

Democracy Towards Participative Making One Nation One Election (Simultaneous Elections) Towards Views And Its Impact...

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Abstract

This paper examines the possible effects—both favourable and unfavourable—of holding simultaneous elections throughout India, a concept known as "One Nation, One Election." To prevent repeated election cycles, this paper proposed reform would synchronise the dates of state, local, and national elections. The analysis concludes that by lowering expenses associated with election administration, security deployments, and governance interruptions, synchronised elections might result in significant cost savings for both state and federal governments. It is predicted that annual cost savings could reach up to ₹45 billion. State governments would benefit from spending more time on governance rather than campaigning, even though national issues may take precedence over local issues. Voter fatigue may be lessened for citizens, but their power to voice discontent with the state may be lost.

Key Words: *Federalism, Regionalism, Governance, Policy stability, Political uncertainty, Voter fatigue, Electoral logistics, Campaign costs, Incumbency advantage, Anti-defection law, One Nation One Election.*

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I. Introduction:

One parliamentary, state, and local elections, ensuring that they occur simultaneously. The aim is to create a more efficient and focused electoral system. In September 2023 "Nation One Election" means a concept that advocates for synchronizing the electoral cycles of various levels of government in a country. The idea is to align the schedules of, the Union Government formed a 'High-Level Committee on One Nation, One Election,' chaired by former President Ramnath Kovind. The committee has been in discussions with both national and state-level political parties, gathering input from the public and jurists. Anticipated recommendations from the committee have sparked concerns regarding their potential impact on India's democratic framework and federal structure.

Recent Trending News:

There have been various recommendations on One Nation One Election. Implementing national and state elections simultaneously would be a complex undertaking. It will require significant constitutional and logistical changes. It would necessitate at least five amendments to the Constitution related to the duration of parliamentary and state legislative houses as well as the dissolution powers of the President. Namely, amendments would be needed to Indian Constitution Articles 83, 83(2)85, 172,(1) 174, and 324 and 356.

In addition, conducting polls across India simultaneously for national and state positions would demand a large increase in electronic voting machines (EVMs) and voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) units. A sizable scaling up of logistical and technical infrastructure would be essential

Further, such a significant electoral reform does not have the support of all involved parties. A parliamentary panel examined the issue of simultaneous polls, gathering input from stakeholders like the Election Commission of India and various political groups. However, broader consensus was not achieved due to differing perspectives. As a result, making the logistical and constitutional adjustments required for combined national and state elections remains an open question.

What is One Nation One Election?

"One Nation One Election" (ONOE) refers to a concept advocating for simultaneously holding all national and sub-national elections in a country, typically within a fixed timeframe. It aims to streamline the electoral process, reduce costs, and potentially increase voter turnout. However, it also raises concerns about logistical challenges, potential political manipulation, and the impact on local issues. One nation one election committee is a high-level committee constituted by the Government under the chairpersonship of Shri Ram Nath Kovind former President of India.

Background on One Nation One Election:

Just after independence, Simultaneous elections were conducted for the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies simultaneously. This was true for elections in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967. But this was discontinued because, in 1968-69, some State Legislative Assemblies were dissolved earlier due to various reasons.

Currently, elections to the state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are held separately. That is, whenever the current government's five-year term either ends or whenever the legislature is dissolved. The terms of the Legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha may or may not synchronize with one another. For instance, Rajasthan faced elections in late 2018, whereas Tamil Nadu will go to elections only in 2021.

Precedent of Simultaneous elections to Federal and Provincial Legislatures in other countries: In South Africa, elections to national as well as provincial legislatures are held simultaneously for five years and municipal election are held two years later.

In Sweden, election to National Legislature (Riksdag) and provincial legislature/county council (Landsting) and local bodies/municipal Assemblies (Kommunfullmaktige) are held on a fixed date *i.e.* second Sunday in September for four years (last was held on 14 September, 2014 and the forthcoming one is slated on 9 September, 2018)⁴. In the U.K., the term of the Parliament is governed by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, 2011⁵.

Justification for Holding Simultaneous Elections:

- 1) Expenditure incurred for conduct of separate elections every year. Presently, the cost of holding elections for Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies of States and UTs has been pegged at Rs 4500 crore by the ECI. It was felt that holding simultaneous elections would reduce the massive 4500 crore by ECI.
- 2) Elections lead to imposition of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in the poll bound State/area and as a result, the entire development programmes and activities of the Union and State Governments in the poll bound State would come to a standstill. Frequent elections lead to imposition of MCC over prolonged periods of time which affects the normal governance.
- 3) Frequent elections lead to disruption of normal public life and impact the functioning of essential services. If simultaneous elections are held, this period of disruption would be limited to a certain pre-determined period of time.
- 4) It would free the crucial manpower which is often deployed for prolonged periods on election duties. For example, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections which were held along with State Assembly Elections in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh was spread over ten phases and 1077 in situ companies and 1349 mobile companies of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) were deployed in Sikkim.

