

## ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION: AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENS OF COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

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### ABSTRACT

*With serious concerns about its effects on the federal structure of the nation, the "One Nation, One Election" concept has become a major topic of discussion in India regarding electoral reform. Proponents contend that holding elections for the State Legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha at the same time will increase efficiency, lessen budgetary strains, and foster policy stability. On the other hand, detractors argue that synchronization might seriously violate the constitution, erode state sovereignty, and skew voter behaviour. Using cooperative federalism as a lens, this study investigates the question of whether holding simultaneous elections may actually promote a more cooperative relationship between the Union and the States or if doing so runs the danger of centralizing power at the expense of regional variety.*

**Keywords:** *One Nation One Election, Federalism, Constitution, Electoral Reforms, Parliament*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of "One Nation, One Election" and its subsequent effects on Indian federalism are at the intersection of constitutional principles and reforms in the electoral system of India. With a parliamentary style of governance and a population as diverse and large as India, election scheduling has generated a great deal of discussion and attention. In an effort to expedite the democratic process, this idea aims to synchronize the election cycles at all governmental levels, from the local self-governments to the State Legislative Assemblies and Lok Sabha.

In India, the notion of holding elections at the same time is not new. It was used in the years after India gained its freedom from British domination. The Government of India Act, 1919, sometimes referred to as the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, established direct elections in India and gave the people the power to vote. This arrangement changed over time, and in 1951–1952, the first

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general elections to Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies took place in a concurrent manner following independence.<sup>1</sup>

Simultaneous elections were common in the first decade (1951-1960), with only two elections held during that time. The following decade (1961-1970) saw five states (Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Punjab) have elections three times apiece, upending this pattern. In the ensuing ten years (1971-1980), the situation deteriorated as fourteen states held three elections, with Odisha being the only one to hold four elections during that time.<sup>2</sup>

In the decades that followed, the increased electoral frequency of the 1970s started to decrease. Five states held elections three times between 1981 and 1990, while two states experienced the same frequency between 1991 and 2000. Elections took place four times to Lok Sabha during these years. This resulted in a loss of election synchronization in addition to an increase in election frequency.

The Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies of States should all hold their respective elections simultaneously, according to the "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) concept. This idea has been envisaged with the aim of streamlining the voting mechanism by way of reducing the number of elections as well as the costs and disruptions they create. But it is important to think about the consequences and challenges of implementing such a system. The idea that ONOE may save the expense of organizing several elections is one of the main arguments in favor of it. Every year, India has elections at various levels, which drives up security, labour and logistical costs. It is asserted by the proponents of One Nation One Election that if all the multiple elections are combined into a single event, then it will result in substantial amount of savings, which would consequently enable the State machinery to make use of the available resources in a manner which is more effective and efficient for the purposes of public welfare and development<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, ONOE can reduce the endless cycle of election campaigns, which will increase political stability. With election synchronization, elected officials could have more time to complete their work and keep their promises without being

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<sup>1</sup> Arunav Chetia, "One Nation One Election: What it could Mean for India?", 2(1) *Social and political research foundation*, (2020), available at: [https://sprf.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/7.2.2020\\_One-Nation-One-Election\\_What-it-Could-Mean-for-India.pdf](https://sprf.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/7.2.2020_One-Nation-One-Election_What-it-Could-Mean-for-India.pdf) (last visited on September 11, 2025 at 7:12 PM).

<sup>2</sup> B. Phani Kumar, "Simultaneous Elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies", *Members Reference Service Larrdis*, (2016), available at: [https://loksabhadocs.nic.in/Refinput/New\\_Reference\\_Notes/English/Simultaneous\\_election\\_to\\_Lok\\_Sabha\\_and\\_State\\_Legislative\\_Assemblies.pdf](https://loksabhadocs.nic.in/Refinput/New_Reference_Notes/English/Simultaneous_election_to_Lok_Sabha_and_State_Legislative_Assemblies.pdf) (last visited on September 9, 2025 at 12:12 PM).

<sup>3</sup> L. Willnat and A. Aw, "Elections in India: One Billion People and Democracy" *The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World* 124-141 (2009).

distracted by campaigning. By lessening voter weariness, ONOE may increase turnout. By holding all polls simultaneously, ONOE may increase public interest and engagement and strengthen the democratic process.<sup>4</sup>

The implementation of ONOE carries a number of challenges and potential drawbacks. One of the main concerns is the logistical difficulties of conducting such a large-scale election exercise. Managing elections across multiple places with varying levels of infrastructure and logistical capacities would require careful planning and coordination. Any operational errors or oversights could cast doubt on the electoral process's fairness and harm its reputation.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of cooperative federalism?
2. What are simultaneous elections?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages to implementation of One Nation One Election in India?
4. What will be the consequences of simultaneous elections of cooperative federalism in India?

