

## **Understanding One Nation-One Election In India: Impacts And Implications**

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### **Abstract:**

Elections are the main way a democracy shows the will of the people. They reveal opinions and choices and help shape the future of a country. Running elections is a large task that costs a lot of money and takes a lot of time. It is fair to say that India faces elections almost all year long. This has led to the idea of stopping the frequent election cycle. Many political parties now suggest holding all elections at the same time as a solution. The goal of one nation, one election is to synchronize the elections for the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies. This would reduce the number of elections held each year. Making this change would affect the federal system of India. Because of that, discussions and debates among different groups are necessary before any decision is made. Building consensus on whether synchronized elections are practical should be part of public talks. This article discusses both the benefits and the challenges of implementing one nation, one election. It stresses the importance of balancing national and regional interests while addressing legal and constitutional issues. The paper also examines different aspects of the plan to see if it is practical and trustworthy. It considers what impact it could have on politics, society, and the economy, all of which could influence the future of Indian democracy.

**Keywords:** Constitutional Issues, Elections, Politics, Society, Influence, Federal System, Political Parties.

## **Introduction:**

Elections are a key part of a strong democracy. The Election Commission of India ensures elections are free and fair, allowing people to choose their leaders. Currently, India holds elections separately for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. This method has been criticized because it costs a lot of money and leads to multiple election rounds throughout the year. These repeated elections slow down development work. This issue led to the idea of One Nation One Election (ONOE). The plan has generated debate because it marks a change from the usual voting system. It breaks the tradition of having separate election cycles. The 1999 Law Commission Report was the first to describe this idea clearly. But it gained more attention when Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed support during the 2014 elections. The concept is not entirely new to India. After independence, the first Lok Sabha and state elections were held in 1951-52. These elections took place together for three terms, in 1951-52, 1957, 1962, and 1967. They stopped during the fourth Lok Sabha because some state assemblies were dissolved early in 1968 and 1969. This caused the elections to be held separately again. In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee looked into the possibility of holding elections at the same time, in its 79th report. So, the question is whether conducting simultaneous elections is necessary for India. Many researchers see benefits like saving resources, improving governance, and speeding up development. They also point out that fewer elections mean less disturbance from election rules and codes of conduct. However, other studies point out challenges. These include constitutional issues, logistical problems, higher needs for infrastructure, and less control for states under ONOE. Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy, who led the Law Commission, made an important statement on this topic. In its 170th report from 1999, he said, "We should end the cycle of elections every year and out of season. Elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies should happen together. Though we can't predict every situation, holding separate elections should be the exception. The rule should be one election every five years for Lok Sabha and states."

The term "Simultaneous Elections" describes a system where election timings for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are coordinated. Voters get the chance to vote for both their local and national representatives on the same day. This doesn't mean that voting must happen all at once across all regions. It allows for voting to be spread out over different phases, as long as voters can still cast ballots for both levels of government on the same day. This approach marks a major change from the traditional voting method and involves legal and constitutional challenges.

**Constitutional Provisions Regulating Elections:** The Indian Constitution does not mention the concept of ONOE directly, but several provisions are relevant to it:

Article 83 sets the term of the House of People at five years. The President can dissolve it earlier based on the Prime Minister's advice. However, it makes no mention of holding elections at the same time.

Article 172 deals with state legislatures. It states that a Legislative Assembly in each state lasts five years unless dissolved sooner. Like Article 83, it does not discuss simultaneous elections.

Article 356 concerns president's rule in states if the constitutional machinery fails. Under this provision, state assemblies are automatically suspended. If this situation occurs, holding simultaneous elections becomes impossible.

Article 324 gives the Election Commission control over elections, including superintendence and direction. It does not, however, specify that elections must be held together. The Anti-Defection Law is found in the Tenth Schedule. It disqualifies members who switch parties. If simultaneous elections happen, this law will need changes to handle issues related to ONOE.

The Representation of People's Act, 1951, covers election notifications. Sections 14 and 15 empower the Election Commission to announce elections at least six months before the current terms end. These rules will need updates to include the scheme for simultaneous elections.

