

One Nation, One Election: Evaluating Simultaneous Elections in India

Abstract

This essay examines the proposal of synchronising Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections in India—commonly referred to as "One Nation, One Election." It evaluates historical precedents, potential benefits, inherent challenges, and possible solutions, aiming to provide a balanced perspective on whether simultaneous elections can enhance governance efficiency while preserving India's federal structure.

1 Introduction

India's electoral calendar is characterised by frequent, staggered polls at both the national and state levels, leading to perpetual campaign activity and governance disruptions. The "One Nation, One Election" concept seeks to align the five-year cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies to conduct simultaneous polls, thereby reducing election frequency and its attendant costs.

2 Historical Context

Between 1951 and 1967, India successfully conducted simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and most State Assemblies. However, political instability and premature dissolution of several assemblies disrupted this practice. Revisiting this system requires examining why it ended and whether today's political maturity can sustain it.

3 Potential Benefits

3.1 Governance Continuity

Synchronised polls would minimise the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, allowing governments to focus on policy implementation without periodic interruptions.

3.2 Financial and Administrative Efficiency

Elections are resource-intensive. The 2019 general election alone cost over INR 60,000 crores. Consolidating polls could yield substantial savings in logistics, personnel deployment, and security arrangements.

3.3 Political Stability and Long-Term Planning

Simultaneous elections could foster a stable political environment, incentivising policymakers to pursue long-term development goals rather than short-term populist measures.

4 Challenges and Concerns

4.1 Voter Bias and Overlap

Concurrent polls may encourage voters to vote uniformly for the same party at both state and national levels, potentially marginalising regional issues and parties.

4.2 Federal Dynamics and Issue Salience

National narratives often dominate media coverage, risking the overshadowing of state-specific concerns like local infrastructure or public health.

4.3 Logistical and Legal Hurdles

Aligning staggered terms would require constitutional amendments and extensive administrative coordination, including extending or truncating existing legislative terms.

5 Mitigating Strategies

5.1 Voter Education Campaigns

Robust awareness programmes can delineate the distinct roles of the Union and State governments, helping citizens make informed choices based on different issue domains.

5.2 Strengthening Regional Platforms

Encouraging political parties to maintain focused state-level manifestos and campaigns can preserve regional salience even in a simultaneous election setup.

5.3 Phased Implementation

A gradual approach—realigning one or two states in the first phase—can help identify and resolve practical challenges before full-scale rollout.

6 Conclusion

”One Nation, One Election” presents both significant advantages in terms of efficiency and continuity, and critical risks concerning federal balance and voter behaviour. By adopting targeted educational efforts, legal safeguards, and phased execution, India can explore the feasibility of synchronised elections while safeguarding regional autonomy and democratic accountability.