



RECALIBRATING REPRESENTATION: A POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE 2026 DELIMITATION FRAMEWORK AND REGIONAL FEDERAL BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

This research study provides an overview of profound constitutional, political, and fiscal challenges in light of the Constitution's 131st Amendment bill, 2026 and the Delimitation bill, 2026. Uplifting the five-decade-old freeze on parliamentary seat allocation enacted under the 42nd Amendment (1976), extended by the 84th Amendment (2001), the legislative framework introduces an unprecedented expansion of the Lok Sabha from 550 to 850 seats. While designed to operationalise women's reservation and fix unequal voter distribution, the bill's population-heavy formula triggers a severe demographic tilt. This structural bias deepens the geopolitical divide between the high-fertility northern states and the demographically stable, high-revenue-generating states of the south, putting a strain on India's federal equilibrium. This research explores the procedure of the 2026 bills and the emergence of a centralised 'concentric nation' and therefore highlights the strain on India's asymmetrical federal structure, thus analysing alternative policy and structural remedies to preserve the cooperative equilibrium.

Keywords: Delimitation Bill 2026, Asymmetrical Federalism, Voter Malapportionment, Special Majority.

INTRODUCTION

The Union Minister introduced the Delimitation Bill 2026 in the Lok Sabha on 16 April, 2026. Indian Federalism has long operated on a delicate compromise between majoritarian democracy and systematic federal continuity. According to Article 81 of the Constitution of India, the Lok Sabha seats were strictly based on the proportional population of various states in India. However, in the mid-1970s, asymmetrical progressions in family planning, healthcare, women's education and human development began to appear between various states. To

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prevent the states that were lucrative in implementing the various government policies from being penalised with the loss of political representation, the Indira Gandhi Government enacted the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1976, freezing the state-wise allocation of parliamentary seats based on the 1971 census. However, this freeze was subsequently extended for another quarter century under the Vajpayee Government by the 84th Constitutional Amendment Act in 2001, freezing the allocation of seats until the first census conducted after the year 2026.

With the introduction of the 2026 Delimitation Bill, it tends to address an escalating, volatile demographic distortion. Due to the population explosion in the northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, & Madhya Pradesh, alongside the southern states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, & Andhra Pradesh that strictly adhered to federal directives, individual vote values split down stark lines, thereby violating the democratic bedrock principle “one person, one vote, one value”. However, lifting this restriction unleashes severe structural contradictions. Reshaping the dynamics according to population proportionality threatens to dismantle the regional balance of power and the very foundation of Indian Federalism. The Lok Sabha failed to pass the bill, which aimed to fasten the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the legislature by enabling delimitation based on the 2011 census. As per Article 368 of the Indian Constitution, the passing of the bill requires a special majority. With a house strength of 528, the bill secured only 298 votes, falling short of the required 352 benchmark.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK OF THE 2026 REFORMS

The Legislative framework put forward by the Central Government consists of a triad of adjustments that were outlined to accelerate and expand the delimitation process. One of the key features of this delimitation bill is the expansion of the statutory limit of Lok Sabha seats from 543 members to a maximum of 850 members. Under this reallocation, seats were.

- Up to 815 seats are designated for the representatives from the states.
- Up to 35 seats are designated for the Union Territories.

The Delimitation Bill, 2026 and the accompanying Constitution's (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, are based on an approximation of a 50% increase model in the Lok Sabha. Under this model, the absolute number of seats for every state will increase. For Instance, Southern states such as Tamil Nadu (Moving from 39 to 59 seats) and northern states such as Uttar Pradesh

(Moving from 80 to 120 seats). However, policy analysts underline that the absolute protection masks a profound dilution of the reduction in proportional political authority.

PARLIAMENTARY DETERMINATION OF DELIMITATION CENSUS

The parliament is set to bypass the standard requirement of the post-2026 census. Instead, the delimitation bill, 2026 framework prescribes the 2011 census as the baseline for the next delimitation commission. This 15-year-old data reliance serves as an administrative necessity to expedite the implementation of the 33% Women's reservation quota in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, enacted under the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam). Since a new publication of the census would effectively push the deployment down to the 2034 general elections. Therefore, the parliament aims to operationalise the delimitation commission in time for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

APPOINTMENT OF THE DELIMITATION COMMISSION

The Bill creates an independent, high-powered Delimitation Commission authorised to redraw state boundaries and establish internal territorial constituencies. The commission consists of:

- A chairperson who is or has been a Supreme Court judge.
- The Chief Election Commissioner or an Election Commissioner nominated by the Chief Election Commissioner.
- The State Election Commissioner of the concerned state.

Under Article 329 of the Constitution of India, it strictly mandates that the validity of any law relating to the delimitation of constituencies or the allotment of seats to such constituencies shall not be called in question before any court of law, thereby protecting the process from extensive litigation.

THE “CONCENTRIC NATION” VS. THE SOUTHERN PERIPHERY

The primary legislative challenge of the 2026 delimitation framework threatens to further intensify the geopolitical rift between the northern and southern states. By considering seat distribution in accordance with population analysis, the literally termed “concentric nation”, which is the high- fertility Hindi core states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, significantly outpace the political majority without the necessity of building multi-regional alliances across the southern or north-eastern peripheries. For Instance, according to

population proportion, Uttar Pradesh functions as a political centre of gravity. If a political party or coalition secures a majority within this territory, it can form the central government, bypassing the need for complex alliance-building.

