

One Nation, One Election: Constitutional Reform, Federalism and the Future of Indian Democracy

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Abstract: *The proposal of “One Nation, One Election” has emerged as one of the most significant contemporary political and constitutional issues in India. The proposal seeks to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, with the broader objective of reducing election expenditure, minimizing administrative disruption and ensuring continuity in governance. At the same time, the proposal has generated serious debate regarding constitutional amendments, federalism, democratic representation, the tenure of elected governments and the autonomy of States. The issue has become particularly relevant because the parliamentary committee examining the proposed constitutional and legal changes continued consultations with different stakeholders during 2026, while its reporting timeline was extended for further examination.*

This article critically examines the concept, historical background, objectives, advantages and challenges of simultaneous elections in India. It argues that electoral efficiency alone should not become the sole criterion for evaluating democratic reform. Any attempt to introduce simultaneous elections must balance administrative efficiency with constitutional morality, federal principles, political diversity and democratic accountability. The study concludes that “One Nation, One Election” can be considered a major electoral reform, but its implementation requires broad political consensus and strong constitutional safeguards.

Keywords: One Nation, One Election, simultaneous elections, electoral reform, federalism, Constitution of India, democracy, governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is the world's largest democracy and conducts elections at different levels of government, including the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and local self-government institutions. Because the terms of different legislatures do not coincide, elections take place in different parts of the country at different times. This frequently brings political campaigns, the Model Code of Conduct and the deployment of administrative and security personnel into the governance process.

The idea of conducting simultaneous elections is not entirely new to India. During the initial decades after Independence, elections to the Lok Sabha and several State Legislative Assemblies were generally held together. However, the premature dissolution of certain State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha gradually disrupted this cycle. Over time, India moved towards a system of frequent and staggered elections.

The contemporary proposal popularly known as “One Nation, One Election” seeks to restore a system in which elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are synchronized. The proposal under examination involves significant constitutional and legal questions, including the tenure of legislatures, premature dissolution, mid-term elections and the role of the Election Commission. Parliamentary consultations in 2026 specifically considered these constitutional issues, including federalism and the Basic Structure Doctrine.



Thus, the issue is not merely about conducting elections on the same day. In fact, the proposal can involve elections being conducted in phases while maintaining a common five-year electoral cycle. The larger question is whether India can achieve electoral efficiency without weakening the democratic and federal foundations of its constitutional system.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the concept and historical development of simultaneous elections in India.
2. To analyse the major objectives behind the proposal of “One Nation, One Election.”
3. To evaluate the possible advantages of simultaneous elections for governance and administration.
4. To examine the constitutional and federal challenges associated with the proposal.
5. To study the possible impact of simultaneous elections on democracy and political representation.
6. To suggest measures for ensuring that electoral reforms protect constitutional values and democratic principles.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning and historical background of the concept of “One Nation, One Election”?
2. What are the major arguments supporting simultaneous elections in India?
3. What constitutional amendments and institutional changes may be required for its implementation?
4. How can simultaneous elections affect the federal structure of India?
5. Can electoral efficiency be achieved without reducing democratic accountability and State autonomy?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based primarily on secondary sources such as constitutional provisions, parliamentary developments, government documents, reports, scholarly writings, news reports and published material related to electoral reforms. The study critically analyses both the advantages and challenges associated with the proposal.

V. THE MEANING OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

“One Nation, One Election” refers to the idea of synchronizing elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies so that elections take place within a common electoral cycle. The proposal does not necessarily mean that every citizen in India will vote on exactly the same day. Elections may still be conducted in different phases because of India's geographical size, population and security requirements. The central idea is to reduce the repeated cycle of elections by bringing national and State elections into a synchronized five-year framework.

The proposal currently involves examination of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and related amendments concerning Union Territories. The parliamentary committee examining these measures has continued consultations with legislators, constitutional experts, civil society and other stakeholders.

VI. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Reduction in Election Expenditure

One of the major arguments supporting simultaneous elections is the reduction of repeated election-related expenditure. Elections require the deployment of government employees, security personnel, electronic voting infrastructure and other administrative resources. Supporters argue that synchronizing elections can reduce the frequency with which these resources are mobilized.

Continuity in Governance

Frequent elections may result in repeated implementation of the Model Code of Conduct and increased political activity. Supporters of simultaneous elections argue that a synchronized electoral cycle would allow governments to concentrate more consistently on policy implementation and developmental programmes. The parliamentary



committee's consultations have highlighted governance efficiency and reduced administrative disruption as important arguments in favour of the proposal.

Reduced Administrative Burden

Government employees, teachers, police personnel and other public servants are often assigned election-related responsibilities. A common electoral cycle may reduce repeated diversion of administrative and security resources towards election duties.

Long-Term Policy Planning

Governments may be able to focus more effectively on medium- and long-term development programmes when the political and administrative system is not repeatedly entering election mode. Supporters therefore consider simultaneous elections a governance reform rather than merely an electoral reform.

Constitutional Challenges

The implementation of simultaneous elections is not a simple administrative exercise. It raises complex constitutional questions because the Constitution provides for fixed but not always uninterrupted terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

A major challenge concerns the premature dissolution of a government. If a State government loses its majority before the completion of its term, an important question arises: should a new election be conducted for a full five-year term, or should the newly elected Assembly continue only for the remaining period of the synchronized electoral cycle?

Similarly, if the Lok Sabha is dissolved prematurely, the system must determine how the common electoral cycle will be restored. These issues require careful constitutional design.

The ongoing parliamentary examination has specifically considered issues such as mid-term elections, the remaining tenure of legislatures after premature dissolution, the powers proposed for the Election Commission and the relationship of the proposal with federalism and the Basic Structure Doctrine.

