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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Fix the Upper House Instead: A Different Answer to the Delimitation Problem

 THE STATESMAN

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POLITY ·

GS2

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Rewarding states for demographic performance through permanent extra parliamentary seats gives some citizens more voting power than others for something they personally did not do. Is fiscal reward through Finance Commission transfers a genuinely adequate substitute, or does political representation carry something money cannot?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Every federation has to reconcile equal citizens with unequal states. Most do it by giving each principle its own chamber. India gave both principles to both chambers, which is why the argument has nowhere to go.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Delimitation is among the most examinable GS2 topics available in 2026, and most answers stop at describing the north-south dispute. This editorial supplies the comparative-federalism frame that converts a description into an argument, and its central proposal, amend the Rajya Sabha rather than the Lok Sabha, is exactly the kind of specific institutional recommendation a strong Mains answer needs.

GS Paper 2: Indian Constitution, features, amendments, significant provisions; structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive and the Legislature; issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

For **Prelims**, fix the article numbers and the amendment chronology precisely; both are directly testable.

PROVISION	CONTENT	WHY UPSC TESTS IT
Article 81	Composition of the House of the People; ratio between population and seats to be broadly uniform across states	The constitutional basis of proportional representation in the Lok Sabha
Article 82	Readjustment of seats after each census, by a Delimitation Act enacted by Parliament	The provision the freeze suspended
Article 326	Elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies on the basis of universal adult suffrage	The equality-of-the-vote principle underlying the argument
42nd Amendment, 1976	Froze seat allocation at 1971 census levels until after 2000	The origin of the freeze
84th Amendment, 2001	Extended the freeze to the first census after 2026	The extension that makes Census 2027 the trigger
Article 80 and the Fourth Schedule	Composition of the Rajya Sabha and the allocation of seats to states; 233 elected plus 12 nominated, total 245	The provisions the editorial's central proposal would have to amend

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Lok Sabha strength rose from 489 in the first Lok Sabha to 522 after the 1961 census, and to 543 when the third [Delimitation Commission](#) applied the 1971 census, effective from the 1977 general election. The 42nd Amendment then froze allocation at 1971 levels, on the reasoning that states succeeding at family planning, then a national priority, should not lose parliamentary weight for doing so. The total has stood at 543 since 1987, when Goa attained statehood and Daman and Diu became a separate Union Territory with its own seat. Note that the 2000 bifurcations creating Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand added no seats at all: the freeze meant parent-state seats were redistributed within an unchanged total, which is itself an illustration of how completely the freeze has held.

YEAR	LOK SABHA STRENGTH	NOTE
1951-52	489	First Lok Sabha
Post-1961 census	522	
Post-1971 census	543	Third Delimitation Commission; effective from the 1977 election. Last allocation before the freeze
1987 onward	543	Daman and Diu given a separate seat on Goa attaining statehood
Proposed, April 2026	850	Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill; negated 17 April 2026

The April 2026 package proposed raising the ceiling for state seats from 530 to 815 and for Union Territories from 20 to 35, taking the House maximum from 550 to 850. Ministers assured Parliament that no state would lose seats in absolute terms, but no such guarantee appeared in the text of the Bills, and the Bills did not **mandate** a uniform percentage increase per state. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill was negated on 17 April 2026, rendering the companion Bills infructuous.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Why the freeze cannot become permanent

The 42nd Amendment freeze was a political compromise addressing an exceptional historical situation. It suspended the operation of Articles 81 and 82 without repealing the principle they embody. A temporary constitutional arrangement that hardens into a permanent norm does not resolve the original distortion; it substitutes a second distortion, in which a citizen's vote carries different weight depending on the state they live in, for the first.

Why the Lok Sabha is the wrong site for federal accommodation

The Lok Sabha is the House of the **People**. Its representative logic runs to citizens, not to states. Building state-protective weighting into it means telling a citizen that their parliamentary influence is greater or smaller because of their state's **demographic** history, which is a proposition about individuals that is difficult to defend on any democratic principle. Federations that manage this tension successfully do not manage it inside the lower house; they manage it between chambers.

