

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION - A DEEP ANALYSIS

Nishita*
Nikita Verma**

ABSTRACT

The concept of “One Nation, One Election” becomes a significant subject in India’s political and legal debate, aiming to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Currently, elections are held separately, resulting in constant campaigning and recurring financial and administrative burdens. From a constitutional perspective, the proposal is not unprecedented—India followed this system until the late 1960s, when premature dissolutions disrupted the cycle. Reviving it would require substantial amendments to the Constitution and electoral laws. Proponents highlight global practices, like South Africa and Sweden, where synchronized elections enhance efficiency and stability. However, critics warn of challenges in India’s federal context, that simultaneous polls may dilute regional concerns, centralize political narratives etc. Thus, the debate reflects tension between efficiency and its implementation. This article extensively explores the reform’s feasibility that hinges on political consensus, constitutional safeguards, and careful balancing of India’s pluralistic democracy. The exploration includes the probabilities of authoritative tendencies, security threat, mid-term elections, federal dilemma, its operational and logistical complexities etc. The article critically evaluates the underlying repercussions of the reinstating the policy without disparaging the substantive advantages associated with the enforcement of the Policy.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Elections, Constitutional Reform, Federalism, Electoral Efficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of One Nation, One Election has emerged as a central debate in India’s democratic and constitutional framework. It refers to holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies across the country, replacing the current system of staggered and frequent electoral cycles. While India initially followed this model after independence, political instability and premature

* LLM, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law.

** B.A.LL.B, Punjab School of Law, Punjabi University.

dissolution of assemblies in the late 1960s disrupted the uniform cycle, giving rise to the present arrangement of multiple elections at different intervals.

Supporters of the idea argue that frequent elections impose an enormous financial and administrative burden. The Election Commission of India, political parties, and state machinery expend significant resources every year on the conduct of elections. Simultaneous polls are expected to enhance governance by minimizing the disruptions caused by the repeated enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, which often halts developmental activities. Moreover, synchronized elections could reduce populist decision-making driven by short-term electoral gains, enabling governments to focus on long-term policy implementation.¹

ASPECT	DETAILS
Definition	Simultaneous conduct of elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies in India.
Objective	Reduce election fatigue, save costs, ensure policy continuity, and strengthen governance.
Current System	Elections are held separately for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, leading to frequent polls and caretaker governments.
Benefits	- Cost reduction for the exchequer- Better governance continuity- Reduced model code violations- Higher policy focus instead of continuous elections
Challenges	- Constitutional amendments required- Synchronization of election cycles- Federal concerns over state autonomy- Possible voter fatigue with longer terms if assemblies are dissolved early
Key Proposals	- Amending Articles 83 & 172 of the Constitution- Fixing a common five-year term cycle- Mechanisms for mid-term dissolution or emergencies
Recent Developments	The Law Commission of India and Parliamentary committees have examined feasibility; political debate ongoing among parties.
Global Examples	Some countries like Bangladesh and the Philippines hold simultaneous parliamentary and presidential elections.
Conclusion	“One Nation, One Election” aims to streamline the democratic process, but requires careful legal, political, and administrative planning to balance federalism and governance efficiency.

Table 1: - Concept, one nation one election

However, critics highlight serious challenges. India's vast federal structure accommodates diverse regional issues, which may be overshadowed by national narratives if simultaneous elections are held. Additionally, aligning electoral cycles would require constitutional amendments and could involve extending or curtailing

¹ Norm Kelly, “One Vote, One Value” in *Directions in Australian Electoral Reform: Professionalism and Partisanship in Electoral Management* 109-130 (ANU Press, 2012).

legislative terms, raising concerns over democratic legitimacy. There is also apprehension that concentrating elections may weaken accountability, as citizens would get fewer opportunities to express dissent at the ballot box.

