One Nation, One Election in India: A Comprehensive Analysis

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
Research Paper	*The idea of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposes synchronizing elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to streamline the electoral process, reduce expenditure, and enhance governance efficiency. This paper examines the historical background, constitutional provisions, legislative developments—including the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024—and recent updates such as the formation of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed deliberation. The paper also critically analyzes the feasibility, advantages, and challenges of implementing simultaneous elections in India.*
Keywords :	
One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Elections, Electoral Reforms, Indian Democracy, Constitutional Challenges, Governance Efficiency, Federalism	

1. Introduction

The term "election" originates from the Latin word electio, meaning "choice" or "selection," which itself is derived from the verb eligere (to choose). Over time, it entered Old French as eleccion and later became election in Middle English around the 14th century. The word has consistently referred to the process of selecting representatives or making decisions through voting.

An election is a fundamental democratic process through which individuals vote to choose their leaders, representatives, or policies. It ensures public participation in governance, allowing citizens to express their political will and influence decision-making. Elections are governed by constitutional provisions and electoral laws, ensuring fairness, transparency, and legitimacy in a political system.

Elections can be categorized into different types based on their nature and process. Direct elections allow citizens to vote for candidates directly, as seen in Lok Sabha elections in India. In contrast, indirect elections involve representatives choosing a leader, such as the Indian President's election by Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs). Other types include

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general elections, held periodically to elect the main legislative body, and by-elections, conducted to fill vacant seats before the next scheduled election.

The election process plays a vital role in maintaining democratic values, ensuring leadership accountability, and reflecting the political choices of the people. It is a crucial mechanism that upholds political stability, governance efficiency, and citizen empowerment in democratic societies.

Elections in India are conducted at multiple levels—national, state, and local. The current system, where elections take place at different times across various states, leads to frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), thereby disrupting governance. The idea of One Nation, One Election is not new and was practiced between 1951 and 1967. However, political instability led to staggered elections, which have continued since then. The Government of India has reintroduced this discussion through The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, aiming to align the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

2. Historical Background

Simultaneous elections were conducted in India until 1967. However, after premature dissolution of various state assemblies and the Lok Sabha in later years, elections became unsynchronized. Several committees, including:

- The Law Commission (2018)
- The Election Commission of India (2016)
- The NITI Aayog Report (2017)

recommended reverting to simultaneous elections to ensure governance stability and economic efficiency. Several countries around the world have experimented with simultaneous elections, offering valuable insights into the feasibility, advantages, and challenges of implementing *One Nation, One Election* in India. The United States follows a fixed electoral calendar where elections for the President, Congress, and several state and local bodies occur together every even-numbered year in November. This system ensures high voter participation, cost-effectiveness, and streamlined governance. However, individual states retain the autonomy to hold additional elections, leading to inconsistencies in political cycles.

South Africa, on the other hand, holds elections for the National Assembly, Provincial Legislatures, and Municipal Councils at different intervals. This staggered approach allows regional concerns to be addressed independently, but it also results in governance instability as frequent elections often disrupt administrative decision-making. Similarly, Germany does not synchronize its federal, state, and local

elections. While this model helps accommodate regional diversities, it has the unintended effect of turning regional elections into mid-term referendums on federal policies, affecting national governance stability. In contrast, Sweden successfully conducts simultaneous elections every four years for the Riksdag (national legislature), County Councils, and Municipal Assemblies. This system has led to greater voter participation, stable governance, and more efficient public administration. However, political parties must carefully balance local and national issues during election campaigns to ensure that regional concerns are not overshadowed by broader national narratives. Indonesia has also moved toward synchronized elections since 2004, holding simultaneous polls for the President, Parliament, and regional legislatures. Given the country's vast geography and logistical challenges, Indonesia's experience underscores the importance of robust electoral infrastructure and coordination mechanisms.

Brazil provides another example of a country with simultaneous elections, where the President, National Congress, Governors, and State Assemblies are elected together every four years. The system has contributed to electoral efficiency and reduced campaign costs. However, the complexity of managing electronic voting systems and ensuring fair electoral practices remains a significant challenge. These international experiences demonstrate that synchronized elections can improve governance efficiency, reduce electoral expenses, and enhance voter engagement. However, for a diverse and federal nation like India, the implementation of simultaneous elections must be carefully tailored to address regional representation concerns, logistical complexities, and constitutional amendments. A hybrid model that balances national and state-level considerations could offer the most viable solution.