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1. To understand and comprehend the meaning of cooperative federalism.
2. To trace the historical development of simultaneous elections in India.
3. To study the constitutional and legal framework concerning simultaneous elections in India.
4. To carry out an analysis of the arguments in favour as well as against One Nation One Election.
5. To critically examine the implications of One Nation One Election on cooperative federalism in India

## 4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Simultaneous elections in India, if implemented, are likely to reshape the dynamics of cooperative federalism by enhancing policy coordination among Union and various States, but may also risk diluting the autonomy of regional governments.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Strömbäck and L.L. Kaid, "A Framework for Comparing Election News Coverage Around the World" *Routledge* 1-18 (2009).

<sup>5</sup> A. Bhatnagar, "Issue of 'One Nation, One Election' in Indian Perspective", available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d51f/749733ce735dfc4dadda5024dbd6653ece44.pdf> (last visited on September 11, 2025 at 7:12 PM).

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With a focus on analyzing constitutional provisions, parliamentary debates, reports and Supreme Court rulings concerning federalism and electoral procedures, the current study employs a qualitative and doctrinal research methodology. The discussion of simultaneous elections under India's federal structure will be contextualized through a critical analysis of secondary materials, including books, journal articles, and policy papers.

## 6. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Yugant Rane and Sarvesh Nayak (2025)**<sup>6</sup> opine that proceeding on the premises that the electoral process is the heart and soul of the democracy, and any tampering with the same would lead to compromise in the idea of democratic India envisaged by the constitution, the authors through this essay attempt to establish that the elections are of paramount importance in the governance of this nation and they cannot be adjusted for material considerations.

**Rachana M. Suvarna and Manish K. Salian (2025)**<sup>7</sup> are of the view that India is faced with a complex and multifaceted electoral landscape due to the occurrence of recurrent national and state elections. One Nation, One Election (ONOE), which was last used in 1967, was recently approved by the president and prime minister in order to coordinate election cycles. Today, though, holding simultaneous elections is fraught with difficulties.

**Sapna Chadah (2024)**<sup>8</sup> writes that federal democratic nations, governments at the national as well as sub-national government levels, face the unique challenge of frequent and recurrent elections.

**Satyam Sinha (2023)**<sup>9</sup> writes that the concept and notion of simultaneous elections has been formulated for the purpose of coordinating the electoral schedule in such a manner so as to reduce the frequency of continuous election cycles that keep on taking place in various states.

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<sup>6</sup> Yugant Rane and Sarvesh Nayak, "Federalism, Democracy and the Idea of One Nation One Election" (2025), available at: <https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/blog/federalism-democracy-and-the-idea-of-one-nation-one-election/> (Last visited on September 4, 2025 at 6:19 PM).

<sup>7</sup> Rachana M. Suvarna and Manish K. Salian, "One Nation, One Election: An Analysis from Layman's Perspective", 8(2) *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* 162-172 (2025).

<sup>8</sup> Sapna Chadah, "Theme Paper on 'One Nation, One Election'", *Indian Institute of Public Administration* (2024).

<sup>9</sup> Satyam Sinha, "One Nation One Election: A Blow to Federalism or the Need of the Nation?", 44(5) *Journal of Propulsion Technology* 3535-3543 (2023).

**A. Lijphart (1996)**<sup>10</sup> observes that India adopted a system of "one election" or, in other words, that of simultaneous elections at state and central levels, upto the year 1967. Despite the practice's goal of streamlining political and governance processes, it was discontinued in 1967 due to logistical and political concerns, and following national and state elections were conducted independently.

## **7. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Complex constitutional and legal issues are brought up by the One Nation One Election policy, which means simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha as well as Legislative Assemblies of the States. Important clauses in the Constitution, Representation of People Act, 1951, and institutional oversight by the Election Commission of India all contribute to the stability and structure of the electoral system in India. Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174 of the Indian Constitution, which govern the term and the process of dissolution of these legislative bodies, must be carefully considered in any reform.