The debate, therefore, lies at the intersection of efficiency and democracy. While the proposal promises administrative and fiscal benefits, it also poses significant constitutional, political, and federal challenges. Any reform in this regard must carefully balance these competing interests while safeguarding India's democratic ethos.²

1.1 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The study aims to critically examine the feasibility of One Nation, One Election in India, assessing its constitutional, political, and administrative implications. It seeks to explore whether synchronized elections can strengthen democratic governance, reduce costs, and improve efficiency without undermining federalism, representation, or the vibrancy of electoral democracy.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a doctrinal and analytical approach, relying on constitutional provisions, parliamentary debates, Law Commission reports, and scholarly articles to examine the feasibility of One Nation, One Election. Case laws and judicial pronouncements are analyzed to understand the constitutional framework governing elections and legislative terms. Comparative insights are drawn from countries practicing simultaneous elections to evaluate applicability in the Indian context. Secondary data sources, including government reports, expert committee recommendations, and media analyses, are used to assess both benefits and challenges. The study also employs a critical lens to balance normative ideals with practical implementation concerns.

3. CONTENT/DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 AUTHORITATIVE TENDENCIES:

Is it a hidden attack to the democratic conscience of the world's largest democracy? Delving deeper, it is imperative to understand the word Democracy is comprised of two words "Demos" meaning "people" and "Kratos" meaning "the government". Aristotle defines "democracy" as "the freedom of the citizens"¹ One unequivocal

² Anupam Saraph, "An Agenda for Reform of the Election System in India", 46 *Economic and Political Weekly* 19 2011, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41151988> last visited on Sept. 29, 2025.

attribute of Democracy is that its government is always accountable to its people, and it is also enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution of India that “the people” has the “sovereign power” of the nation². Preamble to the Constitution of India opening with the words “We, the People of India”, speaks volume of where the ‘Sovereignty’ lies.³

However, what is alarming is the apprehension of this Bill silently jeopardizing the spirit of democracy. Staggered elections empower citizens to make nuanced choices, which encourages better governance. In the present electoral framework, if a voter supported one political party during national elections but based on a critical assessment of their performance and integrity, they have the liberty to opt for a different party during subsequent state elections. This flexibility allows voters to hold governments accountable at different levels and enhances democratic responsiveness.⁴ However, under a system of simultaneous elections, this layered accountability may diminish. Voters may be influenced to vote uniformly across both levels of government, leading to reduced scrutiny, consolidation of power, and the risk of an increasingly authoritarian political climate. The bottom line is that, once a party is elected for a long term, it might become authoritative or if not, less accountable and responsive towards its people. Thus, while simultaneous elections may bring administrative convenience, they could come at the cost of democratic depth and decentralization.

Consequently, it may undermine the golden thread of “democratic principles” on which the entire Constitution runs. Democracy, as defined by Abraham Lincoln, is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. However, the Bill promises financial benefits and more, it is imperative to address something undercurrents.⁵

3. 2 SECURITY THREAT:

Implementing the *One Nation, One Election* policy would require full attention, massive manpower, advanced technology, and meticulous coordination. India must

³ Sarah F. Anzia, *Election Timing and the Electoral Influence of Interest Groups*, The Journal of Politics, Vol. 73, No. 2, (2011), pp. 412–427. JSTOR, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381611000028>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

⁴ Andrew Wyatt, *India in 2014: Decisive National Elections*, Asian Survey, Vol. 55, No. 1, (2015), pp. 33–47. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2015.55.1.33>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

⁵ Murray Goot, *Pauline Hanson’s One Nation: Extreme Right, Centre Party or Extreme Left?*, Labour History, No. 89, (2005), pp. 101–119. JSTOR, available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/27516078>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

be well-prepared to prevent, respond to, and neutralize threats that cannot be overlooked.

