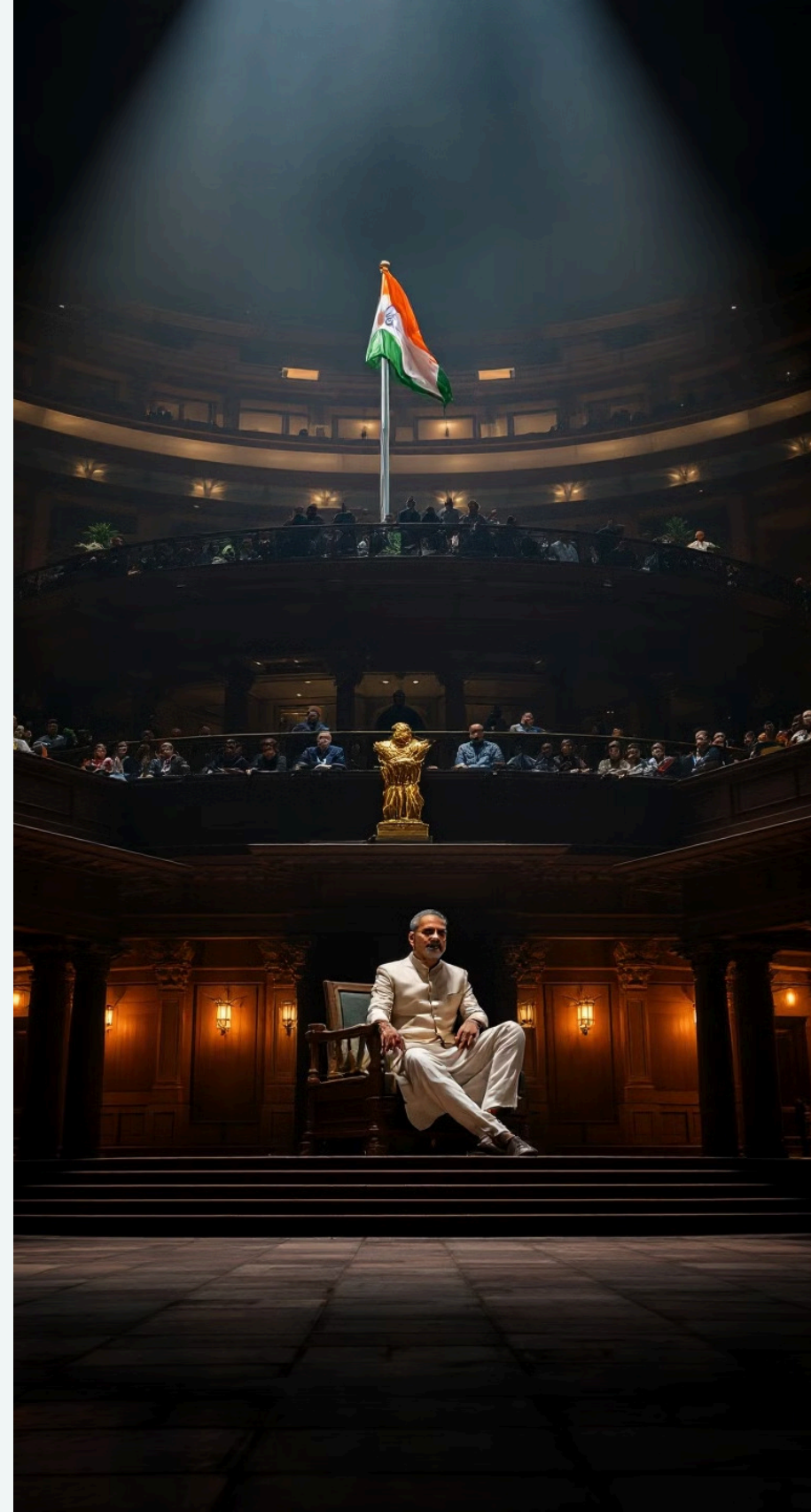


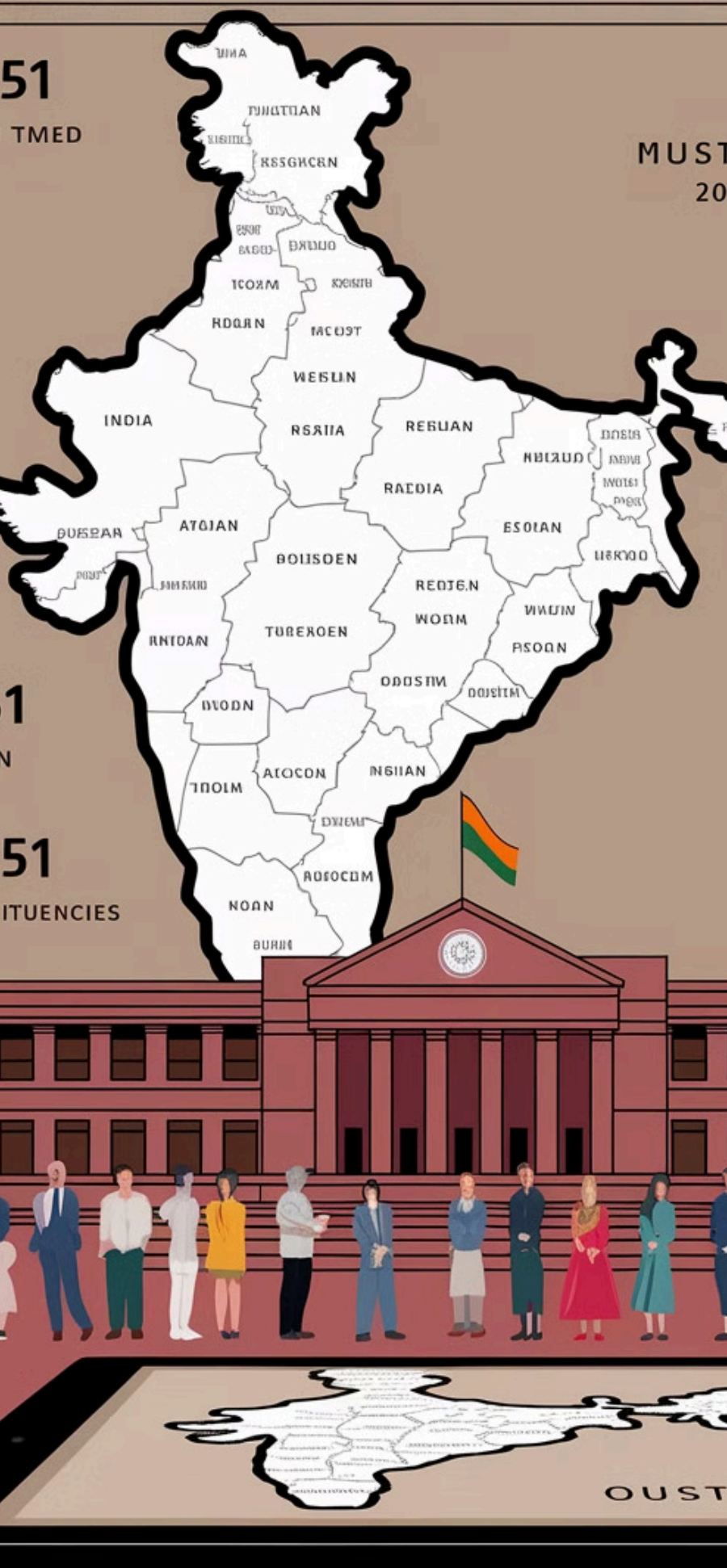
Thinking Beyond Population Count: A New Approach to Political Representation

The discourse on delimitation and financial devolution has caused an uproar in Parliament and some State Assemblies, posing a threat to the federal character of our nation. With the constitutional freeze on parliamentary seats expiring soon, there's growing anxiety about political representation between peninsular States and those in the north.

The development divide in India has created a demographic divide that needs recognition in delimitation and financial devolution calculations. This presentation explores why we must move beyond population size as the sole criterion for political representation and examines alternative approaches to maintain equitable representation across India's diverse states.



Historical Context of Delimitation in India



1

1951

7.3 lakh population per Lok Sabha seat

2

1951-1971

Seats increased in response to population growth

3

1971

Reached 543 seats with 10.1 lakh population per seat

4

1971-2026

Constitutional freeze on number of seats

The history of delimitation in India shows a pattern of increasing parliamentary seats to accommodate population growth. From 1951 to 1971, the population representation per Lok Sabha seat rose from 7.3 lakh to 10.1 lakh, with the total reaching the current 543 seats. This number has been frozen since 1971, with the freeze extending until 2026.

