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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

e-Courts Phase III Accelerates India's Transition Towards Digital, Paperless and Citizen-Centric Justice Delivery

Recent Developments:

- **e-Courts Phase III (2023–2027)** continues to transform India's judicial system through **digitisation, e-filing, virtual hearings, interoperable platforms, Artificial Intelligence (AI), analytics and Optical Character Recognition (OCR)**; the Union Cabinet approved Phase III on **13 September 2023** with a financial outlay of **₹7,210 crore**.
- As of **July 2026**, more than **1.21 crore cases** had been filed electronically, while e-payments had processed approximately **₹1,594 crore in court fees and ₹97 crore in fines**.
- **CIS 4.0** has been implemented across all courts, integrating judicial information with the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), e-Filing, Virtual Courts and Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)**.
- More than **734 crore pages of court records**, including legacy records, had been digitised, while courts had conducted more than **4.15 crore video-conferencing hearings**.
- **2,515 e-Sewa Kendras** were functional across High Courts and District Courts as of the July 2026 progress update; a separate official update reported **2,584 functional e-Sewa Kendras across 25 High Courts as of 30 June 2026**, reflecting continuing expansion.
- The **Union Budget 2026** allocated **₹1,200 crore** to e-Courts Phase III, in addition to **₹810 crore** for judicial infrastructure under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for District and Subordinate Courts.

Understanding the e-Courts Mission Mode Project:

Meaning and Institutional Framework:

- The **e-Courts Mission Mode Project** is a technology-driven judicial reform initiative aimed at strengthening **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)** in India's judiciary and improving the accessibility, efficiency, transparency and affordability of justice.
- The project has been implemented since **2007** under the **National e-Governance Plan**, with the **Department of Justice** coordinating with the **e-Committee of the Supreme Court** and implementing the project through the respective High Courts.
- The project follows a **decentralised implementation model**, because High Courts play the central role in deploying digital judicial infrastructure across their respective jurisdictions.

Core Objectives:

- **Digitisation:** Convert paper-based judicial records and processes into secure digital formats.
- **Access to justice:** Enable citizens, lawyers, judges, witnesses and other stakeholders to access judicial services remotely.
- **Transparency:** Make case information, orders, judgments and pendency data more accessible through platforms such as **NJDG**.
- **Efficiency:** Reduce procedural delays associated with physical filing, manual record management, physical service of summons and unnecessary court visits.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure that citizens with limited digital literacy or inadequate digital infrastructure can access online judicial services through **e-Sewa Kendras**.

Evolution of the e-Courts Project:

Phase I — Basic Computerisation (2011–2015):

- Phase I concentrated on **basic computerisation and internal connectivity**; **14,249 courts** were computerised and **LAN connectivity** was installed in **13,683 courts**.
- The phase established the technological foundation required for subsequent digital judicial services.

Phase II — Citizen-Centric Digital Services (2015–2023):

- Phase II focused on using ICT to facilitate **citizen-oriented judicial services**, including hardware modernisation, WAN connectivity, stakeholder training and establishment of e-Sewa Kendras.
- Major digital platforms such as **Case Information System (CIS)**, **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**, **e-Filing** and **e-Payments** were developed during this phase.

Phase III — Digital, Paperless and Intelligent Courts (2023–2027):

- Phase III has an approved financial outlay of **₹7,210 crore** and seeks to transform courts into **digital and paperless institutions** through large-scale digitisation and universalisation of digital services.
- Its major focus areas include **legacy-record digitisation**, **e-Filing**, **e-Payments**, **virtual hearings**, **paperless courts**, **interoperability**, **AI**, **analytics**, **OCR**, **secure digital storage** and **citizen-centric services**.

Major Digital Components and Their Significance:

National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):

- NJDG is a public-facing judicial data platform that enables access to information relating to **cases, orders, judgments and pendency**, thereby improving transparency and facilitating evidence-based judicial administration.
- As of July 2026, NJDG provided access to information concerning more than **32.46 crore cases** and over **39.79 crore orders and judgments**.
- NJDG can support identification of **pendency patterns**, **case categories**, **procedural bottlenecks** and **workload distribution**, making it relevant to judicial planning and performance monitoring.

e-Filing and e-Payments:

- **e-Filing** allows litigants and advocates to submit judicial documents electronically, reducing dependence on physical filing counters, paper records and repeated court visits.
- **e-Payments** enable online payment of court fees and fines, improving convenience, reducing transaction costs and strengthening financial transparency.
- More than **1.21 crore cases** had been filed through the e-Filing platform by July 2026, demonstrating substantial adoption of digital filing.

Video Conferencing and Virtual Courts:

- **Video Conferencing** enables remote participation of judges, lawyers, witnesses, undertrials and other stakeholders, thereby reducing travel requirements and improving access to judicial proceedings.
- More than **4.15 crore video-conferencing hearings** had been conducted by July 2026.
- **Virtual Courts** enable online adjudication of selected categories of cases, particularly traffic challans, thereby reducing the physical burden on conventional courts.

- **31 Virtual Courts** were functional under the July 2026 progress update.

e-Sewa Kendras:

- **e-Sewa Kendras** function as citizen assistance centres within court complexes and bridge the **digital divide** by helping citizens access digital judicial services.
- They assist with **e-Filing, e-Payments, case-status tracking, certified copies, orders and judgments, video-conferencing access and other digital court services.**
- Their importance extends beyond technology because they provide an institutional mechanism for ensuring that digitalisation does not exclude citizens lacking digital literacy or adequate infrastructure.

Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS):

- **ICJS** seeks interoperability among different pillars of the criminal justice system, enabling digital exchange of information among institutions such as **police, courts, prosecution, prisons and forensic agencies.**
- Integration of **CCTNS-generated FIRs and chargesheets with CIS 4.0** reduces duplication, improves information flow and strengthens end-to-end digital criminal justice administration.

NSTEP and e-Summons:

- **National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP)** enables technology-assisted tracking and management of judicial processes such as summons and notices, improving traceability and reducing delays in service.
- The **e-Summons system** facilitates electronic delivery of summons through email and represents a shift from conventional paper-based processes towards faster digital communication.

Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies:

- Phase III incorporates **Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, OCR, analytics and other emerging technologies** to improve judicial research, document processing, transcription, translation and case management.
- **LegRAA (Legal Research Analysis Assistant)** has been developed to assist judges with **legal research and document analysis.**
- The Government has earmarked **₹53.57 crore** within the Phase III technological advancement component for AI, Machine Learning and related emerging technologies in High Courts up to 2027.
- The Supreme Court and **IIT Madras** have collaborated on AI-enabled technologies covering **transcription, translation, summarisation, process automation, legal-domain language models and capacity building.**

Digital Preservation and Paperless Courts:

- Phase III treats **digitisation of legacy judicial records** as a central requirement because historical paper records create problems of storage, retrieval, preservation and physical accessibility.
- The Department of Justice has reported that Phase III envisages digitisation of approximately **3,100 crore documents**, while a substantial budgetary allocation has been made specifically for digitisation and preservation of court records.
- The **Judicial Digital Trustworthy Repository** is being developed to facilitate secure and permanent digital preservation of judicial records.

Constitutional and Governance Significance:

Access to Justice:

- Judicial digitalisation strengthens the constitutional objective of **access to justice**, particularly by reducing geographical, financial and procedural barriers faced by litigants.
- It complements the principle underlying **Article 39A**, which directs the State to promote equal justice and provide free legal aid so that opportunities for securing justice are not denied because of economic or other disabilities.

Transparency and Accountability:

- Platforms such as **NJDG** increase the public availability of judicial information and enable data-driven assessment of pendency and disposal patterns.
- Greater transparency can strengthen institutional accountability while preserving the necessary safeguards for **privacy, confidentiality and judicial independence**.

Cooperative Institutional Architecture:

- e-Courts demonstrates **institutional cooperation between the executive and judiciary**, with the Department of Justice coordinating implementation and the Supreme Court's e-Committee providing technological and judicial guidance.
- The decentralised model through High Courts recognises India's **federal and multi-level judicial structure**.