Conversely, the southern periphery, which includes states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, experienced a population decline due to the implementation of progressive social policies, including female literacy rates and population stabilisation. Although there's relative progress in the southern part, under the 2026 delimitation framework, there is a drop in the overall percentage share in the Lok Sabha, even though the government's 50% increase model amplifies their absolute seat count. However, this shift results in a diminished democratic voice at the central level or in Parliament.

THE STRAIN ON ASYMMETRICAL FEDERALISM

The Delimitation Bill, 2026, which proposed the expansion of the Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850, further complicated India's system of asymmetrical federalism. The Indian Constitutional matrix balances diverse regional and linguistic diversities, unique fiscal distributions, historical trajectories, etc. This proposed Bill disrupts the delicate equilibrium in various ways.

Fiscal-Political Asymmetry: Indian Federalism relies heavily on the Southern states, which function as the economic engine for the entire nation. While the central government mechanises the distribution of wealth to the underdeveloped northern states. If the delimitation bill is implemented, it will reduce the overall political say of the South while they are contributing fiscally. Therefore, it separates the tax contributor from the locus of legislation.

Cultural and Linguistic Strains: India is a "Union of States" comprising diverse regional, cultural and linguistic variations. While such a union is designed to prevent the dominance or majoritarianism of a single linguistic or geographical region. Asymmetrical federalism aims to resolve this issue by providing equal legislative powers to diverse regions, despite their small population. However, the delimitation bill risks alienating peripheral and linguistic minority states, thereby undermining cooperative federalism.

Disruption of the Rajya Sabha Equilibrium: The Delimitation Bill, 2026, and the Constitution's 131st Amendment Act significantly alter India's bicameral dynamics. While the bill proposed the fundamental expansion of Lok Sabha seats to 850, this lopsided growth

reflects a significant institutional imbalance between the two houses. Since the Rajya Sabha seats are frozen at 250 members as mandated in Article 80 of the Constitution, in accordance with the provision contained in the fourth Schedule.

This structural imbalance poses three major constitutional outcomes:

- Firstly, it leads to a shift in the bicameral ratio between the lower and upper houses from a 2.2:1 to a stark 3.3:1 ratio, thereby undermining the Rajya Sabha's legislative weight.
- A significant numerical surge in Lok Sabha seats can override the Rajya Sabha's veto power in a combined legislative sitting.
- With the expansion of the lower house, the influence of the upper house on electoral colleges, such as the Presidential elections, also shrinks.

STRUCTURAL REMEDIES

Federal Balancing: In Indian Federalism, Bicameralism is designed for an equal weightage of power to both houses. A proposed remedy, mirroring the United States Senate, to function as a truly federal counterweight. It should be structurally amended to either enhance the equilibrium or increase the minimum baseline of the seats, regardless of the population ratio in various states, to check any legislative dominance of the Lok Sabha by the Rajya Sabha.

Degressive Proportionality: Degressive Proportionality is a principle that is being implemented by the European Union Parliament. It departs from the fundamental democratic principle of "one person, one vote" to achieve political fairness among states. This principle functions on the conceptual basis that smaller states should be allocated more seats per capita than larger states. It therefore prevents the high-fertility northern states from achieving a unilateral legislative majority.

Inter-state vs Intra-State: To harmonise democratic equity and federal equilibrium, the delimitation commission must be bifurcated into inter-state and intra-state. Inter-state seat allocation aims to rationalise power between states by applying the principle or mechanism of "degressive proportionality". It ensures that states that implemented progressive government policies and have stable demographics are not politically marginalised by the highly populated regions. Intra-state redistricting resolves disparities by redrawing boundaries within an individual state to rectify local malapportionment. It restructures internal constituent

boundaries based on the 2011 census to prevent vote dilution caused by urbanisation and migration.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Decoupling Women's Reservations: A key structural critique in the 2026 delimitation bill utilises this 33% reservation (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) enacted under the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023, as the back force to enforce such a parliamentary expansion. Thereby, an alternative measure of implementing the 33% women's reservation immediately with this current framework is preferred.

Administrative Bifurcation of Large States: Policy analysts propose a more radical geographical policy alternative: bifurcating high-fertility states, such as the Northern states, into smaller, more flexible administrative units. Scholars argue that the problem doesn't exist in the disparities between the north-south divide but rather with the sheer size of population in the political units.

Strengthening the Rajya Sabha: In accordance with the expansion of the Lok Sabha seats under the 2026 delimitation bill, the strength of the Rajya Sabha should also be enhanced to prevent the dominance of any unilateral legislative majority. Therefore, the alternative is to mirror the US Senate model of shifting the Rajya Sabha from a population-proportional model to a model of equal representation, i.e., every state gets a fixed number of seats regardless of its population ratio.

CONCLUSION

The delimitation Bill 2026 and the Constitution's (131st Amendment) Bill 2026 represent a structural challenge for contemporary India. The bill proposed a relative expansion of the Lok Sabha seats to 850 based on the 2011 census. While the bill aims to correct voter malapportionment and increase women's representation in the legislation, policy analysts criticise the bill as it creates a significant rift and therefore leads to north-south polarisation.

Implementing the 2026 bill, it could strain the cooperative nature and federal balance of India. Therefore, various structural remedies and policies are prescribed, such as the principle of degressive proportionality, administrative bifurcations, decoupling the women's reservation

bill, federal balancing and strengthening the upper house to constitute an equilibrium constitutional framework without diminishing regional identities.

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