These concerns can be outlined pointwise:

1. **Deployment of Security Forces:** A large number of police personnel and other law enforcement agencies would be diverted from their regular duties to manage election-related responsibilities, potentially leaving gaps in routine law and order enforcement.
2. **Nationwide Disruption:** From political leaders to ordinary voters, the entire nation would be mentally consumed by the ongoing election process. Campaigns, speeches, advertisements, media coverage, and political events would dominate public discourse for an extended period—approximately 150 days.⁶
3. **Increased Vulnerability:** During this prolonged period of political and administrative focus on elections, the country could become more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, communal violence, or other disruptive events.
4. **Opportunity for Corruption:** With institutions stretched thin and public attention diverted, this time could be exploited for corrupt practices, undermining the rule of law and disrupting social peace.

In summary, conducting elections simultaneously raises significant security concerns. Organizing elections in a country with the world's largest population is an extremely complex and a demanding process. While the idea of synchronized elections may offer administrative and economic benefits, it must be carefully weighed against the serious security and societal challenges it could pose.

3.3 THE CASE OF MID-TERM ELECTIONS:

Section 3 of the Bill amends Article 83 of the Constitution of India by inserting additional clauses after Article 83(2) which introduces the concept of unexpired term in an attempt to set the objective of smooth simultaneous elections in motion and to avoid its disruption. Mid-term elections refer to elections held before the scheduled time due to the premature dissolution of a legislative assembly, either at the state or national level. Under the One Nation, One Election proposal, which aims to synchronize Lok Sabha (national) and state assembly elections across India, a mechanism would need to be established to handle such mid-term

⁶ Subrata K. Mitra & Jivanta Schöttli, *India's 2014 General Elections: A Critical Realignment in Indian Politics?*, Asian Survey, Vol. 56, No. 4, (2016), pp. 605–628. JSTOR, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26364378>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

scenarios. The proposal suggests that if a government falls mid-term, a new government could be formed from within the existing legislature for the remainder of the term, or fresh elections could be held, but the newly elected legislature would serve only the remaining period of the original synchronized cycle. This ensures that all elections remain aligned, preserving the uniformity of the electoral schedule while accommodating political contingencies.⁷

The underlying problems of mid-term elections are twofold:

1. Reluctance of State Governments:

A major concern is whether state governments would willingly accept the curtailment of their full five-year tenure. While there is no constitutional bar on shortening a state government's term for synchronization, the political willingness to do so is questionable. Furthermore, if governments are aware that their terms may be cut short, they might lose motivation for good governance and instead adopt a passive or non-committal administrative approach.

2. Short -Term Governance and Populism:

Governments with shortened terms may prioritize political survival over long term development goals. In an attempt to win in the next synchronized elections, they may resort to populist means like providing freebies and offering subsidies. While these may be politically expedient, but they may severely impact the state's fiscal health and economic planning. In his article, the Hon'ble Minister highlights that frequent elections tend to disrupt the focus of both Governments and political parties. The constant need to secure victory in upcoming elections pushes them to prioritize short-term political gains over long-term objectives. Consequently, important and necessary economic planning is often sidelined. There have been multiple occasions in the past where Governments have delayed or avoided implementing crucial structural reforms due to electoral considerations — a delay that ultimately affects the very sections of society most in need.⁸

3.4 OPERATIONAL AND LOGISTICAL COMPLEXITIES:

⁷ Robert I. Rotberg, *National Elections*, Nigeria: Elections and Continuing Challenges, Council on Foreign Relations, (2007), pp. 7–15.. JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05763.8>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

⁸ Mahendra P. Singh, *Federalism, Democracy and Human Rights: Some Reflections*, Journal of the Indian Law Institute, Vol. 47, No. 4, (2005), pp. 429–446. JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43951994>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

Massive Scale of Operations: Conducting elections for the entire country (Lok Sabha, all State Assemblies, and potentially local bodies) simultaneously would be an unprecedented logistical challenge. It would require:

1. **Electoral Magnitude:** As per studies, the magnitude of India's electorate is enormous. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, there were about 96.88 crore registered voters. The number of polling stations for Lok Sabha 2024 is projected to rise from 10.36 lakh in 2019 to 11.8 lakh in 2024; which is approximately a 14% rise. If ONOE is attempted, the requirements will be massive in booths, logistics, staff etc. As per Election Commission, there will be a need to expand the polling stations to 13.6 lakh by 2029.
2. **Enormous Number of EVMs and VVPATs:** To hold such large level simultaneous elections, ECI estimates around 30 lakh electronic voting machines, far more than currently available, requiring massive procurement, storage, and transport infrastructure. It may lead to manufacturing and supply chain pressure. Besides machines, warehouses⁹ will also require multiplication which ultimately must accelerate the requirement of security standards (CCTVs, periodic inspections, physical security) etc.

