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One Nation, One Election: Synchronising the Ballot or Disrupting the Mandate?

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The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' proposes the simultaneous conduct of electing the members of all state legislatures and the lower house of Parliament of India, i.e., Lok Sabha. This impactful move initiative seeks to streamline the election-related procedure in India, which currently holds multiple elections at different times, leading to significant financial costs, administrative burdens, and prolonged periods of election-related disruptions. Various agencies argue that ONOE would enhance governance by ensuring a more stable political environment, reducing the frequency of electoral cycles, and enabling States to focus on growth rather than regular campaigning. It is also believed to foster greater voter engagement and reduce election fatigue among the electorate. However, the implementation of ONOE faces several challenges. Critics raise concerns about the potential dilution of regional issues in national elections, the logistical complexities involved in synchronising diverse electoral processes, and the implications for federalism in a diverse nation like India. Additionally, legal and constitutional hurdles must be addressed, as the current framework does not support simultaneous elections. The abstract underscores the ongoing debate surrounding ONOE, highlighting its potential benefits and challenges while emphasising the need for a comprehensive dialogue involving various stakeholders to assess its feasibility and implications for Indian democracy.

However, there are various hurdles to implementing ONOE. Critics highlight worries about the possible dilution of regional issues in national elections, the logistical challenges of synchronising multiple electoral systems, and the implications for federalism in a diverse country like India. Additionally, legal and constitutional difficulties must be resolved, as the current system does not enable simultaneous elections. The abstract also highlights the ongoing debate surrounding ONOE,

emphasising its potential benefits and limitations, as well as the importance of a broad dialogue including diverse stakeholders to assess its feasibility and ramifications for Indian democracy.

Keywords: *administration, legislative actions, election, democracy, federalism, constitution.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of 'One Nation, One Election' has long been a subject of deliberation in India, and it is now increasingly being regarded as a potential necessity for the nation's democratic framework. On 26th November 2020, during the conclusion of the 80th All India Presiding Officers' Conference, the Prime Minister of India emphasised that the concept of One Nation, One Election is not merely a topic for debate but a crucial need for India. He noted that the frequent conduct of elections at different levels and at varied intervals hampers the country's development process and governance continuity.¹ The Prime Minister urged the presiding officers of various legislatures to engage deeply with the idea and to take proactive steps in this direction.

In December 2020, when the Election Commissioner of India was asked whether the Commission is competent to implement the concept of simultaneous elections, he responded affirmatively, stating that it could be implemented, subject to necessary constitutional amendments and modifications to election laws.²

The idea has also featured prominently in the manifestos of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during both the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, where the party expressed its commitment to pursue simultaneous elections if elected to power. Following the 2019 general elections, an all-party meeting was convened in June 2019, during which the Prime Minister once again urged all political parties to view the proposal not through a partisan lens but as a reform in the national interest.

¹ Akhilesh Kumar Singh, 'One nation, one election is not a matter of debate but a necessity for India' *Times of India* (27 November 2020) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/one-nation-one-election-not-a-subject-of-debate-but-a-necessity-for-india-modi/articleshow/79436955.cms>> accessed 25 August 2025

² Soni Mishra, 'Modi reignites discussion on 'one nation, one election'' *The Week* (24 December 2020) <<https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/12/24/modi-reignites-discussion-on-one-nation-one-election.html>> accessed 25 August 2025

However, responses from the opposition have been divided. While some political leaders have expressed apprehension that the idea may disproportionately benefit a single party, others have maintained a neutral stance, calling for further deliberation and study.

In pursuit of a comprehensive framework, the BJP announced the organisation of 25 webinars dedicated to the One Nation, One Election discussion. These sessions aim to facilitate dialogue among senior party leaders, legal experts, and members of academia.³ The objective is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the feasibility, constitutional implications, and administrative preparedness required for implementing simultaneous elections across India.

The Prime Minister's consistent advocacy for this reform underscores a broader vision – to streamline India's electoral process, minimise governance disruptions, and ensure developmental continuity. Through research, deliberation, and consensus-building, the government seeks to move towards realising the possibility of holding one election for the entire nation in the near future.

INDIA'S ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of India vests the Election Commission of India (ECI) with the control, superintendence, and direction of the conduct of elections to the offices of the President, Vice-President, Parliament, and the State Legislatures. At the state level, elections to the local bodies are conducted under the supervision of the State Election Commissions (SEC). The ECI is responsible for preparing and maintaining electoral rolls for parliamentary and state assembly elections, while the SECs prepare rolls for the elections to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies.

Unlike many other countries where local governance institutions are not constitutionally mandated, India's 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) granted constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipalities by introducing Chapters IX and IX-A into the Constitution. As a result, India conducts elections at three levels – Union, State, and Local.