### **7.1. Articles 83 and 172: Fixed Term with Flexibility**

It is contained in Article 83(2) that the normal term for a Lok Sabha shall be for a period of five years starting from the date on which first meeting of the House takes place, unless it is dissolved earlier<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, Article 172(1) plays down an identical term for the state legislative assemblies<sup>12</sup>. These provisions of the Constitution establish a fixed five year term but do not guarantee a full term, as they are allowed for premature dissolution, which is a fact central to the debate of simultaneous elections.

### **7.2. Articles 85 and 174: Power of the President of India and Governors of the States**

Article 85 and 174 confer power on the President and the Governor, respectively, to dissolve legislatures and summon sessions<sup>13</sup>. These clauses in the Indian constitution give the legislature considerable latitude in determining how long it will exist. Constitutional changes would be necessary for any election synchronization reform for the purposes of preventing the dissolution of the state legislatures or the Lok Sabha at will. Such changes would need to pass the basic structural doctrine test, nevertheless. In the seminal decision of *Kesavananda*

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<sup>10</sup> A. Lijphart, "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation" 90(2) *American political science review*, 258-268 (1996).

<sup>11</sup> The Constitution of India, art. 83(2).

<sup>12</sup> The Constitution of India, art.172(1)

<sup>13</sup> The Constitution of India, arts. 85, 174.

*Bharati v. State of Kerala*<sup>14</sup>, the Hon'ble Supreme Court ruled that federalism and democracy are fundamental to the system and that constitutional revisions cannot undermine them. One could argue that enforcing electoral cycle uniformity compromises the states' federal autonomy.

### **7.3. The Representation of the People Act, 1951**

The foundation of India's election system is the Representation of the People Act, 1951. It covers election procedures, candidate qualification and disqualification, electoral rolls, and the model code of behaviour. Significant changes would need to be made to this act in order to support simultaneous elections. For example, the act's Section 14 gives the president the authority to announce the Lok Sabha general elections, whereas Article 15 gives the governor the authority to announce the election to a State Legislative Assembly.<sup>15</sup> Reworking the aforementioned sections would be necessary to coordinate this notification across the country.

### **7.4. Role of the Election Commission of India**

The ECI noted in its 1983 Annual Report that staggered elections impair governance because they frequently enforce the Model code of conduct, and it suggested a return to the original practice of conducting elections simultaneously elections for Lok Sabha as well as legislative assemblies of the states. However, the Election Commission's authority is restricted to recommending and implementing within the parameters of the Indian Constitution and the legislation passed by the Parliament. It cannot impose electoral synchronization on its own without first allowing for constitutional or legislative changes. Article 327 empowers the Parliament to enact laws pertaining to elections to the House of People as well as State Legislative Assemblies. Article 328 also gives similar authority to State Legislative Assemblies with respect to elections being conducted within the State.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while it can serve as an implementing authority and adviser the burden of legal change lies with the parliament.

## **8. HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE REPORT ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA**

The Government of India established the High-Level Committee (HLC) on Simultaneous Elections on September 2, 2023, with former President Ram Nath Kovind being its chairman. Its main goal was to determine whether holding of simultaneous elections was feasible. The committee analyzed the possible advantages and difficulties of this proposed election reform by consulting with

<sup>14</sup> *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, AIR 1973 SC 1461.

<sup>15</sup> The Representation of the People Act, 1951, (Act 43 of 1951) ss 14, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Election Commission of India, "Annual Report 1983" 1,2 (April 1983).

experts and requesting a great deal of public and political input. The committee's conclusions, recommendations for constitutional reforms, and the expected effects of simultaneous elections on public opinion, governance, and resources are all covered in length in this study.

## 9. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL AND THE AMENDMENT PROCEDURE

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024<sup>17</sup> was brought to the Lok Sabha by the government on December 17, 2024. *"There is an imperative need for holding of simultaneous elections for various reasons and given that elections have become expensive and time consuming,"* the government said in the statement of objects and reasons annexed to the bill, citing the HLC's recommendations<sup>18</sup>.

The law amends the constitution in a number of important ways. First and foremost, it introduces a new provision (Article 82-A), which stipulates that all State Legislative Assemblies constituted before the expiry of the Lok Sabha's full term shall stand synchronized with the Lok Sabha's term, commencing from the date of the first sitting of the newly elected Lok Sabha following a general election. This is a temporary, one-time step in order to bring central and state elections into line. According to the new clause, elections to all state assemblies will be held concurrently with the next national election. The ECI is given broad authority to suggest to the president that any state assembly election be postponed. However, if there is delay in any state election then the term of such Legislative Assembly (as and when it gets formed) will overlap with the full term of Lok Sabha.

