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THE FEASIBILITY AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract:

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) refers to holding simultaneous elections for the national and state legislatures in a country. This research paper explores the feasibility and constitutional challenges of implementing ONOE, with a focus on India and the United States. By comparing the constitutional frameworks, electoral systems, and political structures in both countries, the paper aims to identify potential legal, practical, and political hurdles. Additionally, the study will examine the historical context and case law that might influence the adoption of ONOE in each country, offering insights into the challenges and benefits of such a system.

Introduction

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) proposes holding simultaneous elections for both the national and state legislatures, as well as local bodies, within a country. This proposal aims to streamline electoral processes by reducing the frequency of elections, lowering administrative costs, and improving voter turnout. The idea has gained prominence in various countries, particularly in India, where it has been a topic of debate in recent years. Proponents of ONOE argue that it could enhance the efficiency of the electoral process, reduce the financial burden on the government, and foster greater political stability. However, critics of the proposal highlight several potential challenges, including the possible erosion of federalism, the difficulty of aligning elections across diverse states, and the risk of political centralization.¹

¹ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu* (Nov. 28, 2018), <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-nation-one-election-the-case-for-simultaneous-elections/article25580390.ece>.

In India, the ONOE debate has been significantly influenced by the country's complex electoral system, which involves elections to the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament), state legislative assemblies, and local bodies. These elections are often staggered over a period of several years, with some states holding elections ahead of others. The proposal to synchronize all elections has gained traction in recent times, with political figures and policymakers suggesting that a single, nationwide election could improve governance and reduce the costs associated with the electoral process. While the idea is not new, recent political developments and calls for electoral reforms have brought ONOE back into the spotlight.²

In the United States, the electoral process is characterized by the separation of federal and state elections. Federal elections, which occur every two years for Congress, are distinct from state-level elections, where governors, state legislatures, and local officials are elected according to individual state laws. The U.S. Constitution grants significant autonomy to states in conducting their elections, and any move to synchronize federal and state elections would require a complex restructuring of the political system. Unlike India, the U.S. has not entertained the idea of holding simultaneous elections, and the proposal faces substantial resistance due to concerns about states' rights and the fundamental structure of federalism.³

Historical Context of Elections in India and the U.S.

In India, elections have been held periodically since the country's independence in 1947. Initially, India adhered to a system of staggered elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, with state elections occurring independently of the national elections. Over time, however, this system has led to frequent elections, sometimes in different states, which disrupt governance and lead to significant financial expenditures. In recent decades, there have been discussions about the possibility of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. The proposal was endorsed by various political leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who highlighted the potential benefits of synchronized elections, such as reduced election-related costs and improved governance.⁴

The U.S., on the other hand, has a different electoral structure, where elections at the federal

² Constitution of India, art. 83, 172.

³ Constitution of the United States, art. I, § 4; 17th Amend.

⁴ M.V. Rajeev Gowda, "One Nation, One Election: Feasibility and Constitutional Challenges," *The Economic Times* (Aug. 7, 2019), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/one-nation-one-election>.

and state levels are held independently. The U.S. system was designed to preserve state sovereignty, with the Constitution allowing states considerable freedom in managing their own electoral processes. Elections for Congress are held every two years, while gubernatorial and state legislative elections occur according to state-specific schedules. The U.S. has faced challenges related to the synchronization of elections in the past, particularly during instances of disputed presidential elections, such as the 2000 Bush v. Gore case.⁵ However, the idea of holding synchronized federal and state elections has not gained significant traction in the U.S., mainly due to concerns about undermining the federal structure and state autonomy.⁶

Relevance of the ONOE Proposal in Contemporary Political Discourse

The proposal for ONOE has gained significant attention in both India and the U.S. in recent years. In India, the debate over ONOE has been revived by the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been vocal about the need for electoral reforms. The proposal aligns with the broader vision of enhancing political efficiency and reducing the burden on the electoral system. Proponents argue that ONOE could lead to significant savings in electoral costs, improve voter engagement by reducing the frequency of elections, and create a more stable political environment by aligning the electoral cycles.⁷

In contrast, critics of ONOE in India have raised concerns about its implications for federalism and the autonomy of state governments. The synchronization of elections could disproportionately benefit national parties, potentially weakening the political influence of regional parties. Moreover, implementing ONOE would require significant changes to India's constitutional framework, including amendments to Articles 83 and 172, which govern the tenure of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, respectively. The legal and practical challenges of aligning elections across the country remain a major hurdle to the implementation of ONOE in India.⁸

In the United States, while there has been no serious political movement advocating for ONOE, the proposal has occasionally been discussed, particularly in the context of the increasing

⁵ "Bush v. Gore," 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

⁶ A. J. Muthiah, "The Politics of Simultaneous Elections in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 10 (2017): 52-56.

⁷ Shankar Acharya, "Simultaneous Elections and the Costs of Indian Democracy," *Indian Journal of Economics* 63, no. 1 (2020): 33-45.

