International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies
Publisher's Home Page: https://www.ijeks.com/

Fully Open Access   **Research Paper**

One Nation, One Election: Feasibility and Implications on Indian Democracy

Warisa Parveen[1*]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, India.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-03-12-030
*Corresponding Author: warisaparveen43@gmail.com

The idea behind "One Nation, One Election" is to synchronize India's Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections in order to simplify the electoral process and lessen the expenses and disturbances that come with it. In this essay, the viability, advantages, and difficulties of holding simultaneous elections in India are examined. In order to put the dispute in context, the historical development of Indian elections—from the earliest days of synchronized elections to the present practice of separate polls—is investigated. The advantages of holding elections at the same time are examined, including financial savings, improved administrative effectiveness, stable governance, and less voter fatigue. The study does, however, also point up important obstacles, such as constitutional modifications, the possible loss of state sovereignty, practical issues, and the influence on political party dynamics and voter behaviour.

Keywords: *One Nation One Election, Indian Democracy, Electoral Reforms, Political Stability.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the goal of streamlining the electoral process, cutting expenses, and minimizing the interruptions to governance that frequent elections entail, the "One Nation, One Election" concept promotes coordinating the elections of the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha (national parliament). In the past, India held simultaneous elections for the national and state legislatures until 1967, when political unrest, state assembly dissolution, and regional inequalities forced the practice to end. Since then, elections have been spaced out, with the national parliament and other states holding their elections at different periods. With supporters claiming that it might guarantee greater administrative effectiveness, promote political stability, and save a substantial amount of money, the concept of "One Nation, One Election" has attracted fresh interest in recent years. Concerns are raised about the proposal's viability, nevertheless, especially in light of probable state autonomy reduction, logistical difficulties, and constitutional revisions. Opponents contend that it might weaken the representation of local issues, marginalize regional parties, and consolidate power. In order to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of synchronized elections, as well as the consequences for the nation's federal structure, democracy, and political system, this study will look at the historical

background of India's election practices. It also makes suggestions for potential ways to deal with the difficulties in putting "One Nation, One Election" into practice.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Following the British model of holding synchronized elections for both the national and state legislatures, India was the first country to use the concept of simultaneous elections after gaining independence. Elections for state assemblies and the national parliament, the Lok Sabha, were conducted concurrently from 1952 to 1967. This strategy was primarily justified by the need to guarantee administrative effectiveness, lessen election weariness, and save money. The Indian National Congress (INC) controlled Indian politics at this time, and its strong central authority made it simpler to establish a single electoral procedure. Both the federal and state governments benefited from the streamlined governance structure and cogent political discourse made possible by this synchronization.

But things started to alter in the late 1960s. Elections for certain state assemblies were no longer held in conjunction with the national elections in 1967, marking a change. Political unpredictability and the expanding power of regional parties were the main causes of this shift. A precedent for future separate elections was established when the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly was dissolved before its term was up and elections were conducted separately. Election synchronization got more challenging as the years went by because regional parties acquired clout and coalition politics became the norm.

Separate elections became the norm in the 1970s and 1980s as the Congress Party's power waned and the Janata Party and other regional parties rose to prominence. The practical problems of coordinating the national and state electoral timetables, as well as logistical issues, contributed to the move to separate elections. With Lok Sabha and state assembly elections scheduled at various times, this trend persisted into the 1990s and 2000s, frequently resulting in political instability, high election-related costs, and voter fatigue. With political leaders and policymakers claiming that having simultaneous elections may save expenses, administrative hassles, and the instability brought on by frequent elections, the concept of "One Nation, One Election" has been resurrected in recent years. In the twenty-first century, the proposal has drawn attention, especially from the present administration, which has pushed for changes to expedite the voting process. Although some people have embraced this concept, others are still wary because of worries about how it would affect the federal system and state governments' independence. The ongoing discussion of this matter reflects the shifting political landscape in India.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

➢ To examine the feasibility of implementing "One Nation, One Election" in India.
➢ To analyze the potential benefits of synchronized elections, including cost savings, administrative efficiency, and political stability.
➢ To explore the challenges and obstacles involved in holding simultaneous elections, such as constitutional amendments, logistical complexities, and political implications.
➢ To assess the impact of synchronized elections on India's federal structure and state autonomy.
➢ To evaluate the potential effects of simultaneous elections on voter behavior, political parties, and governance.
➢ To explore comparative examples from other countries with synchronized elections and draw lessons for India.
➢ To propose possible solutions and recommendations for overcoming the challenges associated with implementing "One Nation, One Election" in the Indian context.

