

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Sabarimala case is a seminal legal battle concerning the conflict between individual religious freedom (Article 25) and denominational autonomy (Article 26). The current proceedings involve a nine-judge Bench examining whether the 2018 judgment—which allowed women of all ages to enter the temple—requires a rethink based on the "essential religious practices" (ERP) of the deity, who is worshipped as a Naishtika Brahmachari (perennial celibate).

Entry of 'fertile women' antithetical to the identity of Sabarimala deity, says temple board in top court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
 NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said everybody is entitled to their individual conscience and no religion is superior to the other, even as the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) argued that the entry of "fertile women" between 10 and 50 years of age would be antithetical to the very manifestation and identity of the "special deity" at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala.

Appearing before a nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Su-

rya Kant, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, for the TDB (which manages the shrine), said there were about 1,000 temples dedicated to Lord Ayyappa in India. The shrine at Sabarimala was the only one with the deity in the form of a *Naishtika Brahmachari* (perennial celibate).

Mr. Singhvi argued that the very foundation of the fame and prowess of the deity lay in the fact that Lord Ayyappa was in the *Naishtika Brahmachari* form. "The only reason people revere him is that he has eschewed all forms of *grihastashram* and em-



Lord Ayyappa is in the *Naishtika Brahmachari* form at Sabarimala, says counsel.

braced penance of a very high order. Worshippers observe *vratham*," Mr. Singhvi submitted.

He denied that women were excluded in toto. He said a "sub-classification"

of women, that is, those aged between 10 years and 50 years, could not take the Sabarimala pilgrimage.

He submitted that the entry of "fertile women in this age group would be antithetical to the very manifestation and identity of the deity... They can visit Lord Ayyappa in the other 999 temples".

Justice B.V. Nagarathna orally observed that Article 25(2)(a) of the Constitution required "religious practices" to be left untouched.

She said Article 25 (freedom of conscience and religion) invoked equality for all religions. "No religion is

superior to the other. Persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience. The truth is one. Scholars interpret it in different ways. That is why everybody is entitled to their individual conscience. Article 25 (1) recognises that no path or conscience is superior to any other path or conscience... You may follow any path you wish," Justice Nagarathna said.

Justice M.M. Sundresh said belief was at the core of religion. Even a religious denomination was only an entity which gave effect to the religious belief of individuals, he said.

Key Legal Arguments in the Current Hearing

The Deity's Identity: The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) argues that the deity's manifestation as a Naishtika Brahmachari is the "soul" of the temple. They contend that the exclusion of women aged 10–50 is not based on "impurity" but on preserving the specific character of the deity.

Freedom of Conscience (Article 25): Justice Nagarathna highlighted that Article 25(1) protects the "freedom of conscience" for all individuals equally. The Court's observation suggests that no single religious interpretation or practice should be deemed "superior" if it infringes upon the conscience of others.

Essential Religious Practice (ERP) Doctrine: The central question is whether the exclusion of women is "essential" to the Hindu faith or merely a "customary" practice that can be regulated by the State for social reform under Article 25(2)(b).

Constitutional Framework

Core Articles Involved

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Article	Description in the Context of Sabarimala
Article 14	Right to equality; used by petitioners to challenge the gender-based ban.
Article 17	Abolition of Untouchability; the 2018 majority view (Justice Chandrachud) argued that "untouchability" includes social exclusion based on notions of "purity" and "pollution."
Article 25	Individual right to profess, practice, and propagate religion. It is subject to Public Order, Morality, and Health.
Article 26	Right of "religious denominations" to manage their own affairs. The TDB argues Sabarimala devotees form a distinct denomination.

Evolution of the "Essentiality Test"

Shirur Mutt Case (1954): The Supreme Court ruled that "religion" covers all rituals and practices integral to it. The Court took upon itself the task of determining what is "essential."

Doctrine of Constitutional Morality: In recent years, the Court has moved toward "Constitutional Morality," which prioritizes values like justice, liberty, and equality over traditional or religious morality.

Critical Dimensions

The "Naishtika Brahmachari" Concept

The argument for exclusion rests on the specific nature of the idol. Under Indian law, a deity is a "juristic person" capable of holding property and having rights. The debate is whether the deity's "right to remain a celibate" can override the fundamental rights of female worshippers.

The Conflict of Rights

Individual vs. Group: Does the individual's right to worship (Art 25) take precedence over a community's right to manage its temple (Art 26)?

Judicial Overreach: Critics argue the Court should not act as a "theologian" by deciding which religious practices are "essential."

Conclusion

The Sabarimala case is not merely about temple entry; it is a defining moment for Transformative Constitutionalism in India. The final ruling of the nine-judge Bench will likely set a lasting precedent on how the State balances ancient religious traditions with modern constitutional values of gender equality and non-discrimination. It tests the resilience of the Indian secular model, which seeks to be "principled" rather than "indifferent" to religion.

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UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: In the context of the Sabarimala case and Indian Jurisprudence, the term "Juristic Person" refers to:

- (a) Only a human being capable of understanding the law.
- (b) A non-human entity, such as a deity or a corporation, that has legal rights and duties.
- (c) An individual who has been appointed as a legal guardian of a temple.
- (d) A religious denomination that has more than 10,000 followers.

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critically examine the "Essential Religious Practices" (ERP) doctrine. Does the judiciary's role as an arbiter of religious essentiality lead to "judicial overreach," or is it a necessary tool for Transformative Constitutionalism? **(150 Words)**



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Page 08 : GS I & III : Geography & Indian Economy- Agriculture / Prelims Exam

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued its first Long-Range Forecast (LRF) on April 13, 2026, predicting a "below normal" monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average (LPA). This warning comes at a delicate time when Indian agriculture is already bracing for supply chain shocks due to the escalating conflict in West Asia.

The Meteorological Challenge: El Niño vs. IOD

El Niño Dominance: The primary driver for the 2026 deficit is the rapid development of El Niño in the equatorial Pacific, transitioning from a weak La Niña earlier this year. Historically, El Niño has a strong correlation with monsoon failure in India.

