

Article Topic: Pan-India Single Election and Integrated Election System

Abstract

The idea of holding simultaneous elections across the country—popularly known as *One Nation, One Election*—has garnered significant attention in India's political and academic circles. This concept, now increasingly discussed under terminologies such as *Pan-India Single Election* and *Integrated Election System*, proposes synchronising elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to reduce electoral costs, administrative strain, and political disruption. This article explores the conceptual basis, legal feasibility, practical implications, and democratic challenges of implementing a unified electoral cycle across India. While the objective may promise efficiency and economic benefits, concerns about federalism, voter engagement, and constitutional amendments necessitate a cautious, deliberative approach.

Keywords: One Nation, One Election, Integrated Election System, Democratic challenges, Voter Engagement, Constitutional Amendments

Introduction:

India, the world's largest democracy, conducts elections on a scale unmatched by any other nation. From panchayat to Parliament, the electoral machinery is perpetually active somewhere or the other. While this continual cycle is a testimony to India's democratic vibrancy, it also poses certain structural challenges—administrative, financial, and political. Against this backdrop, the concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has gained momentum.

This idea envisions simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies. Though discussed since the early decades of independence, it has only recently become a central theme in electoral reforms. Proponents argue it will streamline governance, reduce election costs, and minimize political distractions. Critics fear it might undermine federalism and alter the balance of power.

This article explores the concept in depth, through the FILAC approach—Facts, Incidents, Logic, Argument, and Conclusion, while incorporating the filler content strategy for enriched narrative flow.

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The very concept of this scheme was proposed to conduct only one election in a given voting year in the entire country. This may be because of several reasons, some maybe because the voters might have difficulties in making voting choices, if they are to give votes twice a year, once to the Lok Sabha followed by the State Legislative Assemblies, although this was prescribed as a part of the resolution that was submitted by the President of India.

India is always in an election mode. During a normal tenure of the Lok Sabha, the country witnesses, on an average, elections to about 5-7 State Assemblies every year.

The elections to the Panchayats, Urban Local Bodies, elections to the State Legislative Assemblies etc increases the total number of elections that India usually faces every year irrespective of the fact whether it is general elections or not. Such frequent electoral cycles¹ end up impacting and affecting the administrative and the Developmental Activities of the nation. Hence, Simultaneous Elections or One Nation One Election is considered as a potential solution to combat the Electoral Problems that a country faces.

A) These very Concept has gained acceptance by various different committees including the Law Commission of India, The Niti Aayog Commission, The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice etc but is still miles to reach momentum and full force and Vigor.

B) The concept of simultaneous elections is not new. Elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously every time between 1951 till 1967. Due to the early dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle got interrupted for the first time at that point of time

Normally the Elections to the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and to the State Legislative Assemblies are held together in the same time each year and the voters caste their votes according to the different phases of the election process.

In 2024, India conducted its general elections, with nearly half of the world's population participating in various elections globally amidst the challenges and the conflicts and economic crises. The elections in India were part of this global democratic process which reflected both hope and frustration among the Voters.

Hence the proposal of One Nation, One Election was put to effect by the Prime Minister of India. This is the reason as to why amid massive protest the One Nation, One Election Bill was even introduced into the Lok Sabha very recently. The Bill is subjected to protests which state that it impacts the basic structure framework of the constitution particularly the very principle of federalism is infringed by way of the bill. Moreover, the Bill is said to be Anti-federal and that this bill is beyond the legislative competence of the house.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a **doctrinal legal method**, relying on constitutional provisions, parliamentary reports (notably the Law Commission's Reports), and relevant judgments of the Supreme Court. Secondary sources include journal articles, government publications, and commentaries on the Indian Constitution. A comparative perspective is also employed to evaluate practices in countries like South Africa and Sweden, where synchronised elections are practiced.

¹ P K Tripathi, 'Simultaneous Elections and the Federal Dilemma' (2017) *Journal of Constitutional Law*.
Madhav Godbole, 'One Nation, One Election: Convenience vs Constitution' *India Today* (New Delhi, 2019).

