

One Nation, One Election: The Future of Indian Elections

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Abstract

In any democratic system, the main feature is to have periodic elections through which the representatives of the people are elected to run the government. Indian democracy operates on the same principle, with elections held every five years at the national, state, and local levels of government. The concept of “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) stands for simultaneous elections. This proposed change to the election system aims to hold simultaneous elections to reduce election costs and the frequency of elections. Proponents of ONOE argue that this initiative will reduce significant cost and election frequency, which will result in better governance and uninterrupted policymaking. While critics, on the other hand, raise concerns regarding legal, logistical, and constitutional problems, along with voters’ fatigue in electing candidates and sideline of regional issues. This analysis exemplifies other international standings on simultaneous elections, such as South Africa, Sweden, Germany and Indonesia. This study is crucial to understanding the features of ONOE and its purpose. This study focuses on ‘One Nation, One Election’ along with its importance, feasibility, advantages, difficulties and campaign cost reduction.

Keywords: *One Nation One Election, Election, Electoral Reforms, Democracy, ONOE, Campaign Cost*

Introduction

India, as world's largest democracy, conducts elections every five years for all three tiers of government. Since independence India chose the democratic form of government, where its citizens can choose their representatives to run the government. At present, there are nearly 900 million people in India with voting rights that makes India the world's largest democracy. All three tiers of government that is Parliamentary Lower House, State-level legislative elections, and local (municipal/panchayat) level elections were conducted periodically, in which voters take part separately for every election.

The modern Indian nation-state came into reality on 15th of August 1947. Since then, free and fair elections have been held at regular intervals as per the principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution, Election Laws and System. The Election Commission of India (ECI) was established on 25th January 1950 as a constitutional body that is responsible for the conduct of free, fair and periodic elections. The ECI is an autonomous, independent, and permanent body

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that has regulatory authority over election finance and political parties and also manages a single electoral roll for separate elections. Currently, a fresh bill has been proposed by the government in the Lok Sabha with the idea of synchronising and aligning various elections across India, well known as ‘One Nation, One Election’.

‘One Nation, One Election’ stands for the process of conducting synchronized elections throughout India. This concept envisions conducting simultaneous elections at the national and state level in the first phase and synchronising election timelines. The core aim of ONOE is to establish a systematic schedule where voting for the Lok Sabha, state legislative bodies, and local bodies can occur concurrently. This idea of ONOE is a transformational shift from the present practice of scattered elections throughout the political calendar. This proposal is supported by the ECI on the grounds of lowering election costs and significant logistical burden posed by managing multiple election cycles.

Since the time of inception of this idea of One Nation, One Election, it has sparked discussions in the political arena and among citizens also. Advocates of ONOE argue that aligning election cycles could enhance administrative and policy efficiency and significantly reduce wastage of resources. On the other hand, critics cautioned against potential complications on regional issues and representation of regional parties.

This election reform initiative aims to streamline the electoral process by establishing a way of simultaneous elections and a predictable voting calendar. This harmonization would represent a significant shift from the current system in which elections occur at disparate times across multiple states and governmental tiers (Deo, 2024).

Origin of One Nation, One Election

The notion of concurrent elections is not new to the world such elections in which several or all level of representative were elected in same election process. Even in India this is not new as elections of lower house of parliament and state legislative assembly were held simultaneously till 1967. The practice of conducting the first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies simultaneously in 1951-52 was maintained for the three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967 (Santhosh Kumar, 2024)

In India, elections were traditionally not staggered; the inaugural national election for the Lok Sabha and state legislatures occurred concurrently in 1951-52. This cycle of elections continued till 4th general election of 1967, after which it broke out due to political unrest at federal and state levels (Deo, 2024). Mishra argues that this alignment of Lok Sabha and state legislative elections was disrupted in 1968-69 due to the premature dissolution of various state assemblies. (Mishra, 2018). In the late 1960s, several states saw early dissolution of legislative assemblies, and the separation of election cycles was further intensified by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 1970 and the ensuing midterm election in 1971. After that time, state and national elections have been handled independently, resulting in a system where elections occur often in certain sections of the country. The Election Commission of India (ECI) originally suggested in 1983 to restore simultaneous elections. The Law commission of India in 107th report of 1999 made additional request for restoration of simultaneous elections. A parliamentary standing committee in 2015 also suggested simultaneous elections. On

September 2, 2023, the Indian government established a High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, led by former President Dr. Ram Nath Kovind. This committee submitted the 18000-page report to central government on 14th March 2024, on basis of recommendation made by committee central government proposed new bill in lower house of parliament on 18th sept 2024 titled 'One Nation, One Election' (Online, 2024).