The IOD "Buffer": The IMD hopes for a **Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)** by the second half of the season (August–September). A positive IOD—where the western Indian Ocean is warmer than the eastern—often acts as a "counter-weight" to El Niño, bringing more rain than the Pacific signals suggest.

Snow Cover Influence: Below-normal Eurasian snow cover during Jan–March 2026 is another factor that traditionally has an inverse relationship with monsoon strength.

Geopolitical Overlay: The West Asia Crisis

The analysis notes that "war-like clouds" over West Asia are compounding weather risks:

Natural Gas & Urea: Nearly **86% of the LNG** required for India's domestic fertilizer plants is sourced from the Gulf. Force majeure declarations (e.g., by QatarEnergy) have led to gas supply cuts, potentially throttling domestic urea production.

Fertilizer Price Volatility: Global urea prices surged to a three-year high (rising over 30%) in March 2026. This increases the government's subsidy burden and threatens the affordability of inputs for the Kharif season.

Static Part: Monsoon Categories & Mechanisms

1. IMD Classification of Rainfall

The IMD bases its forecast on the **LPA (Long Period Average)**, currently calculated as **87 cm** (1971–2020 average).

Dry days

As India faces a rainfall deficit, it must make preparations for the worst

After the crest, the trough is inevitable. Following two years of surplus rainfall, India is likely staring at a significant shortfall in the coming monsoon. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) in its April forecast has predicted an 8% deficit, or "below normal" rainfall, coming June-September. There is a five percent margin of error in this estimate but going by IMD's track record, there are many more times it has expected a 'normal' monsoon only for India to end up with a drought than it has forecast a drought and been proved wrong. In fact, when IMD warns of a deficit in April, history shows that India often experiences a drought. The agency, in its official lexicon, never uses the term 'drought' and only refers to a deficit below 90% as "deficient." In the April of 2015, IMD issued a "below normal monsoon" forecast for the 2015 south-west monsoon season, predicting seasonal rainfall at 93% of the long-term average, again, 'below normal.' India ended up much worse at 86% Long Period Average (LPA). IMD expects a depressed monsoon this time in the second crucial half of the monsoon (August and September) on the back of weather models indicating an El Niño, the cyclical phenomenon where a heating of the central equatorial Pacific Ocean beyond 1 degree Celsius has corresponded nine out of 16 times since 1950 to a deficient monsoon.

The timing of an El Niño matters. If the temperature rise happens outside of the monsoon months, its impact on the monsoon is not as threatening. In 2019, for instance, the IMD expected less than normal rainfall in April because El Niño-like conditions were on the horizon. Paradoxically, India ended up with above normal rainfall because that heating was not as strong as expected. This year too, the IMD expects the Indian Ocean Dipole would counter the desiccating impact of the El Niño. In a year where the most concerning clouds as of now are the war-like ones over West Asia, shortage of gas and fertilizer could worsen farmer sentiment on top of the weak rains. The government should immediately begin preparations to shore up fertilizer stocks, equitable water distribution, particularly in reservoirs that are likely to be stressed, and provide timely advisories to farmers on optimal sowing practices.

Daily News Analysis

Category	Rainfall Range (% of LPA)
Deficient	< 90%
Below Normal	90% – 95%
Normal	96% – 104%
Above Normal	105% – 110%
Excess	> 110%

2. Key Climate Drivers

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO): A warming of the central and eastern Pacific. It weakens the trade winds, reducing the moisture-laden winds reaching India.

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD): Also known as the "Indian Niño."

Positive IOD: Warmer Western Indian Ocean \rightarrow Better Monsoon.

Negative IOD: Warmer Eastern Indian Ocean \rightarrow Suppressed Monsoon.

Critical Dimensions

1. Economic Resilience & Food Security

While irrigation coverage has improved to nearly **55% of the Gross Cropped Area**, a significant portion of pulses and oilseeds remain rain-fed. A deficient monsoon, combined with high fertilizer costs, could trigger **cost-push inflation** in food prices.

2. The "Double Whammy" of 2026

Farmers in many regions (notably Central India and Telangana) are facing a "double whammy": significant losses from unseasonal hailstorms/flooding in the pre-monsoon period (Feb–March 2026), followed by a predicted dry summer.

Conclusion: Strategic Preparedness

To mitigate "the worst," the government's response must be three-pronged:

Buffer Stocking: Utilizing the current fertilizer inventory (approx. 180 LMT as of March 2026) to prevent local shortages.

Water Governance: Prioritizing reservoir management for irrigation over industrial use in stressed basins.

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Adaptive Sowing: Timely agromet advisories to encourage drought-resistant varieties or short-duration crops if the July rains are delayed.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: In the context of the IMD's classification of monsoon rainfall, a "Below Normal" monsoon is defined when the realized rainfall is:

- (a) Less than 90% of the Long Period Average (LPA).
- (b) Between 90% and 95% of the Long Period Average (LPA).
- (c) Between 96% and 104% of the Long Period Average (LPA).
- (d) Exactly 92% of the LPA, regardless of other factors.

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the concept of "Climate-Smart Agriculture" in the context of increasing ENSO-related uncertainties. Suggest policy measures that the Indian government should adopt to build resilience against recurrent "Below Normal" monsoons. (150 Words)

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Page 09 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act is more than a representative quota; it is a structural innovation aimed at "Epistemic Diversity"—the inclusion of diverse knowledge and lived experiences into the highest decision-making bodies. By guaranteeing 33% reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, India is transitioning from a Procedural Democracy (focus on elections) to a Deliberative Democracy (focus on the quality and inclusivity of debate).

