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The Delimitation Commission: Redrawing India’s Constituencies

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The Delimitation Commission: Redrawing India’s Constituencies

Practice: 8 MCQs



Sansad Bhavan, the Parliament House in New Delhi, at dawn. Photo by Daderot, Wikimedia Commons, Public domain.

Every ten years India counts its people. Delimitation decides how those people are turned into seats. Exams ask who does it, why courts stay out, how many Commissions there were, and what the freeze means.

- **Goal:** equal population per seat (**Article 81**). Parliament fixes who does it and how (**Article 82**, **170(3)**).

- **Courts: Article 329(a)** bars them from questioning a delimitation law.
- **Commissions: four**, under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.
- **Freeze:** State seat shares stay on the **1971** census until the first census after **2026**.
- **2026:** the 131st Amendment Bill failed, **298** for and **230** against.
- **Exam:** UPSC CSP 2024 Q71 (answer d, four Commissions).

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1. What is delimitation, and who does it?

Delimitation means redrawing constituency boundaries so that each seat has about the same number of people. The Constitution sets the goal. **Article 81(2)** says each State gets seats in proportion to its population. It also says each State is divided so that every constituency has about the same population.

Parliament decides who does the work. **Article 82** covers the next step. After every census, seats and constituencies are readjusted. Parliament fixes by law the authority and the manner. **Article 170(3)** gives State

Assemblies the same rule.

1.1 Who sits on the Commission?

The **Delimitation Bill, 2026** shows the usual design. The Chairperson is a **current or former Supreme Court judge**. The other members are the **Chief Election Commissioner** (or an Election Commissioner the CEC names) and the **State Election Commissioner** of the State concerned.

The Bill also adds **10 associate members** for each State. Five are Lok Sabha MPs and five are MLAs, named by the Speakers. Associate members cannot vote or sign a decision.

Sources:

- Article 81, Constitution of India
- Article 82, Constitution of India
- Article 170, Constitution of India
- PRS, Delimitation Bill 2026 summary

2. Why can courts not question delimitation?

Article 329(a) bars the courts. The validity of **any law on delimitation or on allotment of seats** to constituencies cannot be called in question in any court. This is why a delimitation exercise, once done, is very hard to challenge.

2.1 How does the Commission work in public?

Under the 2026 Bill, the Commission first **publishes its proposal** in the Gazette of India and in each State Gazette. It then **considers objections and suggestions**. It holds one or more **public sittings**. The **final orders** appear in the Gazette of India.

The same Bill says every constituency must be a compact area as far as practicable. Physical features, administrative boundaries, communication and public convenience must be considered. Every Assembly constituency must lie wholly inside one Lok Sabha constituency.

Sources:

- Article 329, Constitution of India
- PRS, Delimitation Bill 2026 summary (section 2)

Under Article 329(a), any court may review a law on delimitation or seat allotment.

Explain it back: why is delimitation so hard to challenge in court?

Article 329(a) bars courts from questioning a law on delimitation or seat allotment. The Commission also works in public, so objections are heard before the final order.

