

Large vs Small Constituencies

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In the Parliament Building, the Lok Sabha chamber will have a seating capacity for 888 members, while Rajya Sabha will have 384 seats for the upper house members. This has led to the belief that there is likely to be expansion of the number of parliamentary members. Let us understand the representational crisis that India currently faces in detail.

In news: New Parliament building will last 150 years, its Houses can seat 150% more MPs

Placing it in syllabus: Governance

Dimensions

- Facts: Smallest and the largest Constituencies
- Large Constituencies in India and their problems
- Small Constituencies and the challenges involved to their creation
- Suggestion: A viable size

Content:

- Constituencies are de jure apportionment of space for the purpose of electing representatives of people living in the territorial limits of a democratic state.
- The elected representatives represent not only the people but also their respective segments of territory, the constituencies.
- These two – the land and the people – and the prevailing law of the country provide the basis for constituency boundaries and their delimitation.

Facts: Smallest and the Largest Constituencies:

- Indian Members of Parliament (MPs) represent many more people than MPs in other countries such as Britain, Canada or the US that elect a single representative from

each geographically determined constituency.

- the size of the PCs has grown dramatically over time. In 1971, the average PC had more than 5,00,000 electors, which rose to 7,39,600 in the 1984 elections.
- On average, an Indian parliamentarian today represents constituencies with more than 1.5 million or 15 lakh eligible voters, or close to 2.5 million or 25 lakh citizens.
- This is more than the population of over 50 countries across the world and almost four times the number of citizens a Member of Parliament represented in the first Indian election in 1952.
- As of 2014, **Malkajgiri Constituency in Telangana** is the **largest Lok Sabha constituency** by number of more than 31 lakh electors.
- On the other hand, the parliamentary constituency (PC) of **Lakshadweep** is the **smallest Lok Sabha Constituency** with less than 50,000 eligible voters

In Canada, each MP represents about 97,000 eligible voters whereas a British MP is accountable to approximately 72,000 voters.

Each member of the House of Representatives in the United States has to win a plurality in constituencies with an average of about 5.8 lakh electors, which is about a third of the size of the average parliamentary constituency in India.

Large Constituencies in India and their problems:

- In 1952, most MPs represented a somewhat equal number of people (about 4.32 lakh eligible voters).
- Since then, not only has the size of the electorate increased for all constituencies, but there is also greater variation in the number of voters each MP represents.
- The sheer size of the electorate that each MP is

supposed to represent may be seriously **undermining representative democracy** in India.

Hinders effectively reach out to voters:

- For instance, it would anyway be very difficult for a candidate running for Lok Sabha elections to reach out to as many as 15 lakh voters.
- Managing to do so during the very short official campaign period is even harder.
- If candidates are unable to effectively reach out to voters and educate them about themselves and their campaigns, it impairs the ability of the voters to make informed decisions about who should represent them.

Ineffective representation of voters' interests:

- Once elected, no Member of Parliament can effectively represent the interests of so many people.
- If candidates cannot reach out to enough voters, and elected MPs cannot really represent the interests of enough people in their constituencies, then elections may become less about hearing the voices of the voters and addressing the issues they care most about.

Low voter turnout:

- This **representation crisis** might be the reason why turnout in general elections in India is lower than state and local elections.

Small Constituencies and the challenges involved to their creation:

In such a scenario, creating small constituencies would serve us better. However, there are certain challenges to be overcome.

Need for Constitution Amendment:

- The Indian Constitution permits a maximum of 552 Lok Sabha MPs.
- But the state-wise allocation of seats was supposed to be adjusted every 10 years based on population changes, in such a way that each Member of Parliament would represent roughly an equal number of people, not counting Union Territories or particularly small states.
- Increasing the number of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Seats would need a comprehensive Constitutional Amendment.

Overcoming North – South Disparities and Malapportionment:

- Proportional representation is enshrined in India's constitution, which governs the allocation of seats in the lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha (or "House of the People")
- **Article 81** of the Indian Constitution requires that each state receive Lok Sabha seats in proportion to its population and allocate those seats to constituencies of roughly equal size.
- To divide these seats proportionally, **Article 82** of the constitution calls for the reallocation of seats after every census based on updated population figures.
- Since the 1970s, the difference in the successful adoption of population control measures has brought huge population changes in Northern and Southern States. Indian states have grown at drastically different rates over the past 40 years, a product of disparate – albeit slowly converging – fertility rates
- Due to the considerably lower rate of growth of population in the southern states, their representation is likely to go down, while that of the northern states will go up considerably.
- This unequal position is unlikely to be acceptable to the southern states and might lead to yet another north-south confrontation

Lack of studies on the effects of previous delimitation:

- No study of the actual delimitation of constituency boundaries and its effect on electoral outcome and the geography of representation in India could be carried out.
- This is due to the secrecy and non-availability of delimitation commissions' reports on the actual considerations for delimitation of constituency boundaries.
- As a new boundary can change the pattern of electoral representation in the legislature, it could lead to political distrust and bickering.

Suggestion: A viable size

- Expanding the size of the house may also be more politically feasible than reapportioning the current number of seats.
- population as the sole basis for deciding representation in Parliament will have to be examined afresh and new criteria will have to be evolved.
- Many political scientists have proposed that the Lok Sabha expands just enough that the most overrepresented state does not lose any seats under reapportionment.
- An even more radical measure would involve moving toward a fixed number of seats for each state (again, like the US Senate, where every state has two senators – irrespective of population size). Transforming the upper house into a real venue for debate of states' interests could potentially soften the opposition to a reallocation of seats in the lower house.
- Irrespective of the route pursued, the debate on India's representational future should not be delayed any further.

Mould your thought: Discuss the various facets of representational crisis in Indian Parliament? Suggest solutions to overcome them.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the meaning of representational crisis and Constitutional provisions
- Mention the difference between the largest and smallest constituency / representation in Northern States and Southern States
- Discuss problems with large constituencies
- Discuss the solutions for rectifying these problems
- Conclusion