

One Nation-One Election: Possibilities and Challenges in India

Sandeep,

Research Scholar,
Department of Political Science,
Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Motihari, Bihar

Abstract

The need for having synchronised elections to the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies has been debated for long time. In popular sense of the term, simultaneous elections entail elections to all the three tiers of the Constitutional institutions House of the People (Lok Sabha), State Assemblies (Vidhan Sabha) and Local bodies taking place in a synchronised manner. What this effectively means is that a voter vote for electing members to all the tiers of the Government on the same day. To oversee the election of the President and Vice President, Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha, legislative committee, state assembly, district assembly, and panchayat, the electoral commission is required. The majority of the committee's time was spent counting the ballots, checking the voter list, and dividing the constituencies. In our constitution, the nation established a quasi-federal structure. India is not a completely federal nation like the United States or a united nation like the United Kingdom. Both the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha require elections for members. One Nation-One Election in India possibilities and challenges are discussed in the current paper.

KEYWORDS: - Democracy, Election, Lok Sabha, Legislative Assembly, Election Commission, policy, Constitutional.

Introduction

All recent government actions in India appear to be based on the One Nation-One Election principle. The GST is based on the principle of "One Nation, One Tax." The "One Nation-One Curriculum" construct is part of the new education policy. The idea of "One Nation-One Election" advocates holding the Lok Sabha and all state legislature elections at the same time. In India, the idea of holding simultaneous elections is not new. After gaining independence and putting the constitution into effect, the first election, which took place in 1951–1952, was held simultaneously. Elections were held simultaneous during 1951-1952 till 1967-1968 afterwards it got disrupted. The concept end when fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved early. The ideal condition requires that an honest and upright person who is public spirited and want to serve the people, should be able contest and get elected as people's representative.

Until now several Electoral bodies conduct elections under *Article 324* of the Constitution mandates the Election Commission of India to supervise, direct and control elections to the offices of President, Vice President, both house of the Parliament, State Legislative Council and Assemblies. *Article 73 and 74* facilitate State Election Commission (SEC), these bodies conduct elections at State level in every 5 years. The idea of One Nation-One Election in India is a proposed electoral reform advocated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Indian democracy has its federal structure where centre and state governments enjoy their rights and responsibilities. Parliament and state assemblies make a balance between autocracy and democracy, centralization and decentralization.¹

What is a One Nation-One Election

In India, elections for the state legislature and the Lok Sabha are held on the same day once every five years. This allows voters in a particular constituency to cast their votes for both the state legislature and the Lok Sabha on the same day This does not entail that the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections must take place on the same day nationwide. "One nation-one election" is the concept at its core. Even though these were hampered by the quick dissolution of state assemblies, India famously held concurrent election until 1967. Elections for local governments like panchayats and municipalities cannot be held concurrently because of their high number and presence on the state list.²

BRIEF HISTORY OF ONE NATION-ONE ELECTION IN INDIA

Since the Indian government has already tried it out multiple times, simultaneous elections are not a novel idea. India held its first ever simultaneous elections for the State Assembly and Lok Sabha in 1951–1952, two years after gaining independence. Up until 1967, it was the standard. But later, issues with the electoral system simultaneously emerged as a result of the dissolution of

¹ Uikey, border. Pathak Bhavana, Hashmi Zuber, Srivastava Shalabh (2017). Scope of one nation one election a feed forward Study on people's perception International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR) ISSN: 2319-7064 Index Copernicus Value (2016) 79.57 Impact Factor (2017) 7.296.

