

One Nation, One Election in India: Problems, Prospects and Federal Implications

Nang Myawati Thommong

Guest Lecturer, Political Science, IGG College

Abstract

The proposal of “One Nation, One Election”(ONOE) seeks to synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, which has emerged as a significant electoral reform in India’s democratic discourse. The primary objective of this reform is to minimise administrative and financial burdens, and limit governance disruptions caused by repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct and enhance policy continuity. However critics contend that such a reform may fundamentally alter India’s federal balance.

This paper critically examines the rationale, feasibility and constitutional implications of ONOE within India’s federal framework. Using analytical approach, the study trace the historical evolution of simultaneous election in India. It evaluates institutional argument supporting electoral synchronisation and analyses the potential impact on state autonomy, federal balance and democratic representation. By situating ONOE within India’s socio- political context and analysing the international practices, the study argues while electoral synchronization may offer administrative and economic advantages, but its implementation possess challenges to the principle of federalism and democratic decentralization adopted in India. Without robust constitutional safeguard and broad political consensus, electoral synchronisation risk centralising political power and marginalise regional interest . This paper concludes that the incremental electoral reform may provide a more viable alternative to address governance disruptions while preserving India’s federal and democratic character.

Keywords: One Nation, One Election, Federalism, Electoral Reforms, Governance, India

Introduction

India’s electoral democracy is distinguished by its distinct culture and diverse cultural practices. As the world’s largest democracy, India conducts elections at multiple levels- national, state and local, often at frequent intervals. While elections remain the backbone of democratic accountability, this frequency has raised concerns regarding governance disruption, administrative burden and escalating public expenditure (Das, 2024).

To address these challenges, the proposal of One Nation, One Election has gained prominence in contemporary political and academic discourse. The reform seeks to synchronise elections of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, within a single electoral cycle of every five years and enabling voters to cast their votes for both tiers of government simultaneously. Proponents argue that simultaneous election would enhance effective policy implementation improve the utilisation of administrative machinery, increase voter turn out, reduce election expenditure, and strengthen governance (Kumar,2025)

In December 2024, discussions surrounding the feasibility of simultaneous elections gained renewed attention with the introduction of the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the constitution of a high-level committee chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind to examine its legal and institutional viability. The proposal is envisioned as a significant electoral and governance reform in India. However, its adoption is also expected to influence the functioning of regional political parties and may have implications for the federal structure of the Indian polity (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024).

Historical Background

The concept of simultaneous elections is not new to India's electoral framework. In the initial decades following independence, India followed a synchronised electoral cycle. From the first general elections in 1952 until 1967, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were conducted simultaneously, reflecting political stability and continuity in legislative tenure (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024). However, this practice was discontinued after 1967 due to political instability, and the emergence of a competitive multi-party system and the premature dissolution of several State Legislative Assemblies (Debroy & Desai, 2017).

Since then, the Election Commission of India has conducted elections at different intervals for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. In several instances, coalition instability at both central and state levels resulted in frequent dissolution of assemblies, further fragmenting the electoral cycle (Kumar, 2025).

After 1960s, India has witnessed a pattern of staggered elections conducted at different times due to loss of majority support in one single political party, internal party realignment and lead to a pattern of coalition among different political parties which frequently faces power conflicts and poor coordination further experiencing pre-matured dissolution. Consequently, elections occur almost every year, with an average of five to seven State Assembly elections taking place annually (Debroy & Desai, 2017). This frequent electoral process has adversely affected governance and administrative functioning, the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct leads to repeated diversion of administrative machinery for election-related duties (Singh & Grewal, 2024).

Due to these challenges, the idea of implementing ONOE has periodically resurfaced in public and institutional discourse. The Election Commission of India and various expert committees have highlighted the administrative strain caused by frequent elections and suggested exploring electoral synchronisation as a means to improve governance efficiency and reduce electoral expenditure (Ankit, 2025). The Law Commission of India in its 170th Report (1999) also recommended simultaneous elections to reduce electoral disruption and enhance governance continuity.