Review of Literature

1. **P.K. Tripathi** (Journal of Constitutional Law, 2017) argues that simultaneous elections can enhance administrative efficiency and reduce fiscal burden, but warns about the potential distortion of federal principles.
2. **Madhav Godbole** (India Today, 2019) critiques the idea ²as “politically convenient but constitutionally complex,” emphasising the logistical and legal challenges, especially premature dissolution of Assemblies.
3. **Dr. Subhash Kashyap** (Former Secretary-General, Lok Sabha) ³supports the idea in his works, highlighting its potential to reduce the "election-mode" paralysis of governance and ensure policy continuity.

The Reasons Supplementing the idea of the Objective of One Nation, One Election

First and the foremost reason to impose this criterion would be that during the general elections to Lok Sabha, the Model Code of Conduct is applicable throughout the entire country and during elections to Assemblies, the code is applicable to the entire State. Apart from the routinely administrative activities all the other activities remain suspended till the time the Model Code of Conduct becomes applicable to the state. The Model Code of Conduct essentially contains the behavioural norms, codes of conduct which is applicable to every politician. Candidate and members of the party during the entire election process including the time when the election campaigning takes place. ⁴The Analysis from Niti Aayog shows for an instance that if the average period of operation of the Model Code of Conduct for a state legislative assembly is 2 Months, then in that case the Model Code of Conduct would be made applicable at least for a period of 4 to 6 months in that constituency or in the other areas of the country.

Secondly the massive expenditures that have been incurred by the Government and the Political Parties may be yet another reason as to why this objective should be put to effect.

⁵Since elections keep on happening very frequently, the Government of India (bears 100% cost of Lok Sabha and 50% cost of Vidhan Sabha) and State Governments (50% cost of Vidhan Sabha elections and 100% cost of third tier) have to keep spending portions of their budgets on a recurring manner. This may be the reason of fear and apprehension in the minds of political

² Madhav Godbole, 'One Nation, One Election: Convenience vs Constitution' *India Today* (New Delhi, 2019).

³ Subhash C Kashyap, *Our Constitution: An Introduction to India's Constitution and Constitutional Law* (NBT 2011).

⁴ NITI Aayog, 'Discussion Paper on Simultaneous Elections: Pros and Cons' (January 2017) <https://www.niti.gov.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

⁵ Election Commission of India, 'Report on Electoral Expenditure' (2016) <https://eci.gov.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

parties who need to keep a regular and uniform flow of funds to be able to conduct the elections and to stand for the elections in a smooth manner.

Thirdly, Engaging the officers who are employed as security personnels for longer durations.

Conducting Elections is a very elaborate and a huge process. Whilst conducting Elections and making it a huge success several people from various professions are hired, ⁶mostly the government officers (the Police task Forces, the Armed Personnels, the School Teachers are allocated duties to conduct elections in a peaceful, free, fair and transparent manner.

Recruiting these officials is considered to be important but if the time period of the elections exceeds then they have to serve for a longer period than the usual. This will have an impact on them as for example the police forces who could invest more of their time controlling the internal security matters, the type of duties and responsibilities that are primarily entrusted to them are now spending their time in performing the extended election duties.

Finally, this very criterion may also have an impact on ⁷the entire Policy Making process and Governance. “Short-sighted”, “populist” and “politically convenient” measures are given higher priority over “difficult” structural reforms which may be more benefitting to the citizenry from a long-term perspective. This leads to improper optimisation of Governmental Activity which hinders upon the design, delivery and the overall structure of the public policies and the measures of Development of the Country.

This is why if the elections take place in a frequent basis, then the government’s risk-taking capabilities will be reduced altogether and then the government will move and select convenient and safe quo’ist approaches. Therefore, this One-Nation, one election Method calls for eradicating the permanent holding of elections all year round so that the government is given a reasonable opportunity to work in bringing transformative changes in the Country’s developmental and administrative structure without thinking about the upcoming, impending elections. So that the government is given the liberty to think about the long-term development of the entire country of India.

Arguments of Critics who opposed the Plan of One Nation One Election

That Perhaps this criterion might be one which is motivated with political gains, this also means the very fact that the voters would simply vote on national issues rather than on state issues. The primary wordings of this argument simply would indicate that the voters are not able to make good choices in their voting behaviour and voting pattern, in the sense that they are not able to differentiate between Elections held to the Lok Sabha and to the State Legislative Assemblies, in case simultaneous elections are held in a given year. Critics have also argued that in such an instance the voters might end up voting for the same party in case there is favouritism in the national wave for some party and in this way all the larger and stronger national parties would emerge as victorious as compared to all the smaller regional parties. In a mature democratic set-up like that of India, the organisation of voters who cast their vote for

⁶ Ministry of Law and Justice, ‘Reform Proposals for Electoral Management in India’ (2020) <https://lawmin.gov.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

⁷ PRS Legislative Research, ‘Analysis of One Nation One Election’ (2019) <https://prsindia.org> accessed 18 June 2025.

