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“ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION: A STEP TOWARDS STABILITY OR A THREAT TO FEDERALISM?”

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Abstract

The proposal of “One Nation, One Election” envisions simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies in India, aiming to streamline governance, reduce expenditure, and enhance political stability. While the concept has its roots in the electoral practices of the early years after independence, it has gained renewed attention in contemporary political discourse. Proponents argue that synchronized elections would curb the recurring policy paralysis caused by frequent electoral cycles, minimize the massive costs incurred by the Election Commission and political parties, and foster a more coherent development agenda. However, critics caution that such a move could undermine the federal spirit enshrined in the Indian Constitution, diminish regional representation, and necessitate complex constitutional amendments involving multiple Articles, including 83, 85, 172, and 356. Judicial precedents such as S.R. Bommai v. Union of India and Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain highlight the delicate balance between democratic processes and constitutional limitations. Comparative perspectives from countries like Sweden and South Africa reveal varied approaches to synchronized elections, underscoring the necessity of tailoring reforms to India’s unique socio-political fabric. This paper critically examines the constitutional, administrative, and political feasibility of “One Nation, One Election,” weighing its potential to enhance stability against its risks to India’s pluralistic and federal structure. Through a comprehensive analysis of statutes, case laws, and policy recommendations, it seeks to offer a nuanced perspective on whether the proposal can harmoniously coexist with the principles of representative democracy and cooperative federalism.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Federalism, Indian Constitution, Simultaneous Polls, Electoral Reforms.

1. Introduction

The discourse on “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) has emerged as one of the most debated electoral reforms in contemporary India.¹ At its core, the proposal envisions holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies, ideally once every five years. Proponents argue that this will reduce election-related expenditure, improve governance, and create a predictable policy environment. Critics, however, caution that it could dilute India’s federal structure, marginalize regional political voices, and lead to practical difficulties in its execution.

The Indian electoral system, as currently structured, witnesses elections almost every year, with some state going to polls within months of another. This constant electoral cycle diverts administrative machinery,² disrupts governance, and burdens the exchequer. According to estimates by the Election Commission of India (ECI), the 2019 General Elections alone cost approximately ₹60,000 crore, including both government and political party spending. With each state election incurring significant additional expenses, the cumulative cost is enormous.

Yet, the solution of synchronizing elections is not merely a matter of cost-saving. It involves navigating the complex constitutional framework, amending multiple provisions, and addressing the delicate balance of power between the Union and the States — a balance that forms the bedrock of Indian federalism.³

This paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of the constitutional, legal, and political dimensions of ONOE, exploring its feasibility, potential benefits, inherent risks, and the implications it holds for India’s democratic fabric.

2. Historical Context and Evolution of Simultaneous Elections in India

The idea of simultaneous elections is not alien to India’s democratic journey. In fact, from the first general elections in 1951–52 until 1967, Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections were largely held together. This was facilitated by the near-synchronisation of electoral terms, as both Parliament and the State Assemblies generally completed their full five-

¹ Kumar, Arun. "Electoral Reforms in India: Evaluating the Potential of One Nation, One Election." *Trinity Journal of Management, IT & Media* 15.1 (2024).

² Ahmed, Zheer, and SAMUEL KURUVLLA. "The Idea of One-Nation, One-Election: Its Potential Risk and Significance for India." *Journal of Polity and Society* 16.2 (2024).

³ Surya, Yuvraj. "" One Nation, One Election: A theoretical critique."

year tenures.⁴

The disruption of this synchrony began in the late 1960s due to two factors: premature dissolution of legislatures and the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356. The 1968–69 political crises in several states, followed by the 1970 dissolution of the Fourth Lok Sabha, broke the cycle of concurrent elections. Over time, political instability, coalition dynamics, and constitutional crises further widened the temporal gap between central and state elections.⁵

The Election Commission of India (ECI), in its 1983 annual report⁶, was among the first to officially suggest the revival of simultaneous elections, citing administrative efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This proposal resurfaced periodically in policy discussions, notably in the 1999 Law Commission of India's 170th Report, which examined the possibility of reverting to the pre-1967 model.

