

88% of households in India have a mobile phone

By: Prमित Bhattacharya | Mint | December 06, 2016

77% of the bottom quintile have a mobile phone, but only 18% of them have access to tap water

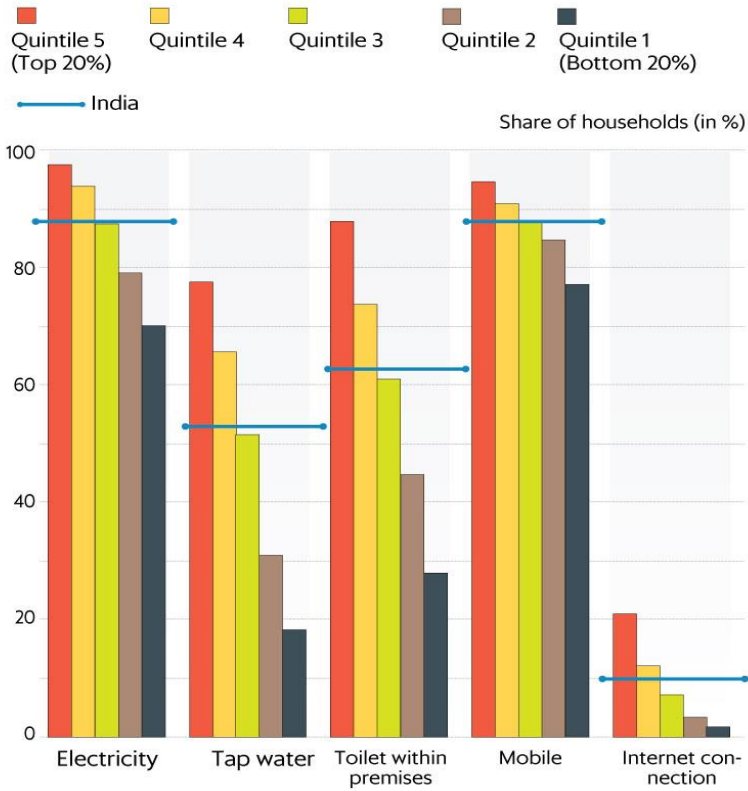
When the results of the 2011 census were published, one stark finding stood out: more households had mobile phones than toilets in India. Fifty-three per cent of households had a mobile phone, while only 47% had a toilet within their homes in that year, the census statistics showed. Five years later, the gap between the two seems to have widened as the march of telecom connectivity has outpaced the march of water connectivity in the country.

While the proportion of households with toilets has moved up, the proportion of those with mobile phones has grown even more sharply, according to fresh data from a nationally representative household survey. Eighty-eight per cent of households in India today have a mobile phone, according to the 'Household Survey on India's Citizen Environment & Consumer Economy' (ICE 360° survey) conducted in 2016. The same proportion of households have access to electricity, but far fewer households have access to toilets or tap water, the survey shows. Access to tap water is a function of class, the data suggests. So is access to toilets.

Apart from poverty, the other key factor behind the widespread prevalence of open defecation seems to be the lack of running water in many households. The data shows that 6% of households nationally (and 9% of rural India) defecate in the open despite having toilets. Many researchers have drawn attention to this phenomenon, pointing to the role of education and behavioural change in convincing people to use toilets. But the survey seems to suggest that a key reason why people with toilets may still defecate in the open is the lack of running water. Of households that defecate in the open despite having toilets, 63% reported having toilets without running water.

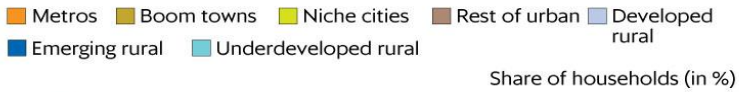
Household amenities

Access to tap water seems to be a fairly good proxy of class in India: the richer you are, the more likely you are to have access to tap water



Around a quarter of households in metros have access to Internet while only 3% of households in under-developed rural areas have an Internet connection

Economic clusters



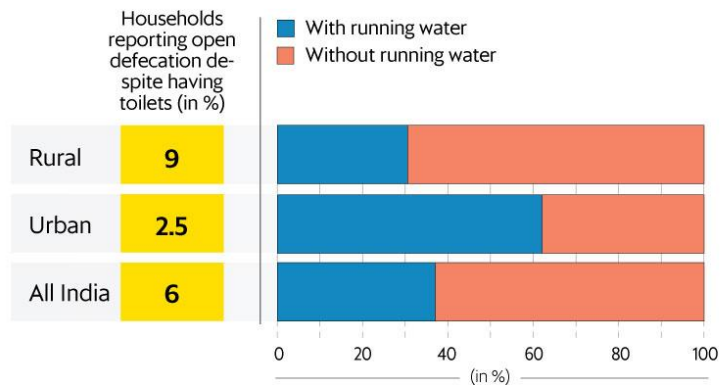
Of households without toilets, 92% defecate in the open. The proportion is lower in urban India because a significant chunk of people without toilets have access to community or public toilets.

