

Harmonising Democracy: Exploring the Feasibility and Implications of One Nation One Election in India

Dr. THOMAS FELDMAN*

Mukherjee Fellows - Policy, Politics and Governance Foundation (PPGF)

Email- pushyamitra.joshi@nation1rstpolicy.org

diksha.bohra@nation1rstpolicy.org

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Abstract

The momentum surrounding the concept of 'One Nation, One Election' in Indian political discourse underscores the proposal for simultaneous parliamentary and state legislative elections. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted dimensions of simultaneous elections in India, addressing both the obstacles and benefits inherent in such an approach. Drawing upon insights from diverse organisations and their recommendations regarding 'One Nation, One Election,' this study explores the reform's objective of synchronising national and state election cycles to mitigate frequent electoral processes. By scrutinising potential cost reductions stemming from synchronised polls, encompassing savings in election administration, security measures, and interruptions to governance, this research underscores the fiscal advantages for governments at various levels. Furthermore, it investigates the potential ramifications of simultaneous elections on political campaigning strategies, voter behaviour patterns, and governance dynamics. In sum, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on electoral reforms in India by offering nuanced perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with embracing simultaneous elections.

I. Background

India's electoral cycle, spanning across 28 states and union territories, has witnessed elections almost every year in different parts of the country. Due to the Model Code of Conduct and campaigning, this constant state of electioneering adversely affects developmental projects and governance initiatives. Recognising this challenge, the concept of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) advocates for the simultaneous conduct of Lok Sabha and all Vidhan Sabha (state assemblies) elections once every five years, excluding panchayat, municipal, and by-elections.

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Pralhad Joshi, announced on September 1, 2023, the formation of a committee to explore the feasibility of a 'One Nation One Election.' This idea has been supported by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Union government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and has been under consideration for some time. However, parties like the Indian National Congress along with some regional parties opposed the idea of 'One Nation, One Election.'

The call for One Nation, One Election is not novel. It has been advocated since 1983 by various entities, including the Election Commission of India, the Law Commission, NITI Aayog, and the Parliamentary Standing Committee. The current committee, chaired by former president Ram Nath Kovind, marks the fourth attempt to assess the viability of simultaneous elections.

The tradition of simultaneous elections prevailed in India until 1967, with Lok Sabha and State Assemblies being elected concurrently in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, disruptions caused by the premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, as well as the early dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 1970, followed by fresh elections in 1971, shattered this cycle.

II. Simultaneous Elections and the Proposal for One Nation One Election

A. History of Simultaneous Elections

1. Simultaneous elections involve aligning the electoral schedules of the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's Parliament) and State Legislative Assemblies, ensuring they occur concurrently. This synchronisation excludes elections for local bodies (Panchayati Raj and Municipal elections).
2. In India, simultaneous elections to both the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha were successfully conducted in 1951-52, 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, maintaining this synchronised schedule became challenging thereafter, leading to a divergence in the timing of elections to the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. As a result, efforts to realign the election schedules for both bodies have not yet been successful.
3. In its 1983 annual report, the Law Commission advocated for the development of a system to facilitate simultaneous elections.
4. Similarly, the Law Commission's 170th report in 1999 emphasised the importance of reverting to the practice of holding Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections simultaneously.
5. The 79th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2015 also supported the concept of simultaneous elections, a sentiment echoed by a 2017 NITI Aayog paper.

B. Incidences of Early Elections

1. The initial general elections to both the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies were held concurrently in 1951-52, marking the beginning of simultaneous elections. This synchronised approach persisted for the next three consecutive general elections.
2. In July 1959, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru recommended to President Rajendra Prasad the dismissal of the Kerala government, headed by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, which was the 1st elected communist government globally. Throughout the 1960s, various states including Kerala, Haryana, Bihar, Nagaland, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal witnessed the collapse of unstable governments, leading to the necessity of holding midterm elections.
3. In 1970, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha 15 months earlier than scheduled and announced fresh elections for 1971. This move effectively uncoupled the state assembly elections from the general elections.
4. Following this, the term of the 1st Lok Sabha was prolonged until 1977 under Article 352. Subsequently, the eighth, tenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Lok Sabha completed their full five-year terms. However, the sixth, seventh, ninth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth Lok Sabha were dissolved prematurely.
5. Due to premature dissolutions and extensions of terms for both the Lok Sabha and various state legislative assemblies, the pattern of separate elections for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies has persisted for the past 53 years. Consequently, the cycle of simultaneous elections has been disrupted.