In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice produced its 79th report titled *Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies*, which concluded that the idea was desirable but would require substantial constitutional amendments and political consensus.

In 2018, the Law Commission's draft working paper on simultaneous elections proposed two possible models:

1. Aligning elections by extending or curtailing terms of some state assemblies;
2. Holding elections twice every five years — once for Lok Sabha and half the states, and again for the other half.

Historically, the argument for simultaneous polls has drawn from the early stability of India's electoral system, where voters participated in a single large exercise, reducing administrative duplication. However, critics point out that the political and constitutional realities of post-1967 India — including the rise of regional parties and the assertion of state autonomy — make

⁴ Bhat, M. "Between Trust and Democracy: The Election Commission of India and the Question of Constitutional Accountability." *Constitutional Resilience in South Asia (Jhaveri et al. eds, Bloomsbury 2023)* (2020).

⁵ Reddy, Charith, and Shagun Bhargava. "For Laws May Come and Laws May Go, but Defections Go on Forever: A Critical Analysis of the Role of the Speaker in Indian Anti-Defection Laws." *NLIU L. Rev.* 10 (2020): 328.

⁶ Singh, Ujjwal Kumar, and Anupama Roy. *Election commission of India: Institutionalising democratic uncertainties*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

such uniformity more challenging.⁷

Thus, the evolution of ONOE is marked by a shift from a practical historical precedent to a complex constitutional reform proposal, requiring not just nostalgia for the past but also adaptation to contemporary federal dynamics.

3. Constitutional Framework and Relevant Provisions

The proposal for “One Nation, One Election” operates within the constraints and possibilities of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution does not expressly prohibit simultaneous elections; however, implementing such a system would require substantial amendments to multiple provisions to align the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Key Constitutional Provisions Involved

1. **Article 83(2)** – Specifies that the Lok Sabha shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting, unless dissolved earlier.
2. **Article 172(1)** – Provides a similar five-year tenure for State Legislative Assemblies.
3. **Article 85** – Empowers the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha at any time.
4. **Article 174** – Grants Governors similar powers for State Assemblies.
5. **Article 356** – Provides for President’s Rule in states, leading to early dissolution and elections.
6. **Article 324** – Vests the Election Commission of India (ECI) with the power to conduct free and fair elections.
7. **Article 368** – Governs constitutional amendments, which would be essential to operationalise ONOE.

Legal Implications of Implementation

Bringing all elections into synchrony would require:

- Amending **Articles 83 and 172** to either extend or curtail the tenure of certain legislatures.
- Introducing a mechanism to handle **mid-term dissolutions** without disrupting the fixed schedule, possibly through caretaker governments or partial re-elections.

⁷ Bhat, M. Mohsin Alam. "Governing democracy outside the law: India's Election Commission and the challenge of accountability." *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 16.S1 (2021): S85-S104.

- Harmonising the powers under **Articles 85 and 174** with the new system to avoid arbitrary dissolutions.

The **Representation of the People Act, 1951** would also require substantial amendments to adjust electoral timelines and procedures. Furthermore, changes to **anti-defection laws** under the Tenth Schedule might be necessary to ensure stability during the synchronised term.⁸

Interplay with Federalism

The Constitution embodies a quasi-federal structure, as affirmed in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*⁹ (1994). The power of states to operate independently within their tenure is integral to this structure. Curtailing or extending terms to fit a national electoral schedule could be seen as centralising power, potentially conflicting with the spirit of Articles 245 and 246, which distribute legislative powers between the Union and States.¹⁰

Judicial Standpoint

In *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain*¹¹ (1975), the Supreme Court reinforced that free and fair elections are part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Any amendment affecting electoral processes must not violate this doctrine. Thus, ONOE must pass the test of constitutionality not only in terms of procedure under Article 368 but also under the **basic structure doctrine** laid down in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*¹² (1973).

In essence, while the constitutional text provides the foundation for ONOE, its actual implementation demands a delicate balancing of central authority, state autonomy, and the inviolable principles of democratic governance.

