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HOW WOULD A CARBON MARKET FUNCTION? (GS-III)

Carbon Market, Carbon Credits, Carbon offsets

How would a carbon market function?

What are carbon credits and how would they be traded between firms? Why do corporations not want the government to be involved in the issue of carbon credits? Who introduced the concept of carbon credits? Why are some experts critical of carbon offsets?

EXPLAINER

The Hindu Bureau

The story so far:
COP29, the ongoing climate conference in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, has given a fillip to the idea of using carbon markets to curb carbon emissions by approving standards that can help in the setting up of an international carbon market as soon as the coming year.

What is a carbon market?
A carbon market is a market that allows the buying and selling of the right to emit carbon into the atmosphere. Suppose a government wants to limit the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. It can issue certificates called carbon credits that allow the holder of the certificate to emit a certain amount of carbon into the atmosphere. One carbon credit is equivalent to 1,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide. By limiting the number of carbon credits that are issued, governments can control how much carbon is released into the environment. It should be noted that anyone who doesn't hold carbon credits to their name would not be allowed to emit any carbon into the atmosphere. Carbon credits were first used in the 1990s in the U.S., which introduced the cap-and-trade model to control the emission of sulphur dioxide. Individuals and firms that hold carbon credits but don't actually need them for any reason can sell their credits to interested buyers. The price at which these carbon credits are traded is determined by market forces, which in this case are the supply of carbon credits and the demand for these certificates. A carbon market can also include the trading of carbon offsets. In this case, a business that pollutes the environment for example, can purchase carbon offsets sold by an environmental NGO that promises to plant trees that suck a certain amount of carbon emissions out of the



atmosphere for each offset that it sells.

What is good about carbon markets?
Pollution of the environment and climate change caused by carbon emissions is a classic case of what economists call an externality. An externality is caused when the cost of an economic activity is not properly accounted for (or internalised) by the market price system due to the absence of well-defined property rights. For example, a business that uses raw materials such as iron will have to pay the supplier who owns the iron to be able to procure and use it, thus incurring a certain cost. But when the same firm emits carbon into the atmosphere, it doesn't usually have to pay any money to anyone. In other words, firms are generally able to emit their waste into the atmosphere for free. This of course leads to unhindered pollution of the

reporting system, like the Carbon Disclosure Project. They have been loathe to government interventions limiting carbon emissions, arguing that such budgeting may lead to output restrictions or rise in costs. They also point to varied production processes, some that might have diverse supply chains that might make it difficult to find the optimal carbon budget for their facilities. Large multinational corporations such as ExxonMobil and General Motors have advocated for carbon markets that allows free trading of carbon credits among firms at a price determined by market forces, that would allow these firms to purchase carbon credits from other firms, which don't need them as much. This they say, helps allocate carbon credits more efficiently than government diktat.

What can go wrong?
Even when there is a functioning carbon market, a government that is not very keen on reducing emissions may increase the supply of carbon credits and drive down the price of the right to pollute, leading to no noticeable drop in emissions. Others may keep a strict cap on the supply of carbon credits but allow firms to cheat by allowing them to illegally emit carbon. The success of carbon offsets also depends on the degree of personal incentive that firm owners possess to care about carbon emissions, which may often be very little. Critics claim that firms that purchase carbon offsets often do it for the sake of virtue signalling and may have little incentive to ensure that their investments in these instruments are actually helping offset carbon emissions. Meanwhile, other critics have raised more fundamental questions regarding how exactly a government would be able to arrive at the optimum supply of carbon credits. They argue that politicians, who do not incur any personal economic cost when they legislate emission reductions, may restrict the supply of carbon credits more than what is really necessary, leading to slower economic growth.

THE GIST

A carbon market is a market that allows the buying and selling of the right to emit carbon into the atmosphere. Suppose a government wants to limit the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. It can issue certificates called carbon credits that allow the holder of the certificate to emit a certain amount of carbon into the atmosphere.

However, corporations have preferred a voluntary reporting system, like the Carbon Disclosure Project. They have been loathe to government interventions limiting carbon emissions, arguing that such budgeting may lead to output restrictions or rise in costs.

Even when there is a functioning carbon market, a government that is not very keen on reducing emissions may increase the supply of carbon credits and drive down the price of the right to pollute, leading to no noticeable drop in emissions.