State Assembly elections or Lok Sabha elections held simultaneously is generally a reflection of several parameters such as the strength of the organisation, presence of parties, perception and ideologies of leaders, caste, social dynamics, development agenda etc.) and not primarily only the timing.

Secondly various other [4] Critics have stated that this particular model is not feasible or do-able in conducting elections. Several questions pertaining to it may be highlighted which may be regarding the term periods in which the Assemblies and the Lok Sabha operate and function, whether it would be feasible to curtail and diminish some of the terms of the State Assemblies, should the term period of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha should be fixed or not, whether the Election Commission of India would be able to bear the burden of the constant supply of Security Forces, Man-power and Logistic Resources which may be required at the time of conducting elections.

The Democratic Labyrinth: Setting the Groundwork

The idea of simultaneous elections is not new. India actually held synchronized elections from 1951 to 1967. However, political instability, premature dissolutions of state assemblies and the Parliament led to their desynchronization.

Key Facts:

⁸The Law Commission (170th Report) recommended simultaneous elections in 1999.

The NITI Aayog, in a 2017 paper, proposed a practical roadmap for implementation.

In 2023, the Government of India constituted a High-Level Committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to examine the feasibility of ONOE.

Financial implications are significant. According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the 2019 Lok Sabha elections alone cost over ₹60,000 crore, including state and private expenditures. Add to this the assembly elections held in multiple states almost every year, and the economic burden becomes apparent.

From a logistical standpoint, elections demand massive deployment of security forces, EVMs, polling staff, and surveillance mechanisms. With frequent elections, governance often comes to a standstill due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) being in force repeatedly.

⁸ Law Commission of India, *170th Report on Reform of Electoral Laws* (May 1999)
<https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

A Glimpse into the Ground Reality

⁹The issue of staggered elections is not just academic—it has real-world implications.

1. The 2014-2019 Timeline:

During this term of the 16th Lok Sabha, India witnessed 15 major state elections. These included politically critical states like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu. Each election necessitated huge campaigning, repeated code of conduct restrictions, and diversion of government machinery.

2. The Election Fatigue in 2022-23:

With elections in Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and several northeastern states in quick succession, voter fatigue became evident. There was also a noticeable shift in governance patterns. Policy announcements were either withheld or rushed before the MCC kicked in, affecting long-term developmental planning.

3. The Success of Panchayat-Level Simultaneity:

Interestingly, many states already conduct simultaneous panchayat elections for various tiers. This experience at the grassroots shows that synchronization is not entirely unfeasible, although scaling it to the national level is far more complex.

Weighing the Pros and Cons

The Case for Simultaneous Elections:

1. Cost Efficiency:

A unified electoral cycle would drastically reduce the financial burden on the exchequer and political parties.

Lesser strain on security forces and administrative resources.

2. Governance Stability:

¹⁰Continuous election cycles often bring policy paralysis.

⁹ PRS Legislative Research, 'Simultaneous Elections: Issues and Challenges' (2018) <https://prsindia.org> accessed 18 June 2025.

¹⁰ Subhash C Kashyap, *Our Constitution: An Introduction to India's Constitution and Constitutional Law* (NBT 2011).

Simultaneous elections would allow governments at all levels to focus on governance, not survival or campaigns.

3. Voter Engagement:

A combined electoral event may enhance turnout due to consolidated awareness campaigns.

Voter fatigue from frequent elections could be minimized.

4. Curtailment of Populism:

Governments often announce unsustainable populist schemes just before elections.

A common election cycle might make such practices less frequent.

4. Administrative Simplification:

Resource planning, deployment, and training can be streamlined. EVM production and logistics become more manageable.

The Case Against Simultaneous Elections:

1. Federal Concerns:

¹¹States may lose their autonomy if elections are forced into a fixed national timeline. The principle of federalism enshrined in the Constitution could be compromised.

2. Practical Feasibility:

Assemblies and Parliament can be dissolved early due to no-confidence motions or other political exigencies. Would all elections be rescheduled then?