### **Ram Nath Kovind Committee Report, 2024:**

The Ram Nath Kovind Committee released its report in 2024. The committee was formed on September 2, 2023, to look into the idea of holding simultaneous elections. It was led by Shri Ram Nath Kovind, former President of India. The committee held talks with many groups to get their views. Forty-seven political parties shared their opinions, with 32 supporting the plan for all elections to happen at the same time. Experts from many fields, including the Chief Justice of India and other high courts, were also asked for their views. Economists and business groups were consulted on how the plan might affect the economy. The committee later submitted its report to President Droupadi Murmu. It proposed a two-step process to carry out simultaneous elections. First, elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies would be held together. In the second step, elections for local governments like municipalities and panchayats would follow within 100 days. The report recommends using a single electoral roll and Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) for all elections. It also notes that the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies are five years, but suggests not fixing a minimum length for these terms. The report highlights that the Constitution's core includes Articles 14, 19, and 21, which protect rights and freedoms. It states that free elections, rule of law, and an independent judiciary are key principles of the Constitution. The committee says its suggestions follow constitutional rules and are needed to boost development and social unity. It argues that holding elections at the same time could improve progress and strengthen democracy with minimal changes to the law. The report counters claims

that this plan breaks democratic rules. It says simultaneous elections will save time and money. It also reduces the cost of conducting elections, which is a major issue. Some political parties oppose the idea, saying it doesn't fix problems like hung Parliaments or Assemblies. The committee explains this issue by citing the Sarkaria Commission. It suggests that when no party has a clear majority, the Governor can take certain steps. First, invite parties to try to form a government before elections. Second, ask the largest party to create a government by getting support from other parties and independents. Third, form a coalition after elections. Lastly, a coalition government can be formed where some parties actually run the government while others support it.

### **Critical Assessment of onoe:**

The Indian Constitution's Article 1 describes India as a Union of States. It does not mention federalism explicitly, but India generally follows a federal setup. Implementing the One Nation, One Election scheme challenges this federal structure. It risks ignoring local issues and focusing only on national concerns during elections, or vice versa. Problems like poverty, illiteracy, pollution, regionalism, and unemployment might not appear in political parties' election plans. Different election cycles mean the country stays in campaign mode most of the year. This leads to the continuous enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, which hampers public service and development efforts. Elections also cost a lot in human resources, with large deployments of security forces like CRPF.

In 2023, a Parliamentary Standing Committee, led by President Ram Nath Kovind, asked political parties for opinions on ONOE. Parties such as the Indian National Congress, All India Trinamool Congress, Communist Party of India, AIMIM, and NCP voiced concerns. They questioned whether the scheme could be enforced within the current constitutional and legal system, considering the different powers of Parliament and state legislatures. The main criticisms of simultaneous elections fall into three categories.

- First is feasibility. It questions whether conducting elections on such a large scale is practical. Coordinating votes across states with different political settings is a tough task. Synchronizing elections could weaken state political units and strain budgets of both central and state governments. There is no clear plan on how to align the terms of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. It would also require more security and staff for Election Day.
- Second are constitutional issues. Major changes in the Constitution are needed to harmonize election schedules, and this will take time and effort. It also needs political agreement.

- Third is the risk of voters acting recklessly. People might find it hard to distinguish between voting for state and national elections. One issue is that national concerns might influence voters in local polls. On the other hand, local issues could sway votes in national elections. This could lead voters to pick the same party at both levels. As a result, local or regional parties that focus on local interests could lose power. Voters might prefer national parties that deal with broader issues instead.
- Regional issues could be overlooked with one nation, one election, as attention shifts from local concerns to national problems. Professor Sanjay Kumar of the Center for Study of Developing Societies and Professor Jagdeep Chhokar of the Association of Democratic Reforms shared an article on this topic. During a conference hosted by ADR on “Simultaneous Elections – Possibilities and Challenges,” Kumar argued against holding elections at the same time. He said this approach might silence the voices of people on the margins by reducing the influence of regional parties that highlight local issues. This could weaken democracy instead of strengthening it. Some critics believe that one nation, one election could damage India's federal structure. It might reduce state independence by making politics more centralized. The process would also create a big financial burden for both the central government and states. Organizing simultaneous elections needs a lot of resources and manpower. It presents major logistical problems as well. The idea could face opposition from political parties. Some might oppose it because it could disrupt their regional strategies. Gaining agreement from all parties on this plan will not be easy.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations:**