Placing women at the core of democracy

For decades, the need for making women agents of empowerment rather than just recipients of welfare has been acknowledged and discussed by various governments. But the credit for bringing on board all dissenting and delaying voices goes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, by passing the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (or Women's Reservation Act) 2023 has established a milestone in India's constitutional trajectory. The legislation guarantees 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures, but its significance goes far beyond the appeals of representation, equality, and inclusion. The lenses of institutional design, epistemic diversity, and developmental rationality establish this Act as a remarkable structural innovation in Indian democracy, which will go a long way in reaffirming that the reform is aimed not merely at reservation but also at the very intelligence and resilience of our constitutional order.

There is no doubt that the Adhiniyam will function as a mechanism that deepens democracy. There will be an expansion of the social and perceptible base from which democracy draws political authority, thus further strengthening representative democracy. It will also broaden the state's decision-making intelligence by incorporating previously overlooked and ignored standpoints. Recruitment in Indian politics has been confined by politics of dynasty, caste, and networked masculinities. The Act has the potential to break this ecosystem and will force political parties to reorganise their structures and shift their focus from 'just getting elected' to 'searching and nurturing the talent that can be elected'. The increased numbers of women in legislatures will broaden the horizons of legislative debate in content, tone, and ethical range.



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Governance will become more effective when deliberations are informed by multiple experiences. Women legislators, drawing upon their distinctively lived social realities, are likely to articulate different conceptions of justice, liberty, and fairness. Domestic violence, childcare infrastructure, public sanitation, and access to public services will no longer be peripheral or 'soft issues' as they will be reasoned differently. This can be rightly understood as a shift from procedural democracy, where the focus is on structures, institutions, and processes, to deliberative democracy, where the focus is on collecting competing arguments and the quality of the process rather than its outcome.

This law also finds reasonable justification in the grammar of political economy. It ensures that policy making is informed by real lives rather than statistics alone. Over the decades, women have made their mark in India's informal economy. From agricultural labourers, self-help group leaders, and teachers to street vending and domestic work, women constitute the unacknowledged and hence uncounted macroeconomics of survival. When this dispersed expertise translates to formal decision making and policy formulation, it allows different stakeholders – political parties and the state – to listen to an entirely different set of micro-rationalities. The public policy discourse has already established that when decisions are made by those in the first line of consequence bearing, the feedback loop between the government and the citizenry shortens and becomes more effective.

Administrative readiness
However, guaranteeing the Act's transformative potential will be a difficult nut to crack. It will largely depend on how well the

ecosystem of politics, party organisation, and public discourse adapts to it. The centuries-old habits of thought, social hierarchies, inhibitions, and material constraints may resist or distort its content, thus delaying the democratic renewal. The first challenge is institutional as the Adhiniyam is chained to the timely completion of the Census and the delimitation of constituencies. It needs administrative readiness to translate the Act into action. Secondly, genuine reform would require redesigning internal political party structures so that women can be recruited at all operating levels. It calls for a realistic acceptance of them as co-political actors and not figurative placeholders. Parties also have to ensure that the voices not yet heard - of the marginalised

as well as of the mainstreamed - do not remain excluded in practice. The challenge here is to not be consumed by the already existing and overtly active elitist political oligarchies. Thirdly, affective restructuring will be required because the institutions, which habitually display performative aggression, may instinctively look through the ideas of empathy and social reasoning. Fourthly, women themselves have to stand up to the constraints of social norms and gender roles which still limit their mobility, time, and autonomy. Fifthly, the Indian society must rise to the need of the hour. This entails a thorough reconfiguration of social attitudes to confer women the space, dignity, and respect essential for profound and autonomous engagement in public life.

The reform should be seen as a long process of political refinement wherein we must develop the habit of recognising, listening, and accommodating different perspectives as it will lead to intelligent policy making and deepening of democracy.



The first challenge to implementing the law is institutional as it is chained to the timely completion of the Census and the delimitation



Constitutional & Legal Framework

A. The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023

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Daily News Analysis

Article 330A: Reserved seats for women in the Lok Sabha.

Article 332A: Reserved seats for women in State Legislative Assemblies.

Article 334A (The Sunset Clause): The reservation will last for **15 years** initially.

The Linkage: The Act will come into effect after the first **Census** and subsequent **Delimitation** (redrawing of constituencies) exercise.

B. Evolution of Women's Representation

73rd & 74th Amendments (1992): Introduced 33% reservation for women at the **Panchayat and Municipality** levels. This "grassroots" experience serves as the empirical foundation for the current national-level Act.

Previous Attempts: Efforts to pass this bill were made in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2008, highlighting the long-standing "networked masculinities" and "political logjam" that delayed it.

C. International Context

IPU Data: Global average of women in national parliaments is approximately **26%**.

India's Standing: Historically, women's representation in the Lok Sabha hovered around **14-15%**. This Act aims to propel India toward the top tier of gender-inclusive democracies.

News Analysis: Core Themes

Theme	Description & Impact
Shift in "Intelligence"	Moving beyond "male-centric" policy-making to incorporate "micro-rationalities"—insights from the informal economy (SHGs, street vendors, domestic workers).
Broadening Justice	Issues like childcare, public sanitation, and domestic violence shift from being "soft/peripheral issues" to "core legislative priorities."
Breaking Oligarchies	The Act challenges dynastic politics and caste-based masculinities by forcing parties to scout and nurture new female talent.
Political Economy	Decisions made by those in the "first line of consequence bearing" (women) shorten the feedback loop between the state and citizens.

Challenges to Implementation ("The Nut to Crack")

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Administrative Linkage: The "Chaining" of the Act to the Census and Delimitation may delay actual implementation until the late 2020s.

The "Sarpanch Pati" Syndrome: The risk of women being used as **figurative placeholders** for male relatives.

Internal Party Democracy: Political parties must reform their internal recruitment to avoid only the "elitist political oligarchies" from benefiting.

Social Norms: Reconfiguring societal attitudes to respect women's autonomy and leadership rather than viewing it through the lens of "performative aggression."

