

Delimitation in India: Constitutional Framework, Reservation Design and Post-2026 Electoral Policy Agenda

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Abstract: *Delimitation in India is the constitutional and statutory process of redrawing territorial constituencies and, when constitutionally permitted, readjusting the distribution of seats so that representation tracks population “so far as practicable.” The framework is anchored in Part V UNION and Part VI THE STATES of the Constitution—particularly Articles 81 and 82 for the House of the People, Article 170 for State Legislative Assemblies and Articles 330 and 332 for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)—together with the statutory regime created under the Delimitation Act, 2002 and related election laws.*

This research paper examines (i) how the Constitution’s “population-to-seat” equality principle is operationalized through delimitation, (ii) how the long “freeze” on inter-State seat readjustment has reshaped representation and federal bargaining and (iii) how reservation rules for SCs and STs are legally differentiated—SC-reserved constituencies are mandated to be geographically dispersed across a State, a requirement that is not present for ST-reserved constituencies.

This review uses a primary-source spine (Constitution text updated through the 106th Amendment; Delimitation Act, 2002; official notifications and gazettes; and official press releases) to map legal architecture and integrates prior scholarship to evaluate contested outcomes—such as the opacity of SC “dispersal” in practice; the governance burden created by very large constituencies; and the post-2026 policy menu (seat expansion, timing scenarios tied to census publication and institutional interactions with women’s reservation and simultaneous-election proposals).

Keywords: *delimitation; malapportionment; representation; constituency boundaries; Scheduled Castes; Scheduled Tribes; federalism; census; seat freeze; women’s reservation; simultaneous elections.*

1. Introduction

Delimitation is a governance technology for converting population counts into territorial representation. India’s constitutional provisions embeds a strong equality aspiration—seat allocation should produce broadly comparable population-to-representative ratios “so far as practicable” across States and, within a State, across constituencies (Government of India, 2024). Yet no delimitation system is purely arithmetical: the legal framework explicitly permits trade-offs for geography, administrative boundaries, communications and public convenience and it also mandates community-based seat reservation with distinct rules for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Government of India, 2002).

The central constitutional dilemma is that “equal vote value” must be pursued inside a federal polity where population change is not uniform. India’s solution since the 1970s has been a prolonged constitutional “freeze” that decouples certain seat readjustments from the most recent census and postpones inter-State redistribution until after the first cen-

sus taken after 2026 (Government of India, 2024). This freeze preserved a prior balance of representation among States but the growing divergence between actual population and representation intensity has entrenched positions on demographic transition, fiscal federalism and regional representation (Reuters, 2025a).

This paper addresses three research questions. First, what is the operative legal architecture for delimitation and reserved-seat design and how does it distribute discretion between Parliament, the executive and delimitation authorities (Government of India, 2024)? Second, what does the differentiated legal treatment of SC and ST reserved constituency selection imply for transparency of outcomes, especially where SC populations are widely dispersed (Government of India, 2002)? Third, what policy scenarios become plausible after 2026—particularly regarding parliamentary seat expansion, the implementation design of the 106th Constitutional Amendment for women’s reservation and the administrative sequencing issues raised by simultaneous-election proposals (Government of India, 2024)?

Constitutional and statutory framework

Population-to-representation equality in the constitutional text

Article 81 sets the constitutional logic for representation in the House of the People. It caps the House at “not more than five hundred and thirty” directly elected members from States and “not more than twenty” members representing Union territories and it demands that State seat allocations be arranged so that the ratio between seats and State population is, “so far as practicable,” the same for all States; likewise, constituencies inside a State should be drawn so that the population-per-seat ratio is “so far as practicable” the same throughout the State (Government of India, 2024).

These equality clauses are then bridged to decennial population measurement through Article 81(3), which defines “population” by reference to the last preceding census figures that have been published. Crucially, Article 81(3) contains a time-limited interpretive rule: until the relevant figures for the first census taken after 2026 are published, key “population” references are legally locked to earlier censuses (1971 for inter-State allocation and 2001 for certain intra-State constituency purposes) (Government of India, 2024).

Article 82 provides the constitutional command for readjustment “upon completion of each census,” but it is simultaneously the constitutional vehicle through which the “freeze” is implemented: it states that until the relevant figures for the first census taken after 2026 are published, it shall not be necessary to readjust (i) the allocation of seats among States as readjusted on the basis of the 1971 census and (ii) the division into territorial constituencies as may be readjusted on the basis of the 2001 census (Government of India, 2024).

