

Risks in India's delimitation debate

Mains: GS-II - Polity & Governance

Why in News?

The Union government is keen to kick off a fresh delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies; in April 2026, it had moved an amendment to the delimitation bill, but could not pass it.

What is Delimitation?

- **Delimitation** - It is the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
- **Article 81(1)** - It states there can be no more than 550 members in the Lok Sabha, 530 from states and 20 from Union Territories.
- **Article 81(2)(a)** - The ratio of the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a state and the population of the State shall be the same for all states.
- **Article 81(2)(b)** - Ratio between the population of each constituency and the number of seats allotted to it shall be the same throughout the State.
- **Article 82** - It states that after every Census is completed, the allocation of Lok Sabha seats to each state must be adjusted based on population changes.
- **Past delimitation exercises** - Delimitation has taken place 4 times - 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002, with the number of seats fixed and readjusted during the first 3 exercises.

To know more about **Delimitation**, click [here](#)

Key proposals placed before Parliament in the previous Session

- Increase the size of the Lok Sabha up to a maximum of 850 seats;
- Distribute these seats among the States based on the 2011 Census through a fresh, countrywide delimitation of constituencies; and
- Reserve one-third of the total seats for women.

What happens if there is no Constitutional amendment?

- **No need of constitutional amendment** - For a fresh delimitation to happen, a Constitutional amendment is not required.
- The terms for the next delimitation are already written into the Constitution, principally in Articles 81 and 82.

A Constitutional amendment is required only if the existing constitutional provisions relating to delimitation are to be changed.

- **Trigger for delimitation** - A fresh delimitation will be triggered after the 2027 census data is published. This is because the Constitution mandates action after the first Census conducted post-2026.
- **Mandatory delimitation after 2027** - If there is no Constitutional amendment at all, there will be a delimitation exercise that must begin after the release of 2027 Census data.
- If no amendment, two things will happen after the census -
 - Reallocation of the existing strength of the Lok Sabha among the States and Union Territories on the basis of the population recorded in the new Census.
 - Delimitation of individual constituencies within each State.

Can a fresh delimitation be completed before the 2029 Lok Sabha elections?



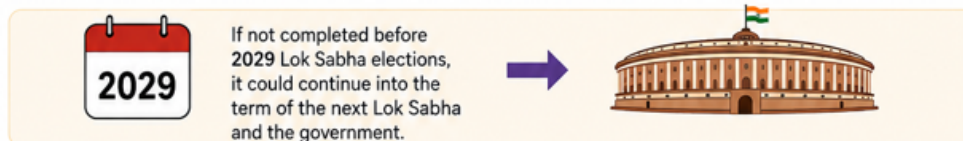
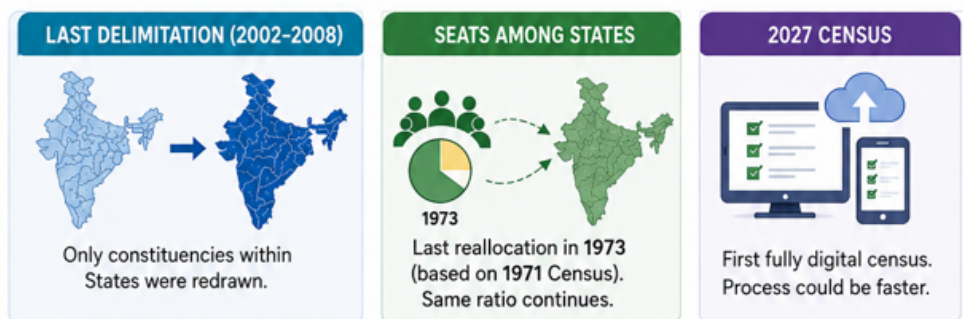
CAN A FRESH DELIMITATION BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE 2029 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS?



MAY OR MAY NOT



IN THE PAST, DELIMITATION TOOK SEVERAL YEARS



The same can happen with the next Delimitation Commission.



What will be the mandate of the next Delimitation Commission?

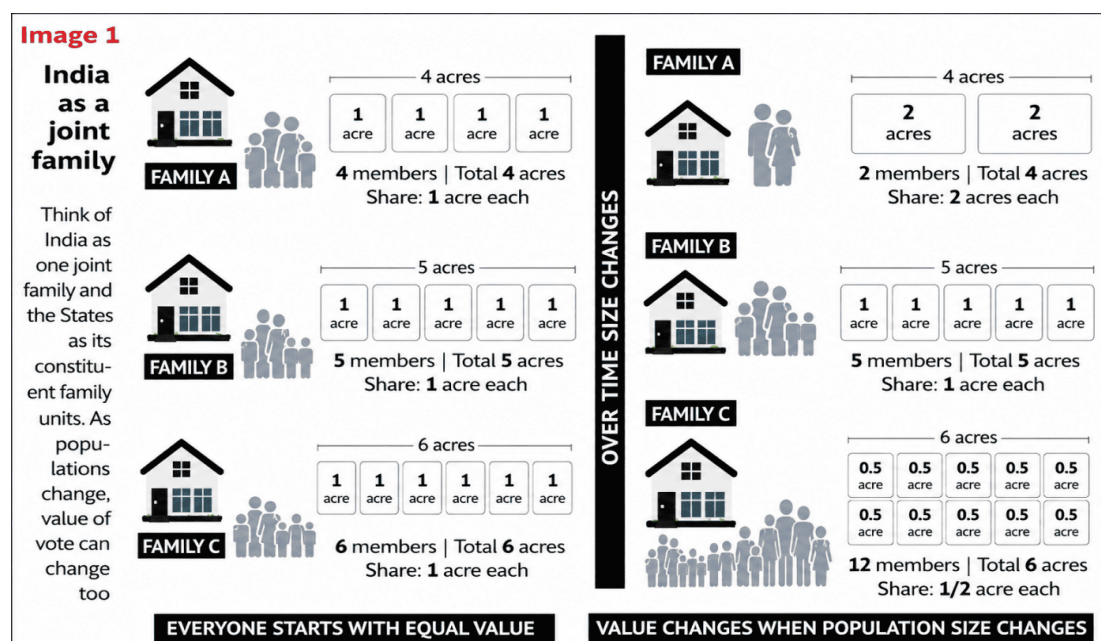
- **Current seat distribution** – At present, the distribution of the 543 Lok Sabha seats among the States is based on the population figures of the 1971 Census.
- When the benchmark changes from the 1971 population to the population recorded in the first Census after 2026, the seat distribution is likely to change.
- **Likely impact** – Southern States are likely to face a reduction in their share of Lok Sabha seats, while the Hindi-speaking States, particularly Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, are likely to gain seats.
- The maximum number of Lok Sabha seats allowed by the Constitution is 550.
- **Women reservation** – A third of the Lok Sabha seats nationally, and one-third of the

