



Exploring the Prospects of One Nation One Election | 27 Sep 2024

This editorial is based on “[GOI, think through ONOE](#)” which was published in The Times of India on 25/09/2024. The article highlights that the implementation of "One Nation, One Election"(ONOE) requires political compromise, including the central government shortening its parliamentary term. This statesmanship could foster consensus among states, ensuring a fair transition while enhancing voter turnout and preserving the festive significance of elections in India.

For Prelims: [One Nation, One Election\(ONOE\)](#), [Federalism](#), [Lok Sabha](#), [State Legislative Assemblies](#), [Election Commission of India's](#), [Model Code of Conduct](#), [18th Lok Sabha elections](#), [Electronic Voting Machines \(EVMs\)](#), [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail \(VVPAT\)](#), [Powers of the President](#), [President's Rule](#), [Anti-Defection Law](#), [No-Confidence Motion](#).

For Mains: Significance of electoral Reforms in India.

With the approval of a proposal for **simultaneous elections** nationwide and the report submitted by a **high-level committee** chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, the idea of "[One Nation, One Election\(ONOE\)](#)" has once again gained significant traction in India's political landscape. Advocates argue that this approach could enhance governance by **reducing the frequent interruptions** caused by staggered elections, allowing governments to focus on long-term policy implementation rather than short-term electoral strategies. Additionally, it could **potentially lower the costs** associated with conducting multiple elections and **streamline the electoral process**, promoting a sense of stability and predictability in governance.

However, the proposal has also sparked considerable debate, raising critical concerns about its **implications for [federalism](#)** and political representation. Critics warn that simultaneous elections may **overshadow local issues** and **marginalize regional parties**, favoring national parties and reducing political diversity. Additionally, the **logistical challenges** and the need for fair **representation across diverse demographics** must be carefully considered as India explores this significant change.

What is One Nation, One Election?

- **Definition:** ONOE refers to the proposal of holding simultaneous elections for the [Lok Sabha](#) and all [State Legislative Assemblies](#) in India.
 - In some cases, it may also include local body elections, such as those for municipalities and panchayats.
- **Objective:** The fundamental aim of ONOE is to **align the electoral cycles** across different levels of government, conducting elections concurrently or within a set timeframe.
 - This would necessitate significant **constitutional amendments** and changes to various election related laws and processes..

- **Historical Context:** India experienced synchronized elections from **1951 to 1967**, during which elections for the Lok Sabha and most State Assemblies were **held simultaneously**.
 - However, this practice eroded due to political factors and **premature dissolutions of assemblies**.
 - The election cycles diverged further due to **political instability and defections** in the 1960s.



What are the Advantages of One Nation, One Election?

- **Cost Reduction:** Simultaneous elections could lead to significant savings in resources like **security personnel, polling staff, and election materials**.
 - The cost of Lok Sabha elections in India has increased significantly, rising from **Rs 10.5 crore** in the first election of 1951-52 to **Rs 50,000 crore** in 2019.
 - This significant escalation reflects the growing complexities and scale of the electoral process over the decades.
 - Also, the [Election Commission of India's](#) (ECI) **operational costs** could decrease due to streamlined processes.
- **Governance Continuity:** Fewer elections could mitigate the "policy paralysis" caused by short-term electoral strategies and the [Model Code of Conduct](#), while also reducing resource strain, constant campaigning, and corruption among political parties.
- **Reduced Disruptions:** Less frequent elections would mean fewer disruptions to public life, benefiting educational institutions often used as polling stations.
 - Also, teachers, along with other government service holders, are indulged in election duties and training, **disrupting their actual duties**.
 - Thus, ONOE could **enhance administrative efficiency** by allowing officials to focus more on governance instead of election duties.
- **Increased Voter Participation:** Supporters argue that simultaneous elections may reduce "**election fatigue**," potentially leading to higher voter turnout and engagement.
- **Streamlined Campaigns:** Political parties could benefit from **concentrated campaign efforts**, allowing smaller parties a better chance to compete effectively.
- **Economic Benefits:** The [Kovind Committee](#) report indicated that India's national real **GDP growth** could be **1.5% points** higher in the year following simultaneous elections compared to the previous year.
 - The report also indicated a potential **1.28% increase in fiscal deficit** and a **17.67% rise in public spending** following simultaneous elections.
 - Also, fewer elections might diminish the **influx of black money** and pressure on businesses for political donations. The ECI seized **Rs 10000 crore** during the [18th Lok Sabha elections](#).
- **Improved Election Monitoring:** The concentrated nature of simultaneous elections might facilitate better election monitoring.
- **Enhance Administrative Efficiency:** Supporters argue that holding joint polls can enhance **administrative efficiency**.
 - Simultaneous elections would **reduce governance downtime** and improve security by **freeing resources** usually tied up in the election process.

