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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Beyond the Population Arithmetic — Does Expanding the Lok Sabha Guarantee Better Representation?

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**21 April 2026 · **POLITY** · **GS2**

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# Beyond the Population Arithmetic — Does Expanding the Lok Sabha Guarantee Better Representation?

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## EDITORIAL SUMMARY

*Indian Express*, April 21, 2026 — As the political debate over **Lok Sabha seat expansion after delimitation** intensifies, this editorial challenges the assumption that more MPs automatically means better representation. India's post-delimitation exercise will significantly increase seats in northern states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra) and reduce the relative weight of southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana) — states that have performed better on fertility rate reduction. The piece argues that representation quality — constituency service, legislative participation, accountability to constituents — is more important than seat count, and that the real crisis is institutional, not arithmetic.

## THE CONTEXT — DELIMITATION AND SEAT EXPANSION

### What Is Delimitation?

**Delimitation** is the process of redrawing parliamentary and state assembly constituency boundaries based on updated census data. India's Parliament has 543 Lok Sabha constituencies — unchanged since the 1970s despite India's population growing from ~550 million to ~1.45 billion.

The **91st Constitutional Amendment (2003)** and Article 82 of the Constitution require delimitation after each census. However, a **freeze on seat expansion** was imposed until 2026 (under the 84th Amendment) to protect southern states from losing seats due to their successful population control.

**Post-2026 delimitation** — now under active political discussion — will:

- **Increase total Lok Sabha seats** (from 543 to potentially 800+)
- **Reallocate seats** based on population share from the 2021 Census
- Result in northern states gaining seats proportional to their higher population growth

## The North-South Tension

REGION	POPULATION GROWTH PERFORMANCE	DELIMITATION OUTCOME
Southern states	Low TFR; better population control	Lose relative seat share
Northern states (UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan)	Higher TFR; faster population growth	Gain seats

Tamil Nadu's Total Fertility Rate (~1.6) is below replacement level; Uttar Pradesh's (~2.4) is above. Under population-proportional delimitation, Tamil Nadu's parliamentary weight decreases relative to its economic contribution — despite having a smaller population to manage per MP.

## THE REPRESENTATION QUALITY ARGUMENT

The editorial's central argument: **more MPs ≠ better governance.**

### What Determines Representation Quality?

- 1 **MP-to-constituent ratio** — India's average is ~2.5 million per MP (among the worst globally)
- 2 **Constituency service capacity** — can an MP effectively address 2.5 million constituents' needs?
- 3 **Legislative participation** — attendance, questions raised, bills debated
- 4 **Accountability mechanisms** — NOTA, right to recall, performance disclosure

Simply adding seats reduces the MP-to-constituent ratio arithmetically — but if the quality of MPs (education, capacity, accountability) remains unchanged, governance outcomes may not improve.

### International Comparison

COUNTRY	SEATS	POPULATION	POP/SEAT
USA	435 (House)	340 million	~780,000
UK	650	67 million	~100,000
India (current)	543	1.45 billion	~2.67 million
India (post-delimitation, ~800 seats)	800	1.45 billion	~1.8 million

Even at 800 seats, India's constituency size would remain far larger than most democracies — questioning whether the expansion meaningfully closes the representation gap.

## THE FEDERAL EQUITY PROBLEM

### The “Penalising Success” Argument

Southern states argue that delimitation penalises them for successfully controlling population growth. This creates a **perverse incentive structure** in the Indian federal system:

- States that invested in women’s education, healthcare, and family planning → lose federal representation
- States where these investments were delayed → gain federal representation

This undermines the principle of **cooperative federalism** and creates regional resentment — Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been among the most vocal critics.

### The Finance Commission Parallel

The **15th Finance Commission** (headed by N.K. Singh) controversially used the **2011 Census** population data (instead of 1971) for its horizontal **devolution** formula — giving more weight to recent population figures and benefiting high-population states. Southern states resisted this change.

Delimitation raises the same structural tension: federal representation versus federal performance incentives.

## WHAT ACTUALLY IMPROVES REPRESENTATION?

The editorial argues that institutional reforms matter more than seat count:

### 1. Strengthen Constituency Development Capacity

- **MPLADS (Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme)** — ₹5 crore/year/MP for constituency development — should be enhanced and better monitored
- Create MP secretariats with research and constituent service capacity

### 2. Parliamentary Productivity

- India’s Parliament sits for fewer days than most comparable democracies
- **Parliamentary session days:** India averages ~60-70 days/year; UK Parliament sits 150-180 days
- More sessions, more committee work, stronger scrutiny would improve governance more than seat expansion

### 3. Electoral Reform

- **NOTA (None of the Above):** Strengthen — currently NOTA votes don’t trigger re-election

- **Right to Recall:** Discussed but not legislated
- **Candidate disclosure:** Criminal background and asset declaration reforms

## 4. Women's Representation

The **Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023** — the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam** — reserves **33% of Lok Sabha seats for women**, but implementation is tied to post-delimitation seat allocation. This creates a linkage between delimitation and women's reservation that makes the issue politically urgent.

### THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

ARTICLE	PROVISION
Article 81	Composition of the House of the People; seats allocated on population basis
Article 82	Readjustment after each census
Article 327	Parliament's power to make laws on delimitation
<b>84th Amendment</b>	Froze seat expansion until 2026 to protect southern states
<b>87th Amendment</b>	Used 2001 Census for delimitation of constituencies (not seat reallocation)
<b>106th Amendment (2023)</b>	Women's reservation — 33% in Lok Sabha and state assemblies

### UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Delimitation, Articles 81/82/327, Lok Sabha composition, federal equity
GS2 — Governance	MPLADS, parliamentary productivity, representation quality
GS2 — Social Justice	Women's reservation (106th Amendment), North-South equity
Mains Keywords	Delimitation, 84th Amendment, 106th Amendment, Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, MPLADS, NOTA, federal equity, representation

## KEY FACTS

- **Lok Sabha seats:** 543 — unchanged since 1970s delimitation
- **84th Amendment:** Froze seat expansion until 2026 to protect southern states
- **106th Amendment (2023) — Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam:** 33% women’s reservation; linked to post-delimitation implementation
- **India’s MP-constituent ratio:** ~2.5 million per MP — among world’s highest
- **Tamil Nadu TFR:** ~1.6 (below replacement); UP TFR: ~2.4 — drives north-south seat tension
- **MPLADS:** ₹5 crore/MP/year for local development
- **15th Finance Commission:** Used 2011 Census data; controversy over penalising population control states
- **Article 81:** House of the People composition based on population
- **Article 82:** Readjustment after census — the constitutional basis for delimitation
- **Parliament sitting days:** India ~60-70/year vs. UK ~150-180/year

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