

Delimitation & the South

The Constitution mandates delimitation after every Census. But, the number of seats in Parliament, and the share of each state, has remained static since 1976. This is largely due to opposition from southern states

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UNION HOME MINISTER Amit Shah on Wednesdaysaid that southern states would not lose "even a single seat" after delimitation, addressing long-held apprehensions of states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala about losing representation in Parliament if delimitation was to be carried out based on latest population data.

Largely due to the divergent economic trajectories of the two regions, population growth in South India has been far slower than in the North. Thus, if delimitation were to take place based on latest population data, northern states would receive a much larger number of seats in Parliament compared to the South.

Why delimitation?

Delimitation is a Constitutional mandate, to be carried out after every Census in order to readjust the number of seats in Parliament, and the boundaries of constituencies, based on latest population data. The idea is to ensure that each constituency has roughly the same number of people living in it.

Up until 1976, after every Indian Census, the seats of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State legislative Assemblies were re-distributed throughout the country. This happened thrice, based on the Censuses of 1951, 1961, and 1971.

The 42nd Amendment to the Constitution, passed during the Emergency, froze the total number of Parliamentary and state Assembly seats till the 2001 Census. This was done so that states with higher rates of population growth could implement family planning measures without losing representation in Parliament.

In 2001, the boundaries of constituencies were altered. But the number of seats that each state had in Lok Sabha, as well as the strength of states' legislative Assemblies, remained the same. This was largely due to opposition from southern states.

Why are southern states nervous about delimitation?

States in peninsular India feel that delimitation based on latest population data will reduce their representation in Parliament, and thus diminish their political heft.

In September 2023, during the debate in Parliament on the Women's Reservation Bill — whose implementation is linked to the delimitation process — DMK leader Kanimozhi read out a statement from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin. It said, "...if delimitation is going to be on population census, it will deprive and reduce the representation of the south Indian states... There is fear in the minds of the people of Tamil Nadu that our voices will be undermined."

Supporting Kanimozhi, TMC MP Mahua Moitra had said, "According to data, we will have a 0% increase in the number of seats for

Population-wise seat ratio was broadly equitable after last delimitation

States	1961 Population	1967 Seats	Population/ Seat Ratio	1971 Population	1976 Seats	Population/ Seat Ratio
Uttar Pradesh	7,01,43,635	85	8,25,219	8,38,48,797	85	9,86,456
Bihar	3,48,40,968	53	6,57,377	4,21,26,236	54	7,80,115
Rajasthan	2,01,55,602	23	8,76,331	2,57,65,806	25	10,30,632
Tamil Nadu	3,36,86,953	39	8,63,768	4,11,99,168	39	10,56,389
Kerala	1,69,03,715	19	8,89,669	2,13,47,375	20	10,67,369
India	43,92,34,771	520	8,44,682	54,81,59,652	542	10,11,365

Based on projected 2025 population, current seat ratios not equitable

States	Current Seats	2025 Projected Population	Seats at the same ratio as last time #	Seats at 15 lakh ratio	Seats at 20 lakh ratio
UP*	85	25,23,42,000	250	168	126
Bihar*	54	17,08,90,000	169	114	85
Rajasthan	25	8,27,70,000	82	55	41
Tamil Nadu	39	7,73,17,000	76	52	39
Kerala	20	3,60,63,000	36	24	18
India	543	141,33,24,000	1,397	942	707

Electoral performance of top 2 parties in past 5 elections in the states

States	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
UP (85)*	SP 36	SP 23	BJP 76	BJP 67	BJP 38
	BSP 19	INC 26	SP 5	BSP 10	SP 37
Bihar (53)*	RJD 24	JDU 20	BJP 32	BJP 28	BJP 20
	JDU 7	BJP 20	LJP 6	JDU 16	JDU 12
Rajasthan (25)	BJP 21	INC 20	BJP 25	BJP 24	BJP 14
	INC 4	BJP 4		RLP 1	INC 8
Kerala (20)	CPM 12	INC 13	INC 8	INC 15	INC 16
	CPI 3	CPM 4	CPM 5	IUML 2	IUML 2
Tamil Nadu (39)	DMK 16	DMK18	ADK 37	DMK24	DMK 22
	INC 10	ADK 9	BJP 1	INC 8	INC 9

10.11 lakh, *UP includes Uttarakhand, Bihar includes Jharkhand, Source: EC

Kerala, only a 26% increase for Tamil Nadu, but a whopping 79% for both MP and UP."