- ❖ The ongoing COP29 climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, has brought renewed focus on carbon markets as a tool to curb carbon emissions. The conference aims to establish standards for setting up international carbon markets to regulate emissions.

What is a Carbon Market?

- ❖ A carbon market is a trading system that allows the buying and selling of carbon credits.





- ❖ Governments set a limit (cap) on the amount of carbon dioxide that can be emitted.
- ❖ Companies are issued **carbon credits** (certificates), which permit the holder to emit a specific quantity of carbon dioxide.
- ❖ **1 Carbon Credit = 1 tonne (1,000 kg) of CO** emissions.

How It Works:

- ❖ Companies that emit **less than their quota** can sell unused credits to others.
- ❖ Companies emitting **more than their quota** must buy credits to offset their excess emissions.

Purpose:

- ❖ By capping emissions and enabling credit trading, governments can **control total carbon emissions** and encourage businesses to adopt greener technologies.

Background

- ❖ **Origins:** Carbon credits were first introduced in the **1990s** in the U.S. through the **cap-and-trade model** to limit sulfur dioxide emissions.
- ❖ Since then, carbon markets have been implemented globally as part of efforts to reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** and combat climate change.

What is Good About Carbon Markets?

- ❖ **Internalizing Externalities:**
 - **Pollution** is treated as an economic externality – a cost to society that businesses don't directly pay for.
 - Carbon markets force businesses to **account for their emissions** by assigning them a monetary value.
- ❖ **Encourages Cost-Effective Solutions:**
 - Companies emitting less carbon can profit by selling excess credits.
 - Drives businesses to adopt **greener technologies** to reduce costs.
- ❖ **Innovation and Technology:**
 - Carbon markets incentivize investment in **renewable energy** and innovative technologies to reduce emissions.
- ❖ **Flexibility for Corporations:**
 - Companies can balance between reducing emissions themselves or buying credits, offering a flexible solution to comply with environmental goals.





The Issues with Carbon Markets

- ❖ **No Real Reduction in Emissions:**
 - A functioning carbon market doesn't always guarantee reduced emissions.
 - Companies may focus on **buying credits** rather than **cutting pollution**.
- ❖ **Illegitimate or Fake Credits:**
 - Weak enforcement allows some players to **illegally claim carbon credits** or supply fake offsets.
- ❖ **Greenwashing:**
 - Corporations may purchase carbon credits for **reputation purposes** (e.g., appearing sustainable) without real action to reduce emissions.
- ❖ **Cost Inequality:**
 - Large corporations can afford to buy credits, but smaller businesses may struggle under the financial burden.
- ❖ **Supply Chain Issues:**
 - Companies face difficulties in **accurately tracking** emissions and ensuring the credits they purchase reflect true environmental gains.

Corporations' Preference:

- ❖ **Reporting Over Regulation**
 - Corporations like **ExxonMobil** and **General Motors** favor **free trading of carbon credits** among firms.
 - They oppose **government intervention**, arguing:
 - Regulations lead to **output restrictions**.
 - Budgets for carbon emissions raise costs.
 - **Global supply chains** complicate optimal carbon budgeting.

Why This Matters:

- ❖ Free trading allows for **efficient allocation of carbon credits**, ensuring credits are used where they are needed most.
- ❖ However, lack of strict enforcement raises concerns about abuse of the system.

What Can Go Wrong?

- ❖ **Weak Carbon Markets:** If governments do not set strict targets, carbon markets may become ineffective, leading to minimal emissions reduction.





- ❖ **Resistance to Accountability:** Some companies **hide actual emissions** or manipulate data, undermining the market's integrity.
- ❖ **Over-Reliance on Offsets:** Companies might avoid taking real action by continuously **buying offsets** instead of transitioning to cleaner technologies.
- ❖ **Lack of Standardization:** Without **global standards**, it becomes difficult to measure, report, and verify emissions reductions consistently.
- ❖ **Social Justice Concerns:** Developing countries may face economic challenges in adopting these markets due to limited access to green technologies.