⁸ Constitution of India, art. 83, 172.

polarization of American politics and the administrative burden of conducting multiple elections. The challenges faced by the U.S. in holding simultaneous elections are compounded by the country's commitment to the principle of federalism, which grants states the autonomy to regulate their own elections. Any move to change the election process would require a fundamental shift in the balance of power between state and federal authorities, making the proposal highly contentious.⁹

In both countries, the ONOE proposal touches on broader debates about the structure of democracy, the nature of federalism, and the role of elections in democratic governance. While the idea of ONOE has the potential to bring about substantial reforms, its implementation raises numerous constitutional, political, and logistical challenges that need to be addressed. This paper will explore these challenges in greater detail, providing a comparative analysis of the constitutional frameworks of India and the U.S. and examining the feasibility of implementing ONOE in both countries.

Concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE):

Theoretical Underpinnings of ONOE

The "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) concept proposes synchronizing national, state, and local elections within a single timeframe, thereby consolidating electoral cycles. This idea involves conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament), state legislative assemblies, and local bodies in India. The central premise of ONOE is to create a more efficient, cost-effective, and voter-centric electoral system. By aligning election dates across all levels of government, ONOE advocates for the elimination of staggered elections, which often result in political instability and heightened administrative costs. The synchronization of elections would theoretically allow the country to focus its efforts on governance rather than frequent electoral campaigning.¹⁰

ONOE's central objectives are to reduce the financial and administrative burdens associated with conducting multiple elections. Elections are costly, particularly in a large, diverse country like India, where multiple rounds of voting take place over extended periods. By holding

⁹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Federalism and Election Law: A Study," U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2016.

¹⁰ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu* (Nov. 28, 2018), <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/one-nation-one-election-the-case-for-simultaneous-elections/article25580390.ece>.

elections simultaneously, ONOE aims to achieve substantial savings in electoral expenses. For instance, the cost of organizing an election, from the preparation of voter lists to the deployment of election staff and security, is significant. Moreover, frequent elections often lead to a drain on public resources, and the administrative machinery faces constant pressure.¹¹

Another key benefit of ONOE is the potential for increased voter turnout. Frequent elections lead to voter fatigue, and when elections are spaced too closely together, people may feel overwhelmed, resulting in disengagement from the political process. By consolidating elections into a single event, ONOE aims to reduce political fatigue and boost voter participation. Additionally, a single election would provide voters with a clearer, more comprehensive understanding of the political landscape, encouraging them to participate more actively.¹²

Lastly, ONOE is proposed as a way to reduce political instability, which often results from staggered elections. Frequent elections may disrupt governance as parties spend time and resources campaigning instead of focusing on policy implementation. Simultaneous elections would, in theory, provide political stability by aligning the tenure of national and state governments. This would allow for more cohesive policymaking, with both national and state governments working on similar timelines. However, despite these advantages, ONOE also faces considerable challenges. One of the primary concerns is the complexity of the administrative processes involved. Coordinating elections for multiple levels of government in a diverse country like India requires substantial logistical efforts, and the decentralized nature of the Indian political system may pose challenges in ensuring smooth coordination.¹³

The proposal has also raised concerns about its potential impact on federalism. In a federal system like India's, state governments have significant autonomy to address local issues. Synchronizing elections could undermine this autonomy, as national parties might overshadow regional parties in the election process. Political centralization is another risk associated with ONOE. National parties could dominate the political landscape at the expense of smaller

¹¹ Shankar Acharya, "Simultaneous Elections and the Costs of Indian Democracy," *Indian Journal of Economics* 63, no. 1 (2020): 33-45.

¹² A. J. Muthiah, "The Politics of Simultaneous Elections in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 10 (2017): 52-56.

¹³ M.V. Rajeev Gowda, "One Nation, One Election: Feasibility and Constitutional Challenges," *The Economic Times* (Aug. 7, 2019), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/one-nation-one-election>.

regional parties, diminishing the diversity of India's political system. Critics argue that ONOE may lead to a scenario where national issues dominate the electoral agenda, leaving little room for regional concerns.¹⁴

ONOE in India: Historical Background

The origins of ONOE in Indian political thought can be traced back to the early years following India's independence. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, recognized the need for synchronization in elections to avoid the disruptions caused by frequent elections. However, due to the complex political and administrative structures in India, it was difficult to implement this proposal at that time. The staggered election system was maintained to accommodate India's diverse regional needs, with different states and territories having their own electoral schedules.¹⁵

In recent years, ONOE has experienced a resurgence, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2014, Modi advocated for simultaneous elections, emphasizing that it would lead to better governance, reduced costs, and a more stable political environment. The idea was further explored by the Law Commission of India in 2016, which published a report recommending simultaneous elections as a viable solution to the problems caused by multiple elections in India. The commission argued that holding synchronized elections would streamline the electoral process, minimize costs, and improve the efficiency of governance.¹⁶

However, ONOE in India faces substantial challenges, primarily due to the federal nature of the Indian political system. The country is home to a diverse range of political parties, each with its regional base and ideological orientation. Aligning national and state elections would involve significant constitutional changes, particularly to Articles 83 and 172 of the Indian Constitution, which govern the tenure of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Critics argue that such a change would undermine the autonomy of state governments and weaken the political influence of regional parties.¹⁷ The logistical difficulties of aligning elections across various states are also significant. Different states hold elections at different intervals, and some states

¹⁴ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu*, (Nov. 28, 2018).