Conclusion

The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is a masterstroke in "Political Refinement." Its success depends on whether the Indian political ecosystem can move beyond the quota mindset and embrace empathy-based reasoning. While the legislation provides the skeleton of equality, it is the reconfiguration of social attitudes and political party structures that will provide the flesh and blood to this democratic renewal. As the author notes, the goal is not just "getting elected," but "nurturing the talent that deserves to lead."

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : The "Sunset Clause" mentioned in the context of the Women's Reservation Act refers to:

- (a) The requirement that all debates on the bill must conclude by sunset.
- (b) The provision that the reservation will cease to have effect after a period of 15 years unless extended by Parliament.
- (c) The expiration of the current Delimitation Commission's mandate.
- (d) The rule that reserved seats will rotate after every General Election.

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The success of women's reservation at the grassroots level (Panchayati Raj) has been a mixed bag of "empowerment" and "proxy-representation." In this light, evaluate the challenges that might hinder the effective implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam at the national level. **(150 Words)**

Page 09 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 and the Delimitation Bill, 2026 seek to lift the 50-year freeze (established in 1976) on the inter-state allocation of seats. While the stated objective is to operationalize the Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam (Women's Reservation Act), the reallocation based on population data from the 2011 Census creates a stark regional divide in political representation.

How proposed delimitation would redraw political map

On reallocation based on 2011 Census, southern and northeastern States stand to lose the most in seat share; Hindi-heartland States gain disproportionately

DATA POINT

Srinivasan Ramani
Sambavi Parthasarathy

If the Lok Sabha's strength is expanded to 850 seats and seats are allocated on the basis of the 2011 Census population, as the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the companion Delimitation Bill to be tabled in Parliament envisage, the southern States and the North-East would see a sharp erosion in their share of parliamentary representation, while the Hindi-heartland States of northern India would be the overwhelming beneficiaries.

The two Bills, to be introduced in Parliament from April 16, seek to do a) raise the Lok Sabha ceiling from 543 to 850 seats (815 from States, 35 from Union Territories), b) replace the constitutional freeze that pegged seat allocation to the 1971 Census with an open-ended formula allowing Parliament to choose the Census basis by ordinary law, and c) constitute a Delimitation Commission that would use the latest published Census, currently the 2011 Census, to redraw boundaries and reallocate seats. The stated purpose is to operationalise women's reservation under the Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam, 2023.

It is to be noted that Home Minister Amit Shah said in Coimbatore in February 2025 that southern States would not lose a single seat on a "pro rata basis". Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told *The Hindu* on April 13, 2026 that concerns about southern States were a "silly concern", asserting there would be a "proportional increase across the country".

However, the Bills contain no mechanism to guarantee existing seat proportions. Article 81(2)(a) mandates population-proportional allocation and not a uniform

percentage increase. In other words, delimitation will be based on population proportion according to the latest available Census.

Who gains and who loses

Using 2011 Census population to allocate 850 seats proportionally and comparing against a uniform proportional increase (which preserves existing seat shares), the disparities become stark. The five States/UTs that gain the most seats compared to a proportional increase belong to the Hindi heartland. Four of the five States/UTs that lose the most belong to the South or the East. (Table 1)

Aggregated by region, the pattern is unmistakable. The Hindi heartland's (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Delhi) share in the 850-seat House would rise from 38.1% to 43.1%. The South's share would fall from 24.3% to 20.7%. The North-East would decline from 4.4% to 3.8%. The Eastern States would slip from 14.4% to 13.7%. (Table 2)

The demographic roots of this asymmetry are visible in the latest fertility data. According to NFHS-5 (2019-21), all five southern States have total fertility rates between 1.5 and 1.8, well below the replacement level of 2.1 (Chart 3). Bihar (3.0), Meghalaya (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.4), Jharkhand (2.3), and Manipur (2.2) remain above replacement. The gap that drove the original 1976 freeze on seat allocation has narrowed over the decades, but it persists.

States that invested in health, education, and family planning would see their share of parliamentary power shrink, while States that lagged on these indicators would gain the most. The data lays bare the core tension in the delimitation exercise: Article 81(2) (a) rewards demographic weight, not developmental achievement.

Revising representation

The data for the tables were sourced from Census of India, 2011; NFHS-5 (2019-21); Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026; Delimitation Bill, 2026

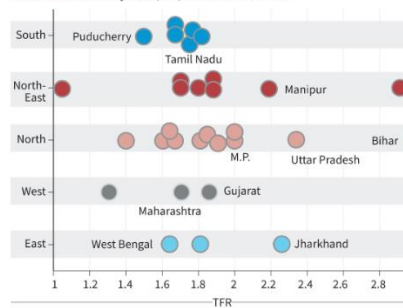


TABLE 2: Region-wise increase in seats, and region-wise share of seats in the current composition and as per the proposed delimitation exercise

Region	% increase in seats	As a share of 543 seats	As a share of 850 seats
East	48.7%	14.4%	13.7%
Hindi-heartland	76.8%	38.1%	43.1%
North-East	33.3%	4.4%	3.8%
North-non-Hindi	58.3%	4.4%	4.5%
South	33.3%	24.3%	20.7%
West	56.4%	14.4%	14.3%
Grand total	56.5%	100%	100%

The South's share in the post-delimitation Parliament will fall from 24.3% to 20.7%, while the Hindi heartland's share will rise from 38.1% to 43.1%

CHART 3: Total fertility rates (TFR) across various States



The data for chart-3 is based on NFHS-5 (2019-21). As shown in the chart, all five southern States have TFR between 1.5 and 1.8, below the replacement level of 2.1

Calculations by The Hindu Data Team

TABLE 1: The table shows seats gained/lost due to the proposed delimitation exercise based on Census 2011 population, when compared with that of a proportional increase in seats. In the table, red depicts States that could lose seats, blue shows those with gains

States/UTs	Change in seats
Uttar Pradesh	13
Maharashtra	3
Bihar	10
West Bengal	-2
Madhya Pradesh	5
Tamil Nadu	-11
Rajasthan	8
Karnataka	-2
Gujarat	2
Andhra Pradesh	-5
Odisha	-3
Telangana	-2
Kerala	-8
Jharkhand	1
Assam	0
Punjab	-1
Chhattisgarh	1
Haryana	2
Delhi	5
Jammu & Kashmir	3
Uttarakhand	-1
Himachal Pradesh	-1
Tripura	0
Meghalaya	-1
Manipur	-1
Nagaland	-1
Goa	-2
Arunachal Pradesh	-2
Puducherry	-1
Mizoram	-1
Chandigarh	-1
Sikkim	-1
Dadra & NH and Daman & Diu	-3
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	-1
Ladakh	-1
Lakshadweep	-1



Static Part: Constitutional Foundation

Article 81: Mandates that seats in the Lok Sabha be allotted to states such that the ratio between the number of seats and the population is, as far as practicable, the same across all states.