The main criticism of holding simultaneous elections is that it is not practical or realistic. First, there is the question of how to pick a starting date or timeline for trying this idea. Second, once a date is chosen, it must be decided how to align the terms of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies to make elections happen together. The best approach for the first question is to try it with the next scheduled Lok Sabha elections. Regarding the second, after holding such elections alongside the Lok Sabha, a consensus must be reached on adjusting the terms of state assemblies. This must align with the rules in the constitution and laws, with input from the government, political parties, and the public. It is crucial that changes to assembly terms be kept as short as possible, unless absolutely necessary.

Looking at current state assembly terms, it is clear that implementing simultaneous elections all at once is not possible. This would mean many assemblies would need to extend or cut their terms, which many parties would oppose. To carry out true simultaneous elections, broad support

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from political parties is essential. Without it, the plan will not succeed. The Election Commission has suggested some steps to avoid problems during implementation. These include:

- To prevent early dissolution, if a no-confidence motion is passed against the government, it should be accompanied by a confidence motion supporting another government. Both votes should happen at the same time. If dissolving the Lok Sabha is unavoidable, the president could appoint a government to run the country until elections are held again.
- Similar rules should be set for State assemblies to prevent premature dissolutions.

These suggestions, along with laws like the Anti-Defection Act of 1985 and a Supreme Court ruling in the S.R Bommai case, can help avoid early dissolutions and keep governments stable.

Holding elections at the same time can bring political and economic stability. It can also make policies clearer. But long single-party rule could reduce government answerability. The plan might favor national parties over regional ones. It could lead to better governance and more stability. However, it might also weaken state autonomy and reduce accountability. The best approach is to try the one-nation-one-election (ONOE) system while making reforms in voting rules. This can lessen the negative effects on regional groups and government accountability. In a coalition government system, this plan might face trouble. Governments can be brought down easily on no-confidence motions, which would make elections necessary often. Because of this, ONOE may work better in a presidential system where the government isn't dependent on the support of the legislature.

## **Conclusion:**

The idea of One Nation, One Election has sparked a lot of discussion in India's politics and public areas. It aims to hold national and state elections at the same time. Supporters believe it can improve government work, save money, and make governance more stable. However, it also raises important questions about the Constitution, federal rules, and how feasible it is to put into practice. Looking at its possible effects shows a complicated mix of democratic values, practical challenges, and India's many social and political differences. One main benefit of One Nation, One Election is the potential to cut costs. India holds elections at different levels almost every year, which costs a lot of resources. Holding elections together could make the process more efficient. It would help the Election Commission manage campaigns better and free up government funds for other projects instead of election activities.

Another key advantage is that it could lead to more stable government. Right now, governments often stop working on new policies during frequent election periods because of the Model Code of Conduct. Holding elections all at once could reduce delays and give governments a chance to work smoothly throughout their term. It may also lead to less divisiveness and harsh campaigning, encouraging politics focused on development. But these benefits come with serious challenges. One problem is the difficulty of aligning the terms of state assemblies, especially if some are dissolved early. This could force some elections to be delayed or shortened, raising worries about respecting the choice and time given by voters.

India's federal system depends on regional independence. Regular elections allow states to voice their needs and represent local issues. Combining state and national elections might hide local concerns or benefit bigger parties at the expense of regional ones. This could shift the political balance and weaken the cooperative nature of federalism. Organizing elections across India's vast and diverse landscape would be a huge task. It would require better infrastructure, more manpower, and detailed planning from the Election Commission. Ensuring free, fair, and smooth elections would be very difficult under this system.

In the end, One Nation, One Election is an appealing idea for better efficiency and stability. But it also risks upsetting India's democracy, federal system, and practical logistics. Its adoption must involve wide talks with political parties, state leaders, legal experts, and the Election Commission. A shared plan should be built with consensus, respecting India's democracy and diversity. The move must protect the integrity of the voting process at both the national and state levels.

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