At the State level, Article 170 similarly defines the structure of State Legislative Assemblies and historically has been paired with the same “readjustment after census” logic, which is part of why delimitation debates are not only about parliamentary power but also about State-level representation and administrative capacity (Government of India, 2024).

Reservation as constitutional mandate and timing constraint

Articles 330 and 332 constitutionalize reservation for SC and ST representation in the House of the People and in State Legislative Assemblies. Article 330 mandates reserved seats for SC and ST categories in the House of the People and ties the number of reserved seats to population proportion “as nearly as may be” (Government of India, 2024). Article 332 does the same for State Assemblies, again using proportionality to population “as nearly as may be” (Government of India, 2024).

Both Article 330 and Article 332 incorporate a shared definitional device for “population” through an Explanation that, until the relevant figures for the first census taken after

2026 have been published, it treats the reference census (for the purpose of these reservation articles) as the 2001 census (Government of India, 2024). This matters because the constitutional baseline for proportionality and the statutory process for constituency identification often turn on the same census base, but special legal pathways (such as the Jammu and Kashmir delimitation) can shift the applicable census by legislative amendment (Government of India, 2002).

The Delimitation Act, 2002 and the legal design of discretion

The Delimitation Act, 2002 establishes the operative statutory procedure for delimiting parliamentary and assembly constituencies. It sets a three-member Delimitation Commission: a chairperson who is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court, the Chief Election Commissioner (or a nominated Election Commissioner) and the State Election Commissioner concerned (Government of India, 2002).

Section 9 then specifies the core delimitation criteria. For all constituencies, it requires geographic compactness “as far as practicable,” and it directs the Commission to have regard to physical features, existing administrative boundaries, facilities of communication and public convenience; it also requires that each assembly constituency fall wholly within a parliamentary constituency (Government of India, 2002).

Section 9 draws a sharp distinction between SC and ST constituency identification:

- For SC reservations, constituencies “shall be distributed in different parts of the State” and located, “as far as practicable,” in areas where the proportion of SC population is “comparatively large” (Government of India, 2002).
- For ST reservations, constituencies “shall, as far as practicable, be located” in areas where the proportion of ST population “is the largest” (Government of India, 2002).

This difference is not merely administrative practice; it is statutory text. The SC regime embeds a dispersal obligation that demands a second-order balancing step beyond “largest proportion,” whereas the ST regime is normatively closer to a “rank by concentration” rule (tempered by the phrase “as far as practicable”) (Government of India, 2002).

The Act also specifies mandates for transparency: publication of proposals, receipt and consideration of objections and public sittings in each State as the Commission thinks fit (Government of India, 2002).

Finally, the Act provides strong finality: once published, a delimitation order “shall have the force of law” and “shall not be called in question in any court” (Government of India, 2002). This statutory finality is reinforced by the Constitution’s electoral-matters bar in Article 329, which blocks court challenges to the validity of delimitation and allotment laws made under Articles 327 or 328 (Government of India, 2024). However, the Supreme Court has clarified that the ex-

clusionary language does not eliminate constitutional scrutiny in every scenario; limited judicial review may remain available where a delimitation exercise is attacked on narrow constitutional grounds such as manifest arbitrariness (Supreme Court of India, 2024).

History of delimitation rounds and the freeze regime

The constitutional “freeze” as a structural intervention

The most consequential “event” in India’s delimitation history is not a boundary redraw but the constitutional decision to postpone inter-State seat readjustment. The Constitution’s own footnotes—integrated into the official consolidated text—record that the Forty-second Amendment inserted key provisos into Articles 81 and 82 (effective in the late 1970s) and that later amendments substituted the year-2000 endpoint with year-2026 and moved the relevant census bases (Government of India, 2024).

Under the current text, both Article 81(3) and Article 82

include explicit “until after 2026” clauses. Article 81(3) freezes the meaning of “population” for inter-State allocation to the 1971 census (for specified sub-clauses) and to the 2001 census for intra-State constituency ratio purposes, until the release of the relevant figures for the first census after 2026 (Government of India, 2024). Article 82 then couples readjustment to each completed census but states that until after the first post-2026 census figures are published, two key forms of readjustment are not necessary: inter-State allocation (anchored to 1971) and intra-State territorial division (as may be readjusted on the basis of 2001) (Government of India, 2024).

