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# **FROM FREQUENT POLLS TO FOCUSED GOVERNANCE: THE ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION PROPOSITION**

AUTHORED BY - C. JEGANNATH<sup>1</sup>

## **ABSTRACT**

The notion of *One Nation One Election* (ONOE) has recently gained significant attention among policymakers, constitutional experts, and the public. Spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and supported by various law commission experts, this concept aims to address the challenges and inefficiencies of India's current election system. At present, multiple elections at different levels are conducted every year, consuming enormous time, money, and manpower. The author explains that such frequent electoral exercises divert administrative focus from governance and development, as millions of government employees are repeatedly deployed for election duties. This paper suggests that adopting the ONOE model could streamline the electoral process, reduce financial and logistical burdens, and ensure greater political stability. By synchronising elections across the country, the system could enhance policy continuity and governance efficiency. The author suggests that implementing ONOE would require constitutional amendments to align the terms of the central and state legislatures. Furthermore, this paper suggests that in cases of mid-term elections resulting from a no-confidence motion, the remaining term could be managed by the President or Governor as a deterrent to political instability. Overall, this paper explains that ONOE would represent a shift toward a more organised, cost-effective, and development-oriented democratic structure, minimising disruption and promoting long-term governance.

**Keywords:** Consistency, Democracy, Expenditure, Governance, One Nation One Election.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As the bedrock of any democratic system, elections provide people with the vital chance to elect their leaders for a set term. It is nearly impossible to envision a democratic system functioning without the electoral process. "Despite certain inherent flaws, democracy is widely

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regarded as the most effective form of governance, as it empowers people to select their leaders based on merit and capabilities”<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, it provides mechanisms to hold elected representatives accountable for their actions, whether in omission or commission.

“India, among the world’s largest democracies, governs a population of over 140 crore, with 96.88 crore registered voters, as per the Election Commission of India (ECI)”<sup>3</sup>. Over the past 75 years, Indian democracy has evolved, matured, and undergone various experiments, remaining resilient through time. Except the Emergency period from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, imposed by then Prime Minister, India’s democratic framework has withstood numerous challenges.

To build a more efficient, sustainable, and dynamic democracy, it is crucial to re-examine the electoral process. Since elections uphold democratic values and ensure governance, there is an urgent need to enhance their efficiency, especially considering the current resource-intensive and time-consuming nature of frequent elections. Organizing elections in India is a massive endeavour that demands significant resources, manpower, and complex logistical planning. In this regard, the concept of simultaneous elections presents itself as a potentially viable solution, offering a way to tackle various structural challenges in the existing system. It is an option that merits consideration to simplify the electoral process and lessen the strain on the nation.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

This doctrinal research seeks to answer the following question:

*“Whether the concept of One Nation, One Election, a boon or a bane?”*

## SIMULTANEOUS ELECTION

“Federal democracies, characterized by the coexistence of national and subnational levels of governance, often face a distinct challenge—the frequent occurrence of elections.”<sup>4</sup> India, too, has been dealing with this issue over the past few decades, with numerous state assembly elections taking place regularly. These frequent elections impose a significant financial and administrative burden, while also causing disruptions for citizens, political parties, and the

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<sup>2</sup> “VS Ramadevi and SK Mendiratta, How India Votes- Election Laws, Practice and Procedure (Lexisnexis publication, 5<sup>th</sup> edition 2024)”

<sup>3</sup> “Largest electorate for General Elections - over 96.88 crore electors registered across the country – Press Information Bureau – available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2005189> “

<sup>4</sup> “Sapna Chadah, ‘One Nation, One Election’ 27 Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi”

government. This has led to growing discussions around the idea of ‘ONOE’—the concept of holding simultaneous elections.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of simultaneous elections, various scholars have attempted to explain the term. According to Sugato Dasgupta and others, “Simultaneous General Elections” refer to elections that are conducted at the same time for different types of governing bodies<sup>5</sup>. Shugart offers a more specific perspective, defining Simultaneous General Elections as those held concurrently to elect officials at both the “national and regional levels”, covering parliamentary and presidential candidates in countries with a presidential system.

