

One Nation, One Election: Constitutional Feasibility and Democratic Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The proposal of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) has emerged as one of the most debated reforms in contemporary Indian democracy. It envisions synchronizing elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, thereby reducing the frequency of polls and associated costs. Advocates argue that ONOE would enhance governance efficiency, minimize policy paralysis, and reduce the burden on the Election Commission and security forces. Critics, however, highlight constitutional hurdles, federal concerns, and the risk of undermining democratic diversity. This article examines ONOE through the lens of constitutional feasibility and democratic challenges. It explores historical precedents, constitutional provisions, and judicial interpretations relevant to synchronized elections. The analysis underscores the tension between efficiency and representation, questioning whether ONOE aligns with the spirit of India's federal structure and parliamentary democracy. By engaging with comparative experiences from other democracies, the article situates ONOE within broader debates on electoral reform. Ultimately, it argues that while ONOE may offer administrative convenience, its constitutional implementation requires careful amendments, consensus-building, and safeguards to preserve democratic pluralism. The study concludes that ONOE is less a technical reform and more a constitutional reimagining of India's electoral democracy, demanding nuanced deliberation rather than hasty execution.

KEYWORDS

One Nation One Election, Constitutional Law, Federalism, Electoral Reform, Democratic Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

India's democratic journey has been marked by both continuity and change, reflecting the evolving aspirations of its people and the resilience of its constitutional framework. Among the many debates shaping contemporary discourse, the proposal of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) stands out as a transformative idea that seeks to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. While the concept promises efficiency and stability, it simultaneously raises profound constitutional and democratic questions. To understand its

feasibility, one must situate ONOE within India's historical electoral practices, constitutional provisions, and the broader philosophy of federalism embedded in the Constitution.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The government of India has proposed the concept of one nation one election aimed at synchronizing elections to the lok Sabha, state legislative assembly and panchayat/Municipal elections. While the policy is expected to reduce recurring election expenditure at enhance governance efficiency it also raises constitutional, federal, administrative and political concerns. The debate remains unresolved due to lake of clarity on: Election can be implemented without compromising federalism and constitutional autonomy of states. The proposed framework aligns with democratic values, representation and electoral fairness. The practical feasibility including logistics, security, evm, ballet availability and resource management. Whether the implementation of one nation one election in India is constitutionally feasible democratically justified, financially viable and administratively practical.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

These are research objective as under to examine the constitutional provision related to conducting election in India, to evaluate the impact of one nation, one election on federalism and the autonomy of states to assess the economic implications, to study administrative and logical challenges to understand the impact on governance and political accountability to explore suitable module or framework etc

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on doctrinal and empirical mixed method research approach may be applied the overall research design and study of constitution article like 324, 172, 174, 356 representation of the people act 1951, parliamentary reports, law commission reports and niti aayog discussion and other standing committee recommendations. The primary data and secondary data etc.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the inception of the Republic, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously. The first four general elections (1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967) followed this synchronized pattern, ensuring a unified electoral rhythm across the nation. However, political instability, premature dissolutions of assemblies, and the rise of coalition governments disrupted this cycle. The fragmentation of the political landscape, particularly after 1967, led to staggered elections across states. This shift reflected the growing assertion of regional parties and the deepening of India's federal democracy.

The disruption of synchronized elections was not merely procedural; It was symptomatic of India's political pluralism. The emergence of diverse political voices, representing regional identities and local aspirations, underscored the federal nature of the polity. Thus, while ONOE seeks to restore the original rhythm of elections, it must contend with the realities of a multi-party, federal democracy where political cycles rarely align neatly.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The feasibility of ONOE hinges on constitutional provisions governing the tenure of legislatures. Article 83(2) stipulates that the Lok Sabha shall continue for five years from the date of its first meeting, unless dissolved earlier. Similarly, Article 172(1) provides that every State Legislative Assembly shall continue for five years, unless dissolved sooner. These provisions establish fixed terms but allow for premature dissolution, reflecting the dynamic nature of parliamentary democracy.