3. Legislative Framework and the 129th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2024

The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in Lok Sabha, proposes amendments to synchronize elections nationwide. It suggests adding Article 82A (1-6) to the Constitution, ensuring that all state assembly terms align with the Lok Sabha's tenure. Key provisions include:

- **Article 82A(1):** Sets an "appointed date" for implementing simultaneous elections.
- **Article 82A(2):** Aligns all future state assembly terms with the Lok Sabha's tenure.
- **Article 82A(3):** Mandates the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct simultaneous elections.
- **Article 82A(4):** Defines simultaneous elections as those held for both Lok Sabha and State Assemblies together.
- **Article 82A(5-6):** Allows flexibility in exceptional cases but ensures alignment of future terms.

- **Amendments to Articles 83 & 172:** If dissolved early, the new Lok Sabha or State Assemblies will only serve the remaining term.
- **Amendment to Article 372:** Empowers Parliament to legislate on conducting simultaneous elections.

The bill, however, excludes local body elections from synchronization.

4. Recent Developments: Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) Review

On December 17, 2024, Union Home Minister Amit Shah revealed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi recommended sending the ONOE Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed discussion. Consequently, a 39-member JPC was formed to examine its provisions and feasibility. The first meeting of the JPC was scheduled for January 8, 2025, where Law Ministry officials briefed members on the bill's key aspects.

This step underscores the government's intent to build consensus on a matter with significant political and administrative implications.

5. Rationale for One Nation, One Election

5.1. Cost Reduction

Frequent elections lead to high financial costs due to repeated deployment of security forces, election officials, and electronic voting machines (EVMs). ONOE would significantly cut down these expenses.

5.2. Governance Stability

Frequent elections lead to policy stagnation due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which restricts government decision-making. ONOE could allow uninterrupted governance and long-term policymaking.

5.3. Voter Turnout & Engagement

A single election cycle may increase voter turnout, as voters would participate in one consolidated process instead of multiple elections.

5.4. Reduction in Electoral Malpractices

ONOE could reduce the impact of vote-buying, muscle power, and electoral violence, as elections would be conducted simultaneously under strict monitoring.

6. Challenges and Concerns

The proposal of One Nation, One Election has sparked significant debate in India, with opposition parties raising several concerns regarding its feasibility, impact on federalism, and potential risks to democratic representation. Many opposition leaders argue that simultaneous elections could weaken the federal structure of the country by centralizing power and reducing the autonomy of state governments. They

believe that elections at different levels allow voters to make distinct choices based on regional and local issues, which might get overshadowed if all elections are held at once.

Another major concern is that regional parties may be at a disadvantage in a synchronized election system. Opposition leaders argue that national parties, especially the ruling party at the Centre, could dominate the electoral narrative, making it harder for regional parties to highlight state-specific concerns. They fear that issues affecting particular states may not receive adequate attention, leading to an imbalance in democratic representation. Additionally, some critics point out that in cases where a state government falls before its full term, waiting for the next synchronized election could lead to prolonged periods of President's Rule, disrupting governance and denying the electorate their right to elect a new government promptly.

Opposition parties also question the logistical and financial feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections. Managing elections across the country on the same day would require an enormous deployment of security forces, election officials, and voting infrastructure. Given the scale of India's electoral process, ensuring free and fair elections without disruptions would be a significant challenge. Furthermore, they argue that any move to amend the Constitution for this purpose must be approached cautiously, as it would require broad political consensus, which is currently lacking.

Some opposition leaders have also raised concerns about the democratic process being diluted. They argue that holding all elections together might reduce the accountability of legislators, as voters would be making decisions about national and state leaders at the same time, potentially leading to less scrutiny of individual candidates. Critics also warn that such a system could weaken parliamentary oversight, as a government with a fixed five-year term and no mid-term elections might become less responsive to public concerns.