The Projected Impact of Population-Based Delimitation

753

Projected Seats

Total Lok Sabha seats if adjusted for 2026 population

20 lakh

Population Per Seat

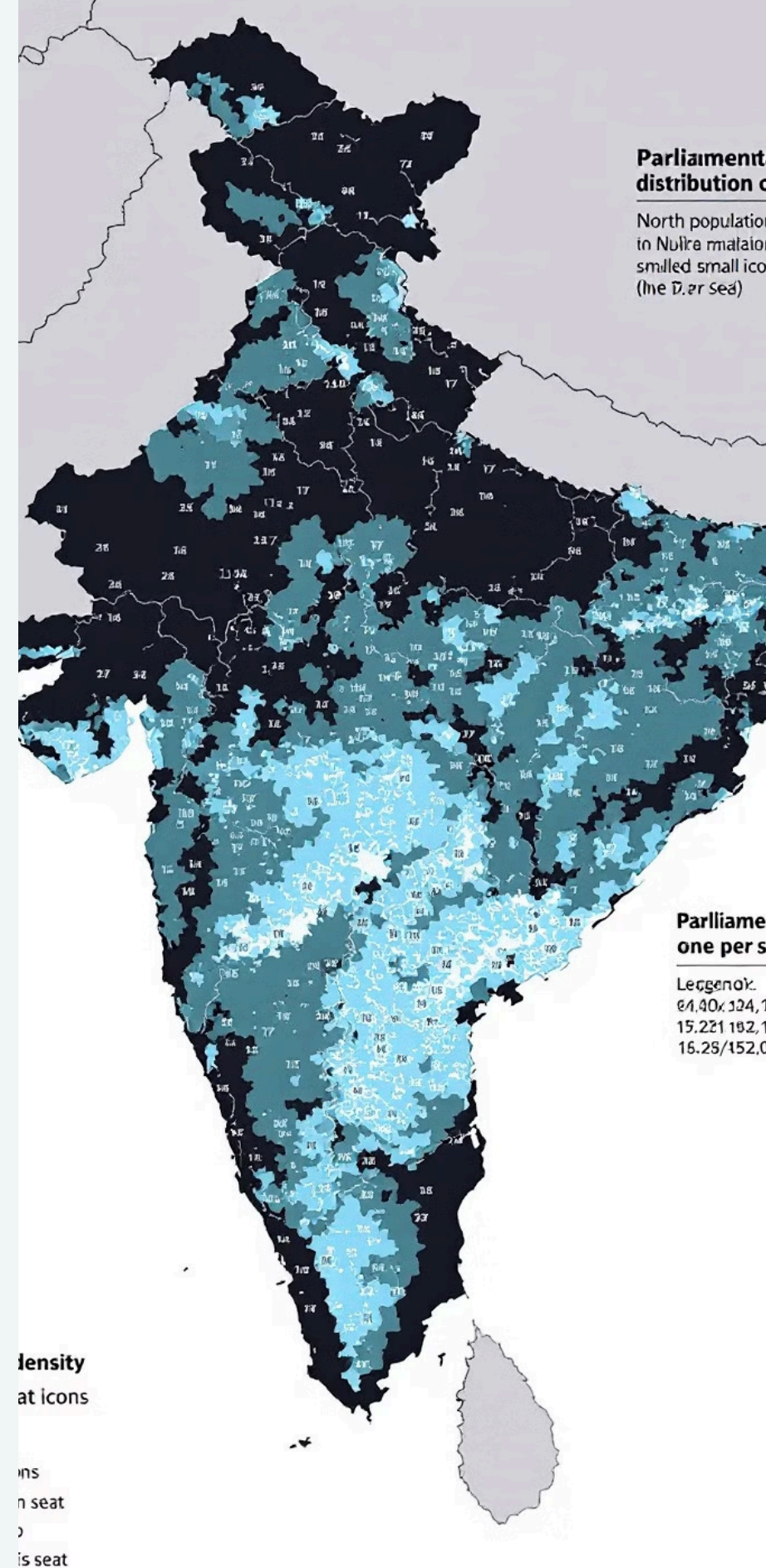
Projected representation ratio by 2026

543

Current Seats

Total seats frozen since 1971

Following historical trends of increasing seats with population, the projected number of Lok Sabha seats would reach 753 by 2026, with approximately 20 lakh people per seat. This creates a concerning imbalance: peninsular states with better demographic progress may lose representation compared to northern states with higher populations but poorer demographic performance.