C. References from Other Countries

1. In South Africa, elections for both national and provincial legislatures occur simultaneously and are held every five years. Municipal elections, on the other hand, take place two years after the national and provincial elections.
2. In Sweden, elections for the National Legislature (Riksdag), provincial legislatures/county councils (Landsting), and local bodies/municipal assemblies (Kommunfullmaktige) are all held on a fixed date, which is the second Sunday in September, every four years.
3. In Britain, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act of 2011 was enacted to establish a greater sense of stability and predictability for the British Parliament and its duration. According to this act, the 1st elections were scheduled for the 7th of May, with subsequent elections set to take place on the 1st Thursday of May every fifth year thereafter.

D. The Concept of 'One Nation One Election'

1. The concept of 'one nation one election' has been discussed and examined by various entities in the past, including the Election Commission, the Law Commission, and parliamentary committees. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has consistently included it in its election manifesto since 1984.

2. In 1983, the Election Commission (EC) initially proposed exploring the feasibility of simultaneous elections. Furthermore, in its 170th report in 1999, the Law Commission also recommended holding simultaneous elections for both the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies.
3. In 2015, a parliamentary standing committee produced a report on the feasibility of simultaneous polls, emphasising potential advantages such as cost reduction and enhanced administrative efficiency.
4. In 2017, the government think tank NITI Aayog published a paper on simultaneous elections. It pointed out potential cost savings and administrative benefits while also noting the need to address federalism and democratic safeguards.

Year	Timeline
1952	First General Elections in India
1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967	India voted simultaneously for the Centre and states.
1959	The cycle was broken in Kerala when Jawaharlal Nehru's government used Article 35G of the Constitution to dismiss the Communist E M S Namboodiripad's government.
1960	Kerala voted for a new five-year Assembly.
1983	The Election Commission of India proposed 'One Nation, One Election' in a report for the first time to reduce election frequency and costs.
1999	The 170 th Law Commission, under the leadership of B.P. Jeevan Reddy, also advocated simultaneous elections.
2003	In 2003, Hon. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took up the matter with Congress president Sonia Gandhi.
2010	LK Advani raised the matter of 'One Nation, One Election' with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
2015	The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, headed by E M Sudarsana Natchiappan, recommended simultaneous elections in its report titled 'Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies'.
2017	NITI Aayog released a paper titled 'Simultaneous Elections' by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai proposed holding at least 14 assembly polls with the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, citing the

Year	Timeline
	significant savings to the exchequer. But it recognised the criticism that simultaneous assembly and Lok Sabha polls could lead to a similar voting pattern.
2018	In August 2018, the Law Commission of India, chaired by Justice B.S. Chauhan released a draft working paper outlining the legal and constitutional aspects of simultaneous elections.
2019	On August 15, 2019, Hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji emphasised the need for debate and discussion on this concept during his Independence Day speech. Later in the year BJP leader Vinay Sahasrabuddhe Ji, a former Rajya Sabha MP, was tasked by the party's leadership with raising awareness about the concept of one nation, one election and evaluating the idea.
2020	The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice, led by Anand Sharma, examined the issue, seeking input from various stakeholders.
2023	On September 1, 2023, the central government constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Former President Shri Ram Nath Kovind along with Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, former Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Finance Commission Chairman NK Singh, former Lok Sabha Secretary General Subhash C Kashyap, Senior Advocate Harish Salve and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari to study the electoral process in India. Member of Parliament from the INC Party, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury refused to join.
2024	In its manifesto, 'Sankalp Patra, ' the BJP party has vowed to implement 'One Nation, One Election'.

E. Current Election cycles in India for both Houses

1. The Election Commission will conduct elections to form the 18th Lok Sabha between April 2024 and June 2024. Additionally, elections for the State Assemblies of four states—Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim—will be held simultaneously. Subsequently, elections for other state assemblies will take place accordingly:
 - a. **October 2024 to November 2024:** Haryana, Maharashtra
 - b. **January 2025 to February 2025:** Jharkhand, Delhi, Bihar
 - c. **May 2026 to June 2026:** Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry
 - d. **March 2027 to May 2027:** Goa, Manipur, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.
2. From 2024-2G, in addition to the Lok Sabha elections, polls for approximately 14 State Assemblies will take place. Sometimes, elections for certain state assemblies are announced within a month of concluding elections for others. When factoring in elections for the third tier of government, such as Panchayati Raj

institutions and Municipal Bodies in rural and urban areas, as well as bye-elections, the electoral cycles can significantly disrupt administrative and developmental activities in the poll-bound states/regions and the broader governance process.