Way Forward

- ❖ **Robust Regulations:** Governments should ensure **strict emission targets** and **accurate monitoring** of carbon credits.
- ❖ **Transparency:** Implement standardized and transparent reporting systems to track carbon emissions effectively.
- ❖ **Incentivize Green Innovation:** Provide support for businesses transitioning to **low-carbon technologies**.
- ❖ **Global Cooperation:** Carbon markets need **global integration** to align efforts across developed and developing nations.
- ❖ **Avoid Greenwashing:** Independent audits and verification mechanisms should ensure credits reflect actual emissions reductions.

Conclusion

- ❖ Carbon markets have the potential to play a significant role in combating climate change by incentivizing businesses to cut emissions. However, for them to succeed:
 - Strict **regulations** and **monitoring** mechanisms are essential.
 - Efforts must focus on **real emission reductions**, not just trading carbon credits.
 - Collaboration between governments, corporations, and global agencies is needed to create **credible, transparent, and effective carbon markets**.
- ❖ When implemented effectively, carbon markets can ensure a cleaner environment while fostering sustainable economic growth.





THE DIGITAL FRONTIER OF INEQUALITY (GS- I, II)

Tech - Facilitated Gender - Based Violence The digital frontier of inequality

India stands at a pivotal moment in its digital revolution, underpinned by an internationally recognised model of digital public infrastructure. Today, India has 1.18 billion mobile connections, 700 million Internet users, and 600 million smartphones.

While the narrowing of the digital gender divide is a sign of progress, as in many countries, a surge in gender-based violence (GBV), particularly tech-facilitated GBV, threatens to overshadow gains. In response, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently launched 'Ab Koi Bahana Nahi (no more excuses)', a national campaign aligned with the global '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence'. This annual campaign is led by UN Women.

The risks

India's digital transformation has unlocked immense opportunities for empowerment. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has increased account coverage almost four-fold since 2015, with women holding 55.6% of the accounts. Digital Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-mobile linkages enable direct benefits and cashless transactions, especially in rural areas. However, this increased connectivity has also exposed women to new risks.

In urban areas, online harassment is rampant, particularly targeting women in public-facing roles such as journalists and politicians. Rural India boasts 20% more Internet users than in urban areas (2021 Nielsen report). Already constrained by societal norms, many women and girls lack the digital literacy and skills to navigate online spaces safely. Compounding the issue, many women are also unaware of their rights or the mechanisms available to them for reporting abuse.

TFGBV takes many harmful forms. These include persistent harassment such as cyberstalking, online trolling, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Impersonation



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Ensuring women's safety online is not only a moral obligation but also a critical pillar for India's progress

and fraud through fake profiles, voyeurism, and grooming further exploit vulnerable individuals. These often force women and girls to retreat from digital spaces.

India has taken important steps to combat TFGBV. Legal protections, including the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2024, provide a strong foundation to address digital violence. Mechanisms such as the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal enable anonymous reporting, while the government-led Information Security Education and Awareness Programme spreads digital safety awareness. Women-specific programmes, such as Digital Shakti, launched by the National Commission for Women, equip women with tools to navigate online spaces securely. These measures mark great progress in creating safer digital spaces, though some gaps remain.

India also actively engages in international negotiations and agreements, including the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women where UN member states, including India, signed off on agreed conclusions that called for "adequate safeguards in order to promote an open, secure, stable, accessible and affordable information and communications technology environment for all women and girls". This underscores India's commitment to tackling TFGBV.

The way forward

Achieving truly safe digital environments for women and girls requires more focused and strategic efforts that can keep pace with this changing and evolving digital world.

The Global Digital Compact, adopted by world leaders including India, at the UN Summit of the Future earlier this year, further strengthens legal and policy frameworks "to counter and eliminate all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use

of technology". Therefore, combating TFGBV must be a top priority. This includes enforcing stricter laws against perpetrators of online violence, and swifter justice for survivors. Holding social media platforms accountable is an important part of the tool kit to reduce TFGBV.

Expanding digital literacy programmes, particularly in rural areas, is critical. Integrating safe online practices into school curriculums and conducting community workshops for women and men, young and old, can be empowering. Additionally, nationwide campaigns that challenge societal norms and actively engage men and boys as allies can foster respectful and inclusive digital spaces.

Collaboration with India's vibrant tech industry is essential. While many platforms have introduced safety features, these need further enhancement to proactively address online abuse. Leveraging artificial intelligence to detect and remove abusive content, yet retaining human oversight, alongside introducing user-friendly reporting mechanisms, can improve safety.