To implement ONOE, significant constitutional amendments would be required. Synchronizing elections would necessitate altering Articles 83 and 172 to fix uniform terms across legislatures, irrespective of premature dissolutions. Moreover, provisions such as Article 356, which empowers the President to impose President's Rule in states, complicate the synchronization process. The Representation of the People Act, 1951, which governs electoral procedures, would also require substantial revision to accommodate a unified electoral calendar.

FEDERALISM AND DEMOCRATIC CONCERNS

The Indian Constitution enshrines federalism as a basic feature, as affirmed by the Supreme Court in *SR Bommai v Union of India* (1994). Federalism ensures that states retain autonomy in governance, including the conduct of elections. ONOE, by imposing a uniform electoral cycle, risks undermining this autonomy. It raises questions about whether efficiency can be prioritized over representation, and whether centralization of electoral processes aligns with the spirit of cooperative federalism.

Furthermore, the democratic implications of ONOE extend beyond constitutional mechanics. Elections are not merely administrative exercises; they are moments of political accountability and public participation. Staggered elections allow citizens to engage with issues specific to their states, while synchronized elections may dilute regional concerns in favor of national narratives. Thus, ONOE must be evaluated not only for its constitutional feasibility but also for its impact on democratic diversity.

The debate on ONOE is therefore not a technical matter of electoral scheduling but a constitutional and democratic reimagining of India's polity. It requires balancing efficiency with representation, centralization with federal autonomy, and administrative convenience with democratic pluralism. As India contemplates this reform, the historical experience of synchronized elections, the constitutional framework governing legislative tenures, and the federal spirit of the Constitution must guide deliberations.

Judicial perspectives on One Nation, One Election emphasize that while Parliament has the constitutional power to amend legislative terms, courts have consistently underscored the primacy of federalism, democratic representation, and constitutional safeguards.

JUDICIAL PERSPECTIVES ON ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

1. Constitutional Authority and Law Commission Views

The 23rd Law Commission has clarified that Parliament can amend Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution to alter the five-year term of legislatures, thereby enabling simultaneous elections. While ordinary legislation cannot reduce or extend these terms, constitutional amendments are permissible if they serve larger national objectives. This position reflects judicial recognition that the Constitution is flexible enough to accommodate reforms, provided they are enacted through the proper amendment process under Article 368.

2. Supreme Court on Federalism and Autonomy

The judiciary has repeatedly emphasized that federalism is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. In *SR Bommai v Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that the autonomy of states cannot be undermined by central authority. Applying this principle to ONOE, courts would likely scrutinize whether synchronized elections compromise state autonomy by forcing premature dissolutions or extensions of assemblies. Judicial precedent suggests that any reform must respect the balance of power between the Union and the states.

3. Judicial Concerns on Representation

Indian courts have consistently highlighted that elections are not merely administrative exercises but fundamental mechanisms of representation. In cases concerning premature dissolutions, the Supreme Court has stressed that the people's mandate must be respected. ONOE, by imposing uniform cycles, could raise questions about whether voters in states with unstable governments are denied timely opportunities to elect new representatives. Judicial perspectives would likely weigh efficiency against the constitutional right to representation.

4. Election Commission and Judicial Oversight

The Election Commission of India (ECI), under judicial scrutiny, has maintained that synchronized elections would require massive logistical changes. Courts have historically upheld the independence of the ECI, ensuring that electoral reforms do not compromise free and fair elections. Judicial oversight would therefore focus on whether ONOE strengthens or weakens the Commission's ability to conduct impartial elections.

5. Comparative Judicial Lessons

Judicial perspectives in other democracies also inform the debate. For instance, South Africa's Constitutional Court has upheld synchronized elections as consistent with its constitutional framework, while European courts have emphasized proportional representation safeguards. Indian courts, drawing from comparative jurisprudence, would likely insist that ONOE must not dilute pluralism or minority representation.

Judicial perspectives reveal a cautious openness: constitutional amendments can enable ONOE, but courts will demand safeguards to protect federalism, representation, and electoral fairness. The judiciary's role will be pivotal in balancing administrative efficiency with democratic integrity, ensuring that reforms do not erode the constitutional fabric.