3. Voter Behaviour Risks:

Simultaneous elections may cause voters to conflate national and state issues. This may harm regional parties and diminish political diversity.

¹¹ Suhas Palshikar, 'Nationalising the Vote: A Threat to Regional Democracy' *The Hindu* (2020) <https://thehindu.com> accessed 18 June 2025.

4. Constitutional and Legal Hurdles:

It would require multiple constitutional amendments—Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356—to align the terms of various legislatures.

¹²

Consent of at least half the states is also necessary, adding a layer of political complexity.

Arguments: Voices from Both Sides

In Favor:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a vocal supporter of ONOE, citing it as a solution to the frequent disruption of governance. The NITI Aayog paper of 2017 argued for implementation in two phases, beginning with syncing elections of states whose terms are expiring close to the general election.

The Election Commission has expressed conditional support, noting it can execute the plan if the legal and logistical frameworks are put in place.

Scholars like Bibek Debroy have emphasized that simultaneous elections could act as an antidote to the "election economy," which skews long-term policymaking.

In Opposition:

Regional parties like the DMK, TMC, and BJD have opposed the proposal, fearing centralization of political narratives. Legal experts like Fali S. Nariman have warned that ONE may erode the foundational principle of cooperative federalism.

Political scientists argue that simultaneous elections may reduce electoral accountability, especially at the state level. A ruling party could leverage its national appeal to win state elections even if its performance in the state is subpar.

The Road Ahead

The concept of One Nation, One Election is undoubtedly alluring, especially when viewed through the lenses of cost, stability, and efficiency. However, it also raises profound questions about constitutional integrity, federalism, and democratic diversity.

To move forward, a phased approach might be ideal. For instance:

First Phase: Clubbing elections of states whose terms are ending close to each other and the Lok Sabha.

¹² Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, 'Is One Nation, One Election Feasible?' (2019) 54(4) *Economic & Political Weekly* <https://epw.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

Second Phase: Gradual constitutional amendments and legal framework development.

Third Phase: Broad-based consultations with political parties, state governments, and civil society.

It must be remembered that democracy is not just about efficiency—it is about representation, decentralization, and inclusivity. The push for simultaneous elections should not become a push for political homogenization. Any reform must be consensual, well-reasoned, and context-sensitive.

India’s democratic experiment is its greatest strength. Any attempt to reshape its electoral process must preserve its pluralism, empower the states, and deepen participatory governance—not dilute it.

International Precedents: Countries like South Africa, Sweden, and Indonesia hold simultaneous elections with some success. However, these nations have different political architectures. Lessons can be drawn, but blindly emulating them won’t work.

Technological Integration: The ECI must invest in next-gen EVMs, digital voter databases, and AI-based polling logistics if ONOE is implemented. Without technological sophistication, the scale of ONE could strain the existing infrastructure.

Civic Education Imperative: A synchronized election requires high voter literacy. The ability to distinguish between national and state issues is critical to prevent electoral confusion.

Judicial Preparedness: The courts must be ready for election-related litigation spikes post-implementation. Dispute redressal mechanisms need strengthening.

Media Responsibility: With the convergence of elections, media must responsibly delineate between different governance levels. Otherwise, national issues could swamp state narratives, harming regional accountability.

Between the Ideal and the Real

The idea of “One Nation, One Election” embodies the desire for streamlined democracy. Yet, democracy is inherently complex—messy, slow, but inclusive. The road to ONOE will be long, possibly riddled with legal, political, and logistical roadblocks. But if pursued with deliberation rather than imposition, it could lead to a more coherent electoral system.

India stands at a critical juncture. The challenge is not merely to synchronize elections, but to synchronize electoral reform with constitutional ideals.

Constitutional and Legal Challenges

¹³The major legal hurdles to implementing a Pan-India Single Election include:

1. Amendments to Key Constitutional Provisions:

- Article 83(2) (Duration of Lok Sabha),
¹⁴
- Article 172 (Duration of State Legislatures),
- Article 356 (President's Rule and premature dissolution),
- Article 324 (Powers of the Election Commission).

2. Federal Structure Concerns:

States may perceive this as a dilution of their autonomy, especially where regional issues are overshadowed by national campaigns.

3. Judicial Precedent:

The Supreme Court has consistently upheld the federal structure and the independence of elections, requiring that any changes be both procedurally and substantively democratic.