Major Benefits:

- **Reduced transaction costs:** Digital filing, payments and remote hearings reduce travel, paperwork and repeated physical visits.
- **Improved transparency:** NJDG provides accessible information regarding cases, orders, judgments and pendency.
- **Faster information exchange:** CIS, ICJS and other interoperable platforms facilitate digital movement of judicial information.
- **Better record management:** Digitisation reduces dependence on physical storage and improves retrieval and preservation.
- **Greater inclusion:** e-Sewa Kendras help bridge the digital divide and enable citizens with limited technological capacity to use digital judicial services.
- **Administrative efficiency:** Digital dashboards, analytics and case-management tools can assist judges and court administrators in monitoring judicial workloads.

Key Challenges:

Digital Divide and Accessibility:

- Digital justice can unintentionally exclude citizens who lack **internet connectivity, smartphones, digital literacy or financial resources**, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
- Expansion of **e-Sewa Kendras, assisted digital services and multilingual interfaces** is therefore essential for inclusive digital justice.

Cybersecurity and Data Privacy:

- Digitised judicial records contain highly sensitive personal, financial and legal information, creating risks related to **cyberattacks, unauthorised access, data breaches and identity theft**.
- Strong encryption, authentication, access controls, audit trails, cybersecurity standards and privacy safeguards are necessary for trustworthy digital courts.

Technological Reliability:

- Dependence on digital infrastructure creates vulnerabilities arising from **network failures, power interruptions, software incompatibility and inadequate technical support**.
- Resilient connectivity, cloud infrastructure, disaster recovery systems and continuous maintenance are therefore essential.

AI and Judicial Independence:

- AI can assist judges but should not replace **human judicial reasoning, constitutional interpretation or judicial accountability**.
- Algorithmic systems require safeguards against **bias, opacity, inaccurate outputs, automation bias and inadequate explainability**.

Digital Evidence and Procedural Fairness:

- Greater digitisation increases the importance of reliable **digital evidence, authentication, chain of custody and cybersecurity**.
- Remote hearings should not compromise the accused's right to a fair hearing, effective legal representation or meaningful participation in judicial proceedings.

Way Forward:***Build Inclusive Digital Justice:***

- Expand **e-Sewa Kendras**, assisted digital services, multilingual platforms and digital-literacy programmes to ensure that technological modernisation does not become a new barrier to justice.

Strengthen Cybersecurity:

- Establish robust **privacy-by-design, encryption, authentication, cybersecurity audits, data governance and disaster-recovery mechanisms** across judicial platforms.

Adopt Responsible AI:

- AI deployment should follow principles of **human oversight, transparency, explainability, accuracy, accountability and constitutional rights protection**.
- AI should primarily function as an **assistive technology**, leaving final judicial decisions to constitutionally authorised human institutions.

Integrate Digitalisation with Judicial Reform:

- Technology alone cannot eliminate pendency because delays also arise from **judicial vacancies, inadequate infrastructure, procedural complexity, investigation delays, shortage of prosecutors and excessive litigation.**
- e-Courts should therefore be integrated with **ADR, mediation, Lok Adalats, case-management reforms, judicial capacity building and process simplification.**

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Constitutional linkage:** Article 39A provides the normative foundation for equal access to justice and free legal aid.
- **Governance linkage:** e-Courts represents **Digital India applied to the justice sector**, shifting governance from physical-service delivery towards digital, data-enabled and citizen-centric administration.
- **SDG linkage:** The initiative contributes to **SDG 16 — Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, particularly the objective of promoting access to justice and effective, accountable institutions.

Epigenetic Inheritance Study Challenges Conventional Mendelian Patterns and Expands Understanding of Heritable Biological Information

Recent Developments:

- A study published in **Nature Genetics** identified widespread patterns of **non-Mendelian inheritance of DNA methylation** in mice, demonstrating that some epigenetic information can persist across generations without altering the underlying DNA sequence.
- Researchers used **long-read nanopore sequencing** to analyse allele-specific DNA methylation across generations in mouse **liver and muscle tissues**, allowing genetic sequence and methylation information to be examined on the same DNA molecules.
- The study identified approximately **7,600 autosomal genomic regions** showing distinct epigenetic inheritance patterns, of which **7,081 followed Mendelian inheritance**, while **at least 522 showed non-Mendelian inheritance.**
- Approximately **7% of the identified autosomal epigenetic inheritance patterns were non-Mendelian**, indicating that heritable epigenetic information may be more widespread than previously recognised.
- The researchers identified **five seemingly new imprinted genes**, including an **X-linked gene**, and observed widespread **sex-specific DNA methylation patterns** concentrated particularly in the liver.
- The study provided evidence for naturally occurring **intergenerational paramutation** at the **Capn11** locus and identified highly likely additional examples involving **intracisternal A particle transposable elements** at **Vps37c** and another genomic region.
- The findings do not establish that epigenetic inheritance operates in humans to the same extent, because comprehensive human studies remain difficult due to **environmental exposures, age, genetic variation and other confounding factors.**

Understanding Epigenetics:

Meaning and Core Concept:

- **Epigenetics** refers to heritable or persistent changes in **gene activity and regulation** that occur without changing the underlying **DNA sequence**.
- The **DNA sequence** provides the genetic information, whereas the **epigenome** consists of molecular modifications that influence which genes are accessible and expressed within a cell.
- Although most cells of an organism contain essentially the same DNA, different epigenetic states allow **liver, brain and muscle cells** to express different sets of genes and perform specialised functions.
- Epigenetic marks can respond to **diet, stress, ageing, physical activity, environmental exposures and toxins**, thereby providing a molecular mechanism through which environmental conditions can influence gene regulation.

Major Epigenetic Mechanisms:

DNA Methylation:

- **DNA methylation** involves the addition of a **methyl group** to DNA, most commonly at cytosine bases in **CpG sites**, and methylation at gene regulatory regions is often associated with reduced gene transcription.
- DNA methylation is central to processes such as **genomic imprinting, X-chromosome inactivation, transposon silencing and cellular differentiation**.

Histone Modification:

- DNA is wrapped around proteins called **histones** to form **chromatin**, and chemical modifications of histones influence how tightly DNA is packaged.
- **Tightly packed chromatin** generally reduces access to transcriptional machinery and promotes gene silencing, whereas **loosely packed chromatin** generally permits greater transcriptional activity.

Non-Coding RNA:

- **Non-coding RNAs** are RNA molecules that generally do not serve as templates for protein synthesis but can regulate gene expression through mechanisms involving RNA degradation, translation control and chromatin regulation.

Epigenetic Inheritance:

Meaning:

- **Epigenetic inheritance** occurs when epigenetic information influencing gene regulation is transmitted from one generation to another without requiring a change in the underlying DNA sequence.
- Most epigenetic marks are normally **reset or substantially erased during germ-cell formation and early embryonic development**, which acts as an important barrier to transgenerational inheritance.
- Some epigenetic information can nevertheless escape this resetting process or be re-established in a manner that produces parent-to-offspring or intergenerational effects.

Mendelian and Non-Mendelian Components:

- The study showed that most observed DNA methylation inheritance patterns were **Mendelian**, primarily because methylation differences were associated with **cis-acting methylation quantitative trait loci**, meaning that nearby genetic variants influenced methylation.
- At least **522 autosomal examples** displayed non-Mendelian patterns, including **emergent epigenetic inheritance, trans-acting methylation effects, genomic imprinting and paramutation**.
- Therefore, the study does not overturn Mendelian genetics; rather, it demonstrates that **inheritance of molecular regulatory information can contain additional layers beyond DNA sequence transmission**.

Major Findings of the Study:

Non-Mendelian Epigenetic Inheritance:

- Researchers identified at least **522 autosomal examples of non-Mendelian inheritance**, demonstrating that some DNA methylation patterns did not follow conventional allele-based inheritance.
- The findings suggest that **epigenetic information can contribute to inherited biological variation**, although the relative importance of this mechanism in naturally occurring human inheritance remains uncertain.