Drawing from these interpretations, it can be understood that simultaneous elections involve conducting multiple elections at the same time, differing in both their scale and the offices being contested.

### **HISTORY OF ONE NATION ONE ELECTION**

At the time of India’s independence, the country began its democratic journey by conducting simultaneous elections for both the Parliament and State Assemblies. “The first General Election in 1951-52” was held alongside the state assembly elections, and this practice continued without interruption through the elections of 1957, 1962, and 1967. Therefore, it is evident that simultaneous elections were the norm for three consecutive terms. The concept is not a newly introduced idea, but rather a practice rooted in the early years of Indian democracy. “However, this trend was disrupted in 1972, when the synchronization between parliamentary and assembly elections broke down. Since then, simultaneous elections have not been held across the country.”<sup>6</sup>

Currently, elections are conducted frequently, leaving hardly any part of the calendar year free from electoral activity. On average, India holds between five to seven elections annually. Given the extensive deployment of manpower and public funds, such frequent elections are often viewed as inefficient and unproductive. Elections in India have evolved into large-scale events, likened to festivals, marked by loudspeakers, mass rallies, and constant media attention. Voters cast their ballots year-round—for Members of Parliament, State Legislative Assemblies, and

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<sup>5</sup> “Kishore Desai, "Simultaneous Elections (One Nation One Election)." Dr.Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation”.

<sup>6</sup> “Satyam Sinha, “One Nation One Election: A Blow to Federalism or the Need of the Nation? 44 No. 5 Journal of Propulsion Technology 3536 (2023)”

local bodies like municipalities and panchayats.

The frequent elections not only burden citizens but also dilute the essence of democratic participation, leading to a decline in the seriousness of the electoral process. This raises a valid question—whether the current noisy and cumbersome system truly benefits the nation. In the age of technological advancement, is it not logical to consider democratic innovations like the ‘ONOE’ model?<sup>7</sup>

The ruling party, BJP, has recently shown strong commitment towards implementing this model, actively engaging with other national and regional parties, the general public, and key stakeholders to build consensus. What is most important, however, is to avoid politicizing such significant issues merely for short-term gains. Often in India, political opposition is driven by narrow interests rather than national welfare. There is no harm in sincerely exploring and testing new governance models that promise efficient, disciplined, and smart democratic functioning.

Today’s governance demands the elimination of noisy, disorganized, and resource-heavy election practices. All major political parties should collaborate to establish clear principles and concrete strategies to make ‘ONOE’ a reality, aiming for systematic progress and a more disciplined political environment.<sup>8</sup>

### **PERTINENT PROVISIONS<sup>9</sup>**

The timing of elections for a legislature (Lok Sabha or State Assemblies) is determined by the duration of its term, which is, in turn, governed by the applicable “constitutional and statutory provisions” that regulate various aspects of its formation, dissolution, and expiration.

Accordingly, the paragraphs list the constitutional provisions relevant to the issue of simultaneous elections.

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<sup>7</sup> “ParinduBhagat and Dr Mrs. PurviPokharyal. ‘CONCEPTUAL REFORMS ONE NATION – ONE ELECTION’ Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online, 2020; Vol 19 (Issue 4): pp.3929-3935”.