This “freeze” has had two governance effects. It reduced the urgency with which demographic change translates into inter-State parliamentary power shifts. At the same time, it increases the size and heterogeneity of constituencies over time as population grows within fixed seat totals—raising the representation intensity on Members of Parliament and skewing “representative accessibility” as a democratic value.

State-wise distribution of parliamentary and assembly constituencies showing the variance across the states are depicted in the Table 1 and Figure 1:

Table 1: State-wise population ratio per parliamentary and assembly constituencies in India

States/UTs	Parliamentary Constituencies - 2008	Assembly Constituencies - 2008	Total Population - 2001	Population per parliamentary constituency	Population per assembly constituency
Rajasthan	25	200	56507188	2260288	282536
Haryana	10	90	21144564	2114456	234940
Madhya Pradesh	29	230	60348023	2080966	262383
Uttar Pradesh	80	403	166197921	2077474	412402
Bihar	40	243	82998509	2074963	341558
Maharashtra	48	288	96878627	2018305	336384
Nagaland	1	60	1990036	1990036	33167
Delhi	7	70	13850507	1978644	197864
Gujarat	26	182	50671017	1948885	278412
Jharkhand	14	81	26945829	1924702	332665
West Bengal	42	294	80176197	1908957	272708
Assam	14	126	26655528	1903966	211552
Chhattisgarh	11	90	20833803	1893982	231487
Karnataka	28	224	52850562	1887520	235940
Punjab	13	117	24358999	1873769	208197
Andhra Pradesh	42	294	76210007	1814524	259218
Orissa	21	147	36804660	1752603	250372
Uttarakhand	5	70	8489349	1697870	121276
Jammu and Kashmir	6	87	10143700	1690617	116594
Tamil Nadu	39	234	62405679	1600146	266691
Tripura	2	60	3199203	1599602	53320
Keralam	20	140	31841374	1592069	227438

Contd...

States/UTs	Parliamentary Constituencies - 2008	Assembly Constituencies - 2008	Total Population - 2001	Population per parliamentary constituency	Population per assembly constituency
Himachal Pradesh	4	68	6077900	1519475	89381
Meghalaya	2	60	2318822	1159411	38647
Manipur	2	60	2166788	1083394	36113
Puducherry	1	30	974345	974345	32478
Chandigarh	1	0	900635	900635	
Mizoram	1	40	888573	888573	22214
Goa	2	40	1347668	673834	33692
Arunachal Pradesh	2	60	1097968	548984	18299
Sikkim	1	32	540851	540851	16902
A & N Islands	1	0	356152	356152	0
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	1	0	220490	220490	0
Daman and Diu	1	0	158204	158204	0
Lakshadweep	1	0	60650	60650	0
Total	543	4120	1028610328	1894310	249663

Source: Delimitation report 2008, census of India and author's estimates.

The delimitation cycle and contemporary exceptions

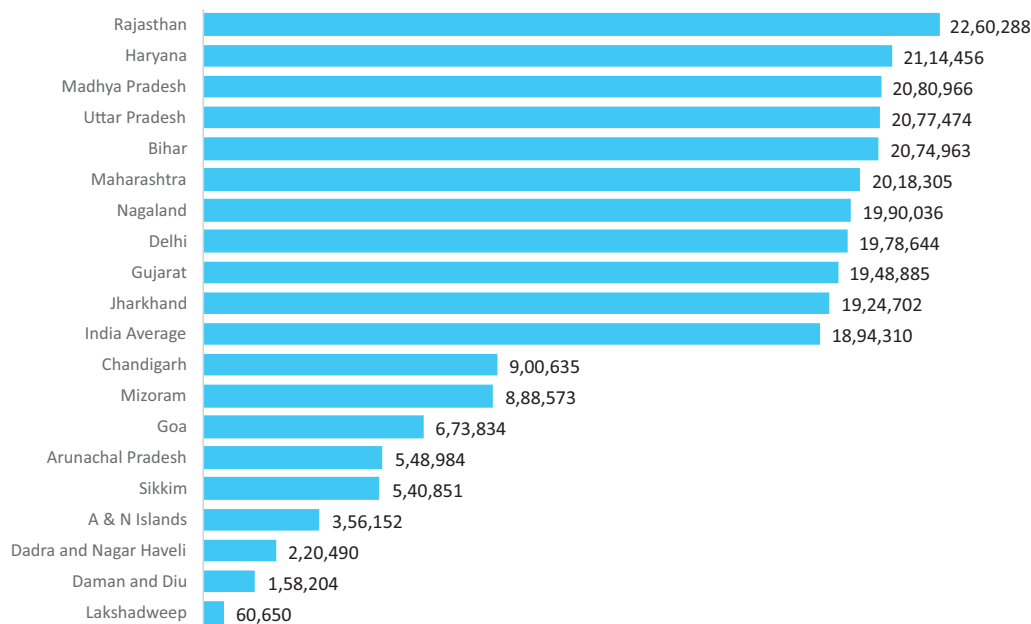
While the freeze delays certain seat readjustments, it does not eliminate constituency-boundary rationalisation. Statute and constitutional design allow delimitation authorities to redraw constituency maps on a specified census base (historically 2001 for the nationwide regime under the Delimitation Act, 2002), even while keeping total seats broadly frozen.

