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Media
Why politicians contest two seats, why EC wants to limit them to one
Why do they do it?

PM MODI contested from Varanasi as well as Vadodara in the last Lok Sabha elections 2014

Objective

✓ Demonstrate mass appeal across states
  ✓ Gather support for the party
✓ back-up plan in case they fail to win from one of their two constituencies
  ✓ Conversely, winning from both the constituencies enhances the credibility of their victory and projects them as efficient leaders
Over the years, several senior leaders have contested two constituencies in Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Some contested even three.

Until 1996, when an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, restricted to two the number of seats one candidate could contest in one election.

And whenever they have won more than one, the candidates have retained only one, forcing bypolls in the rest.

In the original 1951 Act, Section 33 permitted a person to contest from more than one seat, while Section 70 of the Act prevented him or her from holding on to more than one seat in state or central legislatures.
• Last week, the Election Commission told the Supreme Court in an affidavit that Section 33(7) of the Act should be amended to restrict any candidate to only one seat in one election.

• This was after the court had sought the EC’s response to a public interest petition challenging the validity of the provision that still allows a candidate to contest two seats simultaneously.
The affidavit said:

“When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he has to vacate one of the two seats if he wins both.

This, apart from the consequent unavoidable financial burden on the public exchequer, government manpower and other resources for holding by-election against the resultant vacancy, is also **an injustice to the voters of the constituency** which the candidate is quitting from.

There have been several cases where a person contests election from two constituencies and wins both.”
It referred to an earlier proposal to end or restrict this practice:

“The Election Commission proposed amendment of Section 33(7) in the year 2004 to provide that a person cannot contest from more than one constituency at a time. However, in case the existing provisions are to be retained, a candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the by-election to the seat that contestant decides to vacate in the event of him/her winning both seats.

The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for state assembly and Rs 10 lakh for the general election.”
That cost would have multiplied many times now.

The latter proposal, if put into practice, would have allowed only candidates with resources to contest two seats, and then bear the cost of a resultant by-election in the event of their winning both. Also, if winners were to pay for causing by-elections, what about those caused by the resignations of sitting MPs, like those of the YSR Congress last week?
The Law Commission has agreed with the proposal to bar a person from contesting more than one seat at a time but has not endorsed the alternative proposal that winning candidates also shoulder the cost of ensuing by-elections.

Earlier, the Dinesh Goswami Committee report in 1990 and the 170th report of the Law Commission on “Electoral Reforms” in 1999 had included recommendations for restricting one contestant to one seat.
In the 1957 Lok Sabha election, when a fledgling Bharatiya Jana Sangh was struggling to grow, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then 32, tried his luck from three constituencies in UP — Balrampur, Mathura and Lucknow — after having finished third in Lucknow in the 1952 polls.

Vajpayee got elected from Balrampur, finished second in Lucknow and forfeited his deposit in Mathura.

The Balrampur victory introduced the young Opposition leader to Lok Sabha, dominated by the Congress then.
In 1977, **Indira Gandhi** suffered a surprise defeat in her well-nursed constituency, Rae Bareli; in 1980, she did not want to risk that again. She filed her nomination from Medak (now in Telangana) and Rae Bareli. It was packaged as an attempt to bridge the divide between the North and the South. She won from both constituencies, and chose to **forsgo Medak**.

Many leaders continued the trend, both before and after the 1996 amendment that set the limit at two seats — Vajpayee (Vidisha and Lucknow in 1991), L K Advani (New Delhi and Gandhinagar in 1991), **Sonia Gandhi** (Bellary and Amethi in 1999), **Mulayam Singh Yadav** (Azamgarh and Mainpuri in 2014) and Lalu Prasad (Saran and Pataliputra in 2009).
Telugu Desam Party founder N T Rama Rao contested three seats — Gudivada, Hindupur and Nalgonda — in the 1985 Assembly polls, won all, retained Hindupur and vacated the other two, forcing by-elections there.

In 1991, Haryana deputy chief minister Devi Lal contested three Lok Sabha seats — Sikar, Rohtak and Ferozepur — as well as the Ghirai assembly seat. He lost them all. Had he won everywhere, three by-elections would have been necessitated.
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