The comparative point is the editorial's strongest

FEDERATION	LOWER HOUSE	UPPER HOUSE
United States	House of Representatives, by population	Senate, two per state regardless of population
Australia	House of Representatives, by population	Senate, twelve per state regardless of population (76 total: six states at twelve, plus two each for the ACT and Northern Territory)
India	Lok Sabha, by population	Rajya Sabha, also allocated by state population

India's Rajya Sabha is elected by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies, by proportional representation through the single transferable vote, with seats allocated to states under the Fourth Schedule in rough, degressively proportional relation to population. The result is that a populous state is advantaged in both chambers, and the upper house cannot function as the federal counterweight that upper houses exist to provide. If a constitutional amendment is required in any case, the editorial's question is a fair one: why amend the chamber whose logic is citizen equality, rather than the chamber whose logic was supposed to be state equity?

Why fiscal reward is the better instrument for demographic performance

Achieving low fertility was a national objective and recognising it is legitimate. But representation and reward are different currencies. Rewarding a state through permanently enhanced voting power confers on its individual citizens a greater say in national lawmaking, which is a strange reward for something no individual citizen personally accomplished. Fiscal recognition through [Finance Commission](#) transfers delivers the reward to the state, which is the entity that performed, without altering the equality of the vote. Fertility outcomes also depend heavily on female literacy, urbanisation, health infrastructure and income levels, so treating a high-fertility state as simply having failed is analytically weak.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

When two legitimate principles conflict inside one institution, ask whether the design error is the conflict or the fact that both principles were assigned to the same institution. Citizen equality and state equity are both defensible, and an institution forced to serve both will satisfy neither. Most federations solved this by separating the principles across chambers. India's difficulty is not that its two principles conflict, which is normal, but that its institutional architecture gives them no separate homes. This "separate the principles rather than balance them" move applies well beyond delimitation, to any institution asked to pursue two objectives that pull against each other.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a set of scales meant to balance two weights: on one side, the equality of every citizen's vote; on the other, the equity of every state's voice. In the American design, the two weights sit on separate scales in separate rooms, the House and the Senate, and each scale balances comfortably because it carries only one weight. In India both weights have been placed on the same scale, the Lok Sabha, because the second scale, the Rajya Sabha, was built to the same population-linked specification as the first. The current argument is over how to redistribute weights on a single overloaded scale, when the available fix is to start using the second one.

WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Restore Lok Sabha proportionality gradually**, across two or three delimitation cycles rather than in one adjustment, so the transition is politically absorbable.
- 2 **Reform Rajya Sabha representation** toward equal or weighted state allocation, giving federal equity an institutional home and the upper house genuine federal character.
- 3 **Place delimitation on a statutory, periodic footing** comparable to the Finance Commission, so that it operates on a fixed cycle rather than at political discretion.
- 4 **Shift demographic-performance rewards to the fiscal channel**, through Finance Commission transfers, **decoupling** the reward from the weight of a citizen's vote.
- 5 **Build the consensus first**, since the April 2026 Bills were introduced without prior cross-party consensus and the Constitution Amendment Bill was negated, and no delimitation settlement will hold without broad agreement.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has repeatedly tested **federalism**, the composition of Parliament, constitutional amendments and centre-state relations, and delimitation is the live 2026 vehicle for all of them. The comparative-federalism content here is directly transferable to questions on the Rajya Sabha's role and on asymmetric federalism.

Practice question: "India is unusual among federations in allocating upper-house seats by population, leaving neither chamber able to perform the federal-equity function." Examine this claim and assess whether Rajya Sabha reform is a better response to the delimitation problem than expanding the Lok Sabha. (250 words, 15 marks)

Interview angle: Rewarding states for demographic performance through permanent extra parliamentary seats gives some citizens more voting power than others for something they personally did not do. Is fiscal reward through Finance Commission transfers a genuinely adequate substitute, or does political representation carry something money cannot?