The Delimitation Act itself includes “deferral” mechanics: the President may defer delimitation in a State if unity and integrity are threatened or if there is a serious threat to peace and public order (Government of India, 2002). This helps explain why certain areas have proceeded on separate timelines and under special legal routes.

The “exceptional” route becomes most visible in the post-2019 legal reconstruction of Jammu and Kashmir, where Parliament’s reorganisation statute and consequential amendments

altered the operative census base and enabled a delimitation that increased the number of assembly constituencies.

Figure 1: Population per parliamentary constituency (selected states & UTs, 2001 census / 2008 delimitation base)



Reservation design and the Scheduled Caste dispersal problem

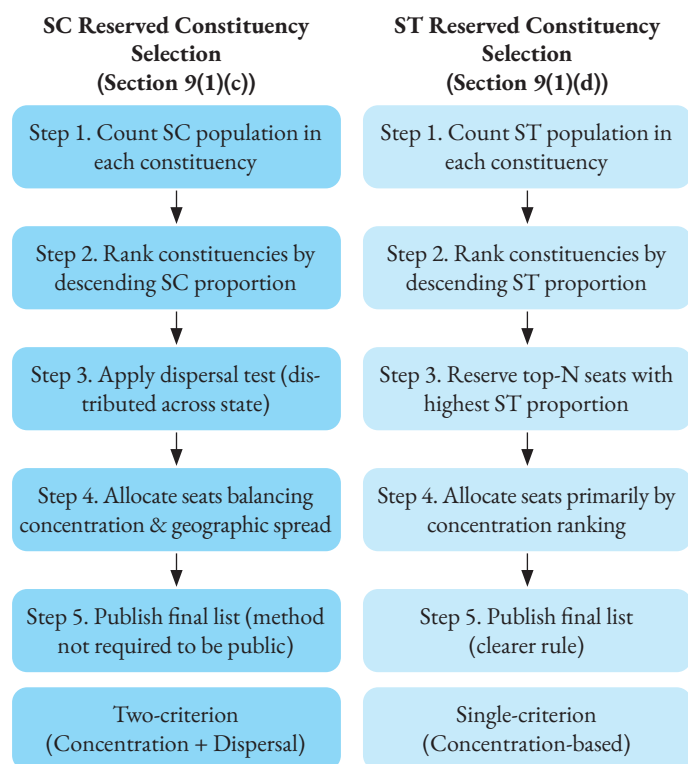
The legal asymmetry between SC and ST constituency selections

The reservation of constituencies is based on the principle of representation being proportional to the communities’ population. Constituency selection is however governed by Section 9 of the Delimitation Act, 2002 which builds an ex-

explicit distinction: SC-reserved constituencies must be both (i) located in areas where SC proportion is comparatively large and (ii) geographically distributed in different parts of the State; ST-reserved constituencies, by contrast, are to be located where the ST proportion is the largest (as far as practicable) (Government of India, 2002).

The dispersal requirement is well-intentioned: it ensures that SC communities in different regions of a State — not just in the highest-concentration pockets — get the chance to be represented by a member of their community and that over successive delimitation rounds, reserved-seat rotation does not concentrate in the same area. Jensenius (2017) notes that rotation of reserved constituencies across election cycles has ensured SC communities in multiple parts of large States have periodically experienced direct reserved-seat representation (Government of India, 2002).

