

One Nation One Election

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ABSTRACT

The 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal aims to synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies so that they are generally held together in a single electoral cycle. Recurrent elections involve considerable expenditure, the repeated deployment of public staff and security forces, and periods when the Model Code of Conduct may affect government announcements and administrative priorities. The proposal has returned to national discussion because its supporters argue that synchronisation could reduce these costs and give governments more time to govern. Critics, however, raise constitutional and democratic concerns about federalism, the autonomy of State administrations, the premature dissolution of legislatures, voter preferences, unequal campaigning strength, and the risk of national issues overshadowing local ones.

This paper studies India's historical experience of simultaneous elections, the constitutional framework, the recommendations of earlier committees, and the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 along with the associated Union Territories legislation. Its method is doctrinal and analytical, and it relies on constitutional provisions, statutes, committee reports, judicial principles and authentic public materials. The paper argues that simultaneous elections are not unlawful in themselves, but that their implementation needs careful constitutional design. A practical solution should protect the elected life of legislatures, within a realistic framework for suspended Houses and no-confidence situations; preserve the authority of State institutions; and ensure the independence of the Election Commission and adequate electoral infrastructure.

The paper concludes that the matter should be treated as a constitutional change and not merely as an administrative cost-saving measure. Public consultation, accurate costing, federalism safeguards and a clear contingency mechanism are essential before implementation.

KEYWORDS: One Nation One Election; simultaneous elections; Indian Constitution; federalism; Election Commission of India; parliamentary democracy; Model Code of Conduct; State Legislative Assemblies; constitutional amendment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections are at the heart of representative democracy. They enable people to choose their leaders, hold governments to account and change political leadership peacefully.

In India, elections are held at different levels of government and at different times. The Lok Sabha election is held across the country, while elections to State Legislative Assemblies are held according to the constitutional term of each House. Elections to Municipalities and Panchayats are conducted separately under the constitutional framework for local self-government. Because the terms of legislatures are staggered, some part of the country is often in the middle of an election process.

The plan popularly known as “One Nation, One Election” aims to align the elections to the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies. It does not necessarily mean that every voter in the country must vote on a single day. Practical arrangements may involve several phases, as long as the elections take place within one synchronised cycle. Advocates say the plan would cut recurring public spending, reduce the deployment of teachers and other government personnel, ease the burden on security forces, and limit the disruption caused by continuous campaigning and the Model Code of Conduct. The plan also poses a basic question: how can administrative efficiency be reconciled with the independent term of office of different elected governments in a parliamentary democracy?

India has in fact seen periods when Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections were held together. The first general elections of 1951–52, and the elections that followed, took place in this way. The pattern began to change when several State governments and the Lok Sabha were dissolved before their terms expired, and the result was a gradual decoupling of the election timetables. Restoring synchronisation requires more than adjusting dates.

This paper does not assume that synchronisation is intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. It asks whether the proposed arrangement can be reconciled with constitutional democracy, federalism, free and fair elections and responsible government. The core issue is how India could carry out synchronised polls without violating the constitutional autonomy of the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies.

The first concern is constitutional. In a parliamentary system, a government must retain the confidence of the elected House. The life of a legislature cannot be known in advance, since governments may lose majority support, coalitions may break up and constitutional crises may occur. A rigidly fixed simultaneous cycle therefore sits uneasily with the principle that a government holds office only as long as it enjoys the confidence of the House.

The second concern is federalism and voter choice. The third is institutional. Simultaneous elections demand a great deal of coordination: electronic voting machines, voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) units, polling personnel, security arrangements, transport, storage and counting facilities. The actual savings will depend on how accurately these needs are estimated and on how often events interrupt the normal cycle.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to:

1. describe the importance and historical evolution of simultaneous elections in India;
2. examine the constitutional provisions on the term and dissolution of the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies;
3. analyse the discussions of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015), the Law Commission’s draft report (2018) and the High-Level Committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind;
4. review the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the related legislation;
5. evaluate the potential administrative and financial benefits alongside democratic and federal considerations; and
6. suggest safeguards that may help any reform remain consistent with constitutional norms.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

The paper addresses four questions.

1. First, what constitutional amendments and statutory changes are required to hold Lok Sabha and State

Assembly elections together?