21st Law Commission Report:

A draft report on "Simultaneous Elections" prepared by the 21st Law Commission was considered in the second meeting of the 22nd Law Commission held on 29th November, 2022. The 22nd Law Commission resolved that it should again seek the opinion of the stakeholders including national political parties, the Election Commission of India, Bureaucrats, academician, experts, etc. on the 6 questions put forth by the 21st Law Commission in its draft report as under:

Benefits of One Nation One Election:

- ❖ The law commission claims that having a simultaneous election has several advantages For example:
- ❖ Save public money- it will reduce the enormous costs involved in frequent elections.
- ❖ Reduce the burden on the administrative setup and security forces- it will reduce the enormous manpower that has to be deployed every time there is an election.
- ❖ Policies- simultaneous elections will ensure that the Ensure timely implementation of government ruling party focuses on development instead of being in constant election mode.
- ❖ As the model code of conduct will not be applied frequently, governments will be able to launch policies and programs in a timely manner. It will also ensure the continuation of policy.
- ❖ It will Ensure that the administrative machinery is engaged in development activities rather than electioneering- It will help educators to work without fear of vacations. Schools and universities will also be able to open on time.
- ❖ According to the law commission, simultaneous elections will also boost voter turnout.
- ❖ Simultaneous elections can also work against vote bank appeasement politics.

Demerits of One Nation One Election

- ❖ Even if simultaneous elections become a reality there are several demerits of such a reform. Many opposition political parties have made their opinions clear against this reform.

- ❖ Holding simultaneous elections may affect the judgment of voters. Voters will tend to focus more on national issues rather than local issues.
- ❖ Due to strong Central politics, regional parties will not be able to raise regional and local issues appropriately.
- ❖ It will further the centralization tendency of Indian polity and politics.
- ❖ Simultaneous elections can have a negative impact on the government's accountability to the people. Repeated elections keep the government and legislatures in check, which will not happen in case of simultaneous elections.
- ❖ Elections in a state will have to be postponed to synchronise the elections. This can only be done through the president's rule, which will be problematic for democracy and federalism.
- ❖ Although simultaneous elections will reduce the expenditure by governments, it may not affect expenditure by political parties which is one of the reasons for corruption in politics.
- ❖ The constitutional amendment required to only have a 'constructive vote of no confidence can tamper with the ethos of parliamentary democracy.
- ❖ Although the election commission has said that holding simultaneous elections is feasible, it will be a considerable feat and logistical challenge.

Simultaneous polls plan gets Union Cabinet approval:

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday (September 18, 2024) accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, that had proposed simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step, and municipal and panchayat polls within 100 days of the general election in the next phase.

"This is an important step towards making our democracy even more vibrant and participative," Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a strong votary of simultaneous polls, said in a post on X.

Calling it a giant stride towards electoral reforms, Home Minister Amit Shah, in a post on X, said, "This reflects Modi Ji's iron will to bolster our democracy through clean and financially efficient elections and accelerate economic growth through more productive allocation of resources".

The report of the Kovind panel, which ran into more than 18,000 pages, was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu in March.

To synchronise the elections, the committee has suggested that the President, through a notification issued on the first sitting of the Lok Sabha post general elections, set an 'Appointed Date'. This date would mark the beginning of the new electoral cycle.

State Assemblies that are formed after the date and before the completion of the Lok Sabha's term would conclude before the subsequent general elections. After this, election to the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies would be held simultaneously.

The Committee had factored scenarios such as a hung House, or a no-confidence motion, and recommended amendments to Article 83 (duration of Houses of Parliament) and Article 172 (duration of State legislatures) of the Constitution.

Upcoming State/UT elections:

State Elections Schedule

1) Completed to Elections to Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim Andhra Pradesh, Odisha Assemblies in June 2024-with Lok Sabha General Elections.

It recommended a common electoral roll, which would need coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs). The ECI is responsible for the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, while the local body elections for municipalities and panchayats are managed by the SECs. The proposed changes regarding the single electoral roll and single voter ID card would need ratification by at least half of the States.

National Parties' Dominance Over Regional Parties

Simultaneous elections have raised serious concerns since they may favour big national parties like the Congress and BJP at the expense of regional groups by emphasizing national issues and leadership.

In state assembly elections, regional parties currently have room to mobilise supporters based on their qualifications, position as the state's leader, and regional goals. When state elections are conducted independently of Lok Sabha votes, local issues have more weight than national ones. Nonetheless, there would be a greater emphasis on national concerns like leadership, ideology, national security, etc. when the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections are held simultaneously. This runs the risk of drowning out regional parties that want to emphasise their track record of governance and unique state vision.

