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ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: ANALYSING INDIA'S MOVE TOWARDS UNIFIED POLLS

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Abstract

“One Nation, One Election” proposes synchronizing India’s Lok Sabha (parliamentary) and state assembly elections to establish a unified electoral cycle. Elections are conducted separately, leading to a near-continuous election cycle that demands substantial administrative resources, incurs costs, and even hampers governance through repetitive enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)¹. For example, Elections in India entail significant economic expenditures, posing challenges to resource efficiency. For instance, the 2019 Lok Sabha elections incurred an estimated cost of ₹55,000/-, marking them among the most expensive elections globally. This financial strain should be alleviated through the synchronization of elections. The 2018 Law Commission report highlighted that simultaneous elections could potentially reduce these expenses by up to 40%, primarily by consolidating resources such as polling personnel, electronic voting machines, and logistical arrangements. These savings could be redirected toward developmental programs and infrastructure. Moreover, enforcing the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during each election cycle halts new policy announcements. It restricts public spending on developmental projects and even delays long-term initiatives, disrupting governance continuity. This repeated suspension of executive action affects critical areas such as infrastructure, welfare schemes, and economic reforms. Furthermore, voter fatigue is another concern, as evidenced by Lokniti-CSDS.² Studies show a 10-15% decline in voter turnout in closely spaced elections. This paper explores the benefits, challenges, historical demands, and potential alternatives required to make this proposal viable, and it further provides a roadmap for its implementation.

Key Words: One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Election, Voter, Lok Sabha, Assemblies.

¹ Election Commission of India, 'Model Code of Conduct' <https://www.eci.gov.in/mcc> accessed 10 October 2024.

² Lokniti-CSDS, 'Surveys' <https://www.lokniti.org/surveys> accessed 07 October 2024.

Introduction

India's democratic framework is defined by its frequent and surprising election cycles, with elections for Lok Sabha (parliamentary), state legislative assemblies, and local bodies occurring at different intervals. As this process reflects the vibrancy of India's democracy, it also imposes substantial financial, administrative, and governance challenges. Financially, frequent elections incur significant expenses, including those for election infrastructure, security arrangements, and personnel deployment. Administratively, elections require an extensive workforce, including government officials and security forces, often disrupting public services like education and law enforcement. Governance challenges arise due to the repetitive enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which halts policy implementation, further delays developmental projects and restricts new welfare initiatives. The concept of "One Nation, One Election" hereinafter (ONOE) proposes aligning these elections to streamline resources, minimize policy disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and enhance governance continuity in India.

This paper will explore the feasibility of implementing ONOE by analyzing its historical context, legal and logistical constraints, and potential alternatives that could be used. Drawing from reports published by several esteemed institutions such as the Elections Commission of India, Law Commission, and NITI Aayog, it further examines the concerns associated with this reform. Lastly, the study proposes a phased implementation strategy, balancing synchronized elections with the complexities of India's federal structure.

Potential Advantages of Simultaneous Election

India's current election system, where Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly elections are held independently, frequently disrupts the governance. Every time an election is scheduled across the country, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)³ is implemented, which is used to restrict the government from making policy announcements, launching public welfare programs, or carrying out large-scale developmental initiatives. This restriction can be extended over multiple periods within five years, effectively placing the government in a prolonged state of "Election Mode." Simultaneously, elections would limit these restrictions to a single electoral period, allowing governments to carry out their mandates without the frequent interruptions that currently accompany staggered elections.

³ Election Commission of India, 'Model Code of Conduct' <https://www.eci.gov.in/mcc> accessed 10 October 2024.

The MCC-driven restrictions, aimed at maintaining election fairness, inadvertently lead to policy paralysis. Several times, governments have been unable to make critical, long-term decisions in some sectors like infrastructure, health, and education because of the frequent imposition of the MCC. The NITI Aayog⁴ and the Law Commission⁵ Have highlighted how single elections could alleviate this issue by limiting the MCC to a unified electoral period and providing greater freedom for the government to implement policies that will benefit the public without waiting for the election cycle to conclude. Furthermore, simultaneous elections would reduce the tendency for short-term, populist measures, encouraging political leaders to adopt a broader, long-term vision in policymaking.

