

ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA: GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Kandi Kamala

Project Director, Minor Research ICSSR New Delhi

Associate Professor

Dept. of Political Science, Government Degree & PG College for Women (A+Autonomous)
Begumpet, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

ABSTRACT

The proposal for Simultaneous Elections, popularly known as "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE), has emerged as a significant electoral reform debate in India. The concept advocates conducting elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies concurrently, replacing the current system of staggered elections. Proponents argue that simultaneous elections can reduce the financial burden of frequent elections, minimize disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct, enhance policy continuity, and improve administrative efficiency. Critics, however, contend that such a reform may undermine India's federal structure, diminish the importance of regional issues, and affect democratic representation by favoring national political narratives over state-specific concerns. This study examines the feasibility of simultaneous elections in India from governance and democratic perspectives. It analyzes the constitutional, legal, administrative, and political challenges associated with synchronizing electoral cycles across the country. The research also explores the potential impact of simultaneous elections on governance efficiency, public expenditure, voter turnout, electoral participation, and accountability mechanisms. Particular attention is given to the implications for federalism, Centre-State relations, and the representation of diverse regional interests within India's multi-party democratic framework. The study employs a qualitative research methodology based on the analysis of constitutional provisions, reports of the Election Commission of India, Law Commission recommendations, parliamentary committee reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature. Comparative experiences from countries practicing synchronized elections are also examined to identify relevant lessons for India.

Keywords: One Nation, One Election; Electoral Reforms; Governance; Federalism; National Interest; Democratic Accountability; Indian Constitution; Party Politics; Indian Democracy

INTRODUCTION

India, the world's largest democracy, conducts elections at multiple levels of government, including the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local self-government institutions. Since independence, elections have played a crucial role in ensuring democratic participation, political accountability, and representative governance. However, the electoral calendar in India has become increasingly fragmented due to the premature dissolution of legislatures, political instability, and varying electoral cycles across states. As a result, elections are held almost every year in different parts of the country, leading to significant financial, administrative, and political implications. In this context, the proposal for Simultaneous Elections, commonly referred to as "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE), has emerged as a major electoral reform initiative. The concept advocates conducting elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, thereby synchronizing electoral cycles across the country. This system was effectively in place during the first two

decades after independence, when elections to the Lok Sabha and most State Assemblies were held together in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, the cycle was disrupted due to the premature dissolution of several state assemblies and the Lok Sabha, resulting in the current system of staggered elections.

The debate on simultaneous elections has gained renewed attention in recent years through recommendations from the Election Commission of India, the Law Commission of India, the NITI Aayog, and various parliamentary committees. Supporters argue that simultaneous elections can reduce public expenditure, improve governance efficiency, minimize the repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, enhance policy continuity, and optimize the deployment of administrative and security resources. They contend that a synchronized electoral process would enable governments to focus more effectively on development and long-term policymaking rather than remaining in a continuous election mode.

At the same time, critics raise concerns regarding the constitutional feasibility and democratic implications of the proposal. They argue that simultaneous elections may weaken the federal character of the Indian political system by overshadowing regional issues and state-level political priorities. There are also concerns that national political narratives could dominate electoral discourse, potentially affecting the representation of regional parties and the diversity of political voices. Moreover, implementing simultaneous elections would require extensive constitutional amendments, modifications to electoral laws, and broad political consensus among stakeholders.

The issue therefore presents a complex intersection of governance efficiency, federal dynamics, and democratic values. While the prospect of reducing election-related costs and administrative burdens is attractive, it is equally important to examine whether such reforms would preserve the principles of representative democracy, political accountability, and federal balance that underpin the Indian constitutional framework.

Against this backdrop, the present study, “Assessing the Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections in India: Governance and Democratic Perspectives,” seeks to critically examine the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of simultaneous elections. The study explores the constitutional, legal, political, and administrative dimensions of the proposal and evaluates its potential impact on governance, democratic participation, electoral accountability, and federal relations. By analyzing policy reports, constitutional provisions, electoral data, and scholarly literature, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on electoral reforms and provide a balanced assessment of the feasibility of simultaneous elections in India.