<sup>8</sup> “Arunav Chetiya, ‘One Nation, One Election: What it could mean for India’ 20 social and political research foundation 03 (2024)”

<sup>9</sup> “Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, ‘A Discussion paper on analysis of simultaneous elections: The what why and how’ 5 Niti Aayog report 2017 “

## TENURES OF THE HOUSE OF PEOPLE AND STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES:

“Article 83 of the Indian Constitution outlines the tenure of both Houses of Parliament, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha”<sup>10</sup>. Specifically, Article 83(2) stipulates that “the Lok Sabha has a term of five years from the date of its first sitting, unless it is dissolved sooner”<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, Article 172(1) sets “a five-year term for State Legislative Assemblies, starting from their first sitting”<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, the proviso to Article 83(2) states that “during a proclamation of emergency, the term of the Lok Sabha may be extended by Parliament by law for a period not exceeding one year at a time, and not extending beyond six months after the emergency has ended”<sup>13</sup>. An equivalent provision applies to State Legislative Assemblies under the proviso to Article 172(1). These constitutional provisions indicate that while the standard term of a House is five years, it may be dissolved earlier, and its tenure can only be extended during an emergency, within the limits specified

## PRE-MATURE DISSOLUTION OF HOUSE OF PEOPLE OR STATE ASSEMBLIES

“Article 85(2)(b) of the Indian Constitution grants the President the authority to dissolve the Lok Sabha”<sup>14</sup>. A corresponding provision exists under Article 174(2)(b), empowering “the Governor to dissolve State Legislative Assemblies”<sup>15</sup>. Article 356 is particularly relevant to the premature dissolution of a State Legislative Assembly. When a State is placed under President’s Rule as per Article 356, the President may dissolve the Assembly before the completion of its term. While Article 356 has been used on multiple occasions to impose President’s Rule in various States, the criteria for such premature dissolution have become more stringent after the introduction of the “**Anti-Defection Act**”<sup>16</sup> and the landmark Supreme Court judgment delivered by the Constitutional Bench in “*S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*”<sup>17</sup>. In this judgement, the apex court laid down “certain guidelines circumscribing the conditions for proclamation of President’s Rule by the Union Government”. The guidelines state:

a) “Parliamentary approval from both Houses is mandatory for the President to dissolve a State Legislative Assembly”; and

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<sup>10</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 83”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 172”

<sup>13</sup> Id., art. 83.

<sup>14</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 85”

<sup>15</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 174”

<sup>16</sup> “Fifty-second constitutional amendment act, 1985”

<sup>17</sup> “AIR 1994 SC 1918”

b) “A proclamation of President’s Rule is open to scrutiny by the judiciary”.

Effectively, the President may place the Legislative Assembly in suspended animation, but cannot dissolve it without the approval of both Houses of Parliament. “The judiciary has the power to review the validity of such a proclamation and, if the use of Article 356 is deemed mala fide, can reinstate the dismissed State Government and revive the dissolved Legislative Assembly.”

“As per **Article 75(3)**<sup>18</sup>, The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People”. “**Article 164(2)**<sup>19</sup> provides a similar responsibility of the Council of Ministers to the State Legislative Assembly”. Thus, the Executive derives its legitimacy from the Legislature and remains in office only as long as it retains the latter's confidence. If the Lok Sabha or a State Legislative Assembly loses trust in the Council of Ministers, a “no-confidence motion” may be passed. The government can collapse at any time upon the successful passage of such a motion in the respective House. These provisions suggest that while the fall of an elected government is constitutionally envisaged, it remains inherently unpredictable.

### **OBLIGATION FOR MANAGING ELECTIONS TO THE LOK SABHA AND STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES**

“As previously mentioned, the Constitution empowers the Election Commission of India (ECI) to *supervise, direct, and control* the conduct of elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Councils.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to this constitutional provision, the Parliament has enacted “the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Representation of the People Act, 1951, along with associated rules—namely, the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, and the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961—to support and facilitate the ECI in conducting elections”.