Therefore, constitutional amendment without a clear mechanism for handling political instability may create new democratic complications.

Federalism and the Autonomy of States

India is a Union of States with a federal constitutional structure. State governments derive their democratic legitimacy directly from the people of their respective States. Consequently, any reform that alters the tenure or electoral cycle of State Assemblies must be examined from the perspective of federalism.

Critics argue that a common national electoral cycle may give excessive importance to national political issues. During simultaneous elections, voters may focus more heavily on national leaders and national political debates, while local and State-specific issues may receive comparatively less attention.

For example, issues relating to agriculture, water disputes, regional development, language, local employment and State welfare policies may be overshadowed by national political campaigns. This could influence the independent political character of State elections.

Therefore, the major constitutional challenge is to ensure that simultaneous elections do not transform India's federal democracy into an excessively centralized political system.

Democratic Accountability and Representation

Another important concern relates to democratic accountability. Elections are not merely administrative events. They provide citizens with an opportunity to evaluate governments and express their political preferences.

Frequent elections may create administrative burdens, but they also provide regular opportunities for public accountability. Therefore, the objective of reducing the number of elections should not result in reducing the democratic capacity of citizens to hold governments accountable.

A healthy democracy requires both efficient governance and continuous accountability. Electoral reform must therefore maintain a balance between these two objectives.



The Role of Political Consensus

A constitutional reform of this magnitude cannot be successfully implemented through administrative decision-making alone. It requires broad political consultation and democratic consensus.

The parliamentary committee has continued consultations with different stakeholders and State-level representatives. In July 2026, the committee conducted consultations in Goa and stated that the feedback received would be used in preparing its recommendations. Reports in July 2026 also indicated that the committee was given additional time to submit its report, demonstrating that significant constitutional and political questions remain under examination.

This process itself demonstrates that the proposal requires careful examination rather than a hurried constitutional transformation.

One Nation, One Election as a Contemporary Political Issue

The importance of “One Nation, One Election” lies in the fact that it represents a larger debate about the future direction of Indian democracy. The central question is whether democracy should prioritize administrative efficiency or preserve multiple opportunities for political accountability.

Supporters view the proposal as a solution to repeated elections, high expenditure and governance disruption. Critics, however, emphasize federalism, constitutional autonomy and the possibility that national political issues could dominate State politics.

The debate therefore represents a conflict between two important democratic values:

Efficiency in governance and diversity in democratic representation.

The challenge before India is not simply to choose one value over the other. The challenge is to develop an institutional system capable of protecting both.

VII. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The proposal of “One Nation, One Election” is one of the most significant contemporary electoral reform debates in India.
2. The proposal aims to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies within a common electoral cycle.
3. The major advantages claimed for the proposal include reduced election-related expenditure, continuity in governance and reduced administrative burden.
4. The proposal involves complex constitutional questions relating to the tenure, dissolution and reconstitution of legislatures.
5. Federalism is one of the most important concerns because State elections involve distinct regional and local political issues.
6. Simultaneous elections may increase the influence of national political narratives over State-specific issues.
7. Democratic accountability should not be weakened in the pursuit of administrative efficiency.
8. The continuing parliamentary consultations and extension of the committee's reporting timeline in 2026 indicate that the proposal remains under active examination rather than being a completed reform.
9. Broad political consensus and constitutional safeguards are essential for the successful implementation of any simultaneous election framework.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

1. Build National Political Consensus

The Union Government should engage with State governments, political parties, constitutional experts, civil society organizations and academic institutions before implementing any major electoral reform.

2. Protect the Federal Structure

Any constitutional amendment should clearly protect the autonomy and democratic authority of State governments.



3. Develop a Clear Mechanism for Premature Dissolution

The Constitution or relevant legislation should clearly explain what happens when a government loses its majority or when an Assembly is dissolved before the completion of its term.

4. Strengthen the Role of the Election Commission

The Election Commission should be provided with adequate institutional and logistical capacity to conduct simultaneous elections effectively and independently.

5. Ensure Representation of State Issues

Political parties, media and civil society should ensure that regional and State-specific issues receive adequate attention during simultaneous elections.

6. Introduce the Reform Gradually

Instead of immediately synchronizing all elections, India may consider a phased approach. This would allow the country to examine practical difficulties and make necessary institutional adjustments.

7. Establish Constitutional Safeguards

The reform should be accompanied by clear safeguards against arbitrary dissolution, unnecessary extension or reduction of legislative terms and excessive centralization.

8. Encourage Public Debate

Since the proposal directly affects the democratic rights of citizens, public consultation and political education should form an important part of the reform process.

IX. CONCLUSION

“One Nation, One Election” is not merely an administrative proposal. It is a major constitutional and political question concerning the future structure of Indian democracy. The proposal has the potential to reduce repeated election-related expenditure and administrative disruption while creating a more predictable electoral cycle. However, its implementation also raises serious questions regarding federalism, the tenure of elected governments, democratic accountability and the representation of regional interests.

India's democracy is characterized by political diversity, regional aspirations and constitutional federalism. Therefore, electoral reform must not be evaluated solely on the basis of cost reduction or administrative convenience. A successful democratic reform must preserve the constitutional principles on which the Indian political system is built.

The future of simultaneous elections will depend upon the ability of policymakers to develop a system that combines **efficient governance with democratic accountability, national coordination with State autonomy, and electoral reform with constitutional safeguards.**

Therefore, “One Nation, One Election” should be approached not simply as a slogan or political programme, but as a major constitutional reform requiring careful deliberation, broad consensus and a strong commitment to India's democratic and federal values.

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