III. Simultaneous Elections

A. The Positives

1. Simultaneous elections are expected to cut down on the significant costs incurred from holding separate elections each year. According to the Election Commission of India, conducting elections for both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies currently amounts to approximately Rs. 4500 crores. For instance, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections cost the exchequer Rs. 3,870 crores, while the Bihar elections in 2015 alone cost the government Rs. 200 crores.
2. Elections lead to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in the areas where polls are held, halting the development programs and activities of both the Union and State Governments in those regions. The imposition of MCC for extended periods due to frequent elections disrupts normal governance processes.
3. Frequent elections disrupt regular public life and essential services. However, if simultaneous elections are conducted, this disruption would be confined to a predetermined period, mitigating its impact on normal functioning.
4. Elections tend to exacerbate societal divisions by emphasising caste, religion, and communal issues, as candidates feel compelled to engage in political rhetoric to secure electoral advantages.
5. Simultaneous elections would alleviate the strain on essential manpower, which is frequently deployed for extended periods during election duties. For instance, during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, which coincided with state assembly elections in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, the process spanned ten phases. This required the deployment of 1077 in situ companies and 1349 mobile companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF).
6. Holding elections at specific periods could potentially reduce horse trading by elected representatives, which remains a concern even with the anti-defection laws in place. Holding elections at fixed intervals can make it harder for them to switch parties or form alliances for personal gain.
7. Frequent elections lead to governments making policy decisions to woo the electorate at every election. Even though this cannot be stopped fully, the frequency with which the governments have to announce freebies will come down. Frequent elections have led to a situation where many state governments are broke. With fewer elections, their finances could be in better shape.

B. The Negatives

1. Operational Feasibility: Implementing simultaneous elections presents significant challenges, as it would require adjusting the terms of existing legislatures to synchronise their election dates with those of the rest of the country. This could involve arbitrarily curtailing or extending their terms, which would raise concerns about undermining democracy and federalism.

2. The Law Commission in its 2018 report on simultaneous elections has suggested an alternative: States could be categorised based on their proximity to the next general elections, with one round of State Assembly polls coinciding with the next Lok Sabha election, followed by another round for the remaining states 30 months later. However, this approach still doesn't guarantee the elimination of midterm polls.
3. The challenge of deploying security forces and officials across 7,00,000 polling stations situated in diverse geographic and climatic conditions simultaneously is daunting. This difficulty often leads to elections being conducted in multiple phases and on different dates, even within the same state.
4. **Impact on Voter Behaviour:** Certain political parties contend that simultaneous elections could influence voter behaviour, potentially leading voters to prioritise national issues even in state elections. This could result in larger national parties winning both state and Lok Sabha elections, thereby marginalising regional parties.
5. State and national elections typically revolve around distinct sets of issues. In simultaneous elections, voters may prioritise one set of problems over the other in ways they might not have done if the elections were held separately.
- G. Facing the electorate more frequently than once every five years enhances the accountability of politicians and keeps them vigilant. Additionally, elections create numerous job opportunities, thereby stimulating the economy at the grassroots level.

C. Challenges associated with 'One Nation One Election'

1. **Feasibility:** Articles 83(2) and 172 of the constitution stipulate that the tenure of Lok Sabha and state assemblies respectively will last for five years unless dissolved earlier, and there can be circumstances as in Article 35G, wherein assemblies can be dissolved earlier. Therefore, 'One Nation One Election' plan raises serious questions: What would happen if the Central or state government collapses mid-tenure? Would elections be held again in every state or will the President's rule be imposed?
2. **Legal Challenges:** The Law Commission headed by Justice B. S. Chauhan reported that simultaneous elections are not feasible within the existing framework of the Constitution. It said that the Constitution, the **Representation of the People Act 1951**, and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies would require appropriate amendments to conduct simultaneous polls. The commission also recommended receiving ratification from at least 50% of the States which may be a challenging task. Further, simultaneous polls require constitutional amendments by a two-thirds majority in Parliament and ratification by at least half the states. **Article 83** (relating to the duration of Houses of Parliament), **Article 85** (relating to dissolution of the Lok Sabha by the President), **Article 172** (relating to the duration of the state legislatures), **Article 174** (relating to dissolution of the state legislatures) and **Article 356** (relating to the imposition of the President's Rule in states) will need amendments - a challenging pathway given opposition presence across several states.
3. **Against the idea of Federalism:** The idea of 'One Nation One Election' does not square with the concept of 'federalism' as it is established on the notion that the entire nation is 'one' contradicting the content of Article 1 which envisages India as a 'Union of States.'

4. **Logistical Challenges:** It will pose logistical challenges in terms of the availability and security of electronic voting machines, personnel and other resources. EC may face difficulties in managing such a massive exercise.