¹⁵ Constitution of India, art. 83.

¹⁶ Law Commission of India, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," Report No. 255 (2015), <https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in>.

¹⁷ A. J. Muthiah, "The Politics of Simultaneous Elections in India," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52, no. 10 (2017).

face challenges in conducting elections due to local factors such as security concerns or administrative delays.¹⁸

Furthermore, the political resistance to ONOE is not limited to regional parties. While the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and other national parties support the idea, there is widespread concern among regional parties that simultaneous elections would benefit national parties at their expense. National parties like the BJP and Congress would have a more significant advantage, as they have a broader national presence, and larger resources compared to regional parties that focus on specific states. The risk of political centralization is a serious concern for those who advocate for the preservation of India's federal structure.¹⁹

ONOE in the U.S.: A Historical Perspective

The U.S. has a fundamentally different approach to elections, owing to its distinct federal structure. The U.S. Constitution grants states significant autonomy over their electoral processes. Federal elections, such as those for the U.S. Congress and presidency, are separate from state and local elections, and each state is free to determine its election schedule. This decentralized system is designed to protect the powers and rights of states, with elections managed at the state level. The idea of holding simultaneous elections for federal and state offices has never gained significant traction in the U.S., largely due to concerns over federalism and the protection of state sovereignty.²⁰

Debates surrounding ONOE in the U.S. are relatively rare, but when they occur, they center on the risks of undermining states' rights. The U.S. Constitution provides that states have the authority to regulate elections, and any proposal to synchronize federal and state elections would require significant legal and constitutional changes. The federalist system in the U.S. is predicated on the principle that states should have considerable control over their own electoral processes, including the ability to schedule elections independently of the federal government. This ensures that state-specific issues, such as local governance and regional priorities, are adequately represented. Proposals to combine federal and state elections have thus met with significant political resistance.²¹

¹⁸ Constitution of India, art. 83.

¹⁹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Federalism and Election Law: A Study," U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2016.

²⁰ Constitution of the United States, art. I, § 4.

²¹ *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

Moreover, the 2000 presidential election and its aftermath underscored the complexities of the American electoral system. The case of *Bush v. Gore* highlighted the challenges that arise when federal and state elections are closely intertwined. The Supreme Court's decision to intervene in the Florida recount emphasized the delicate balance of power between the state and federal governments, illustrating the complications that can arise from efforts to centralize elections. Critics argue that a move toward ONOE could exacerbate these issues and diminish the ability of states to regulate elections according to their unique needs. Any effort to synchronize elections would likely face opposition from political leaders and citizens who believe that preserving the federal balance is essential to the functioning of the U.S. political system.

Comparative Constitutional Analysis: One Nation, One Election (ONOE) in India and the United States

1. Constitutional Framework of India

India's federal structure is defined by the Constitution of India, which sets out a division of powers between the central (Union) and state governments. The Constitution organizes powers into three lists: the Union List, the State List, and the Concurrent List, found in the Seventh Schedule. The Union List includes matters of national importance such as defense, foreign affairs, and national security, while the State List includes local issues like police, public health, and agriculture. The Concurrent List includes subjects that both levels of government can legislate on, such as education and criminal law. The Indian federal system is thus one of asymmetric federalism, with the Union government holding significant powers over certain areas of governance, particularly in times of national crises, while the states retain autonomy over a range of local matters.²²

The proposal for One Nation, One Election (ONOE)—the idea of holding national, state, and local elections simultaneously—would require significant adjustments to this federal framework. India's current system allows state and national elections to occur independently, with state legislative assemblies holding elections every five years, while the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) elections occur every five years as well but are not synchronized. Implementing ONOE would mean coordinating elections across all levels, requiring constitutional amendments to reconcile the timing and governance structure of India's federal

²² Constitution of India, art. 1-51, Seventh Schedule.

system.²³

The Constitution of India includes several provisions related to elections, with Articles 83, 172, and 324-329 being most pertinent to ONOE. Article 83 stipulates the duration of the Lok Sabha, stating that it will not exceed five years, and similarly, Article 172 sets a five-year term for state legislative assemblies. Both these articles are central to the idea of ONOE because any proposal to synchronize elections would likely necessitate either extending or reducing the tenure of state legislatures to ensure that elections occur simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. Moreover, Article 324 grants the Election Commission of India (ECI) the authority to oversee elections at all levels, making it the central body that could manage simultaneous elections if ONOE were implemented. Articles 325-329 further lay down the framework for the conduct of elections and the representation of various constituencies.²⁴