Secondly, the Constitution Amendment Bill clarifies that if a new Parliament is constituted following an early ('midterm') election—such as in the event of a coalition collapse—it shall function only for the remainder portion of the unexpired term of the immediately preceding Lok Sabha. This is effected through an amendment to Article 83, which governs the period of tenure of the Lok Sabha. Article 172, which deals with the term and tenure of India's numerous state assemblies, is altered similarly by the law.

Last but not least, the Constitution Amendment Bill revises Article 327 to make it clear that Parliament may occasionally enact legislation pertaining to the holding

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Law & Justice, The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, *available at*: <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-twenty-ninth-amendment-bill-2024> (last visited on September 17, 2025 at 9:17 AM).

<sup>18</sup> Statements of Objects and Reasons, The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Bill No. 275 of 2024).

of simultaneous elections (as well as revising regulations pertaining to the creation of electoral rolls and conducting of the state and national elections).

Since Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu & Kashmir are among the Indian union territories with elected legislatures, the government also proposed the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024<sup>19</sup>, to implement the same rules for assembly elections in these areas.

The steps for modifying the Indian Constitution are outlined in Article 368. To put it briefly, there are three different kinds of constitutional changes, and each requires a different ratification process. There is a constitutional requirement of a simple majority in Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha for the first category, which is the same requirement that any other measure must meet in order to become law. This relates to particular clauses included in different articles of the constitution that are subject to change through regular legislative process. Amendments which need a "special majority," or two-thirds of both chambers of parliament, fall under the second category. For the majority of constitutional amendments, this is the standard process. The third and last category deals with revisions that need to be approved by at least half of state legislatures along with a special majority of Parliament<sup>20</sup>. For instance, amendments that alter the legislative relationship between the Centre and the States, or those concerning the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution—which delineates the distribution of powers and functions between the Union and State legislatures—require the assent of a majority of the States.

Most people agree that the One Nation, One Election laws need to be ratified by a minimum of two-thirds of the members of both chambers of Parliament currently in session. The more significant query is whether the proposed revisions fall under the third category mentioned above, which would initiate the process of ratification by the states. Opinions differ on this point. According to some constitutional academics, state approval would be necessary for constitutional revisions that would allow for simultaneous elections. Other claims, such as the HLC report itself, contend that since the legislation do not, in theory, change the legislative entries listed in the Seventh Schedule, state ratification is not required. According to the HLC report, ratification by half of all states would only be necessary for revisions that change the date of local body elections. The issue of local body elections has been completely avoided in the government's bills thus far. The controversial issue of constitutional ratification is likely to be discussed by the parliamentary standing committee examining the proposed legislation<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Bill No. 276 of 2024).

<sup>20</sup> M. P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law* (8th edn, LexisNexis 2018) 1431–1436.

<sup>21</sup> High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, *Report of the High Level Committee on One Nation One Election* 94–96 (Government of India, March 2024).



## **10. IMPACT OF ONE NATION ONE ELECTION ON VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS**

The multi-faceted impact of simultaneous elections on different stakeholders in India has discussed herein below:

### **10.1. Voters**

One Nation, One Election's effects on voters are complex. On the one hand, since voters wouldn't be called to the polls for separate state and national elections, it might lessen "election fatigue." By focusing electoral fervor on a single cycle and guaranteeing a more definitive mandate, this might potentially boost voter turnout. However, academics warn that holding elections at the same time could make it harder for voters to discern between local, state, and federal issues.

### **10.2. National Political Parties**

One Nation, One Election offers structural and strategic benefits to national political parties. They can increase their exposure and electoral domination by pooling campaign funds, cutting spending, and presenting a consistent national narrative throughout all states thanks to a synchronized election cycle. The stakes are raised, though, as a wave of anti-incumbency sentiment may impact state and parliamentary elections at the same time, putting national parties at higher political danger<sup>22</sup>.

### **10.3. Regional Political Parties**

One Nation, One Election poses serious difficulties for regional political parties. Since national-level storylines are amplified by simultaneous elections, regional parties run the risk of becoming less visible as national discourses take precedence over their state-specific concerns. Their traditional voting base, which frequently depends on grassroots mobilization and localized agendas, may be weakened, as well as their bargaining strength in coalition politics<sup>23</sup>.