### **THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT, 1951**

The Representation of the People Act, 1951, outlines the detailed procedures for conducting elections in India. It serves as the legal foundation empowering the Election Commission of India to oversee the electoral process. The Act specifies the eligibility criteria for individuals contesting elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures, lays down the general framework for election conduct, details the process of vote counting, result declaration, and addresses the

<sup>18</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 75”

<sup>19</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 164”

<sup>20</sup> “The Constitution of India, art. 324”

resolution of election-related disputes, among other provisions. “**Section 14** of the Act provides for the *notification for General Elections to the Lok Sabha*”<sup>21</sup>. The proviso to the Section states: “..Provided that where a general election is held otherwise than on the dissolution of the existing House of the People, no such notification shall be issued at any time earlier than six months prior to the date on which the duration of the House would expire under the provisions of clause (2) of Article 83.”

“**Section 15(2)** of the Act provides a similar provision for State legislatures. This means that *the ECI is empowered to notify elections to both Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies six months prior to the end of normal terms of these Houses*. This would not alter their term in any way”<sup>22</sup>.

## NEED FOR ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Within the context of Indian democracy, the call for simultaneous elections has become a prominent subject of debate, intended to address the issues arising from the existing staggered election cycles. The frequent occurrence of elections is viewed as a hindrance to administrative efficiency, optimal resource utilization, and consistent policy execution. “To break free from the continuous election mode—which obstructs effective governance and shifts attention away from developmental goals—simultaneous elections are being considered a practical and viable alternative”<sup>23</sup>.

The 79th Report<sup>24</sup> of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015) on the “*Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies*” lays out the rationale behind this proposition:

### i) Efficient Electoral Process Management

Frequent elections at multiple levels of government interrupt regular administrative processes and require significant manpower and logistical effort. Simultaneous elections are expected to streamline operations, reduce disruptions, and support a more focused approach to governance.

### ii) Financial Benefits of Synchronized Elections:

Organizing separate elections involves substantial expenditure on areas such as

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<sup>21</sup> “The Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Act 43 of 1951), s. 14”

<sup>22</sup> “The Representation of the People Act, 1951 (Act 43 of 1951), s. 15”

<sup>23</sup> “Bhaswat Prakash, ‘one nation one election: a comparative analysis from voter behavior to political polarization’ SSRN journal 4 (2022)”

<sup>24</sup> “Department related parliamentary standing committee on personal, public grievances, law and justice, ‘The 79th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015) on the Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies’ 19 (2015)”

security, logistics, and publicity. Holding elections simultaneously could significantly reduce costs by consolidating resources into a single electoral event.

**iii) Promoting Long-Term Policy Focus:**

Regular elections often push governments to concentrate on short-term populist measures instead of long-term developmental policies. Simultaneous elections aim to provide fixed terms for governments, thereby ensuring greater stability, consistency in policymaking, and smoother implementation.

**iv) Fewer Elections, Fewer Restrictions:**

With each election, the “Model Code of Conduct” becomes active, which restricts government decision-making. Fewer elections would mean fewer impositions of the Code, allowing governance to continue without frequent interruptions.

**v) Boosting Voter Turnout**

Repeated election cycles can lead to voter fatigue, diminishing public engagement with the democratic process. Fewer voting events through simultaneous elections could counteract this issue, potentially enhancing voter turnout and encouraging more informed and meaningful participation.

**vi) Emphasis on development**

It is argued that holding simultaneous elections could encourage political leaders and parties to concentrate on developmental issues instead of being constantly engaged in election campaigns. This shift in focus could lead to better implementation of development policies and more effective governance.

## **POSITION OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

### **1. SOUTH AFRICA**

Elections held within a five-year span are distinct from provincial elections. Members of the House of Assembly (Lower House) and Provincial Councils are elected from single-member constituencies using the “first-past-the-post” system. For both National and Provincial Assemblies, a party-list proportional representation system is used, meaning parties are allocated seats based on the percentage of votes they receive. “Provincial and municipal elections occur every five years. In the case of provincial elections, political parties submit a list of candidates to the Independent Electoral

Commission (IEC), and seats are allocated accordingly.”<sup>25</sup>

The National Assembly consists of 400 seats, while each Provincial Legislature has a varying number of seats, determined by the population of the province. Municipal Council elections use a mixed-member electoral system, combining direct voting in certain wards with selections from party lists. This system ensures that all parties are represented, leading to a diverse legislative composition.