Just as important is the development of robust survivor support systems that offer accessible counselling, legal aid and rehabilitation services. Expanding the capacity of helplines and initiatives such as TechSakhi, a helpline offering accurate information, empathetic support, and assistance, will ensure that survivors receive timely and effective assistance.

As we concluded observing the 16-Days of Activism that ends on International Human Rights Day every year, India's timely message is unequivocal: *Ab Koi Bahana Nahi*. Ensuring women's safety online is not only a moral obligation but also a critical pillar for India's progress.

Governments, tech companies, civil society groups, individuals, and international organisations have a role to play, and we in the UN Country Team are proud to be a partner in this journey.





- ❖ India is at a pivotal stage in its **digital revolution** with increasing access to mobile connections, smartphones, and Internet penetration. While this has created opportunities for empowerment, particularly for women, it has also amplified **digital gender inequality** and led to **technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)**.

Background

- ❖ **Digital Growth in India:**
 - **1.18 billion mobile connections**, 700 million Internet users, and 600 million smartphones.
 - The **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana** expanded access to financial services, with 55.6% of accounts held by women.
- ❖ **Positive Developments:**
 - Greater **digital inclusion** enables women, especially in rural areas, to access education, jobs, and financial resources.
 - Government initiatives like **Digital Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM)** provide direct benefit transfers and seamless transactions.
- ❖ **Emerging Challenges:**
 - **Gender-based violence** in digital spaces (TFGBV) threatens women's safety and participation in digital opportunities.
 - Examples include **cyberstalking, harassment, phishing, voyeurism**, and fraudulent activities using fake profiles.

Key Issues

- ❖ **Digital Gender Divide:**
 - **Urban-rural divide:** Rural areas have fewer resources and digital skills training opportunities.
 - Cultural norms and societal restrictions prevent many women and girls from safely accessing the Internet.
- ❖ **Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV):**
 - Forms of TFGBV include:
 - **Cyberstalking and harassment.**
 - Non-consensual sharing of images.
 - Fake profiles, fraud, and voyeurism.
 - Women and girls are targeted, leading to mental stress and withdrawal from online spaces.

❖





❖ Urban Vulnerability:

- A 2021 Nielsen report revealed **20% more Internet users** in rural areas are men, highlighting urban women's higher vulnerability due to their public roles.

Impact

❖ Women's Safety:

- TFGBV leads to **emotional and psychological distress**, often forcing women to **retreat from digital spaces**, undoing empowerment gains.

❖ Economic Disparity:

- Digital exclusion restricts women from **participating in online jobs**, entrepreneurship, and skill development programs.

❖ Societal Challenges:

- Lack of **digital literacy** and awareness about reporting mechanisms exacerbate risks.
- Under-reporting of incidents due to **fear of societal backlash** or lack of trust in systems.

❖ Policy and Legal Challenges:

- While India has laws like the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, and new policies like **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2024**, enforcement remains weak in addressing online violence.

Measures Taken

❖ Legal Protections:

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal**: Enables anonymous reporting of cybercrimes.
- **Digital Shakti Campaign**: Tools and resources to help women navigate online spaces safely.
- **Women-specific safety programs**: Platforms like **TechSakhi** offer helpline support.

❖ International Efforts:

- India signed the **67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women** for stronger safeguards for women in digital spaces.

❖ Education and Awareness:

- Integrating **digital literacy** into school curriculums.
- Community **workshops** for men and women to improve awareness about **online safety**.

❖ Technology Solutions:

- Leveraging **AI** to detect and remove abusive content.
- Developing **swift reporting mechanisms** on social media platforms.





Positives

- ❖ **Increased Awareness:**
 - Campaigns like **Ab Koi Bahana Nahi** highlight the importance of women's digital safety.
 - Women are now receiving tools and legal recourse to fight back.
- ❖ **Collaboration:**
 - Partnerships with **tech industries** to strengthen reporting mechanisms.
 - Inclusion of men as **allies for gender equality** online.
- ❖ **International Best Practices:** Adoption of **global strategies** like the **Digital Global Compact** to eliminate gender-based online violence.

