

Delimitation Commission in India: An Overview

Introduction

The Delimitation Commission in India is a crucial body responsible for redrawing the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies based on population changes. This process ensures equitable representation and maintains the balance of electoral democracy. The commission operates independently and plays a vital role in upholding the principles of free and fair elections.

Why in News?

The delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the first Census after 2026. The **2021 Census** was originally postponed due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** and subsequent delays by the Central Government.

What is Delimitation?

Delimitation refers to the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each state for the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. It also includes determining the seats reserved for **Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)** in these houses. This process is conducted by the **Delimitation Commission**, which is set up under an act of Parliament.

Constitutional Basis

The Delimitation Commission derives its authority from **Articles 82 and 170** of the Indian Constitution.

- **Article 82** mandates the reallocation of Lok Sabha seats among states after every census.
- **Article 170** deals with the readjustment of the number and boundaries of legislative assembly constituencies within states.

The process of delimitation is carried out through a **Delimitation Act**, enacted by Parliament after every census.

Composition of the Delimitation Commission in India

The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the **President of India** and usually comprises:

1. A **retired Supreme Court judge** as the chairperson.
2. The **Chief Election Commissioner** or an Election Commissioner nominated by the CEC.
3. The **State Election Commissioners** of respective states.

History of Delimitation in India

Delimitation Commissions have been set up **four times: 1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002** under the respective Acts of Parliament. The first delimitation exercise in **1950-51** was conducted by the **President with the help of the Election Commission**.

The last major delimitation exercise that **changed the state-wise composition of the Lok Sabha** was in **1976**, based on the **1971 Census**. However, to avoid states with higher population growth gaining undue advantage, the **42nd Amendment Act (1976)** froze the number of Lok Sabha seats until **2000**, which was later extended by the **84th Amendment (2001)** until **2026**.

The **87th Amendment Act (2003)** allowed delimitation based on the **2001 Census**, but without altering the number of seats allotted to each state.

Significance of Delimitation

1. **Representation:** Ensures **fair representation** in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies based on population changes, upholding the democratic principle of **“one citizen-one vote-one value.”**
2. **Equity:** Adjusts **territorial constituencies** to prevent underrepresentation or overrepresentation.
3. **Reserved Seats for SC/ST:** Determines the **allocation of reserved seats** for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as per constitutional provisions.
4. **Federalism:** Impacts **political power distribution** among states, balancing representation and federal considerations.
5. **Population Control Measures:** Earlier freezing of seats incentivized **population control measures**, raising concerns about its impact on state representation in the upcoming delimitation.

Concerns Related to Delimitation

1. Regional Disparity:

- Southern states, despite better population control, may **lose representation** in comparison to northern states.
- The **southern states contribute 35% to India's GDP**, but hold only **18% of the population**.

2. Inadequate Funding:

- The **15th Finance Commission** used the **2011 Census** for funding allocations, raising concerns about southern states losing **funding and representation**.

3. Impact on Reservations:

- The **reallocation of seats** could shift power towards northern states, affecting **SC/ST representation** in Parliament.

International Practices

1. United States:

- The **House of Representatives** has been capped at **435 seats** since **1913**.
- Seats are redistributed among states every 10 years through the **method of equal proportion**, ensuring minimal changes to representation.

2. European Union (EU):

- The **EU Parliament (720 seats)** follows the principle of “**degressive proportionality**”, meaning smaller nations have proportionally more representation compared to larger ones.

Recent Developments and Challenges

1. **Jammu & Kashmir Delimitation (2022):** After the abrogation of **Article 370**, a **special Delimitation Commission** redrew constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir.

2. **Upcoming Delimitation (2026):** With the **freeze ending**, debates focus on how **2021 Census data** will impact representation.

3. **Challenges:**

- **Political Implications:** Changes in **seat allocation** could **alter political power** between states.
- **Demographic Pressures:** Balancing **population growth** with **fair representation** remains a challenge.

Conclusion

The Delimitation Commission plays a critical role in India's democratic structure by ensuring fair electoral representation. With the **2026 delimitation exercise** approaching, discussions on balancing **population growth, representation, and federal principles** will shape the future of Indian democracy. Ensuring **transparency, fairness, and inclusivity** in the process is essential to maintaining public trust in the electoral system.

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