Staff engagement in frequent elections presents another challenge. Election duties demand the involvement of millions of government personnel, which includes teachers, police officers, and civil servants, especially in education and public safety. With simultaneous elections, staff can focus on their primary roles with minimal disruption.

The financial implications of frequent elections in India are very substantial in nature. For example, in the year 2019, the Lok Sabha elections alone were the most expensive in history; they cost around INR 55,000 crores (approximately USD 8 billion)⁶ According to the data released in the Centre for Media Studies report. These high expenses include direct costs such as ballot setup, transportation, and electronic voting machines (EVM), with indirect expenditures like deployment of security personnel and logistical support. These high expenditures could be consolidated by conducting simultaneous elections, reducing the need for repeated expenditures, including logistical arrangements, security operations, and other electoral preparations.

Simultaneous elections offer a solution by reducing the frequency of these expenditures. If both national and state elections are held, it will consolidate costs, which could result in savings on equipment, administrative resources, infrastructure, *etc.* The Election Commission would

⁴ Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, *Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why" and "How"* (NITI Aayog Discussion Paper, 2017).

⁵ Law Commission of India, *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections* (2018) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/LCI_2018_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf accessed October 12 2024.

⁶ NDTV Profit, 'India Election Expenditure 2019: Lok Sabha Elections Was the World's Costliest' <https://www.ndtvprofit.com/elections/india-election-expenditure-2019-lok-sabha-elections-was-the-worlds-costliest> accessed 15 October 2024.

require fewer funds for logistics, security arrangements, and administrative procedures, making the election process more economically sustainable. Additionally, these savings could be redirected towards developmental projects in several areas, such as defense, medical facilities, education, and employment generation, and eventually could benefit the whole country.

Historical perspective on simultaneous elections in India

India's electoral landscape initially featured simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies after independence. This order was established in the year 1951-1952 general elections.⁷ Then, it continued for around two decades. However, political events during the year 1969-1999 period⁸ This led to a disturbance in this cycle, which created staggered electoral schedules. Since then, only various commissions and government bodies have started working on returning to a unified electoral system, recommending steps towards implementing simultaneous elections to improve multiple areas such as governance, reduce expenses, and ensure policy stability.

India's post-independence history in which synchronized elections began diverging in the **late 1960s**. With the Lok Sabha dissolved in **1970** due to political instability, the central, central, and state election cycles were disturbed. State legislatures also faced dissolutions, further complicating the efforts to maintain aligned elections with the central. The result of all these dissolutions was that they created a fragmented electoral calendar in which the polls occurred nearly every year, necessitating continuous mobilization of electoral and security resources.

⁷ Down to Earth, *First General Elections in India* (Vol. 1) https://cdn.downtoearth.org.in/library/0.61706000_1558592806_first-general-elections-in-india,-vol.pdf accessed 27 October 2024.

⁸ Noorani, A.G., 'Selecting a Prime Minister: 1969–1999', *CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS AND CITIZENS' RIGHTS: An Omnibus Comprising Constitutional Questions in India and Citizens' Rights, Judges and State Accountability* (Delhi, 2006; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Oct. 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195678291.003.0025>, accessed 30 October 2024.

We can refer to the table below for various Lok Sabha formulations: -

Lok Sabha	Last date of poll	Date of constitution of Lok Sabha	Date of first sitting	Date of expiration of term (Article 83(2) of Constitution)	Date of dissolution of Lok Sabha	Overall Term (in days) (Col 6 - Col 4)	Overall Term (approx)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
First	21-Feb-52	2-Apr-52	13-May-52	12-May-57	4-Apr-57	1787	5 years
Second	15-Mar-57	5-Apr-57	10-May-57	9-May-62	31-Mar-62	1786	5 years
Third	25-Feb-62	2-Apr-62	16-Apr-62	15-Apr-67	3-Mar-67	1782	5 years
Fourth	21-Feb-67	4-Mar-67	16-Mar-67	15-Mar-72	27-Dec-70	1382*	3 years & 10 months
Fifth	10-Mar-71	15-Mar-71	19-Mar-71	18-Mar-77	18-Jan-77	2132**	5 years & 10 months
Sixth	20-Mar-77	23-Mar-77	25-Mar-77	24-Mar-82	22-Aug-79	880*	2 years & 5 months
Seventh	6-Jan-80	10-Jan-80	21-Jan-80	20-Jan-85	31-Dec-84	1806	5 years
Eighth	28-Dec-84	31-Dec-84	15-Jan-85	14-Jan-90	27-Nov-89	1777	5 years
Ninth	26-Nov-89	2-Dec-89	18-Dec-89	17-Dec-94	13-Mar-91	450*	1 year & 3 months
Tenth	15-Jun-91	20-Jun-91	9-Jul-91	8-Jul-96	10-May-96	1767	5 years
Eleventh	7-May-96	15-May-96	22-May-96	21-May-01	4-Dec-97	561*	1 year & 6 months
Twelfth	7-Mar-98	10-Mar-98	23-Mar-98	22-Mar-03	26-Apr-99	399*	1 year & 1 month
Thirteenth	4-Oct-99	10-Oct-99	20-Oct-99	19-Oct-04	6-Feb-04	1570*	4 years & 4 months