Renewed momentum for the proposal emerged in 2023 with the constitution of a high-level committee to examine the legal, constitutional and logistical feasibility of implementing "One Nation, One Election." The committee described the reform as potentially transformative, citing its capacity to enhance governance efficiency, improve voter participation and contribute to economic stability (Singh & Srivastava, 2024).

Rationale of One Nation, One Election

Impact of the Model Code of Conduct

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) plays a crucial role in ensuring free and fair elections in India by regulating political parties and candidates during the electoral process. However, its frequent imposition

due to fragmented elections has significant implications for governance. During the enforcement of the MCC, governments are restricted from announcing new policies, initiating major development projects and taking significant administrative decisions. Frequent elections, therefore, result in repeated governance interruptions and administrative slowdowns, affecting long-term planning and effective service delivery (Singh & Grewal, 2024).

Simultaneous elections are viewed as a potential solution to this challenge, as they would reduce the repeated enforcement of the MCC and provide governments with uninterrupted time for governance and policy implementation.

Reduction in Electoral Expenditure

The rising cost of elections has emerged as a major fiscal concern in India. Conducting elections in a large and diverse country requires extensive financial resources for logistics, campaigning, security arrangements, deployment of personnel and administrative management. Estimates suggest that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections incurred expenditure amounting to several thousand crores, reflecting the substantial financial burden associated with frequent electoral cycles.

Simultaneous elections are therefore proposed as a cost-effective alternative. By consolidating electoral processes, expenses related to security deployment, administrative arrangements and electoral logistics can be significantly reduced. Such financial efficiency would allow greater allocation of public resources towards developmental and welfare initiatives (Ankit, 2025).

Administrative Challenges

Frequent elections impose considerable administrative burdens on governance institutions. Large numbers of government officials, including civil servants, police personnel and other administrative staff, are deployed for election duties. This deployment often extends over long periods and requires extensive training and coordination, leading to suspension or delay of routine administrative responsibilities.

The repeated diversion of administrative manpower disrupts governance and affects policy implementation. Simultaneous elections could mitigate these challenges by reducing the frequency of such deployments and enabling administrative institutions to focus more effectively on governance, public service delivery and long-term policy execution (Kumar, 2025).

Frequency of Elections and Governance Disruption

The continuous cycle of elections in different states results in governments frequently operating in campaign mode. Parliamentary sessions and legislative activities are often influenced by ongoing elections in various states, contributing to governance instability and delays in decision-making.

A synchronised electoral cycle would reduce such disruptions and enable governments to function with greater stability and continuity. By limiting the frequency of elections, simultaneous elections could provide a stable governance environment conducive to effective policy implementation and developmental planning.

Voter Participation and Electoral Fatigue

Repeated electoral mobilisation can reduce voter enthusiasm and turnout, particularly in state and local elections held at short intervals. In contrast, synchronised elections may improve voter convenience and encourage greater participation by consolidating the electoral process into a single event.

Experiences from several countries that adopted ONOE suggest that electoral synchronisation can contribute to higher voter turnout and stronger democratic engagement. While the relationship between simultaneous elections and voter turnout remains debated, the consolidation of elections has the potential to enhance voter participation and strengthen democratic processes (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024).

Recommendations and Institutional Support

The idea of simultaneous elections has received attention and support from several institutional bodies and expert committees over the years. Various commissions and parliamentary committees have examined the feasibility of electoral synchronisation and highlighted its potential governance and administrative benefits. The Law Commission of India, in its 170th Report (1999), recommended conducting Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections simultaneously to reduce the perpetual electoral cycle and improve governance efficiency. Similarly, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution also supported the idea of aligning electoral cycles to enhance administrative stability and reduce repeated electoral disruptions. The proposal has also been debated in both Houses of Parliament and examined by the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in its 79th Report (2015). The Committee emphasised efficient utilisation of public resources and noted that frequent elections impose financial and administrative burdens on the state. However, it also recognised the legal and constitutional complexities involved in implementing simultaneous elections and suggested a phased approach to electoral synchronisation (Kumar, 2025).