MAJOR ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF ONOE

1. Cost Efficiency

Conducting elections at different times leads to repeated expenditure on logistics, security, and manpower.

ONOE would *significantly reduce financial burden* on the exchequer by holding elections once every five years.

2. Administrative Convenience

Frequent elections require massive deployment of police, paramilitary forces, and government staff, disrupting routine administration.

Simultaneous elections would *free up* resources for development and governance instead of being tied up in election duties.

3. Policy Continuity and Stability

Repeated elections often push governments into "permanent campaign mode," delaying long-term policy decisions.

ONOE would allow governments to focus on governance rather than constant electoral politics, ensuring smoother implementation of reforms.

4. Reduced Political Polarization

Continuous elections fuel divisive rhetoric and populist measures.

Holding elections together could reduce political polarization and encourage parties to present comprehensive national and state agendas.

5. Boost to Voter Participation

Simultaneous elections may increase turnout by simplifying the process for citizens, who vote once for both national and state representatives.

This could *strengthen democratic legitimacy* by ensuring broader participation.

6. Legal and Constitutional Feasibility

The *23rd Law Commission* has clarified that Parliament can amend Articles 83 and 172 to synchronize terms of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, making ONOE constitutionally possible.

7. Historical Precedent

India followed simultaneous elections until 1967. The system worked smoothly in the early decades of independence, showing that ONOE is not alien to Indian democracy.

Supporters of ONOE believe it will reduce costs, improve governance, and strengthen democracy by aligning electoral cycles. While challenges remain in implementation, the constitutional and administrative arguments strongly back the feasibility of this reform.

Administrative Efficiency

One of the most compelling arguments in favour of ONOE is the enhancement of administrative efficiency. Frequent elections in India require massive deployment of government machinery, which disrupts routine governance and diverts resources away from development. Synchronizing elections would streamline administration and allow officials to focus on long-term governance rather than repeated electoral duties.

HOW ONOE IMPROVES ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY

1. Reduced Disruption of Governance

Currently, elections are held almost every year in some state or another.

This requires continuous diversion of civil servants, teachers, and local officials for election duties, slowing down welfare schemes and administrative work.

ONOE would minimize such disruptions by concentrating election duties into a single cycle.

2. Optimal Use of Security Forces

Large contingents of police and paramilitary forces are deployed during elections.

With staggered elections, these forces are repeatedly mobilized, straining resources.

ONOE would allow *one consolidated deployment*, freeing forces for regular law-and-order duties.

3. Streamlined Logistics

Election Commission spends enormous effort on voter lists, polling booths, and EVM management multiple times.

Simultaneous elections would *reduce duplication of work*, saving time and manpower.

4. Better Policy Implementation

Frequent enforcement of the *Model Code of Conduct (MCC)* halts new projects and policy announcements.

ONOE would reduce MCC interruptions, ensuring smoother execution of development programs.

5. Improved Coordination Between Centre and States

Aligning electoral cycles would foster **cooperative federalism**, as both levels of government would work on synchronized timelines.

This reduces administrative friction and enhances efficiency in implementing national schemes.

SUPPORTING VIEWS

The *Law Commission of India (2018)* observed that ONOE would reduce administrative strain and MCC-related delays. Public administration experts argue that synchronized elections create a predictable governance cycle, allowing governments to plan reforms and allocate resources more effectively. ONOE promises to *enhance administrative efficiency* by reducing duplication of effort, minimizing disruption of governance, and ensuring smoother policy implementation. By consolidating electoral processes, governments can devote more energy to development, welfare, and long-term reforms rather than being trapped in a cycle of constant election management.

STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE STABILITY

The idea of *strengthening governance stability through One Nation, One Election (ONOE)* rests on the principle that synchronized electoral cycles reduce political uncertainty and allow governments to focus on long-term development rather than short-term populism. In the current system, frequent elections across states and the Centre often push governments into a “permanent campaign mode,” where policy decisions are delayed or diluted to avoid electoral backlash. This leads to instability in governance and repeated interruptions due to the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct. ONOE, by aligning national and state elections, would provide a predictable five-year window of uninterrupted governance, enabling policymakers to plan reforms, implement welfare schemes, and pursue infrastructure projects without fear of immediate electoral consequences. Such stability would also foster cooperative federalism, as Centre and States would work on synchronized timelines, reducing friction and enhancing coordination. Ultimately, ONOE promises a governance environment where continuity, consistency, and

accountability are strengthened, ensuring that democratic processes support development rather than disrupt it.