² Kumar, Santhosh. (November 24th 2021) One Nation-One Election – Is it a good idea www.iasexpress.net/simultaneous-elections/#:~:text=One%20Nation%20One%20Election%20%20is%20it%20a,crucial%20as%20one%20nation%2C%20one%20election%20is%20needed.

various legislative assemblies in 1968 and 1969. In actuality, the Lok Sabha was disbanded in 1970. Consequently, because the elections for the state assembly and the parliamentary elections were different

The Election Commission's annual report for 1983 advocated going back to simultaneous polling once more. In its 1999 report, the Law Committee likewise made a similar comment. This subject has been the subject of numerous discussions and arguments during the last ten years. In reality, the Bhartiya Janata Party's programme for the 2014 Lok Sabha election supported simultaneous elections as a system. In 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi once more raised the possibility of restoring this idea to India and Indian politics. Instead, in January of that year, Niti Aayog created a working paper on the subject. The Law Commission of India declared in a working paper from April 2018 that at least "five constitutional suggestions" are required in order to reinstate this system. The decision to hold the polls concurrently has not yet been made, though.³

Amendments Required in case of Simultaneous Elections

The policy of simultaneous elections is not possible in the current framework of the constitution, so we require some essential amendments in the constitution to implement this policy:

Article 83 of the Constitution: Duration of Houses of the Parliament, we are required to fix the time and the tenure of the house of people.

Article 85 of the Constitution: Sessions of the Parliament, prorogation and dissolution, there must be some guidelines for the dissolution of session; it must not be done on vague and ambiguous reasons.

Article 172 of the Constitution: Duration of the state legislature.

Article 174 of the Constitution: Sessions of the Parliament, prorogation, and dissolution.⁴

How to implement One Nation-One Elections in India

As mentioned previously, the table below briefly illustrates the NITI Aayog model on how simultaneous elections can be implemented.

Relevant Issues	Proposed solutions
Possible date of implementing simultaneous elections	May start implementation from 18 th Lok Sabha elections (2024)
How to synchronize terms of State Assemblies	Proposed two-phase elections as the most feasible solution. Phase I (Lok Sabha + 14 States) in May-Jun 2024, Phase II (remaining States): 2.5 years later in Oct-Nov 2026 Would need one-time extension or curtailment of terms of various State Assemblies based on some suggested rules / framework This will need some Constitutional and Statutory amendments
Should the term of Assembly / Lok Sabha be fixed and how to ensure continuity in simultaneous elections	Fixed term is not proposed. Instead, the relevant recommendations of Election Commission could be considered in this matter (details in NITI Aayog note). This will need some Constitutional and Statutory amendments

⁵ Source of- NITI Aayog

³ Shivani, ONE NATION-ONE ELECTION: A NEW ELECTORAL REFORM IN INDIA SUPREMO AMICUS ISSN 2456-9704 VOLUME 24 PAGE NO 3

⁴ Mishra, Kartika. May 4 (2020) Simultaneous Elections- A Boon for India
www.blog.ipleaders.in/simultaneous-elections-boon-india/

⁵ Desai, Kishore. Simultaneous Elections (One Nation One Election) Brief Note on the “What”, the “Why” and the “How” of Simultaneous Elections. Page No 11. Former OSD – NITI Aayog & Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister

Possibilities of One Nation-One Election in India

Reducing Government Expenditure

Election preparation and administration routinely cost the government hundreds of crores. Most of the funds are used on arrangements, salaries, and security. Simultaneous voting will result in huge savings for the government that can be put to better use.

More Time for Development Work

Political parties and ministers are constantly in election mode due to the irregular timing of elections. As a result, parties delay changes or make decisions based on short-term considerations, disrupting and distorting agendas and depriving the public of clear policies. By holding concurrent elections, the ministers will be able to devote a solid four years to enacting programmes and helping their constituents.

Better Deployment of Security Forces

The use of security personnel is the second important resource that must be available in large quantities, in addition to money. By holding the Lok Sabha and state legislature elections at the same time, it will free up the security personnel, who are taken away from their primary responsibilities for each election.⁶

Saving Money Tips

The main argument for holding simultaneous elections is the money the government will save. A significant sum of money will be saved if the nation adopts the "One Nation, One Election" model. In the 28 states and the 8 UTs, there are 4120 MLAs. The spending limit for larger assemblies is Rs. 40 lakhs. The total cost would be close to Rs. 11 billion if all the states and UTs held a single election. About five states typically hold elections each year.