Figure 2: SC vs. ST Reserved Constituency Selection — Statutory Process Differentiation under Section 9, Delimitation Act 2002



Source: Authors’ diagram derived from section 9(1)(c) and section 9(1)(d) of the Delimitation Act, 2002.

Why dispersal is creating a transparency gap

Although dispersal is legally mandated, the Delimitation Act does not specify a methodology or criteria for what would count adequately “distributed in different parts of the State,” nor does it specify how to make the trade-off between “comparatively large” concentration and geographic spread (Government of India, 2002). This creates a transparency gap: the public sees the outcome (which seats are reserved) but may not

be able to reconstruct the decision rule that balanced dispersal against concentration.

It can be broadly understood from electoral scholars that commissions may begin with the highest-concentration constituencies (SC populations are not likely to be majority-concentration in most constituencies) and then allocate remaining reserved seats by applying a dispersal criterion, which yields reserved constituencies with SC shares below the statewide SC average.

Toward transparent, reviewable criteria for dispersal

Optimal policy design that balances the geographical/regional dispersal with concentration should be consistent with the transparency requirements the Act already imposes in other respects — publication of proposals, public sittings, consideration of objections. One workable approach is a two-stage allocation rule:

First, assign the number of SC-reserved constituencies to sub-State regions (for example, districts or a stable administrative partitions) proportional to SC population in those regions, using the relevant census base. Second, within each region, reserve the constituencies with the highest SC proportion until the regional quota is met. This makes dispersal measurable (every region gets SC-reserved seats in proportion to its SC population) and makes concentration measurable (explicit within-region ranking). Such a rule also aligns with the Delimitation Act’s preference for maintaining administrative boundaries and public convenience (Government of India, 2002).

A second approach is based on optimization over a principle: define a public objective function (maximize sum of SC proportions across reserved constituencies) subject to explicit dispersion constraints (e.g., each geographic zone must contain at least k reserved seats or reserved seats must not all fall inside a small subset of districts) and then publish the resulting selection, the constraints and the sensitivity analysis. The key institutional improvement here is not adherence to a particular algorithm but a verification that the methodology holds up to the law’s stated purpose and promise.

The SC constituency dispersal issue should be seen as a transparency and accountability problem for effective administration — produced not by the statutory mandate, but by the absence of a published operational metric for dispersal.

Special delimitations in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam

Jammu and Kashmir as a statutory exception inside the freeze regime

The delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India, 2002) after the 2019 reorganisation illustrates a

special pathway: a Delimitation Commission, acting under the Delimitation Act, 2002 as applied through the reorganisation framework, produced a delimitation order that (i) increased the number of Assembly seats to 90, (ii) recalculated SC and ST reserved seats for the UT Assembly and (iii) reconfigured parliamentary constituency composition (Press Information Bureau, 2022).

The Commission determined the number of seats for the House of the People allocated to the UT as five, with zero seats reserved for SC and zero for ST at that parliamentary level; it also determined ninety seats for the Legislative Assembly, with seven reserved for SC and nine reserved for ST (District Election Officer, Kishtwar, 2022). The official gazette text also ties the delimitation to published figures of the 2011 census (District Election Officer, Kishtwar, 2022).

The release states that the final order yields 43 Assembly constituencies in Jammu region and 47 in Kashmir region; it also indicates that each of the five parliamentary constituencies would comprise 18 Assembly segments and that one parliamentary constituency was carved out by combining the Anantnag region with Rajouri and Poonch (Press Information Bureau, 2022).

The delimitation's operational parameters describe a variance approach ("margin of +/-10% of the average population per Assembly Constituency") and a reliance on stable administrative units (districts/tehsils/patwar circles), explicitly claiming that patwar circles were not broken and that Assembly constituencies were kept within district boundaries (Press Information Bureau, 2022).

Assam and the distinct Election Commission pathway under the RPA 1950

In Assam (Government of India, 2002), delimitation proceeded through a different legal mechanism. Under Section 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Election Commission can conduct delimitation for certain States (including Assam) following the rescission of a deferment order and using specified procedures and publication requirements (Government of India, 1950).

The government's official communications emphasize that the procedure for Assam's delimitation followed Section 8A of the RPA 1950 read with Section 9(1)(c) and (d) of the Delimitation Act, 2002 and the relevant constitutional provisions (Articles 82, 170, 330 and 332) (Press Information Bureau, 2023a).