International scenario

Elections are the core of every democratic society in modern world, internationally the concept of simultaneous elections are not new. Simultaneous elections means that process of elections on multiple levels of governments, such as national and provincial, done in concurrent manner. Globally nations like South Africa, Sweden, Germany, Indonesia conducts simultaneous elections. This section looks at the history and use of simultaneous elections in several important foreign countries.

I) South Africa

In post-apartheid era, first general elections were held in 1994 in South Africa. This watershed moment changed African state to a democratic state where voters cast their votes for both national and provincial representatives simultaneously (Union, 1994). This process of simultaneous election continued till date. In every five years, on the same date, all nine provincial and the national assembly representative were elected under the South African electoral system. This post-apartheidic reform in election gave a significant political stability at a period of political and social change, it also streamlined the election process. Simultaneous elections in South Africa not only signifies the cost saving, political stability but also points to the ignorance of regional issues and demands of smaller parties. Keeping in view of these issues, India where multi-party, multi-region and multi-culture exists and needs and demands of every region is different the notion of One Nation, One Election needs require more deliberate attempt to strengthen federal and democratic fabric of the country.

II) Sweden

Sweden started its simultaneous elections in 1970, when it conducted Riksdag (Parliament) election along with municipal and country elections. Before 1970, parliamentary and municipal elections were conducted independently. This electoral reform's main objective is to streamline electoral process and increase voter turnout. In result of this reform, it is evident that voter turnout increased and election process streamlined. The issue of overshadowing of local issues by national issues are persistent in Swedish system. In Indian context it is important to focus on local issues as our federal system heavily relies on regional political dynamics.

III) Germany

After the unification of Germany, it conducted its first election in 1871, managed and supervised by Emperor Wilhelm I (Deo, 2024). In early days Germany uses single member district system but after abdication of throne by Wilhelm II this voting system was rebuilt. Presently, Germany uses proportional representation system in its elections. There are many pros and cons of German electoral constitution.

IV) Indonesia

Indonesia is world's third largest democracy after India and U.S.A., this democratic system stands on process of simultaneous elections. Before 1998, the legislature and the president were elected separately. When dictatorship of Suharto ended, the Indonesian people made various democratic reforms one of which is simultaneous elections. Indonesia a nation state in south Asia having various similarity with India in size, complexity of voting, and diversity of peoples, so it is very relevant for India. The Indonesian experience shows that while voter turnout and political stability increases but on the other hand complexity for voter to differentiate between local and national issues rises, and voter are overwhelmed by the choices.

Features and Purpose of ONOE

India is one of the most vibrant democracies in the world having dynamic and comprehensive electoral system. Elections in India is planned, conducted and supervised by Election Commission of India for parliamentary and state legislative assemblies. Multiple tiers of government in Indian democracy requires frequent elections on all levels. The concept on 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) aims to synchronize parliamentary and state legislative elections, potentially creating a more streamlined process.

The process of simultaneous elections can fix a certain date on which the election will happen after every term ends. This change requires multiple legal and constitutional amendments to implement ONOE across India (Vishwanath, 2023). The central government on 2nd sept 2023 set up a high-level committee to examine numerous aspects, both legal and logistical, for implementing the 'One Nation, One Election'. The committee was headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind that also includes union home minister Amit Shah. This committee also examined the aspects of constitutional amendments to facilitate simultaneous elections. On 14th March 2024, committee submitted its 18000 pages long final report to the President of India. On the basis of suggestion made in this report and other reports the central government came up with 'One Nation, One Election' bill in the lower house of parliament.

ONOE will align the electoral cycles across different tiers of government and conduct simultaneous elections within a prior fixed timeframe. Simultaneous elections have both advantages and challenges to implement in dynamic, vast and vibrant democracy like India.

Current Developments and discussions

After the 2024 general elections, BJP led NDA came victories in the elections with 293 seats in Lok Sabha. The opposition INDIA block led by Indian National Congress and other regional parties won 233 seats. Resulting in NDA made government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The central government on 18th September 2024, approved 'One Nation, One Election' bill before the parliament. The ONOE bill has been passed in Lok Sabha with a ratio of 269 votes in favour and 198 against the passing of bill (Mishra P. , 2024).