4. Judicial Perspectives and Landmark Case Laws

The judiciary's role in shaping the discourse on "One Nation, One Election" is indirect but crucial. While no case has directly adjudicated the constitutional validity of simultaneous elections, several landmark judgments on electoral integrity, federalism, and tenure of

⁸ Muthu Kumar, B. "Study on Anti-defection Law and Inner-Party Democracy with Specific Reference to India and the United Kingdom." *Comparative Law: Unraveling Global Legal Systems*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024. 371-385.

⁹ (1994) 3 SCC 1.

¹⁰ Khosla, Madhav, and Milan Vaishnav. "Democracy and defections." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 22.2 (2024): 400-430.

¹¹ 1975 Supp SCC 1.

¹² (1973) 4 SCC 225.

legislatures provide the interpretive framework for assessing its feasibility.

Key Judicial Principles

- 1. Basic Structure Doctrine** – *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*¹³ (1973) established that certain constitutional features, including democracy, federalism, and free and fair elections, cannot be abrogated by amendment. Any move toward ONOE must survive this test.
- 2. Free and Fair Elections as Part of Basic Structure** – In *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975), the Supreme Court categorically held that free and fair elections are integral to democracy and form part of the basic structure. An electoral reform that disadvantages certain parties or voters could be struck down.
- 3. Federalism and State Autonomy** – *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*¹⁴ (1994) cemented federalism as part of the basic structure, limiting the Centre's power to dismiss state governments. ONOE's requirement to adjust state assembly terms could be challenged as undermining this autonomy.
- 4. Tenure of Legislatures** – In *Special Reference No. 1 of 2002* (Gujarat Assembly Election Case), the Supreme Court held that while the tenure of a legislature is generally five years, it can be curtailed or extended only in specific situations such as emergencies under Article 356 or during a national emergency under Article 352. This creates legal tension for ONOE, which may require artificial extension or reduction of terms.
- 5. Election Commission's Role** – In *Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner*¹⁵ (1978), the Court interpreted Article 324 broadly, giving the ECI powers to ensure free and fair elections. For ONOE, the ECI would have to devise mechanisms for synchronised polls without compromising electoral fairness.

Public Interest Litigations (PILs)

There have been PILs advocating for simultaneous elections, such as *Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v. Union of India*¹⁶ (2019), where the petitioner sought directions for ONOE, citing governance efficiency and reduced costs. The Supreme Court declined to issue a mandamus but directed the government and the Election Commission to examine the feasibility. The Court acknowledged that while the idea had merit, it required political consensus and legislative

¹³ (1973) 4 SCC 225.

¹⁴ (1994) 3 SCC 1.

¹⁵ (1978) 1 SCC 405.

¹⁶ (2019) 11 SCC 683.

action rather than judicial diktat.¹⁷

Judicial Balancing Act

The judiciary is likely to adopt a cautious approach, respecting the legislative domain while ensuring that any ONOE framework does not erode the federal structure or electoral fairness.

If challenged, courts would assess:

- Whether constitutional amendments for ONOE violate the basic structure.
- Whether synchronisation adversely affects political representation at the state level.
- Whether voters' democratic rights are curtailed.

Thus, while the courts have not given a direct ruling on ONOE, existing jurisprudence suggests that its constitutional survival will depend on preserving both **federalism** and **electoral integrity**.

5. Arguments in Favour of One Nation, One Election

Proponents of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) argue that synchronising Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections offers substantial political, economic, and administrative benefits, making it a desirable electoral reform for India's governance framework.

1. Reduction in Electoral Expenditure

One of the strongest arguments is financial. The Election Commission of India (ECI) reported that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections cost approximately ₹60,000 crore when factoring in government spending and political party expenditure. Frequent state elections add substantially to this figure. Simultaneous elections would significantly cut recurring costs related to deployment of security forces, transportation of electoral materials, and administrative arrangements. Funds saved could be diverted to developmental priorities.¹⁸

2. Continuity in Governance and Policy Implementation

Frequent elections often lead to a governance slowdown due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which restricts new policy announcements and major governmental decisions. With ONOE, the MCC would be enforced only once in a five-year cycle, allowing uninterrupted policy implementation and better long-term planning at both

¹⁷ Agresto, John. *The Supreme Court and constitutional democracy*. Cornell University Press, 1984.