Negatives

- ❖ **Digital Exclusion:** Persistent **rural-urban gap** leaves rural women behind in digital literacy and access.
- ❖ **Weak Enforcement:** Slow or ineffective implementation of existing legal frameworks.
- ❖ **Victim Blaming:** Cultural and societal norms often blame victims rather than perpetrators.
- ❖ **Under-reporting:** Fear of backlash prevents women from reporting incidents of online harassment.

Way Forward

- ❖ **Strengthening Legal Framework:**
 - Enforce stricter laws with clear penalties for perpetrators of **TFGBV**.
 - Ensure **social media accountability** to swiftly remove harmful content.
- ❖ **Improving Digital Literacy:**
 - Expand **digital literacy programs** in rural areas to enable women to use the Internet safely and confidently.
 - Integrate **online safety education** in schools and community workshops.
- ❖ **Support Systems:**
 - Build **robust support systems** with counseling, legal aid, and rehabilitation services.
 - Strengthen helpline initiatives like **TechSakhi** for immediate assistance.
- ❖ **Technology Partnerships:**
 - Collaborate with **tech companies** to detect, block, and report abusive content.
 - Leverage **artificial intelligence** and **user-friendly tools** for reporting online abuse.





❖ **Inclusive Policies:**

- Implement strategies that engage men and boys as allies for gender equality in digital spaces.

Conclusion

- ❖ Ensuring women's safety in the digital space is not just a **moral obligation** but a **critical necessity** for India's progress. TFGBV poses a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and must be tackled through a **multi-faceted approach**:
 - Stronger **legal enforcement**.
 - Enhanced **digital literacy and awareness**.
 - Collaboration with **technology platforms** and **global initiatives**.
- ❖ With focused efforts, India can bridge the **digital gender divide** and empower women to participate equally in the country's digital future.





LET'S TALK ABOUT 'ONE CANDIDATE, MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCIES' (GS-II)

One Candidate , Multiple Constituencies

Let's talk about 'one candidate, multiple constituencies'

Ever since the panel for 'One Nation One Election' led by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, recommended simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, much has been written on its positive and negative aspects, the practical considerations and of course the politics around the subject. Amidst all the political accusations and counter-accusations, another important issue has gone missing from attention. The matter is about one candidate contesting from multiple constituencies (OCMC) for the same office.

The background, the challenges

The Constitution of India provides for regular elections every five years to the Legislative Assembly and the lower House of Parliament. However, the Constitution, other than providing for the Election Commission of India (ECI), has empowered Parliament to regulate the manner of conducting the elections. Therefore, 'contesting from multiple constituencies' has been dealt with in the Representation of the People Act 1951. Under the Act, there was no limit on the number of constituencies a candidate could contest – until 1996. This resulted in candidates contesting from multiple constituencies, sometimes more than two, winning them and vacating all but one seat, in accordance with Section 70 of the same Act. This necessitated by-elections frequently.

Due to this, Parliament amended the Act in 1996 to limit the number of constituencies that a candidate can contest from, to two. The amendment intended to discourage one candidate from contesting from multiple constituencies. Despite this, the practice has continued. The numbers are even more frequent in State Legislative Assembly elections, leading to frequent by-elections – there were 44 by-elections for State Assemblies in November 2024 due to the resignation of sitting legislators.

Frequent by-elections due to candidates winning from multiple constituencies pose several challenges. First, they add to taxpayer costs. The administrative cost of the Lok Sabha elections is borne by the central government, and Legislative Assemblies by the State governments; in the 2014 general election, it amounted to ₹3,870 crore. Adjusted for 6% annual inflation, the 2024 general election is put at a cost of ₹6,931 crore, or ₹12.76 crore per seat. If 10 politicians win from two constituencies, the extra cost of holding a by-election would be around ₹130 crore. While this is relatively small when compared to overall election spending, the real issue lies in the massive expenditure by political parties, estimated at ₹1,35,000 crore for the recent general election, or about ₹250 crore per constituency, according to the estimates by the Centre for Media Studies. This burden ultimately



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falls on the public, and much of the funding comes from black money, which undermines financial transparency.

Second, the by-election necessitated by the vacation of a winning candidate within an initial six months tends to favour the ruling party. This is borne out in by-election trends across multiple States. This emanates from the fact the ruling party can mobilise resources and provide patronage to party workers. Such a scenario of a non-level playing field is skewed against the Opposition, which has negative implications for parliamentary democracy.

