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Women's Reservation Act — Early Delimitation Proposal to Fast-Track 33% Quota

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Women's Reservation Act — Early Delimitation Proposal to Fast-Track 33% Quota

The Union Government proposed conducting early delimitation using 2011 Census data — instead of waiting for the yet-to-be-conducted 2026 Census — to implement the Women's Reservation Act (106th Constitutional Amendment, 2023) before the 2029 general elections. Under this proposal, Lok Sabha seats would increase from 543 to approximately 816.

THE 106TH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT — WHAT IT PROVIDES

The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, passed in the special session of Parliament held in the new Parliament building in September 2023, provides:

- **33% reservation** for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies
- Also applies to the **NCT of Delhi Assembly**
- Does **NOT** apply to Rajya Sabha or State Legislative Councils

- Reservation to **commence after** the next delimitation exercise based on the first Census conducted after the Act
- Reservation to be **rotated** after each subsequent delimitation

Why the Delay?

The Act links implementation to a Census and subsequent delimitation. Since the 2021 Census was postponed due to COVID-19 and the 2026 Census has not yet been conducted, implementation could be delayed until the 2030s — defeating the Act’s purpose.

THE EARLY DELIMITATION PROPOSAL

Key Features

FEATURE	DETAIL
Census basis	2011 Census (instead of waiting for 2026 Census)
Lok Sabha seats	543 → approximately 816 (50% increase)
Women’s reserved seats	~273 (33% of 816)
Existing constituencies	No existing seat eliminated — expansion only
Selection method	Lottery system for which constituencies reserved for women
Constitutional amendments needed	Article 81 (LS composition), Article 170 (State Assemblies)

Constitutional Provisions at Play

- **Article 81:** Composition of Lok Sabha — currently limited to 550 elected members from states + 20 from UTs
- **Article 82:** Readjustment of seats after each Census through a Delimitation Act
- **Article 170:** Composition of State Legislative Assemblies
- **84th Constitutional Amendment (2002):** Froze delimitation until “the first Census taken after 2026” based on 1971 population figures to not penalise states that controlled population growth

THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

This is the most politically sensitive dimension. Southern states — Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana — successfully implemented family planning programmes and slowed population growth. Northern states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan grew faster.

The Fear

A population-based delimitation would **increase seats for high-growth northern states** and **reduce the proportional weight of southern states**, effectively penalising them for responsible governance.

How the Proposal Addresses This

The “expansion-only” model ensures:

- No existing constituency is eliminated
- Southern states retain their current seat count
- New seats are added proportionally, with many going to larger northern states
- Women’s reservation applies across all states

HISTORICAL CONTEXT — WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

LOK SABHA	TOTAL WOMEN MPS	PERCENTAGE
1st (1952)	22	4.4%
10th (1991)	39	7.2%
14th (2004)	45	8.3%
16th (2014)	62	11.4%
17th (2019)	78	14.4%
18th (2024)	74	13.6%

Despite steady improvement, women’s representation at ~14% remains far below the global average of ~26% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

The Long Road to the 106th Amendment

YEAR	EVENT
1996	81st Amendment Bill introduced by H.D. Deve Gowda government
1998	Reintroduced by Atal Bihari Vajpayee government
1999-2004	Multiple attempts — all lapsed
2008	Rajya Sabha passed 108th Amendment Bill
2014-2023	Bill did not progress in Lok Sabha
September 2023	106th Amendment passed in new Parliament building

LOCAL BODIES — A SUCCESS STORY

The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)** already provide 33% reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities. Several states have gone further:

- **Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh:** 50% reservation for women in Panchayats
- **Result:** Over 14 lakh elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions across India
- Studies show women-led Panchayats invest more in water, sanitation, and education

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- ❶ The government needs to pass a **new Delimitation Act** in Parliament
- ❷ A **Delimitation Commission** (headed by a retired Supreme Court judge) must be constituted
- ❸ The Commission will redraw constituency boundaries using 2011 Census data
- ❹ **Constitutional amendments** to Articles 81 and 170 require a two-thirds majority in both Houses
- ❺ State Assemblies would also need to be expanded proportionally

UPSC RELEVANCE

106th Amendment Act, Article 81, Article 82, Article 170, 84th Amendment (delimitation freeze), 73rd/74th Amendments (women in local bodies)

MAINS GS-I:

Women's empowerment, social change through political representation

MAINS GS-II:

Delimitation, federal concerns, Centre-State relations, parliamentary sovereignty

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
WOMEN'S RESERVATION ACT (106TH AMENDMENT):

Passed: September 20, 2023

Provides: 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha + State Assemblies + Delhi Assembly

Does NOT cover: Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Councils

Pre-condition: Census + Delimitation before implementation

Original bill: 81st Amendment Bill, 1996 (introduced by PM Deve Gowda)

DELIMITATION:

Constitutional basis: Article 82 (Parliament enacts Delimitation Act after each Census)

Last delimitation: 2008 (by Justice Kuldeep Singh Commission, based on 2001 Census)

84th Amendment (2002): Froze delimitation until after 2026 Census, used 1971 population for seat allocation

87th Amendment (2003): Delimitation of SC/ST reserved seats based on 2001 Census

CURRENT LOK SABHA:

Total seats: 543 (530 states + 13 UTs)

SC reserved: 84 seats

ST reserved: 47 seats

Women MPs (18th LS): 74 (~13.6%)

LOCAL BODY RESERVATION:

73rd Amendment (1992): 33% women reservation in Panchayats (Article 243D)

74th Amendment (1992): 33% women reservation in Municipalities (Article 243T)

States with 50% reservation: Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Global average women in parliament: ~26% (IPU, 2024)

Rwanda: Highest women's representation — 61% in lower house

India's rank: 143rd out of 190 countries (IPU) in women's parliamentary representation

Pawan Kumar Chamling (Sikkim) introduced 33% women reservation in urban local bodies in 2003

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [PIB](#), [PRS Legislative Research](#)

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 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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