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Lok Sabha Expansion to 850 Seats: Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill Explained

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Lok Sabha Expansion to 850 Seats: Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill Explained

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WHY IN NEWS:

The government introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill in the special Parliament session (April 2026) proposing to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 850 — the first major expansion since the 1970s — based on 2011 Census data, linked to the Women’s Reservation Act’s 33% quota.

BACKGROUND: INDIA’S FROZEN LOK SABHA STRENGTH

India’s Lok Sabha currently has **543 elected seats** — a number that has been frozen since 1977 under the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, which extended the freeze introduced by the 39th Amendment in 1976.

The original freeze was meant to prevent states that had successfully controlled population growth from being penalised (by losing seats) relative to states with higher fertility rates. The freeze was extended to 2001 and then again to 2026 by the 84th Constitutional Amendment (2001).

With 2026 arriving, the constitutional window for delimitation has opened — and the proposed bill seeks to use it.

THE CONSTITUTION (131ST AMENDMENT) BILL — KEY PROVISIONS

FEATURE	DETAIL
Current Lok Sabha strength	543 elected seats
Proposed strength	850 elected seats
Basis for delimitation	2011 Census
Linked legislation	Delimitation Bill (introduced simultaneously)
Women's Reservation linkage	33% seats for women to be implemented after delimitation
Amendment type	Requires special majority (Article 368) + ratification by \geq half of state legislatures

Why 2011 Census (Not 2021)?

The 2021 Census was delayed due to COVID-19 and has not yet been published as of 2026. The government is using 2011 Census data as the available baseline. This is constitutionally permissible — the Constitution requires delimitation based on the “last preceding Census” figures that have been published.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Article 81 — Composition of the Lok Sabha

- Lok Sabha shall not exceed **550 elected members** (Article 81 as currently amended by 91st Amendment Act, 2003 which set limit at 552 including 2 Anglo-Indian nominated)
- The 131st Amendment Bill must therefore also amend **Article 81** to raise the ceiling to 850

Article 82 — Readjustment After Census

- After each Census, Parliament must by law readjust the allocation of seats and division of each state into territorial constituencies
- This is the constitutional basis for the Delimitation Bill

Article 368 — Amendment Procedure

The 131st Amendment, touching Article 81 (representation structure), requires:

- 1 **Special majority** in each House — more than 50% of total membership AND 2/3 of members present and voting
- 2 **Ratification by \geq half of state legislatures** (since it affects state-Centre representation balance)

THE DELIMITATION PROCESS

Delimitation Commission is a statutory body set up under the Delimitation Act. It:

- Determines the number of seats in each state
- Draws constituency boundaries
- Is headed by a retired Supreme Court judge; includes the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissioners

Key principle: Seats are allocated proportionally to population — so states with larger populations get more seats.

Historical Delimitation Commissions

COMMISSION	YEAR	CENSUS USED
First	1952	1951
Second	1963	1961
Third	1973	1971
Fourth (proposed)	2026	2011

(Note: No delimitation occurred after 1981, 1991, or 2001 Censuses due to the freeze)

THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE CONTROVERSY

The most politically contentious aspect of the expansion is how additional seats will be distributed across states.

The Core Problem

Population-based seat allocation rewards states with higher population growth and penalises states that have better managed fertility. Northern states (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan) have higher Total Fertility Rates (TFR) than southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana).

STATE/GROUP	APPROX. TFR	POPULATION GROWTH (2001–2011)
UP, Bihar (North)	3.0–3.5	High (20–25%)
Tamil Nadu, Kerala (South)	1.7–1.8	Low (10–15%)
National average	~2.2	~17.6%

Projected Seat Change

Under 2011 Census-based delimitation:

- Northern states (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan) likely **gain** seats
- Southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, AP, Telangana) likely **lose** relative share or gain fewer seats than their population contribution deserves

This has triggered sharp political opposition from southern chief ministers and parties, who call it “demographic punishment” for successful family planning.

WOMEN’S RESERVATION CONNECTION

The **Women’s Reservation Act (Constitution 106th Amendment Act, 2023)** provides 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. However, it has a critical condition: **the reservation will not come into effect until after the next delimitation exercise.**

The 131st Amendment Bill and Delimitation Bill are therefore essential prerequisites for the Women’s Reservation Act to actually function.

Critics argue: This linkage effectively delays women’s reservation by years, as delimitation is a complex and politically contentious process.

RAJYA SABHA IMPLICATIONS

An expanded Lok Sabha also affects Rajya Sabha composition:

- Rajya Sabha has a fixed ceiling of **250 members** (238 elected + 12 nominated under Article 80)
- With Lok Sabha expanding to 850, the Lok Sabha-Rajya Sabha ratio shifts — the upper house’s relative check on the lower house weakens

Some constitutional scholars argue that a truly proportional Parliament may also require expanding the Rajya Sabha, though no such proposal has been introduced alongside the current bills.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Article 81, 82, 368; Delimitation Commission; Women’s Reservation Act; federal politics
GS2 — Governance	Parliamentary functioning; representation and democracy
GS1 — Indian Society	North-South demographic divide; fertility rate disparities; federal equity
Essay	“Representative democracy must ensure proportionality without penalising developmental success”
Mains Keywords	Constitution 131st Amendment, Article 81, delimitation, Women’s Reservation Act, Delimitation Commission, TFR, North-South divide, 84th Constitutional Amendment

FACTS CORNER

ITEM	DETAIL
Current Lok Sabha strength	543 elected seats
Proposed strength	850 seats
Last delimitation	1973 (based on 1971 Census)
Freeze introduced	42nd Amendment (1976); extended to 2026 by 84th Amendment (2001)
Census basis	2011 Census (2021 Census unpublished)
Women’s reservation trigger	Must wait for delimitation under 106th Amendment Act 2023
Amendment procedure	Article 368 — special majority + \geq half state legislature ratification
Delimitation Commission head	Retired Supreme Court judge
Article 81 ceiling (current)	550 members (including 2 Anglo-Indian nominated, now removed by 104th Amendment 2020)
States likely to gain seats	UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan
States likely to lose relative share	Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, AP, Telangana

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