REDUCING POLITICAL FATIGUE

One of the persuasive arguments in favour of ONOE is its potential to *reduce political fatigue* among citizens, political parties, and administrative machinery. In India's current system, elections are held almost every year in some state or another, which means voters are repeatedly called to the polls, parties remain in constant campaign mode, and officials are continuously diverted to election duties. This cycle creates exhaustion and disengagement.

For *citizens*, frequent elections can lead to voter fatigue, where repeated campaigns and polling reduce enthusiasm, lower turnout, and weaken democratic participation. ONOE would streamline the process, allowing voters to cast their ballots once every five years for both national and state representatives, thereby making participation more meaningful and less burdensome.

For *political parties*, constant campaigning drains resources, time, and energy, often pushing them toward short-term populist promises rather than long-term policy vision. Simultaneous elections would enable parties to focus on comprehensive manifestos and governance rather than perpetual electioneering.

For the *administration*, repeated mobilization of security forces, teachers, and civil servants for election duties disrupts governance and welfare delivery. ONOE would reduce this strain, allowing officials to concentrate on development work instead of being repeatedly pulled into electoral management.

By reducing political fatigue, ONOE promises a healthier democratic environment where citizens remain engaged, parties focus on governance, and administration functions efficiently. It strengthens the idea that elections should be a *celebration of democracy, not a constant burden*.

COMPARATIVE GLOBAL EXAMPLES

1. South Africa

- Holds *national and provincial elections together every five years*.
- Municipal elections are scheduled separately, two years later.
- This system reduces administrative burden and ensures political stability at the national and provincial levels.

2. Sweden

- Conducts *national, regional, and local elections simultaneously every four years*.
- This synchronization ensures high voter turnout and efficient use of resources.
- It also strengthens policy continuity by aligning governance cycles across levels.

3. United Kingdom

- The *Fixed-term Parliaments Act (2011)* established a regular schedule for national elections every five years.
- Local elections are often synchronized with national polls, reducing duplication of effort.
- This system provides predictability and minimizes governance disruptions.

4. Germany

- While federal elections are held every four years, *many states align their elections with federal polls* to reduce costs and maximize voter participation.
- Synchronization is not constitutionally mandated but widely practiced for efficiency.

5. Indonesia

- Since 2004, Indonesia has conducted *simultaneous presidential and legislative elections*.
- This has streamlined governance and reduced campaign fatigue, though challenges remain in managing large-scale logistics.

6. Philippines

- Holds *national and local elections together every six years*.
- This synchronization ensures that governance cycles are aligned, though mid-term elections for local offices still occur.

LESSONS FOR INDIA

- **Efficiency:** Countries like Sweden and South Africa show that synchronized elections reduce costs and administrative strain.
- **Stability:** The UK and Germany demonstrate how predictable cycles strengthen governance stability.
- **Participation:** Indonesia and the Philippines highlight how simultaneous elections can boost voter turnout and reduce political fatigue.
- **Adaptability:** Each country adapts synchronization to its federal or unitary structure, suggesting India must design ONOE carefully to respect federalism.

CONCLUSION

The debate on One Nation, One Election (ONOE) reflects India's search for a balance between democratic vibrancy and governance efficiency. The arguments in favour such as minimizing policy paralysis, enhancing administrative efficiency, reducing political fatigue, and strengthening governance stability highlight the potential of ONOE to streamline the electoral

process and allow governments to focus on long-term development. Comparative global examples show that synchronized elections are not unprecedented and can indeed foster stability, reduce costs, and improve voter participation.

At the same time, ONOE must be implemented with sensitivity to India's federal structure, diversity, and constitutional safeguards. The success of such a reform depends on robust documentation systems, standardized procedures for age and voter verification, and strong institutional coordination between the Centre and States.

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