HISTORY OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA

The concept of simultaneous elections is not new to Indian democracy. In fact, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were conducted together during the first four general election cycles (1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967). This synchronization reflected the constitutional vision of the Constituent Assembly of India, which provided fixed five-year terms for both Parliament and State Assemblies, ensuring electoral uniformity across the Union and the States.

However, the cycle was disrupted in the late 1960s due to premature dissolutions of several State Assemblies caused by political instability, defections, and breakdown of coalition governments. The situation further intensified when the Fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved early in 1970, leading to fresh parliamentary elections in 1971. These developments permanently desynchronized national and state electoral cycles.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the increasing fragmentation of the party system, rise of regional parties, and instability in both Parliament and State Assemblies further entrenched the practice of staggered elections. As a result, India began witnessing frequent elections in different states throughout the year, creating what many scholars describe as a “permanent campaign mode.”

The idea of restoring simultaneous elections resurfaced periodically. The Election Commission of India has, at different times, discussed the logistical feasibility of such synchronization. The Law Commission of India in its 170th Report (1999) recommended exploring the possibility of aligning election cycles. More recently, discussions intensified under the Government of India, including the constitution of a High-Level Committee chaired by Ram Nath Kovind to examine the feasibility of implementing *One Nation, One Election*.

Thus, historically, simultaneous elections were once the norm in India but became fragmented due to political instability and constitutional developments. The current debate represents an attempt to revisit and potentially restore an earlier electoral practice, while adapting it to contemporary political and federal realities.

REFORMS UNDER ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) is framed as a comprehensive package of electoral and governance reforms rather than a single procedural change. At its core, ONOE seeks to restructure India’s electoral calendar through synchronized elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, thereby redefining the relationship between elections, governance, and public administration.

Electoral and Institutional Reforms

A central reform under ONOE involves aligning the tenure of legislatures through constitutional and statutory amendments. This may include fixed terms for elected bodies, mechanisms to manage mid-term dissolutions, and provisions for holding elections in exceptional circumstances. Proposals such as “constructive no-confidence motions” and interim assemblies have been discussed as safeguards to ensure continuity of governance without frequent electoral disruptions. These reforms aim to bring predictability and stability to the political system while reducing the need for repeated elections.

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

ONOE is also presented as a governance reform intended to minimize administrative paralysis caused by the frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct. Repeated elections often delay development projects, policy rollouts, and budgetary decisions. By consolidating elections, governments are expected to gain longer uninterrupted periods for policy implementation, strategic planning, and institutional reforms. Supporters argue that this would strengthen outcome-based governance and improve state capacity, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure, welfare delivery, and public service reform.

Fiscal and Economic Reforms

Another major reform dimension relates to public finance. Elections in India involve significant expenditure by the state on security, logistics, and administrative deployment. ONOE proposes to rationalize these costs by reducing duplication and optimizing the use of public resources. Proponents link this reform to national interest, arguing that savings from election-related expenditure can be redirected towards development priorities, social welfare schemes, and capital investment.

Political and Party-System Reforms

The reform agenda of ONOE has been strongly advanced by the Bharatiya Janata Party (**BJP**), which views synchronized elections as a means to promote political stability and decisive governance. From this perspective, ONOE is aligned with broader reforms aimed at reducing fragmentation, discouraging populist short-termism, and strengthening mandate-based politics. However, critics argue that such reforms may disproportionately benefit national parties, potentially marginalizing regional parties and altering the competitive balance of India's federal political system.