Third, the financial burden of organising a by-election disproportionately falls on the already defeated candidate and their party, forcing them to spend resources once again.

Fourth, the saying "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people" suggests that elections should serve people's needs. However, a candidate contesting from multiple seats serves as a hedging mechanism against uncertainties and often prioritises the leader's interests, not the people's. This undermines democratic principles, placing politics above the public.

Fifth, OCMC is sometimes used to enhance the reach and message delivery of the leader, relying on their popularity for electoral success. This often reflects the leader's dominance within the party, particularly in family- or leader-centric parties. Moreover, OCMC goes against the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression of citizens. A petition filed in 2023 (*Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India*) argued that when people elect a representative, they trust that person to be their voice. Contesting multiple constituencies, winning them, and vacating one for a by-election violates Article 19(0)(a) of the Constitution. This practice causes voter confusion and discontent, as seen in Wayanad, Kerala, when Rahul Gandhi vacated his seat in 2024, potentially leading to voter apathy. The voter turnout was 64.24% in the bypoll and 72.92% in the general election.

Some advantages

The OCMC is common in many countries. It may also have some practical considerations. First, contesting multiple seats provides a safety net for candidates, especially in tightly contested constituencies. Second, in a polity such as India, where politics is centered around the leader and family, OCMC smoothes the leader's continuation or transition in case a leader-centric party secures a majority in the elections but the leader of the party loses out. For instance, Mamata Banerjee lost the Nandigram seat in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections. To make way for her, another leader elected from the Bhabanipur constituency had to resign from the

Assembly. Similar things unfolded in the case of Pushkar Singh Dhami, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand in the 2022 Assembly elections.

International experience

OCMC is not unique to India. Pakistan and Bangladesh allow candidates to contest multiple constituencies but require them to relinquish all but one seat. Pakistan places no limit on the number of constituencies a candidate can contest, as seen in the 2018 elections when the former Prime Minister contested five seats and vacated four. Similarly, Bangladesh allowed candidates to contest up to five constituencies until 2008 but now limits it to three. The practice was once common in the United Kingdom but has been banned since 1983. Most European democracies have phased it out to promote clear representation and accountability.

The misuse of the OCMC far outweighs the benefits. There have been demands for reforms, and probable solutions may be considered. First, amend Section 33(7) of the RP Act 1951 to ban one candidate contesting from multiple constituencies for the same office. The ECI, in 2004, recommended the government ban the practice. The 255th Law Commission report in 2015 made the same recommendation.

Second, recovering the full cost of by-elections from the candidate vacating a seat can serve to discourage candidates from contesting simultaneously. The ECI recommended cost imposition on candidates contesting from multiple constituencies in 2004. However, the practice of OCMC will continue as the winning candidate or political party can afford to pay the cost.

Third, a more effective deterrent would be to hold the by-elections after a year, allowing voters ample time to make an informed decision and giving the defeated candidate sufficient time to recover and prepare strategically for another contest. This would also provide a more balanced and fair electoral process. This could be done by amending Section 151A, Representation of Peoples Act 1951 which provides for by-election within six months of the occurrence of vacancy.

Holding elections requires substantial financial resources from the state. Furthermore, with elections being a round-the-year affair in India, the frequent need for by-elections takes time and money – resources that could otherwise be better invested in the country's development. However, as the issue of OCMC is political, it requires political willpower and the support of the major parties to bring about change. However, unlike the One Nation One Election, it does not have many proponents in political parties. If "one person, one vote" is the core democratic principle for voters, it is time to enforce "one candidate, one constituency" for candidates.

If 'one person, one vote' is the core democratic principle for voters, it should be 'one candidate, one constituency' for politicians

❖ The debate around **One Nation, One Election** has triggered attention towards an associated issue – **One Candidate, Multiple Constituencies (OCMC)**.

- Under current laws, candidates can contest elections from **two constituencies**.
- This practice has raised questions about **political ethics, financial implications, and fair representation** in India's parliamentary democracy.





- ❖ The issue revolves around balancing the **democratic right** of candidates to contest multiple seats with the **disruptive effects** of subsequent by-elections.