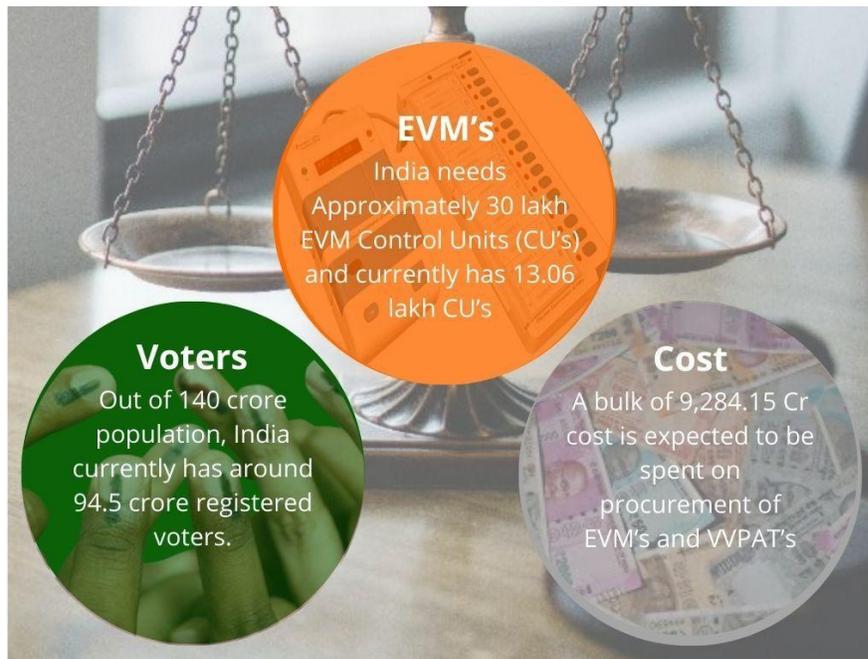


Image: Logistical Challenges for 'One Nation, One Election'

5. **Overshadowing the Regional Interests:** The present form of recurrent elections can be seen as beneficial in a democracy as it allows voters to have their voices heard more frequently. As the underlying issues of national and state polls are different, the present framework prevents the blending of issues, ensuring greater accountability. A 2015 study by the think tank IDFC found “a 77% chance that the winning political party or alliance will win both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in that state when held simultaneously” undermining the distinctive demands and needs of each state. The dominance of national issues over that of state issues and vice-versa is potentially harmful to the federal structure of the Indian polity. As such a situation mandates strangulating the scope of regional parties, this defeats the very purpose of strengthening and deepening the democracy to its roots.

IV. Reports Backing One Nation One Election

The Election Commission of India has consistently expressed its support for a simultaneous poll plan. It first stated it in its 1983 annual report and backed it again as recently as in a 2022 meeting with the 22nd Law Commission.

A. Law Commission Report (1999)

The Commission, then headed by former Justice B.P Jeevan Reddy, in its 170th Report on Reform of Electoral Laws (1999), had cautioned that such elections cannot be held overnight. It recommended advancing some state elections and making adjustments in the schedule of others, a possible constitutional amendment for extending or curtailing the term of one or more legislative assemblies. Also, it suggested simultaneous motion of

no-confidence in the incumbent government as well as confidence in alternative government, among others. Further, the report also advocated putting an end to the 'cycle of election every year'. It said a separate election to a legislative assembly should be '**an exception, not the rule.**'

B. Parliamentary Standing Committee report (2015)

The department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievance, Law and Justice, Rajya Sabha, in its 79th report in 2015, also studied the possibility of holding simultaneous elections. Titled '**Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies,**' the report was tabled in parliament in December 2015. The report took into account the findings of the 1999 Law Commission report. It recommended holding simultaneous elections in two phases, with elections of some assemblies at the midterm of the Lok Sabha and the remaining at the end of the tenure of the Lok Sabha. It also recommended that early elections to the Lok Sabha or other state assemblies can take place only if either of the two conditions are met:

1. A motion for an early General Election is agreed upon either by at least two-thirds of the whole House (including vacant seats);
2. If a no-confidence motion is passed and no alternative government is confirmed by the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assemblies within fourteen days by means.

C. NITI Aayog Report (2018)

In February 2018, Minister of State for Law and Justice P.P. Chaudhary said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha that the government had received the recommendations of the NITI Aayog in a paper titled "**Analysis of Simultaneous Elections.**" Chaudhary said that the NITI Aayog report had taken into account the Standing Committee's report and worked out a possible framework whereby elections to Lok Sabha and state assemblies could be held simultaneously in two phases. "The paper envisages holding simultaneous elections to the Assemblies of about one-half of the States along with Lok Sabha General Elections due in April-May 2019 and the rest of the States in the mid-way, i.e. October-November 2021, entailing extension or curtailment of the duration of the Assemblies whenever required," he said. "However, this would require amendments to the relevant provisions of the Constitution." The government has not taken any decision on the recommendations of any of these committee reports. It has now come up with a fourth committee to look into the subject of 'One Nation One Election.'