This disturbed the election cycle, in which widespread elections eventually became very costly, with administrative and financial demands increasing as electoral operations were repeatedly conducted across different states. The repeated enforcement of the *Model Code of Conduct (MCC)* also impacted various areas like governance, as government policies were frequently put on hold, and development projects faced delays. This period highlighted the challenges that were put up due to these unsynchronized elections and set the stage for various reform recommendations over the next few decades.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) first acknowledged the potential benefits of returning to simultaneous elections in its First Annual Report, 1983⁹, the ECI has highlighted that simultaneous elections could reduce the administrative and financial burden on the government and electoral machinery. This initial advocacy by the ECI laid the groundwork for further consideration of simultaneous elections as a solution to the challenges faced at that time. So, it makes a compelling case for re-establishing a unified election schedule.

⁹Election Commission of India, *First Annual Report (1983)* [https://onoe.gov.in/reports/First%20Annual%20Report%20\(1983\).pdf](https://onoe.gov.in/reports/First%20Annual%20Report%20(1983).pdf) accessed 21 November 2024

The 170th Law Commission of India (1999) report, led by Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy,¹⁰ again proposed this idea. The report proposed re-aligning elections to stabilize governance, reduce electoral expenses, and prevent repeated implementation of the Model Code of Conduct. This recommendation revived discussion about the feasibility of holding simultaneous elections for both the Lok Sabha and State Legislatures.

The report has even recommended necessary amendments to the Representation of the People's Act of 1951 to make synchronized elections legally feasible. The Commission, similar to ECI's First Annual Report, 1983, argued that these changes could help reduce excessive election expenditures and administrative redundancies. It emphasized that frequent elections diverted government attention and several resources from critical governance functions to electoral processes; it has further suggested that a unified election schedule could maintain the focus on sustained development.

Further, in Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015)¹¹ Again, a significant push was observed when the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice reviewed the matter and submitted a report to explore the feasibility of simultaneous elections. The committee's findings supported earlier recommendations, emphasizing the need for broad public consensus and constitutional amendments to implement such a project.

The report focused on the point that MCC hindered governance continuity by frequently interrupting and delaying all government projects and initiatives. It has suggested the phased implementation of simultaneous elections, recommending several constitutional amendments to Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174 of the Indian constitution.¹², which determines the terms and sessions of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. This proposal stressed the need for legislative support and public agreement to enact such substantial changes to the electoral system, aiming to streamline governance while achieving cost savings.

¹⁰ Law Commission of India, *One Hundred Seventieth Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws* (1999) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ca0daec69b5adc880fb464895726dbdf/uploads/2022/08/2022082424.pdf> accessed 01 November 2024.

¹¹ Law Commission of India, *79th Report on Simultaneous Elections* (1983) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/79th_Report.pdf accessed 02 November 2024.

¹² The Constitution of India (2024) arts 83, 85, 172, and 174 <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 02 November 2024.

Then, a public policy thinks tank nodal agency of *the Government of India* called Niti Aayog, in the year (2017)¹³ again suggested its phased approach to implement simultaneous elections in India. Niti Aayog's proposal starts with aligning election dates within a select number of states as a practical step toward transitioning to synchronized national election mode. This strategy aimed to reduce disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct and streamline governance cycles.

This phased approach, as outlined by NITI Aayog, was intended to offer a practical way to assess the effects of simultaneous elections on governance and public spending. The report's recommendations focused on creating an extensive program to initiate the transition gradually, allowing time to address several challenges and refine legislative adjustments as needed.