### **10.4. Election Commission**

One Nation, One Election would drastically change the Election Commission of India's (ECI) institutional duties. The benefit of conducting elections at the central and state level simultaneously is that it would lessen the need for frequent deployments of security personnel, poll workers, and election supplies since there would be fewer large-scale electoral exercises. The difficulty, though, is the sheer

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<sup>22</sup> S.Y. Quraishi, *The Great March of Democracy: Seven Decades of India's Elections* (Penguin, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Yogendra Yadav, *Making Sense of Indian Democracy* (Permanent Black, 2019).

size of planning a coordinated national election, which calls for previously unheard-of levels of logistical cooperation, improved infrastructure, and increased funding.

### 10.5. Local Governments

Election cycle synchronization may lessen disturbances to local and panchayat government and match national and state agendas with developmental programs, but it may also obscure issues at the local level. In a consolidated election cycle, the predominance of state and national narratives may reduce the prominence of local candidates, lessen voter interest in issues affecting the entire community, and undermine the spirit of decentralized self-governance envisioned in Parts IX and IX-A of the Constitution<sup>24</sup>.

## 11. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

### 11.1. Reduction in Cost

At present, with elections taking place throughout the year, the exchequer is burdened with avoidable expenditure, which could be significantly reduced if simultaneous elections were conducted. In the first general elections to the House of People which were held in 1951–52, 53 political parties contested, approximately 1,874 candidates participated, and the total election expenditure amounted to ₹11 crores. On the other hand, in the general elections conducted in the year 2019, 610 political parties participated in the electoral process, more than 9,000 candidates were in the fray and total expenditure was approximately Rs. 60,000 crores<sup>25</sup>. Incurring of expenses is the joint liability of the Election Commission of India, Central and the State governments<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, it is evident that the Election Commission, State governments, and the federal government bear the financial responsibility. While the State spends for State assembly and the Central government spends for elections to the Lok Sabha, if simultaneous elections are held, the costs will be split 50/50 between the two governments. Therefore, if elections are held concurrently, the burden will be shared and the

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<sup>24</sup> L.C. Jain, *Decentralisation and Local Governance: Essays for George Mathews* (Orient Blackswan, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Amit Singh, “One election: Constitutional Challenges”, *Legal service India*, available at <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-1763-one-nation-one-election-constitutional-challenges.html> (last visited on September 7, 2025 at 11:45 AM).

<sup>26</sup> Amit Garg, “One nation one election – A critical analysis”, *Ipleaders*, (2018), available at <https://blog.ipleaders.in/one-nation-one-election/> (last visited on September 7, 2025 at 11:45 AM).

Election Commission's spending budget is estimated at Rs. 4500 crores.<sup>27</sup> The deployment of security forces only once every five years, rather than annually, would itself result in a substantial reduction in expenditure under this head.

### 11.2. More Time for Other Work

The parties and the government focus more on campaigning, creating manifestos, courting voters, and formulating election-winning strategies because elections are held all year long. As a result, productivity declines with the little amount of time they have remaining. However, if this system becomes popular, the ruling party's only chance to win power again would be to operate efficiently and advance welfare.

### 11.3. MCC and Policy Paralysis

The Model Code of Conduct, which outlines the dos and don'ts for candidates and political parties, will be put into effect during the election. It will become relevant as soon as the notifications are sent out. Since then, no matter how pressing the need, the ruling administration has been unable to implement any new policies or initiatives. Because there are five or six elections every year, the Code is constantly applied, which impedes the nation's progress.<sup>28</sup>

### 11.4. Strengthening of Federal Structure through Synchronization

Simultaneous elections can foster a more harmonious relationship between the Union and the States by aligning their political cycles, thereby reducing the constant friction of staggered electoral contests. When central and state governments are elected at the same time, it encourages cooperative federalism by promoting shared developmental agendas rather than adversarial politics<sup>29</sup>. By preventing policy paralysis brought on by conflicting political pressures, synchronization may also guarantee improved coordination in the planning and execution of welfare programs. Additionally, it can promote a more comprehensive national policy conversation while lessening the impact of local populist issues

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<sup>27</sup> Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, "A discussion paper on Analysis of simultaneous elections: the 'what', 'why' and 'how'", *Niti Aayog*, available at <https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf> (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