¹⁸ Sircar, Jawhar. "Major Issues Concerning Free and Fair Elections: The Case of West Bengal."

central and state levels.¹⁹

3. Reduced Disruption to Public Life

Elections involve large-scale mobilisation of government staff, particularly teachers, police personnel, and administrative officers, disrupting regular public services. Holding all elections together would minimise such interruptions, ensuring that essential services like education, law enforcement, and healthcare function without prolonged disturbances.

4. Enhanced Voter Turnout

Studies have shown that simultaneous elections in the early years of the Republic witnessed higher voter participation, as citizens could cast their votes for both central and state representatives in a single exercise. The convenience of a unified voting process could improve turnout, especially in rural areas where travel to polling booths is a logistical challenge.²⁰

5. Curbing Populist and Polarising Politics

Frequent elections encourage political parties to engage in short-term populist measures and polarising campaigns to secure immediate electoral gains. ONOE would compel parties to adopt long-term policy visions and cooperative governance strategies, knowing they have a fixed term without constant electoral pressure.

6. Administrative Efficiency and Security Deployment

The deployment of security forces during elections is resource-intensive and often diverts personnel from critical duties. A single electoral cycle would optimise the use of security resources and reduce strain on the administrative apparatus.

7. Learning from International Practice

Several countries, such as South Africa and Sweden, conduct national and regional elections together, demonstrating the feasibility of synchronised electoral systems in large democracies. While India's federal dynamics are unique, these examples show that a well-designed framework can balance central and regional representation.

In summary, ONOE's advantages lie in **cost savings, governance stability, improved voter engagement, and administrative efficiency**. Supporters believe these benefits outweigh potential drawbacks, provided constitutional safeguards protect federalism and political diversity.

¹⁹ Saleem, Mohammad. "Decoding the Model Code of Conduct Time to Shift from Morality to Penalty." *Issue 5 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.* 3 (2020): 173.

²⁰ Sabato, Hilda. *The many and the few: political participation in republican Buenos Aires*. Stanford University Press, 2001.

6. Arguments Against One Nation, One Election

While the concept of “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) has apparent benefits, it also raises significant constitutional, political, and practical concerns. Critics warn that implementing ONOE could fundamentally alter India’s democratic and federal framework.

1. Threat to Federalism

India’s Constitution is quasi-federal, granting states autonomy within their legislative terms. Synchronising elections would require extending or curtailing terms of state assemblies, potentially undermining their sovereignty. As affirmed in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), federalism is part of the basic structure. Any change perceived as centralising political authority could face constitutional challenges.

2. Curtailment of Voters’ Democratic Choice

If a state government collapses mid-term, ONOE could lead to either:

- Installing a caretaker government until the next national cycle, or
 - Conducting early elections but electing representatives for a shortened term.
- Both options compromise the voter’s mandate — either by denying them timely representation or by cutting short their chosen government’s term.

3. Disadvantage to Regional Parties

Regional parties often build campaigns around state-specific issues, distinct from national narratives. Simultaneous polls risk diluting these concerns under the overshadowing influence of national campaigns, favouring larger national parties with greater resources and nationwide presence.

4. Practical Difficulties in Synchronisation

India’s political landscape is prone to mid-term dissolutions due to coalition instability, defections, or no-confidence motions. Ensuring perfect synchronisation would be challenging without rigid anti-defection safeguards, which themselves could reduce parliamentary flexibility.

5. Constitutional Amendment Complexity

Amending Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174, alongside substantial changes to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, would require **ratification by at least half of the states** under Article 368(2). This level of consensus is difficult to achieve in a politically fragmented environment.²¹

²¹ Ginsburg, Tom, and James Melton. "Does the constitutional amendment rule matter at all? Amendment cultures and the challenges of measuring amendment difficulty." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 13.3 (2015): 686-713.