National Assembly and Provincial Legislature elections are held simultaneously, allowing voters to cast ballots for both at the same time. In contrast, municipal elections are conducted separately, also on a five-year cycle. Thus, while National and Provincial elections occur together, municipal elections follow their own independent schedule. “South Africa is scheduled to hold its next general elections in 2029, during which voters will elect a new National Assembly and new provincial legislatures across all provinces”.

## 2. SWEDEN

“Sweden follows a proportional electoral system, in which political parties receive seats in the elected parliament according to the proportion of votes they secure. Elections for the Parliament (Riksdag), County Councils, and Municipal Councils are conducted simultaneously<sup>26</sup>. Municipal elections are held every four years on the second Sunday of September, while elections to the Municipal Assemblies occur every five years, also on the same day”.

## 3. GERMANY

Germany's constitution came into effect in 1949. The country follows an electoral system that includes simultaneous elections for the Bundestag (Lower House), Landtags (State Assemblies), and municipal bodies. This system is based on proportional representation. Notably, the Chancellor cannot be removed through a regular “vote of no-confidence”. Instead, Germany employs a “constructive vote of no-confidence,” which ensures that the Chancellor can only be removed if a replacement is simultaneously agreed upon. The German Parliament can pass a resolution to dismiss the government only when it also nominates a successor, thereby promoting stability

<sup>25</sup> “South Africa to hold general election on May 29 Aljazeera, February 20, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/20/south-africa-to-hold-general-election-on-may29>”

<sup>26</sup> “Law Commission Draft Report, 2018. Page no.31, Refer to Annexure 1 (x)”

and minimizing political uncertainty despite the system's complexity<sup>27</sup>.

“Dr. Subhash C. Kashyap, a member of the High-Level Committee (HLC), supported the German model of the Constructive Vote of No-confidence, along with the Bundestag's method of nominating the Chancellor. He also examined the process followed in Japan, where the Prime Minister is nominated by the National Diet and formally appointed by the Emperor. Dr. Kashyap proposed that India consider adopting a model similar to those used in Germany and Japan, expressing the belief that such a system would also be advantageous for India”.

#### 4. INDONESIA

The Indonesian Constitutional Court declared “*Article 3 Paragraph 5, Article 12 Paragraphs 1 and 2, and Article 112 of the Presidential Election Law* to be unconstitutional”. The Court ruled that Law No. 42 of 2008 violated constitutional principles, leading to the implementation of concurrent presidential and legislative elections starting in 2019. Indonesia now conducts simultaneous elections, during which “the President, Vice President, and members of both national and regional legislative bodies are elected on the same day”.

To streamline the process and prevent multiple rounds of voting, the country uses a secret ballot system, with indelible ink applied to voters' fingertips to ensure transparency and prevent fraud. Political parties must secure at least 4% of the national vote to gain representation in the National Parliament. “To win the presidency, a candidate must obtain over 50% of the total votes and at least 20% of the vote in more than half of Indonesia's provinces.”<sup>28</sup>

“On February 14, 2024, Indonesia successfully conducted its simultaneous elections”. Nearly 200 million citizens voted for “the President, Vice President, Members of Parliament, Regional Assemblies, and Municipal bodies, making it the largest single-day election ever held in the world.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Law Commission Draft Report, 2018, Page no. 32-33, Refer to Annexure 1 (x).”