Then again, the Law Commission emphasized "One Nation, One Election." The Law Commission's 255th Draft Report (2018)¹⁴ Explained the framework necessary for implementing simultaneous elections. The report identified constitutional amendments required in Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution of India.¹⁵, among others, to facilitate a unified electoral cycle. It elaborated on the administrative and financial efficiencies that could be achieved by consolidating resources across a single election schedule, potentially saving the government's considerable costs while maintaining electoral integrity.

The report suggested that aligning elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies could reduce the government's expenditures by a significant margin. It further pointed out that synchronized elections will enhance the stability of the governance, efficiency in security arrangements and administrative efforts, and strengthen the democratic process by reducing the repetitive cycles of the campaigns.

The push for simultaneous elections has evolved through various commissions, parliamentary committees, and political endorsements, which reflects a long-standing recognized need for

¹³ *NITI Aayog, Report on Simultaneous Elections* (2017) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/NITI_AYOG_REPORT_2017.pdf accessed 03 November 2024.

¹⁴*Law Commission of India, Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections* (2018) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/LCI_2018_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf accessed 04 November 2024.

¹⁵*Constitution of India* (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcd1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 05 November 2024, Articles 83 and 172.

electoral reforms to address India's unique governance challenges. Through cost savings, governance stability, and administrative efficiency, a unified election model continues to be seen as a pathway to streamline a country's democratic process.

While the concept of simultaneous elections provides several potential benefits, specific significant challenges complicate its feasibility and implementation. These concerns include legal, logistical, and administrative aspects, highlighting the complexities of consolidating national and state election cycles.

Challenges in Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India

The feasibility of the simultaneous election is among the most critical concerns. India is one of the world's largest democracies, with over 900 million registered voters.¹⁶ Across *29 states and eight union territories*. Even in the current staggered system, conducting elections at this stage is a major logistical feat, with the Election Commission of India (ECI), which requires months to prepare for the electoral process in each state, aligning elections with the central government. Aligning all polls nationwide would require unprecedented levels of coordination and preparation. Any delay or logistical failures could compromise the integrity of the electoral process, resulting in vast administrative challenges.

Further, if we analyze this move, then we have to see that currently, the Indian Constitution does not support simultaneous elections, as it prescribes fixed terms for the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections, as it prescribes fixed terms for the Lok Sabha and each state assembly under Articles 83 and 172, respectively. Several constitutional amendments would be required to implement synchronized elections, involving changes to several articles beyond just those related to legislative terms. Amendments would be necessary to Articles 85, 174, 356, and 324 of the Indian Constitution, which govern Parliament sessions, dissolution of state assemblies, President's rule in states, and the powers of the Election Commission, respectively. The **255th Law Commission Report** emphasized that these amendments are not only legally complex but would also require substantial political consensus, as any amendment to state legislative terms would affect the autonomy of state governments.

¹⁶ India Has Nearly 97 Crore Voters Now, Says EC," *The Hindu* (thehindu.com, 2024) <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-has-nearly-97-crore-voters-now-says-ec/article67828780.ece> accessed 07 November 2024.

Provided that many constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority in the Parliament and ratification by at least half of the state legislatures, this process would entail noticeable legislative efforts and time. The need for extensive cross-party support to pass such amendments adds another layer of difficulty, as parties might be reluctant to alter the system, which affects their political strategies and timelines, or maybe because their opponents have put forward the proposal.

For instance, taking the past precedent, the ECI used 1.7 million EVMs for the 2019 general elections.¹⁷, and along with around 1.35 million VVPAT units¹⁸. So, simultaneous elections would demand an unprecedented number of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units.

In addition to EVMs, simultaneous elections would require many human resources. Currently, election duty involves millions of government personnel, including teachers, police, and local government staff, across multiple phases over months. Conducting nationwide elections simultaneously would require an even larger workforce to manage polling stations, perform security checks, and oversee ballot counting. This workforce concentration would strain administrative resources and likely impact regular public services, particularly education and law enforcement, during the election period.

The availability and distribution of administrative resources present a major logistical challenge for simultaneous elections. The conducting polls across the country required large-scale deployment of security personnel, vehicles, government funding, and polling staff. For instance, in 2019, over 11 million¹⁹ Were deployed across the country, including police, paramilitary forces, and civilian staff. Synchronized elections would increase the need for these resources, which may not be feasible without compromising operational efficiency and security, particularly in sensitive or remote areas.

