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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Expanding Lok Sabha to 850: Representation vs. Penalising Development

THE HINDU

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill proposes to expand Lok Sabha to 850 seats based on the 2011 Census. Southern states that achieved replacement-level fertility will lose relative representation — creating a constitutional incentive structure that punishes successful population management. Is there a way to expand the House without penalising development?"

 Source: [Original editorial ↗](#)
The Hindu

EDITORIAL SUMMARY

The Hindu argues that expanding Lok Sabha to 850 seats based on 2011 Census data will penalise southern states for successful population management — creating a perverse constitutional incentive. The editorial calls for a Joint Parliamentary Committee review, de-linking of Women's Reservation from delimitation, and exploration of population-plus-development indices for seat allocation.

THE CURRENT REPRESENTATION GAP

India currently has **543 elected Lok Sabha members** for a population of 1.4 billion — approximately **one MP for every 25 lakh (2.5 million) citizens**. This is among the worst MP-to-constituent ratios of any large democracy:

COUNTRY	LOWER HOUSE SEATS	POPULATION PER SEAT
India (current)	543	~25 lakh
India (proposed)	850	~16 lakh
USA	435	~7.5 lakh
UK	650	~1 lakh
Brazil	513	~4 lakh

The case for expansion on representational density grounds is strong.

THE FREEZE HISTORY

AMENDMENT	YEAR	WHAT IT DID
39th Amendment	1975	First froze seat allocation
42nd Amendment	1976	Froze until after 2001 Census
84th Amendment	2001	Extended freeze to 2026

The freeze was explicitly designed to prevent states that had achieved replacement-level fertility from being penalised in Parliament by states that hadn't.

THE TFR DIVIDE

STATE	(2021 NFHS-5)
Bihar	3.0
Uttar Pradesh	2.4
Rajasthan	2.0
Tamil Nadu	1.7
Kerala	1.8
Karnataka	1.7
Andhra Pradesh	1.7
National average	2.0

Southern states are already at or below replacement level (2.1). Under pure population-based delimitation, they gain fewer additional seats than their democratic “entitlement” under any equity-adjusted formula.

THE WOMEN’S RESERVATION DELAY PROBLEM

The **Women’s Reservation Act (Constitution 106th Amendment Act, 2023)** provides 33% reservation but explicitly conditions implementation on:

- ❶ Delimitation being completed
- ❷ New Census being published

This means women’s reservation — passed 26 years after being first introduced — is still not operational. De-linking it via a rotation/draw mechanism within current constituencies would immediately activate it without waiting for delimitation.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Article 81, 82, 368; Delimitation Commission; Women’s Reservation Act
GS2 — Governance	Federal dynamics; Rajya Sabha’s checking function
GS1 — Society	North-South demographic divide; TFR disparities
GS4 — Ethics	Equity in political representation; constitutional morality
Mains Keywords	Constitution 131st Amendment, Delimitation Commission, Women’s Reservation Act, TFR, North-South divide, Article 81, Article 82, Rajya Sabha balance, 84th Amendment

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Expanding Lok Sabha to 850 based on 2011 Census population data will tilt political power toward high-fertility northern states at the expense of southern states that succeeded in population management — creating a perverse constitutional incentive while failing to address the underlying architecture of political representation in a diverse federal democracy.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The 42nd (1976) and 84th (2001) Constitutional Amendments froze Lok Sabha strength precisely to prevent southern states from losing seats due to better family planning — that rationale has not changed; in fact, the TFR gap between North and South has widened in the intervening 25 years.
- The Bill also raises questions about Rajya Sabha balance: with Lok Sabha growing to 850 while Rajya Sabha remains at 250, the upper house’s checking function on the lower house structurally weakens — a federalism concern since Rajya Sabha gives smaller and southern states relatively greater voice.
- The linkage of Women’s Reservation (33%) to delimitation completion effectively delays gender justice — the reservation was passed in 2023 but operationalisation is now contingent on a constitutionally complex, politically contentious multi-year process.

- Joint Parliamentary Committee review and wider public deliberation — including consultation with state governments — would provide legitimacy to changes this constitutionally significant; rushed passage risks federal backlash.

COUNTER

The freeze on Lok Sabha strength has created serious under-representation: India now has one MP for roughly 25 lakh citizens (vs one for 7 lakh in 1952). Expanding seats increases representational density, potentially improving constituency-level accountability. The population-proportionality principle is fundamental to democratic equality of citizens.

WAY FORWARD

Three-part approach: (1) De-link Women's Reservation from delimitation — enact a standalone constitutional amendment with immediate effect using a rotation/draw mechanism within current constituencies; (2) Explore population-plus-development index for seat allocation — weighting HDI or demographic achievement alongside raw population count; (3) Mandate JPC review with states consultation before the Delimitation Bill's passage. The constitutional goal is not mechanical population proportionality but fair and effective representation.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

The proposed expansion of Lok Sabha to 850 seats based on the 2011 Census has reignited the North-South demographic divide debate. Critically examine the constitutional, political, and federal implications of this exercise. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill proposes expanding Lok Sabha from 543 to 850 seats based on the 2011 Census — the first such expansion since 1977. While expanding representation is

democratically desirable, the census-based methodology reignites the North-South divide and raises constitutional, federal, and gender-equity concerns that require careful examination.

BODY

Constitutional dimension: The Bill amends Article 81 and requires Article 368 special majority plus ratification by at least half of state legislatures — a high procedural bar reflecting the Bill’s significance. The 42nd and 84th Amendments froze Lok Sabha strength precisely to prevent southern states from losing seats due to better population management.

That rationale is stronger today: Tamil Nadu’s TFR is ~1.7, Kerala’s ~1.8, vs UP’s ~3.0 and Bihar’s ~3.2. A pure population-based reallocation directly penalises states for achieving the national goal of replacement-level fertility. **Federal dimension:** Expanding Lok Sabha to 850 while Rajya Sabha stays at 250 alters the institutional balance.

Rajya Sabha, where smaller and southern states have relatively more voice, becomes proportionally weaker as a check on the lower house. This has federalism implications beyond mere seat counts.

Gender dimension: The Women’s Reservation Act 2023 (33% in Lok Sabha/assemblies) is operationally linked to delimitation completion — meaning women’s reservation remains notional until this complex process is done.

De-linking these would be both constitutionally simpler and more immediately just. **Representation deficit:** Simultaneously, India’s 1:25 lakh MP-to-citizen ratio is among the worst among large democracies. More seats do improve constituency-level accountability.

The debate is not about whether to expand, but how to do so equitably.

CONCLUSION

The Lok Sabha expansion is constitutionally due and democratically necessary — but the methodology requires federal sensitivity. A population-plus-development index for seat allocation, de-linking of women’s reservation, and a Joint Parliamentary Committee review with state consultations would balance democratic expansion with federal equity.

The Constitution’s amendability is a strength; using it without adequate deliberation on a question this consequential would be a weakness.

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