<sup>28</sup> “Kanupriya Kapoor, ‘Indonesia election 2024: How the electoral system works’ Reuters, February 12, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/how-indonesia-holds-worlds-biggest-single-day-election-2024-02-07/> (last visited on 14-04- 2025)”

<sup>29</sup> “Ananda Teresia and Stanley Widianto , Reuters, February 15 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesians-wake-new-presumed-president-prabowo-2024-02-14/> (Last visited on 14-04-2025)”

## NOTABLE JUSTIFICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

### i) **Managing the Financial Burden of Multiple Elections**

Simultaneous elections can significantly reduce the costs associated with conducting frequent elections. In India, elections have become an almost continuous process, involving massive and sometimes unimaginable expenditures. If this recurring democratic exercise is scheduled at fixed intervals, where voting for both Parliamentary and State Assembly elections takes place together, unnecessary spending can be minimized. The Central Government currently bears 100% of the costs for elections to the House of People and 50% of the expenses for State Assembly elections. As the world's largest democracy, with 97.07 crore registered voters, India faces a monumental financial and logistical challenge in managing elections on such a large scale. On average, the country holds between 5 to 7 elections each year. A synchronized election system would undoubtedly help reduce excessive expenses, as well as the considerable time and effort involved. This is clearly illustrated by past data: in 2009, the central government spent ₹1,115 crore on the general election, and by 2014, this amount had nearly tripled to ₹3,870 crore. Implementing a more efficient election mechanism like ONOE could lead to significant savings of taxpayers' money and foster a more streamlined electoral process.

### ii) **Election Cycles and Their Effect on Developmental Progress**

It is estimated that whenever the "Model Code of Conduct (MCC)" is in effect, a period of 2 to 3 months during either Parliamentary or Assembly elections results in a phase where no new policy implementations take place. This time lapse inevitably disrupts the continuity of developmental plans and policy execution. When elections are held throughout the year on a regular basis, the repeated enforcement of the MCC has a direct impact on various development schemes. This frequent interruption often causes policy paralysis and leads to a governance deficit.

### iii) **Reviving the past trend<sup>30</sup>**

India has the potential to join the group of countries that practice the concept of ONOE. This idea is not entirely new to India, as the country conducted simultaneous elections in its early years—in 1951–52, 1957, and 1963. However, this practice was later

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<sup>30</sup> "B. Muthu Kumar, 'One Election, two Votes: The Feasibility of Reviving the Past Trend' 5 The GNLU Law review 141 (2018)"

disrupted due to political reasons. By adopting this model again, India could align itself with nations such as Sweden, Indonesia, South Africa, Germany, Spain, Poland, and Belgium, which already follow similar electoral practices.

**iv) Saving Voters' Time with Simultaneous Elections**

It can also help save voters' time, allowing them to utilize their time and energy more efficiently instead of repeatedly going to vote. Typically, a voter is required to cast multiple votes—for the Parliament, State Assembly, and local government. This means that, on average, a citizen ends up voting nearly every one and a half years.

**v) Managing Massive Personnel Deployments During Elections**

The large-scale mobilization of polling personnel is another significant challenge associated with elections in India. The Election Commission of India is perhaps the only government body with just a few thousand permanent staff members, yet it has to rely on borrowing crores of personnel from various departments to prepare for and conduct elections. The magnitude of this mobilization can be understood by looking at the numbers involved. During the sixteenth election to the House of the People, around one crore personnel were deployed as polling officials to manage and oversee elections at approximately 0.93 million polling stations across the country, averaging about 10.75 personnel per polling station. These staff members, including security personnel, who are temporarily assigned to election duties, could otherwise be more productively engaged in their regular roles.

**vi) The Case Against Mid-Term Elections: A Call for Reform**

ONOE can help address the recurring issue of mid-term elections in India. Mid-term elections pose a challenge due to their repetitive nature, requiring another round of expenditure on resources, manpower, and time. It is unfair that the consequences of a hung parliament or a “no-confidence motion” stemming from the actions of either the electorate or elected representatives—should result in additional burden on others. To address this, there is a need for progressive legislation and constitutional amendments to prevent mid-term elections from being imposed on the public. In such unforeseen situations, instead of holding fresh elections, the President could take charge of the administration for the remainder of the term. After all, why should citizens and the government be forced to spend twice the amount of hard-earned money on elections?