What are the Challenges of One Nation, One Election?

- **Threat to Federalism:** Synchronizing national and state elections could overshadow local issues, as the national narrative may dominate electoral discourse.
 - This could result in **national parties overshadowing regional voices**, diminishing the representation of local concerns and needs, which are often best understood by state-level parties.
 - Also, in a synchronized election framework, smaller regional parties may find it difficult to compete against parties having deeper pockets and larger influence, potentially **diminishing political diversity and overshadowing regional issues**.
 - Simultaneous voting may **confuse less informed or first-time voters**, leading to uninformed choices and more invalid votes, which could undermine democracy.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Organizing simultaneous elections would place immense strain on the resources and capabilities of the ECI and security forces.
 - Implementing simultaneous elections would require a significant purchase of [Electronic Voting Machines \(EVMs\)](#) and [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail \(VVPAT\)](#) machines.
 - The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015)** estimated that around **Rs 9,284.15 crore** would be needed for the procurement of these machines.
 - Logistical challenges in diverse regions could compromise the integrity and smooth execution of elections.
- **Constitutional Concerns:** Implementing ONOE would necessitate significant amendments to the Constitution and Representation of People Act, 1951 (RPA) potentially altering its fundamental structure.
 - Some amendments will require a [special majority](#) of one third members under art 368 and require **ratification by more than half of India's states**.
 - Such changes might infringe on existing [powers of the President](#) and state governors, raising questions about the balance of power and the nature of India's parliamentary democracy.
- **Governance Vacuums:** The reduced flexibility in calling early elections in response to political crises could result in prolonged periods of [President's Rule](#) in states where governments fall mid-term.
 - This could create **governance vacuums**, leaving citizens without adequate representation or decision-making during critical periods.
- **Reduced Accountability:** Frequent elections keep representatives vigilant, but experts warn that less frequent elections might **reduce their accountability**, limiting voters' chances to express dissatisfaction.
 - This could **lead to complacency** among elected officials, reducing their responsiveness to constituent needs and concerns.
- **Pressure on Election Machinery:** The ECI would face significant **pressure to conduct free and fair elections** simultaneously across the country.
 - Any systemic failures or irregularities could have **far-reaching consequences**, potentially eroding public trust in the electoral process and institutions.

What have various Committees Recommended on ONOE?

- **High level Committee on Simultaneous Elections:** The Union Cabinet has recently approved the proposal for simultaneous elections in India, as recommended by the **high-level committee** led by former **President Ram Nath Kovind**. The **Key Recommendations** are-
 - **Phased Implementation:** Simultaneous election in two phases-
 - **First Phase:** Conduct **Lok Sabha and State Assembly** elections simultaneously.
 - **Second Phase:** Hold local body elections (panchayats and municipalities) within 100 days of the first phase.
 - **Constitutional Amendments:** The **Kovind committee** proposed **15 amendments** to the Constitution, requiring two Constitution Amendment Bills.
 - **First Bill:** Addresses the transition to a simultaneous election system and allows for fresh elections if a Lok Sabha or State Assembly is dissolved before its term ends. This bill does not require state ratification.
 - **Second Bill:** Focuses on local body elections and the establishment of a **Single Electoral Roll**. This bill will require **ratification by more than half of India's states**.
 - **New Constitutional Articles:**

- **Article 82A:** Proposed to facilitate the transition to simultaneous elections.
- Notification by the President marking the "**Appointed date.**"
- All legislative assemblies formed after this date will end with the Lok Sabha's full term.
- Expands Parliament's power to include conducting simultaneous elections by amending **Article 327.**
- **Handling Early Dissolutions:**
 - Amendments to **Articles 83 and 172** clarify the terminology of "full term" and "unexpired term" for **Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.**
 - Assemblies that replace dissolved ones will serve only for the unexpired term before subsequent simultaneous elections.
- **Local Body Elections and Electoral Roll:**
 - The second Bill proposes a new **Article 324A**, empowering Parliament to ensure local elections occur simultaneously with general elections.
 - A new **Article 325(2)** introduces a **Single Electoral Roll** for all elections, to be managed by the ECI, reducing the role of State Election Commissions to a consultative capacity.
 - **Logistical Considerations:** The implementation of these recommendations will require extensive planning and coordination among various levels of government to ensure a seamless electoral process.
- **Earlier Recommendations:**
 - **The Law Commission Working Paper (2018):**
 - Amend the Constitution and the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, to enable simultaneous elections.
 - Modify the [Anti-Defection Law](#) to prevent stalemates in hung legislatures.
 - Extend the six-month limit for issuing election notifications for added flexibility.
 - **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015):**
 - The 2015 report emphasized the advantages of synchronized elections for better political stability.
 - The committee noted that implementing simultaneous elections would need extensive resources, including **EVMs and VVPATs**, estimated to cost around **Rs 9,284.15 crore**, while also highlighting significant logistical and constitutional challenges.
 - **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution:** Their 2002 report **advocates for simultaneous elections** to promote continuity in governance.
 - **NITI AAYOG:** The 2017 Working Paper **supports simultaneous elections** to streamline the electoral process and strengthen democracy.