2. Second, how can the constitutional rules on the term and dissolution of legislatures, collective responsibility and the confidence of the House be reconciled with a synchronised cycle?
3. Third, what administrative, financial and federal benefits and costs are likely to follow, and how reliable is the evidence for them?
4. Fourth, what safeguards are needed to preserve the independence of the Election Commission and the federal character of the Constitution?

The working hypothesis is that simultaneous elections may reduce some repetitive administrative expenditure and the number of election-related interruptions. However, such a reform can be constitutionally sustained only if it respects the confidence-based nature of parliamentary government and the distinct role of State elections, and only if it allows genuine elections to be held when a House becomes vacant before the end of its term.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a doctrinal and analytical legal approach. The primary materials include the Constitution of India, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, committee reports and relevant constitutional doctrine. The study considers legal design, institutional outcomes and competing constitutional values. Claims about cost savings are treated as propositions to be tested against transparent evidence, not as settled conclusions, because actual expenditure will depend on election timetables, procurement, manpower and contingency plans.

5. MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

ONOE refers mainly to the proposal to hold elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and the State Legislative Assemblies on a synchronised schedule. It is a political label rather than a complete legal concept, and its exact scope will be defined by the law that is eventually adopted.

The High-Level Committee led by Ram Nath Kovind recommended a phased approach.¹ In the first step, elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies would be held simultaneously. In the second step, elections to Panchayats and Municipalities would be held within 100 days of those general elections. The Committee also suggested a common electoral roll and voter identity system, subject to the necessary constitutional and statutory arrangements.

The difference between synchronisation and a single polling day is substantial. India is a huge country with diverse geography, population distribution, security needs and logistical requirements. Polling can be held in phases and still fall within the same synchronised electoral cycle. The change would lie in the timing of elections and in the legal link between them. Any examination should therefore distinguish between the following:

- the main idea of synchronising elections to Parliament and the State Assemblies;
- the practical question of whether polling takes place on a single day or in phases;
- the separate issue of local body elections; and
- the ancillary proposal for a common electoral roll.

¹High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, Report presented to the President of India (14 March 2024).

6. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN INDIA

India's early election history is an important starting point. The first general elections of 1951–52 were held along with elections to most State Legislative Assemblies, and the cycle remained broadly aligned through the elections of 1957, 1962 and 1967. This was not the result of any standing rule that all legislatures must be dissolved on the same date. It happened because the first elections were held together and most governments completed their full terms.

The cycle was disturbed when some State Assemblies were dissolved prematurely. The Fourth Lok Sabha was then dissolved in 1970, before the expiry of its term, and a national election followed in 1971. Political instability, changes of government and constitutional amendments gradually produced different election timetables, and over the years State Assembly elections came to be held in different years.

A workable ONOE system therefore cannot simply assume that every House will complete a fixed term. It must answer the question of what happens after an early break-up. India's history shows that synchronisation has existed before, but historical precedent alone does not decide whether the proposed constitutional design is appropriate today.

7. CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The proposal operates within a number of constitutional limits. Article 83 provides for the term of the Houses of Parliament. Under it, the Lok Sabha continues for five years unless it is dissolved earlier, and Parliament may extend that term by law, for not more than one year at a time, while a Proclamation of Emergency is in operation. The President has the power to summon Parliament and to dissolve the Lok Sabha under Article 85.² Article 172 deals with the normal duration of State Legislative Assemblies, subject to the Constitution, and Article 174 provides for the summoning, prorogation and dissolution of State Legislatures.³ Together, these provisions show that the life of a House is fixed by the Constitution but can be cut short before its normal term.

Article 75(3) makes the Council of Ministers collectively responsible to the House of the People, and Article 164(2) applies the same principle to the State Legislative Assembly.⁴ These rules make the confidence of the elected House a core element of parliamentary government. If a government loses that confidence, the constitutional system must provide a way to form another administration or, where that is not possible, to call an election. A harmonised calendar cannot change this constitutional fact.

Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament, the State Legislatures and the offices of President and Vice-President in the Election Commission of India. Local body elections are regulated separately by Articles 243K and 243ZA, which provide for State Election Commissions.⁵ Under Article 327, Parliament may make laws on elections to legislatures, subject to the Constitution, and Article 328 recognises the power of the States to make laws on elections to their own legislatures, subject to the Constitution and any parliamentary law.⁶ These provisions bear on the allocation of power and on the legal machinery needed for a coordinated cycle.