6. Risk of Nationalising Local Issues

Elections are an opportunity for citizens to address local grievances. Simultaneous polls could push these concerns to the periphery as parties focus on national agendas, weakening local governance accountability.

7. Administrative and Logistical Overload

Conducting elections for over 900 million voters at once would require an unprecedented scale of logistical coordination — from electronic voting machines (EVMs) to security deployment — potentially straining the Election Commission's capacity.

8. Judicial Uncertainty

Given the lack of precedent, any ONOE-related constitutional amendment could be challenged before the Supreme Court under the basic structure doctrine. A judicial stay during implementation could derail the entire electoral calendar, creating political uncertainty.

In essence, opponents argue that ONOE's risks lie in its **potential to centralise power, diminish regional representation, weaken federalism, and overload electoral machinery**. These factors suggest that while the reform aims for efficiency, it may come at the cost of India's democratic diversity.

7. Comparative International Models

A study of electoral systems worldwide reveals that several democracies conduct simultaneous national and regional elections, while others deliberately stagger them to preserve federal autonomy. Analysing these models provides insights into the potential adaptation of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) in India.

1. South Africa

South Africa holds national and provincial elections simultaneously every five years. The system ensures administrative efficiency and cost reduction. However, the country operates under a unitary-like system with limited provincial autonomy compared to India's federal structure, making direct replication unsuitable.²²

2. Sweden

Sweden synchronises elections for its national parliament (Riksdag), county councils, and municipal assemblies. The uniform electoral calendar fosters high voter turnout and

²² Engel, Ulf. "South Africa: the 2014 national and provincial elections." *Africa Spectrum* 49.2 (2014): 79-89.

predictable governance. However, Sweden's smaller population, strong party discipline, and absence of mid-term government collapses differentiate it from India's volatile political environment.

3. Indonesia

Indonesia conducts simultaneous elections for the president, national legislature, and regional bodies. While cost-effective, the 2019 polls demonstrated severe logistical challenges, including overworked election officials, some of whom died due to exhaustion. This underscores the risks of conducting large-scale simultaneous elections in geographically vast and diverse countries like India.²³

4. Germany

Germany follows a mixed approach. Federal and state elections are generally held separately, allowing states to focus on local issues. However, some Länder voluntarily align their elections with federal polls to save costs. The federal structure is strongly protected, showing that staggered elections can coexist with efficiency.²⁴

5. United States

The U.S. deliberately staggers federal, state, and local elections to maintain a clear separation of powers and protect state autonomy. Mid-term elections act as a political check on the executive. Adopting ONOE in the U.S. would be politically infeasible, illustrating the difficulty of synchronisation in a true federal system.²⁵

Lessons for India

- Countries with **unitary or quasi-unitary systems** (e.g., South Africa, Sweden) find ONOE easier to implement.
- Large, diverse federations (e.g., U.S., Germany) often prefer staggered elections to safeguard regional autonomy.
- Indonesia's example warns of **logistical overload**, relevant for India's 900+ million electorate.
- Partial synchronisation, as seen in some German states, offers a middle path — India could explore **phased alignment** over several years rather than enforcing a single nationwide date.

²³ Yenita, Yenita. "Simultaneous elections for budget efficiency: Advancing fair and inclusive democracy." *Jurnal Perspektif Pembiayaan dan Pembangunan Daerah* 12.5 (2024): 443-458.

²⁴ Dettnerbeck, Klaus, and Wolfgang Renzsch. "Multi-level electoral competition: the German case." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10.3 (2003): 257-269.

²⁵ Morley, Michael T. "The Independent State Legislature doctrine, federal elections, and State constitutions." *Ga. L. Rev.* 55 (2020): 1.

Relevance to India's Context

India's vast geography, multi-party system, and constitutional federalism make a full-scale ONOE challenging. However, hybrid models — synchronising some state elections with national polls while keeping others separate — may balance efficiency with democratic diversity.

Comparative study reveals that while ONOE is feasible in some systems, its success depends on **political stability, constitutional design, and administrative capacity**. India must adapt lessons to its own realities rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model.