Among the main drawbacks anticipated for regional parties are:

- ✓ The electoral narrative centred on leadership, macroeconomics, and national issues will be exclusively shaped by mainstream national coalitions.
- ✓ There is less room for regional concerns.
- ✓ When required to cast ballots simultaneously, voters who carefully evaluate the differences between state and central elections that are held months apart discover that regional concerns are overshadowed.
- ✓ Funds are concentrated in the hands of larger national parties, which run campaigns centred around national themes that resonate with Indian voters nationwide.
- ✓ Rather than concentrating solely on their main regional agenda, smaller regional parties will have to make an attempt to explain national issues.
- ✓ Regional parties argue that holding concurrent elections weakens India's federal democracy because state aspirations are submerged in discussions focused solely on the results of the national election.

Others counter that strong regional campaigns can maintain the prominence of state problems. Regional parties can also benefit from alliances with national fronts. However, in concurrent election cycles, regional parties surely face higher electoral stakes.

In conclusion, by giving mainstream national parties with greater resources to mobilise voters on national issues the upper hand, synchronised national and state polls run the risk of overshadowing regional parties. Voters can still be won over by practical tactics that are centred on local goals.

II. Conclusion

The discussion about synchronizing electoral cycles to hold Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections together every five years presents valid points from both perspectives. After careful consideration, it becomes clear that there are significant benefits for governance, the economy, and voters, while the compromises related to federalism and diversity require careful consideration and balance.

Potential Benefits:

- ❖ Concurrent polls will reduce confusion and ensure smooth policy implementation throughout the government's five-year term, optimizing the efficiency of governance.
- ❖ Central and local governments can focus more on economic development and social welfare programs instead of wasting effort and resources on constant election campaigns.
- ❖ Improves policy stability and consistency, contributing to macroeconomics and investors' contributions.
- ❖ Trust that leads to acceleration of growth.
- ❖ Logistic costs can be optimized for the election committee and political parties
- ❖ Instead of frequent investigations, the matching of campaign efforts.
- ❖ Guarantee Security measures compliance, and management logistics is more effective.
- ❖ Instead of distributed state /national survey, we will carry out simultaneous general elections.
- ❖ Excessive centralization by tying state election results to perceptions about the central government can undermine regional aspirations and federal accountability.
- ❖ Regional and state-specific issues risk being overshadowed by the dominance of national issues, ideologies, and leadership narratives during unified campaigns.
- ❖ The pressures on the central and state governments to perform and reform, induced by asynchronous electoral cycles, will decrease, leading to complacency during prolonged periods of unanimous control.
- ❖ Accountability to voters through frequent opportunities to express dissatisfaction against underperforming regimes is reduced when simultaneous elections enforce rigid 5-year terms.

When evaluating the advantages and weaknesses, the acts of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha synchronized the elections. We promise significant profits in improving political stability and strengthening economic growth but, It is a positive net, and systematic changes need to support implementation.

Political stability

- ❖ The biggest advantage of simultaneous surveys is to ensure advanced stable possessions to governments
- ❖ Focus on management and reforms instead of spending efforts in frequent elections.
- ❖ Resulting
- ❖ Political continuity and close coordination of the national state, not preoccupied with asynchronous pressure in elections promotes greater political stability.
- ❖ However, parallel institutional changes are necessary to prevent the abuse of long cycles of power, temporary accountability being stripped away.
- ❖ Strengthening decentralization, expanding press freedom, and guaranteeing the impartial conduct of constitutional institutions such as the Election Commission, the Church of Almighty God, and strengthening

anti-defection laws are important. Periodic Lok Sabha elections are only one instrument of promoting democratic accountability.

Economic Stability

- ❖ Simultaneous elections promise significant economic gains by improving investor sentiment, attracting capital inflows and accelerating growth.
- ❖ Ensuring political stability during the five-year term of the government
- ❖ Stimulating public and private investment, unhindered by the political uncertainty that currently limits new business capital expenditure.
- ❖ Reducing election costs, streamlining the use of administrative logistics for a one-off election, and increasing resources for development work instead of frequent election campaigns will also support growth.

However, economic decision-making can stagnate without periodic electoral pressure.

Thus, transparency mechanisms such as RTI, independent regulators, and the encouragement of policy innovation at the state level and competition, even within simultaneous voting cycles, remain important.

In essence, simultaneous elections usher in a model of governance that separates electoral and administrative functions, allowing for continued and stable governance, and thus fostering more robust economic development unhindered by changing political conditions and uncertainty. This shift is gaining momentum in mature democracies around the world. However, the transition needs to be accompanied by systemic efforts to strengthen institutional checks and balances.

In summary, aligning national and state electoral cycles does have the potential to usher in an era of improved political stability and accelerated economic growth for India. But this will require strengthening institutional safeguards to keep elections and policies accountable and effective.

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