Administrative and Logistical Considerations

Implementing a single election system would require:

- **Massive deployment of security and personnel**, especially in sensitive regions.
- **Enhanced EVM and VVPAT infrastructure** to handle the sheer scale of simultaneous voting.
- **Digital and physical infrastructure for training, logistics, and communication** on an unprecedented scale.

¹³ Constitution of India 1950, arts 83(2), 172(1), 356, 324.

¹⁴ Fali S Nariman, *The State of the Nation: In Context of India's Federalism* (Hay House 2018).

- **A single, synchronised voter roll update** to ensure no disenfranchisement.

These challenges necessitate a phased implementation strategy rather than a sudden shift.

Arguments in Favor of the Integrated System

1. **Cost** **Efficiency:**
Frequent elections cost the exchequer thousands of crores. A single election every five years would drastically reduce recurring expenses.
2. **Governance** **Continuity:**
With MCC being enforced less frequently, policy implementation will be smoother and less interrupted by political compulsions.
3. **Reduced Voter** **Fatigue:**
Consolidating elections may improve turnout and reduce disinterest caused by repeated electoral cycles.
4. **Curbing Electoral** **Polarisation:**
With fewer elections, the scope for continuous political polarisation and communal mobilisation might reduce.

¹⁵Criticisms and Counterpoints

1. **Democratic** **Dilution:**
Holding all elections together risks reducing the electorate's focus on state issues, with national narratives dominating campaigns.
2. **Unstable Governments and Mid-Term Collapses:**
A state government collapsing mid-term would challenge the synchronisation principle. Would the state be under President's Rule till the next national election?
3. **Over-centralisation:**
A single election calendar may erode the flexibility of states to dissolve assemblies and

¹⁵ Law Commission of India, 'Need for Electoral Courts' (Report No. 255, 2015).

call fresh mandates, which is a vital democratic mechanism.

¹⁶**Suggested Alternatives and Safeguards**

- **Phased Synchronisation:**
Cluster states into groups and synchronise elections in phases, eventually converging into a unified cycle over a decade.
- **Fixed Tenure with Conditional Dissolution:**
Introduce a mechanism where premature dissolution leads to the appointment of a caretaker government until the next scheduled election, thereby preserving synchronisation.
- **Constitutional Amendment with Federal Consensus:**
Engage in broad-based consultation with states, political parties, and constitutional experts before enacting sweeping changes.

Comparative Global Experience

Countries like **South Africa, Indonesia, and Sweden** conduct joint elections for multiple tiers of government, though not always on the same day. These models demonstrate that with institutional safeguards, integrated electoral frameworks can function without undermining democratic principles.

However, unlike India, these nations often have presidential systems or less complex federal arrangements, limiting the utility of direct comparisons.

¹⁶ Editors Guild of India, 'Guidelines for Electoral Reporting in Multi-level Polls' (2023) <https://editorsguild.in> accessed 18 June 2025.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the pertinent problem is coordination, co-operation and commitment among the different stakeholders and the members of the different political parties to come together and to be able to agree to the very notion of One Nation, One Election.

The Honourable prime Minister has stated about India's rapid transformation and growth which will not come through gradual evolution in the first instance. Unlike gradual, incremental measures, transformative measures typically involve short term plans which may be a bit risky in the sphere of politics. Frequent elections would crowd the Government's risk-taking capabilities and incentivize it to opt the safer status-quoist approach instead.

The Constitution does provide sufficient room to make amendments to suit the changing times and needs as is the case with long-term reforms in the structures and administrative process of the country. Hence, implementing simultaneous elections would also cause bring upon short-term advancements and changes in the Indian Economy. However, this would be a stepping stone towards improved governance and it will hence help in reforming the entire electoral system and polity. This will then help in restructuring and reforming the entire Indian polity.

¹⁷ [1] Press Release on One Nation, One Election. Available at:¹⁷ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2085082>

[2] One Nation, One Election Bill. Available at : <https://visionias.in/current-affairs/monthly-magazine/2025-01-22/polity-and-governance/one-nation-one-election-bill>

[3] The cost of 'One Nation, One Election': 800 more EVM warehouses. Article Available at: <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/politics/the-cost-of-one-nation-one-election-800-more-evm-warehouses>

[4] The Arguments Against 'One Nation, One Election' Are Unconvincing. Article Available at: <https://thewire.in/politics/debate-the-arguments-against-one-nation-one-election-are-unconvincing>