Despite these objections, the government insists that *One Nation, One Election* would lead to cost savings, administrative efficiency, and political stability. However, opposition parties continue to demand greater discussions, consultations, and safeguards to ensure that any electoral reform strengthens rather than undermines India's democracy.

6.1. Constitutional & Legal Challenges

- Amending multiple constitutional provisions requires broad political consensus.
- Potential judicial review could delay implementation.

6.2. Administrative and Logistical Hurdles

- Conducting elections in all states simultaneously requires extensive planning.

- Deployment of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) at a massive scale is a logistical challenge.

6.3. Federalism Concerns

- Critics argue that ONOE weakens state autonomy by aligning their terms with the Lok Sabha.
- State-level issues might get overshadowed by national narratives, affecting regional representation.

6.4. Political Opposition

- Opposition parties argue that ONOE disproportionately benefits national parties, reducing regional parties' influence.
- Different state election cycles allow political course corrections, which would be lost in a single synchronized election.

7. Recommendations for Implementation

The concerns raised by opposition parties regarding One Nation, One Election can be addressed through a combination of constitutional safeguards, institutional reforms, and a phased implementation strategy. One major concern is the impact on federalism and regional autonomy. This can be mitigated by ensuring that regional issues are not overshadowed by national narratives. A solution could be the introduction of a structured campaign period where regional and local elections are given separate attention before national issues dominate. Additionally, special provisions could be made for regional parties to ensure their concerns are adequately represented in public discourse and media coverage.

The fear that simultaneous elections may favor national parties over regional ones can be addressed by implementing a mixed electoral model. This could involve holding Lok Sabha and state assembly elections together while keeping local body elections separate. This would allow regional parties to maintain their influence at the grassroots level while still benefiting from the efficiency of synchronized elections. Furthermore, political funding reforms could ensure fair competition by capping election expenditures and providing state funding for campaigns, particularly for smaller and regional parties.

The logistical and administrative challenges of conducting elections on a single day can be managed through a staggered but synchronized approach. Instead of holding all elections on the same day, elections can be conducted in phases over a designated period, ensuring security forces and election officials are not overstretched. Investments in electronic voting infrastructure, voter education, and security measures would also help streamline the process and minimize disruptions.

To address concerns about governance stability in cases where a state government collapses before completing its term, a provision could be made for a mid-term election cycle. This could involve holding by-elections for dissolved assemblies at predetermined intervals rather than waiting for the next full-term election. Additionally, constitutional amendments could ensure that such governments are not left in prolonged President's Rule by mandating the formation of caretaker governments until fresh elections take place.

Finally, the opposition's demand for broader political consensus can be met by establishing a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) or a National Commission on Electoral Reforms to study the proposal in-depth. This committee could include representatives from all major parties, legal experts, and civil society members to ensure that concerns from all stakeholders are addressed. Pilot projects in select states could also be conducted to evaluate the feasibility and impact of simultaneous elections before full-scale implementation.

By adopting these measures, the government can ensure that *One Nation, One Election* is implemented in a manner that strengthens democracy, upholds federalism, and addresses the genuine concerns of opposition parties and regional stakeholders.

To ensure smooth transition, the following steps can be considered:

7.1. Phase-wise Implementation

- Start with synchronizing elections in a few states, before nationwide rollout.
- Conduct pilot projects to analyze effectiveness and challenges.

7.2. Strengthening Electoral Infrastructure

- Develop a unified electoral roll for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies.
- Upgrade EVM storage, security, and logistical management.

7.3. Public Awareness & Political Consensus

- Conduct nationwide campaigns to educate voters and stakeholders.
- Engage with regional parties and state governments for consensus-building.

8. Conclusion

The One Nation, One Election initiative presents a transformative approach to electoral reforms in India. While it offers advantages like cost reduction, governance stability, and higher voter turnout, its implementation requires extensive legal, political, and logistical adjustments. The government's decision to refer the bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee indicates a step toward broader consensus-building.

However, issues like federalism concerns, logistical complexities, and political opposition must be carefully addressed before a nationwide rollout.

As India progresses towards electoral reforms, a balanced and phased approach is essential to ensure both democratic integrity and administrative efficiency.

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