Rapid Development Work

It has been noted that new projects are not inaugurated when the election model code of conduct is in effect. Therefore, a single election will guarantee consistency in the policies and initiatives of the federal and state governments.

Examine Black Money

The use of "dark money" in elections is an open secret. A significant amount of black money was turned into white money during the nation's elections. As a result, if elections are held throughout the year, a parallel economy may emerge in the country.

Governance effectiveness

If elections are not held every year, the government would not be required to entice the populace with enticing programmes and caste- and religion-based policies. Even state and federal governments can make difficult decisions for the benefit of the economy without having to annually produce a lucrative budget.⁷

Saving Time:

Elections are held throughout the year, which is a massive, difficult, and time-consuming task. To ensure smooth, peaceful, and impartial elections, the Election Commission of India needs the support of a sizable number of polling officials, as well as the military forces. Additionally, a single election will save a tonne of time and money. The security forces will also be put to better use for internal objectives.

Advantageous to the Government's Treasury

One of the main arguments in favour of holding simultaneous elections is the fact that they will reduce the burden on the government's exchequer. If India chooses this course of action, it will significantly reduce costs. For larger assemblies, the budget limit increases from 28 to 40 lakhs. Therefore, if all the states and UTs staged a single election, the total cost would be close to \$11 billion. At the moment, only about 5 states hold yearly elections. The aforementioned factor contributes to the wisdom of the "one nation, one election" strategy. Simultaneous elections would help conserve resources because they would reduce the amount

⁶ Raja, Vidya. (May, 28 2018) One Nation, One Election: Are Simultaneous Polls a Good or Bad Idea for India? <https://www.thebetterindia.com/143182/one-nation-one-election-simultaneous-polls-good-or-bad/>

⁷ Singh, Hemant. (2019). *One Nation-One Election: Merits and Demerits*. at Last Retrieved on 10-May-2021, from <https://m.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/one-nation-one-election-1561032672-1>

of time and money needed for frequent elections. Additionally, it is anticipated that more people will leave their homes to cast their ballots.⁸

Challenges of One Nation-One Election in india

Hard Times for Regional Parties

Regional parties won't be able to compete with national parties in terms of spending on elections and electoral strategy, which is related to the aforementioned point. Local issues and local voters are very important in state assembly elections. Therefore, the regional parties will not support a one-time election. This raises the issue of political agreement once more.

Delay in Election Results

Almost all regional parties are currently calling for elections to be conducted using ballots. When elections are held in a one-time manner, everything happens at once, which causes a large amount of time to pass before the results can be announced. There are a tonne of polls taking place across the nation. It will take a considerable amount of time to produce a consolidated product.

The Requirement of Huge Machinery & Resources

Conducting simultaneous elections in all the states, UTs, and Lok Sabha will be a difficult challenge since, as we all know, India is the greatest democracy in the world.⁹

National and State Issues Combined-

Taking both elections into consideration will also require blending state and federal problems. The state would be overshadowed by national concerns, which would cause lawmakers to give it less attention. One India, One Election would be a positive development if it could be implemented with the correct application of policies and regulations and address the growing demand for competent administrative and security personnel. It will inevitably cause more issues than it would solve if the necessary facilities are not there. Many people are in favour of the idea and support it. There is no reason why it wouldn't be beneficial for the nation's electoral processes if it meets the necessary requirements.

Cost Efficiency is Also a Challenge-

The general conundrum surrounding the cost of holding separate elections can be resolved by imposing a strict cap on election expenses for all parties. Prior to the application of the model code of conduct, they were frequently observed spending. There is no way the costs would be higher if that could be restricted.