The final order was published in August 2023. According to the official release, the delimitation retained the total number of Assembly seats at 126 and Lok Sabha seats at 14 and was notified and published in the gazettes of the Central Government and the State (Press Information Bureau, 2023b). Further re-

porting and policy tracking note that the order came into effect on August 16, 2023 (PRS Legislative Research, 2023).

The Assam exercise is instructive for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that constituency boundary rationalisation within fixed seat totals can be conducted through the freeze period using the 2001 Census base or supplementary 2011 data, providing a legal pathway for updating constituency maps even when inter-State seat reallocation remains frozen. Second, the extensive consultation process — draft publication, public objections, representations from political parties and local bodies — illustrates the legitimacy value of procedural transparency in delimitation exercises, a principle that should inform the SC dispersal methodology reform discussed above.

Post-2026 policy scenarios and conclusion

The Census Condition Precedent

The Constitution makes a precise condition precedent for post-freeze readjustment: it is not enough that 2026 has passed; the "relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026" must be published (Government of India, 2024). The timeline is thus contingent on the census schedule and the release of final population figures.

Recent reporting indicates that India's delayed decennial census is planned to conclude by March 1, 2027, following a multi-year postponement (Reuters, 2025b). If that schedule holds and if published figures emerge on a politically usable timeline, the earliest realistic window for a nationwide post-freeze delimitation would still require time for statutory steps: enactment or activation of the necessary delimitation law, constitution of the delimitation authority, publication of proposals, public hearings and final order publication order — a process that took approximately six years in the 2002–2008 exercise.

Seat expansion and the "800+" question

While expanding the number of seats in the lower house seems like a logical inevitability at the time of publication of this article, it remains a key policy choice post-2026 on how this will be made possible. The Constitution currently caps Lok Sabha membership structurally at 530 (States) + 20 (Union territories), meaning that a substantial expansion requires constitutional amendment of Article 81's caps and related implementing legislation (Government of India, 2024).

The capacity question is politically salient because the new Parliament building was explicitly designed with a much larger Lok Sabha chamber capacity (888 seats) in mind, signalling an architectural readiness for expansion (Press Information Bureau, 2023c).

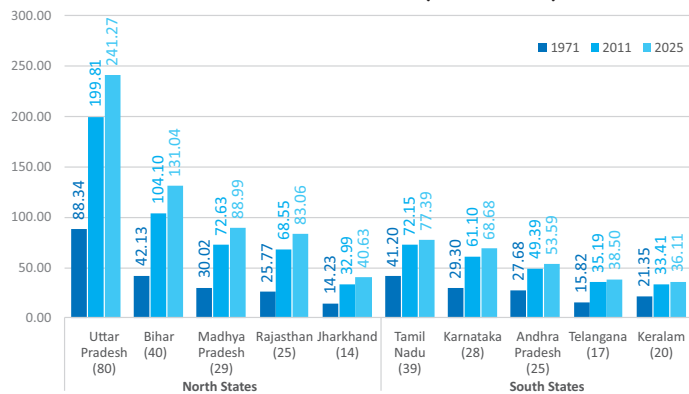
There is also a democratic-function argument for expansion. Using the World Bank’s 2024 population estimate for India (about 1.45 billion), a 543-seat Lok Sabha implies roughly 2.7 million people per elected member—an extraordinarily high constituent load when compared to other mature democracies and a practical constraint on constituency service, responsiveness and deliberative linkage between citizens and representatives (World Bank, n.d.).

Federal risk and the north–south divergence

A post-freeze redistribution—especially if implemented without compensatory seat allocation—risks intensifying regional polarisation. Major political debate has already crystallized around the north–south divergence: southern States argue that delimitation based strictly on population change would reduce their relative voice because they experienced slower population growth, while more populous northern States would gain a larger seat share. Reporting has documented this emerging tension and noted assurances from the Union government that southern States would not “lose” seats, even as the core redistribution arithmetic remains contested (Reuters, 2025a).

From a constitutional-design perspective, several “grand bargain” options are available, each with different trade-offs: expanding the total number of seats so that no State loses absolute seats while high-growth States gain additional seats; introducing transitional protections (for example, phased increases); or pairing Lok Sabha reallocation with adjustments in other federal institutions (for example, reforming principles of fiscal federalism or the Council of States allocation) to reduce perceived “demographic punishment.” The Constitution itself does not prescribe such bargains, but it sets the legal boundary conditions in Article 81 and Article 82 (Government of India, 2024). Figure 3 (below) illustrates the population growth divergence between key northern and southern states.