²Constitution of India, arts 83 and 85 (duration of Parliament and dissolution of the Lok Sabha).

³Constitution of India, arts 172 and 174 (duration of State Legislatures; summoning, prorogation and dissolution).

⁴Constitution of India, arts 75(3) and 164(2) (collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers at the Union and State levels).

⁵Constitution of India, arts 243K and 243ZA (State Election Commissions and elections to local bodies).

⁶Constitution of India, arts 324, 327 and 328 (superintendence of elections and legislative powers relating to elections).

Reading these provisions together does not show that simultaneous elections are impermissible in themselves. The real question is whether the proposed design, in substance and in operation, impairs vital constitutional principles. In a proper legal review, the purpose of synchronisation must be kept distinct from the details of any particular mechanism.

8. COMMITTEE REPORTS AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Public bodies have been studying the idea of simultaneous elections for several decades. The Law Commission of India examined the appropriateness of holding elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies together in its 170th Report, presented in 1999.⁷ In 2015, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice studied the feasibility of simultaneous elections in its 79th Report.⁸ It spoke about the cost of separate elections, the repeated deployment of staff and the effect of the Model Code of Conduct. It also observed that the change would be challenging and that a phased approach might be needed.

In August 2018, the Law Commission published a draft report on holding simultaneous elections.⁹ It said that the existing constitutional framework would need to be adjusted, and that amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the rules of procedure of Parliament and the State Legislatures would be necessary. The report noted the benefits as well as practical problems such as premature dissolution. Because it is a draft, it should be treated as a proposal for consultation and not as a final or binding legal position.

The High-Level Committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind was constituted in 2023 and submitted its report to the President in March 2024.¹⁰ The Union Cabinet accepted its recommendations in September 2024.¹¹ This does not mean that ONOE is already a constitutionally entrenched nationwide system. Its legal status depends on legislative scrutiny and on the enactment and commencement of the relevant provisions.

9. THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 seeks to amend the Constitution to provide for a synchronised election cycle for the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies.¹² The central design is that, after a general election, the President would issue a notification fixing an appointed date, and the terms of State Assemblies constituted after that date would end together with the tenure of the Lok Sabha.¹³ The proposed framework also covers situations where a House is dissolved early. In such a case, elections would be held only for the remainder of the common term and not for a new full five-year term. The Bill further provides that the Election Commission may recommend that an Assembly election be held at a later date if it considers that simultaneous elections cannot be conducted.

⁷Law Commission of India, 170th Report, *Reform of the Electoral Laws* (1999).

⁸Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, 79th Report, *Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies* (2015).

⁹Law Commission of India, *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections* (30 August 2018).

¹⁰High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, Report (n 1).

¹¹Press Information Bureau, “Cabinet accepts recommendations of High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections” (18 September 2024).

¹²The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024.

¹³PRS Legislative Research, *The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024: Bill Tracking and Summary*.

The corresponding Union Territories legislation extends the framework to those Union Territories that have legislatures.¹⁴ These legal details matter because the constitutional status of Union Territories is not the same as that of States, and the arrangements for their legislatures do not match in every respect. Any reform must clarify how the common cycle interacts with existing legislation and with the constitutional position of each legislature.

The remainder-of-term approach is meant to restore synchronisation after an early break-up. But it could mean that a newly elected Assembly serves for a shorter term than the usual five years. The reform should not become a pretext for prolonged caretaker arrangements or for weakening the House's ability to hold a government to account. The constitutional design must therefore state clearly that synchronisation is subordinate to the core principle of responsible government, and not the other way round.

10. POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES

10.1 Reduced Cost of Repeated Elections

A main argument for ONOE is that it could reduce the cost of repeated elections. Elections require polling places, voting machines, paper audit trail devices, ballot materials where necessary, transportation, training, counting centres and security arrangements. Political parties and candidates also bear campaign costs. Sharing some equipment and planning could make the process more efficient. The net saving, however, can be known only through clear estimates. Promised savings need to be validated rather than accepted at face value, because a simultaneous election may require much more equipment and staff to be available at the same time.