The ICE 360° survey was conducted by the independent not-for-profit organization, People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE), headed by two of India's best-known consumer economy experts, Rama Bijapurkar and Rajesh Shukla. The survey is among the largest consumer economy surveys in the country. The urban sample of the survey is comparable to that of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) consumer expenditure survey conducted in 2011-12. While the NSSO surveyed 101,651 households of which 41,968 (41.3%) were urban households, the ICE 360° survey covered 61,000 households of which 36,000 (59%) are urban households. The rural sample of the ICE 360° survey is less than half of the NSSO sample. Nonetheless, all the estimates of each region have been derived by adjusting for the respective population of those regions.

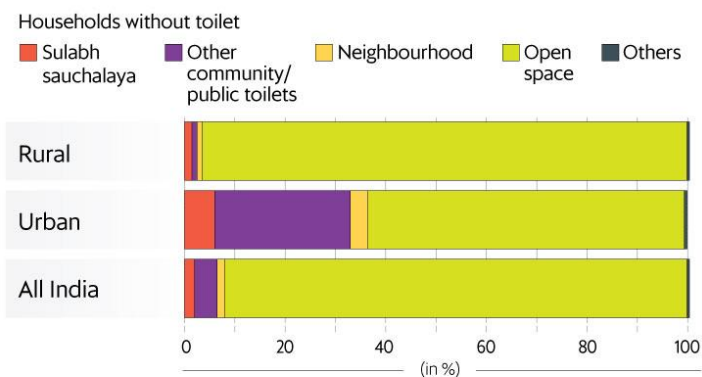
The ICE 360° survey shows a significant improvement in household amenities such as access to electricity, tap water and even toilets, compared to the 2011 census. The proportion of households with an electricity connection has moved up 20 percentage points to 87.6% over the past five years, the survey suggests. Over the same period, the proportion of households with tap water in their homes has increased by 26 percentage points to 52.6% in 2016 and the proportion of households with toilets has seen a 16 percentage point change, as per the survey. Even access to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections seems to have risen sharply, with 54.5% households surveyed reporting using LPG as cooking fuel as against 28.5% such households in 2011. Much of the increase seems to be driven by gains in rural India.

Toilet troubles

Of households reporting open defecation despite having toilets, 63% did not have running water in their toilets



Most households without toilets defecate in the open but the proportion is lower in urban India because of the presence of community/public toilets. Nearly a third of households without toilets in urban India use such facilities



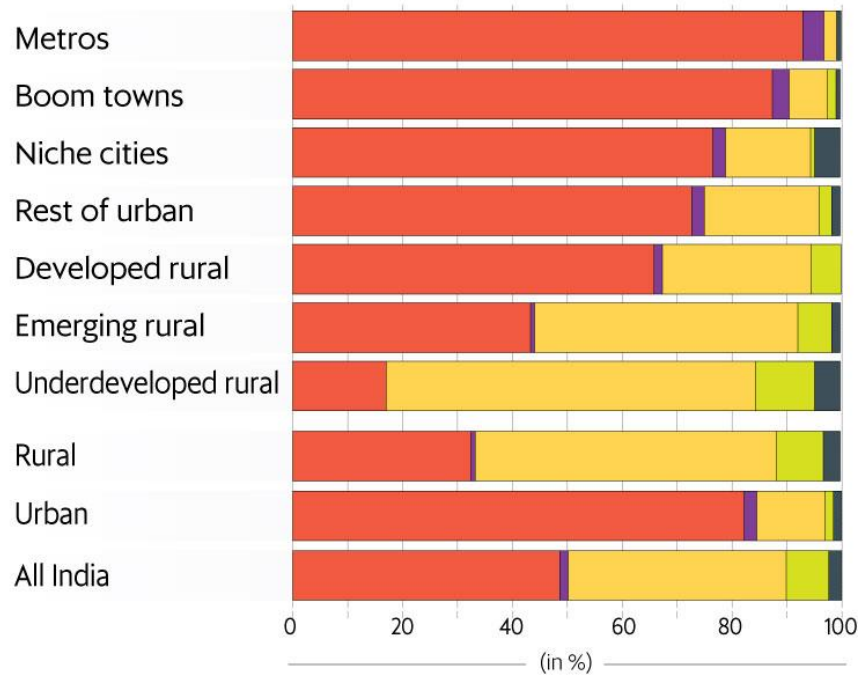
It needs to be kept in mind that while the 2011 figures were based on a complete census, the 2016 figures are estimates based on a survey and hence need to be interpreted with greater caution. Nonetheless, estimates such as these based on a nationally representative survey usually provide a fair sense of the direction of change even if they under-state or over-state the pace of change because of sampling errors. And the trends seem to suggest a significant improvement in access to household amenities across the country over the past half a decade.

