



EDITORIAL: INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: GOVERNANCE

DATE: 06.03.2025

TOPIC: DELIMITATION / ELECTION

Two possible ways to solve India's delimitation deadlock

- **Understanding Delimitation and Its Rationale**

- Delimitation in India is the process of redrawing the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies based on population shifts, ensuring fair representation in the political system.
- This process has been frozen since 1976 to prevent penalizing states that have successfully controlled their population growth, particularly southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- The freeze on delimitation has created an imbalance where states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with higher populations, remain underrepresented in comparison to the southern states with more controlled population growth.
- The proposed delimitation in 2029 is expected to shift political power towards the northern states, where population growth has been significant. This could alter the existing political equilibrium in India and potentially disadvantage southern states.

- **Legal and Constitutional Basis of Delimitation**

- The Indian Constitution mandates delimitation under Article 82, which empowers the Delimitation Commission to carry out the task of adjusting constituency boundaries based on population data.
- Delimitation exercises were conducted in 1952, 1962, and 1972, but the 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976 froze the process until 2001. This freeze was further extended until 2026 to give more time for population control in various states.
- The delay in conducting delimitation has led to situations where states with controlled population growth, like those in the south, face a risk of losing political representation, while states with high population growth gain more influence, raising concerns of fairness and regional equity.

- **The South vs. North Divide in Representation**

- Critics argue that southern states, while having lower population growth, contribute significantly more to the nation's economy through factors like per capita income, taxation, and infrastructure development.



- The northern states, in contrast, face greater challenges, including high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure, which adds to the economic disparity between the two regions.
- There is concern that southern states are effectively subsidizing the northern regions through economic contributions, and if the proposed delimitation proceeds without addressing these disparities, it may exacerbate intrastate inequalities.
- This situation can be likened to the "Red Queen effect," where the southern states must continue advancing just to maintain their current political and economic standing, despite their lower population growth.
- **Comparative Global Perspectives on Delimitation**
 - Delimitation practices vary across countries. For instance, New Zealand and South Africa have constitutional frameworks that govern delimitation, while countries like India and Japan manage the process through ordinary legislation.
 - Judicial intervention in delimitation has been a point of contention. In the case of *Meghraj Kothari v. Delimitation Commission* (1966), the Supreme Court upheld the delimitation orders as final to prevent delays in elections.
 - Recent judicial rulings, particularly on the delimitation of Jammu & Kashmir, have underscored the complexities of balancing legal frameworks with the political realities of constituency redrawing.
- **Women's Representation and the Delimitation Link**
 - The Women's Reservation Bill (2023), which mandates 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies, is closely tied to the delimitation process.
 - Since delimitation must be conducted before implementing the Women's Reservation Bill, the introduction of gender representation in Parliament will be delayed until at least 2029, which raises concerns about India's commitment to equitable political participation.
 - This delay highlights the challenge of ensuring meaningful gender representation while navigating the complexities of demographic changes and electoral reforms.
- **Impact on Marginalized Communities: SCs, STs, and Migrants**
 - Delimitation also has significant implications for marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), migrants, and socio-religious minorities.
 - Article 330(2) of the Indian Constitution mandates proportional reservation of seats for SCs and STs in Parliament, but the allocation is still based on the 2001 Census, despite significant demographic shifts in these communities.



- The 2023 Bihar Caste-Based Survey revealed that SC and ST populations have increased, yet their representation remains static, highlighting a disconnect between demographic reality and political representation.
- These discrepancies contribute to the underrepresentation of these communities in the political process, raising questions about fairness and inclusion.
- **Proposed Solutions to Address the Imbalance**
 - One solution to address the imbalance is to adopt a purely population-based seat allocation model, but this could disproportionately shift power toward the Hindi heartland, leaving southern states underrepresented.
 - Scholars like Alistair McMillan have suggested expanding the Lok Sabha to accommodate demographic changes while preserving the representation of all states, ensuring no state is unfairly disadvantaged.
 - Another proposal by Milan Vaishnav involves reforming the Rajya Sabha, creating a counterbalance to the increasing political dominance of the northern states and helping maintain regional equity in India's political system.
- **Concerns Over Gerrymandering and Political Manipulation**
 - A key concern regarding delimitation is the possibility of gerrymandering, where political parties may manipulate electoral boundaries to secure long-term dominance in specific regions.
 - Some experts advocate for an alternative approach, which includes expanding parliamentary seats while decentralizing power to state governments. This would allow for more localized governance and ensure that electoral boundaries are drawn in a fair and democratic manner.
 - This approach would also promote grassroots democracy, ensuring broader political participation, particularly for women and marginalized castes, in line with Alexis de Tocqueville's vision of equality of conditions, where every citizen has an equal opportunity to engage in the political process.
- **Conclusion**
 - The proposed delimitation exercise is a complex process that involves balancing demographics, law, and political realities. It requires careful navigation to ensure fairness and equity in India's electoral system.
 - A broad political consensus will be necessary to update India's electoral infrastructure, as seen in the rare agreement on the 127th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which brought about consensus on the Women's Reservation Bill.
 - Dutch political scientist Arend Lijphart's idea of consociational democracy, where power is shared among diverse groups, could serve as a guiding principle for



PL RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

MAKING YOU SERVE THE NATION

managing India's delimitation process in a way that ensures all communities have a fair voice.

- If managed properly, delimitation could enhance India's electoral democracy and strengthen the democratic longevity of the nation, ensuring that the political system remains inclusive and reflective of the country's diverse demographic makeup.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/two-possible-ways-solve-india-delimitation-deadlock-9872442/>