10.2 Better Use of Public Personnel

A second benefit is a reduction in the repeated deployment of public workers. Public employees such as teachers, local administrative officials and police officers are often given election duties. Election work is an important part of democracy, but multiple deployments can disturb normal administrative work. A coordinated timetable could cut the number of separate mobilisation exercises and help public organisations plan their work more predictably. At the same time, the scale of a simultaneous exercise must remain manageable.

10.3 Fewer Model Code of Conduct Periods

A third potential benefit concerns the Model Code of Conduct. The Code applies once elections are announced and binds political parties, candidates and governments. Its purpose is to prevent abuse of official position and to ensure a level playing field. Critics of the present system say that repeated Code periods can delay announcements or change policy decisions, and synchronisation could reduce the number of such periods. However, the Code does not automatically stop all governance, and its practical effect will depend on the form of the proposal, the stage of the election and the directions in force. Any claimed governance advantage should therefore be quantified carefully.

10.4 Predictability and Time to Govern

A fourth benefit is that a common cycle could give election administrators, public agencies, businesses and civil society greater predictability, since they could plan around a known election period. Governments could also get more uninterrupted time to govern between elections. A reformed calendar will not, however, produce better government by itself. It can make the intervals between elections more predictable, but the quality of policy depends on institutions, accountability and political choices.

¹⁴The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024.

11. OBSTACLES AND CRITICISMS

11.1 Federalism and the Nationalisation of State Elections

The first major problem is federalism. India's States are governed by elected governments with their own political priorities. Concurrent elections can create a common campaign mood in which national parties and national leaders receive undue importance. Even if State performance varies, voters could use their Lok Sabha choice as a guide for their Assembly vote. This possibility is sometimes called the nationalisation of State elections. The effect is unpredictable and would differ from State to State, depending on the party system, the media environment and local concerns. Still, it is a serious democratic issue, because State elections are a separate channel of accountability.

11.2 Length of Legislative Terms

The second problem is the length of legislative terms. The normal constitutional term is five years unless the House is dissolved sooner. If the common cycle is maintained by shortening the term of a newly elected Assembly, the Assembly and its government may get less time than voters expect. If the cycle is instead maintained by lengthening the tenure of a legislature, a separate constitutional difficulty arises. The proposed framework relies heavily on the remainder-of-term approach, but that approach raises recurring doubts about the validity and usefulness of very short terms. A carefully thought-out transition rule is therefore needed.

11.3 Premature Dissolution and Hung Houses

A third concern is premature dissolution and hung Houses. Parliamentary government is a government of confidence, not of the calendar. If a government loses a vote of confidence, constitutional mechanisms decide whether another government can be formed, and if none can, new elections may have to be called. The legal system must decide whether to hold a fresh election only for the remaining period of the term or to rely on a caretaker government, and how to deal with repeated instability. The rules should neither create a constitutional vacuum nor complicate the election process.

11.4 Election Infrastructure

The fourth problem is election infrastructure. The Election Commission would need adequate voting devices, voter-verifiable paper audit trail units, trained staff, transport, safe storage, counting facilities and security forces. These requirements are significant in a country of India's size. Procurement must be planned years in advance, and machines must be serviced, tested and stored safely. A simultaneous cycle also increases the scale of the operation at any given time. If equipment or personnel are inadequate, the quality of election administration could suffer.

11.5 Political Competition and Election Spending

The fifth issue is political competition and election spending. Small or regional parties may find it harder to compete with large parties that have nationwide networks. Voters may also face a more centralised media narrative when Lok Sabha and Assembly polls are held together. This does not mean that regional parties are bound to lose, but it raises questions about equal opportunity, campaign expenditure and the visibility of State-level issues. A proper assessment should separate direct government outlays, deployment costs, party expenditure, compliance costs, campaign costs and wider economic effects. Without a transparent baseline, claims about the size of the savings remain unclear.

12. BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES: A SUMMARY

One Nation, One Election has been proposed as a way of coordinating elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies. Any benefits are largely administrative and financial, and their extent dep-

ends on how the reform is implemented.