¹⁷ 2019 Elections: Allocation of Requisite EVMs, VVPATs Underway," *Business Standard* (business-standard.com, 2018) https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/2019-elections-allocation-of-requisite-evms-vvpats-underway-118100700208_1.html accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁸ 2019 Elections: Allocation of Requisite EVMs, VVPATs Underway," *Business Standard* (business-standard.com, 2018) https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/2019-elections-allocation-of-requisite-evms-vvpats-underway-118100700208_1.html accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁹ 20 Lakh Security Personnel Deployed for Lok Sabha Polls: Exercise Bigger Than Army Operation Brasstacks," *India Today* (indiatoday.in, 2019) <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/20-lakh-security-personnel-deployed-lok-sabha-polls-exercise-bigger-army-operation-brasstacks-1530526-2019-05-20> accessed 10 November 2024.

Furthermore, the cost of elections could rise sharply due to the need for additional resources to cover all polling stations nationwide. Reports indicate that the **2019** Lok Sabha elections cost approximately INR 55,000/- crore; this figure would be going to rise very sharply if all state and national elections were held concurrently, as a more significant number of personnel, security, and logistical arrangements would be required on a significantly larger scale. However, the good part will be that the above costs or constraints will only be suffered once, and the state could work smoothly without any restrictions in the upcoming period.

While the concept of simultaneous elections offers various benefits, implementing it across India presents significant logistical, legal, and administrative challenges. Considering these concerns, several alternative approaches could be explored to optimize the election process without compromising federalism, governance, or the democratic structure.²⁰

Alternative approaches to the simultaneous elections

The first alternative is to maintain the **current electoral schedule**.²¹, it will allow Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and Local Body elections to be conducted separately per their natural timelines. This approach will avoid the logistical and constitutional challenges of implementing synchronized elections. However, the continuous election cycle would persist, requiring administrative and financial resources to be repeatedly allocated. Governance disruption due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) would remain a concern in this alternate.

Although this option does not address resource efficiency or MCC-related policy delays, it will uphold the current system's flexibility. It will align with India's federal structure by allowing states to determine their election schedules.

The second alternative is to conduct **Lok Sabha and Local Body elections together while keeping the state legislative assembly elections separate**.²². Currently, the State Election Commission conducts local body elections, while the Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts Lok Sabha elections. Combining these two would reduce the frequency of imposition of MCC and consolidate several administrative efforts at two levels.

²⁰ Pandit S, *One Nation One Election: Challenges in the Indian Government System*

²¹ PRS Legislative Research, 'Draft Report: Simultaneous Elections' <https://prsindia.org/policy/report-summaries/draft-report-simultaneous-elections> accessed 02 December 2024.

²² Press Information Bureau, 'Press Note' <https://pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?ModuleId=3&NoteId=153577> accessed 03 December 2024

The approach could streamline elections in rural and urban areas, as local body elections occur in multiple phases, often used to overlap with assembly elections. However, combining these two elections may require vast coordination between the State Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions, which operate independently.

Third, a more practical option could be **Lok Sabha elections separately while combining state legislative assembly and local body elections**²³. Since the Election Commission of India conducts Lok Sabha elections and the State Election Commission oversees legislative assembly and local body elections, this arrangement will align with the responsibilities without requiring significant structural changes.

Combining state assembly and local body elections will significantly reduce the costs and resource duplication for the state election commissions. It would also allow for better synchronization within the states only without altering the current schedule of parliamentary elections, preserving the distinction between national and regional issues.

The fourth alternative is **Lok Sabha, State Assembly Elections, and local Body elections separately**²⁴. In this alternative, the Election Commission of India (ECI) would conduct Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections simultaneously, while the local body would remain. (Placeholder1) (Placeholder1) The responsibility of State Election Commissions. This division will respect the federal structure by maintaining the autonomy of State Election Commissions while reducing the frequency of elections for national and state legislatures.

This concept could help streamline the election process for the two most extensive democratic exercises, reducing MCC-related disruptions to governance at the state and national levels. However, as discussed earlier, the logistical challenges of conducting Lok Sabha and Assembly elections together – such as additional EVM requirements and many more– would need to be addressed.