Article 82: Requires the readjustment of seats after every census.

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Daily News Analysis

The 1976 Freeze (42nd Amendment): The government froze seat allocation at the 1971 Census levels to ensure that states successfully implementing family planning (population control) were not penalized with a loss of political power.

The 84th Amendment (2002): Extended this freeze until the first census after 2026.

News Analysis: The Great Redrawing (2026 Proposals)

A. The Shift in Power (Hindi Heartland vs. The South & East)

Under an 850-seat House, the distribution moves strictly toward population-proportionality, favoring high-growth states:

Region	Current Share (543 seats)	Projected Share (850 seats)	Trend
Hindi Heartland	38.1% (207 seats)	43.1% (366 seats)	Gain (+5.0%)
Southern States	24.3% (132 seats)	20.7% (176 seats)	Loss (-3.6%)
North-East	4.4% (24 seats)	3.8% (32 seats)	Loss (-0.6%)

B. Major State-wise Impact

Gainer States: Uttar Pradesh (+13 seats relative to a uniform increase), Bihar (+10), Rajasthan (+8), and Madhya Pradesh (+5).

Loser States: Tamil Nadu (-11 seats relative to a uniform increase), Kerala (-8), and Andhra Pradesh (-5).

C. The "Development Penalty"

The core tension lies in the demographic divergence. Southern states have achieved Total Fertility Rates (TFR) of 1.5–1.8 (well below the replacement level of 2.1), while states like Bihar (3.0) and UP (2.4) remain higher. Delimitation, as currently proposed, essentially rewards states with higher population growth, potentially disincentivizing future developmental milestones in health and education.

Key Constitutional & Federal Concerns

Administrative Discretion: The 131st Amendment removes the requirement to use the "last preceding census," giving Parliament the power to choose the demographic baseline (currently 2011) via ordinary law.

Federal Friction: States that contribute more to the national GDP (the South contributes ~35% with only ~18% of the population) feel their fiscal contribution is being met with political marginalization.

The "Sunset Clause" Paradox: While the Women's Reservation Act has a 15-year sunset clause, the redrawing of the map is a permanent structural change.

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Conclusion

Delimitation is a "wicked problem" for Indian democracy. While expanding the Lok Sabha improves the representative-to-constituent ratio, a purely population-based approach risks turning the Union into a majoritarian arrangement where a few high-population states can dictate national policy. To maintain Cooperative Federalism, the government may need to consider a "Weighted Formula"—incorporating factors like the Demographic Performance Index (used by the Finance Commission) to reward states that have successfully balanced growth with development.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Under the Constitution of India, which Article mandates the readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha after each Census?

- (a) Article 79
- (b) Article 80
- (c) Article 81
- (d) Article 82

Ans: d)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critically analyze the linkage between the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam and the Delimitation exercise. Does the administrative requirement of a census and redrawing of boundaries act as an unnecessary hurdle to women's political empowerment? **(150 Words)**

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A maritime chokepoint is a narrow, strategic waterway that serves as a high-traffic corridor for global trade, with no viable alternative routes. The Strait of Hormuz is the world's premier energy artery, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. Its disruption immediately impacts global inflation, energy prices, and Asian industrial stability.

Why is the Strait of Hormuz critical to global energy flows?

What is a maritime chokepoint? How does international law govern these waters?

Smriti Sudesh

The story so far:

Since late February, the Strait of Hormuz has emerged as the centre of a deepening energy and security crisis. The escalation followed U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran, after which Tehran tightened restrictions on the narrow waterway. The situation intensified further this week when President Donald Trump ordered a U.S. naval blockade of vessels sailing to or from Iranian ports. As of April, a ceasefire has allowed a limited number of ships to pass through. However, continued threats and the U.S. blockade have kept most tankers away, reducing daily transits from around 130 vessels to just a few on several days.

What is a maritime chokepoint?

A maritime chokepoint is a narrow stretch of sea through which a large share of global trade must pass, with no easy alternative route. These are natural geographic bottlenecks created by

coastlines, islands, or narrow channels that concentrate shipping into tight corridors. Because ships cannot easily reroute, these chokepoints become critical nodes in the global trading system. Today, between 70 and 80% of the world's oil moves by sea, and much of it passes through such chokepoints. Even a single incident can disrupt traffic almost immediately. The consequences can be far-reaching. Energy prices tend to rise sharply, shipping costs increase and supply chains can be disrupted. This can lead to shortages of critical commodities, contributing to inflation and slowing economic growth.

Why is the Strait of Hormuz critical?

The Strait of Hormuz is widely regarded as the world's most important maritime chokepoint. It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean and is a primary export route for oil producers in the region. At its narrowest, the strait is just 21 nautical miles (38 km) wide. Under normal circumstances, about

21 million barrels of oil – roughly one-fifth of global consumption – pass through it each day. In addition to crude oil, large volumes of liquefied natural gas from Qatar and the UAE also move through this route. Nearly 80% of these energy flows go to Asia, making countries such as India, China, Japan, and South Korea dependent on the route.

What are the other key global chokepoints?