³ 'BJP to hold 25 webinars to push idea of 'one nation, one election'' *The Economic Times* (26 December 2020) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/bjp-to-hold-25-webinars-to-push-idea-of-one-nation-one-election/articleshow/79967987.cms?from=mdr>> accessed 25 August 2025

- At the Union level, elections are conducted for the President, Vice-President, Lok Sabha, and Rajya Sabha.
- At the State level, elections are held for the Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad (in the six states with bicameral legislatures).
- At the Local level, elections are conducted for Panchayats and Municipalities.

Direct elections take place for the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha, and local bodies, allowing citizens to directly elect their representatives through universal adult suffrage.

MEANING OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

The concept of One Nation, One Election envisions the synchronisation of election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, so that elections to both are conducted simultaneously within a fixed time frame.

The Prime Minister of India has repeatedly advocated this idea, suggesting that the country should have a single electoral roll instead of separate ones maintained by the ECI and SECs. Under Article 324 of the Constitution, the ECI is empowered to prepare and update electoral rolls for parliamentary and assembly elections. Similarly, Article 243K and Article 243ZA empower the SECs to conduct elections and prepare electoral rolls for Panchayats and Municipalities, respectively. The Prime Minister has suggested that the electoral rolls prepared by the ECI for national and state elections should also be used for local body elections to save time, effort, and public expenditure.

Another rationale behind this initiative is the frequent election cycle in India, which keeps the government in a constant state of election mode. As elections are held almost every year in different states, governments often refrain from introducing major policy reforms that could have electoral repercussions. Consequently, policymaking and governance are delayed. The proposal, therefore, aims to conduct elections once every five years, allowing uninterrupted governance and policy continuity during that period. However, given that local body elections fall under the jurisdiction of the SECs, conducting all three levels of elections simultaneously may raise federalism concerns. To safeguard India's federal structure, the current proposal focuses on holding Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections

simultaneously, while allowing local body elections to be conducted separately by the respective SECs.

INDIA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM (1952-1967)

Following independence, an Interim Government functioned from 1947 until 1951 under the Constituent Assembly. The first general elections were conducted between October 1951 and February 1952, marking the beginning of India's democratic journey. These elections covered both the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies.

Subsequently, elections to the Rajya Sabha were held in March 1952, with its first session convened on 3rd April 1952. The Presidential election took place on 2nd May 1952, in which the elected representatives of the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Assemblies participated. Dr. Rajendra Prasad assumed office as India's first President on 13th May 1952, the same day that the election for the Vice-President was held.

From 1952 to 1967, simultaneous elections were successfully conducted across the country. The Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha, Presidential, and Vice-Presidential elections were all held together in 1957, 1962, and 1967. This period represents the only phase in India's electoral history when the nation operated under a synchronised election cycle, a system the One Nation, One Election proposal seeks to revive in a modern context.

CHANGES AFTER 1967 AND THE REASONS THEREOF

The synchronised electoral cycle that existed between 1952 and 1967 began to break down primarily due to premature dissolutions of the Lok Sabha and various State Legislative Assemblies. The Lok Sabha may be dissolved before the completion of its term if the ruling party loses its majority, there are large-scale defections, or the Prime Minister advises early dissolution for political advantage.

Under Articles 85 and 174 of the Constitution of India⁴, the President and the Governor possess the power to dissolve the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha, respectively, upon the advice of the Council of Ministers. Consequently, both the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers have, at times, exercised discretion to advance elections for political or strategic reasons.

⁴ Constitution of India 1950, arts 85 and 174

After the 1967 general elections, the next Lok Sabha elections were constitutionally due in 1972. However, in 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi recommended the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, leading to fresh elections in 1971. Subsequently, the term of the Lok Sabha, which was to end in 1976, was extended to six years during the Emergency period (1975–1977) through a constitutional amendment. The 1977 elections then saw the fall of the Indira Gandhi government and the rise of the Janata Party.

In 1980, early elections were again held when the Janata Party government collapsed, and Indira Gandhi returned to power. The elections scheduled for 1985 were preponed to 1984 after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Later, elections were conducted in 1989, but political instability continued, resulting in another election in 1991 after the ruling party lost its majority. Similarly, the government formed after the 1996 elections survived only until 1998, when mid-term elections became necessary. Political stability returned only after the 1999 elections, following which governments largely completed their five-year tenures.

DISRUPTIONS IN STATE ELECTIONS

The Vidhan Sabha election cycles were similarly disrupted due to loss of majority, defections, and frequent imposition of President's Rule under Article 356 of the Constitution⁵. Between 1968 and 1969, several state governments—including those in Bihar, West Bengal, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh—were dissolved following political splits within ruling parties. This fragmented the synchronised electoral schedule across states.