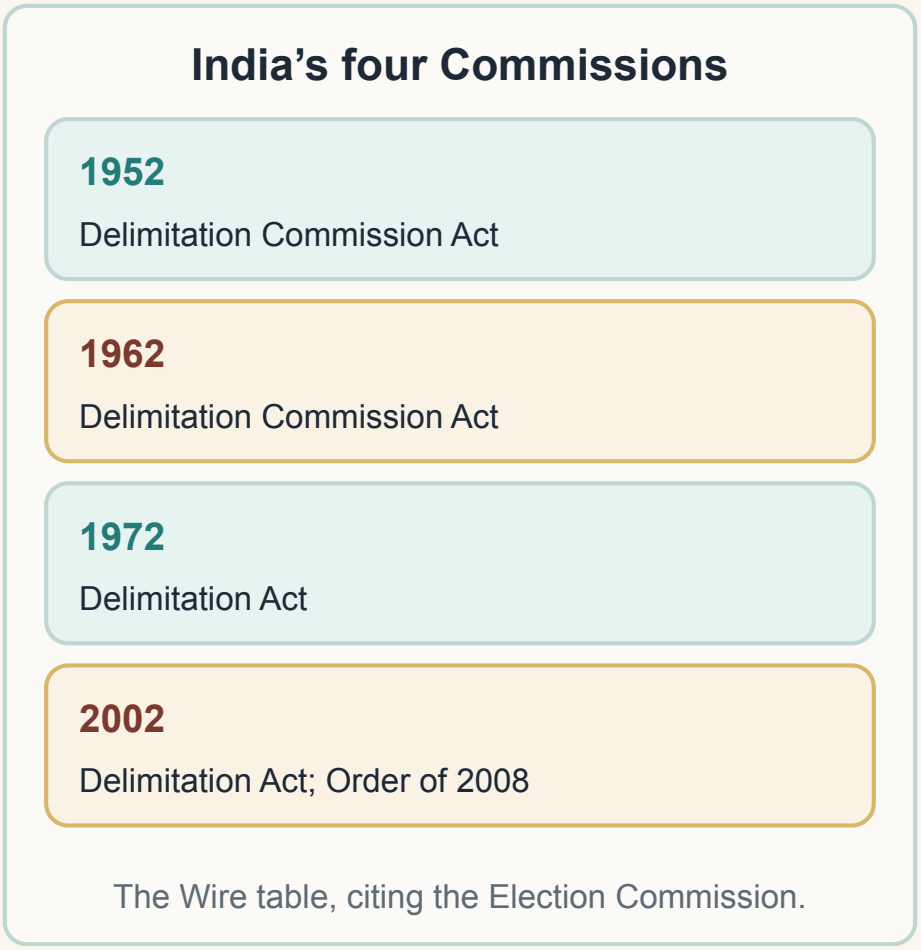
3. How many Delimitation Commissions has India had?

India has had **four** Delimitation Commissions. They worked under four laws: the **Delimitation Commission Act, 1952**, the **Delimitation Commission Act, 1962**, the **Delimitation Act, 1972** and the **Delimitation Act, 2002**.

UPSC Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination 2024, General Studies Paper I, Series A, Q71.
How many Delimitation Commissions have been constituted by the Government of India till December 2023?
(a) One
(b) Two
(c) Three
(d) Four

Read the UPSC question paper (Series A, printed page 31) and the UPSC answer key. The key gives (d), **Four**. The four Commissions match the four laws of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002.

The Wire's table lists final orders under the first three laws between **1953** and **1976**. The fourth Commission's **Order of 2008** used the **2001 census**.



Four laws to remember. Original explanatory diagram.

3.1 What did the 2008 Order do?

The 2002 Commission redrew most State maps with the **2001 census**. The Order took effect in **2008**. It changed boundaries and reserved seats, but the **total number of seats stayed the same**. The Wire's table lists **84 SC** and **47 ST** reserved Lok Sabha seats.