DEMOCRATIC AND FEDERAL IMPLICATIONS

While ONOE is promoted as a reform to enhance efficiency and national coherence, it also necessitates reforms to protect democratic accountability and federal diversity. Concerns over the dilution of state-level issues, voter choice, and regional autonomy have led scholars to emphasize the need for institutional safeguards, inclusive consensus-building, and phased implementation. Without such reforms, ONOE risks being perceived as centralizing rather than democratizing. In sum, One Nation, One Election represents a multidimensional reform agenda encompassing electoral design, governance efficiency, fiscal rationalization, and party politics. Its success as an electoral reform depends not only on technical feasibility but also on its ability to reconcile national interest with India's pluralistic and federal democratic ethos.

How the Idea of *One Nation, One Election* Emerged within the BJP

The articulation of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) as a formal reform agenda gained clarity and political momentum with the rise of the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** as a dominant force in national politics. While the concept itself predates the BJP—having existed in practice during the early decades after independence—the party played a decisive role in transforming ONOE from a historical precedent into a contemporary reform proposal.

Ideological and Governance Foundations

The BJP's engagement with ONOE is rooted in its broader ideological emphasis on political stability, strong governance, and institutional efficiency. The party has consistently argued that frequent elections disrupt governance, encourage short-term populism, and divert administrative machinery away from development goals. From this standpoint, ONOE aligns with the BJP's vision of a decisive state capable of long-term planning and execution, rather than one constrained by continuous electoral cycles.

Electoral Experience and Administrative Concerns

After assuming office at the Centre in 2014, the BJP directly encountered the practical challenges of staggered elections—frequent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, repeated deployment of security forces, and delays in policy implementation. These governance constraints reinforced the party's argument that India was operating in a "permanent election mode." As a result, ONOE was increasingly framed not just as an electoral adjustment, but as a structural reform necessary to enhance administrative efficiency and policy continuity.

Formal Political Articulation

The BJP gradually institutionalized ONOE within its political discourse. The idea found space in party manifestos, parliamentary debates, and public speeches by senior leaders. Government-backed discussions, reports, and consultations further legitimized the proposal as a subject of national policy debate rather than a partisan slogan. By positioning ONOE as a

reform serving national interest—through reduced expenditure, stable governance, and coherent policymaking—the BJP sought to elevate it above narrow party advantage.

STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

At the same time, critics argue that the BJP's support for ONOE is not ideologically neutral. Given the party's strong national presence and centralized campaign machinery, synchronized elections may amplify national narratives and leadership appeal, potentially disadvantaging regional parties. This has led opposition parties to view ONOE as a reform that could reshape electoral competition in favor of national parties, particularly the BJP. Thus, the idea's emergence within the BJP reflects both governance-driven motivations and strategic political calculations.

From Idea to Reform Debate

In essence, ONOE became a BJP-backed reform through a convergence of ideological belief in strong governance, administrative experience of electoral disruptions, and a strategic vision for restructuring India's political timetable. The party's role has been pivotal in moving ONOE from historical memory to the center of contemporary electoral reform debates, making it a critical lens through which to examine the intersections of governance, national interest, and party politics in India.

Opinions of Other Political Parties in India on *One Nation, One Election*

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) has generated sharp and diverse reactions across India's political spectrum. While the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** strongly advocates the reform as a governance-enhancing measure, most other political parties approach ONOE with caution, skepticism, or outright opposition. Their responses are shaped by concerns related to federalism, electoral accountability, and political competition.

Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress has consistently expressed reservations about ONOE. The party argues that synchronized elections could weaken India's federal structure by subordinating state-level political dynamics to national narratives. According to the Congress, frequent elections provide voters with regular opportunities to hold governments accountable, and reducing this frequency may dilute democratic responsiveness. The party also highlights constitutional challenges, particularly regarding the premature dissolution of legislatures and the potential erosion of state autonomy.