In 1977, the Janata Party government imposed President's Rule collectively in nine states, dissolving their assemblies and conducting fresh elections. The same pattern reappeared in 1980, when the Indira Gandhi government dismissed these nine state governments under Article 356 after returning to power. Over time, the frequent and politically motivated misuse of Article 356 became a matter of serious constitutional concern. However, the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *S.R. Bommai v Union of India* (1994)⁶ curtailed such misuse by laying down strict judicial guidelines. The Court ruled that the President's Rule must be subject to judicial review, thereby significantly limiting arbitrary dismissals of state

⁵ Constitution of India 1950, art 356

⁶ *S. R. Bommai v Union of India* (1994) 2 SCR 644

governments. Following this judgment, political stability improved, and elections began to be conducted more regularly in accordance with their constitutional terms.

HISTORY OF THE DEMAND FOR SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

The idea of reintroducing simultaneous elections has been periodically discussed since the breakdown of the original cycle. The Election Commission of India, in its Annual Report of 1983, highlighted the need to revert to a synchronised electoral schedule to ensure governance continuity. The Law Commission of India, in its 170th Report (1999), also examined the feasibility of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The proposal gained renewed momentum when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) incorporated the idea into its 2014 election manifesto, reaffirming its commitment again in 2019.

In 2016, the Prime Minister revived the national debate on the issue, leading the NITI Aayog to release a Working Paper in January 2017, outlining the logistical and constitutional framework required for simultaneous elections. The Law Commission's Draft Report of April 2018 further recommended that at least five constitutional amendments would be necessary to implement the proposal effectively, along with a clear legal mechanism for synchronising election cycles in the future.⁷

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Solve the Problem of Governance: The State are consistently in a state of election due to continuous elections being held every year. In 2017, NITI Aayog prepared a working paper which observed that in the past thirty years, there hasn't been a single year in which elections were not held. So, because of the conduct of elections, a model code of conduct is implemented, which prescribes what can be done and what cannot be done during the period of election, out of which one thing which it talks about is that the State can't announce any development plans during that period. Due to regular elections, it causes policy paralysis as policies cannot be implemented during the election period, and the government keeps delaying their policy implementation to have short-term gains in the elections, which are going to be held in a particular state, and they don't miss out on the votes due to their policy

⁷ R Keerthana, 'The Hindu Explains: One nation, one election' *The Hindu* (28 March 2024) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/one-nation-one-election/article28073916.ece/amp/>> accessed 25 August 2025

decisions¹⁴. With elections being conducted regularly, a lot of staff of the government are put on election duty, due to which the normal functioning of the government departments cannot be done properly. With regular elections, there is a governance crisis, so it's better to conduct elections once in five years so that proper governance can be done.

Keep a Check on the Finances: A lot of expenditure is incurred by the government in conducting elections, and even the candidates and the parties' spending is a lot during the elections. According to the Election Commission, in the 2014 elections, the total expenditure incurred was 3870 crores, and in state elections, there is about 200-300 crores per state.⁸ The Election Commission even said after the 2014 elections that if there had been one election, then the total expenditure would have been around 4500 crores. So if the expenditure can be cut down by conducting one election, then the government should try and save money for better developmental works.

It will Reduce Corruption: One of the reasons why India has so much corruption is that political parties need lots of funds as elections come regularly. Giving funds to political parties also leads to crony capitalism, as, instead of asking for funds from everyone, they ask for it from a few influential people who, in return, expect policy formulation in their favour. Since elections are so frequent in India that political parties have to collect so much money for contesting the elections that after the elections, they have to cheat on the policies that are formulated or planned to be formulated to recover the amount of money spent on elections.⁹ So, if elections are not that frequent, there will be less corruption and crony capitalism will also be controlled to some extent.

It Saves the Social Fabric: Whenever elections take place, communalism, regionalism, and casteism can be seen as every political party wants to win elections, due to which they try and do polarisation because every political party has a targeted vote bank. So if regular elections are there, then every time the atmosphere and the ambience get destroyed. So if elections are conducted once, then the bitterness within the society will be felt only once, and after that, things will go smoothly for the coming five years.

⁸ Rakesh Dubbudu, 'What is the expenditure incurred for conducting 'Lok Sabha' Elections?' (*Factly*, 16 January 2019) <<https://factly.in/understanding-election-expenditure/>> accessed 26 August 2025

⁹ Vivek K Agnihotri, 'One Nation, One Election: Trapped between desirability and feasibility' (*India Legal*, 10 December 2020) <<https://indialegallive.com/column-%20news%20/one-nation-one-election-modi-lok-sabha/>> accessed 26 August 2025

Better Voter Turnout: When there are regular elections, the interest of the voters tends to be affected as they lose interest due to the conducting of frequent elections. So a democracy can prosper only when there is maximum participation of the voters in the voting, as only that will lead to participative democracy. So if elections are conducted once in five years, then there will be more participation from the voters, and they will show more interest in it.