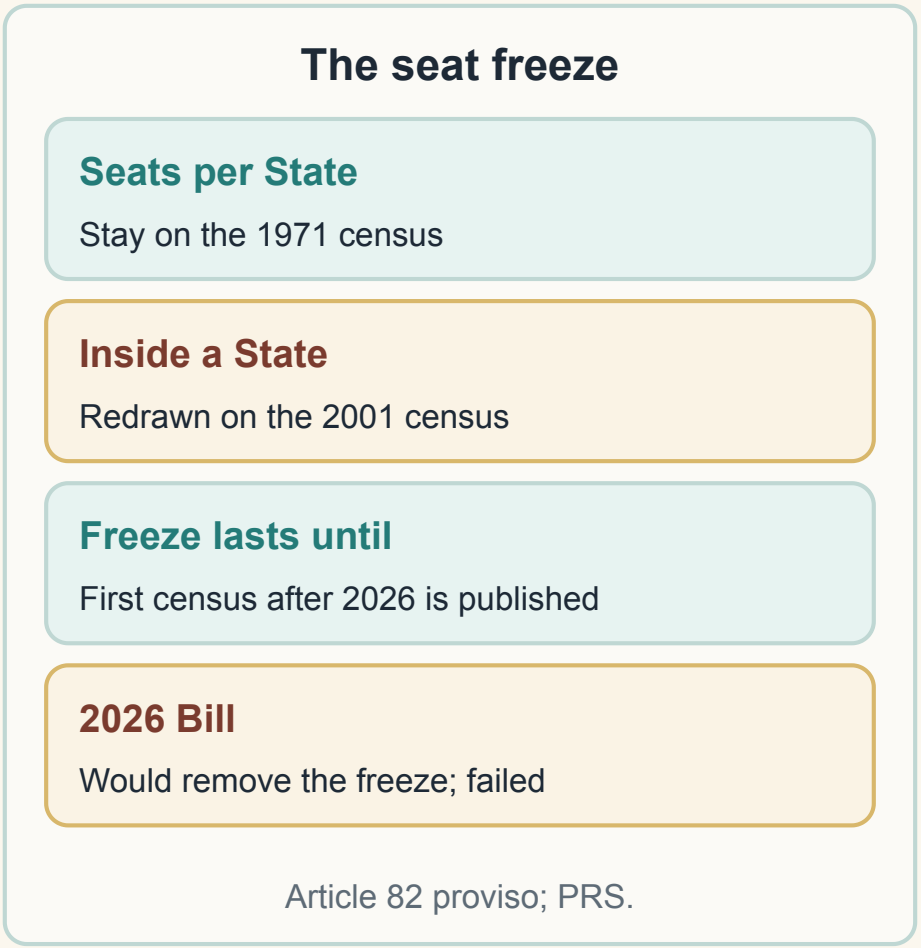
Sources:

- The Wire, India's history with delimitations (table citing the Election Commission)

Four Delimitation Commissions have worked in India.

4. What is the seat freeze, and why was it imposed?

The **proviso to Article 82** is the freeze. Until the figures of the **first census after 2026** are published, the Constitution does not require a fresh allocation. The seats given to States stay on the **1971 census**. The division of each State into constituencies stays on the **2001 census**.



How the freeze works. Original explanatory diagram.

4.1 How was it extended?

PRS explains the history. A **1976** amendment put off readjustment for 25 years. Another amendment in **2001** froze each State's share for a further 25 years, until the first census after 2026. It still allowed seats to be redrawn **inside** each State. The Wire says this compromise has held for nearly five decades, about **50 years**.

4.2 What are the seat limits today?

PRS says Lok Sabha has at most **550** members. Up to **530** come from States and up to **20** from Union Territories. The 550 is our own sum of the two limits.

Sources:

- Article 82, Constitution of India (section 4)
- Article 170, Constitution of India (section 4)
- The Wire, India's history with delimitations (table citing the Election Commission) (section 4)
- PRS, Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill 2026 summary

Until the first census after 2026 is published, each State's Lok Sabha seats stay on the 1971 census.

5. What happened in Jammu and Kashmir in 2022?

A separate Commission was set up for the Union Territory under the **Delimitation Act, 2002**. It was headed by **Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai**, a retired Supreme Court judge. The CEC and the State Election Commissioner sat with her as ex-officio members. It used the **2011 census**. It froze administrative units as they stood on **15 June 2020**.

The final order gave **90 Assembly seats**: **43 in Jammu** and **47 in Kashmir**. It reserved **9 seats for Scheduled Tribes** for the first time, and **7 for Scheduled Castes**.