<sup>28</sup> Aishwarya Lakshmi VM, "An analysis on 'one nation, one election' policy in India: is it the need of the hour?", *JSLSR*, available at: [https://jslsr.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/4/5/124513060/article\\_jslsr\\_3.pdf](https://jslsr.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/4/5/124513060/article_jslsr_3.pdf) (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

<sup>29</sup> Law Commission of India, *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections* (2018).

dictating state elections. One Nation, One Election might thereby strengthen unity while upholding India's federal system by lowering electoral fragmentation.<sup>30</sup>

### 11.5. Increase in Voter Turnout

It has been indicated by empirical studies that there is an upward trend in voter turnouts in case of simultaneous elections, due to the fact that there is a reduction of the logistical burden to vote on numerous occasions. This effect has been observed in a number of democratic nations across the globe which practice synchronised electoral cycles<sup>31</sup>. Compared to Lok Sabha elections, state elections in India often draw lower turnout, which suggests that synchronization could boost overall voter turnout, especially among peripheral voters.<sup>32</sup>

## 12. ARGUMENTS AGAINST ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Concurrent elections, according to critics, will erode federalism, reduce the accountability of state governments, and decrease the severity of regional issues. Broad political consensus and substantial constitutional changes are required for synchronization to be feasible. Regional parties believe that national parties unfairly benefit from their position. For a certain amount of time, incumbent governments will have too much authority and be less inclined to fulfill their responsibilities and address grievances.<sup>33</sup>

### 12.1. Legislative Term Adjustments

One of the major challenges in conducting simultaneous polls is the difficulty to carry out adjustments in the legislative terms. There is no provision in the prevalent system which permits smooth synchronisation in the absence of either extending or restricting the tenures and timelines of multiple legislatures, which gives rise to numerous legal and governance concerns<sup>34</sup>. This problem is made more difficult by the instability that results from the Lok Sabha or State Assemblies' midterm

<sup>30</sup> Ritu, "Implications of simultaneous elections in India", 7(4) *International Journal of Political Science and Governance* 246-249 (2025).

<sup>31</sup> E. Bracco & F. Revelli, "Concurrent elections and political accountability: Evidence from Italian local elections" 148 *JEcon Behav Organ.* 135-149 (2018).

<sup>32</sup> L. Rudolph & A. Leininger, "Coattails and spillover-effects: Quasi-experimental evidence from concurrent executive and legislative elections" 70 *Elect Stud.* (2021).

<sup>33</sup> A.S. George, "One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India" 2(3) *Partners Universal International Research Journal*, 40-60 (2023).

<sup>34</sup> Law Commission of India. 79th Report on Reform of Electoral Laws. New Delhi: Ministry of Law and Justice, 1999 [cited 2025 Jan 15]. Available at: [https://legallaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous\\_elections/79th\\_Report.pdf](https://legallaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/79th_Report.pdf) (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

dissolutions. To coordinate all electoral cycles, any shift to simultaneous elections would need a one-time modification that would need thorough political and constitutional talks.

### **12.2. Precedence of National Issues over Regional Concerns**

Critics contend that such a system substantially narrows the choices available to the electorate. This can cause "national issues" to take precedence over local ones, favoring national parties over regional or local ones. Therefore, there would be a "national wave in favor of large national parties" if elections were held simultaneously, benefiting larger national parties at the expense of regional parties.<sup>35</sup> This would result in weakening of the nation's federal democratic framework and undermining the depth and breadth of the values of Indian democracy.

### **12.3. Influence on Decision of Voters**

Another reason against 'One Nation One Election' is that they may affect voter behaviour. In numerous instances, people have cast ballots for the same party in both the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha when simultaneous elections were held. Even in State Assembly elections, such circumstances may cause national problems to affect voters' choices. An analysis showed that on an average basis, the chances of an Indian voter casting his/her vote for the same party for Central and State elections is 77% when the elections are held simultaneously<sup>36</sup>. Conversely, frequent election cycles enhance accountability, as local and state-level issues periodically influence electoral outcomes.

### **12.4. Loss of Democratic Flexibility**

According to Articles 83 and 172, the parliamentary system currently in place permits midterm elections in the event that administrations lose support, guaranteeing that the executive branch is always answerable to the legislature and, eventually, the people. This natural flexibility would be limited if simultaneous elections necessitated artificially synchronizing the terms of legislatures, either by lengthening or shortening their tenure. Such inflexibility might undermine the idea

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<sup>35</sup> Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, "A discussion paper on Analysis of simultaneous elections: the "what", "why" and "how"", *Niti Aayog*, available at: <https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf> (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

<sup>36</sup> Praveen Chakravarty, "Nudging the Voter in one direction?" *The Hindu* April 9 2016, available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/state-assembly-elections-nudging-the-voter-in-one-direction/article8438114.ece> (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

of shared accountability and prevent people from having a timely chance to voice their displeasure of a government that isn't doing its job well.