V. Constitutional and Statutory Provisions Relevant to the Issues

A. Terms of House of People and State Legislative Assemblies

1. Article 83(2) of the Constitution provides for the tenure of both the Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha). Article 83(2) provides for a term of five years for Lok Sabha from the date of its first sitting unless dissolved earlier. Similar provisions under Article 172(1) provide for a five-year tenure for the State Legislative Assembly from the date of its first sitting. Further, the proviso to Article 83(2) of the Constitution provides that when a proclamation of emergency is in operation, the term of the House may be extended for a period not exceeding one year at a time by Parliament by law and not extending in any case

beyond a period of six months after the Proclamation has ceased to operate. A similar provision also exists for the State Legislative Assembly under the provision to Article 172 (1) of the Constitution.

2. Article 172(1) provides for a similar tenure for the State Legislative Assembly from the date of its 1st sitting. The House's tenure cannot be extended beyond 5 years except in emergencies.

B. Pre-mature dissolution of Lok Sabha or State Assemblies

1. Article 85 (2)(b) of the constitution of India provides the President with the power to dissolve Lok Sabha. A similar provision for dissolution of State Legislative Assemblies by the Governor of State is provided under Article 174 (2)(b). Further, regarding the premature dissolution of a State Legislative Assembly, Article 35G is also relevant. If a State is under President's rule as provided under Article 35G, the Legislative Assembly of the said state may be prematurely dissolved by the president. While there have been several cases of the proclamation of President's Rule in states under Article 35G in the past, premature dissolution of State Assemblies has been made significantly stringent in the light of the Anti-defection Act 1985 and the judgement by the Constitutional Bench of Supreme Court of India in S.R. Bommai v. Union of India.
2. As per Article 75(3), "The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the People." Article 164(2) provides the Council of Ministers a similar responsibility to the State Legislative Assembly. The Executive, therefore, derives its legitimacy from the legislature and remains in power as long as it enjoys the confidence of the latter. A no-confidence motion can be passed if either Lok Sabha or the State Legislative Assembly loses confidence in the Council of Ministers. It can fall at any time with the passage of a non-confidence motion in that House.

C. Responsibility for the conduct of elections of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies

Besides Article 324, to facilitate the conduct of elections by the ECI, the Parliament has enacted the Representation of People Act, 1950 and Representation of People Act, 1951, and the Rules framed thereunder, viz., Registration of Electoral Rules, 1960 and Conduct of Election Rules, 1961.

D. The Representation of People Act, 1951

1. Section 14 of the Act provides for the notification of General Elections to the Lok Sabha.
2. Section 15(2) of the Act provides a similar provision for the State Legislatures. This means that the ECI is empowered to notify elections to both Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies six months before the end of the normal terms of these Houses. This would not delay their term in any way.

VI. Ram Nath Kovind Panel on One Nation One Election

The High-level Committee, commonly referred to as the Kovind panel due to its chairman, former President Ram Nath Kovind, was established in September 2023 to examine the issue. The panel's members included Home Minister Amit Shah, former Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Lok Sabha Secretary General Subhash C Kashyap, former chairman of the 15th Finance Commission N K Singh, Senior Advocate Harish Salve, and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. Additionally, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal was a special invitee to the committee.

The committee contacted 62 political parties, receiving responses from 47 of them. Among these, 32 favoured holding simultaneous elections, while 15 were against the idea. To inform their decision, the committee extensively

researched election procedures in various nations, such as South Africa, Sweden, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Belgium. Consequently, they proposed conducting Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections concurrently in India. Additionally, the committee gathered feedback from citizens, receiving a total of 21,558 responses after soliciting public input.

The Kovind panel convened G5 meetings at the Jodhpur Officers' Hostel in New Delhi, with its 1st meeting on March 10. Throughout its deliberations, the committee referenced numerous reports and studies and engaged with a diverse array of stakeholders on the matter.