seats within each State, will be reserved for women.

- **Mandated sequence if no amendment** - In the absence of any Constitutional amendment, the following sequence is envisaged:
 - The reallocation of Lok Sabha seats among States;
 - The delimitation of constituencies within States; and
 - The implementation of women's reservation — all tied to the Census 2027.

How is the allocation of seats to each State determined?

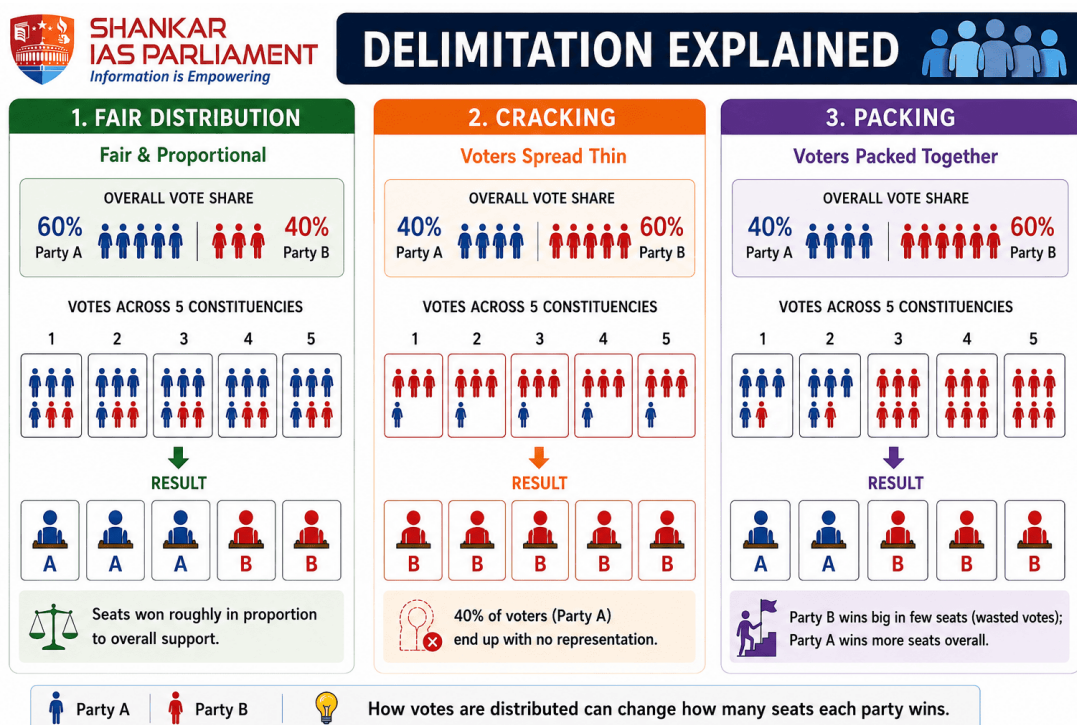
- **Likeness with Family**



- **Variation in representation** - In 1967, an MP across most major States represented roughly four to five lakh electors.
- Today, an MP from Kerala represents about 14 lakh electors, while in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the figure is around 19 lakh, which shows how the value of each vote differs across States.
- **Policy decisions** - The above variation is the result of a deliberate decision by all parties, taken on two occasions, in 1976 and 2001, not to punish States that had stabilised their populations.
- The Constitution gives that leeway, that the size of Lok Sabha constituencies is not necessarily based on a national average, which today would be about 18 lakh voters per constituency.
- **Flexibility of Article 81** - It requires seats to be allocated among States “so far as practicable”, on the basis of a national average.
- This leeway for variation allows for a balance between two principles that can be in tension:
 - Federalism, or representation of States, and
 - Democracy, or one vote, one value.
- **Main issue** - The debate on delimitation now needs to resolve the tension between
 - Representation of States (federal balance).
 - Equal value of votes (democratic fairness).

What is gerrymandering?

- **Gerrymandering** – It is the political manipulation of electoral district boundaries to give one political party or group an unfair advantage over others.
- The practice distorts fair representation by engineering election outcomes, often resulting in bizarrely shaped voting districts.
- **Principle of equal numbers** – The democratic principle of One Person, One Vote, One Value, the first requirement is that every Lok Sabha constituency should have roughly the same number of voters.
- **Equal numbers not equal to equal value** – Even if constituencies have equal numbers of voters, the value of each vote may still differ.
- **Impact of grouping** – Even if constituencies have the same number of voters, the way those voters are grouped can dramatically affect electoral outcomes.
- Thus, equal numbers alone do not guarantee equal value for every vote.



Reference

[The Hindu](#) | [The stakes in India's delimitation debate](#)