These provisions would require amendments to the Constitution for ONOE to be feasible. Synchronizing elections could involve altering the tenure of state assemblies and potentially modifying how elections are scheduled at both the Union and state levels. These changes would need a thorough constitutional debate and significant legislative effort to amend Articles 83 and 172, as well as provisions regarding the role of the Election Commission.²⁵

The Role of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in the Conduct of Elections

The Election Commission of India plays a critical role in overseeing free and fair elections across the nation. The ECI is an autonomous constitutional body, created under Article 324, tasked with administering elections for Parliament, state legislatures, and local bodies. Under ONOE, the Election Commission would be responsible for conducting simultaneous elections at all levels of government. This centralization of power could streamline the election process, reducing costs and voter fatigue, but it also raises concerns regarding the administrative capacity of the ECI to conduct such a large-scale operation across different electoral constituencies. One of the main concerns with ONOE is whether the ECI, with its existing infrastructure and resources, would be able to manage elections for the national, state, and local

²³ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu* (Nov. 28, 2018).

²⁴ Constitution of India, art. 83, 172, 324-329.

²⁵ Law Commission of India, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," Report No. 255 (2015).

governments simultaneously. The coordination challenges involved in managing election campaigns, preparing voter rolls, and ensuring the security of ballot boxes across multiple levels of governance would require substantial investment in administrative capabilities. Furthermore, any potential delay or issue in conducting these elections could have far-reaching consequences, especially if an election for one level of government gets delayed or compromised due to logistical issues.²⁶

Several historical examples demonstrate the complexity of synchronizing elections in India. For instance, in the case of mid-term elections, if the Lok Sabha or a state assembly is dissolved before the end of its term, elections must be held separately for the new assembly, disrupting the schedule of synchronized elections. The dissolution of the state assemblies due to political instability, such as in President's Rule, has also led to the need for mid-term elections. These scenarios suggest that the implementation of ONOE would be logistically complex and would require constitutional adjustments to allow for the possibility of elections being held simultaneously even in cases of political upheaval at the state level.²⁷

The United States also follows a federal system, with a clear division of powers between the federal government and state governments. Under the U.S. Constitution, the national government is granted specific, enumerated powers, including the authority to regulate interstate commerce, provide national defense, and establish post offices. The Tenth Amendment reserves all other powers to the states or the people. States thus retain significant control over a variety of matters, including elections. As the U.S. Constitution grants states the authority to manage elections, this decentralization makes it challenging to implement ONOE, as the synchronization of federal and state elections would require substantial encroachment on state powers.

The U.S. Constitution provides for the regulation of federal elections in Article I, Section 4, which empowers state legislatures to determine the "Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives." This grants states considerable leeway in scheduling and regulating elections for both federal and state offices. Additionally, the Seventeenth Amendment (1913) established direct election of Senators, reinforcing state

²⁶ "Election Commission of India," Election Commission of India, available at <https://eci.gov.in>.

²⁷ Law Commission of India, "Simultaneous Elections: The Case for One Nation, One Election," Report No. 255, at 34 (2015).

control over election procedures.

The decentralized nature of elections in the U.S. means that federal and state elections are usually scheduled separately, with state elections occurring at different times than presidential or congressional elections. Under ONOE, such a system would need to be overhauled, requiring a significant shift in the balance of power between state governments and the federal government. This would involve changes to the Constitution to allow federal control over the scheduling of state elections, which could meet significant resistance from state legislatures that have historically jealously guarded their election powers.²⁸

State governments in the U.S. have significant autonomy in the administration of elections, including voter registration, early voting, and determining the rules for absentee ballots. Any attempt to synchronize elections across federal and state levels would require federal legislation overriding state autonomy, potentially infringing upon the rights of states to conduct their elections according to their political culture and preferences. The degree of resistance from state governments to such an infringement would likely be substantial, particularly in areas where local control is seen as essential to preserving state identity and political independence.²⁹

Relevant Case Law

U.S. case law has highlighted the importance of federalism in election regulation. In *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964), the Supreme Court held that state legislative districts must be equal in population, embodying the principle of “one person, one vote.” This case, and others like it, demonstrates the centrality of state autonomy in determining electoral processes. Similarly, the Court’s decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000), which involved a dispute over the Florida vote count in the presidential election, illustrated the complications that arise when federal and state elections are closely intertwined. The resolution of this case highlighted the challenges of managing state elections while ensuring the integrity of national elections, a concern that would be amplified under ONOE.³⁰

Key Differences in the Distribution of Electoral Powers Between

²⁸ U.S. Constitution, art. I, § 4; Seventeenth Amendment.