Sex-Specific DNA Methylation:

- Researchers identified widespread **sex-specific DNA methylation patterns**, particularly in the mouse liver, indicating that epigenetic regulation can differ substantially between males and females.
- Such sex-dependent epigenetic variation may contribute to differences in **gene expression, metabolism and disease susceptibility**, although the biological consequences require further investigation.

Genomic Imprinting:

- The study identified **at least five seemingly new imprinted genes**, including one located on the **X chromosome**.
- **Genomic imprinting** is an established epigenetic phenomenon in which gene expression depends on whether a particular allele was inherited from the **mother or father**.
- In an imprinted gene, one parental copy may be epigenetically silenced, resulting in preferential expression of the other parental copy.

Paramutation at Capn11:

- The researchers identified naturally occurring **intergenerational paramutation** at the **Capn11** locus, providing evidence of a non-Mendelian epigenetic inheritance mechanism in a naturally occurring mammalian genome.
- **Paramutation** occurs when the epigenetic state of one allele influences the epigenetic state of its homologous allele, with the altered state potentially persisting into subsequent generations.
- The **Capn11** gene encodes a calcium-dependent protease that is predominantly expressed in the testis during later stages of meiosis and has been associated with male reproductive biology.

Role of Intracisternal A Particles:

- Researchers identified highly likely additional examples of paramutation involving **intracisternal A particles**, which are **endogenous retroviral transposable elements** present within the mouse genome.

- These elements are important because they can resist genome-wide demethylation processes occurring during **gametogenesis and embryogenesis**, potentially allowing certain epigenetic states to persist between generations.

Tissue-Specific Epigenetic Inheritance:

- The researchers examined DNA methylation in both **liver and muscle**, demonstrating that epigenetic inheritance can be strongly influenced by tissue type because DNA methylation is itself tissue-specific.
- The study therefore highlights that inheritance cannot always be understood solely by examining DNA sequence because **tissue-specific regulatory information** may also influence gene activity.

Important Concepts for UPSC:

Genomic Imprinting:

- **Genomic imprinting** is a form of epigenetic regulation in which expression of an allele depends on its **parental origin**.
- Unlike conventional Mendelian inheritance, where maternal and paternal alleles are generally treated according to their genetic identity, imprinting can cause one parental allele to remain active while the other is epigenetically silenced.

Paramutation:

- **Paramutation** is an epigenetic interaction in which one allele induces a heritable change in the epigenetic state of its homologous allele.
- It differs from an ordinary DNA mutation because the **DNA sequence itself does not necessarily change**, while the altered regulatory state can persist across generations.

Epialleles:

- **Epialleles** are alleles that have identical or essentially identical DNA sequences but differ in their epigenetic states and consequently may differ in gene expression.
- Epialleles provide an important conceptual link between **genetic variation, epigenetic regulation and phenotype**.

Methylation Quantitative Trait Loci:

- **Methylation quantitative trait loci** are genomic variants associated with differences in DNA methylation levels.
- **Cis-acting methylation quantitative trait loci** influence methylation near the genetic variant, whereas **trans-acting methylation quantitative trait loci** can influence methylation at more distant genomic locations.

Epigenetic Inheritance and Mendelian Inheritance:

Feature	Conventional Mendelian Inheritance	Epigenetic Inheritance
Basis	Involves the transfer of DNA sequence variants, including alleles , from parents to their offspring.	Involves the transmission of epigenetic regulatory states that may persist without altering the underlying DNA sequence.

Key Principle	Usually operates according to Mendelian principles , particularly the laws of segregation and independent assortment.	May result in inheritance patterns that differ from classical Mendelian expectations under certain conditions.
Gene Expression	Gene activity is largely determined by the inherited DNA sequence , together with other regulatory processes.	Gene activity may be modified by epigenetic marks , which can either promote or suppress the expression of particular genes.
Stability	The nucleotide sequence is generally highly stable between generations , although mutations can introduce changes.	Epigenetic modifications are generally more flexible and reversible than alterations to the DNA sequence.
Reproductive Resetting	Genetic information is passed to the next generation through sperm and egg cells .	Many epigenetic modifications undergo erasure or reprogramming during germ-cell development and early embryogenesis .
Inheritance Pattern	Usually gives rise to relatively predictable genetic transmission patterns between parents and offspring .	Certain epigenetic states may persist despite reproductive reprogramming , show parent-of-origin effects, or affect the expression of another allele through mechanisms such as paramutation .

Why the Study Matters:

Understanding Heritability:

- Traditional genetic studies cannot explain every heritable phenotype because some biological variation may arise from **gene regulation, environmental interactions and epigenetic states** rather than DNA sequence differences alone.
- Epigenetic mechanisms may therefore contribute to the broader problem of **missing heritability**, although they do not provide a universal explanation for it.

Environment and Inheritance:

- Epigenetic mechanisms provide a plausible molecular pathway through which **environmental conditions can influence gene regulation**, but evidence for stable transgenerational inheritance in humans remains limited.
- Therefore, environmental effects on parents should not automatically be interpreted as permanently inherited epigenetic traits in their descendants.

Precision Medicine:

- Because many epigenetic modifications are **potentially reversible**, enzymes and molecular pathways controlling DNA methylation, histone modification and chromatin structure represent potential therapeutic targets.
- Epigenetic therapies are already relevant to the treatment of certain diseases, particularly some **cancers**, although their clinical use requires careful control because epigenetic pathways regulate many genes simultaneously.

Disease Research:

- Abnormal epigenetic regulation is associated with **cancer, metabolic disorders, developmental abnormalities and other complex diseases**.

- Understanding epigenetic inheritance may improve the interpretation of disease susceptibility where genetic sequence alone cannot fully explain observed patterns.

Evolution:

- Epigenetic changes can sometimes arise and change more rapidly than DNA sequence mutations, creating a potential mechanism for short-term responses to environmental conditions.
- However, whether such changes become stable evolutionary adaptations depends on their **persistence, inheritance, effects on fitness and interaction with genetic evolution.**

Epigenetic Inheritance and Lamarckism:

Similarity:

- The possibility that environmentally influenced epigenetic states may persist across generations has a conceptual resemblance to **Lamarckian inheritance**, because acquired biological states could potentially influence descendants.

Critical Difference:

- Modern epigenetic inheritance does **not validate classical Lamarckism**, because inheritance remains governed primarily by genetic mechanisms and most environmentally induced epigenetic changes are not permanently transmitted across generations.
- Epigenetic inheritance should therefore be understood as an **additional regulatory layer of heredity**, rather than as a replacement for Mendelian genetics or the modern theory of evolution.

Limitations of the Study:

Mouse Model:

- The study was conducted in **mice**, and its findings cannot be directly extrapolated to humans because mammalian species differ in developmental processes, epigenetic regulation and environmental exposure patterns.

Germline Reprogramming:

- Extensive **epigenetic reprogramming during gametogenesis and early embryonic development** normally removes many parental epigenetic marks, limiting the persistence of acquired epigenetic states.

Human Evidence:

- Comprehensive genome-wide studies of epigenetic inheritance in human families have not yet established that the patterns observed in mice occur in humans with comparable frequency or biological significance.

Environmental Confounding:

- Human populations experience highly variable **diet, age, lifestyle, environmental exposure and socioeconomic conditions**, making it difficult to distinguish inherited epigenetic effects from shared environmental effects.

Broader Scientific Significance:

Beyond the DNA Sequence:

- The study strengthens the concept that biological inheritance involves more than the transmission of DNA sequence alone because **DNA methylation and other regulatory states can influence gene activity**.
- Nevertheless, DNA sequence remains the fundamental hereditary information system, while epigenetic mechanisms primarily determine how that information is regulated and expressed.