Beyond Hormuz, the global trading system relies on a small set of equally critical maritime chokepoints. These include the Strait of Malacca, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal, and the Panama Canal.

The Strait of Malacca runs between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It forms the shortest sea route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, making it a key route for trade between West Asia, Africa, and East Asia.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait sits between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of

Africa. It acts as the southern gateway into the Red Sea, through which ships must pass before reaching the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. This makes it a crucial link in the trade route between Asia and Europe.

The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway that cuts across Egypt, connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. It allows ships to avoid the long journey around Africa.

Further west, the Panama Canal cuts across the narrow Isthmus of Panama, linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This makes it a vital route for trade between Asia, the Americas, and Europe, eliminating the need to sail around South America.

How does international law apply to these waterways?

The movement of ships through international chokepoints is governed primarily by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under its provisions, straits used for international navigation are subject to the principle of "transit passage", which allows ships and aircraft of all nations to pass continuously and without obstruction. However, countries along the strait can regulate shipping for safety and environmental reasons, but they cannot stop ships from passing through or impose selective restrictions. This right of passage is broadly recognised under international law, though in practice, enforcement depends on naval strength and coordination between countries.

THE GIST

▼ The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow stretch through which about one-fifth of global oil and large volumes of LNG pass daily, making it central to global energy flows and trade.

▼ Blockades or threats can sharply reduce shipping, push up energy prices, disrupt supply chains.

Static Part: Geography and Energy Economics

A. Strategic Geography

Dimensions: At its narrowest point, the strait is only 21 nautical miles (38 km) wide.

Shipping Lanes: The navigable channel is even narrower, consisting of two 2-mile-wide lanes for inbound and outbound traffic, separated by a 2-mile-wide buffer zone.

Littoral States: The strait is bordered by Iran to the north and Oman (Musandam enclave) and the UAE to the south.

B. Energy Statistics (Standard Conditions)

Volume: Approximately 21 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil—roughly 20% of global consumption—passes through here.

LNG: It is the primary route for Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Qatar, the world's top LNG exporter.

Asia Focus: Nearly 80% of the oil moving through the strait is destined for Asian markets (India, China, Japan, South Korea).

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Daily News Analysis

C. Other Key Global Chokepoints

Strait of Malacca: Links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea (critical for China's energy).

Bab el-Mandeb: The "Gate of Tears" connecting the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea.

Suez Canal: The artificial link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

Panama Canal: The link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

International Law: UNCLOS Framework

The governance of these waters is primarily defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

Transit Passage: Unlike "Innocent Passage" (which applies to Territorial Seas and can be suspended), "Transit Passage" applies to straits used for international navigation. It allows for continuous and expeditious navigation that cannot be suspended or obstructed by littoral states.

Rights of Littoral States: While Iran and Oman can regulate shipping for maritime safety and pollution, they **cannot** legally block or selectively restrict vessels based on nationality or destination under UNCLOS.

Conflict of Interpretation: A recurring legal tension exists because Iran has signed but not ratified UNCLOS, occasionally arguing that it is only bound by customary international law rather than the specific "Transit Passage" provisions.

News Analysis: The 2026 Energy Crisis

Event/Action	Impact & Significance
U.S. Naval Blockade	Marks a significant shift in maritime policy under the Trump administration (2026), testing the limits of Freedom of Navigation (FON).
Supply Chain Shock	Transit dropped from 130 vessels/day to single digits. This creates a "feedback loop" of rising insurance premiums and shipping costs.
India's Vulnerability	As a major importer of West Asian crude, any prolonged closure of Hormuz threatens India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) and fiscal deficit.

Conclusion

The Strait of Hormuz is the "Achilles' heel" of the global economy. The current 2026 crisis highlights that while international law (UNCLOS) provides a framework for "Transit Passage," the actual security of these waters often depends on Naval Diplomacy and the balance of power. For India, this crisis reinforces the urgent need for energy diversification and the expansion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to bypass traditional maritime bottlenecks.

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UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following pairs of "Maritime Chokepoint – Bordering Countries" is correctly matched?

1. Strait of Hormuz: Iran and Oman
2. Bab el-Mandeb: Yemen, Djibouti, and Eritrea
3. Strait of Malacca: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Ans: d)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the legal distinction between "Innocent Passage" and "Transit Passage" under UNCLOS. How does the lack of ratification of UNCLOS by key littoral states create "gray zones" in international maritime security? **(250 Words)**

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Women's reservation and delimitation should be delinked

Parliament is scheduled to discuss two far reaching Bills ostensibly for the implementation of the one-third reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The Bills are the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill which seeks to raise the number of seats in Parliament to 850 seats with one-third reserved for women "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose", and The Delimitation Bill, 2026, which sets up the Delimitation Commission to redraw boundaries of existing seats on the basis of the "latest Census figures published on the date of the constitution of the commission", which is the 2011 Census. The government expects the Opposition to turn itself into a rubber stamp and approve utterly flawed proposals or be damned as being anti-women.

Unnecessary linkages

In September 2023, to blunt mounting criticism of its failure to legislate on women's reservation, the government hastily pushed through the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (NSVA) in a so-called "special session", just months before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This legislation was markedly different from the Bill which had been adopted by the Rajya Sabha in 2010. If that Bill, which had gone through several rounds of parliamentary scrutiny, had been presented by the government, as it should have been, women's reservation could have been implemented from the 2024 elections itself. Instead, the Modi government, through the NSVA, linked women's reservation to the proposed Census and delimitation. During the ensuing debate almost all Opposition parties expressed concern that these unnecessary linkages would not only deny women the right of reservation in the 2024 Lok Sabha and subsequent Assembly elections but would put its implementation in limbo contingent on other factors. The government responded that Opposition fears were unfounded and that a Delimitation Commission would be set up after the 2024 elections and that the Census would be completed in time. None of this happened.

