

# LINEAR REGRESSION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO DATA ON ITS POLICIES

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Even as the Union government suggests that there were prima facie reasons for the [suspension of the Director of the International Institute for Population Sciences \(IIPS\), K.S. James](#) — the IIPS prepares the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) and reports to the Health Ministry — it is difficult not to spot vindictive motives. In recent years, the government has taken a hostile approach towards the release of any data, even by its own agencies, that reveal inconvenient truths about its policies and their outcomes, rather than using them as feedback. The NFHS-5 (2019-21), for example, debunked the government's claim in 2019 that all villages were open defecation free (ODF); it showed that 19% of surveyed households did not use any toilet facility. Other surveys, i.e., the National Statistical Office survey from October 2018, the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey of 2019-20 and the Multiple Indicator Survey released earlier this year, also indicated that many villages were not ODF. The NFHS-5 also showed a rise in anaemia and that 57% of the surveyed rural households lacked access to LPG or natural gas, calling into question the impact of the Ujjwala Yojana.

What transpired in the recent past with other statistical findings is also revealing. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation had junked its consumer expenditure survey (CES) of 2017-18 ostensibly due to data quality concerns even as important indices related to inflation and poverty continue to be pegged to the CES of 2011-12. The NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey, which was cleared by the National Statistical Commission (NSC) in 2018, was held back for showing a sharp increase in unemployment, but was released only after the government returned to power in 2019. The delay resulted in the resignations of the former acting chairman and another member of the NSC over the interference of the NITI Aayog in statistical issues. NITI Aayog's involvement in releasing the back series on GDP growth that contradicted an NSC report in 2018, was another indication of the government's efforts to undermine traditional statistical institutions. Recently, a series of opinion articles by members of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister sought to discredit the methodology used by the NFHS and similar surveys. The government has also unduly and unjustifiably delayed the decennial Census exercise, putting into limbo several statistical measures and programmes dependent upon Census information. Shenanigans of this kind do not bode well for an otherwise robust statistical system, which has been subject to strains at a time when there has been an explosion of public data in a growing digital world of commerce and governance.

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