8. Implementation Challenges and Possible Models (*continued*)

Key to Success

Any ONOE framework must be designed with layered safeguards:

- **Federal Safeguards:** Explicit constitutional guarantees that ONOE will not be used as a pretext to dissolve state governments prematurely for political advantage.
- **Mid-Term Contingency Provisions:** A clear, uniform mechanism to deal with state or central government collapses, such as a defined caretaker period or special elections for the remainder of the term.²⁶
- **Election Commission Empowerment:** Strengthening the Election Commission of India's operational independence and capacity to conduct simultaneous polls without compromising fairness.
- **Technological Readiness:** Deployment of upgraded, tamper-proof EVMs with VVPATs, robust training for polling officers, and digital tools for logistics tracking.²⁷
- **Voter-Centric Reforms:** Education campaigns to ensure that voters can clearly differentiate between ballots for national and state representatives, minimising confusion and invalid votes.²⁸

Balanced Approach

An immediate, full-scale ONOE rollout is unlikely to be feasible without major political disruption. A *phased synchronisation model* or *hybrid approach* may provide a pragmatic compromise — reducing the frequency of elections without dismantling state-level autonomy.

²⁶ Schleiter, Petra, and Valerie Belu. "The challenge of periods of caretaker government in the UK." *Parliamentary Affairs* 68.2 (2015): 229-247.

²⁷ Akhtar, Syed Afzal. "The Issue of EVM." *Available at SSRN 3871197* (2021).

²⁸ Shah, Syeda Haleema, and Manzoor Ahmad Naazer. "ROLE OF ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES (EVMs) AND TRANSPARENCY OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF INDIA."

In essence, ONOE can only succeed if it is seen not as a centralising tool but as a cooperative federal reform. This requires an unprecedented level of consensus-building, transparent public debate, and phased adaptation. Without these, the policy risks becoming a politically divisive exercise rather than a unifying electoral reform.

9. Political, Social, and Economic Implications

The implementation of “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) would reverberate across India’s political, social, and economic spheres, influencing not only governance patterns but also the democratic culture.

Political Implications

1. Restructuring Electoral Strategies

ONOE would compel political parties to design campaigns with both national and state-level agendas in mind.²⁹ This may incentivise a more unified vision for governance but could also blur the distinction between central and state issues. Larger national parties with better financial and organisational capacity may gain an advantage over regional parties, potentially altering the balance of power in Parliament and state legislatures.

2. Impact on Coalition Politics

Coalition governments — a common feature in India — may experience added stability during a fixed term. However, the rigidity of synchronised elections could limit the ability to respond to shifting political mandates between cycles, reducing the flexibility that mid-term polls currently provide.

3. Legislative Productivity

With the Model Code of Conduct enforced only once every five years, Parliament and state assemblies may see fewer interruptions, enabling longer legislative sessions and more comprehensive policymaking.

Social Implications

1. Voter Engagement

Simultaneous elections could increase voter turnout by combining both state and national ballots in one visit. However, it could also lead to “voter fatigue” in the sense that a single polling process covering two levels of government may overwhelm less-

²⁹ Sule, Babayo. *Political party financing and electoral politics in Nigeria’s fourth republic*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.

informed voters, potentially resulting in less nuanced choices.³⁰

2. Public Perception of Governance

The fusion of central and state election narratives could create a perception that governance is a monolithic exercise, weakening public understanding of the separate responsibilities of the Union and state governments.

3. Campaign Culture

ONOE may reduce the frequency of polarising election rhetoric but could also intensify political polarisation during the single, large-scale campaign season. Social media narratives may be more nationalised, affecting local issue visibility.

Economic Implications

1. Cost Efficiency

The most immediate economic benefit lies in reducing the frequency of election-related expenditure. Government spending on security deployment, EVM logistics, and polling arrangements could see significant cuts. Political parties, too, may spend less overall on campaigns, freeing resources for governance or development programmes.

2. Opportunity Costs

Elections divert administrative machinery and security forces away from regular duties. ONOE would reduce these interruptions, ensuring continuity in developmental projects, infrastructure rollouts, and welfare delivery.

