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Women's Reservation and Delimitation Should be Delinked

Context

- The introduction of the **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill** and the Delimitation Bill, 2026, marks a significant moment in the debate on **women's reservation** in India.
- While these proposals promise one-third reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies, they simultaneously tie implementation to delimitation, Census, and seat expansion.
- This approach raises serious concerns about **delays**, **political intent**, and the dilution of democratic reforms.

Unnecessary Linkages and Delayed Implementation

- The linking of women's reservation to a future Census and delimitation exercise has created avoidable delays.
- The earlier 2010 Bill enabled immediate implementation, but the later framework introduced through the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (NSVA)** made it conditional.

- As a result, reservation could not be implemented in the 2024 general elections or subsequent Assembly elections.
- The consequences are visible in declining representation. Women's participation in Parliament dropped to **6%**, and in State Assemblies, it remained below **10%**.
- These figures highlight how procedural conditions have obstructed **gender equality** rather than advancing it.
- Instead of strengthening **political representation**, the policy has effectively postponed it, leaving women underrepresented in legislative bodies.

Motives Behind the Linkages

- The combination of delimitation, 2011 Census, and seat increase suggests deeper political calculations.
- Using outdated Census data weakens the urgency for updated demographic data, including demands for a **caste census**.
- At the same time, linking reservation to **boundary redrawing** introduces a process that is historically contentious and open to manipulation.
- Past delimitation exercises, particularly in regions like **Assam** and **Jammu & Kashmir**, have faced criticism for **partisan bias** and **undemocratic practices**.
- The redrawing of constituencies can influence electoral outcomes by altering the composition of voters.
- Linking women's reservation to such a process risks undermining both reforms, as the legitimacy of reservation becomes tied to a disputed exercise.
- Additionally, the inclusion of seat expansion adds another layer of complexity.
- Instead of implementing a straightforward reform, the policy creates multiple dependencies, delaying outcomes and increasing the scope for **political advantage**.

Implications for Marginalised Communities

- Delimitation based on outdated population data has serious implications for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- Reservation for these communities is determined by their population share, and any miscalculation leads to underrepresentation.
- If delimitation ignores current population growth, the number of **reserved seats** for SCs and STs may not reflect their actual demographic strength.
- This directly affects SC/ST women, whose representation depends on the **intersection of caste and gender quotas**.
- A reduced number of reserved seats results in fewer opportunities for women from marginalised communities.
- Such an outcome contradicts the broader goal of **social justice** and weakens the inclusiveness of democratic institutions.

The Case for a Stand-Alone Law

- Women's reservation is fundamentally a **stand-alone reform** that should not depend on unrelated processes.
- The earlier legislative model demonstrated that reservation could be implemented without linking it to delimitation or Census updates.
- Reintroducing such linkages transforms a clear reform into a delayed and conditional promise.
- Separating reservation from **delimitation disputes** would ensure immediate implementation and prevent the shifting of responsibility onto those who question boundary changes.
- It would also safeguard the reform from being used as a tool for **broader political strategies**.
- A simple legislative amendment, removing the condition that reservation will begin only after delimitation and Census updates, can enable immediate enforcement.
- Issues like seat increase and boundary adjustments can be addressed independently through **parliamentary debate** and **consensus-building**.

Conclusion

- By linking women's reservation to **Census timelines, delimitation processes, and seat expansion**, the policy postpones implementation and introduces uncertainty.
- This approach undermines both **democratic principles** and the long-standing demand for gender justice.
- Restoring the original vision requires **removing all conditional linkages** and ensuring immediate implementation.
- Women's reservation should not be contingent on other reforms or used to justify contentious processes.
- A clear and independent law would strengthen democracy, enhance representation, and uphold the **principles of equality and fairness**.

Women's Reservation and Delimitation Should be Delinked FAQs

Q1. What is the main issue with the current women's reservation Bills?