Vast Deployment of Personnel: A huge number of polling officials, security forces, and administrative staff would be needed, diverting them from their regular duties on an unprecedented scale. For instance, in 2024, around 1.5 crore polling staff were engaged over the entire Lok Sabha election process.

Also, the training of such gigantic force may prove to be a cumbersome process including EVM/VVPAT handling, electoral procedures, documentation etc. Training millions of people, deploying them, managing their transportation, accommodation in remote areas may magnify fatigue and potential for administrative errors.

3.5 THE FEDERAL DILEMMA:

Article 1 of the Indian Constitution provides, “*India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States*” stating that Indian Union was indissoluble and no state had the right to secede. Ambedkar argued that India's system was not a true federation but a union, as the states were not a product of a compact between sovereign entities but were created by the Union for administrative purposes. But at the same time he

⁹ Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Introduction, Does “One Nation, One Election” Make Sense for India?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 17-19. *JSTOR*, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.3>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

argued, “The Indian Constitution is a federal Constitution in as much as it established what may be called a dual polity which will consist of the Union at the Centre and the States at the periphery each endowed with sovereign powers to be exercised in the field assigned to them respectively by the Constitution”.¹⁰ This formed the basis of India’s unique federalist structure to be called as *Cooperative Federalism*.

1. **Judicial Contravention:** Implementing ONOE would likely require premature dissolution or artificial extension of State Legislative Assemblies to align their terms with the Lok Sabha. Such measures undermine the constitutional guarantee of state autonomy and impose a rigid uniformity that runs counter to India’s plural design. This position resonates with the Supreme Court’s observation in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* that the Constitution, while not traditionally federal, distributes powers in a manner reflective of a federal structure.¹¹
2. **Undermining Regional Political voices:** When elections are held simultaneously, national issues tend to overshadow state-specific concerns such as agriculture, language, or regional development. This dynamic marginalizes regional parties and undermines their role as vehicles of local representation. The Supreme Court in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* recognised federalism as part of the basic structure, warning against constitutional practices that erode the autonomy of States. ONOE risks producing precisely such an imbalance by privileging centralised narratives over local voices. The Court has further underlined that federalism forms part of the *basic structure* of the Constitution and cannot be abrogated.
3. **Distortion of federal equilibrium:** ONOE has the potential to tilt the balance of power towards the Union by consolidating electoral mandates around central leadership. Such a shift may enhance the dominance of national parties, thereby diluting the salience of state-specific issues and undermining the principle of cooperative federalism. Over time, this could reassess India’s quasi-federal framework into one with increasingly union-centric characteristics. Constitutional scholars, including Seervai, have warned that altering this federal equilibrium risks eroding the spirit and structural integrity of the Constitution.

¹⁰ Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Introduction*, Does “One Nation, One Election” Make Sense for India?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 1–3. *JSTOR*, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.3>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

¹¹ Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Front Matter*, Does “One Nation, One Election” Make Sense for India?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. i–ii. *JSTOR*, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.1>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

4. ARGUMENT AND DISCUSSION

The One Nation One Election has drawn attention of various criticism. Though synchronization might have their own benefits in the worldly views, but at the same the challenges it poses are very baffling and intrigued that if the practical implementation is done without probing them, they can lead to a dire failure in the whole system. While the proponents of the theory argue it could reduce costs and improve government efficiency, critics highlight their concerns about its impact on federalism, democratic accountability, practical feasibility and the representation of regional interests.