Integration of Genetics and Epigenetics:

- Modern biology increasingly treats phenotype as the outcome of interactions among **DNA sequence, epigenetic regulation, environment, development and cellular context**.
- The study therefore contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of heredity rather than overturning the foundations of classical genetics.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Conceptual distinction:** Genetic mutation changes DNA sequence, whereas epigenetic modification generally changes gene regulation without altering the DNA sequence.
- **Inheritance distinction:** Mendelian inheritance primarily tracks transmission of alleles, whereas epigenetic inheritance concerns transmission or persistence of regulatory states that can influence gene expression.
- **Evolutionary perspective:** Epigenetic mechanisms demonstrate that phenotype can be shaped by interactions among genes, regulatory states and environment, while natural selection continues to operate on heritable variation.
- **Scientific caution:** Evidence from mice demonstrates a biological possibility but does not establish equivalent transgenerational epigenetic inheritance in humans.

Bankers' Books Evidence Bill 2026 Modernises Banking Evidence Law for Digital Records While Raising Privacy and Cybersecurity Concerns

Recent Developments:

- The **Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026** was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 3 August 2026, passed by the Lok Sabha on 5 August 2026, and subsequently passed by the Rajya Sabha on 10 August 2026, clearing Parliament and paving the way for replacement of the colonial-era **Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891**.
- The Bill seeks to modernise the legal framework governing the use of bank records as evidence by explicitly recognising records maintained in **electronic, digital, virtual and cloud-based forms**.
- The reform is intended to align evidence law with the realities of **digital banking**, while retaining most of the substantive framework of the 1891 Act.
- The legislation has also generated concerns regarding **data privacy, cybersecurity, authentication of digital records and safeguards against unauthorised access**, particularly because digital records can be copied and transmitted much more easily than physical banking records.

Background and Need for Reform:

Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891:

- The **Bankers' Books Evidence Act, 1891** was enacted to simplify the production of banking records in judicial proceedings by allowing **certified copies of entries in bankers' books** to be used as evidence without routinely requiring production of original records.
- Under the earlier framework, a certified copy of a relevant bank entry could serve as **prima facie evidence** of the existence of the entry and of the matters, transactions and accounts recorded in it.
- The framework reduced the need for bank officials to physically produce original ledgers or repeatedly appear before courts merely to authenticate routine banking records.

Why the 1891 Framework Became Inadequate:

- The original legislation was designed for an era when banking records were predominantly maintained in **physical books, ledgers and registers**.
- Modern banking increasingly relies on **core banking systems, electronic databases, digital records, cloud infrastructure and automated transaction logs**, creating a need for technology-neutral evidence law.
- The expansion of **internet banking, mobile banking, digital payments and electronic financial services** has therefore made explicit recognition of digital banking records increasingly important.

Major Provisions of the Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026:

Expanded Meaning of Bankers' Books:

- The Bill expands the legal framework to expressly recognise **electronic or digital records** of bankers' books as admissible evidence.
- Such records may be maintained **electronically, digitally, virtually or in cloud-based and other technological environments**, thereby bringing the evidentiary framework closer to contemporary banking architecture.
- The Bill therefore moves the law away from an essentially physical-record-oriented framework towards a **technology-neutral evidentiary framework**.

Admissibility of Electronic Records:

- An electronic or digital record of a banker's book can be admitted as evidence when specified conditions regarding its **authenticity, accuracy and integrity** are satisfied.
- The relevant copy must be a **true copy** of the entry or information and must correctly represent or be appropriately derived from the original record.
- The system should not show **unauthorised alteration of data**, and there should be no tampering or other event that undermines the integrity and accuracy of the record.

Certification of Digital Evidence:

- The Bill introduces defined certification requirements for electronic and digital banking records so that courts can assess their **authenticity and evidentiary reliability**.
- This is broadly consistent with the wider shift in Indian evidence law towards formal authentication of **electronic records**, including the certification framework under the **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023**.
- Standardised certification can reduce uncertainty regarding whether a digitally produced bank record is a genuine representation of the underlying banking record.

Clarification of “Special Cause”:

Position under the 1891 Act:

- Under the earlier law, where a bank was not a party to legal proceedings, a bank officer generally could not be compelled to produce bankers’ books or appear as a witness regarding their contents unless a court or judge ordered such production for **special cause**.
- The 1891 Act did not clearly define the expression “**special cause**”, leaving considerable scope for judicial interpretation.

Position under the 2026 Bill:

- The Bill defines “**special cause**” to include circumstances where:
 - The **accuracy or genuineness** of an entry or information is doubtful.
 - An event indicates that the **regularity or ordinary nature of record-keeping has been interrupted**.
 - The bank has failed to comply with a **court order concerning inspection of bankers’ books**.
- The clarification can make the procedure more predictable and reduce unnecessary involvement of bank officials in litigation where the authenticity of records is not genuinely disputed.

Application to Other Financial Entities:

Existing Framework:

- The 1891 Act primarily applied to entities engaged in **banking business**, along with specified postal savings and money-order offices.

Proposed Expansion:

- The Bill empowers the **Central Government** to extend its provisions to any entity or class of entities operating in the **financial sector** through notification.
- The government may prescribe **conditions, exceptions or modifications** while extending the framework to such entities.
- This provision creates flexibility for future technological and financial developments but also raises questions about whether entities such as **fintech platforms and digital financial service providers** should receive the same evidentiary treatment as regulated banks without additional safeguards.

Investigative Powers and Privacy Concerns:

Section 11 and Production of Records:

- The Bill retains provisions concerning the production of bankers’ books for **investigations and inquiries**, including the existing framework under which specified investigative orders can operate without requiring routine physical production of banking records.
- The provision has attracted attention because banking records contain highly sensitive information about an individual's **financial transactions, assets, liabilities and economic behaviour**.

Why Digital Records Increase the Risk:

- Physical banking records are relatively difficult to copy, transfer and disseminate at scale, whereas **electronic records can be duplicated and transmitted almost instantly**.
- Wider digital access therefore increases the potential consequences of **unauthorised disclosure, cyberattacks, insider misuse and data breaches**.
- The key policy issue is consequently not merely whether authorities can obtain banking information, but whether such access is accompanied by adequate **necessity, proportionality, purpose limitation, access control and accountability safeguards**.

Major Concerns and Gaps:

Absence of Explicit Hash-Based Verification:

- Experts have argued that the Bill could have explicitly incorporated **cryptographic hash values** as an additional mechanism for demonstrating that an electronic record has not been altered.
- A **hash value** functions as a digital fingerprint of data because even a small alteration to the underlying file can generate a different hash.
- Hash-based verification could therefore strengthen the **integrity and chain of custody of electronic banking evidence**, particularly where the authenticity of a digital record is disputed.

Data Protection and Cybersecurity:

- The Bill primarily addresses the **evidentiary status of banking records** and does not constitute a comprehensive data-protection framework for handling sensitive financial information.
- Effective implementation therefore needs to operate alongside India's broader **data protection, cybersecurity and financial-sector regulatory architecture**.
- Banks and financial institutions need robust safeguards covering **encryption, access controls, audit trails, incident response, data minimisation and secure data transfer**.

Certification Burden:

- Requiring bank officials to certify aspects of the security and integrity of electronic records may create practical difficulties in highly centralised banking systems.
- A branch-level officer may not possess detailed technical knowledge of the **central data centre, cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity controls or third-party technology provider** responsible for maintaining the relevant record.
- A more technically appropriate approach could involve **modular certification**, under which designated technical or information-security officers certify system-level integrity while authorised banking officials certify the relevant banking record.

Extension to Financial Entities:

- The power to extend the legislation to other financial-sector entities through notification provides administrative flexibility but raises questions about **regulatory consistency and parliamentary oversight**.
- Entities with significantly different levels of cybersecurity maturity should not automatically receive identical evidentiary presumptions without appropriate **technical, regulatory and accountability requirements**.