UPSC 2026-2027

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The Finance Commission's Balancing Act



15th Finance Commission Challenge

Confronted anxiety about representation when population weight was updated from 1971 to 2011 data



Demographic Performance Addition

Suggested weightage to demographic performance alongside population count



Weight Adjustment

Increased population component weight from 0.15 to 0.27



Balancing Mechanism

Created equilibrium between states with high population/poor demographics and those with lower population/better demographics

The 15th Finance Commission pioneered a solution by introducing demographic performance alongside raw population counts. By increasing the population component weight from 0.15 to 0.27 and considering demographic progress, they created a more balanced approach to resource allocation across states.



Beyond Population Size: Alternative Approaches

Population Density

Using density instead of absolute numbers could better represent both urban centers and less populated regions like the Northeast, which already has proportionally more seats.

Proportionate Allocation

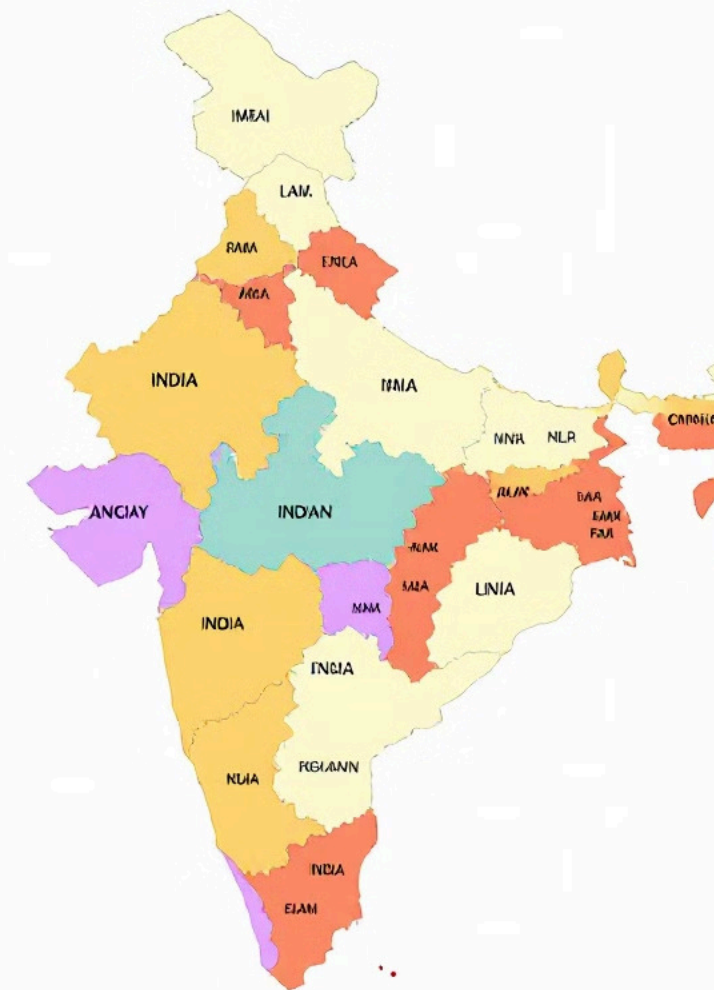
Maintaining status quo may require proportionate increases in seat allocation once an overall target and population-per-seat norm is established.

Demographic Performance

Rewarding states that have achieved better demographic indicators through effective policies and governance.

The time has come to move beyond population size as the sole criterion for political representation. Several alternative approaches could provide more equitable representation. Population density offers a middle path that acknowledges both highly populated urban centers and less densely populated regions that deserve representation.

