

# The Delimitation Dilemma – Representation vs. Federalism

**Syllabus Relevance:** *Federalism: Constitutional Provisions; Changing Nature of Centre-State Relations; Challenges to Nation Building.* **Context:** In January-February 2026, the legislative assemblies of Tamil Nadu and Kerala passed resolutions on Delimitation. This came immediately after the **16th Finance Commission (FC)** report was tabled in the Budget Session. **Key Theme:** *The Shift from Fiscal Complaint to Political Anxiety.* **Keywords:** *Article 81 & 82, 16th Finance Commission, Contribution to GDP Criterion, Symmetric Federalism, The '84th Amendment' Freeze.*

## 1. The Fiscal Update (Feb 2026): A Partial Truce

The "North-South Divide" narrative has evolved significantly after the Union Budget 2026.

- **The Correction:** The 16th FC acknowledged the Southern grievance of "Fiscal Punishment." For the first time, it introduced a **10% Weightage for 'Contribution to GDP'** in the horizontal devolution formula.
- **The Impact:** This move increased the tax share of states like **Karnataka** (from 3.64% to 4.13%) and **Tamil Nadu** (marginal hike).
- **Political Shift:** Consequently, the "Tax Injustice" argument (the old "29 paise" rhetoric) has lost some sting. The South has won the *Fiscal Argument*. Now, the battle has shifted entirely to the *Political Argument* (Delimitation).

## 2. The Core Conflict: Democracy vs. Federalism

The looming Delimitation (based on the first Census after 2026) remains the existential threat.

- **The Democratic Principle (Article 81):** "One Person, One Vote." If UP's population has exploded while Kerala's has stabilized, democratic logic dictates UP *must* get more MPs.
- **The Federal Principle:** States are partners. A partner should not be penalized politically for achieving National Goals (Population Control).
- **The 2026 Reality:** Projections show that if the 1971 freeze is lifted, the South (TN, Kerala, AP, Telangana, Karnataka) could collectively lose **24 Lok Sabha seats**, while the Hindi Heartland could gain **32 seats**.

## 3. The 'Sub-National' Reaction

With the fiscal issue partially addressed by the 16th FC, Southern leaders are now laser-focused on **Political Representation**.

- **The Fear:** They argue that while they have secured their *Money* (via the new FC formula), they are about to lose their *Voice*.
- **The "Vassal State" Fear:** The argument is that a Parliament dominated by Northern MPs (due to higher population) could unilaterally alter subjects in the **Concurrent List** (like Education or Health), imposing policies that the South rejects.

## 4. Theoretical Framework: Symmetric vs. Asymmetric Federalism

- **Symmetric Federalism:** Treating all states strictly by population (Lok Sabha model).
- **Asymmetric Federalism:** Protecting minority regions from the majority.

- **The 'Rajya Sabha' Fix:** Political scientists (like Yogendra Yadav) argue that if Lok Sabha becomes proportional to population, the **Rajya Sabha** must be reformed to follow the **US Senate Model** (Equal Representation for all States, regardless of size) to act as a "Federal Veto."

## 5. Conclusion: The 'Grand Bargain'

The 16th FC has shown that "Compromise" is possible.

- **The Way Forward:** Just as the 16th FC tweaked the *Fiscal Formula* to balance efficiency and equity, the Delimitation Commission must tweak the *Political Formula*.
- **Proposal:** The most discussed solution in Jan-Feb 2026 is "**freezing the ratio**" of seats for states at 1971 levels, but increasing the *total* number of seats in the House. This ensures the South doesn't lose MPs, even if the North gains more.