# 1. Why Lok Sabha is still 543?

**Prelims: Indian Polity**

**Mains: GS-II- Parliament and State Legislatures – Structure, Functioning, conduct of Business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.**

## Why in News?

▸ Last week, former Union Minister and Congress leader Jitin Prasada said the number of Lok Sabha seats should be rationalised on the basis of population. The composition of the Lower House has remained more or less the same for four decades.

## Strength of Lok Sabha:

▸ Article 81 of the Constitution defines the composition of the House of the People or Lok Sabha.

▸ It states that the House shall not consist of more than 550 elected members of whom not more than 20 will represent Union Territories.

▸ Under Article 331, the President can nominate up to two Anglo- Indians if he/she feels the community is inadequately represented in the House.

▸ At present, the strength of the Lok Sabha is 543, of which 530 have been allocated to the states and the rest to the Union Territories.

▸ Article 81 also mandates that the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a state would be such that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is, as far as possible, the same for all states.

▸ This is to ensure that every state is equally represented. However, this logic does not apply to small states whose population is not more than 60 lakh.

▸ So, at least one seat is allocated to every state even if it means that its population-to-seat-ratio is not enough to qualify it for that seat.

▸ As per Clause 3 of Article 81, population, for the purpose of allocation of seats, means "population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published". In other words, the last published Census.

▸ But, by an amendment to this Clause in 2003, the population now means population as per the 1971 Census, until the first Census taken after 2026.

## When was the strength of Lok Sabha Changed?

▸ The strength of the Lok Sabha hasn't always been 543 seats. Originally, Article 81 provided that the Lok Sabha shall not have more than 500 members.

▸ The first House constituted in 1952 had 497. Since the Constitution provides for population as the basis of determining allocation of seats, the lower House's composition (total seats as well as readjustment of seats allocated to different states) has also changed with each Census up to 1971.

▸ A temporary freeze was imposed in 1976 on 'Delimitation' until 2001. Delimitation is the process of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and state Assembly seats to represent changes in the population. However, the composition of the House did not change only with delimitation exercises in 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002.

▸ There were other circumstances as well. For instance, the first change in the composition of Lok Sabha happened in 1953 after the reorganisation of the state of Madras.

▸ With a new state of Andhra Pradesh carved out, 28 of Madras's 75 seats went to Andhra Pradesh. The total strength of the House (497) did not change.

▸ The first major change took place after the overall reorganisation of states in 1956, which divided the country into 14 states and six Union Territories.

▸ This meant subsequent changes in the boundaries of existing states and hence, a change in the allocation of seats to the states and Union Territories. So with reorganisation, the government also amended the Constitution by which the maximum number of seats allocated to the states remained 500, but an additional 20 seats (also maximum limit) were added to represent the six Union Territories. So the second Lok Sabha elected in 1957 had 503 members. Further down the years, the lower House's composition also changed when the state of Haryana was carved out of Punjab in 1966 and when Goa and Daman and Diu were liberated in 1961 and merged with the Indian Union subsequently.

## When it was Frozen, and why?

▸ As per Article 81, the composition of the Lok Sabha should represent changes in population. But it has remained more or less the same since the delimitation carried out based on the 1971 Census.

▸ The population-to-seat ratio, as mandated under Article 81, should be the same for all states.

▸ Although unintended, this implied that states that took little interest in population control could end up with a greater number of seats in Parliament.

▸ The southern states that promoted family planning faced the possibility of having their seats reduced. To allay these fears, the Constitution was amended during Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule in 1976 to suspend delimitation until 2001.

- Despite the embargo, there have been a few occasions which have called for readjustment in the number of Parliament and Assembly seats allocated to a state. -These include statehood attained by Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in 1986, the creation of a Legislative Assembly for the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and creation of new states such as Uttarakhand.

- Although the freeze on the number of seats in Lok Sabha and Assemblies should have been lifted after the Census of 2001, another amendment postponed this until 2026.

- This was justified on the ground that a uniform population growth rate would be achieved throughout the country by 2026.

- So, the last delimitation exercise – started in July 2002 and finished on May 31, 2008 – was conducted on the basis of the 2001 Census and only readjusted boundaries of existing Lok Sabha and Assembly seats and reworked the number of seats reserved for SCs and STs.

- With the total seats remaining the same since the 1970s, it is felt that states in north India, whose population has increased faster than the rest of the country, are now underrepresented in the Parliament.

- It is frequently argued that had the original provision of Article 81 been implemented today, then states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh would have gained seats and those in the south would have lost some.