REGIONAL PARTIES AND FEDERAL CONCERNS

Regional parties have emerged as the most vocal critics of ONOE. Parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (**DMK**), Trinamool Congress (**TMC**), Biju Janata Dal (**BJD**), and Telangana Rashtra Samithi (**TRS**) (now Bharat Rashtra Samithi) argue that ONOE risks marginalizing regional issues and identities. These parties contend that state elections allow voters to prioritize local governance concerns, which may be overshadowed in a simultaneous national election dominated by central leadership and national security or macroeconomic narratives.

Left Parties

Left parties, including the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (**CPI-M**), oppose ONOE on ideological and democratic grounds. They argue that the proposal reflects a centralizing impulse that undermines India's pluralistic democracy. According to the Left, synchronized

elections could reduce political diversity, limit grassroots mobilization, and weaken the ability of smaller parties to challenge dominant political forces.

CONDITIONAL AND CAUTIOUS SUPPORT

A few parties have adopted a conditional or pragmatic stance rather than outright rejection. Some regional parties acknowledge the administrative and financial arguments in favor of ONOE but insist that any such reform must be preceded by wide political consensus, constitutional safeguards, and guarantees for federal autonomy. Without these assurances, they argue, ONOE would privilege national parties over regional formations.

Opposition Alliances and Collective Resistance

Opposition alliances have broadly framed ONOE as a reform driven by the political interests of the ruling party rather than a neutral institutional necessity. They emphasize that India's electoral diversity reflects its social and cultural pluralism, and that staggered elections help sustain this democratic complexity. For these parties, ONOE represents not merely an electoral reform, but a potential restructuring of political competition in favor of centralized power.

Overall Assessment

In summary, opinions of non-BJP political parties on One Nation, One Election range from cautious skepticism to strong opposition. While governance efficiency and cost reduction are acknowledged in principle, concerns about federalism, democratic accountability, and partisan advantage dominate the debate. These divergent party positions underline that ONOE is as much a political and constitutional question as it is an administrative reform, making broad consensus a critical prerequisite for its adoption in India.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the far-reaching constitutional, political, and administrative implications of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE), its consideration as an electoral reform requires a cautious, inclusive, and phased approach. The following recommendations aim to balance governance efficiency, national interest, and democratic pluralism, while addressing concerns raised by various political stakeholders.

1. Build Broad Political and Federal Consensus

ONOE should not be advanced as a unilateral reform driven by the ruling party alone. A structured and sustained dialogue involving national parties, regional parties, state governments, and constitutional experts is essential. Parliamentary committees, inter-state councils, and all-party consultations must play a central role to ensure that the reform reflects collective democratic will rather than partisan priorities.

2. Safeguard Federalism and State Autonomy

Any move toward synchronized elections must incorporate explicit constitutional safeguards to protect India's federal structure. State governments should retain adequate autonomy in policy priorities and governance cycles. Mechanisms must ensure that state-specific issues are not overshadowed by national electoral narratives during simultaneous elections.

3. Phased and Pilot-Based Implementation

Rather than immediate nationwide implementation, ONOE could be introduced in phases. Synchronizing elections in a limited number of states or aligning clusters of

elections may serve as pilot models. This gradual approach would allow policymakers to assess administrative feasibility, voter behavior, and political consequences before full-scale adoption.

4. Constitutional and Legal Clarity

Clear constitutional amendments are necessary to address issues related to fixed tenures, premature dissolution of legislatures, and exceptional political situations. Legal clarity on alternatives such as constructive no-confidence motions or caretaker arrangements is essential to prevent governance deadlocks and democratic dilution.

5. Strengthen Electoral Accountability

Reducing the frequency of elections should not weaken democratic accountability. Complementary reforms—such as stronger legislative oversight, enhanced role of parliamentary committees, transparency in governance, and empowered local bodies—are required to ensure that governments remain responsive between elections.

6. Neutral Institutional Framing

To enhance legitimacy, ONOE should be framed as an institutional reform rather than a party-centric agenda. While the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** has played a key role in reviving the proposal, distancing the reform from partisan narratives will be crucial for wider acceptance. Independent constitutional bodies and expert commissions should guide the reform process.