The ONOE bill is sent to Joint parliamentary committee (JPC) consisting of initially 31 members, later on some other members from smaller parties were added to discuss the bill and new number became 39 (Correspondent, 2024). The panel is assigned to review the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-ninth) Amendment Bill, and the Union Territories

Laws (Amendment) bill, 2024, which is intended to synchronise elections at parliamentary and state assembly level (SNS, 2025). This JPC comprises 39 members, with 27 members from Lok Sabha and 12 members from Rajya Sabha and committee is chaired by Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) M.P. P. P. Chaudhary that completed its first meeting on 8th Jan 2025. Currently the matter is under discussion with JPC.

Advantages Of One Nation One Election

Proponents of One Nation One Election argue that this electoral reform will significantly reduce the election cost, lower corruption, lower pressure on political parties, higher political stability, increase the effectiveness of government and increase voter turnout. This policy of ONOE will provide government more stability in result government can more focus on untrapped long-term policy making.

Political and Governance Stability: When elections conducted more frequently the political and governance stability weakens as parties as well as leaders in government cannot take bold and long-term policy decisions due to fear of voter backlash. By conducting synchronised elections give stable government that could make strong long-term policies, in result it advances overall effectiveness of administration.

Cost Efficiency: Parliamentary panel on estimate discussion revelled that the Election Commission of India spends more than 45,000 crore rupees in conducting parliamentary and state legislative elections. This amount is does not include disclosed and undisclosed expenses by candidates and parties (Bhatnagar, 2024). The conduct of simultaneous elections can cut expenses by the ECI on conduct of elections. Governments can manage the entire electoral process with greater efficiency and save money by organizing elections, which will make it more long-term viable.

Lower Corruption: The ongoing need to generate money to sustain recurrent election campaigns is what fuels political corruption. By lowering the number of required election campaigns within five years, "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) could lessen this (Kamble, 2024). Simultaneous elections decrease chances of election corruption as frequency of elections decrease.

Reduction in Electoral Fatigue: Both citizens and political parties are frequently tired of the perpetual election cycle. By streamlining the electoral process, ONOE seeks to reduce this fatigue and free up more time for real governing rather than nonstop campaigning (Wahab, 2024). Stakeholders can participate more actively in policy debates and civic duties when there are fewer elections to worry about, which will ultimately improve the democratic process.

Simplified Voting Process: Simultaneous elections could improve voter registration efficiency and reduce issues such as names being omitted from the voting list (Kamble, 2024). One nation, one election can make voting process simplified and more efficient for Indian democratic system.

Improved Security Management: Security management for elections in India is a great challenge, as it requires number of para-military force as well as police to be deployed to maintain security for elections. The process of huge deployment of personals and staffs is one

of the significant logistical challenges. ONOE makes this process more simplified as elections were to be conducted in streamlined manner, it allows more efficient and effective planning and deployment of security resources (Wahab, 2024).

Increase Voter turnout: Simultaneous elections can boost voter turnout as voters required to vote only once on a fixed date every five years. The process of simultaneous elections makes voters more aware about their voting rights. A survey conducted by a news agency named News18 which interviewed 4,573 peoples across 29 states and union territories of India, a total of 72.1% respondents believe that ONOE would improve voter turnout in India (News18.com, 2025).

Challenges Of One Nation One Election

The challenges of One nation one election can be multi-faced such as implications to federalism, legal and constitutional amendments, political dominance, economic challenges, overwhelming of voters, security challenges, logistical complexity, Overburdening of Election Commission, Mid-term gaps, Dominance of national Parties, Ignorance of local issues, Electoral violence, Technological challenges, Voter education challenge. Although ONOE can be beneficial for Indian democratic system, but critics have their view on multiple implications of ONOE.

Implication to federalism: Under Article 1 of the Constitution of India defines India as ‘India is a union of states rather than a federation of states’ (Basu, 2011). The Constitution of India gives states independence to regulate their own electoral timeline. By conduct of simultaneous elections, this principle of federalism may be threatened, leading to centralisation of power within the hands of central government.

Legal and Constitutional amendments: To implement ONOE it is required to amend constitution with two-third majority and rectification by at least half the states (Online, 2024). Key articles that are required to amend includes 83, 85(2)(B), 356 and 75(3) along with amendment in Representation of People’s Act, 1951. Achieving such agreement from all stakeholders pose noteworthy challenges.

Political Dominance: In conduct of simultaneous elections, it may be possible that national parties got extra edge over local regional parties. This overshadowing of regional parties could sideline regional issues as well as their representation on parliamentary level. All the national parties have more resources than regional parties that could immensely effect election campaigning. This sideline and weakness of local regional parties could marginalize local prospective and shed more focus on national issues.

