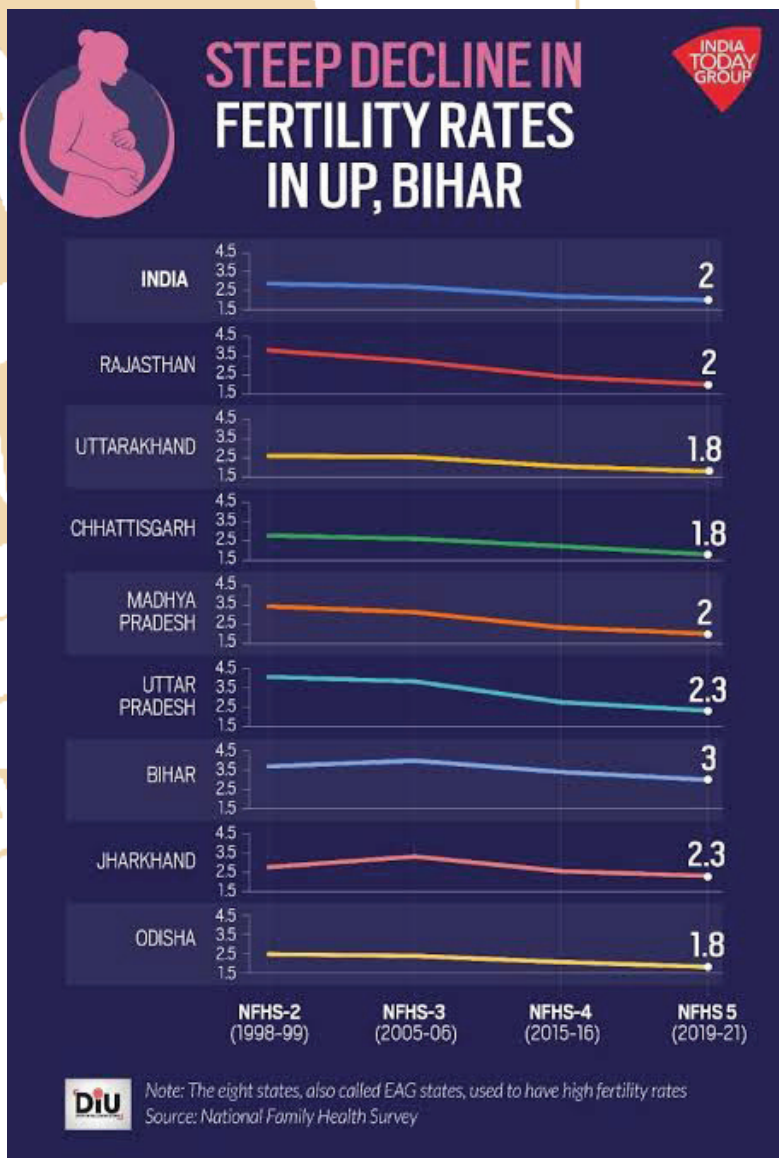
# POPULATION PRIORITIES

The Hindu

Paper - III  
(Economy)

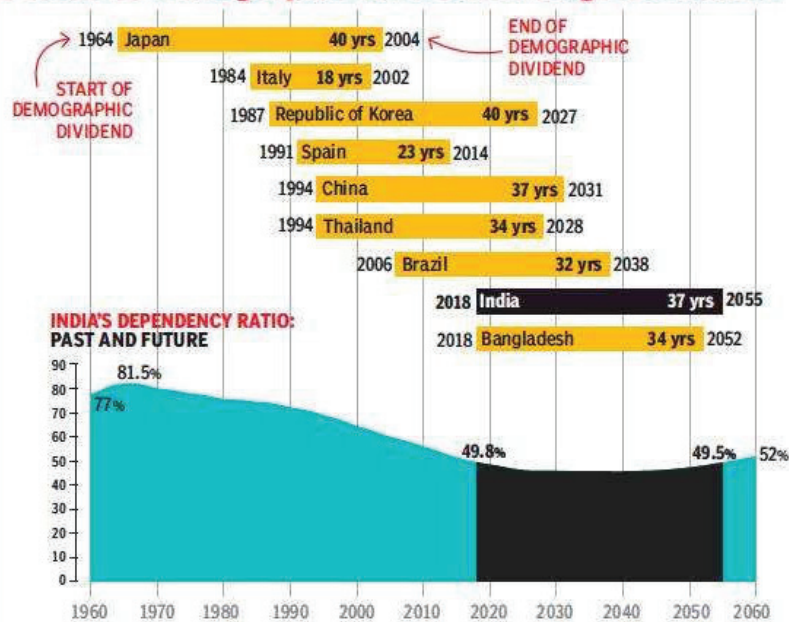
In what was an intriguing statement in her Interim Budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that a high-powered committee will be constituted to consider the challenges arising from “fast population growth and demographic changes”. With the Union government repeatedly postponing the decennial Census — it has not been conducted for the first time in a decade since 1881 — there is no direct evidence to support this statement. It is evident that India is now the most populous country, but the Sample Registration System statistical report in 2020 and the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21) have shown that the total fertility rate (TFR) in India has fallen to 2 overall, with only a few States — Bihar (2.98), Meghalaya (2.91), Uttar Pradesh (2.35), Jharkhand (2.26) and Manipur (2.17) — having a TFR above 2.1. Clearly, the high population growth of the kind seen in the 20th century has been largely arrested — the TFR fell from 5.7 in 1950 to 2 in 2020, albeit differentially across regions. The population share of the southern States, reduced to 21% in 2011 from 26% in 1951, largely a consequence of a rapid reduction in TFR due to better socio-economic outcomes and education, and despite higher migration to these States. While the surveys mentioned are robust and necessary, they are no substitute for the comprehensive Census; the continued delay in its implementation reflects poorly on the Union Home Ministry that is motivated by other priorities rather than executing a vital programme of Indian governance.

The demographic shift in India and rising life expectancy have resulted in challenges and opportunities. The much touted demographic dividend — the relatively high proportion of the working age population in the developing world — is meaningful only if there are sufficient jobs and if they enjoy some degree of so-



cial security that will help them when they age. With high unemployment and the creation of non-farm jobs, which will increase productivity and cater to skilled employment, relatively slack in the last few years, there is the possibility of the country squandering this dividend. The “high-powered” committee will be performing a crucial role if it engages meaningfully in addressing questions related to jobs and social security and the challenges citizens face due to rapid urbanisation and mechanisation of work. However, if the committee focuses on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party’s pet bogies of looking at population issues through the lens of religion and immigration, it will only distract governance from making use of the fast eroding demographic dividend in the country.

## Period of demographic dividend in large economies



### Expected Question for Prelims

**Que.** Consider the following statements with reference to the demography of India-

1. The total fertility rate (TFR) has fallen below 2.1 in all the states of India.
2. The share of population of the southern states has increased in 2011 as compared to 1951.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1                      (b) Only 2  
(c) Both 1 and 2              (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer : D**

### Mains Expected Question & Format

**Que.:** 'Recently the Government of India has announced the formation of a high-powered committee to consider the challenges arising from demographic changes.' Critically analyze this decision of the government.

**Answer's Approach:**

- ❖ In the first part of the answer, discuss the decision of the Government of India to constitute a high-powered committee on the demographic issue.
- ❖ In the second part, discuss the positive and negative aspects of this decision and also discuss the need for census.
- ❖ Finally give a conclusion giving suggestions.

**Note:** - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.