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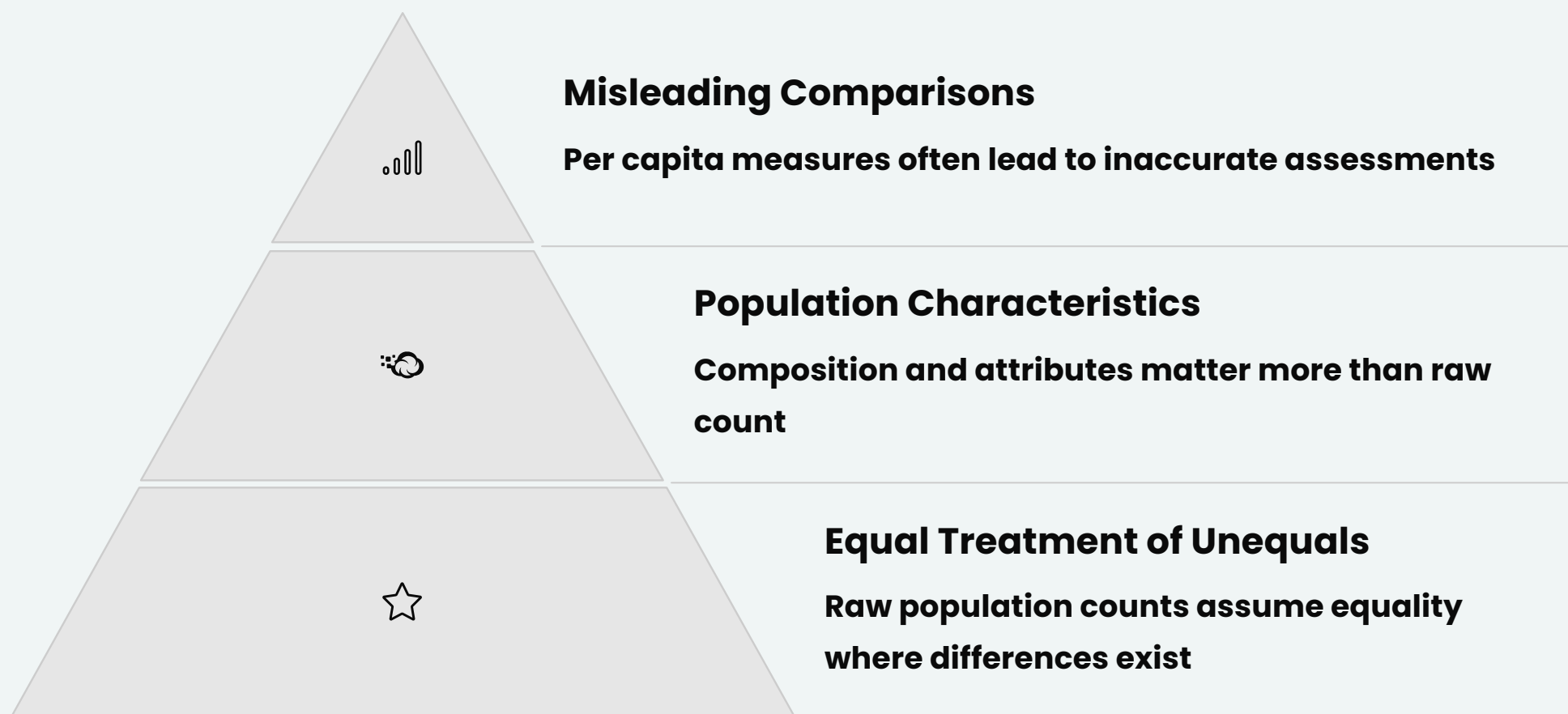
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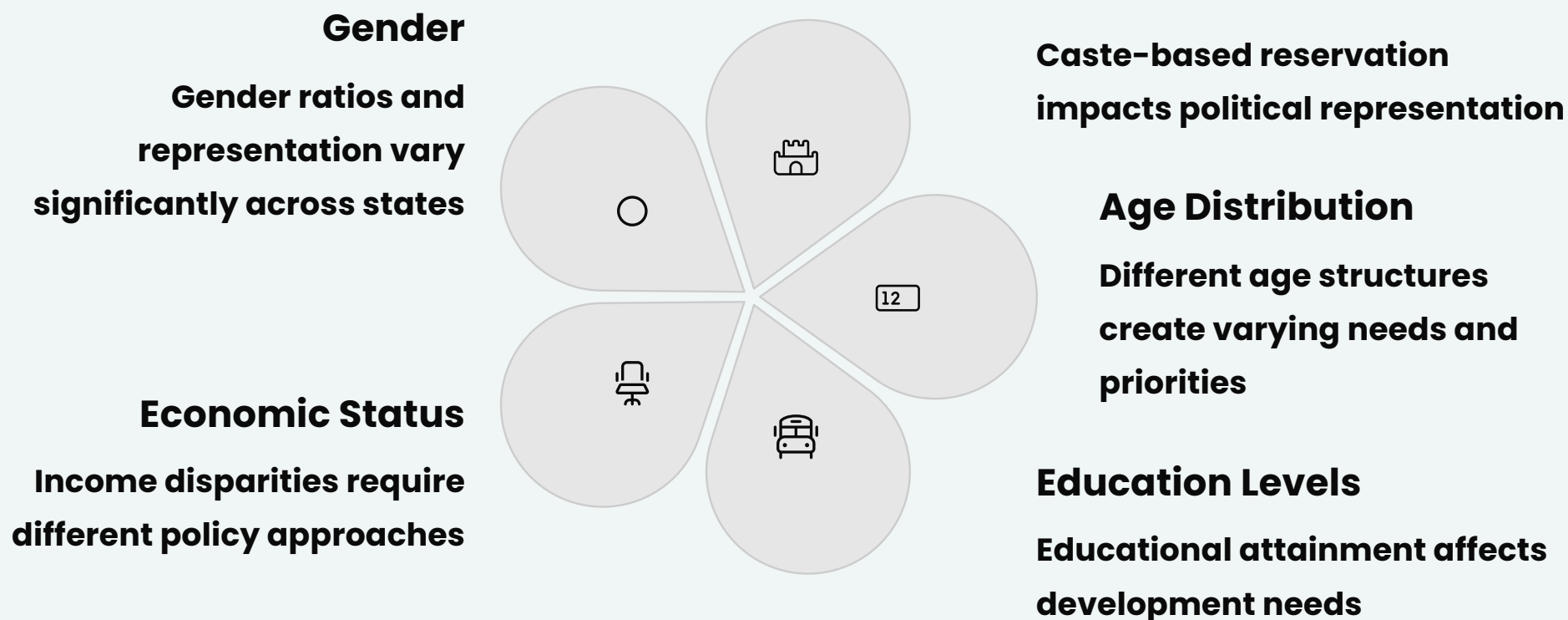
The Per Capita Hangover



