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India's fiscal federalism must be reimagined to ensure every vote carries equal weight: Explained

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What is Delimitation?

Delimitation means:

Fixing the total number of Lok Sabha seats

Deciding how many seats each state gets

Redrawing constituency boundaries

It is done by a Delimitation Commission based on Census data to ensure the principle of "One Person, One Vote, One Value." Articles 81 and 82 of the Constitution support this system.

Why Were Seats Frozen on 1971 Census?

In 1976, during the Emergency, the 42nd Constitutional Amendment froze the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to each state based on the 1971 Census until 2001.

Main Reason Behind the Freeze:

The main reason was that southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala had better success in family planning and population control.

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They feared that if seats were reallocated based on new population figures, they would lose Lok Sabha seats, while high-population-growth northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar would gain more seats.

So, the freeze was done to avoid “punishing” states for successful population control.

What Happened Later?

In 2001, the 84th Constitutional Amendment extended this freeze further till the first Census after 2026.

This means seat allocation among states still remains based on the 1971 Census, though constituency boundaries inside states were later adjusted using the 2001 Census.

Current Problem:

India’s population has grown from about 55 crore in 1971 to over 140 crore today, but Lok Sabha seat distribution among states is still based on old population data.

This creates: Very large constituencies, Unequal representation & Vote value differences between states

Example:

In Bihar, 1 MP represents about 31 lakh people

In Kerala, 1 MP represents about 17.5 lakh people

This means a vote in Kerala carries more political weight than a vote in Bihar.

Why Southern States Are Concerned?

If fresh delimitation happens based on new population data:

Tamil Nadu may lose around 10 seats

Kerala may lose around 7 seats

Uttar Pradesh may gain around 12 seats

Bihar may gain around 9 seats

Southern states fear losing political influence in Parliament.

Overall Significance:

Delimitation is not just about redrawing seats—it affects:

Federal balance

Political power of states

Tax revenue influence

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North-South political debate

Women's Reservation implementation

That is why delimitation has become one of India's most important constitutional and political debates.

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