²³ NITI Aayog, *Report on Simultaneous Elections: A Nationwide Debate* (2017) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/NITI_AYOG_REPORT_2017.pdf accessed 04 December 2024.

²⁴ NITI Aayog, *Report on Simultaneous Elections: A Nationwide Debate* (2017) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/NITI_AYOG_REPORT_2017.pdf accessed 04 December 2024.

The **fifth** alternative is **conducting elections in two cycles every 2.5 years**.²⁵ This approach proposes to divide elections into two cycles: one for **Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections** and the other for local body elections, each conducted every **2.5 years**. By scheduling all elections in two blocks, the MCC would be only applicable during these periods, significantly reducing its governance impact.

This option will balance synchronization and the need to respect India's federal structure. It will even allow for greater efficiency in resource utilization and provide clear governance windows for policymakers. However, implementing this would require vast coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions to ensure proper sequencing and planning.

Sixth is a more experimental approach involving synchronizing elections held in any given year to a particular date.²⁶ For example, all elections – whether for local bodies, state assemblies, or the Lok Sabha – due in a particular year would be conducted on a **fixed date**. This method will prevent staggered election schedules within a year, significantly reducing the frequency of MCC imposition.

This system will allow for partial synchronization without altering the natural timelines of state and national elections, thus preserving federalism. However, aligning electoral preparation across multiple states and election commissions would require a well-coordinated effort.

The above **six alternates** offer a range of solutions that balance logistical feasibility, governance stability, and respect for India's federal structure. While each approach has challenges, implementing even partial synchronization – such as combining Lok Sabha and Local Body elections or conducting elections in two cycles – can bring significant benefits without the complexities of full-scale simultaneous polls. Selecting the best path forward would require careful evaluation of costs, resource demands, and political consensus to ensure the integrity of democratic processes.

²⁵ Press Information Bureau, 'Press Note Details' <https://pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?ModuleId=3&NoteId=153577> accessed 05 December 2024.

²⁶ Super Shetty, 'One Nation, Three Elections: Better Alternative to One Nation, One Elections' (Medium) <https://medium.com/changing-world/one-nation-three-elections-better-alternative-to-one-nation-one-elections-ee57484149ac> accessed 06 December 2024.

Best Alternative: Gradual Implementation with Consensus.

Seeing the complexities and challenges associated with simultaneous elections, a gradual implementation strategy emerged as the most pragmatic alternative. This approach allows for the necessary consensus-building among stakeholders and incremental alignment of electoral processes; it will minimize disruptions to governance and respect India's federal structure.

The success of any electoral reform in a democratic setup like India depends on widespread consensus among political parties, policymakers, state government, and the public. A step-by-step approach will provide sufficient time for stakeholders to deliberate on key issues, address logistical and constitutional challenges, and ensure broad-based acceptance.

1. Engaging political parties and state governments in dialogue to understand their concerns and acknowledge their suggestions in the implementation framework. Ensuring that regional interests are not overshadowed is critical to maintaining federalism.
2. Conducting public awareness programs to highlight the potential benefits of synchronized elections, which could include reduced costing, streamlined governance, and less frequent implementation of MCC-related disruptions. Transparency and communication are essential to gather public support.

A phased implementation strategy needs to be adopted to achieve the goal of simultaneous elections without overwhelming the existing system. This approach ensures that the electoral process evolves gradually and addresses the logistical and constitutional challenges.

The first step would be to synchronize all election schedules for a given year to be conducted on a **fixed date**. For instance, all local bodies, state assemblies, and parliamentary by-elections in a particular year can be held on a pre-determined date. This step would further reduce the frequency of the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) within the year and serve as a test for aligning electoral processes without altering the natural timelines of elections.

This step will require minimal changes to existing laws and administrative procedures. It will also allow election commissions to plan operations more efficiently and assess the feasibility of broader synchronization.

Once the system adapts to holding multiple elections on a single date within a year, the second

phase could involve aligning **Local Body elections** with **State Assembly elections**. Since state election commissions oversee both these processes, combining them would be administratively feasible and would not require significant constitutional amendments.

The benefits of this phase would be that it will reduce the frequency of elections in states, allow for better coordination between state elections commissions, and address governance disruptions caused by repeated MCC impositions.