12.1 Benefits of One Nation, One Election

1. **Lower cost of frequent elections.** Separate elections require arrangements for polling staff, transport, security, polling stations, voting machines, counting centres and training to be repeated each time. A synchronised cycle can reduce the need to organise these arrangements over and over again. The real savings should be established through transparent estimates, because simultaneous elections would also need a considerable quantity of equipment and personnel at one time.
2. **More effective use of public workers.** Government employees, teachers, police officers and other officials are frequently given election duties, and repeated deployments affect their regular work. A synchronised cycle would make personnel and administrative planning more predictable and reduce the number of separate mobilisation exercises.
3. **Fewer periods of the Model Code of Conduct.** The Code is meant to prevent misuse of official machinery and to ensure a fair electoral environment. With recurring elections, certain government statements and actions are restricted again and again. Synchronisation could reduce the number of such periods, although the Code would still apply throughout the election period.
4. **Greater administrative predictability.** Election authorities, public departments, businesses and civil society organisations could plan their activities around a more predictable election calendar. This could lead to better procurement, personnel training, security coordination and public communication.
5. **More time for governance between election cycles.** Supporters believe that governments may spend less time preparing for separate elections and have more time to carry out their programmes between synchronised cycles. This benefit is not automatic, because governments remain accountable to legislatures and the public throughout their term.
6. **Voter convenience.** Voters may be able to cast both votes in a single visit to the polling station when Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are held together. That might make it easier for some voters to participate, but the effect on turnout would depend on local circumstances and voter awareness.
7. **Less recurrent disruption.** Elections can mean rallies, traffic changes, security deployments and temporary restrictions. A coordinated cycle could mean fewer separate election periods. But the campaign itself would still be substantial, so the full impact needs to be judged on evidence.
8. **Better long-term logistics planning.** One cycle would allow election officials to plan equipment needs, storage, transport and training requirements years in advance. Whether such coordination actually improves performance would have to be judged on independent and publicly available evidence.

12.2 Disadvantages of One Nation, One Election

Although One Nation, One Election may have administrative advantages, it also raises constitutional, political and practical concerns. These risks need to be addressed in the legislative framework before implementation.

1. **Risk to the distinct role of State elections.** State Assembly elections decide matters such as State public services, regional development and law and order within the constitutional powers of the State, as well as the working of State governments. If national and State campaigns run simultaneously, national leaders and issues may receive more attention, making it harder for people to assess their State administrations on their own record.
2. **Federalism concerns.** Indian States have elected legislatures and constitutional responsibilities of their own. A common election schedule should not give the impression that State institutions are

subordinate to the national election cycle. Because the change will affect State governments, legislatures and political parties, it is very important to consult the States on the timing of their elections.

3. **Shortened terms for some legislatures.** To restore synchronisation after an early break-up, the proposed scheme provides for elections for the remainder of the common term in appropriate cases. A newly elected Assembly could therefore sit for less than the normal five-year term. This raises questions about the stability of State governments and about the mandate given by the voters.
4. **Hung Houses and no-confidence motions.** Parliamentary government rests on the confidence of the elected House. A government may lack a majority, or a coalition may fall apart, before the normal time for an election. The law should provide for an alternative government where possible and for a clear path to a fresh election where it is not, so that no constitutional vacuum is created.
5. **Heavy logistical demands.** Simultaneous elections will need enough electronic voting machines, voter-verifiable paper audit trail units, trained personnel, secure storage, transport, counting centres and security personnel. Consolidating the exercise into one period could strain procurement and deployment. Poor preparation could compromise the quality of election administration.
6. **Uneven campaigning strength.** National parties may have broader organisation and campaigning networks than smaller or regional parties. A single campaign period may make it harder for regional parties to keep the focus on local issues. This is not inevitable, but fair media access, expenditure disclosure and consistent enforcement of campaign rules are important.
7. **Uncertain cost savings.** Some recurring costs saved by simultaneous elections can be offset by large one-time spending and higher peak capacity. Public expenditure, party expenditure and wider economic effects are separate categories. Savings should not be assumed without a thorough comparison of the existing system and the proposed one.
8. **Risk of delay or rigidity.** Natural disasters, security concerns or other compelling conditions may make it impracticable to hold an election in a particular State at the prescribed time. A strict calendar might make such situations hard to manage, while wide exceptions could be misused. Any exemption must rest on objective criteria, with recorded reasons and public disclosure.
9. **Additional burden on election administration.** A single consolidated election period would place an extraordinary burden on the Election Commission and State-level authorities. The system would need to be properly staffed, equipped, financed and prepared for contingencies, while respecting the independence of the Commission and its duty to conduct free and fair elections.
10. **Need for constitutional and statutory changes.** The reform cannot be achieved through administrative arrangements alone if it changes the tenure and dissolution of legislatures. Amendments to the Constitution and to other laws must follow the procedure laid down by law.