### 12.5. President's Rule and Caretaker Government

Another constitutional concern with One Nation, One Election is the heightened possibility of prolonged periods of President's Rule or caretaker governments, which undermines democratic governance. Under the present system, when a state government falls and no alternative is viable, Article 356 permits the imposition of President's Rule until fresh elections are held. However, under ONOE, fresh polls would have to wait until the next synchronized cycle, compelling states to remain under central rule for extended periods. This would not only dilute the federal balance but also erode the people's right to be governed by an elected representative body. Similarly, at the Union level, if the Lok Sabha is prematurely dissolved, ONOE could force governance through a caretaker government with limited powers until the next synchronized election.

## 13. MEANING OF COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

A notion or subset of federation known as cooperative federalism involves national, state, and local governments working together to address shared issues and provide the populace with products and services. According to *State of Rajasthan v. Union of India*<sup>37</sup>, the Indian system of government is cooperative. In this case, it was observed that:

*"In a sense, the Indian Union is federal. But the extent of federalism in it is largely watered-down by the needs of progress and development of the country which has to be nationally integrated, politically and economically co-ordinated and socially, intellectually and spiritually uplifted. With such a system, the States cannot stand in the way of legitimate and comprehensively planned development of the country in the manner directed by the Central Government".*

The center and the state have a horizontal connection under cooperative federalism. By working in the same direction, they concentrate on national development. Cooperative federalism encourages the States and Union territories to discuss a range of problems and concerns with the ministers. Under this form of federalism, there is no supremacy. The relationship between the Centre and the States is marked by flexibility and interdependence, with cooperation being essential. Under the principle of cooperative federalism, the Union government is

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<sup>37</sup> 1977 AIR 1361.

expected to function as an ‘elder brother,’ fostering collaboration among the States and minimizing conflict to achieve common objectives. Such coordination not only advances the general welfare but also ensures more effective governance. Given its greater financial resources, the Centre is well placed to assist States in meeting their needs. At the same time, the Union also relies on the States for the effective implementation of laws enacted under the Concurrent List.

#### 14. IMPLICATIONS OF ONE NATION ONE ELECTION ON COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

Due to the prevalence of a number of diversity factors such as geography, culture, language and religion, federalism forms the bedrock of the governance structure in India<sup>38</sup>. Even if the Indian Constitution does not advocate for total separation of the federal government from the state, the state government still has a great deal of power and autonomy. According to Article 327 read along with Entry 72 in the Union List, the Parliament has the power to enact laws pertaining to elections for the state legislature and both houses of parliament.

Nevertheless, in case the Parliaments does not enact any such law, then Article 328 read with Entry 37 of the State List empowers the State Government to formulate legislations pertaining to elections to their respective Legislative Assemblies<sup>39</sup>. The direct consequence of adopting the ‘One Nation, One Election’ will be that the State Governments will be left bereft of their authority of enacting such laws. In the already prevalent structure, elections to different State Legislative Assemblies are conducted by the Election Commission of India on frequent basis, thereby making it difficult to bring into effect the idea of simultaneous elections. For the purposes of implementing this model, there will be an imminent requirement of restricting or increasing the terms and tenures of certain State Legislative Assemblies. The entire notion of reducing and prolonging the term is in opposition to the federal concept established in the Constitution.

According to Articles 83(2) and 172(1), the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies would remain in office for five years following their initial meeting. The constitution's stated method is the only way to dissolve the parliament and assemblies earlier, and only in an emergency may the parliament use legislation to prolong the term of the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies.<sup>40</sup> If the Central

<sup>38</sup> B. Huma, “Understanding Indian Federalism” 76(4) *Indian J Polit Sci.* 792-795 (2015).

<sup>39</sup> J. Kanodia, “The Case for Simultaneous Elections in India” *SSRN* (2024), available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4785264](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4785264) (last visited on September 8, 2025 at 8:14 PM).

<sup>40</sup> K. Desai, “Simultaneous Elections (One Nation One Election)” *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation* (2020) available at: <https://spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Note-on-Simultaneous-Elections.pdf> (last visited on September 10, 2025 at 10:10 PM).