This phase would involve minor adjustments to the schedules of state election commissions; it will ensure that local body elections align with assembly elections without affecting their autonomy.

Then, the final phase would involve conducting **Lok Sabha, State Assembly, and Local Body elections simultaneously on a fixed date**. This step will require significant constitutional amendments and coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the state election commissions. By this stage, the logistical framework and operative capacity would have evolved to manage the complexities of unified elections.

Challenges that must be addressed involve adequate procurement and deployment of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units, which we discussed earlier. Further training personnel and ensuring availability of resources, then addressing constitutional constraints and ensuring legal compliance through necessary amendments.

On the other hand, there would be several long-term benefits also included in this imposition, such as a substantial reduction in election-related costs, which could be diverted towards other vital sectors that require development; it could minimize governance disruption due to reduced frequency of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) impositions, then there will be streamlined electoral process and improved policy continuity.

So, a gradual implementation of simultaneous elections will ensure a smooth transition, minimize disruptions, and allow time for resolving challenges at each stage. By synchronizing polls for a particular year, aligning state assembly and local body elections, and finally achieving full-scale synchronization, India can move towards a more efficient and streamlined

electoral process. The above-phased approach will balance the benefits of simultaneous elections with the practicalities of governance and the need to respect federal principles.

Amendments Required in the Implementation

Implementing synchronized elections in India involves significant constitutional amendments, key electoral laws, and procedural rules governing legislative bodies' functions. These changes aim to address the terms, dissolution, and alignment of legislative schedules to maintain a unified electoral cycle. A comprehensive overhaul of existing provisions is vital to maintain governance stability, respect federalism, and create a seamless electoral process nationwide.

First of all, amendments to **Article 83 of the Constitution of India**²⁷ are fundamental, as this article governs the duration of the Lok Sabha. Currently, it provides for a fixed **five-year** term from the date of its first meeting unless dissolved earlier. To align the Lok Sabha's term with the synchronized electoral schedule, this article must be modified to introduce flexibility in the tenure. If the Lok Sabha were to be dissolved prematurely, the succeeding government's term could be limited to the remainder of the five years, ensuring that the unified election timeline is preserved. Conversely, if elections are required earlier than planned, the Lok Sabha's term could be terminated to allow synchronization. In exceptional circumstances, provisions for extending the term by up to six months – similar to what is permitted during a national emergency, defined under **Article 352 of the Constitution of India**²⁸, could be introduced, ensuring no government operates beyond constitutional limits.

Second, further **Article 172 of the Constitution of India**²⁹, which governs the duration of the state legislative assemblies, is a symmetric provision of **Article 83**³⁰. The Constitution of India is different in that it applies to the state legislatures. Amendments to this article are equally important, as they will allow the termination or extension of state assembly terms to align with

²⁷ *The Constitution of India*, Article 83 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 13 November 2024.

²⁸ *The Constitution of India*, Article 352 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 14 November 2024.

²⁹ *The Constitution of India*, Article 172 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 14 November 2024.

³⁰ *The Constitution of India*, Article 83 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 15 November 2024.

the unified electoral cycle. For instance, if a state assembly's term ends at a time that does not align with the national election schedule, the term could be shortened or extended, depending on the need for synchronization. This will ensure a balanced approach that will respect state autonomy while reducing the frequency of elections.

Third, amendments to Articles 85 and 174 of the Constitution of India deal with the prorogation and dissolution of legislatures. Amendment to these articles is critical for maintaining stability in a synchronized election framework. Currently, these articles grant the President of India (for the Lok Sabha) and Governors (for state assemblies) the power to dissolve the respective legislatures upon the advice of the council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister of India. This discretionary power can disrupt a synchronized election schedule if exercised frequently. To prevent such disruptions, these articles must be amended to require a **special majority in the legislature** for dissolution. This change will ensure that dissolution is based on broad legislative consensus, preventing misuse of executive powers and safeguarding the integrity of the unified timelines.

Fourth, **Article 356 of the Constitution of India**³¹ provides for imposing the President's Rule in states but also requires some additional safeguards. As this article allows the president to dissolve a state assembly and assume control in the cases of constitutional breakdown, amendments should ensure that elections for state assemblies under the President's Rule align with the unified electoral schedule. This would help prevent mid-term elections from disturbing the synchronized election cycle, except when emergencies can't be avoided.