²⁹ *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).

³⁰ *Bush v. Gore*, 531 U.S. 98 (2000).

India and the U.S.

A major difference between India and the U.S. in terms of electoral powers is the degree of centralization. In India, the Election Commission plays a dominant role in conducting elections at all levels, ensuring that the national and state elections can be more easily synchronized. In contrast, the U.S. system is more decentralized, with each state having considerable authority over its elections. This decentralization makes implementing ONOE more difficult in the U.S., as it would require a shift in the distribution of electoral powers and may be met with resistance from states that are unwilling to relinquish control over their election processes.³¹

Federalism's Role in Shaping the Election Processes

In India, the central government has a more prominent role in shaping electoral processes, particularly through the Election Commission's authority. This centralized structure makes the implementation of ONOE more feasible, as the government could have the authority to ensure elections are held simultaneously. In contrast, U.S. federalism places significant power in the hands of state governments, which control the timing and manner of elections. This makes synchronizing elections a far more challenging endeavor, as it would require overcoming political opposition from state legislatures that would likely resist federal intervention in their election processes.³²

Potential Constitutional Amendments or Reforms Needed in Each Country to Implement ONOE

For India, constitutional amendments would be needed to alter the tenure of state legislative assemblies (Article 172) and to provide clearer coordination between the Election Commission and state governments. These changes would ensure the alignment of state elections with the Lok Sabha elections. In the U.S., implementing ONOE would require changes to the Constitution, particularly Article I, Section 4, and the Seventeenth Amendment, to allow federal control over state elections. These changes would be politically difficult, given the entrenched power of state legislatures over election processes.³³

Political and Legal Challenges: A Comparative Analysis of India and the

³¹ Constitution of the United States, art. I, § 4.

³² Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

³³ U.S. Constitution, art. I, § 4.

United States

1. India: Political and Legal Hurdles

Political Resistance from State Governments: Implications for Federalism

One of the primary political challenges to the implementation of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) in India is the resistance from state governments. India's federal structure provides significant autonomy to state governments, and many regional parties fear that ONOE could lead to the centralization of political power, undermining their influence in the state political arena. The federal system, as enshrined in the Indian Constitution, ensures that both the national and state governments have separate domains of power. Political parties at the state level, particularly those representing regional or local interests, worry that ONOE would result in their marginalization, as national political issues could dominate the campaign narrative, reducing the focus on regional concerns.

For example, regional parties such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) could be sidelined in favor of larger, national parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). The dominant national parties would likely benefit from having a simultaneous election at all levels, as it would create a larger national campaign platform, overshadowing local and regional issues.³⁴ This is particularly concerning in a country as diverse as India, where different states have varied socio-economic and cultural contexts that demand tailored political strategies.

The concerns about federalism have been voiced by many state leaders, arguing that ONOE could disrupt the balance of power between the center and the states. The debate centers around whether India's federal system can accommodate simultaneous elections without undermining the autonomy of state governments.

The Challenge of Aligning State Assembly Elections with Lok Sabha Elections

A practical challenge in implementing ONOE in India is aligning state assembly elections with Lok Sabha elections. Currently, state assembly elections are held at different times in each state, with some states having their elections every five years while others might have mid-term elections due to dissolutions or other factors. Aligning these staggered elections to a single timeline would require a major overhaul of the electoral process in India.

³⁴ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu* (Nov. 28, 2018).

States with assembly elections due to be held before the end of their five-year term would have to dissolve their legislative assemblies ahead of time, leading to a potential conflict with state governments. The logistical and political challenges of synchronizing these elections, which are meant to reflect the political will of state voters, with the national election cycle could create substantial difficulties. Regional parties and local political groups might resist changes to their electoral schedules, as the overlapping of state and national elections could reduce their chances of gaining power.

Legal Hurdles: The Need for Constitutional Amendments

Implementing ONOE would necessitate several constitutional amendments in India. Specifically, Articles 83 and 172 of the Indian Constitution need to be amended to allow for the synchronization of national and state elections. Article 83 governs the duration of the Lok Sabha, which is currently fixed at five years, while Article 172 deals with the duration of state assemblies. These articles would need to be changed to provide a uniform election cycle, potentially altering the timing of elections and the tenure of state legislative assemblies.

The challenge of constitutional amendments is politically sensitive, as it would require broad consensus across political parties and state governments. Amendments to these articles could face resistance from states that wish to retain their right to hold elections on their own terms, especially when it comes to matters of political autonomy. Additionally, such amendments would have to be approved by a two-thirds majority in Parliament, making it a complex and contentious process.

Issues of Political Centralization: Impact on Regional Parties

One of the key concerns surrounding the ONOE proposal in India is the risk of political centralization. A simultaneous election would likely favor the larger, national parties, which have the resources and infrastructure to campaign at a national level. This could significantly weaken regional parties, which depend on state-level elections to maintain their relevance and power.