Transitional and Interpretation Issues:

- Replacing an existing statute with a new legal framework can create questions regarding the treatment of **ongoing litigation, previously generated records and proceedings initiated under the old law.**
- Courts may therefore need to clarify how the new evidentiary framework interacts with **pending proceedings and records created before commencement of the new legislation.**

Significance for Judicial Efficiency:

Faster Admission of Banking Records:

- Explicit recognition of digital banking records can reduce procedural disputes concerning whether electronic bank statements and other digital records qualify as admissible evidence.
- Standardised certification can help courts focus on the **substantive dispute rather than repeatedly resolving technical questions about the form of banking records.**

Reduction in Physical Documentation:

- Digital evidence reduces dependence on **physical ledgers, printed statements and manual record production,** thereby lowering administrative costs for banks and courts.

Commercial and Financial Litigation:

- Banking records are frequently relevant to disputes involving **loans, cheques, debt recovery, insolvency, fraud, commercial transactions and financial claims.**
- Easier authentication of digital records can potentially contribute to **faster adjudication of commercial disputes.**

Relationship with India's Digital Evidence Framework:

Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023:

- The **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023** provides the contemporary statutory framework governing evidence and gives significant recognition to **electronic and digital records.**
- The Bankers' Books Evidence Bill complements this broader transition by specifically addressing the evidentiary treatment of **bankers' books and banking records.**
- Together, the frameworks reflect India's transition from paper-oriented evidence procedures towards **digitally authenticated evidence.**

Evidence Integrity:

- Digital evidence requires more than mere electronic availability because courts must also be able to assess **authenticity, integrity, provenance and reliability.**
- The effectiveness of the new banking evidence framework will therefore depend not only on legal recognition but also on **technical standards and institutional cybersecurity capacity.**

Benefits of the Bill:

Modernisation:

- The Bill replaces a **135-year-old evidentiary framework** with provisions designed for contemporary digital banking.

Legal Recognition:

- It expressly recognises **electronic and digital banking records** as admissible evidence subject to prescribed safeguards.

Judicial Efficiency:

- It can reduce unnecessary physical production of records and minimise the need for bank officials to appear in court in routine cases.

Standardisation:

- Defined certification requirements can provide courts with a more consistent basis for assessing **digital banking evidence**.

Technology Neutrality:

- Recognition of virtual and cloud-based records allows the legal framework to remain relevant as banking technology evolves.

Challenges:

Privacy:

- Banking records contain highly sensitive personal and commercial information, making **privacy protection** essential.

Cybersecurity:

- Increased dependence on digital evidence creates greater exposure to **hacking, insider threats, unauthorised copying and data breaches**.

Authenticity:

- Courts require reliable mechanisms to establish that digital records have not been **altered, manipulated or fabricated**.

Institutional Capacity:

- Banks, courts and investigative agencies require adequate **technical expertise, cybersecurity infrastructure and standard operating procedures**.

Regulatory Coordination:

- Implementation must remain consistent with the broader frameworks governing **banking regulation, digital evidence, cybersecurity and personal data protection**.

Way Forward:***Stronger Digital Authentication:***

- The framework should encourage technically robust mechanisms such as **cryptographic hashing, digital signatures, trusted timestamps, audit trails and secure chain-of-custody procedures** for sensitive electronic evidence.

Privacy by Design:

- Access to banking records should follow principles of **necessity, proportionality, purpose limitation, data minimisation and accountability**.

Role-Based Access:

- Digital banking evidence should be accessible only to **authorised officials**, with every access, transfer and modification attempt recorded through tamper-resistant audit logs.

Technical Certification:

- Certification responsibilities should be distributed according to expertise, allowing **banking officers to certify record provenance and technical officers to certify system integrity** where appropriate.

Judicial Oversight:

- Sensitive investigative access to financial records should be subject to adequate **legal safeguards and institutional oversight**, particularly where large volumes of personal financial information are involved.

Capacity Building:

- Courts, banks, police agencies and other stakeholders should receive regular training in **digital forensics, electronic evidence handling, cybersecurity and data protection**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Core legal principle:** A certified banking record can function as **prima facie evidence**, reducing the need for routine production of original banking records.
- **Technology-law linkage:** The Bill demonstrates how legislation must evolve alongside **core banking systems, cloud computing, digital payments and electronic record-keeping**.
- **Privacy linkage:** Banking data constitutes sensitive financial information; therefore, digital evidence reform must be balanced against **privacy, proportionality and cybersecurity**.
- **Governance principle:** The reform illustrates the need to combine **Ease of Doing Business, judicial efficiency and technological modernisation** with institutional safeguards.
- **Prelims fact:** The **Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026** was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 3 August 2026, passed by the Lok Sabha on 5 August 2026, and passed by the Rajya Sabha on 10 August 2026.

Census 2027 Introduces Nationwide Caste Enumeration with Digital Census and Special Scheduling for Snow-Bound Regions

Recent Developments:

- The **Census 2027** will include **caste enumeration in its second phase**, marking the first time after Independence that caste other than **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** will be enumerated as part of the regular Census.
- The **Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs** decided on **30 April 2025** to include caste enumeration in Census 2027, and the Government subsequently notified its intention to conduct the Census.
- Census 2027 will be conducted in **two phases: House Listing and Housing Census** from April to September 2026 and **Population Enumeration** in February 2027 for most of India.
- For **Ladakh** and the snow-bound non-synchronous areas of **Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand**, Population Enumeration will be conducted earlier, in **September 2026**, because severe winter conditions make the normal enumeration period operationally difficult.
- The reference date for most of India is **1 March 2027**, whereas the reference date for Ladakh and the specified snow-bound areas is **1 October 2026**.
- Census 2027 will be **India's first digital Census**, with mobile-based data collection and an option for **self-enumeration**, supported by a central digital monitoring system.
- The Union Cabinet approved an outlay of **₹11,718.24 crore** for Census 2027, with around **30 lakh field functionaries** expected to participate in the exercise.

What is the Census?

Meaning and Purpose:

- A **Census** is the systematic collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of **demographic, social, cultural and economic information** relating to the population of a country or a specified geographical area.
- Census data provide an essential statistical foundation for **public policy, welfare programmes, resource allocation, infrastructure planning, governance and evidence-based decision-making**.
- Census information is used by governments, researchers, policymakers and other institutions to understand **population structure, demographic trends, migration, housing conditions, education, fertility and socio-economic characteristics**.

Institutional Framework:

- The **Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India**, under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, is responsible for conducting the Census.
- The Census is conducted under the **Census Act, 1948** and the **Census Rules, 1990**, as amended from time to time.
- The Census is ordinarily conducted **every ten years**, with the **2011 Census** being the most recent completed Census before Census 2027.

Census 2027 — Two-Phase Structure:

- **Phase I — House Listing and Housing Census:** This phase will collect information relating to **housing conditions, household amenities and household assets** and will also create the basic framework required for population enumeration.
- **Phase II — Population Enumeration:** This phase will collect information relating to **demographic, socio-economic, cultural, migration and fertility characteristics** of individuals and will also include **caste enumeration**.
- An optional **15-day self-enumeration period** will precede the 30-day house-to-house enumeration period in Phase I.

Census in India:

Historical Evolution:

- The Census of India has been conducted regularly since **1871**, while the **first complete Census** was conducted in **1881**.
- Census 2027 will be the **16th Census in the series and the 8th Census since Independence**.
- The Census therefore represents one of India's most important long-term sources of **population and socio-economic statistics**.

Constitutional and Legal Position:

- The Census is primarily a **statutory exercise** conducted under the **Census Act, 1948**, rather than under a specific constitutional article mandating a decennial Census.
- The **Census Act, 1948** provides the legal framework for conducting the Census and enables the Central Government to notify the relevant Census arrangements.
- Census schedules and questionnaires are notified by the Central Government through the **Official Gazette** under the Census Rules.

Census 2027 — Major Technological Changes:

First Digital Census:

- Census 2027 will be India's **first digital Census**, with enumerators using secure mobile applications for data collection.
- Digital collection is expected to improve **speed, data quality, monitoring and timely availability of Census information**.