- A. Amending the constitution:** The proposal suggests amending the constitution in two phases to facilitate simultaneous elections. In the 1st phase, simultaneous elections would be conducted for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. This step would require something other than ratification by the states for the constitutional amendments. In the second phase, elections for municipalities and panchayats would be synchronised with elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, ensuring that local body elections occur within 100 days of the elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. This phase would necessitate ratification by at least half of the states.
- B. Single Electoral Roll and Election ID:** To streamline the preparation of a unified electoral roll and electoral photo identity cards for all three tiers of government, an amendment to the constitution is proposed. This amendment would empower the Election Commission of India to prepare a single electoral roll and election ID in consultation with the State Election Commissions. Ratification by at least half of the states would be necessary to enact these amendments.
- C. In case of a hung house, etc:** In case of a hung house, a no-confidence motion, or similar circumstances, a proposal suggests conducting a fresh election to constitute the new Lok Sabha or State Assembly for the remaining term of the House.
- D. Meeting Logistics Requirements:** The committee has proposed that to address logistical needs, the Election Commission of India, in collaboration with the State Election Commissions, should pre-plan and estimate requirements for manpower, polling personnel, security forces, EVMs/VVPATs, and other necessities. This proactive approach aims to ensure the smooth conduct of free and fair simultaneous elections across all three tiers of government.
- E. Stakeholder Consultation:**
1. To illustrate the extent of consultations, the panel noted that it received input from 47 political parties, of which 32 expressed support for simultaneous elections. Likewise, out of the 21,558 responses gathered from citizens across the country, 80 per cent expressed support for simultaneous polls.
 2. The Committee extended invitations to the former Chief Justice of India and 12 former Chief Justices of major High Courts, as well as four former Chief Election Commissioners of India and eight State Election Commissioners. Additionally, the Chairman of the Law Commission of India was invited to provide their perspectives. Business organisations such as the CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM, and eminent economists were also invited to present their views on the economic implications of asynchronous elections.
 3. The panel highlighted that corporate entities emphasised the economic necessity of simultaneous elections, warning that asynchronous elections could contribute to inflation and hinder economic growth.

Suggestions from these bodies underscored that sporadic elections negatively impact economic growth, the quality of public spending, educational outcomes, and overall social harmony.

4. A go-through of BJP supporting One Nation One Election:

The concept of One Nation, One Election gained traction under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019. Particularly during his second term, the BJP has advocated for synchronised elections as a means to enhance fairness in India's electoral process.

- a. 1984: In the BJP manifesto of 1984, the party pledged to combat four 'evils' that threatened the fairness of elections: money power, ministerial power, media power, and muscle power. They also outlined an 11-point blueprint for electoral reforms.
- b. 2004, 2009: The BJP's 2004 manifesto was similar to its 1984 manifesto. The 2009 manifesto focused on only one electoral reform promise: simultaneous elections.
- c. 2014: The 2014 manifesto reiterated the promise of evolving a method of holding Assembly and Lok Sabha elections simultaneously. It promised to revise the expenditure limits realistically.
- d. 2019: The 2019 BJP manifesto promised simultaneous elections and a single voters' list for all elections "to ensure that every citizen gets the right to exercise his/her franchise for all public bodies and to avoid confusion created by multiple voter lists."
- e. 2024: In its manifesto 'Sankalp Patra' for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP party has vowed the implementation of 'One Nation, One Election'. Prime Minister Modi said, "We have set up a committee to examine the issues conducting simultaneous elections and will work towards implementing the recommendations."

VII. Recommendations of the Law Commission suggested in the 2018 report

The Law Commission of India, under the chairmanship of Justice B.S. Chauhan, unveiled its draft report on Simultaneous Elections on August 30, 2018. This report scrutinised legal and constitutional aspects concerning the implementation of Simultaneous Elections. Among the key draft recommendations were:

- A. The Commission noted that Simultaneous Elections cannot be held within the existing framework of the Constitution. However, Simultaneous Elections may be conducted in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies through appropriate amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act 1951, and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. The commission also suggested that at least 50% of the states should ratify the constitutional amendments.
- B. The no-confidence motion may be replaced with a constructive vote of no-confidence through amendments in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies' rules of business.
- C. The anti-defection law could be modified to prevent deadlock in the event of a hung Assembly or Parliament.
- D. The statutory limit of six months for issuing notifications of general elections could be extended as a one-time measure to provide flexibility.