In India, regional parties often focus on local issues, such as language, culture, and regional development, which resonate with voters in specific states. Under ONOE, these issues could be overshadowed by national issues like economic policy or defense, reducing the importance

of regional voices in the national political discourse³⁵. The centralization of elections could ultimately diminish the diversity of political ideologies and lead to a more uniform, nationalized political environment.

Potential Case Law Challenges Related to ONOE

If ONOE were to be implemented in India, several legal challenges could arise, particularly with regard to the potential violation of the rights of state governments. Legal challenges could be brought before the Supreme Court of India, challenging the constitutionality of the amendments to Articles 83 and 172. Such cases would likely involve arguments about the federal structure of the Constitution and whether forcing states to hold elections simultaneously with national elections violates their autonomy.

Legal debates could also center around the issue of whether simultaneous elections would undermine democratic principles by limiting the ability of state governments to address local issues independently. Regional parties and state governments could argue that the central government is overstepping its bounds by mandating simultaneous elections and that such a move would infringe on their constitutional rights.³⁶

2. The United States: Political and Legal Hurdles

State Autonomy: Political Resistance from States and the Principle of State Sovereignty

In the United States, the principle of state sovereignty is deeply embedded in the Constitution, and states have significant authority over how elections are conducted within their borders. The Tenth Amendment grants powers not delegated to the federal government to the states or the people, reinforcing the idea that state governments retain autonomy over matters like election schedules. This principle of state sovereignty makes implementing ONOE in the U.S. extremely difficult.

States would likely resist federal attempts to impose a uniform election schedule, as it would infringe upon their constitutional right to independently manage elections. Political leaders from states, particularly those with strong party structures, would likely oppose ONOE, arguing that it violates their autonomy and could lead to a loss of political influence at the state level.

³⁵ R. Mehta, "Regional Parties and the Challenge of One Nation, One Election," *The Economic Times* (Oct. 18, 2018).

³⁶ A. Ghosh, "Constitutional Challenges to Simultaneous Elections in India," *Journal of Indian Constitutional Law* (2020).

Furthermore, state governments may feel that having control over election dates allows them to address specific local concerns and needs, which could be overshadowed by national electoral issues under a simultaneous election system.

Constitutional Barriers: Challenges in Altering the Separate Election Structure

The U.S. Constitution provides each state with the authority to determine how its elections are held, as outlined in Article I, Section 4. This gives states the power to establish the time, place, and manner of federal elections. To implement ONOE, the Constitution would need to be amended, which would require significant political and legal efforts. This process would be fraught with difficulty, given the constitutional principle of federalism and the strong traditions of states' rights in the U.S.

Amending the Constitution to allow for simultaneous federal and state elections would likely require a supermajority in both houses of Congress and ratification by a significant number of states. The contentious nature of the issue would make it challenging to secure the necessary political support for such an amendment, particularly in light of the political differences between states with varying party affiliations and electoral priorities.³⁷

Legal Implications: Potential Conflicts Between Federal and State Jurisdictions

A potential legal conflict could arise between federal and state jurisdictions if ONOE were implemented. States may argue that imposing simultaneous elections would infringe upon their sovereign authority to manage elections independently, leading to legal battles in the courts. The Supreme Court of the United States might be asked to interpret whether such a reform would violate the Tenth Amendment or other constitutional protections for state powers.

States may also argue that federal mandates regarding election scheduling conflict with their ability to address local political dynamics, particularly with respect to the timing of elections for state legislatures and local offices. These challenges could ultimately lead to litigation and delays in the implementation of ONOE.

Federal vs. State Priorities: How ONOE Might Infringe Upon State Governance and Independence

³⁷ U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 4; Tenth Amendment.

The implementation of ONOE would force a re-evaluation of the balance of power between federal and state governments, potentially infringing on state governance and independence. States with different political and economic priorities might find the uniform election cycle imposed by ONOE to be incompatible with their local needs. For example, some states may prioritize voting rights reforms, while others may focus on issues related to local governance, education, or infrastructure. Having a federal mandate for simultaneous elections could limit the ability of states to tailor their election schedules to address such needs.

Historical Precedents and Case Law Challenges to Federal Election Reforms

Historically, the U.S. has faced legal challenges related to election reforms. For example, *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) and *Bush v. Gore* (2000) involved significant legal debates about electoral procedures, voter representation, and the authority of state versus federal governments in managing elections. If ONOE were proposed, legal challenges similar to those in *Reynolds* and *Bush* could arise, particularly focusing on whether such a reform would be consistent with the principles of federalism and individual state rights.

3. Electoral System Differences: India vs. U.S.

Comparative Analysis of India's First-Past-the-Post System and the U.S.'s Electoral College System

India's first-past-the-post (FPTP) system and the U.S.'s Electoral College system present distinct challenges when it comes to implementing ONOE. In India, FPTP is used for electing both national and state legislatures. Under ONOE, synchronizing elections with the FPTP system would create logistical challenges in coordinating ballots and voting procedures across different levels of government.