The UT has **five Lok Sabha seats**. The Commission joined the Anantnag area of the Valley with Rajouri and Poonch of Jammu into one seat. Each Lok Sabha seat now has **18 Assembly seats**.

Sources:

- PIB, Delimitation Commission final order for J&K, 5 May 2022

The 2022 Jammu and Kashmir Commission used the 2001 census.

6. What happened in April 2026?

On **16 April 2026**, the Government introduced the **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill**, the **Delimitation Bill** and a Union Territories Laws Bill. The amendment would remove the freeze. It would raise the Lok Sabha ceiling to **850**: up to **815** from States and **35** from Union Territories.

The Bill would also let Parliament choose the census by law. The Delimitation Bill said the **latest published census** must be used. PRS notes that this means the **2011 census**.

6.1 What was the vote?

On **17 April 2026**, Lok Sabha **rejected** the amendment. **298** members voted for it and **230** against, with **528** present and voting. A Constitution amendment needs **two-thirds** of members present and voting, so it failed. The Government then withdrew the Delimitation Bill and the UT Laws Bill.

Article 368 sets two tests. The Bill must pass by a **majority of the total membership** of the House. It must also pass by **two-thirds** of the members present and voting. By our own arithmetic, two-thirds of 528 is **352**.

6.2 What about women's reservation?

The **106th Amendment (2023)** gives women one-third of seats in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. It starts only after a delimitation based on the first census after the Act. The 2026 Bill would have removed that census condition.

Sources:

- PRS, Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill 2026 summary (section 6)
- PRS, Delimitation Bill 2026 summary (section 6)
- LiveLaw, Lok Sabha rejects Constitution (131st) Amendment Bill 2026
- Article 368, Constitution of India

In April 2026, Lok Sabha passed the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill.

Think it through: 298 members voted for the Bill. Why did it still fail?

A Constitution amendment needs two-thirds of the members present and voting. With 528 voting, 298 was well short of that.

7. What should an aspirant remember?

- **Article 81** sets the goal of equal population per seat.
- **Article 82** and **Article 170(3)** let Parliament fix the authority and the manner.
- **Article 329(a)** bars courts from questioning delimitation laws.
- India has had **four** Commissions: 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002 Acts.
- Seat shares are frozen on the **1971 census** until the first census after **2026**.
- J&K 2022: **90 seats**, 43 Jammu and 47 Kashmir, **9 ST** seats.
- April 2026: the **131st Amendment Bill failed**, 298 for and 230 against.

Sources:

- Article 81, Constitution of India (section 7)
- Article 82, Constitution of India (section 7)

Your understanding checks

Your 5 quick checks Answered 0 of 5 · Correct 0

This score resets when the page reloads.

Practice: 8 MCQs

Practice MCQs

1. With reference to the Delimitation Commission, its orders, once notified, are?

A. Automatically void after five years

B. Subject to challenge in any Court of law

C. Not open to challenge in any Court of law

D. Subject to modification by the Lok Sabha when the orders are laid before it

See answer ↓

2. When the orders of the Delimitation Commission are laid before the Lok Sabha or a State Legislative Assembly, that House has the power to?

A. Modify the orders freely by a simple majority

B. Refer the orders back to the Commission for revision

C. Neither modify nor reject the orders, only take note of them

D. Reject the orders entirely

See answer ↓

3. Which Article of the Constitution provides the basis for Parliament to set up a Delimitation Commission?

A. Article 81

B. Article 82

C. Article 83

D. Article 84

See answer ↓

4. How many times has India constituted a Delimitation Commission since independence?

A. Four

B. Two

C. Six

D. Three

See answer ↓

5. A Delimitation Commission is typically chaired by which of the following?

A. The Cabinet Secretary

B. The Prime Minister

C. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha

D. A retired Supreme Court judge

See answer ↓

6. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976) froze Lok Sabha and Assembly seat numbers, based on which census?