13. BASIC STRUCTURE, FEDERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Federalism is one of the structural features of the Indian Constitution. The Union and the States work together within a common constitutional order, but each has its own sphere of jurisdiction and its own independent elected legislature. A coordinated election calendar is not, by itself, anti-federal. The constitutional question is whether the particular rules leave State institutions free to act and to remain accountable to their own electorates.

The doctrine of basic structure limits Parliament's power to amend the Constitution.¹⁵ In *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala*, the Supreme Court held that Parliament cannot amend the basic structure of the Constitution.¹⁶ In *S.R. Bommai v Union of India*, the Court treated federalism as one of the basic features of the Constitution while dealing with Article 356.¹⁷ In *Kihoto Hollohan v Zachillhu*, the Court examined the validity of the anti-defection law and the status of the Speaker's decisions under it.¹⁸

These cases do not directly decide the legality of ONOE, but they offer principles that are relevant to a legal evaluation: democratic accountability, federal balance, the functioning of elected Houses and the limits on constitutional amendment. The constitutional validity of a proposal cannot be judged by its stated aim alone. Consultation is no substitute for the constitutional amendment process, but it can reveal practical implications that a purely legislative view may miss. A reform that affects election timing across the Union must be designed with due regard to the constitutional position of the States.

14. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT AND GOVERNANCE

The Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines on election-related conduct, adopted by the Election Commission to help ensure free and fair elections.¹⁹ It governs the behaviour of political parties and candidates and places restrictions on certain activities of governments during the election period. Its object is to prevent abuse of the official machinery and to make sure that the ruling party does not gain an unfair advantage.

The Code does not bring government to a halt. Regular operations and essential services continue, although some announcements and activities may be restricted. Advocates of ONOE say that a single election timetable would reduce the number of times the Code applies, which may mean less disruption to policy announcements and administration. But the effect is not simple. The Code cannot replace legal rules where statutory protection is required. A synchronised cycle would reduce the number of separate Code periods, but it cannot remove the need for fair campaign regulation and an impartial government.

15. INTERNATIONAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Comparative experience can help identify design questions, but no foreign model can simply be copied into India. Some countries synchronise national and subnational elections, while others hold them at different times. Their systems differ in the form of government, the length of legislative terms, federal structure, electoral processes and the mechanisms available for early elections.

In presidential systems, the executive's term may be institutionally separate from that of the legislature. In a parliamentary system, a government lives or dies by the confidence of the legislature, and this difference is important when considering election timetables. The United States, for example, holds federal, State and local elections on a mixture of fixed and staggered schedules, and its experience shows how election timing interacts with federalism, campaign finance and State-level administration.

India has a unique constitutional structure. Any reform should be justified on Indian constitutional principles and practical evidence, and not merely by the existence of simultaneous polls elsewhere.

¹⁵ Constitution of India, art 368 (power to amend the Constitution).

¹⁶ *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala* (1973) 4 SCC 225.

¹⁷ *S.R. Bommai v Union of India* (1994) 3 SCC 1.

¹⁸ *Kihoto Hollohan v Zachillhu* (1992) Supp (2) SCC 651.

¹⁹ Election Commission of India, Model Code of Conduct and election administration material.

16. REQUIREMENTS AND SAFEGUARDS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

16.1 A Clear Legal Definition of the Common Cycle

First, the common cycle must be defined clearly in law. The law should state the date of commencement, the alignment of terms, the treatment of transitional elections and the elections covered by the arrangement. Ambiguous scheduling rules could lead to disputes over the length of a legislature's term or over which authority is responsible for scheduling an election. These rules should be proper legal provisions on which voters and legislators can rely, not merely technical or administrative instructions.

16.2 A Strong Contingency Mechanism

Second, there must be a strong contingency mechanism. When a government loses confidence, the first question is whether an alternative government can command a majority. Where no stable administration can be formed, the legal system should provide for an election without compromising democratic accountability, which is a constitutional duty. The remainder-of-term model must be tested against situations in which only a short period of the term is left. The law should spell out when a very short election cycle is justified and how repeated dissolutions are to be treated.