In the U.S., the Electoral College system for presidential elections and the direct popular vote for Congressional elections creates another layer of complexity for ONOE. The Electoral College is a federal system in which states have a different number of electors based on their population. Implementing ONOE would require changes to the presidential election system and could create complications in voter turnout and representation across different states.

The Administrative and Public Implications of Implementing One Nation,

One Election (ONOE) in India and the United States

1. Administrative Challenges in India

Logistical Complexities of Holding Simultaneous Elections for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Local Bodies

In India, the concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) involves holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha (the national parliament), state legislative assemblies, and local bodies (municipal and panchayat elections). Logistically, such an operation would require a monumental coordination effort. The Election Commission of India (ECI), which is tasked with overseeing elections at all levels, would need to manage a vast array of activities across different regions of the country. Coordinating voting procedures, ballot papers, electronic voting machines (EVMs), and security forces would be a significant challenge. For instance, India has over 900 million eligible voters spread across more than 1.2 million polling stations, making the synchronization of multiple elections a colossal task.³⁸

Ensuring that voters are properly informed about the multiple elections happening at once is another challenge. Voters would need to understand the distinct roles and mandates of candidates running for different offices. The risk of voter confusion increases with multiple elections, especially in a diverse country like India, where political engagement is varied across states. Moreover, some states already face challenges with voter education programs and could struggle to ensure voters are aware of all the elections being held simultaneously.³⁹

Infrastructure Issues: The Role of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and Election Staff

The ECI plays a pivotal role in organizing elections and ensuring their smooth execution. However, the logistical demands of conducting simultaneous elections across multiple levels of government would place immense pressure on its infrastructure. The ECI would need to mobilize additional resources, including training thousands of election staff, ensuring the security of EVMs, and coordinating the transportation of election materials. The Election Commission's existing infrastructure, while effective for organizing national elections, may need significant upgrades to handle the complexity of simultaneous elections.

Election staff, especially those working in remote or conflict-prone areas, would face additional

³⁸ Law Commission of India, *Simultaneous Elections: The Case for One Nation, One Election*, Report No. 255, 2015.

³⁹ S. Subramanian, "One Nation, One Election: The Case for Simultaneous Elections," *The Hindu* (Nov. 28, 2018).

challenges in managing simultaneous voting processes for national, state, and local elections. This would require large-scale recruitment, training, and deployment of personnel, which could stretch the existing staff and logistical systems to their limits.

2. Administrative Challenges in the U.S.

State-Level Autonomy and the Role of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

In the United States, elections are highly decentralized, with state governments overseeing the conduct of elections. This decentralization would pose a significant challenge to implementing ONOE, as states would need to relinquish some of their autonomy over election scheduling. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) plays a supportive role in assisting states with the administration of elections, but it does not have the authority to mandate simultaneous elections across all levels of government. States would likely resist any federal attempt to impose a coordinated election schedule due to concerns over state rights and local control.

Moreover, individual states have differing election laws, processes, and voting technologies, further complicating the coordination of simultaneous elections. In some states, early voting and absentee ballots are common, while others may have strict voter identification laws or use different voting methods, such as paper ballots or electronic systems. Synchronizing these processes for federal and state elections would require significant modifications to state election laws and the adoption of uniform standards across the country, which could face political resistance from states that prefer to maintain their election systems.

Coordination Between Federal and State Authorities

Coordinating elections between federal and state authorities would require changes to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the administrative processes within both levels of government. The U.S. Constitution, under Article I, Section 4, allows states to determine the "Times, Places and Manner" of federal elections, giving them significant autonomy in scheduling elections. If ONOE were to be implemented, this flexibility would be constrained, and the federal government would need to work closely with state governments to ensure the simultaneous scheduling of federal and state elections.

Moreover, there would be practical challenges in aligning voting systems and election processes across the nation. The EAC would play a key role in coordinating the implementation of ONOE, but significant work would need to be done to standardize voting equipment and

procedures across all 50 states, each of which has different laws and practices related to election.⁴⁰ The federal government would likely need to provide substantial funding to ensure that states can meet the logistical demands of holding elections simultaneously, potentially resulting in contentious debates over budget allocations and the role of federal authority in election management.

3. Public Opinion and Voter Turnout

Impact of ONOE on Voter Behavior and Turnout in Both Countries

One of the most significant advantages often cited in favor of ONOE is the potential for increased voter turnout. Proponents argue that by aligning elections at different levels of government, voters will be more likely to participate in elections, as they would be voting for multiple offices in one go. The idea is that simultaneous elections could boost voter engagement by reducing political fatigue and encouraging participation across multiple levels of governance.