**vii) From Chaos to Governance: The Benefits of Synchronized Elections**

The constant election process can be ended urgently to bring about greater peace and order. Voters, along with representatives, politicians, and the millions of polling

personnel involved in the rigorous tasks of ongoing elections, are exhausted. Election preparations often feel like preparing for a battle to defend democracy. Holding synchronized elections would significantly reduce public rallies, false promises, public meetings, and gatherings, thereby preventing the waste of taxpayers' hard-earned money.

## **NOTABLE OBJECTIONS TO ONE NATION ONE ELECTION:**

### **i) The Unprecedented Task of Synchronizing Elections in a Diverse Democracy**

Conducting simultaneous elections in a country like India, with 96.88 crore registered electorates, can be a Herculean task. It would be an unparalleled example among nations, requiring the massive mobilization of government officials to ensure the smooth and successful implementation of the electoral process.

### **ii) Simultaneous Elections and the Threat to Federal Principles**

The Constitution establishes a federal system where the Union and state governments operate within their own defined spheres of authority and responsibilities. State and local governments are formed based on distinct issues, often rooted in local contexts. Holding separate elections helps preserve the independent functioning of state governments. However, simultaneous elections could lead to increased centralization. A strong central government might influence the nature, process, and atmosphere of elections, potentially leading to a dominant role by the Centre that could impact electoral outcomes.

### **iii) Evaluating Voter Preparedness in Simultaneous Elections**

It is fairly debatable whether voters are able to properly and thoroughly evaluate national and local issues. What remains uncertain is the level of political awareness and efficacy among Indian voters. As a result, distinguishing between different political issues could be a significant challenge. Voters may struggle to understand and could potentially confuse or merge various issues. Considering that India remains largely a rural society, with nearly 70% of the population residing in rural areas, there is a high chance that voters might misinterpret or misjudge political matters due to the current levels of political education, awareness, and engagement.

### **iv) Constitutional Amendments: A Prerequisite for ONOE**

Several constitutional provisions may need timely and necessary amendments to facilitate the implementation of the ONOE concept. For instance, a new article could be introduced to prohibit holding a second election in the event of a government's

collapse due to a no-confidence motion. In such a scenario, the remaining term of the government could be managed by the President of India until the completion of the original tenure. “A nation like India cannot afford to conduct another election within a five-year period due to the immense financial and administrative burden involved”.<sup>31</sup>

**v) Simultaneous Polls and the Struggle of State-centric Parties**

There is a valid concern that state-centric political parties may struggle to compete with national-level parties, which possess greater reputation, wider outreach, stronger fundraising abilities, larger financial reserves, extensive membership, prominent leaders, and more effective political strategies. It may take time for voters to fully grasp the complexities of politics and understand the vital role regional parties play in representing cultural diversity and local aspirations. India is a country marked by vast social and political diversity, which is a defining feature of the nation. Therefore, the shift to simultaneous elections could potentially affect subnational parties' electoral success and functioning, ultimately weakening the representation of territorial interests.

**HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE REPORT SUMMARY<sup>32</sup>**

“The Committee, chaired by former President Mr Ramnath Govind, was formed by the Union Government in September 2023 to explore the feasibility and propose a framework for conducting concurrent elections across India for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies. The Committee’s main observations and recommendations aim to tackle the issues arising from frequent elections and to strengthen the stability of governance.”

**i) Underlying Logic for Simultaneous Elections**

The Committee advocates for holding concurrent elections, emphasising the benefits of reducing uncertainty in governance. Frequent elections, they note, create instability and disrupt the continuity of policy implementation, leading to policy paralysis. A unified electoral process, on the other hand, would ensure more predictable governance, reduce costs, and increase voter participation. Supporting this recommendation, the Committee cites a research paper suggesting that concurrent elections could foster higher economic growth, lower inflation, attract greater investments, and improve fiscal expenditure efficiency.