What did happen is that the number of women in Parliament after the 2024 elections decreased from 78 to 74 which is just 13.6% of the total House. Additionally, in 2024 and 2025, State Assembly elections were held in 10 States with a total of 1,276 assembly seats. Only 123 women, which is less than 10%, were elected. This is the real consequence of the unwarranted linkages introduced by the government.

The 131st Amendment Bill not only retains the flawed linkages of the NSVA, it adds a third linkage of increased seats. Thus in the name of women's reservation, the government wants to



Brinda Karat

is a senior leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

achieve three aims – first, it wants to scrap the principle of delimitation based on present population criteria by using the outdated 2011 Census as the base; secondly, by using the 2011 Census, it wants to take pressure off the urgency for a caste census; and finally, it wants women's reservation to be implemented only as part of a delimitation exercise whose aim is to redraw boundaries of seats to suit the ruling regime. That is, women's reservation is once again being held hostage to the fulfilment of other agendas.

The importance of Census data

Till now in India, all the four major national exercises of delimitation of the boundaries of seats have been based on the last available Census data. The number of Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST) reserved seats are based on the proportion of SC/ST communities in the total population. As per the 1971 Census, the absolute number of seats reserved for SCs and STs was 79 and 41 respectively. This increased by 11 seats after the 2001 Census and subsequent delimitation with 84 seats reserved for SCs and 47 for STs with their combined proportion in the population being 24.4%. From 2001 to 2026, the population would certainly have registered a bigger increase. In the name of urgency for women's reservation, implementing a delimitation exercise which ignores the current population of SCs and STs will be a *manuvadi* injustice to oppressed communities, denying them a fair increase in the proportion of reserved seats. It will negatively impact the women of these communities, since the numbers of seats constituting one-third of reserved seats for SC/ST women will also be less than their rightful share.

Delimitation is a highly politically and sensitive issue. The last national delimitation exercise took around six years to complete, from 2002 to 2008, and was implemented in the 2009 elections. Since then, two State-level delimitation exercises have been done for Assam and J&K, directly under the Election Commission of India. Both of these have been strongly criticised for the highly undemocratic and sectarian way in which the boundaries of the seats were redrawn violating the principles of the Delimitation Act, 2002. To put it plainly, in both States the interests of the central ruling regime were advanced by manipulating the creation of seats in such a way as to minimise the impact of voters of particular communities seen as being opposed to the ruling regime. It can be reasonably anticipated that the coming delimitation will be highly contested. Why should women's reservation be linked to such an exercise? Further, even if the proportion of the present

number of seats in different States is to be maintained according to the present government proposal, questions still remain as to the disadvantages of States where population growth is less. All this needs further discussion and cannot be pushed through.

Betrayal of women's reservation

Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law. The 2010 Bill adopted by the Rajya Sabha and supported by the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had no such linkages. I remember Sushma Swaraj, then the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, rushing to congratulate us, then in the Upper House, for the historic passage of the Bill even though she knew that her party would get no credit. But there are no women leaders in the BJP today who would have the courage to call the government out for this; the second betrayal of the women's reservation issue. The only reason that the government is insisting on such a linkage is because it wants to rush through the delimitation process in the name of implementing women's reservation. The onus of delay will be shifted to all those who object to the delimitation boundaries suggested by a Commission packed with government supporters which is what the composition of the proposed Bill suggests.

It is time to say no to the instrumentalisation of the issue of women's reservation. Women's reservation has been fought for by millions of women across India, for decades, to strengthen democracy, not by the denial of rights of SCs and STs and not by bulldozing democratic norms. Those committed to women's reservation must vote against these Bills. The solution lies in going back to the 2010 Bill without linkages to delimitation and the Census. A simple amendment to the 106 Constitution Amendment law passed in 2023 will suffice: in Clause 334A, delete the sentence, one-third reservation for women will commence "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after commencement of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Amendment) Act, 2023 have been published". This will break the link. As far as increase of seats and delimitation is concerned, these are separate issues which should be discussed. As and when Parliament decides on an increase in seats, automatically the framework of women's reservation too will change. Our message to the government is: stop your manipulations, one-third reservation for women without linkages now.



Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law

GS Paper II: Indian Polity and Social Justice

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question: The linkage of women's reservation with the delimitation exercise has been criticized as an instrument of political delay. Evaluate this statement in the context of the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill and its impact on Indian federalism. (150 Words)

Context : The 106th Constitutional Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023) originally linked the implementation of 33% women's reservation to the completion of a Census and a subsequent Delimitation exercise. The 2026 Bills solidify this by expanding the Lok Sabha to 850 seats and using the 2011 Census as the baseline. Critics argue these "unnecessary linkages" delay women's representation and instrumentalize the issue to push through a sensitive redrawing of political boundaries.

Implications of increasing the size of the Lok Sabha

The government has circulated a set of three Bills related to delimitation and women's reservation. These Bills are expected to be taken up in the extended Budget session from April 16-18, and could affect the working of Parliament in several ways. The Constitution (31st Amendment) Bill proposes the following. The limit on the size of the Lok Sabha will be increased from 550 to 850. The number of seats for each State in the Lok Sabha will be based on its proportion in the population of all States. This population will be based on such Census (not necessarily the latest) that is specified by Parliament by passing a law. The Bill also clarifies that the reservation of one-third of seats for women will be effective after a delimitation, and will be valid for 15 years. The Delimitation Bill sets up a Delimitation Commission, and its provisions are similar to the last one set up in 2002. Importantly, it requires the latest published Census to be used. Therefore, the next delimitation is proposed to be based on the 2011 Census. The third Bill extends these provisions to the three Union Territories with legislatures: Delhi, J&K, and Puducherry.