CONCERNS ABOUT SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Conducting elections simultaneously not only has advantages but also has a few drawbacks for the same. Some of the concerns which cannot be ignored while conducting simultaneous elections are:

Feasibility: It is said that conducting simultaneous elections is not feasible, as some say that the Constitution does not allow for the same. For this, the Constitution will have to be amended, and only then can we have one nation, one election. If elections are to be conducted all at one go, then a lot of EVM machines will be required, and a lot of staff will also be required for conducting elections.

Accountability: Our Former Election Commissioner S. Y Quraishi gave an interesting argument as to why elections should not be held simultaneously and said that conducting elections again and again, though it increases the expenditure of the nation, which is not good, but for a democracy, the expenditure is not a big threat, but a bigger threat is accountability.¹⁰ So having elections again and again leads to an increase in the accountability of the government because every few months, the politicians have to come before the people to ask for votes. Since the elected representatives have to appear before the people frequently so they behave responsibly and are accountable.

Federalism will be in Danger: It is said that if elections are conducted simultaneously, then the federal aspect of our Constitution will be endangered, as the national issues will overpower the local issues.¹¹ The ideology of one nation one election will also bring an objective of one leader one election, as it will increase the importance of one leader and instead of a parliamentary form of government, we will be slowly moving towards a

¹⁰ Karan Thapar, 'How 'one nation, one election' could alter our political system, writes Karan Thapar' *Hindustan Times* (30 June 2019) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/how-one-nation-one-election-could-alter-our-political-system/story-P6j7JHLkSdiYpOdfuOKVVM_amp.html> accessed 27 August 2025

¹¹ *Ibid*

presidential form of government. With this, the local issues will die, and the regional parties' existence will come into danger. If elections are conducted simultaneously, then the powers of the EC will increase and those of the SEC will decrease, which would automatically reduce the powers of the states.

SUGGESTIONS

There are some ways in which the model of one nation, one election could be achieved. It can be done by:

- To have Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and Local bodies elections at once. Under this system, the voter goes and elects all his representatives on one day in a particular state.
- The second option could be to have Lok Sabha elections first and then to have Vidhan Sabha and local bodies elections together. There will not be much difficulty in conducting the Vidhan Sabha and Local Bodies elections together because both are regional elections, which are at the state level.
- The third option could be to have lower and upper house elections together and elections of local bodies separately, because local body elections are organised by the SEC.
- The fourth option is similar to that of England, in which there will be synchronisation among the states in which the elections are going to be held in that year. So, all the elections which are going to be held in different states in that particular year will be held on one day.

The best approach towards this is to form a consensus with all the political parties and to obtain the approval from all the political parties, and should avoid resistance from other political parties. The process of having one election should not be done abruptly, but should be done gradually in two or three steps, which will not lead to much resistance, and it will become easy to bring things into the system. These changes can be implemented only if the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, Lok Sabha Business Rules and Vidhan Sabha Business Rules are amended.

CONCLUSION

The One Nation, One Election initiative in India aims to synchronise the schedules of Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, conducting them simultaneously. This approach seeks

to reduce election-related costs, minimise disruptions in governance, and ensure continuity in policymaking.

In September 2023, the Government of India established a High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, to examine the feasibility of this proposal. The Committee's report, released in 2024, recommended aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Following this, the Union Cabinet accepted the recommendations on September 18, 2024, marking a significant step toward comprehensive electoral reform.

Subsequently, two bills were introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024; the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024¹² and the Union Territories Bill 2024 to facilitate the implementation of One Nation, One Election. The first meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the proposal was held on January 8, 2025, in New Delhi, chaired by BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary. Officials from the Ministry of Law and Justice briefed the panel on the framework and procedural implications of the initiative.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently emphasised that the idea of One Nation, One Election serves the national interest, arguing that it would bring greater stability and efficiency to governance. The rationale behind the initiative is that frequent elections keep the country in a perpetual election mode, divert administrative machinery and security forces from their primary functions, and delay developmental activities. However, while the proposal offers practical benefits, it also raises important concerns about India's federal structure. Implementing simultaneous elections across all states and union territories could potentially undermine the autonomy of state governments if not executed carefully. Therefore, before enforcing such a major reform, it is essential to build consensus among all states, ensure extensive debate among political parties, and take public opinion into account.

Gradual implementation and a cooperative approach would ensure that the transition is democratic and inclusive. In a nation as diverse as India, electoral reforms must balance administrative efficiency with constitutional federalism.

¹² The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill 2024