Sources: The Statesman, Election Commission of India, Parliament of India

Source: Fix the Upper House Instead: A Different Answer to the Delimitation Problem — Ujjiyari.com | Free UPSC
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• KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Proportionality of representation is a constitutional principle that delimitation must eventually restore, but the correct site for federal accommodation is the Rajya Sabha rather than the Lok Sabha, and India is unusual among federations in linking upper-house representation to population as well, so that larger states are advantaged in both chambers and Parliament lacks a genuine federal counterweight.



SUPPORTING

- Articles 81 and 82 read with Article 326 establish that representation in the House of the People rests on population, with the ratio between population and seats to be broadly uniform across states and readjusted after each census, so the post-1976 freeze is a departure from the constitutional default rather than an expression of it.
- In several comparable federations the balance is struck between chambers: the United States and Australia elect their lower houses by population while giving every state equal Senate representation, two and twelve respectively, whereas India links Rajya Sabha seats to population as well, so no chamber performs the federal-equity function; Germany's Bundesrat is a partial counter-example, allocating votes to Laender degressively by population rather than equally.
- Rewarding low-fertility states through permanently enhanced parliamentary representation gives some citizens greater voting weight than others for a demographic outcome they did not individually produce, whereas fiscal recognition through Finance Commission transfers achieves the same reward without distorting the equality of the vote.



COUNTER

Federal accommodation is not merely a technical design preference; the 1976 freeze responded to a real fear that states succeeding at a national population-stabilisation objective would be politically penalised for it, and moving that accommodation to the Rajya Sabha assumes the upper house carries comparable political weight, which in India it does not, since money bills and the confidence of the government both rest with the Lok Sabha alone.



WAY FORWARD

Restore Lok Sabha proportionality gradually across two or three delimitation cycles rather than in a single adjustment, reform the Rajya Sabha toward equal or weighted state

representation to give it genuine federal character, and place delimitation on a statutory, periodic footing comparable to the Finance Commission so that it does not depend on political discretion.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

India's Rajya Sabha, unlike the upper houses of most federations, allocates seats on the basis of state population. Examine the implications of this design for federal balance, and assess the proposal to restore Lok Sabha proportionality while reforming the Rajya Sabha instead. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Articles 81 and 82, read with the universal adult suffrage guaranteed by Article 326, establish that Lok Sabha representation rests on population, with the population-to-seat ratio broadly uniform across states and readjusted after each census; the freeze imposed by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 and extended by the 84th Amendment in 2001 is therefore a departure from the constitutional default, not an expression of it.

BODY

The consequence of a five-decade freeze is a growing inequality in the weight of a vote. An average member of the Lok Sabha represented roughly a million people in 1971; that figure has since more than doubled, to roughly 25 to 27 lakh, and has risen unevenly, so that members from high-fertility states represent substantially larger populations than members from states that stabilised their populations earlier.

A pure population-based redistribution at the current House size would transfer roughly nine to fifteen seats to Uttar Pradesh and eight to eleven to Bihar, while Tamil Nadu loses six to eight and Kerala three to five, the range depending on whether 2011 census or projected 2026 population is used. That is why southern states resist it, and why the government's April 2026 attempt, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill together with the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, proposed raising the House ceiling to 850, with ministers assuring Parliament that no state would lose in absolute terms.

That approach preserved existing proportions without constitutionally guaranteeing them, leaving a future Parliament free to revisit the allocation, and the Constitution Amendment Bill was negated on 17 April 2026. The deeper argument is that the Lok Sabha is the wrong instrument for federal accommodation.

Comparable federations resolve the tension between citizen equality and state equity across two chambers: the lower house by population, the upper house by equal state representation, two senators per state in the United States and twelve in Australia. India links Rajya Sabha allocation to population as well, so larger states are advantaged in both chambers and neither performs the counterweight function.

CONCLUSION

The coherent resolution is to restore Lok Sabha proportionality gradually, over two or three delimitation cycles rather than at once, while reforming the Rajya Sabha toward equal or weighted state representation

so that federal equity has an institutional home, and to place delimitation itself on a statutory, periodic footing rather than leaving it to political discretion.

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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