A significant issue in population-based calculations is what can be called the "per capita hangover" - the tendency to use raw population counts as denominators without considering population characteristics. This approach treats unequal populations as equal, leading to misleading comparisons and inappropriate standardization.

This problem extends beyond delimitation into the broader SDG environment, where indicators are generated indiscriminately using per capita measures that fail to account for population composition differences.

The Complexity of Population Characteristics



Population is far more than a mere head count. The proposed delimitation exercise must consider the complexity of gender and caste-based reservation within seat allocation. Population characteristics and composition remain paramount in assessing needs, entitlements, rights, and privileges.

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The Genuine Anxiety About Political Representation

Southern States' Concerns

Better demographic performance may lead to reduced representation

Progress in controlling population growth could be penalized

Potential loss of political influence in national decision-making

Northern States' Position

Higher population growth leads to increased representation needs

Development challenges require stronger voice in Parliament

Demographic transition is still in progress

Federal Balance at Stake

Imbalanced representation threatens cooperative federalism

Resource allocation may become more contentious

National unity requires equitable political voice

The anxiety about political representation is genuine and significant. It's humorous to hear arguments that southern states won't lose seats while northern states gain them. The reality is more complex, with multiple concerns requiring attention in the delimitation exercise.

Multiple Concerns in the Delimitation Exercise



Representation Standard

Should every seat represent an average of 20 lakh population, or should there be an upper limit to ensure expansion of the Lok Sabha with rising population?



Regional Distribution

How can seats be distributed regionally without distorting representation to an unacceptable level?



Population Characteristics

How can the composition and characteristics of population be factored into representation decisions?



Balancing Mechanism

What middle path can accommodate both population size and demographic performance in a fair manner?

The delimitation exercise faces multiple complex challenges that require thoughtful consideration. Finding a balance that respects both population size and demographic performance while maintaining equitable representation across India's diverse states will be crucial for preserving the federal character of our nation.

A Demographic Outlook: The Path Forward



Recognition of Attributes

Acknowledge all potential characteristics of population



Differential Weighting

Apply appropriate weights to different factors



Balanced Approach

Implement a solution that respects diversity and equity

A demographic reading of population involves recognizing all potential characteristics and attributes to weigh them appropriately when making comparative constructs involving population count. Population is beyond a mere head count on issues of representation and allocation, though this is often overlooked in common practice.

Therefore, a demographic outlook remains the key to resolving the prevailing debates and controversies. By thinking beyond population count as a singular yardstick, India can develop a more nuanced, fair approach to political representation that preserves its federal character and respects the progress and needs of all states.



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