VIII. Suggestions of the Election Commission of India (2016)

- A. The timeframe for a General election to form the new house should be determined in a manner that allows the Lok Sabha to begin its term on the predetermined date.
- B. To prevent premature dissolution, it could be stipulated that any 'no-confidence motion' against the incumbent government must also include a 'confidence motion' in favour of a government led by a specified individual as the prospective Prime Minister. Voting for both motions would then occur simultaneously.
- C. Despite the above arrangements. If there is a situation where dissolution of the Lok Sabha cannot be avoided, then the following options can be considered:
 1. If the remaining term of the Lok Sabha is not long (period to be specified), there could be a provision for the President to administer the country, with the assistance and advice of a Council of Ministers appointed by the President, until the next house is constituted at the designated time.
 2. If the remaining term is long (period to be specified), then a new election could be conducted, and the term of the house in such circumstances should extend for the remainder of the original term.
- D. In the case of Legislative Assemblies, in the event of a 'no-confidence motion,' it should be obligatory to simultaneously introduce a 'confidence motion' for the establishment of an alternative government. This practice would typically prevent premature dissolution of Assemblies. However, if an existing Legislative Assembly must be dissolved prematurely due to unavoidable reasons, provisions should be made for the Governor to administer the state with the assistance and advice of a Council of Ministers appointed by the Governor. Alternatively, the imposition of the President's Rule could be considered until the expiration of the term.
- E. If, following a general election, none of the parties can establish a government and another general election is required, the term of the house following the fresh election should only extend for the remainder of the original term. Similarly, if the government must resign for any reason and no alternative is feasible, provisions could be contemplated for a fresh election if the remaining term is significantly long (to be specified). In other cases, governance by the Governor or the imposition of the President's Rule could be considered.
- F. Two windows of one-and-a-half months each could be designated for conducting all bye-elections that arise in a given year. Alternatively, if the proposals for establishing uniform and synchronised terms for the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies are deemed impractical, an alternative suggestion would be to consolidate all elections due in a year into a specific period. Under this arrangement, the advantage would be that general elections for various Legislative Assemblies falling due in a year would be conducted simultaneously rather than at different times throughout the year.

IX. Observations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee

- A. The Committee acknowledged that achieving simultaneous elections every five years might not be immediately feasible, but it could be gradually phased in. However, this would require adjusting the tenure of certain State Legislative Assemblies either by curtailment or extension. It's worth noting that extending the term of the Legislature is only permissible under a proclamation of emergency. However, elections to the Lok Sabha/State

Legislative Assemblies can be conducted up to six months before the expiration of their terms, as per Sections 14 and 15 of the Representation of People Act, 1951.

- B. The committee observed that elections to the Lok Sabha and four State Legislative Assemblies, namely Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim, are slated for April-June 2024. Additionally, elections to the Haryana and Maharashtra State Legislative Assemblies are scheduled within six months of the General Elections 2024. While efforts have been made to minimise discrepancies, there will still be several states where elections cannot be synchronised with the Lok Sabha. The objective is to decrease the frequency of elections.
- C. The committee recommended an alternative and feasible approach to conducting simultaneous elections, which involves holding elections in two phases. In the envisaged plan, the 1st phase could take place in November 201G. Elections for certain State Legislative Assemblies, whose terms end within G months to one year from the designated election date, would be grouped. This may require extending the terms of some assemblies while curbing others. Utilising Sections 14 and 15 of the Representation of People Act, 1951, the Election Commission can announce elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies six months before the conclusion of their natural terms, respectively. This provision could facilitate elections without the need for extending the terms of certain assemblies. Similarly, the second phase of elections will be conducted in 2024, alongside the General Elections for the Lok Sabha.
- D. The committee, acknowledging the provisions of the Fixed Term Parliament Act, 2011 of the United Kingdom, suggested that an early election for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies could only be conducted before the completion of their term under the following conditions:
1. If a motion for an early General Election is approved by at least two-thirds of the entire House (including vacant seats),
 2. If a motion of no confidence is passed, and within fourteen days, no alternative government is confirmed by the Lok Sabha/State Legislative Assemblies through a confidence motion.
- E. The committee additionally proposed that bye-elections for all vacant seats in a given year should be held collectively on a predetermined date or within a specific timeframe.
- F. The committee recognised that obtaining consensus from all political parties might pose challenges in certain states of the country. Nevertheless, considering the broader context of economic development and the implementation of election promises without the hindrance caused by the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct due to frequent elections, the feasibility of holding simultaneous elections deserves thorough consideration and deliberation by all political parties.
- G. While holding simultaneous elections may not be achievable in 2024 or even within the next decade, it's encouraging to have confidence that a solution will eventually be reached to mitigate the frequency of elections. Such a development would alleviate the burden on both the populace and government machinery from the strain of frequent electoral processes. This is particularly crucial for India's competitiveness on the global stage in terms of implementing its developmental agenda in real-time, showcasing its resilience as a vibrant democratic nation.