4.1 CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Synchronization would require aggressive constitutional amendments, since India has already faced it once in 1976 and to the consequence of this, that we till date criticize it and even 'Samvidhan Hatya Divas' has been emerged as a special day to mourn the day, the resultant effect of the same could be risking in case it fails. It might have exposure to arbitrariness undermining the voters' choice and due process. The risk is not merely institutional but can erode the foundations of democratic system of checks and balances.¹²

4.2 THREAT TO FEDERALISM

Centralizing the electoral cycle compels all State governments to follow a single timeline, deprecate state interests and acceleration in context-specific governance challenges. The makers of the Constitution have made to the approach of federalism to protect the Unity-in-Diversity of the country providing solutions to region-centric problems and homogeneity of people. This weakens the core principle of federalism, where states should have control over their own electoral mandates and policy priorities as a consequential effect of the electoral mandates.¹³

¹² Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Critiques*, Does "One Nation, One Election" Make Sense for India?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 11–15. JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.8>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

¹³ Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Reform Possibilities*, Does "One Nation, One Election" Make Sense for India?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 17–19. JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.10>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

4.3 POLITICAL DIVERSITY AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT

When merger of national and state elections happens, it becomes imperative that small parties and regional issues get unattended while national narratives dominate to capture attention and ultimately narrow down the spectrum of political competition. It may also lead to ingrown confusion among the voters to distinguish between the national and state interests at the ballot box. This diminishes pluralism, restricts policy innovation, and ultimately narrows the spectrum of political competition.

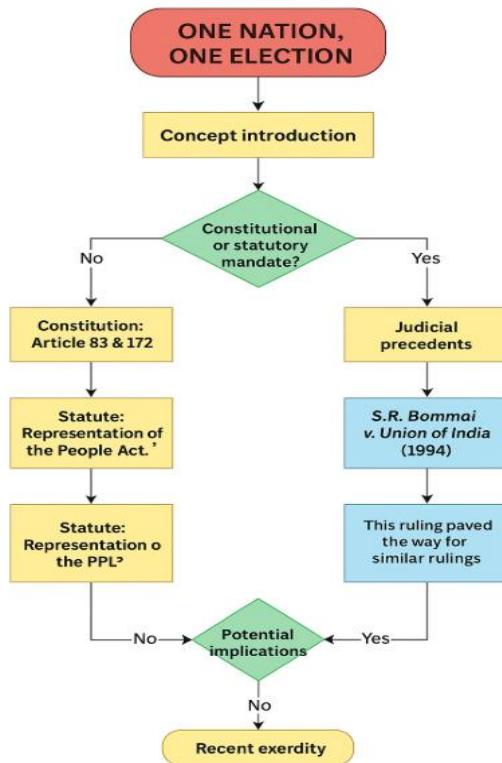


FIG.1: - CONSTITUTIONAL OR STATUTORY MANDATE

5. RESULT/FINDINGS

5.1 PREPARATION AND USE OF COMMON ELECTORAL ROLL:

In 255th law report, it has been mentioned that States follow three different approaches when it comes to using electoral rolls for local body elections:

- (a) using ECI's rolls as the base for creating and updating local electoral rolls,
- (b) directly adopting ECI's rolls without changes, and
- (c) using ECI's parliamentary or assembly rolls as drafts, which are then modified with additions or deletions. In some cases, even the qualifying dates for inclusion differ between parliamentary/assembly rolls and those for local bodies.

