

Delimitation of Constituencies in India: Southern States Up in Arms

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Summary

A controversy is brewing around the delimitation of constituencies in India's Lower House of Parliament (Lok Sabha), which is scheduled for 2026. The southern states of India fear a loss of seats and political power if the redrawing of electoral seats is done based solely on population figures.

In March 2025, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin made [an unusual statement](#) calling for newly-weds in his state to have more children. The context of Stalin's statement was the delimitation process in India scheduled for 2026, which could potentially reduce the representation of the southern states, including Tamil Nadu, in the Indian parliament. Since Stalin voiced his fears, the chief ministers of three of the five southern states, Karnataka, Kerala and Telangana – all opposition-ruled – have expressed apprehension about the delimitation process if it is solely based on population. The southern states account for 20 per cent of India's population, are more developed than most of the northern states and have also done much better at population control than the north.

The [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam](#), Tamil Nadu's ruling party, protested the proposed delimitation in the recently-concluded budget session of parliament. Subsequently, Stalin hosted a [Joint Action Committee on Fair Delimitation](#) in Chennai where, besides Tamil Nadu, chief ministers of three other southern states attended. They demanded that the freeze on the number of parliamentary constituencies be extended for another 25 years.

The number of seats in the Indian parliament has been increased thrice, based on the decennial census, since the country's independence. The last time it happened was in 1972, following the 1971 Census, when the number of seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) was fixed at 543 for a population at the time of 548 million. Since then, the number has been kept constant partly to encourage population control measures. The Forty-Second Constitutional Amendment in 1976 suspended the revision of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies until after the 2001 Census. In 2001, the Eighty-Fourth Amendment further extended the freeze to 2026. A limited delimitation exercise was undertaken in 2008 based on the 2001 Census, where the boundaries of constituencies within states were adjusted without modifying the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha.

However, while India's population has more than doubled since 1971, voters are still represented by only 543 members of parliament (MPs). This means that, whereas in 1951, each MP, on average, represented around 700,000 people, an MP now represents nearly 2.5 million people, the highest representation ratio for any country. This number goes as high as three million for India's largest and most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, with over 240

million inhabitants, compared to about 1.75 million for Kerala, which has a much lower fertility rate.

What formula the government proposes to use for the delimitation exercise is not yet known. [Union Home Minister Amit Shah](#) has provided the assurance that none of the southern states will lose seats. However, the two possible scenarios being commonly discussed will both hurt the southern states in terms of numbers. The first involves keeping the number of [seats in the Lok Sabha fixed at 543](#) and reapportioning the constituencies based on the projected population in 2026 since the 2021 census has yet to be made public. This would result in the states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar gaining 11 and 10 seats respectively while Tamil Nadu and Kerala will lose eight seats each. The second scenario is increasing the number of [total seats to 848](#) based on the projected population in 2026. Here, too, the populous states gain disproportionately, with Uttar Pradesh gaining 63 seats and Bihar 39. In contrast, states like Tamil Nadu will gain only 10 seats and Kerala none.

The southern states are likely to be losers whatever the formula used. However, delimitation is not only a question of federalism. It is also a question of reasonable and equitable representation of voters. To achieve this end, without penalising the southern states, scholars and analysts have suggested several proposals. One solution is to reform the indirectly-elected Rajya Sabha (Council of States) or the Upper House of Parliament to make it a forum to discuss issues related to the states rather than offering sinecures for party loyalists and financial backers, as is the situation today. A way to do this is to reinstate the domicile requirement for Rajya Sabha members that requires them to be residents of the state they represent. However, only amending that might not be enough.

Some analysts have pointed out, [more drastic reforms](#) might be needed. This could be done by making the Rajya Sabha directly elected like the Lok Sabha or adopting the United States model, where each state has a fixed number of senators. That would eliminate the problem of populous and bigger states having more representation than the smaller and less populous ones in the Rajya Sabha. However, it is unlikely that there will be a political consensus to allow these reforms.

A [second solution](#) is to continue with the existing numbers and freeze the delimitation process. This is not likely to find too many backers either since there is a serious mismatch between the number of voters and representatives.

A [third solution](#) is to expand the number of seats in the Lok Sabha without reducing the existing strength of any of the states. That would mean that states like Uttar Pradesh will see an increase in constituencies, but states like Tamil Nadu or Kerala will not see a corresponding fall in their seats. This 'compromise' solution might be able to satisfy many of the stakeholders, including the southern states. Whatever decision the government takes, it is likely to be acrimonious and accompanied by furious debate.

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