Self-Enumeration:

- Citizens will have an option of **self-enumeration**, allowing eligible respondents to provide their Census information digitally before the house-to-house enumeration period.

Digital Mapping and Geospatial Features:

- Census operations are incorporating **digital layout maps and geospatial tools** to improve the identification and coverage of buildings and households.
- The use of digital mapping can reduce dependence on manually prepared maps and improve the accuracy of **household coverage and enumeration boundaries**.

Data Security:

- Census 2027 is being supported by **secure digital infrastructure and designated data centres** to protect the large volume of demographic and socio-economic information collected during enumeration.

Caste Enumeration in Census 2027:

Meaning of Caste Enumeration:

- **Caste enumeration** involves collecting information on the caste identity of individuals as part of population enumeration.
- Such data can provide evidence on the **population distribution, socio-economic conditions and relative deprivation** of different caste groups.
- Reliable caste data can potentially support more evidence-based approaches to **welfare targeting, social justice, affirmative action and policy evaluation**.

Why Census 2027 is Significant:

- Since Independence, the regular Census has enumerated **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, but the Government did not enumerate the population of other castes through the regular Census.
- Census 2027 will therefore represent a major change by including **caste enumeration within the regular Census exercise itself**.
- This distinction is important because the **Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011** was a separate exercise and its caste data were not finalised and published in the same manner as the regular Census data.

Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011:

Background:

- The **Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011** was conducted separately from the regular population Census, with the **Ministry of Rural Development** responsible for the rural component and the then **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation** responsible for the urban component.
- The Census organisation provided **technical and logistical support** to the exercise.

Status of Caste Data:

- The socio-economic data of SECC 2011, excluding caste data, were finalised and published, while the caste data were not released as an official nationwide caste population dataset.
- The Government had noted difficulties in **classification and categorisation of caste names**, including variations in how people reported their caste identities.
- Therefore, Census 2027 faces an important methodological challenge of converting potentially diverse individual caste responses into **consistent, standardised and analytically usable categories**.

Historical Caste Enumeration in India:

1931 Census:

- The **1931 Census** is generally regarded as the last Census in which comprehensive caste-wise data other than the categories subsequently treated separately were collected, tabulated and published before Independence.

- After Independence, the regular Census continued to enumerate **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, while caste-wise enumeration of other groups was discontinued as a matter of policy.
- Consequently, the **1931 Census** became an important historical reference point in discussions concerning the caste composition of India.

Post-Independence Constitutional Framework:

- The Constitution provides a framework for addressing the socio-economic and educational backwardness of disadvantaged groups through **affirmative action and institutional mechanisms**.
- **Article 16(4)** enables the State to make provisions for reservation in public employment in favour of backward classes that are not adequately represented in State services.
- **Article 340** empowers the President to appoint a Commission to investigate the conditions of **socially and educationally backward classes** and recommend measures for their advancement.
- The **Mandal Commission** is an important example of a major backward-class assessment that operated in an environment where comprehensive contemporary caste population data were unavailable.

Arguments in Favour of Caste Enumeration:

Evidence-Based Welfare:

- Caste data can provide more precise information on the **socio-economic conditions of different communities**, helping governments design better-targeted welfare interventions.

Identification of Disparities:

- Reliable data can help identify disparities in **education, employment, income, representation and access to public resources** among different social groups.

Evidence-Based Affirmative Action:

- Updated population and socio-economic information can strengthen the empirical basis for evaluating **reservation and other affirmative-action policies**.

Social Justice:

- Comprehensive data can help identify historically disadvantaged groups and support policies aimed at achieving **greater social and economic inclusion**.

Policy Evaluation:

- Caste-disaggregated data can help assess whether existing welfare and affirmative-action policies are reaching their intended beneficiaries and whether policy redesign is required.

Arguments Against Caste Enumeration:

Reinforcement of Caste Identities:

- Critics argue that official enumeration could strengthen **caste consciousness and social divisions** by making caste categories more prominent in public policy and political discourse.

Risk of Political Competition:

- Caste data may intensify competition among communities for **reservations, welfare benefits and political representation**, potentially creating new political pressures.

Classification Difficulties:

- Caste identities can involve **regional variations, sub-castes, overlapping identities and differences in self-reporting**, making standardisation technically difficult.

Privacy and Data Protection:

- Caste information constitutes sensitive personal and social information, requiring strong safeguards against **unauthorised disclosure, misuse and discriminatory profiling**.

Excessive Focus on Caste:

- Critics argue that excessive policy focus on caste could divert attention from broader determinants of deprivation such as **poverty, education, healthcare, geography and occupational vulnerability**.

Ladakh and Snow-Bound Non-Synchronous Areas:***Why Enumeration Occurs Earlier:***

- **Ladakh** and specified snow-bound areas are classified as **non-synchronous areas** because severe winter conditions make population enumeration during the normal February period operationally difficult.
- These areas will therefore conduct **Population Enumeration in September 2026**, several months before most of India.
- Their reference date will be **1 October 2026**, compared with **1 March 2027** for the rest of India.

Important Clarification:

- The earlier enumeration in Ladakh does **not mean that Ladakh alone is being given a separate caste Census**; caste enumeration is a component of **Phase II of Census 2027** and will be conducted across India according to the applicable Census schedule.
- Therefore, the key distinction is **timing and reference date**, not a separate legal framework for caste enumeration in Ladakh.

Significance of Caste Enumeration:***Governance and Public Policy:***

- Comprehensive caste data can strengthen **evidence-based policymaking** by allowing policymakers to compare socio-economic outcomes across different social groups.

Social Justice:

- Reliable data can improve the identification of **persistent inequalities and under-representation**, strengthening the empirical basis of social-justice interventions.

Reservation Policy:

- Caste and socio-economic data can contribute to future debates concerning **reservation policy, representation and the identification of backward classes**, although enumeration by itself does not automatically determine reservation entitlements.

Cooperative Federalism:

- Since States have different caste structures and policy requirements, successful implementation will require effective **Centre-State coordination** regarding enumeration methodology, training and data use.

Data-Driven Governance:

- Integration of caste information with demographic and socio-economic variables can facilitate more nuanced analysis of **multidimensional deprivation and social mobility**.

Key Implementation Challenges:***Standardisation of Caste Responses:***

- The greatest methodological challenge will be converting **open-ended self-reported caste names** into standardised categories without suppressing genuine social and regional distinctions.

Data Quality:

- Large-scale digital enumeration requires strong systems for **verification, validation, error detection and quality control**.

Privacy:

- Sensitive caste information requires robust safeguards covering **data minimisation, access control, secure storage and lawful use**.

Social Sensitivity:

- Enumerators require adequate training to conduct caste-related questions in a **neutral, respectful and non-discriminatory manner**.

Interpretation:

- Population size alone cannot adequately capture social disadvantage because caste outcomes interact with **income, education, occupation, gender, geography and other socio-economic factors**.

Way Forward:

Standardised Classification:

- The Government should establish a transparent and scientifically robust methodology for converting self-reported caste responses into **standardised statistical categories** while retaining relevant sub-group information.

Independent Quality Assurance:

- Independent experts in **statistics, sociology, anthropology, data science and public administration** can strengthen validation and classification procedures.

Privacy-by-Design:

- Caste data should be protected through **strong encryption, restricted access, audit mechanisms, purpose limitation and clearly defined data-use protocols**.

Evidence-Based Policy:

- Caste data should be analysed together with **education, income, occupation, landholding, health, housing and other socio-economic indicators** rather than being treated as the sole measure of disadvantage.

Periodic Review:

- The Government should establish mechanisms for reviewing the methodology and ensuring that future policy decisions are based on **updated and scientifically validated evidence**.