16.3 Operational and Cost Planning

Third, the Election Commission should announce an operational plan and a realistic assessment of resources. This should cover equipment requirements, procurement, staffing, training, storage, transport, security and contingency reserves. The plan should be examined by impartial technical experts and made public, to the extent consistent with election security. Cost estimates should distinguish between one-off transition costs and recurring expenses, and should compare the proposed system with the current staggered one.

16.4 Protection of State-Level Political Discourse

Fourth, the approach should protect State-level political discourse. Campaign and media rules should promote balanced coverage of both national and State issues. Public broadcasters and other regulated media should follow the relevant requirements of neutrality and access. Political parties should be required to account for relevant expenditure in accordance with law. Voters should also have clear information about the separate roles and competences of the Union and State Governments.

16.5 Transparency and Review

Finally, the results of these assessments should be laid before Parliament and made publicly available. A reform of this magnitude should be judged on evidence, not on its initial political or administrative claims.

17. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research leads to the following findings.

First, India has a history of simultaneous elections, but the earlier cycle was broken by early dissolutions and political upheaval. History shows that synchronisation is achievable in some circumstances, but not that it can be sustained without legal provisions for emergencies.

Second, the present constitutional structure gives special legal significance to the tenure and dissolution of the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures. The rules on collective responsibility imply that a government's ability to command confidence cannot be made subject to a predetermined electoral timetable. Any change must therefore provide a workable link between synchronisation and parliamentary accountability.

Third, the possible benefits are real but conditional. Shared planning and fewer repeated deployments could produce savings, and fewer election periods could lessen some disruptions to governance. But the

case for simultaneous elections must also take into account peak-capacity requirements and significant transition costs. The financial effect should be examined in a public and independently reviewed cost analysis.

Fourth, the federal interest is strong. Simultaneous elections do not eliminate State autonomy as such, but they can influence campaign dynamics and the visibility of State issues. A transparent, well-resourced and independent Election Commission, clear norms for premature dissolution, credible cost projections, consultation with the States and post-election evaluation would reduce these risks. Without such safeguards, a change aimed at improving administrative efficiency could lead to constitutional disputes and public anxiety.

18. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures are recommended.

First, Parliament should issue a thorough constitutional and practical explanation of the proposed system, including how it deals with hung Houses, no-confidence votes, short remainder terms and early termination.

Second, the Election Commission should publish a transparent evaluation of equipment, personnel, security and costs before implementation.

Third, consultation with the States should be documented and its results published, especially if the change affects the term of State Assemblies.

Fourth, any exception to synchronisation should rest on objective standards, recorded reasons and clear public communication.

Finally, the first election cycle under any new structure should be reviewed independently, with the findings presented to Parliament and the public.

These recommendations aim to make the reform evidence-based and constitutionally responsible, rather than treating synchronisation as a goal in itself.

19. CONCLUSION

One Nation, One Election is a major reform proposal on the timing of elections in India. Supporters point to genuine administrative concerns: frequent election deployments, expense, security requirements and repeated periods of election-related restrictions. A coordinated cycle may make planning more predictable and may reduce some repeated purchases. These aims should not be taken lightly.

At the same time, the timing of elections is closely linked to the constitutional life of legislatures, the accountability of governments and the federal relationship between the Union and the States. The Constitution does not treat the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies as units of administration whose terms are matters of convenience alone. Parliamentary government depends on the confidence of an elected House. State governments have their own constitutional responsibilities and must always remain answerable to their electorates. A synchronised schedule must therefore provide for early dissolution, hung Houses, no-confidence motions and situations that require a separate election. If a legally required common calendar takes precedence over the voters' ability to choose a government, the reform would defeat the very democratic aim it is meant to serve.

The amendment proposal and the linked legislation should be judged on their exact words. Committee reports and government proposals are good policy material, but they are no substitute for constitutional procedure. The legitimacy and practical success of the reform will depend on the detailed design it adopts,

the safeguards it creates and its effect on democratic accountability. Efficiency is a legitimate aim, but it must be consistent with democratic responsibility. A careful, clear and constitutionally grounded design offers the best chance of achieving both.

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