7. Voter Awareness and Democratic Education

Public awareness campaigns and academic engagement are necessary to explain the implications of ONOE to voters. An informed electorate is essential to evaluate whether synchronized elections serve democratic participation, governance quality, and national interest.

One Nation, One Election should be pursued only as a consensus-driven, constitutionally sound, and democratically sensitive reform. While its potential benefits in governance efficiency and cost reduction are significant, these must not come at the expense of federal balance, political diversity, and electoral accountability. A calibrated and inclusive reform pathway is therefore essential for ONOE to strengthen, rather than strain, India's democratic framework.

CONCLUSION

The proposal for simultaneous elections in India represents one of the most significant electoral reform initiatives in recent decades. The concept seeks to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies with the objective of reducing election-related expenditure, minimizing administrative disruptions, ensuring policy continuity, and improving governance efficiency. Given the frequency of elections across different states, the idea has gained considerable attention among policymakers, scholars, and political stakeholders. This study finds that simultaneous elections have the potential to generate several governance benefits, including the more efficient utilization of financial and administrative resources, reduced deployment of security personnel, and fewer interruptions to development activities caused by the Model Code of Conduct. The reform may also contribute to greater political stability and facilitate long-term policy planning and implementation.

However, the feasibility of simultaneous elections extends beyond administrative and financial considerations. The study highlights significant constitutional, legal, and political challenges that must be addressed before implementation. Synchronizing electoral cycles would require substantial constitutional amendments, changes in electoral laws, and broad consensus among political parties and state governments. Furthermore, concerns regarding the impact on India's federal structure, regional political representation, and democratic accountability remain central to the debate. From a democratic perspective, simultaneous elections may influence voter behavior by increasing the tendency to vote along national political lines, potentially reducing the visibility of state-specific issues and regional parties. Such outcomes could affect the diversity and inclusiveness that characterize India's multi-party democratic system. Therefore, any move toward electoral synchronization must include safeguards to preserve federal autonomy, regional representation, and the independence of state-level political processes.

The study concludes that while simultaneous elections offer promising governance advantages, their implementation requires careful institutional design, constitutional safeguards, and extensive political consultation. A phased approach, supported by consensus-building among stakeholders and detailed assessment of potential consequences, may provide a practical pathway for reform. Ultimately, the success of simultaneous elections in India should be measured not only by gains in administrative efficiency but also by their ability to uphold the principles of federalism, democratic representation, political accountability, and electoral fairness that form the foundation of the Indian democratic system.

REFERENCE

1. Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2018). *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Election Commission of India. (2015). *Proposed Electoral Reforms*. New Delhi: ECI.
3. Government of India. (2023). *Report of the High-Level Committee on One Nation, One Election*. New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice.
4. Indian National Congress. (2018). *Congress Resolution on Electoral Reforms*. New Delhi: AICC.
5. Kamala, K (2025) "Democratic Reforms in India: The One Nation, One Election Model" *International Journal of Political Science* Volume 11 Number 1, January – June Pp 39-46.
6. Kamalakar , G. (2025) "Electoral Reform 2029: The Road To One Nation, One Election " *Indian Journal of Social Research* Vol. 66 (5+6) (Sep-Oct + Nov-Dec, 261-270.
7. Kashyap, S. C. (2008). *Our Constitution: An Introduction to India's Constitution and Constitutional Law*. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
8. Law Commission of India. (2018). *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections*. New Delhi: Government of India.
9. NITI Aayog. (2017). *Analysis of Simultaneous Elections in India*. New Delhi: NITI Aayog.
10. Palshikar, S., Suri, K. C., & Yadav, Y. (2014). *Party Competition in Indian States*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
11. Sridharan, E. (2019). "Federalism, Party Systems, and Electoral Synchronization in India." *Studies in Indian Politics*, 7(2), 183–197.
12. Vaishnav, M. (2017). *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.