Value Addition for UPSC:

- **Legal basis:** The Census is conducted under the **Census Act, 1948** and **Census Rules, 1990**, rather than through a specific constitutional article mandating a decennial Census.
- **Historical fact:** The **1931 Census** remains the principal historical benchmark for comprehensive caste-wise population data before Independence.
- **Important distinction:** **SECC 2011 was separate from the regular Census**, whereas caste enumeration in Census 2027 is being incorporated directly into the regular Census exercise.
- **Digital milestone:** Census 2027 will be India's **first digital Census** and will provide an option for **self-enumeration**.
- **Administrative scale:** The exercise has an approved financial outlay of **₹11,718.24 crore** and is expected to involve around **30 lakh field functionaries**.
- **Reference-date fact:** The reference date is **1 March 2027** for most of India and **1 October 2026** for Ladakh and the specified snow-bound non-synchronous areas.

Delimitation after Census 2027 may reshape parliamentary representation while testing India's federal balance and democratic equality

Recent Developments:

- The **Census 2027** is being conducted in a new digital framework, and its population data is expected to become central to the next delimitation exercise. The Census authorities have notified the first-phase houselisting period from **1 April to 30 September 2026**, while population enumeration will follow in the second phase.
- The Election Commission of India states that the **present parliamentary constituencies are based on the 2001 Census** and that delimitation of constituencies is constitutionally deferred until the **first Census after 2026**.
- On **16 April 2026**, the Government introduced the **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026**, the **Delimitation Bill, 2026**, and the **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026** in the Lok Sabha.
- The proposed constitutional amendment sought to modify the framework governing delimitation and representation, while the Delimitation Bill proposed a new **Delimitation Commission** and repeal of the **Delimitation Act, 2002**.
- The **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026** was **negatived by the Lok Sabha on 17 April 2026**; consequently, the proposed 2026 legislative framework did not become law.
- The debate nevertheless remains significant because the constitutional freeze on inter-State allocation of Lok Sabha seats is linked to the **first Census after 2026**, making the **Census 2027** a potential trigger for a major reconfiguration of political representation.

What is Delimitation?

- **Delimitation** is the statutory process of fixing or redrawing the territorial boundaries of **Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies** to reflect changes in population.
- Its principal objective is to maintain broadly comparable population representation across constituencies and thereby advance the democratic principle of **“one person, one vote, one value.”**
- In India, delimitation is undertaken by an independent, high-powered **Delimitation Commission**, whose orders have the force of law and cannot be challenged before any court.
- The Commission's final orders are laid before the **Lok Sabha and concerned State Legislative Assemblies**, but these Houses cannot modify the orders.
- The **Election Commission of India** provides institutional and technical assistance during the delimitation process, while the Commission conducts the actual readjustment.

Constitutional and Legal Framework:

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 81:** Provides for the composition of the Lok Sabha and envisages allocation of seats among States broadly in proportion to their population, subject to constitutional qualifications.
- **Article 82:** Requires Parliament to provide by law for the readjustment of Lok Sabha seats and territorial constituencies after each Census, subject to the constitutional framework in force.
- **Article 170:** Provides for the composition and territorial division of State Legislative Assemblies and links their readjustment to the Census-based delimitation framework.
- **Articles 330 and 332:** Provide for reservation of seats for **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, respectively, based on population-related constitutional criteria.

Constitutional Freeze on Inter-State Seat Allocation:

- The **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976** froze the allocation of Lok Sabha seats among States and the total strength of State Legislative Assemblies on the basis of the **1971 Census**.
- The freeze was intended to ensure that States adopting **family planning and population stabilisation** measures were not politically penalised through a reduction in their parliamentary representation.
- The **84th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2001** extended the freeze on inter-State allocation of seats until the first Census conducted after **2026**, while permitting limited readjustment of constituencies within States.
- The **87th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003** enabled the readjustment of constituencies within States using **2001 Census** population figures without altering the total number of seats allocated to each State.
- Consequently, the present parliamentary constituency structure reflects a combination of **1971-based inter-State seat allocation** and subsequent internal constituency readjustment based on newer Census data.

History of Delimitation in India:

Major Delimitation Commissions:

- **1952 Commission:** It was constituted under the **Delimitation Commission Act, 1952**, using the 1951 Census, and undertook the first post-Independence delimitation.
- **1963 Commission:** It was constituted under the **Delimitation Commission Act, 1962**, following the 1961 Census and the reorganisation of States.
- **1973 Commission:** It was constituted under the **Delimitation Act, 1972**, using the 1971 Census and contributed to the subsequent parliamentary constituency framework.
- **2002 Commission:** It was constituted under the **Delimitation Act, 2002**, using the 2001 Census for internal constituency readjustment. The Election Commission records these as the four Delimitation Commissions constituted in India.

Why Delimitation after 2026 Matters:

Restoring Representative Equality:

- Population growth has occurred at different rates across States, resulting in substantial differences in the population represented by individual Members of Parliament.
- A fresh delimitation can reduce such disparities by creating constituencies with more comparable populations.
- It can therefore strengthen the democratic principle of **equal value of votes**.

Reflecting Demographic Changes:

- Since the last major population benchmark used for inter-State allocation was the **1971 Census**, India has experienced substantial demographic, economic and spatial transformation.
- Rapid **urbanisation, migration, fertility decline and regional demographic divergence** have altered the geographical distribution of population.
- A new delimitation can therefore align political representation more closely with contemporary demographic realities.

Women's Political Representation:

- The **106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023**, popularly associated with the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**, provides for one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- Its implementation is constitutionally linked to a **delimitation exercise following the publication of the relevant Census figures**.

- Therefore, the post-2026 delimitation process has implications not only for territorial representation but also for the implementation of women's reservation.

Recalibration of SC/ST Representation:

- Delimitation can require readjustment of constituencies reserved for **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes** in accordance with updated population patterns and constitutional provisions.
- This can improve the geographical distribution of reserved constituencies and potentially strengthen descriptive representation.

Major Challenges:

Federal Imbalance and Population Control:

- The principal controversy arises from the possibility that States with **lower fertility rates** and stronger population stabilisation may receive a smaller proportion of the total Lok Sabha seats than their present share.
- Conversely, States with relatively higher population growth may gain a larger number of seats.
- This creates a tension between **democratic equality based on population** and **federal fairness based on the principle of not penalising successful population stabilisation**.

North-South Political Representation:

- Southern States have generally achieved lower fertility rates and faster demographic stabilisation than several northern States.
- A population-based redistribution could therefore alter the relative political weight of different regions in the Lok Sabha.
- The issue has consequently acquired a strong **North-South federal dimension** involving representation, fiscal contributions, development outcomes and political influence.

Representation versus Population Stabilisation:

- The existing freeze was partly designed to incentivise States to pursue **family planning and population control**.
- A subsequent redistribution purely according to population could create the perception that States which achieved demographic stabilisation are being politically disadvantaged.
- The challenge is therefore to reconcile **representative democracy** with **demographic responsibility**.

Risk of Gerrymandering:

- Although delimitation is assigned to an independent Commission, constituency boundary design can have major political consequences.
- **Cracking** refers to dispersing a particular voter group across several constituencies to reduce its electoral influence.
- **Packing** refers to concentrating a voter group into a limited number of constituencies, potentially reducing its influence elsewhere.
- Transparent criteria, public consultation and objective geographical principles are therefore essential to preserve electoral legitimacy.

Administrative and Political Complexity:

- A major increase in the number of constituencies would require extensive restructuring of **electoral rolls, polling infrastructure, administrative boundaries and parliamentary functioning**.
- The process would also require coordination among the Union Government, Election Commission, State authorities and the Census organisation.

2026 Delimitation Proposal and Its Significance:

Proposed Delimitation Commission:

- The **Delimitation Bill, 2026**, introduced on 16 April 2026, proposed constitution of a Delimitation Commission for readjusting Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly seats.
- The proposed Commission was to consist of a **Chairperson who is or has been a Supreme Court Judge, the Chief Election Commissioner or an Election Commissioner nominated by the Chief Election Commissioner, and the State Election Commissioner of the concerned State**.
- The Bill also proposed **associate members** from each State to assist the Commission in its work.
- The proposal was intended to replace the existing legislative framework under the **Delimitation Act, 2002**, but the associated constitutional amendment did not secure passage.