Government makes any attempt of curtailing the term and tenure of any State Legislative Assembly for the purpose of implementing the notion of ‘One Nation, One Election’ then it would be perceived as abuse of power and would consequently result in undermining of the federal structure of our democracy.

India's federal system is set up so that although assembly elections concentrate more on regional problems that celebrate India's diversity, general elections center on matters of national significance. The overpowering and shadowing of regional issues by national issues is a significant problem with simultaneous elections, according to the critics. National problems will take center stage if the general and assembly elections fall on the same day.<sup>41</sup> At present, regional problems such as local governance, development and leadership form the core topics of discussion in the assembly elections and remain top priority for all stakeholders<sup>42</sup>. However, the notion of simultaneous elections endangers these issues as it can sideline them. Due to this threat perception, there is lack of clarity with respect to the role of regional political parties of simultaneous elections are implemented. Regional Political Parties have had a crucial role to play in the maintenance of federal cohesion in India since the onset of the coalition era in 1989<sup>43</sup>. The prospect of national party dominance is associated with the concept of simultaneous elections. The national parties benefit from simultaneous elections since there is a possibility that they will control state and national politics. The majority of the smaller regional parties would vanish due to the inception of simultaneous elections, however some significant regional parties would endure.<sup>44</sup> Throwing light on the concerns of the regional political parties, Singh wrote-

*“Considering that national political parties will be in a dominating position in case of simultaneous elections, the regional parties will either be less successful or will be compelled to join hands with their national counterparts. Whatever be the case, it would have a negative impact on regional aspirations and demands as it is the*

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<sup>41</sup> A.S. George, “One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India” 2(3) *Partners Universal Int Res J.* (2023).

<sup>42</sup> “Assembly Elections vs. General Elections: What’s the Difference?” *Times of India*. 2023 Nov 25.

<sup>43</sup> R. Goyal, “Impact of Party System on Indian Federalism” 12(4) *Int J Creative Res Thoughts* (2024), available at: <https://www.ijert.org/papers/IJCRT24A4542.pdf> (last visited on September 10, 2025 at 10:10 PM).

<sup>44</sup> S. Kumar, “Simultaneous polls to be a blow to smaller parties” *Deccan Chronicle* 2021 Feb 12, available at: [https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/1\\_10221/sanjay-kumar-simultaneous-polls-to-be-a-blow-to-smaller-parties.html](https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/1_10221/sanjay-kumar-simultaneous-polls-to-be-a-blow-to-smaller-parties.html) (last visited on September 10, 2025 at 10:10 PM).



*regional political parties that primarily raise them at different democratic forums.”<sup>45</sup>*

There are still unresolved concerns over the unfavorable position of regional political parties and the eventual impact of simultaneous elections on the federal structure. Some have suggested that the Indian federal structure is incompatible with the concept of simultaneous elections. If it is put into effect, it will weaken federal dynamics and marginalize regional issues and political parties. The concept strongly favors the national government, which raises concerns about over-centralization, which India's competitive party system has up to this point managed to counter.

## 15. CONCLUSION

The discussion on One Nation, One Election is not only about saving money or avoiding repeated campaigns. It is about how far we can push the balance between the Union and the States without weakening the idea of federalism. This paper tried to show that while ONOE may bring down costs and reduce policy disruptions, it also raises serious doubts about state autonomy and the space for regional politics.

Past practice in India tells us that staggered elections, though frequent, have their own value. They allow voters to separate national issues from local ones and hold governments accountable at different points of time. If everything is merged into a single cycle, the risk is that national debates will dominate, and smaller parties or regional concerns will be pushed aside. That would go against the very idea of cooperative federalism, which is based on both sharing and respecting powers.

The overall point that comes through is that ONOE, in its present shape, looks more centralising than cooperative. That does not mean electoral reform should be rejected altogether. But any reform has to be careful, gradual, and supported with safeguards that protect the federal balance.

In the end, efficiency is important, but it cannot come at the cost of diversity. For India, both have to go together. Unless ONOE is redesigned with that thought in mind, its risks are likely to be heavier than its promised benefits.

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<sup>45</sup> A.P. Singh, “Simultaneous elections, democratic concerns” *THE LEAFLET* 2022 Mar 27, available at: <https://theleaflet.in/simultaneous-elections-democraticconcerns/> (last visited on September 10, 2025 at 10:10 PM).