X. Recommendations

- A. With 5-7 elections annually, achieving synchronisation between State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha without temporarily extending or shortening State Legislative Assemblies becomes nearly unfeasible. As the Lok Sabha elections encompass the entire country, they naturally serve as the optimal starting point for initiating a simultaneous electoral cycle.
- B. To facilitate the implementation of the 'One Nation One Election' initiative, a Two-Phase approach could be adopted for the inaugural cycle. With 11 states scheduled for assembly elections between December 2028 and December 2029, a pragmatic solution involves placing under President's rule the states whose assembly tenure concluded in December or January 2028. Subsequently, their elections can be synchronised with the General elections. Additionally, in states like Maharashtra and Haryana, where the BJP currently holds power, the assembly elections could be advanced and held concurrently with the General elections.
- C. During the initial phase, General Elections could be coordinated alongside the Assembly elections of 11 states, specifically Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim, Haryana, and Maharashtra.
- D. In the second phase, the remaining states, including Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Nagaland, would need to adjust their assembly terms, with Karnataka being the sole exception requiring a 12-month extension. While such adjustments may initially raise concerns among stakeholders due to the perceived inconvenience, the transformative potential of this initiative necessitates overcoming these challenges for the greater benefit of the nation.
- E. Following these adjustments, if the remaining state assemblies' tenure is less than three years leading up to the general elections, they can be governed under the President's rule. This strategic approach sets the stage for the full implementation of 'One Nation, One Election' to commence from the General Elections of 2029.
- F. The principle of 'One Nation, One Election' should ideally become the standard practice. However, alternative methods can be explored and implemented as necessary in the early dissolution of assemblies.
- G. In the event of state assembly dissolution due to unforeseen circumstances, elections should indeed be promptly conducted, and the tenure of the new assembly should align with the remaining period instead of the standard five years. For instance, if Maharashtra's assembly election coincides with the general elections in 2029 and dissolution occurs in 2031, the subsequent elections should be held, and the tenure of the new assembly should span from 2031 to 2034 rather than the typical 2031 to 2036 timeframe.
- H. The concept of simultaneous elections is undoubtedly timely. Yet, given its implications on the federal structure of the Constitution, it necessitates thorough discussion and debate across the political spectrum to address the concerns of regional parties. This inclusive dialogue will facilitate a smoother implementation of the idea across the nation.

XI. Annexure I: Various Parties on ‘One Nation One Election’

National Parties	
Favour	Against
BJP	Congress
National People’s Party	Aam Aadmi Party
	CPM
	Bahujan Samaj

No Response
Shiromani Akali Dal (Simranjit Singh Mann)
Telugu Desam Party
Sikkim Democratic Front
Revolutionary Socialist Party
Rashtriya Loktantrik Party
Rashtriya Janata Dal
Nationalist Congress Party
Kerala Congress
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
Jammu and Kashmir National Conference
Indian Union Muslim League
Bharat Rashtra Samiti

State Parties	
Favour	Against
AIADMK	All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)
All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU)	All India Trinamool Congress
Apna Dal (Soney Lal)	AIMIM
Asom Gana Parishad	CPI
BJD	DMK
JD(U)	National People's Front
LJP(R)	Samajwadi Party
Mizo National Front	MDMK
National Democratic Progressive Party	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi
Shiv Sena	CPI-ML

XII. Annexure II: Reactions

Name of Party	Comment
Bharatiya Janata Party	The Law Commission in 1983 and the Election Commission in 1999 recommended that elections to the Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha should be held simultaneously in the country. In our manifesto also we mentioned that it will be our endeavour to hold simultaneous elections in the country. In the year 201G, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the same thing in Lok Sabha. Similarly, in the year 2017, NITI Aayog also recommended simultaneous elections in the country... It is in the interest of the country.
Indian National Congress	The idea of 'one nation, one election' is an attack on the Indian Union and all its states.
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	The idea of simultaneous elections goes against the basic tenets of the Constitution.
Biju Janata Dal	Odisha has been holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly since 2004. So we are welcoming 'One Nation, One Election.'
Tamil Manila Congress	We support the idea of simultaneous elections to Parliament and state assemblies because this will reduce expenditure and allow optimum utilisation of security forces.
All India Trinamool Congress	Simultaneous elections could lead to an 'Emergency-like situation.' 'One Nation, One Election' will be impractical and not feasible because there will be a drain of public wealth.
Communist Party of India	'One Nation, One Election' is merely a wish of the Prime Minister which they intend to impose on the entire nation. Simultaneous elections will be unconstitutional.
Telugu Desam Party	The proposal of simultaneous elections may be good but requires detailed study, and investigation, and planning besides poll consensus. The move will hurt the basic structure of the Constitution, as there is no guarantee to Indian politics and the multi-party system.

Aam Aadmi Party	Regional parties will have a disadvantage as they will have fewer financial resources and it will be difficult for them to compete with National Parties.
Janata Dal (Secular)	The regional issues "will be put on backseat" if the polls are held simultaneously.
Shivsena	The country is in continuous election mode owing to elections of some kind taking place in at least 5-7 states in a given calendar year. The government officials and paramilitary forces are diverted to perform election duties rather than the duties for which they are meant for. Initially, India witnessed simultaneous elections till 1967. The practice got disrupted thereafter.
Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party	If simultaneous elections are implemented, the same will help in keeping a check over the activities of political parties, where they try to lure voters which has a negative impact on the public interest.

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