Ans. The main issue is that women's reservation is linked to delimitation, Census, and seat expansion, causing delays in its implementation.

Q2. How have these linkages affected women's political representation?

Ans. These linkages have reduced women's representation, with only 13.6% in Parliament and less than 10% in State Assemblies.

Q3. Why is the use of the 2011 Census controversial?

Ans. The use of the 2011 Census is controversial because it ignores current population data and may distort fair representation.

Q4. How does delimitation impact marginalized communities?

Ans. Delimitation based on outdated data can reduce reserved seats for SCs and STs, negatively affecting their representation, especially for women.

Q5. What is the suggested solution to implement women's reservation effectively?

Ans. The suggested solution is to make women's reservation a stand-alone law without linking it to delimitation or

Implications of Increasing the Size of the Lok Sabha

Context

- The government has introduced three Bills on delimitation and women's reservation, likely to be taken up in the extended Budget session.
- The **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill** proposes to increase the Lok Sabha strength from 550 to 850, with seats allocated to States based on their population share, using a Census specified by Parliament.
- It also states that one-third reservation for women will take effect after delimitation and remain valid for 15 years.
- The Delimitation Bill provides for the creation of a Delimitation Commission, similar to the 2002 body, and mandates the use of the latest published Census (likely 2011) for redrawing constituencies.
- The third Bill extends these provisions to Union Territories with legislatures—Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, and Puducherry.
- This article highlights the far-reaching implications of increasing the size of the Lok Sabha through proposed delimitation reforms, examining their impact on federal balance, legislative functioning, and democratic representation in India.

Implications of the Proposed Delimitation Reforms

• Redistribution of Lok Sabha Seats Across States

- The freeze on seat allocation until the post-2026 Census is proposed to be removed.
- Seats will instead be based on the 2011 Census, altering the balance of representation.
- Losers: Kerala and Tamil Nadu
- Gainers: Rajasthan, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh
- MPs from states like U.P. and Bihar could hold greater influence (around 25% of seats), reshaping national policymaking.
- While this equalises the value of each vote, it raises concerns about regional imbalance.

• Greater Flexibility for Parliament in Delimitation

- The amendment allows Parliament to decide:
 - When delimitation should occur
 - Which Census data should be used
- This departs from the current constitutional mandate of delimitation after every Census.
- Since decisions require only a simple majority, the ruling government can effectively control delimitation timing and basis.

- **Weakening of the Rajya Sabha's Relative Role**

- While the Lok Sabha's size is proposed to increase, no change is planned for the Rajya Sabha.
- This widens the power gap between the two Houses:
 - Current ratio: Lok Sabha has 2.2 times Rajya Sabha strength
 - Proposed ratio: Could rise to 3.3 times
- In joint sittings, this gives the Lok Sabha a decisive advantage, enabling governments to pass Bills even with weaker support in the Rajya Sabha.
- It also affects elections for President and Vice-President, where all MPs have equal votes.

- **Expansion of the Council of Ministers**

- The Constitution caps the Council of Ministers at 15% of Lok Sabha strength.
- With Lok Sabha expanding (e.g., to ~815 members), the Cabinet size could increase from 81 to around 122 ministers.

- **Reduced Participation Opportunities for MPs**

- A larger Lok Sabha reduces individual MPs' chances to:
 - Ask questions
 - Raise issues during Zero Hour
- Since these opportunities are often allocated by lottery, increased membership lowers the probability of selection.
- This problem is worsened by the fact that Parliament functions for less than 70 days annually.

Global Comparisons and Lessons for India

- **Large Legislatures: International Practices**

- Countries like the United Kingdom have large legislatures; the House of Commons has 650 members.
- To ensure effective participation, the U.K.:
 - Holds over 150 sittings annually
 - Uses a strong parliamentary committee system to enhance deliberation
- **Role of Parliamentary Committees**
 - In the U.K., every Bill is examined by committees of both Houses.
 - In contrast, in India less than 20% of Bills are referred to committees.
 - This indicates weaker institutional support for detailed legislative scrutiny.
- **Implications for State Legislatures**
 - Though the Bills do not directly address State legislatures, the Delimitation Commission may apply similar logic.

