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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

How Delimitation Can Enable Both Women's and Urban Representation

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**30 May 2026 · **POLITY** · **SOCIAL ISSUES** · **GS2**

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 The Indian Express

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INTERVIEW ANGLE



"The 131st Amendment Bill (defeated in Lok Sabha, April 2026) sought to expand Lok Sabha to 850 seats. The Indian Express argues delimitation — done right — could simultaneously address urban under-representation AND operationalise women's reservation. As a constitutional-design analyst, how would you structure the next delimitation attempt?"

INDIAN EXPRESS | OPINION COLUMN | MAY 30, 2026

Argues that the upcoming delimitation exercise — which the **defeated 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill (April 2026)** tried to operationalise — can structurally boost **both women's representation** (via the 106th Amendment's 33% reservation, dependent on delimitation) **AND urban representation** (by redrawing constituencies to reflect actual urbanisation patterns rather than 1971 census data).

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

Delimitation isn't only about North-South seat-distribution politics — it's also the **only available constitutional lever** to fix two structural under-representations: **women in legislatures** (still ~15% in Lok Sabha) and **urban India** (frozen at 1971 boundaries while urban population has tripled). A well-designed delimitation could repair both.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL BACKDROP

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Delimitation	Article 82 mandates re-distribution of Lok Sabha seats after each census; Article 170 for state assemblies
Freeze (1976)	42nd Amendment (1976) froze delimitation till 2000 census
Extended freeze (2001)	84th Amendment Act, 2001 + 87th Amendment Act, 2003 froze allocation till after the first census taken after 2026
Current basis	All Lok Sabha seat allocation since 1976 has been based on the 1971 Census (then extended to 2001 census for internal constituency boundaries)
Trigger	A census after 2026 (i.e. the long-delayed Census 2027) would automatically end the freeze

THE 131ST AMENDMENT BILL (APRIL 2026, DEFEATED)

The Modi government's **131st Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2026** sought to:

- Raise Lok Sabha strength **from 543 to 850** (815 from states + 35 from UTs).
- Use **2011 Census** as the basis for the new delimitation.
- Decouple the **106th Amendment's women's reservation** from the "first census after 2026" trigger — operationalising it via the 850-seat scheme.

Outcome (April 17, 2026): Defeated in Lok Sabha. **298 votes in favour, 230 against** — short of the 352 (two-thirds of 528 voting) needed under Article 368.

Why it failed: Southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, AP, Telangana) opposed on **federal-equity grounds** — they argued that delimitation rewards population growth, penalising states that achieved demographic stabilisation. This was the **first defeat of a constitutional amendment bill in Lok Sabha in 12 years**.

WHY BOTH REFORMS ARE LINKED

REFORM	WHY DELIMITATION MATTERS
Women's reservation (33%)	The 106th Amendment Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) provides 33% reservation in Lok Sabha + State Assemblies + Delhi Assembly. Section 5 explicitly conditions it on “after the relevant figures for the first census taken after the commencement of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 have been published”. I.e., the 33% is functionally locked behind delimitation.
Urban representation	India's urban population was ~20% in 1971; now ~36% (and Census 2027 may show ~40%+). But Lok Sabha allocation is frozen on 1971 numbers. Urban constituencies are over-populated (sometimes 25-30 lakh voters per seat) while rural seats are under-populated (8-12 lakh).

THE COLUMN'S CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL

The Indian Express column outlines a delimitation design that addresses both:

- ① **Total Lok Sabha strength** — increase to ~850 (as the 131st Bill attempted).
- ② **State-level allocation** — protected at **proportional share** of total seats (so states maintain relative federal balance even if they have fewer absolute seats by population).
- ③ **Within-state allocation** — fully proportional to current population (which corrects the urban under-representation).
- ④ **Women's reservation** — 33% of total seats reserved; rotational by delimitation cycle so no constituency is permanently a “women's seat”.
- ⑤ **Urban over-correction** — explicitly use the 2027 census to redraw seat boundaries within states, ending the 1971 freeze for *internal* boundaries.

THE FEDERAL-EQUITY QUESTION

The South's objection — that population-based delimitation rewards demographic non-restraint — is the political deal-breaker. Three **mitigation** paths:

MITIGATION	DETAIL
Cap state seats by historical baseline	South states retain at least their current absolute seats; new seats are net additions in the North
Composite formula	Weight population + area + tax contribution + demographic performance (analogous to Finance Commission horizontal devolution formula — 41% devolution under 16th FC; weights for income distance, population, demographic performance, area, forest & ecology, GDP contribution)
Bicameral rebalance	Strengthen Rajya Sabha as the chamber of states (currently weakened by 250-cap and elected-by-state-MLA mechanism); ensure Rajya Sabha protects the South even if Lok Sabha shifts North

WHAT INDIA SHOULD DO

- ① **Conduct Census 2027 on schedule** — the trigger for everything.
- ② **Pre-political design** — get a delimitation framework worked out by experts (not just political parties) before the 132nd / next amendment attempt.
- ③ **Build cross-aisle consensus** — pass through joint parliamentary committee with state CMs' inputs.
- ④ **Operationalise women's reservation first** — by decoupling from the broader delimitation if necessary (a smaller amendment).
- ⑤ **Strengthen Rajya Sabha** — convert it into a genuine chamber of states; rebalance bicameral architecture.

UPSC HOOKS

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2	Delimitation (Articles 82, 170, 327); freeze (42nd CAA 1976; 84th CAA 2001; 87th CAA 2003); 131st CAA Bill (defeated April 2026); 106th CAA 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan); women in Indian legislatures; federal equity; bicameralism
Mains	“Examine how a well-designed delimitation exercise can address both women's under-representation and urban under-representation in Lok Sabha. What are the federal-equity safeguards needed?”
Prelims	Article 82, 170; 42nd CAA 1976; 84th CAA 2001; 87th CAA 2003; 106th CAA 2023; 131st CAA Bill 2026 (defeated 298-230 on April 17, 2026; 850 seats proposed); Delimitation Commission Act 2002

CROSS-LINKS

- 131st CAA Bill defeat (April 17, 2026)
- 106th CAA 2023 — Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam
- Census 2027 (long-pending)
- 16th Finance Commission report (Feb 1, 2026) — federal horizontal-devolution formula precedent
- Bombay Reorganisation Act 1960 (May 1) — federal redistribution history

Source: How Delimitation Can Enable Both Women's and Urban Representation — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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