Fifth, **Article 324 of the Constitution of India**³², which empowers the Election Commission of India (ECI) to oversee and conduct elections, and **Article 242(k)**³³, which grants similar powers to State Election Commissions for local body elections, it must be coordinated. Amendments to these articles should establish formal coordination mechanisms between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the State Election Commissions. This coordination is

³¹ *The Constitution of India*, Article 356 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 16 November 2024.

³² *The Constitution of India*, Article 324 (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 17 November 2024.

³³ *The Constitution of India*, Article 242(k) (cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in, 2024) <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf> accessed 17 November 2024.

essential for managing the logistical challenges of synchronized elections, including resource allocation, scheduling, and operational oversight. These changes would ensure that the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the State Election Commissions work collaboratively to facilitate smooth, unified electoral processes across national, state, and local levels.

In addition to the constitutional amendments, there are specific changes required, as in the **Representation of the People Act of 1951**³⁴. This statute governs the conduct of elections for the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies and would need provisions for adjusting schedules; it is used to address premature dissolutions and align staggered elections. For instance, some specific clauses could outline mechanisms for synchronizing elections across different states or addressing unforeseen circumstances that necessitate. These changes will provide a legal framework to operationalize synchronized elections while maintaining the democratic process.

Some procedural rules, such as **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies**, also must be revised. These rules are currently defining the processes for convening sessions, debating legislative matters, and dissolving legislature in sync with the unified electoral calendar. They ensure smooth transitions between legislative terms. For example, rules could mandate that any motion for dissolution must include provisions for aligning the subsequent elections with the synchronized schedule.

Further the Conduct of **the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**³⁵, must also be amended to accommodate the logistical requirements of synchronized elections. These rules govern the procedural aspects of elections, including timelines for nominations, polling, and counting. Amendments will specify unified schedules for these activities and ensure that all national, state, and local elections are conducted efficiently on the same date.

State-specific statutes that govern local body elections, such as municipal and panchayat laws, also require alignment. The State Election Commissions conduct local body elections independently, often overlapping with state assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Amending these statutes to synchronize local body elections with state assembly elections would streamline the process and reduce the overall frequency of elections. It will ensure an efficient use of resources.

³⁴ *Representation of the People Act, 1951* (indiacode.nic.in, 1951) <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2096/5/a1951-43.pdf> accessed 19 November 2024.

³⁵ *The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961* (election.rajasthan.gov.in, 1961) <https://election.rajasthan.gov.in/rti/THE%20CONDUCT%20OF%20ELECTION%20RULES,%201961.pdf> accessed 19 November 2024.

Then, finally, the **Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act of 1952**³⁶, may require amendments to align these elections with the unified schedules. While these elections do not directly impact legislative terms, their synchronization could reduce administrative complexity and further enhance the efficiency of the overall electoral process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper has explored the concepts of “One Nation, One Election,” hereinafter (ONOE), by analyzing its benefits, challenges, historical context, and potential alternatives. Implementing simultaneous elections requires significant amendments to constitutional provisions, electoral statutes, and procedural rules. By aligning the terms of legislatures, introducing a serialized implementation strategy, and addressing logistical and administrative challenges, India can establish a robust framework for synchronizing elections. These reforms will ensure governance continuity and alleviate the financial and administrative burdens of conducting frequent elections nationwide. As highlighted by several reports, such as the 2018 Law Commission, the reduction in election-related expenditure and the minimization of the disruption caused by the repetitive enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) are required for this transition. Furthermore, synchronized elections can improve voter engagement by reducing fatigue and enhancing the focus on long-term policymaking and developmental agendas.

However, this reform must be approached with caution, respecting the federal structure of India. The autonomy of state governments and the diversity of regional issues must be preserved to prevent the overshadowing of local concerns by national narratives. A phased approach, beginning with synchronizing elections in select states or aligning Lok Sabha and local body elections.

Ultimately, this comprehensive legal reform lays the foundation for a streamlined and efficient electoral system that meets the evolving needs of the world’s largest democracy. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, ensuring robust resource management, and prioritizing governance stability, India can uphold its democratic integrity while adapting to the changing demands of its political and administrative landscape.

³⁶ *The Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952* (indiacode.nic.in, 1952) <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2167/1/195231.pdf> accessed 21 November 2024.