Background

❖ Constitutional Provisions:

- Originally, there was **no limit** on the number of constituencies a candidate could contest under the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**.
- Frequent instances of winning and vacating seats necessitated repeated by-elections.

❖ Amendment of 1996:

- Parliament amended the Act in **1996**, restricting candidates to contesting from a **maximum of two constituencies**.
- The amendment aimed to:
 - **Discourage frequent by-elections**.
 - Promote **financial efficiency**.
 - Address concerns of democratic ethics and fair representation.

Meaning and Legal Basis

- ❖ **One Candidate, Multiple Constituencies (OCMC)**: A single candidate contests elections from more than one constituency.
- ❖ **Section 70** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 mandates that a candidate who wins in multiple constituencies must **vacate all but one**.
- ❖ This vacating leads to:
 - **By-elections**, causing additional costs.
 - **Confusion** for voters regarding representation

Impacts

❖ Financial Burden:

- Conducting **by-elections** after a seat is vacated incurs **significant costs**.
- Example: In 2024, the Election Commission reported the cost of holding elections was **₹64.2% in one constituency** and **72.2%** in another.

❖ Political and Social Ramifications:

- It enhances the **dominance of ruling parties**, particularly if they mobilize resources for by-elections.





- The ruling party's **dominance** in by-elections can create an uneven **political playing field** for opposition parties.

❖ **Voter Confusion:**

- Voters feel betrayed if a candidate vacates the seat after being elected, undermining their **trust** in democratic representation.
- Example: The **Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India** case, where the issue of fair representation was debated.

❖ **Manipulation of Resources:**

- Leaders contesting from multiple seats often signal **vote banks** or **power projection** in certain regions.
- Political families, as seen in states like **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar**, use OCMC to solidify **dynastic control**.

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❖ **Democratic Concerns:**

- OCMC creates a **non-level playing field**, benefiting influential parties with greater resources.

Positives

❖ **Maximizing Political Reach:**

- For a leader, contesting from multiple constituencies enhances **popularity** and consolidates voter base.
- Example: Leaders like **Narendra Modi (Varanasi)** or **Indira Gandhi** contested from multiple constituencies to project dominance.





❖ **Symbolic Significance:**

- Contesting from two constituencies demonstrates **political influence** and national stature.

❖ **Democratic Choice:**

- The law allows candidates the **freedom to contest**, respecting the core of democratic ideals.

Similar Instances in Other Countries

❖ **Pakistan and Bangladesh:**

- Candidates are allowed to contest from **multiple constituencies** to test their influence.
- This practice often results in similar financial and electoral challenges.

❖ **United Kingdom:**

- A candidate contests from **one constituency** only, ensuring fair representation.
- This avoids unnecessary by-elections and financial wastage.

❖ **USA:**

- The electoral system does not permit contesting from more than one seat, ensuring stability and clarity in representation.

Way Forward

❖ **Legislative Reforms:**

- Amend the Representation of the People Act to limit candidates to contesting from **only one seat**.

❖ **Financial Accountability:**

- Candidates who vacate seats should be required to **bear the cost of byelections**.
- This measure could discourage misuse of OCMC for political gain.

❖ **Voter Awareness:**

- Educate voters about the implications of **electing candidates contesting multiple constituencies**.

❖ **Alternative Mechanisms:**

- Implement an **automatic selection process**: The seat with the highest vote share could be retained by the candidate, reducing the need for fresh byelections.

❖ **Political Will:**

- Parties must demonstrate ethical responsibility and refrain from fielding candidates in multiple constituencies unless absolutely necessary.
- **Political Ethics**: Parties must voluntarily restrict OCMC to promote democratic integrity.





- **Technology Use:** Leverage tools like **e-voting** to make by-elections less costly and resource-intensive.

Conclusion

- ❖ The issue of **One Candidate, Multiple Constituencies (OCMC)** reflects a broader challenge in balancing democratic freedoms with fiscal responsibility and voter trust. While it allows candidates to maximize their political influence, the resulting by-elections impose significant **financial and social costs**.
- ❖ Reforming the current system to limit candidates to **one constituency** can promote fairness, reduce wastage of public funds, and restore voter confidence in the electoral process. Strengthening **legislative frameworks** and ensuring **political accountability** will help create a more efficient and representative democracy.