It is also worth keeping in mind that much of this change may have preceded the election of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in May 2014. Data from the baseline ICE 360° survey conducted in 2014 (which had a smaller sample size of 20,195 households, and hence is not strictly comparable) suggests that much of the improvement in access to household amenities may have occurred between 2011 and 2014, rather than post 2014. For instance, 87.3% households reported access to electricity, 60.1% reported access to toilets and 36.5% reported access to tap water in the 2014 survey. Thus, most of the improvements in the 2011-16 period seems to have occurred by 2014. Given that rural India leads most of the gains in access to amenities, this may not be so surprising since the period 2011-14 saw a significant boost to rural fortunes.

Growing LPG adoption

LPG seems to be gaining as a fuel of choice at the expense of kerosene

Type of cooking fuel



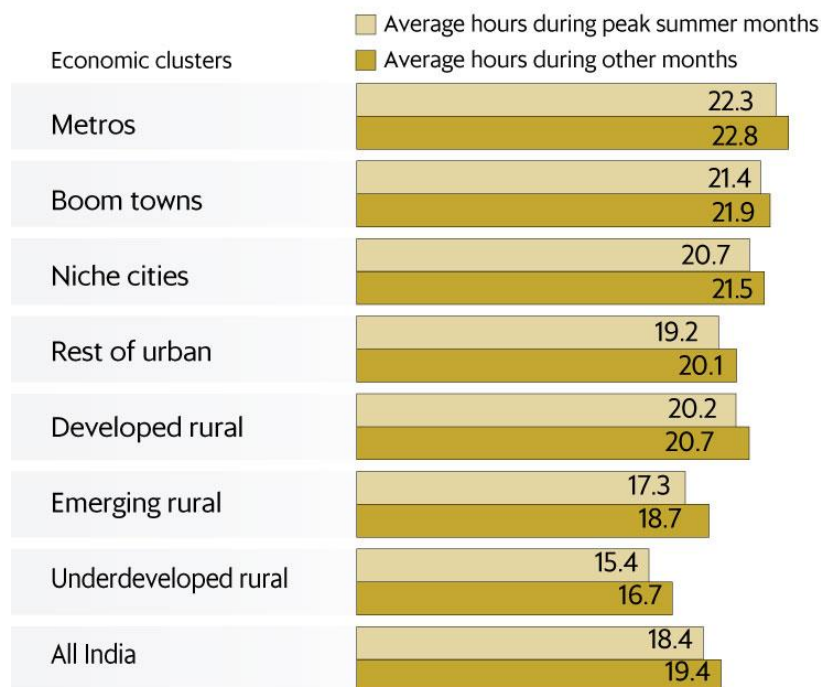
Source: ICE 360° Survey, 2016

While ownership of mobile phones has spiked, access to the Internet has lagged, the latest survey shows. Only 10% of households reported having access to Internet, the ICE 360° survey 2016 shows. Like almost everything else, Internet access too is a function of the income class you belong to and the place you stay in. Barely 1% of households in the bottom quintile have access to Internet but 21% in the top quintile do.

A notable feature of this survey is that it is representative at the level of economic clusters. Urban India has been divided into four clusters: metros (population more than 5 million), boom towns (2.5 to 5 million), niche cities (1 to 2.5 million) and other urban towns (less than 1 million). Based on a district development index, rural India has been sub-divided into three different clusters: ‘developed rural’, ‘emerging rural’, and ‘underdeveloped rural’. The first category includes districts such as Bhatinda (Punjab) and Kangra (Himachal Pradesh). The second category includes districts such as Latur (Maharashtra) and Kamrup (Assam), while the last category includes districts such as Kalahandi (Odisha) and Bastar (Chhattisgarh).

Power cuts

Metros get seven hours more power on average than under-developed rural areas



The survey shows that around a quarter of households living in metros have access to Internet but only 3% in under-developed rural areas have such access. Access to tap water is also deeply uneven. Ninety-five per cent of those living in metros have access to tap water, but only 22% of those in under-developed rural areas have access to tap water.

There is a similar divide when it comes to access to electricity as well, the data suggests. Long power cuts remain a routine feature of life in rural India; people in the metros have fewer and shorter power cuts.

This is the fourth of a 16-part data journalism series on how India lives, thinks, earns and spends, based on the results from the ICE 360° survey conducted by the People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE) in 2016 (www.ice360.in). The next part will look at how India earns.