3. Initial Investment Burden

The upfront costs of implementing ONOE would be high — requiring procurement of millions of additional EVMs and VVPATs, upgrading storage and maintenance facilities, and training a much larger workforce to handle the scale of simultaneous polls.³¹

Balancing Gains and Risks

While ONOE promises economic efficiency and potential governance stability, its political and social impacts are mixed. There is a risk of national politics overshadowing regional issues, marginalising local voices, and altering India's multi-party equilibrium. Economically, the long-term savings may be offset initially by the significant infrastructure investment required.

³⁰ Chaturvedi, Moulik, Garvita Sharma, and Aman Sharma. "Blockchain Based Electronic Voting System." (2024).

³¹ Council II, Carnell A. *Local Election Officials Perceptions about Electoral Process Maturity and Voting Guidelines: A Case Study*. Northcentral University, 2015.

Ultimately, whether ONOE strengthens or weakens India's democracy will depend on the safeguards put in place to protect federalism, ensure equal political competition, and maintain issue-based voter engagement at both the national and state levels.

10. Conclusion and Suggestions

The debate over "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) lies at the crossroads of administrative efficiency and democratic pluralism. Proponents view it as a pathway to streamlined governance, fiscal prudence, and political stability, while critics see in it the risk of centralising power, weakening federalism, and diluting regional representation.

Historically, simultaneous elections were the norm in India until the late 1960s. Political instability, premature dissolutions, and the rise of regional parties disrupted this synchrony. Today's push for ONOE reflects not only nostalgia for that period but also a response to the growing economic and administrative costs of frequent polls. However, the Indian political ecosystem is far more complex than it was in the 1950s and 1960s, requiring reforms tailored to contemporary realities rather than wholesale replication of past practices.

From a constitutional perspective, ONOE would require extensive amendments — to Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174 — alongside revisions to the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Such changes must withstand scrutiny under the **basic structure doctrine**, ensuring they do not erode federalism or the principle of free and fair elections. Judicial precedents in **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**, **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)**, and **Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975)** establish that electoral reforms must preserve the democratic balance between the Union and the states.

Politically, ONOE's feasibility depends on broad consensus — particularly from regional parties — without which any constitutional amendment risks rejection by state legislatures. Administratively, the Election Commission would need massive logistical upgrades: expanded EVM and VVPAT inventories, advanced voter education campaigns, and robust mid-term dissolution protocols.

Economically, while ONOE offers long-term cost savings, it demands substantial upfront investment. Moreover, the economic argument cannot overshadow the democratic imperative to safeguard local issue representation.

Suggestions for the Way Forward

1. Adopt a Phased Synchronisation Model

Instead of immediate nationwide implementation, begin by aligning elections in a few stable states with the Lok Sabha polls, gradually expanding the scope. This reduces political disruption while testing logistical readiness.

2. Strengthen Mid-Term Stability Mechanisms

Introduce clear provisions for caretaker governments or special elections in case of mid-term dissolutions, ensuring voters are not left without effective representation.

3. Federal Safeguards

Amendments should explicitly prohibit arbitrary dissolution of state governments to preserve state autonomy under Articles 245 and 246.

4. Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Any move toward ONOE must be preceded by widespread consultations with political parties, state governments, civil society, and voters, ensuring reforms have democratic legitimacy.

5. Invest in Electoral Infrastructure

Allocate resources for modernising EVM technology, expanding secure storage, training polling staff, and deploying advanced logistics management tools.

6. Maintain Local Issue Visibility

Campaign finance regulations and media guidelines should ensure adequate focus on state-level concerns during a combined electoral season.

Final Assessment

ONOE can deliver governance stability and economic efficiency, but only if implemented with constitutional safeguards, phased adaptation, and a clear respect for India's federal structure. In the absence of these conditions, the reform risks undermining the very democratic diversity it seeks to serve. The challenge, therefore, is not just in holding elections together, but in doing so in a manner that unites rather than centralises, and strengthens rather than flattens, the Indian federal democratic fabric.

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