A. 1961 census

B. 1981 census

C. 1971 census

D. 1991 census

See answer ↓

7. The 84th Constitutional Amendment extended the seat freeze until the first census conducted after which year?

A. 2001

B. 2021

C. 2026

D. 2011

See answer ↓

8. In April 2026, Parliament debated a package of bills to allow delimitation ahead of schedule and expand the Lok Sabha to 850 seats. What happened to the core Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026?

A. It was withdrawn before a vote

B. It passed with a simple majority

C. It was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee

D. It failed to secure the required two-thirds majority, with 298 votes in favour and 230 against

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.**
   The correct answer is **not open to challenge in any court**. Article 329(a) says the validity of any law on delimitation or on allotment of seats cannot be called in question in any court.
   Being open to challenge would go against Article 329(a). Nothing in Article 329 or in the Delimitation Bill 2026 says an order lapses after five years. The Lok Sabha has no step in the process to modify an order.
   Memory hook: Article 329(a) is the courts' stop sign for delimitation.
   ↑ Q1

2. **C.**
   The correct answer is **neither modify nor reject the orders, only take note of them**. In the process PRS describes, the Commission publishes its proposal, hears objections in public sittings and issues final orders in the Gazette of India. The summary gives the House no step to change them.
   Modifying freely, rejecting, or sending the order back to the Commission would all be a step the process does not have.
   Memory hook: The Commission decides; the House only notes.
   ↑ Q2

3. **B.**
   The correct answer is **Article 82**. Article 82 says that after each census, Parliament fixes by law the authority and the manner for readjusting seats and constituencies.
   Article 81 sets the goal of equal population per seat. Article 83 covers the duration of Houses of Parliament. Article 84 covers the qualifications for membership of Parliament.
   Memory hook: 81 sets the goal; 82 sets the machinery.
   ↑ Q3

4. **A.**
   The correct answer is **Four**. India has had four Delimitation Commissions. They worked under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002. UPSC asked this in CSP 2024 and its key gives Four.
   Two, Three or Six do not match the four laws in The Wire's table, which cites the Election Commission.
   Memory hook: Four Acts, four Commissions: 52, 62, 72, 2002.
   ↑ Q4
5. **D.**
   The correct answer is **a retired Supreme Court judge**. A Delimitation Commission is headed by a current or former Supreme Court judge. The 2026 Bill says so, and Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, a retired judge, headed the 2022 Jammu and Kashmir Commission.
   The Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Cabinet Secretary are not named as Chairperson in either source. The Election Commissioners sit as members.
   Memory hook: A judge draws the lines; politicians do not.
   ↑ Q5
6. **C.**
   The correct answer is **1971 census**. The seat freeze of 1976 kept each State's Lok Sabha seats on the 1971 census. Article 82 still names the 1971 census today.
   The 1961 census was used for the Second Commission's work in the 1960s, but the 1976 freeze moved the seat allocation to 1971. The 1981 and 1991 censuses were not used for delimitation, because the freeze was in force.
   Memory hook: 1976 freeze, 1971 count.
   ↑ Q6
7. **C.**
   The correct answer is **2026**. The freeze lasts until the figures of the first census after 2026 are published. The 84th Amendment of 2001 set this date, as The Wire notes.
   2001, 2011 and 2021 are earlier years. They are census years, but the proviso names the first census after 2026.
   Memory hook: Freeze until 2026, then the next census decides.
   ↑ Q7

8. **D.**

   The correct answer is **it failed to secure two-thirds, with 298 votes for and 230 against**. On 17 April 2026 Lok Sabha rejected the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill. A Constitution amendment needs two-thirds of the members present and voting, and 298 of 528 was short of that.

   It did not pass by a simple majority, because an amendment needs more. It was voted on, not withdrawn; the Delimitation Bill and the UT Laws Bill were withdrawn. The LiveLaw report does not say it went to a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

   Memory hook: 298 for, 230 against, 528 voting: not two-thirds.

   ↑ Q8

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