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **National Dialogue:** Initiate comprehensive discussions involving **political parties, civil society organizations, and experts** to assess support and address concerns regarding ONOE.
 - This dialogue should aim to ensure that diverse perspectives are taken into account, facilitating consensus-building around the initiative.
 - For instance, the high-level committee on ONOE has gathered more than 20,000 responses from citizens, with **81%** expressing their support for the concept of simultaneous elections.
- **Gradual Implementation:** Consider a **phased approach** by starting with pilot programs that align a few state elections with Lok Sabha elections.
 - This allows for real-world testing of the concept, enabling stakeholders to identify challenges and make necessary adjustments before a nationwide rollout.
- **Legal Preparations:** Draft essential constitutional amendments and legislative changes, with guidance from legal experts, to establish a strong legal framework for ONOE.
 - For instance, as suggested by ECI, to prevent **premature dissolution**, a [no-confidence motion](#) must include **a confidence motion** for a named successor.
 - If dissolution is unavoidable, the President may administer until the next election if the remaining term is short; otherwise, fresh elections should occur for the original term length. Similar provisions apply to Legislative Assemblies.
 - This process should involve extensive consultations to ensure that the proposed amendments uphold democratic principles and the integrity of the Constitution.

- **Safeguarding Federalism:** Design measures to ensure that state-specific issues remain central in electoral discussions, while also considering ways to protect and promote **regional political parties**.
 - This will help maintain the diversity and representation of various interests within India's federal structure.
- **Strengthening the Election Commission:** Enhance the **capabilities and independence** of the Election Commissions to effectively manage the increased responsibilities associated with ONOE.
 - This may involve **upgrading technological infrastructure** and increasing human resources to handle simultaneous elections.
 - Invest in more **EVMs and VVPAT systems**, and develop tech solutions for **voter registration**, voting, and result tabulation to manage simultaneous elections effectively.
- **Capacity Building:** Implement comprehensive **training programs for election officials, security personnel**, and other stakeholders to ensure efficient management of simultaneous elections.
 - These programs should focus on best practices in election administration and crisis management.
- **International Engagement:** Engage with other countries and international organizations to share experiences and best practices related to electoral reforms.
 - Learning from global examples can provide valuable insights and help avoid potential pitfalls in the implementation of ONOE.
 - For example, **South Africa** holds simultaneous elections for the National Assembly and provincial legislatures every five years, with the President elected by the Assembly.
 - In contrast, **Sweden and Germany** elect their Prime Ministers and Chancellors every four years, while the UK has fixed-term elections every five years.
- **Economic Planning:** Prepare for changes in election-related expenditures by developing strategies to **mitigate potential economic disruptions** during the transition period.
 - This includes planning for resource allocation and budgeting to accommodate the new electoral framework.
- **Public Consultations:** Conduct **extensive public awareness** campaigns to educate citizens about the implications of ONOE.

Conclusion

The proposal for "**One Nation, One Election**" presents a transformative vision for India's electoral landscape, promising to enhance **governance efficiency and reduce costs** associated with frequent elections. While proponents emphasize the potential for streamlined administration and improved policy focus, significant concerns remain regarding the impact on federalism, local representation, and the practical challenges of implementation.

As India navigates this complex issue, it is crucial to **engage in thorough discussions**, consider **diverse perspectives**, and ensure that any reforms uphold the principles of democracy and equity in representation.

Drishhti Mains Question

Discuss the concept of 'One Nation, One Election' in India. Evaluate its potential benefits and challenges, particularly in relation to federalism, governance, and electoral integrity.



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Ans: (d)

Mains:

Q. Simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will limit the amount of time and money spent in electioneering but it will reduce the government's accountability to the people". Discuss. (2017)