Figure 3: Population Growth Divergence — Northern vs. Southern States, 1971–2025 (estimated). Current Lok Sabha seat allocations shown (in million)



Note: 2025 population is projected. Number of parliamentary seats for the respective states are shown in parentheses.

Source: *Census of India (1971, 2001); World Bank population estimates (2024); authors’ chart.*

Women’s reservation is legally tied to commencement of delimitation and the -census

The 106th Constitutional Amendment makes delimitation not merely a representation-equality instrument but also a trigger for gender reservation. The Amendment Act’s commencement clause states that it comes into force on a date appointed by Central Government notification in the Official Gazette (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2023). The operative constitutional mechanism then appears in the inserted Article 334A, which states that women’s reservation provisions “shall come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken” for this purpose “after the relevant figures for the first census taken after commencement” of the 106th Amendment have been published (Government of India, 2024).

This creates a compound timing dependency: (i) commencement notification, (ii) a post-commencement census and publication of relevant figures and (iii) delimitation undertaken for implementing women’s reservation (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2023). In effect, operationalisation of women’s reservation becomes institutionally and politically dependent on the delimitation timetable and therefore on census publication schedules and on the administrative capacity to conduct a delimitation exercise that is simultaneously about representation equality and about rotational reservation design.

Simultaneous-elections proposals add sequencing constraints

Ongoing efforts toward “One Nation, One Election” (simultaneous elections) are structurally distinct from delimitation but interact through administrative sequencing and “map stability.” The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, tracked in policy analysis, proposes a constitutional framework for synchronising the election cycle of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies through presidential notification and term alignment (PRS Legislative Research, 2024). A High-Level Committee chaired by Ram Nath Kovind (Press Information Bureau, 2024) submitted a report on simultaneous elections in March 2024, signalling high-level policy momentum (Press Information Bureau, 2024).

Delimitation matters here because large-scale boundary changes shortly before or during a synchronisation transition would increase administrative complexity (electoral roll revision, booth mapping, polling personnel allocation) and could become politically contested as a perceived tool to reshape

electoral advantage. The legal standards are different, but the institutional risk is common: legitimacy is easier to sustain when constituency maps are stable and when transitions have transparent, data-driven rules (Government of India, 2002).

Conclusion

Delimitation in India is not a single event but an interlocking constitutional-statute system designed to reconcile three competing commitments: (i) vote-value equality “so far as practicable,” (ii) federal balance across States with divergent demographic trajectories and (iii) reserved representation for historically disadvantaged communities.

This paper’s central finding is that the SC reservation controversy often framed as “discretionary dispersal” must be understood first as law: dispersal is mandated by Section 9(1)(c) of the Delimitation Act, 2002, whereas ST reservation is framed closer to a “largest proportion” rule in Section 9(1)(d) (Press Information Bureau, 2023c). The accountability deficit arises because the statute does not specify an explicit metric for “distributed in different parts of the State,” creating space for outcomes that may appear inconsistent to the public even when consistent with the statute.

Second, the post-2026 future is legally triggered by census publication, not political convenience. If the delayed census timeline is realised, the constitutional door to readjustment opens only after relevant figures of the first post-2026 census are published and the subsequent delimitation process must proceed through the publication-hearing-final order pipeline (Government of India, 2024).

Third, seat expansion is not merely a technical adjustment but a constitutional amendment question. The existence of an 888-seat chamber capacity provides a plausible planning horizon for an “around 800+” Lok Sabha, but constitutional caps in Article 81 must be amended for any such expansion and the federal conflict risk of redistribution remains unless expansion is paired with a negotiated allocation strategy (Government of India, 2024).

Finally, delimitation is now a gateway reform: the 106th Amendment formally links women’s reservation to a delimitation exercise after a post-census commencement, making delimitation the institutional hinge for both democratic equality and gender representation design (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2023). Any future delimitation therefore requires a stronger legitimacy toolkit than earlier rounds: published methodologies for SC dispersal, explicit variance norms, transparent data use and a clearly communicated sequencing plan that anticipates interactions with wider electoral.

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