M.R. Madhavan

Co-founder and President of PRS Legislative Research

that will be used for the purpose. Currently, the Constitution requires delimitation after every Census, and to be based on that Census (currently, there is a freeze on this until 2026). The Amendment requires just a simple majority to determine whether to do delimitation, and which Census to use. The government of the day, as it would command the majority in the Lok Sabha, can effectively make this decision. They would need to pass it in the Rajya Sabha too, but that House will be weakened by the same Bill, which brings us to the third implication. While the size of the Lok Sabha is being increased, there is no proposal to change the size of the Rajya Sabha. This affects the relative importance of the two Houses. For example, if the two Houses disagree on a Bill, the President may summon a joint sitting. In such a scenario, each member of Parliament has one vote, so the Lok Sabha with 543 seats has 2.2 times the votes of the Rajya Sabha with 245 seats. If we assume that the Lok Sabha will now have 815 seats (an increase of 50%), it will have 3.3 times the strength of the Rajya Sabha. The effect can be seen with an example. Say, the government has 53% seats in the Lok Sabha (433 out of 815) and just 40% in the Rajya Sabha (98 out of 245 seats). The government will still be able to get its Bills through a joint session as it has a majority of total seats. This imbalance will also play out in elections to the offices of the President and the Vice-President, where each MP across both Houses has an equal vote.

A fourth implication is that the limit on the size of the Council of Ministers will increase. The Constitution was amended in 2003 to limit the Council's size to 15% of the Lok Sabha. If Lok Sabha is expanded to have 815 MPs, the limit on the size of the Central cabinet also increases from 81 to 122. Fifth, the increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the opportunity for an MP to

participate in the deliberations of the House. MPs ask questions to Ministers to hold them to account, and raise important issues in the zero hour. Questions and zero hour interventions are chosen by lottery, and an increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the probability of getting balloted. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that Parliament sits for less than 70 days a year.

Global precedents

Other countries also have large legislatures. For example, the U.K. House of Commons has 650 members. It has evolved processes to provide opportunities to MPs to participate in discussions. It averages over 150 sittings a year, and also has a robust committee system. Parliamentary committees can supplement deliberations. However, the Indian Parliament is found lacking in this respect. For example, every Bill in the U.K. Parliament has to be examined by committees of both Houses. In India, less than a fifth of the Bills are referred to Committees.

Sixth, there could be a similar impact on State legislatures. Though these Bills do not have any provisions regarding the size of State legislatures, that decision will be taken by the Delimitation Commission. If they decide to follow the same rationale and increase the size by 50%, some States could have oversized legislatures. U.P. could end up having over 600 seats while West Bengal and Maharashtra could reach about 450.

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning, and are being introduced with no public discussion. It is imperative that such Bills go through intensive deliberation, both outside and inside Parliament. At the very least, they should be referred to a parliamentary committee, which can engage with experts and the wider public before giving its recommendations.



Huge impact

There are several implications of these proposals. First, the freezing of seats until the first Census after 2026 has been removed. Instead, seats will be decided based on the 2011 Census. An immediate implication is that the relative share of seats in the Lok Sabha for each State will change. The biggest losers are Kerala and Tamil Nadu, while the main gainers are Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While the proposal will equalise the value of the vote of every citizen regardless of their State of residence, it will lead to MPs from U.P. and Bihar (25% of total seats, up from 22%) having significant power to shape national policy.

Second, the Constitution Amendment Bill provides Parliament the flexibility to determine the periodicity of delimitation and the Census

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning, and are being introduced with no public discussion

The Case for Delinking

A. Immediate Implementation vs. Limbo

The 2010 Precedent: The 2010 Women's Reservation Bill (passed in the Rajya Sabha) was a "stand-alone" law with no link to census or delimitation.

Declining Representation: Failure to implement reservation in 2024 led to a drop in women MPs (from 78 to 74). In state elections (2024–25), women won less than 10% of seats.

The Logic of Delinking: Critics like Brinda Karat argue that reservation can be applied to the existing 543 seats immediately via a simple amendment, rather than waiting for a contested delimitation process.

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B. Impact on Marginalized Communities

The Census Gap: Using the 2011 Census for a 2026 delimitation ignores 15 years of population growth, particularly among Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Double Jeopardy: Since SC/ST women's reservation is a "quota within a quota," an outdated census undercounts the total SC/ST seats, thereby reducing the absolute number of seats reserved for women of these communities.

Implications of the 850-Seat Lok Sabha

A. Weakening of the Rajya Sabha

Joint Sitings: Currently, the Lok Sabha is ~2.2 times larger than the Rajya Sabha. At 850 seats, it becomes ~3.3 times larger.

Impact: In a joint session, a government with a strong Lok Sabha majority can easily override the Rajya Sabha, undermining the "House of States" and its role in checking majoritarian impulses.

B. Executive Expansion

Cabinet Size: Per Article 72, the Council of Ministers is capped at 15% of the Lok Sabha. An expansion to 850 seats increases the maximum size of the Union Cabinet from 81 to 122, potentially leading to a more bloated executive.

C. Accountability and Participation

Dilution of Individual Voice: With 850 MPs, the probability of an individual member getting time during Question Hour or Zero Hour drops significantly.

Need for Reform: Unlike the UK House of Commons (650 members), which sits for ~150 days/year, the Indian Parliament sits for <70 days. Expansion without increasing the number of sittings may reduce legislative scrutiny.

Summary: The Regional and Demographic Divide

Concern	Details
Federal Imbalance	Reallocation based on 2011 figures rewards high-population states (UP, Bihar, Rajasthan) and penalizes states with successful family planning (TN, Kerala).
Outdated Data	Using 2011 data for a 2026 exercise is statistically flawed and may be seen as a move to bypass the demand for a fresh Caste Census.
Political Manipulation	Critics fear that linking women's reservation to delimitation allows the ruling regime to "gerrymander" seat boundaries under the guise of gender empowerment.

Conclusion

The 2026 Bills represent a "package deal" where the long-awaited empowerment of women is tied to a fundamental restructuring of Indian federalism. While the expansion of the House aims for "One Person, One Vote" parity, the unwarranted linkages risk making women's reservation a hostage to the highly contentious and potentially divisive delimitation process.