- If assembly sizes increase by around 50%:
 - Uttar Pradesh could exceed 600 seats
 - West Bengal and Maharashtra could approach 450 seats
- This could lead to oversized legislatures, raising concerns about efficiency and manageability.

Need for Wider Deliberation

- The Bills are being introduced with minimal public discussion, despite their far-reaching implications.
- There is a strong case for referring these Bills to a Parliamentary Committee to:
 - Engage experts
 - Gather public input
 - Ensure informed decision-making

Conclusion

- Expanding the Lok Sabha may improve representation but risks weakening federal balance, reducing deliberative quality, and concentrating power unless supported by stronger institutions and broader consultation.

Implications of Increasing the Size of the Lok Sabha FAQs

Q1. What is the main proposal regarding the Lok Sabha?

Ans. The proposal seeks to increase Lok Sabha strength from 550 to 850 seats, allocating them based on population share using a Census specified by Parliament.

Q2. How will delimitation impact State representation?

Ans. Delimitation based on the 2011 Census will shift seats towards populous states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, reducing representation for states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Q3. Why is the Rajya Sabha's role expected to weaken?

Ans. With no increase in Rajya Sabha seats, the expanded Lok Sabha will dominate joint sittings and influence key decisions, reducing the Upper House's relative importance.

Q4. What challenges arise from a larger Lok Sabha?

Ans. A larger Lok Sabha may reduce MPs' participation opportunities, weaken deliberations, and strain parliamentary functioning, especially with limited sitting days.

Q5. Why is greater deliberation on these Bills necessary?

Ans. Given their major constitutional impact, the Bills require detailed scrutiny, expert consultation, and public debate to ensure balanced reforms and protect democratic principles.

Source: TH

Labour Codes in India - Bridging Reform Design and Ground Reality

Context

- Recent strikes by gig workers and protests by factory workers in Uttar Pradesh over low wages and poor working conditions highlight the implementation challenges of labour reforms.
- India's consolidation of 29 central labour laws into four labour codes marks a significant structural reform, but its **real impact** depends on **execution**, not just legislation.

Overview of the Four Labour Codes

- **Code on Wages (2019)**: Universalisation of minimum wages and introduction of a national floor wage.
- **Code on Social Security (2020)**: Expansion of social security to gig and platform workers.
- **Industrial Relations Code (2020)**: Regulates hiring, firing, and dispute resolution.
- **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020)**: Ensures worker safety and welfare.

What the Codes Promise and Where they Fall Short

- **Wages and inequality**
 - For instance, the Code on Wages has the potential to correct chronic wage suppression and reduce inequality at the lower end of the wage distribution.
 - However, its **effectiveness** hinges on where the national floor wage is pegged relative to prevailing market wages.
 - While a floor set too low is meaningless, too high a floor wage without adequate support risks job losses.
- **Labour productivity**
 - The codes create enabling conditions for productivity improvement — through better worker protection, reduced compliance fragmentation, and more efficient labour allocation.
 - However, gains are unlikely to be automatic or uniform.
- **The large firm vs. SME divide**
 - Large firms stand to benefit most — they can absorb compliance costs and gain from reduced worker turnover and improved workforce stability.
 - SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises), which form the backbone of India's employment structure, face disproportionate compliance burdens that can offset any productivity gains.
 - This risks a **regressive outcome** of the very reforms meant to help workers.

Key Challenges

- **Implementation**: Weak enforcement, especially in the informal sector.

