

EDITORIAL

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One Nation, One Election: Prospects, Challenges, and Constitutional Reforms

Introduction

The concept of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) proposes holding simultaneous elections for **Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies**, and possibly **local bodies**, across the country. The Union Government's recent steps, including the formation of a high-level committee under former President **Ram Nath Kovind**, have brought this proposal into focus once again. While the concept promises enhanced governance and resource efficiency, it also raises concerns regarding federalism, political diversity, and the logistics of its implementation.

Definition and Historical Background

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) refers to the idea of conducting simultaneous elections for **Lok Sabha** and **State Assemblies** instead of holding them separately at different times.

- From **1952 to 1967**, simultaneous elections were conducted for the **Lok Sabha** and most State Assemblies.
- This cycle broke in **1968-69** due to the premature dissolution of some State Legislative Assemblies. Further, in **1970**, the **Lok Sabha** itself was dissolved early, leading to separate elections in **1971**.
- These events disrupted the synchronized election cycle, resulting in the current staggered election model.

The Kovind Committee on One Nation, One Election

Formation: On **September 2, 2023**, the Union Government established a committee headed by former President **Ram Nath Kovind** to examine the feasibility of ONOE.

Members: The committee includes **Home Minister Amit Shah**, former Leader of Opposition **Ghulam Nabi Azad**, former Finance Commission Chairperson **N.K. Singh**, former Lok Sabha Secretary-General **Subhash C. Kashyap**, senior advocate **Harish Salve**, and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner **Sanjay Kothari**.

Key Recommendations of the Kovind Panel

The committee has proposed **15 amendments** to the Constitution of India, divided into two Constitutional Amendment Bills.

First Constitutional Amendment Bill	Second Constitutional Amendment Bill
<p>This bill focuses on transitioning to a simultaneous election system for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. It does not require ratification by state legislatures and can be passed by Parliament.</p>	<p>This bill focuses on municipal and panchayat elections, which fall under the State List.</p>
<p>Provisions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Article 82A: Introduces the framework for simultaneous elections. The President will notify an “appointed date” for the transition. Article 327: Expands Parliament’s powers to include the conduct of simultaneous elections. Amendment of Articles 83 and 172: Redefines the five-year term of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the “full term.” Unexpired Term: If the Lok Sabha or an Assembly is dissolved prematurely, a new assembly will serve for the “unexpired term” only. 	<p>Provisions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Article 324A: Empowers Parliament to make laws ensuring that local body elections are synchronized with Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. Article 325(2): Introduces a Single Electoral Roll for all elections, to be maintained by the Election Commission of India in consultation with the State Election Commissions.

Benefits of One Nation, One Election

- 1. Cost Reduction:** ONOE can drastically reduce the financial burden on the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, political parties, and the government.
 - Example: The **2014 Lok Sabha elections** cost ₹3,870 crore, while the **2015 Bihar elections** cost ₹300 crore. The estimated cost of implementing ONOE is ₹4,500 crore.
- 2. Efficient Resource Utilization:** ONOE will reduce campaign expenditures for political parties, benefiting smaller regional parties by allowing better financial management.
- 3. Reduced Policy Paralysis:** Frequent elections lead to the continuous imposition of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, stalling development projects. Simultaneous elections will reduce this policy paralysis and allow governments to focus on governance.
- 4. Focus on Governance:** It will reduce the constant “election mode” in governance and lead to continuity in the implementation of policies and programs by the central and state governments.
- 5. Enhanced Administrative Efficiency:** ONOE will allow the administrative machinery to focus more on governance and less on elections, improving service delivery to the public.
- 6. Improved Internal Security:** The constant mobilization of security forces for elections will be reduced, allowing them to focus on more pressing internal security concerns like **Naxalism**.
- 7. Reduced Use of Black Money:** Simultaneous elections will decrease the influx of black money into the electoral process, as elections will be less frequent.
- 8. Reduction of Populist Measures:** Politicians will focus on long-term governance strategies rather than short-term electoral gains, leading to better policymaking.
- 9. Increased Voter Turnout:** According to the **Law Commission**, simultaneous elections will reduce “voter fatigue” and may increase overall voter turnout.
- 10. Improved Social Harmony:** Fewer elections will reduce the polarization of voters along caste, religious, and communal lines, as elections are often divisive events.

Challenges of One Nation, One Election

- 1. Reduced Accountability:** Frequent elections ensure political accountability. ONOE could reduce this and lead to autocratic tendencies in elected representatives, as they would face elections less often.
- 2. Undermining Federal Power:** National issues may overshadow local concerns in simultaneous elections, reducing the electoral prospects of regional parties. This could weaken federalism in India.

3. **Disadvantage for Regional Parties:** Simultaneous elections could place regional parties at a disadvantage, as national narratives may dominate the electoral discourse, leading to an unfair playing field.
4. **Tampering with Democratic Spirit:** Critics argue that forcing a synchronized election cycle could restrict voters' ability to regularly express their democratic will.
5. **Influence on Voting Behavior:** Studies show that simultaneous elections could influence voters to cast their votes in favor of the same party for both national and state elections, disadvantaging regional parties.
6. **Logistical Challenges:** Organizing simultaneous elections across such a vast country would place immense pressure on the **Election Commission** and security forces. Procuring and deploying additional **EVMs** and **VVPATs** would be both time-consuming and costly.
7. **Internal Security:** The deployment of security forces for simultaneous elections could pose a significant logistical challenge and may compromise internal security management.

Way Forward

1. **Building Political Consensus:** The government should ensure an all-party consensus before proceeding with constitutional amendments and implementing ONOE.
2. **Wait for Law Commission Report:** The **22nd Law Commission** is expected to present a detailed report on the feasibility of ONOE. The government should wait for these recommendations before taking further steps.
3. **Phased Implementation:** Pilot programs that align a few state elections with the **Lok Sabha elections** could be considered to test the practical aspects of ONOE.
4. **Public Awareness:** The government should initiate widespread public consultations and media campaigns to raise awareness about ONOE and its implications.

Conclusion

One Nation, One Election offers several potential advantages, including cost savings, governance continuity, and administrative efficiency. However, the proposal faces significant challenges in terms of federalism, political representation, and logistical feasibility. A well-structured and inclusive national dialogue is crucial before moving ahead with this transformative electoral reform. If implemented, India would set a global example, joining countries like **Belgium**, **Sweden**, and **South Africa** in conducting simultaneous elections.

MAINS QUESTION

Discuss the viability of 'One Nation, One Election' in the context of India's complex political and federal structure. How could simultaneous elections influence voter behaviour, policymaking, and governance? Critically assess whether the potential benefits, such as cost savings and governance continuity, outweigh the risks posed to regional autonomy, electoral accountability, and logistical feasibility



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