Both the ECI's 2004 reform proposals and the Background Paper emphasize that this 'lack of uniformity' across states leads to 'unnecessary duplication of work and increased expenditure'. This is particularly inefficient given that, in most instances, the same field-level officials are responsible for preparing and revising rolls for both types of elections. Moreover, this inconsistency can confuse voters—someone may find their name on one list but missing from another. Adopting a common electoral roll would help eliminate redundancy, reduce costs, and save significant time and effort, especially considering the extensive resources the ECI already invests in preparing accurate electoral rolls.¹⁴

5.2 DEBARRING INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES:

As it a non-controversial fact, that implementing One Nation One Election is a cumbersome process. In order to achieve twofold objectives namely, i) making ONOE convenient and simpler and ii) avoiding confusion among the electorate, independent candidates must be debarred from contesting elections. According to the Law Commission, independent candidates must be disbarred from contesting elections because these are mostly dummy/non-serious candidates or those who stand (with the same name) only to contribute to the voters' confusion. Thus, sections 4 and 5 of the RPA should be amended to provide for only political parties registered with the ECI under section 11(4) to contest Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha elections. Law Commission in its 170th report also states as under - *"Past experience shows that many independent candidates contested Lok Sabha elections in a casual manner or for oblique reasons. In many cases their security deposits were forfeited. One of the resultant effects of independents contesting the Lok Sabha seats is that the ballot paper becomes unmanageably large. Non-seriousness of some of the independent candidates is exemplified in the case of one of the BJP candidates, namely, Shri V.K. Malhotra, against whom quite a few persons of the same name "V.K. Malhotra" stood as independent candidates from the same constituency in Delhi during Lok Sabha elections in order to mislead the masses.*

¹⁴ Milan Vaishnav Et Al., *The Constitutional Amendment Bill, Does "One Nation, One Election" Make Sense for India?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 6–8. JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.6>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.

Such practices are meant to confuse people and make them cast their vote in favour of a candidate whom they never intended to vote.”

5.3 ENHANCING AWARENESS AMONG VOTERS:

As the electorate constitutes the cornerstone of any democratic electoral system, it is imperative to cultivate widespread awareness among voters regarding the potential implications of the *One Nation, One Election* policy. Educating citizens on the possible erosion of electoral discernment—particularly the psychological impact of phenomena such as the bandwagon effect or political indoctrination by dominant national parties—is essential for fostering informed and autonomous voting behavior.

Voters must be equipped to differentiate between ‘region-specific concerns’—such as local governance, agrarian distress, and language or cultural identity—which are typically championed by state-level parties, and ‘broader national concerns’ like foreign policy, national infrastructure, or economic strategy, which rightly fall within the purview of general elections.

Moreover, public discourse must encourage voters to evaluate national parties based on objective performance metrics, proven administrative capacity, and competent leadership, rather than emotional or populist appeals. A critical step in this direction is the discouragement of identity-based vote-bank politics—whether rooted in caste, religion, or other parochial lines—as well as a rejection of manipulative tactics such as the indiscriminate distribution of freebies, which often compromise the integrity of the electoral mandate.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGESSTIONS

The debate on One Nation, One Election encapsulates one of the most pressing questions in India’s democratic journey: how to balance efficiency with inclusivity in governance. The proposal offers undeniable advantages, particularly in reducing the staggering costs of repeated elections, minimizing administrative disruptions, and allowing governments to focus on policymaking without the constant pressure of electoral cycles. By streamlining the democratic process, synchronized elections could also foster political stability and improve voter participation.

Yet, these benefits cannot overshadow the complexities involved. Implementing simultaneous elections would require far-reaching constitutional amendments, careful restructuring of electoral laws, and perhaps even altering the tenure of legislatures, which raises issues of legitimacy. Moreover, India’s federal and pluralistic structure risks being compromised if regional voices are subsumed

under dominant national narratives during a single electoral exercise. Critics rightly stress that democracy in India thrives on its diversity, and reforms must not dilute this strength.¹⁵

Therefore, while the vision of One Nation, One Election is bold and transformative, its adoption must be gradual, consensual, and safeguarded by constitutional checks. Pilot projects, phased implementation, and dialogue among stakeholders could help test its viability. Ultimately, the reform's success depends on reconciling democratic ideals with administrative practicality.

¹⁵ Milan Vaishnav *Et Al.*, *Government's Rationale*, Does “One Nation, One Election” Make Sense for India?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, (2025), pp. 8–11.JSTOR, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep71645.7>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2025.