Proposed Change in Representation:

- The proposed constitutional framework sought to restore population-based readjustment of seats after the relevant Census.
- The debate centred on whether a new population-based allocation would significantly alter the present balance of parliamentary representation among States. – –
- The issue became particularly contentious because the proposed changes were linked with the implementation of **women's reservation** and the future size and composition of the Lok Sabha.

Delimitation and Federalism:

Why Federalism is at Stake:

- The Indian Constitution combines **representative democracy** with a **federal distribution of political power**.
- Lok Sabha representation based strictly on population promotes electoral equality but can alter the relative influence of States.
- Excessive concentration of parliamentary representation in high-population States could strengthen demographic majoritarianism within the Union legislature.
- Conversely, maintaining outdated seat allocations indefinitely can weaken the principle that legislative representation should reflect population.

Role of Rajya Sabha:

- The **Rajya Sabha** represents the States and therefore provides an institutional mechanism for reflecting federal interests at the Union level.
- However, Rajya Sabha representation is also broadly linked to State population, meaning it does not completely neutralise the political consequences of Lok Sabha delimitation.
- Strengthening deliberative and federal functions of the Rajya Sabha can therefore complement any future reform of Lok Sabha representation.

Way Forward:

Build a Federal Consensus:

- The Union Government should undertake structured consultations with **States, political parties, constitutional experts and civil society** before finalising the post-2026 delimitation framework.
- A broad political consensus can reduce the perception that delimitation is merely an exercise in redistributing political power.

Balance Population and Federal Equity:

- The framework should preserve the constitutional principle of **equal representation** while considering mechanisms that prevent States from being disproportionately penalised for successful population stabilisation.
- Any transitional mechanism should remain constitutionally defensible, transparent and based on objective criteria.

Ensure Transparent Delimitation:

- The Delimitation Commission should publish clear criteria, demographic methodology and draft constituency maps.
- Extensive **public hearings and stakeholder consultations** should be conducted before final orders are issued.
- Digital mapping and **Geographic Information System-based tools** can improve accuracy, transparency and public scrutiny.

Protect Electoral Integrity:

- Boundary determination should prioritise **population equality, geographical compactness, administrative convenience, communication links and community interests**, subject to constitutional and statutory requirements.
- Strong safeguards should prevent partisan manipulation of constituency boundaries.

Link Representation with Democratic Inclusion:

- The delimitation process should facilitate effective implementation of **women's reservation** and appropriate readjustment of **SC/ST reserved constituencies**.
- Political representation should therefore address both **territorial equality** and **social inclusion**.

Delimitation versus Census:

Key Distinction:

- The **Census** determines population-related demographic information, whereas **delimitation** uses legally prescribed population data to determine the territorial and numerical framework of electoral constituencies.
- Census data therefore provides the demographic foundation, while the Delimitation Commission performs the constitutional and statutory electoral readjustment.
- The two processes are institutionally distinct but closely connected in the post-2026 context.

UPSC Relevance:***GS Paper II:***

- **Indian Constitution:** Articles 81, 82, 170, 330 and 332.
- **Federalism:** Tension between population-based representation and protection of States that achieved demographic stabilisation.
- **Representation:** Principle of **one person, one vote, one value**.
- **Electoral Reforms:** Constituency rationalisation, boundary determination and prevention of gerrymandering.
- **Women's Representation:** Constitutional linkage between delimitation and implementation of women's reservation.
- **Social Justice:** Readjustment of SC/ST reserved constituencies.

Essay and Ethics:

- The issue illustrates the tension between **equality and equity**, because equal population-based representation may produce unequal political consequences for States with different demographic trajectories.
- It also raises the ethical question of whether governments should be rewarded or penalised for the long-term success of public policies such as **population stabilisation**.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Constitutional Balance:***

“Delimitation is not merely a cartographic exercise; it is a constitutional balancing exercise between electoral equality, federal equity and social representation.”

Key Constitutional Linkage:

Census → Population Data → Delimitation → Territorial Representation → SC/ST Reservation → Women's Reservation → Electoral Equality

Mains Answer Framework:

- **Introduction:** Define delimitation and establish its connection with representative democracy.
- **Body:** Explain the constitutional framework, historical freeze, demographic divergence, federal concerns and women's reservation.
- **Critical Analysis:** Balance **“one person, one vote, one value”** against the concern that population-based redistribution may penalise successful population stabilisation.
- **Way Forward:** Recommend political consensus, transparent methodology, independent delimitation, public consultation and constitutionally sound transitional mechanisms.
- **Conclusion:** Emphasise that successful delimitation must enhance **democratic legitimacy without weakening cooperative federalism**.

QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements regarding the evolutionary phases of the e-Courts Mission Mode Project:

- (1) Phase I (2011–2015) focused on computerizing court complexes and establishing foundational networking infrastructure.
- (2) Phase II (2015–2023) introduced public citizen services like NJDG, eFiling, and eSewa Kendras.
- (3) Phase III (2023–2027) transitions the system toward intelligent judicial infrastructure involving AI, OCR, and solarized complexes.
- (4) Video Conferencing (VC) facilities across courts and penal institutions were introduced for the first time during Phase III.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
- (B) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (C) 3 and 4 only
- (D) 1, 3 and 4 only

2. Consider the following pairs regarding epigenetic concepts and mechanisms:

- (1) Genomic Imprinting — Epigenetic silencing of one gene allele based on parent-of-origin before fertilization
- (2) Histone Modification — Addition of a methyl chemical tag (–CH₃) directly to cytosine bases on DNA
- (3) Non-coding RNA — Functional RNA molecules that bind coding RNAs to regulate translation without producing proteins
- (4) DNA Methylation — Chemical changes altering how tightly DNA is wrapped around histones, controlling transcriptional accessibility

How many of the above pairs are correctly matched?

- (A) Only one pair
- (B) Only two pairs
- (C) Only three pairs
- (D) All four pairs

3. With reference to the Bankers' Books Evidence Bill, 2026, consider the following statements:

- (1) It expands the definition of "bankers' books" to cover records stored in electronic or digital form across onsite, offsite, and virtual or cloud locations.
- (2) It replaces a 135-year-old colonial legislation enacted in 1891.
- (3) It mandates that branch managers must consult designated technical officers before issuing cybersecurity certificates.
- (4) It introduces specific certificate formats for presenting digital records to satisfy courts regarding their genuineness.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 1, 2 and 4 only

- (B) 1 and 2 only
- (C) 3 and 4 only
- (D) 1, 2, 3 and 4

4. With reference to the constitutional provisions and legal tools associated with demographics and social welfare, consider the following statements:

- (1) The Census Act, 1948 provides the statutory authority empowering the Central Government to conduct periodic population surveys.
- (2) Article 16(4) of the Constitution explicitly mandates that it is constitutionally compulsory for the Central Government to conduct a caste census every 10 years.
- (3) Article 340 of the Constitution relates to the appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes.
- (4) The 1931 Census was rejected and its caste data was never used as a reference point by any policy-making decision or commission.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 2 and 4 only
- (B) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (C) 1 and 3 only
- (D) 3 and 4 only

5. Consider the following constitutional provisions:

- (3) Article 302
- (1) Article 81
- (4) Article 172
- (2) Article 82
- (5) Article 331

How many of the above constitutional provisions directly govern or regulate the process of delimitation, seat allocation, or boundary readjustment for parliamentary and assembly constituencies?

- (A) All five
- (B) Only four
- (C) Only three
- (D) Only two

ANSWER KEY

1 – Answer (B), 2 – Answer (B), 3 – Answer (A), 4 – Answer (C), 5 – Answer (D)



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-  oashub19
-  oashub19
-  OASHUB22
-  oashub19@gmail.com
-  M5/17, Acharya Vihar Bhubaneswar 751022