In October last year, expressing concern over an ageing population in his state, Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu announced his government was contemplating legislation to incentivise families to have more children. Days later, Stalin, referring to a potential reduction of South India's share of seats in Parliament due to lower population growth rates, joked: "Why not aim for 16 children?"

Notably, in July last year, the Sangh Parivar too had flagged that lower birth rates in western and southern India had placed these regions at a "disadvantage". RSS-affiliated mag-

azine *The Organiser* had said in an editorial: "Regional imbalance is another critical dimension that will impact the delimitation process of the Parliamentary Constituencies in the future. The States from the West and South are doing relatively better regarding population control measures and, therefore, fear losing a few seats in Parliament if the base population is changed after the census."

What does the data say?

The number of seats each state gets after delimitation will depend upon the base average population that a delimitation commission, as and when constituted, will arrive at.

In the 1977 Lok Sabha, for instance,

every MP in India represented 10.11 lakh people on average. While it is impossible for every constituency to have the same population, it is desirable that the population in each constituency be tightly grouped around this average.

There is, however, no restriction on what this base average should be. If the 10.11 lakh average were to be retained, the strength of Lok Sabha would shoot up to nearly 1,400 (based on the Union Health Ministry's population projection for 2025).

This would also mean that UP (including Uttarakhand) would end up nearly tripling the number of seats it has in Lok Sabha, from 85 to 250. The percentage rise would be even greater for Bihar (including Jharkhand), which would see its tally rise from 25 to 82.

But Tamil Nadu's share would increase from 39 to only 76 while Kerala's tally would rise from 20 to 36 — less than double of what the states' respective shares are at the moment.

Since the new Parliament has only 888 seats, this formula is unlikely to be retained.

If the population of each constituency were to be kept at 20 lakh, Parliament would have 707 seats, compared to 543 at present.

Southern states would still be at a significant disadvantage. Tamil Nadu would neither gain or lose seats, while Kerala would lose two. But UP (including Uttarakhand) would now have 126 seats, while Bihar (including Jharkhand) would have 85.

Even if the average per constituency population were to be kept at 15 lakh (942 seats in Parliament), Tamil Nadu and Kerala would see modest increases to their tally to 52 and 24 respectively, while the tallies of UP and Bihar would rise to 168 and 114 seats respectively.

How will elections be impacted?

Regional parties from the South feel that delimitation based on population could skew elections in favour of parties, such as the incumbent BJP, with a base in the North. Congress too shares this anxiety.

Following the rise of the BJP through the late 1980s and early 1990s on the back of the Ram Temple movement, and the arrival of social justice parties following the Mandal movement, Congress has been doing poorly in the Hindi heartland. From winning 51 seats in UP (including Uttarakhand) and 30 seats in Bihar (including Jharkhand), its tally fell to only six and five in the two erstwhile states respectively.

This, at a time when the party has 99 seats in Parliament. Congress has, in total, won 53 seats in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Telangana and Tamil Nadu alone. In fact, of the 232 seats won by the INDIA bloc in 2024 polls, a little over 100 came from the more populous northern states.

Of the 52 seats won by the Congress in 2019, 15 came from Kerala and eight from Tamil Nadu. Even in 2004, when it had won 145 seats, a majority of its victories had come from South India, with 29 from Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana). In 2009, when it won again, Andhra returned 33 seats.