In India, the voter turnout in national elections is already relatively high, but state and local elections often see lower participation rates, particularly in remote or rural areas. ONOE could potentially address this disparity by encouraging people to vote for both national and state offices at the same time. However, there is also the concern that having too many elections on the same day could confuse voters or lead to fatigue, potentially resulting in lower overall turnout for certain elections.⁴¹

In the U.S., voter turnout is typically lower for non-presidential elections, especially for state and local races. Implementing ONOE could potentially increase overall voter turnout by encouraging voters to engage in federal, state, and local elections simultaneously. However, voter confusion could still be a concern, particularly in states with complicated ballot structures or multiple levels of elections happening at once.

The Political Culture and Engagement in India and the U.S. Concerning ONOE

India and the U.S. exhibit different political cultures when it comes to elections. India's multi-party system and coalition politics often make state elections contentious and closely tied to regional identities, making the idea of ONOE potentially difficult to implement without altering

⁴⁰ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, *State Election Administration*, available at <https://www.eac.gov>.

⁴¹ India Today, "Simultaneous Elections and Voter Fatigue," (July 19, 2018).

these dynamics. In contrast, U.S. elections are primarily characterized by the two-party system, where state elections often reflect broader national trends, making coordination slightly more feasible, but still contentious due to concerns over state autonomy.⁴²

Conclusion and Recommendations

The concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) has garnered significant attention in both India and the United States as a potential way to streamline the electoral process, reduce costs, and mitigate voter fatigue. However, the proposal raises complex constitutional, political, and legal challenges in both countries that need careful consideration.

In India, the federal structure plays a central role in the debate on ONOE. The division of powers between the Central Government and State Governments, enshrined in the Indian Constitution, means that any attempt to synchronize national and state elections must respect the autonomy of state legislatures. Articles such as 83 and 172 of the Constitution govern the terms of the Lok Sabha (lower house) and State Assemblies, respectively, and any change to these provisions would require a constitutional amendment. The practical challenges of aligning elections, particularly the risk of political centralization and the impact on regional parties, further complicate the proposal. However, proponents argue that simultaneous elections could reduce electoral costs, increase voter turnout, and enhance political stability.

In the United States, the federal structure and state sovereignty are even more entrenched, making synchronization of national and state elections particularly difficult. While federal elections are governed by provisions like Article I, Section 4, and the 17th Amendment, state elections are largely the purview of individual states, which have considerable autonomy. Political resistance from state governments and the complex web of federal and state responsibilities makes implementing ONOE in the U.S. a significant challenge. Additionally, the existing Electoral College system and the differences in state-level electoral structures pose hurdles in synchronizing elections without infringing upon state governance.

Policy Recommendations for India and the U.S.

1. Constitutional Amendments and Reforms:

⁴² D. K. Thompson, "Political Culture and Electoral Reform: Comparing India and the U.S.," *International Journal of Political Studies* (2019).

- India: To implement ONOE, India would need to amend key constitutional provisions, particularly Articles 83 and 172, which govern the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. These changes would require political consensus and a constitutional amendment to synchronize election cycles and terms across the national and state levels. Additionally, reforms to empower the Election Commission of India (ECI) to manage the logistics of simultaneous elections would be essential.
 - United States: For ONOE to be feasible in the U.S., there would likely need to be a constitutional amendment to allow for synchronized elections while respecting the federal structure. This might involve revising Article I, Section 4 and the 17th Amendment to allow the federal government to set a unified election schedule. Furthermore, reforms to the Electoral College system might be necessary to streamline the election process and ensure fair representation across states.
2. Political Strategies to Address State Resistance:
- India: Engaging in dialogue with regional parties to address their concerns about political centralization would be critical. The proposal for ONOE must recognize the importance of federalism and ensure that state autonomy is preserved. A gradual transition to ONOE, starting with pilot projects in select states, could help test the feasibility of simultaneous elections while reducing political resistance.
 - United States: Addressing the resistance from state governments would require a clear demonstration of the benefits of ONOE, including the reduction of electoral costs and the increase in voter turnout. Ensuring that state governments retain control over key aspects of state elections, such as candidate selection and voter eligibility, could be an effective way to gain support for the proposal.
3. International Cooperation and Legal Frameworks:
- Both India and the U.S. could benefit from examining international experiences with election synchronization and adopting best practices from countries like Germany and Canada, which have faced similar challenges. Additionally, international legal frameworks, such as those established by the United Nations and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), could guide the reform process and ensure compliance with international electoral standards.

Conclusion

Implementing One Nation, One Election presents significant constitutional, political, and legal challenges in both India and the U.S. While the potential benefits of ONOE, such as reduced costs and increased voter engagement, are substantial, the difficulties associated with federalism and state autonomy cannot be overlooked. To make ONOE feasible, both countries must undertake careful constitutional reforms and engage in political dialogue to address concerns about state rights and centralization. While the road to ONOE is fraught with challenges, it offers an opportunity for both nations to modernize their electoral processes and enhance the efficiency and inclusiveness of their democracies.