Economic Challenges: One election can cut down election expenses but it also came with its own financial and other administrative challenges. To conclude simultaneous elections significant amount of financial and admirative resource is required. As elections conducted across the nation simultaneously it can interrupt economic activity.

Overwhelming of Voters: The voter may be overwhelmed by choices of candidates that they get on multiple levels of election. Number of candidates in a single election can confuse them and result in misinformed or wrong voting decision.

Security Challenges: India is geographically 7th largest nation in the world with an area of 3,287,263 sq. kms. To conduct simultaneous elections across whole territory is a massive task of security. Already in times of election, our internal security system is at stress and in ONOE it may further stressed. The implementation of ONOE could put security at risk to tackle such risk security arrangement and planning needs to be strengthen.

Logistical Complexity: Conducting elections in India requires great logistical requirements and coordination. Simultaneous elections across India for over a billion-voters present numerous challenges. It requires extraordinary level of organisation and use of advanced and latest technology to conduct such a herculin task.

Overburdening of Election Commission: Election Commission of India is responsible for planning, conduct and supervision of elections in India. To conduct elections ECI took employees of state and central government on deputation basis. In case of simultaneous elections that is a single large scale electoral festival, requires increased workload on the EC. It could strain its resources and capabilities of conducting elections in free, fair and efficient elections.

Mid-term Gaps: If in any case a constituency left vacant, for instance due to dissolution, it may be left without representation or in hands of Presidential rule. In such case voice of general citizens could be left unheard in absence of elected representative. Resulting in weakening of citizens voice, inefficient governance, and ultimately effecting well being of the constituency.

Ignorance of Local Issues: Simultaneous elections on multiple tiers of government can ignore local issues while focus on national issues. In compression between local and national issues, parties try to put more pressure on national issue to bag maximum votes to form government but in result it could sideline regional issues and ignore it. It can further be added that charm of national leaders and their call on national level could impress more voters on national level leading to weaking of local issues

Electoral Violence: As scale and complexity of election rises with simultaneous elections that upsurges the risk of electoral violence, more specifically in areas of high concern were tension already exists. Political desire to came in power may give birth to potential political clash between two supporting groups.

Technical Challenges: Conducting one single election for multiple level of government requires use of modern technology effectively and efficiently. Relying heavily on Electronic Voting Machines, modern electronic tools (Cameras, monitoring tools, electronic communication) and advanced logistical technology presents potential weakness. Use of internet to attack electoral installations, malefaction of electoral equipment could disrupt electoral process and shake public confidence in election mechanism.

Voter Education: Voters are the core of any electoral process, they needs to be educated about use of multiple voting machines for various different level of elections. It may be difficult to make sure that citizens are sufficiently informed, involved, and prepared to participate if complicated information about different ballots and candidates is communicated in a short amount of time.

The Way forward

To successfully implement ONOE there is a great requirement of discussion and inclusion of all stakeholders specially all small and large, local and national parties. To test ONOE it could be gradually introduced, without causing widespread disruption of political activity. Elections conducted in phases can help spot possible problems and improve the procedure for a more seamless rollout nationwide.

It is also required to improve the capabilities of Election Commission of India for conduct of effective, efficient, free and fair elections. To achieve such capability additional manpower , training of staffs , resources and support is required. If prepared adequately the ECI can impeccably conduct simultaneous elections across country.

The integration of technology is also required along with promotion of public awareness about One Nation, One Election policy. Integration of technology includes utilization of modern advance technology for inclusion of voters in voters list to EVM and to cater logistical needs of conducting simultaneous elections. On the other hand, public awareness can be promoted through sensitization, discussions on open forum and through academic debates also.

Conclusion

The idea of “One Nation, One Election” is a strong and amicable way to solve significant difficulties of Indian electoral systems which includes a spectrum of issues such as excessive expense on election campaigns, lower voter turnout, complexity and time of elections, etc.

This electoral reform holds lot of potential challenges such as implication to Indian federalism, legal and constitutional amendments, political dominance of national parties, logistical complexity, overwhelming of voters and ignorance of local issues. To implement ONOE precise and efficient planning, agreement among all stakeholders especially political parties and a workable consensus among all stakeholders is desired. If executed ONOE could transform India’s whole electoral system and could provide political and governance stability. It has a potential to enhance our democratic system and can serve as a model globally for other democracies.

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