Hard Task-

Elections for the assembly and panchayats, as well as the Lok Sabha, are not that simple to hold. As the rural and urban areas prepare for voting, it will come with a number of difficulties. Additionally, there might not be enough security and administrative personnel to handle the procedure. Less attention at the voting booths could lead to more conflict and unfettered corruption. People wouldn't desire booth capture in exchange for time savings.¹⁰

Constitutional Amendments

These modifications need extraordinary majorities in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to pass. The government would have a difficult time achieving unanimity among the several political organisations, each of which has its own prejudices. The rules must

⁸ Pal, Sankalpita. (2020). *One Nation-One Election: Why? and why not?* at Last Retrieved on 12-May-2021, From <https://www.latestlaws.com/articles/one-nation-one-election-why-and-why-not/>

⁹ Yadav, Ankita. *One Nation-One Election - Essay on One Nation-One Election* at Last Retrieved on 12-May-2021, from <https://www.essaybanyan.com/essay/essay-on-one-nation-one-election/>

¹⁰ Hegde, Vinayak. 2018 *One Nation-One Election: Are Simultaneous Polls a Good or Bad Idea for India?* (2018, May 28). The Better India. at Last Retrieved on 12-May-2021, from <https://www.thebetterindia.com/143182/one-nation-one-election-simultaneous-polls-good-or-bad/>

go through a rigorous process before being changed because they form the foundation of the constitution and their application may present challenges from a variety of angles.

Not possible

Elections for panchayats, assemblies, and the Lok Sabha are not as simple as they appear. As the city and the villages prepare for voting, there will be a number of complications. There could be a shortage of security, logistics, equipment, and administrative personnel. A lack of vigilance at the voting locations could lead to more difficulty and unbridled corruption, such as booth capture and rigging.¹¹

Federalism

The federal principles, according to which each state has developed its own framework for the political struggle, forbid simultaneous elections. Thus, SE has an impact on a state's political independence.

Resource intensive

Due to a severe lack of resources, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) recently ruled out the prospect of holding simultaneous elections. Electronic voting machines (EVMs) and voter-verifiable paper audit (VVPAT) devices would be highly necessary for SE. Another logistical problem is ensuring that VVPATs are accessible in all states.¹²

Suggestion and Way Forward

Although simultaneous elections are easily adoptable, their effects are dubious and challenging. On the other hand, while the fundamental poll reforms are challenging to implement, they offer long-lasting benefits for the parliamentary democracy and federal system that we have chosen. Such changes could be:

Elections for several legislative assemblies whose terms expire between six months and a year before or after the election date could be held during the Lok Sabha's midterm cycle. Elections for the remaining states could be held concurrently with the overall Lok Sabha elections.

Replacing the first-past-the-post electoral system with a hybrid or proportional representation system (FPTP), enhancing transparency and intra-party democracy, and placing them under the scope of the Right to Information Act. Increasing the effectiveness of the Election Commission as a regulator of free and fair elections by keeping track of all polling expenditures removing phoney voters from the election roll using IT-enabled techniques like electronic voter ID cards, mulling over the possibility of government support for elections.¹³

Conclusion

Due to the various electoral systems in place at the local, state, and federal levels, implementing one nation-one election is more difficult than it appears. Integrating the "One Nation-One Election" strategy with support from all parties, including the average person, is one of the main issues facing the government. Although the theory of one nation, one election may be sound, its implementation in actual practise is challenging due to the viewpoints of the amendment in the fundamental design of the constitution.

The basic structure of the constitution is thought to be unchangeable despite amendments at any level, and it is one of the challenges facing the government to implement it with the updating of the foundation of the constitution and election system at various levels, including village, district, state, and central. Another challenge is to incorporate an effective mechanism to reduce the cost of centralising elections, which can cause chaos in the future in response to changes in the foundation of the It is safe to say that "One Nation, One Election" is not necessary but rather an open attack on the democratic and Federalist values of our country and, for the time being, will continue to be a topic of debate and discussion in webinars and online workshops after discussing the underlying political agenda and the serious harm it is capable of doing to the Constitution.

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¹¹ Singh, Dr. Vikramjit. Political Dimensions of One-Nation-One-Election Approach © 2018 JETIR August 2018, Volume 5, Issue 8 www.jetir.org (ISSN-2349-5162) <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1808981.pdf>

¹² OpCit No 2

¹³ *Simultaneous elections in India*. Ilearncana.com. Retrieved December 6, 2022, from <https://ilearncana.com/details/Simultaneous-elections-in-India/2172>

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