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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Ensure That the Voice of the South Is Heard in Parliament

 **THE HINDU**

23 April 2026

POLITY**SOCIAL ISSUES****GS2****GS1**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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GS2

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The upcoming delimitation exercise may reduce southern states' Lok Sabha seats in proportion to their lower population growth. Is this constitutionally fair? What are the options — freezing seats, upper house reform, or fiscal federalism adjustments?"

THE CORE ARGUMENT

India's upcoming delimitation exercise — constitutionally mandated after the 2027 Census — threatens to reduce the Lok Sabha representation of southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana) because they controlled population growth better than northern states. The editorial argues this creates a perverse incentive: states that performed well on population policy face reduced political representation. It advocates for **freezing Lok Sabha seats** at current levels or creating **alternative representation mechanisms** in the Rajya Sabha to ensure that development-focused states are not structurally penalised.

THE DELIMITATION CRISIS — UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS

What Is Delimitation?

Delimitation is the process of redrawing parliamentary and state assembly constituencies based on census population data.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION	CONTENT
Article 82	Parliament shall readjust Lok Sabha allocation after each census
Article 170	State assemblies similarly re-delimited
Delimitation Act 2002	Governs the process; Delimitation Commission
Freeze until 2026	42nd Amendment (1976) froze seat allocation at 1971 census levels until 2001; further extended to 2026 by 84th Amendment (2001)
After Census 2027	First delimitation based on new census — major realignment expected

The Population Growth Divergence

STATE/REGION	POPULATION GROWTH RATE (APPROX.)
UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan	High (>2% per year historically)
Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, AP, Telangana	Low (near replacement rate or below)
Kerala	Population growth ~0.3-0.5% — near-zero
Bihar	Population growth ~1.5-2%

The consequence: If Lok Sabha seats are reallocated proportionally to population after Census 2027, **southern states will lose seats** and **northern states will gain:**

STATE	CURRENT LOK SABHA SEATS	PROJECTED POST-DELIMITATION
UP	80	~90+
Bihar	40	~50+
Tamil Nadu	39	~33-35
Kerala	20	~16-17
Karnataka	28	~26-27

WHY SOUTH INDIA IS WORRIED

The Perverse Incentive Problem

Southern states:

- Achieved **near-replacement fertility** through education, women's empowerment, and healthcare — outcomes that took decades
- Contribute **disproportionately to tax revenues** (higher per-capita GDP and tax collection)
- Yet face **reduced political voice** in Parliament if representation follows population

The argument: A democratic system that penalises states for responsible governance and rewards high population growth creates a *perverse* structural incentive. States that succeed on human development get fewer seats; states that do not get more seats and thus more power.

Revenue Contribution vs. Political Representation

STATE	SHARE OF CENTRAL TAXES (APPROX.)	SHARE OF CURRENT LOK SABHA SEATS
Tamil Nadu	~5-6%	7.2%
Maharashtra	~15%	8.9%
UP	~9-10%	14.9%
Bihar	~3-4%	7.5%

Southern states are net contributors to central revenues but receive less than proportionate devolution.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEBATE

Option 1 — Freeze Current Seats

Argument: Keep Lok Sabha seat allocation as per current numbers (based on 1971/2001 Census), adjusting only constituency boundaries. This is what the 84th Amendment (2001) effectively did — extending the freeze to 2026.

Criticism: This entrenches the current imbalance indefinitely; doesn't reflect demographic reality.

Option 2 — Increase Total Lok Sabha Seats

Argument: Increase total Lok Sabha strength (currently 543) proportionally — adding seats for growing states without reducing southern states' current count.

Problem: Already raised in Delimitation Act context; would require constitutional amendment. Parliament would become unmanageably large.

Option 3 — Rajya Sabha Reform

Argument: Compensate by giving development-performing states greater Rajya Sabha representation — but Rajya Sabha is already based on state size (Uttar Pradesh: 31 seats vs. Kerala: 9).

Option 4 — Fiscal Federalism Adjustment

Argument: Compensate southern states through Finance Commission transfers rather than political representation — higher devolution shares for states with low population growth.

Current status: 15th Finance Commission increased horizontal equity criteria; population growth penalisation has been a demand.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT — THE 1976 FREEZE

42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) froze seat allocation at **1971 Census levels** — recognising that states implementing family planning should not be penalised during the Emergency period.

84th Amendment (2001) extended the freeze to **2026** — again recognising the same concern.

After 2026 (Census 2027): The freeze expires. Without a new freeze or formula, full delimitation based on 2027 Census is constitutionally mandated.

UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Article 82, Delimitation Commission, 84th Amendment, federalism
GS2 — Governance	Centre-State relations, Finance Commission, fiscal federalism
GS1 — Society	Population policy, demographic dividend, regional imbalance

Mains Keywords: Delimitation, Article 82, 84th Amendment, 42nd Amendment, Lok Sabha seats, fiscal federalism, Finance Commission, population growth, South India, BIMARU states, perverse incentive

Probable Question: “The upcoming delimitation exercise poses a fundamental challenge to cooperative federalism in India. Examine the concerns of southern states and suggest constitutional remedies.” (GS2 Mains)

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/04/south-india-parliament-delimitation-representation/>

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