- **Policy design:** Wage floors that are non-binding or poorly calibrated.
- **Structural:** SMEs burdened by compliance costs.
- **Coverage gap:** Gig/platform workers excluded from social security.
- **Regulatory architecture:** Threshold-based distortions discouraging firm formalisation.
- **Institutional:** Fragmented central-state coordination.

Way Forward – Nine Policy Imperatives

- **Strengthen enforcement mechanisms (critical priority)**

- Weak enforcement is India's Achilles' heel in labour governance. Minimum wages remain **non-binding** in large parts of the informal economy.
- The government must invest in digital wage payment systems, electronic employment records, risk-profiling-based targeted inspections to reduce rent-seeking, and building administrative capacity at both central and state levels.

- **Calibrate wage policy carefully**

- The national floor wage must be binding yet sustainable, factoring in regional cost-of-living variations and sectoral productivity differences.
- **Periodic revisions** linked to inflation and productivity growth are essential to prevent real wage erosion.

- **Support SMEs through the transition**

- Without dedicated support, the codes risk benefiting large corporates while crushing smaller enterprises.
- Necessary interventions include compliance subsidies and tax incentives, simplified reporting requirements, and access to affordable credit and technology for formalisation.

- **Expand and deepen social security coverage**

- Thresholds for EPF (Employees' Provident Fund) and ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation) have eroded in real terms.
- Key actions needed revise and index thresholds to inflation, operationalise the **Social Security Fund** for gig and platform workers.
- Notify contribution rates and design tangible benefit schemes, proactive outreach to informal workers — not passive reliance on gradual formalisation.

- **Remove threshold-based distortions**

- Regulatory thresholds currently incentivise firms to stay small or fragment operations to avoid compliance obligations.

- Graduated, smoother regulatory frameworks are needed to encourage organic firm growth and formalisation.

- **Invest in skill development and human capital**

- Higher wages must be matched by higher productivity.
- This requires **expanding vocational training** access, strengthening industry-academia linkages, and promoting continuous skill upgrading at the workplace level.

- **Ensure cross-sectoral policy coordination**

- Labour reforms cannot work in isolation.
- They must be supported by industrial policy, trade liberalisation, infrastructure development, and investment promotion.
- This will facilitate translating productivity gains into expanded employment, not merely cost savings for firms.

- **Improve administrative and institutional integration**

- A genuine **single-window system** for compliance and benefit delivery is essential.
- Greater centre-state coordination is critical to prevent regulatory fragmentation and ensure uniform, credible implementation across states.

- **Leverage the digital architecture of the codes**

- The codes provide an opportunity to build integrated labour databases, real-time **compliance monitoring** systems, and publicly accessible data on workplace safety and employment conditions.
- This can significantly enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking — transforming labour governance from reactive to proactive.

Conclusion

- The Labour Codes represent a **transformative but incomplete** reform in India's labour ecosystem.
- While they promise improvements in formalisation, productivity, and wage equity, their success hinges on robust enforcement, institutional capacity, and complementary policy support.
- Without addressing structural constraints—especially in the informal sector and among SMEs—the reforms risk remaining **aspirational** rather than **impactful**.

Labour Codes in India FAQs

Q1. What are the key objectives of India's labour codes?

Ans. They aim to rationalise labour laws, leading to incremental and compositional changes in employment with limited direct job creation.

Q2. How does the Code on Wages seek to address wage inequality in India?

Ans. It aims to reduce wage inequality by establishing a national floor wage, contingent on proper calibration.

Q3. What are the challenges faced by MSMEs in the implementation of labour codes?

Ans. MSMEs face disproportionate compliance burdens that may offset productivity gains and discourage formalisation.

Q4. Why is enforcement considered the weakest link in India's labour reforms?

Ans. Weak enforcement, especially in the informal sector, renders minimum wages and social security provisions largely ineffective.

Q5. What measures are required to ensure effective implementation of labour codes in India?

Ans. Strengthening enforcement, supporting MSMEs, expanding social security, and leveraging digital compliance systems.

Source: IE

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