In addition to these institutional endorsements, a high-level committee chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind was constituted to examine the feasibility of implementing One Nation, One Election and to recommend an operational framework. The committee emphasised that simultaneous elections could provide governments with uninterrupted time to govern, improve policy implementation, enhance administrative efficiency and reduce public expenditure. It also highlighted potential macroeconomic benefits such as improved investment climate and better quality of public expenditure (Singh & Srivastava, 2024).

Proposed Framework for Implementation

To operationalise the proposal of simultaneous elections, the government has considered introducing constitutional amendments to align the electoral cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The proposed framework seeks amendments to key constitutional provisions relating to the extending tenure and dissolution of legislatures to enable synchronisation of elections within a uniform electoral cycle.

The framework introduces classifications such as full-term elections, mid-term elections and elections for unexpired terms to provide clarity regarding legislative tenure under a synchronised system. Under this scheme, elections conducted after a notified date would result in the constitution of legislatures whose tenure would be aligned with the five-year term of the Lok Sabha. Consequently, State Legislative Assemblies constituted after this date would have terms coterminous with that of the Lok Sabha, irrespective of the timing of state elections.

The concept of an unexpired term has also been proposed to address situations where legislatures are dissolved prematurely. In such cases, fresh elections would be conducted, but the tenure of the newly elected legislature would be limited to the remaining period of the original term to maintain synchronisation of electoral cycles. This mechanism aims to ensure continuity in the synchronised electoral framework while accommodating political contingencies.

However, the implementation of this framework raises important constitutional and federal concerns. The extension or curtailment of legislative tenure outside constitutionally prescribed emergency provisions has generated debate regarding potential dilution of democratic mandates and state autonomy. Critics argue that altering legislative tenure for the purpose of electoral synchronisation may affect the constitutional

balance between the Union and the States and could raise questions regarding democratic legitimacy (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024).

Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding the possibility of increased centralisation of power and the potential marginalisation of regional political interests under a synchronised electoral system. These concerns highlight the need for careful constitutional design and broad political consensus before implementing simultaneous elections in India.

Federal Implications of Simultaneous Elections

India's federal structure is constitutionally designed to accommodate its vast social, cultural, linguistic and regional diversity. The Constitution characterises India as a "Union of States," under Article 1 of the Indian Constitution, reflecting a federal arrangement that balances national unity with state autonomy. Within this framework, states exercise authority over region-specific governance issues while remaining integrated within a unified constitutional system. Against this backdrop, the proposal of "One Nation, One Election" has generated significant debate regarding its implications for India's federal balance.

Concerns regarding State Autonomy

One of the primary concerns associated with simultaneous elections is the perceived risk to state autonomy. Federalism in India allows states to retain considerable authority over their internal socio-political and developmental matters. State governments are constitutionally empowered to regulate elections to their respective legislative assemblies and manage governance in accordance with regional priorities.

The implementation of simultaneous elections may, however, require states to align their electoral cycles with national elections, potentially limiting their flexibility in responding to region-specific political developments. Critics argue that this could weaken the ability of states to focus on local governance priorities and reduce the political space for addressing region-specific issues (Kumar, 2025)

Marginalisation of Regional Issues in Electoral Discourse

India's federal structure was deliberately designed to accommodate diverse regional interests and aspirations. State elections provide a platform for addressing local issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment, public health, education and regional development. However, simultaneous elections may shift electoral discourse towards national-level issues such as national security, foreign policy and central leadership.

This shift could potentially marginalise regional concerns and reduce the visibility of state-specific issues in electoral campaigns. As national narratives dominate electoral discourse, regional priorities may receive comparatively less attention, thereby weakening issue-based accountability at the state level. Such a development may affect the representative character of state elections within India's federal democracy (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024).

Constitutional Challenges and Tenure Alterations

The implementation of simultaneous elections would require significant constitutional adjustments, particularly with regard to the tenure and dissolution of legislatures. Articles 83(2) and 172(1) of the Constitution provide for a five-year tenure for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, unless dissolved earlier in accordance with established constitutional procedures. Extension of legislative tenure is constitutionally permissible only during a national emergency.

Synchronising electoral cycles would therefore necessitate either extension or curtailment of legislative terms in several states. Such alterations raise important constitutional questions regarding the legitimacy

of modifying legislative tenure for administrative convenience. Scholars have argued that any deviation from constitutionally prescribed tenure norms must be carefully examined to avoid undermining democratic representation and federal balance (Singh & Srivastava, 2024).

Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding the potential use of extraordinary constitutional provisions, such as President's Rule, to maintain electoral synchronisation in cases of premature dissolution of state assemblies. Such measures may alter the balance of power between the Union and the States and require careful constitutional safeguards.

Impact on Regional Political Parties and Federal Dynamics

Regional political parties play a significant role in India's democratic framework by representing local interests and articulating region-specific concerns. They contribute to political pluralism, strengthen democratic participation and often play a decisive role in coalition governments at the national level.

Simultaneous elections may alter the dynamics of electoral competition by aligning state elections with national elections. In such a scenario, electoral outcomes may be influenced by national-level issues and leadership preferences, potentially disadvantaging regional parties. The dominance of national political narratives could reduce the electoral space available for regional parties and affect their ability to mobilise support based on local issues (Kumar, 2025).

Given that regional parties are integral to India's federal and coalition-based political system, any reform that affects their functioning may have broader implications for federal cohesion and democratic representation.

Risk of Unequal Electoral Representation

Another concern associated with simultaneous elections relates to the possibility of unequal electoral competition. National parties and well-established regional parties often possess greater financial resources, organisational capacity and media visibility. In a simultaneous electoral environment, these advantages may become more pronounced, potentially marginalising smaller or emerging political parties. Smaller regional parties, which often represent localised and marginalised interests, may struggle to gain visibility in a synchronised electoral environment dominated by national campaigns. This could narrow the spectrum of political representation and reduce the diversity of political voices within the federal framework. Ensuring equitable electoral competition would therefore be essential for maintaining democratic pluralism in the context of simultaneous elections (Das, 2024).

Challenges to the Federal Structure of India

The proposal of One Nation, One Election raises several practical and structural challenges for the functioning of India's federal polity.

First, educating the voters about a new synchronised electoral framework would be a significant challenge, particularly in rural and remote regions where electoral awareness and literacy levels vary considerably. A shift from staggered elections to a unified electoral system would require extensive voter education, institutional preparation and political consensus (Chetia, 2020).

Second, conducting simultaneous elections across the country in a single phase would require unprecedented administrative and logistical coordination. It would necessitate the deployment of a large workforce, including election officials, security personnel and administrative staff, along with the establishment of a significantly higher number of polling stations and procurement of additional electronic voting machines and VVPAT systems. The scale and complexity of such an exercise have been identified as major logistical challenges to implementation (Ankit, 2025).

Third, synchronising electoral cycles would require either extension or curtailment of the tenure of certain legislative assemblies. In practical terms, it is uncertain whether democratically elected governments would willingly agree to curtail their tenure solely to align with national elections. Such adjustments may raise questions regarding democratic legitimacy and political feasibility, particularly in a competitive multiparty system (Tejaswini, 2025).

Fourth, there exists a risk that regional issues and concerns may be overshadowed by dominant national narratives in a synchronised electoral environment. Studies suggest that simultaneous elections could shift voter focus toward national leadership and national issues, thereby reducing the salience of state-specific concerns and potentially affecting the representative character of state-level democracy.

Fifth, while simultaneous elections are often justified on the grounds of reducing voter fatigue and improving participation, empirical evidence on this claim remains mixed. Electoral behaviour is shaped by multiple factors such as political trust, party credibility and regional political dynamics. Therefore, the relationship between synchronised elections and voter turnout requires careful empirical evaluation rather than normative assumptions (Chetia, 2020).

Finally, the functioning of a pluralistic democratic system depends on the presence of multiple political parties representing diverse interests. Any electoral reform that inadvertently reduces the participation or visibility of smaller political actors may weaken democratic competition and limit political diversity. Scholars have cautioned that simultaneous elections could advantage larger national parties and well-resourced political actors, potentially affecting electoral equity (Vaishnav et al., 2025).

Viewed from a broader perspective, the proposal of One Nation, One Election represents an ambitious electoral reform. Its success depends on its ability to reconcile administrative efficiency with democratic pluralism and federal autonomy.