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<sup>31</sup> “Pratyush Prabhakar, ‘Constitutional Aspects and Challenges for Implementing One Nation One Election’ 4 International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews 755 (2023)”

<sup>32</sup> “High-level committee report summary available at <https://prcindia.org/policy/report-summaries/simultaneous-elections-in-india> (last visited on 16.04.2025)”

**ii) Framework for Execution:**

To implement concurrent elections, the Committee proposed a comprehensive framework, which involves significant constitutional amendments. The first step in the framework is the dissolution of all state assemblies and local bodies at the time of the next Lok Sabha election, regardless of the remaining term, as a one-time measure. This would synchronise all elections, ensuring that Lok Sabha and state assembly elections are held together, with local body elections occurring within 100 days of that date.

**ii) Addressing Hung Legislatures:**

One of the challenges in synchronizing elections arises from the possibility of a hung legislature at any point, which could disrupt the alignment of elections in the future. To mitigate this issue, the Committee recommended that if a “hung legislature or local body” occurs, fresh elections should be held, but with a reduced term. The reduced term would be equivalent to the remaining duration of the five-year cycle for simultaneous elections. This measure would maintain synchronization and ensure elections occur every five years.

**iii) Need for Ratification by States:**

The Committee noted that amendments to the Constitution regarding the tenures of the Parliament and state assemblies would not require state ratification. However, constitutional amendments concerning local bodies will need to be ratified by at least one-half of the states to be enacted. This stipulation adds a layer of complexity to the implementation of the Committee’s recommendations.

**iv) One Electoral Roll:**

Another significant recommendation is the creation of a single electoral roll. The Committee observed that the Election Commission of India is responsible for elections to the Parliament, State Assemblies, and Councils, while the State Election Commissions manage elections to local bodies. Currently, some states allow SECs to create their own electoral rolls, while others use those prepared by the ECI. The Committee proposed the adoption of a one electoral roll to mitigate redundancy and duplication across agencies. This would require a constitutional amendment, and like other proposed changes, it would need ‘ratification by at least one-half of the states’.

**v) Logistical Considerations:**

To ensure the successful execution of simultaneous elections, the Committee recommended that the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions

carry out detailed planning and logistical arrangements. This includes estimating the resources and personnel required to handle the massive scale of simultaneous elections. In summary, the report highlights the need for significant constitutional changes to execute the concurrent elections in India. Its recommendations aim to enhance governance stability, reduce election-related costs, and promote more efficient electoral processes. However, implementing these changes will require careful logistical planning, constitutional amendments, and state-level cooperation to address the challenges of diverse regional dynamics.

## CONCLUSION

ONOE could be a great boon for the country, as it would lead to substantial savings in the costs associated with elections, while also ending the constant election cycle. Both the central and state governments, along with politicians, incur significant expenditures on elections. This system would save time, energy, and effort for both the government and voters, who currently have to cast multiple votes within a span of five years. Citizens would be able to focus on more productive activities, rather than being caught up in the frequent election noise. The government would function in an environment of peace, order, and efficient governance, which is crucial for the successful implementation of social policies and programs. With an average of 5 to 7 elections each year, the government's attention is often diverted from executing and accelerating important policy measures. As for mid-term elections, while they could present challenges in synchronizing Parliamentary and State Assembly elections, a constitutional amendment could be introduced to ensure that any unfinished term of the legislature is delivered to the President or Governor as a punitive measure for forcing another election on the public. Implementing this system, even on a trial basis, could be a politically innovative approach to building a more efficient democracy. The country has already experienced five mid-term elections, doubling expenses and the immense efforts required to conduct elections in India. While there may be some initial difficulties, these can be gradually addressed and adapted to fit the working structure of the country.