Critical Perspective of One Nation, One Election

India's vast democratic landscape presents complex challenges for implementing simultaneous elections. As a multi-tiered federal system comprising numerous states and union territories with distinct political and cultural identities, India requires a careful balance between administrative efficiency and democratic representation. Federalism in India functions not merely as an administrative arrangement but as a mechanism for managing diversity and ensuring representation at multiple levels of governance (Kumar, 2025).

The concept of simultaneous elections has been implemented in several countries such as South Africa, Belgium, Indonesia and Sweden with the objective of improving governance efficiency and reducing electoral expenditure. Comparative analyses suggest that electoral synchronisation can generate administrative and financial benefits when supported by compatible institutional arrangements and stable political systems (Vaishnav et al., 2025).

For instance, in several countries where simultaneous elections are practised, electoral consolidation has contributed to reduced administrative costs and more stable governance cycles. However, scholars caution that these outcomes are context-specific and dependent on political structures, party systems and constitutional design. Direct implementation of such models into the Indian context may therefore be institutionally challenging (Chetia, 2020).

Despite the relative success of simultaneous elections in certain countries, its adaptability to India remains complex. Many of these countries operate under presidential or semi-presidential systems where executive stability is structurally different from India's parliamentary model. India's multiparty system, coalition

politics and strong regional party presence create distinct political conditions that complicate the implementation of a synchronised electoral framework.

Moreover, electoral systems differ significantly across countries. While several countries practising simultaneous elections use proportional representation systems, India follows the first-past-the-post system. Differences in population size, socio-political diversity and scale of electoral administration further complicate the feasibility of direct institutional adaptation. Consequently, the implementation of simultaneous elections in India must be evaluated within its unique constitutional and political context (Vaishnav et al., 2025).

Conclusion

One Nation, One Election represents a significant electoral reform with the potential to enhance governance efficiency, reduce public expenditure and strengthen administrative stability. At the same time, the proposal raises important concerns regarding its implications for India's federal structure, particularly with respect to state autonomy and the functioning of regional political parties. Given India's social, cultural and political diversity, any attempt to synchronise elections must carefully balance administrative efficiency with democratic representation.

A balanced and consultative approach supported by constitutional safeguards and broad political consensus is essential to ensure that electoral efficiency does not come at the cost of federal principles. The success of this reform ultimately depends on its ability to harmonise governance efficiency with the spirit of cooperative federalism embedded in the Indian constitutional framework.

Rather than implementing a sweeping structural transformation, it may be more feasible to address specific concerns arising from frequent elections by reforming aspects of the Model Code of Conduct and improving regulatory mechanisms governing electoral expenditure and campaign practices. Such incremental reforms could reduce governance disruptions while preserving the flexibility and pluralism inherent in India's federal democratic system.

References:

1. Ahmed, Z., & Kuruvilla, S. J. (2024). The idea of one nation–one election: Its potential risk and significance for India. *Journal of Polity & Society*, 16(2), 115–126.
2. Ankit, A. (2025). Towards electoral efficiency: Constitutional, political, and logistical dimensions of One Nation, One Election in India. *International Journal of Sociology and Political Science*, 7(4), 115–117.
3. Vaishnav, M., Mallory, C., & Richter, A. (2025). Does “One Nation, One Election” Make Sense for India. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.
4. Tejaswini, (2025). One nation, one election: Balancing efficiency and representation in Indian politics. *Centre for Development Policy and Practice*.
5. Chetia, A. (2020). One Nation, One Election: What It Could Mean For India. *Social and Political Research Foundation*.
6. Das, T. (2024). One nation one election in India: Possibilities and probable benefits. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*, 10(3), 295–300.
7. Debroy, B., & Desai, K. (2017). Analysis of simultaneous elections: The what, why and how. *The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy*.

8. Kumar, M. (2025). Federal implications of one nation one election model in India. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 7(3), 136–142.
9. Singh, A. K., & Grewal, U. (2024). Application and challenges to the concept of one nation–one election in India. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Projects and Studies*, 12(2).
10. Singh, A. P., & Srivastava, A. (2024). Legal perspectives on the feasibility of ‘one nation, one election’. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 7(2), 3427–3442.