4. ADVANTAGES

➢ **Economic benefits:** One of the biggest benefits of holding elections at the same time is that it saves money. Elections in India are costly for political parties and the government. The burden of holding national, state, and municipal elections every few years puts a heavy financial strain on the nation's resources. By holding elections at the same time, election-related expenses such as those for setting up polling places, organizing election equipment, and making security arrangements would be less frequent. Resources might be pooled by

the Election Commission and other government agencies, making the process more economical. Reduced campaign costs would also help political parties since they could run their campaigns concurrently at the state and federal levels, increasing outreach while cutting expenditures.

➢ **Administrative Efficiency:** Planning, coordination, and a substantial amount of administrative resources are required to manage elections at varied dates for different state and national elections. Election timetable alignment would allow the Election Commission to concentrate on setting up a single, cohesive electoral process, which would result in a more efficient and streamlined use of resources. Centralized planning would be necessary for simultaneous election preparation, enhancing collaboration amongst different states and government agencies. This would guarantee the best possible use of voting materials, polling places, and security guards nationwide. Furthermore, there would be a single training and deployment requirement for election-related personnel, such as government officials and poll workers, which would lessen the administrative burden on the government.

➢ **Political Stability:** Regular elections frequently cause problems for government, especially if they are spaced out at different times. The time and concentration available for governance is diminished as a result of governments being compelled to redirect resources and attention to election-related activities. Elections held simultaneously would reduce these interruptions and enable longer, more stable stretches of government. Instead of always planning for or responding to future elections, political parties should focus on their legislative and administrative responsibilities. A single election cycle would also avoid the destabilizing consequences of frequent elections, which frequently result in political instability, particularly in coalition governments. With less political campaigning and uncertainty following the election, attention may turn to governance and development.

➢ **Enhanced Voter Engagement:** India's frequent elections have raised concerns about voter fatigue. Because they must constantly participate in elections, citizens frequently feel disenchanted and disinterested. Because the election process would be consolidated into a single period, simultaneous elections would probably lessen this tiredness. In order to increase voter turnout and involvement, voters would only need to participate once over a certain term. The public may find elections easier to handle as a result, since there would be less confusion and work required to participate in separate elections for various entities. Voters could be more engaged in the political process if all elections were held at the same time since they would be casting ballots for both national and state representatives simultaneously.

➢ **Reduced Regional Fragmentation:** Election campaigns frequently become extremely regionalized in a nation as diverse as India, with state-based issues often trumping national ones. A fragmented political landscape may result from this division, which may also threaten the national political discourse. "One Nation, One Election" could lessen regional division and foster a more cohesive national political discourse by coordinating state and national elections. National political parties and policies might be strengthened as a result of voters being more inclined to take national issues and policies into account when casting their ballots. In order to foster unity and prevent regional concerns from overshadowing national policy talks, a synchronized election would aid in bridging the gap between regional and national issues.

➢ **Strengthening Democracy:** India's democracy might be strengthened, which is one of the main benefits of holding elections at the same time. Elections at the state and federal levels are scheduled at regular intervals, which forces voters to participate in politics more actively. The tactical voting that frequently occurs when elections are held separately would likewise be eliminated if elections were held

simultaneously. Without being swayed by local or regional considerations, voters can feel more empowered to cast ballots that accurately reflect their political inclinations. Political parties would also need to have a more thorough and unified policy program that addresses both local and national issues. Political conversation may become more robust, open, and responsible as a result.

- ➤ **Facilitating Electoral Reforms:** In India, "One Nation, One Election" might serve as a springboard for other election reforms. The synchronization process would motivate the federal and state governments to examine and enhance the electoral system overall. Reforms can concentrate on the Election Commission's effectiveness, the use of technology to cut down on unethical behavior, and the streamlining of voter registration procedures. In order to ensure a more open and equitable democratic process, it might also spark conversations about the necessity of campaign financing reforms and political ad regulation.

5. CHALLENGES
- ➤ **Constitutional and Legal Challenges:** The requirement for significant constitutional reforms is one of the main obstacles to putting "One Nation, One Election" into practice. The Lok Sabha (national parliament) and state assemblies may be elected separately under the Indian constitution, and each legislative has specific duties and authority. Articles 83, 172, and 356 of the Constitution, which regulate the periods of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, would need to be changed in order for simultaneous elections to take place. Furthermore, since it would interfere with state legislatures' constitutional right to serve out their terms, the procedure of dissolving state assemblies in the middle, as necessary for synchronization, would also need to be addressed.
- ➤ **Political Resistance:** Political opposition, especially from state administrations and regional parties, is one of the main barriers to the adoption of simultaneous elections. By centralizing the political process, the idea of synchronized elections could weaken the

influence of regional parties, who frequently concentrate on state-level concerns. State governments may also oppose the proposal out of concern for their authority and independence. A system that could reduce their electoral relevance in the face of national parties may worry states with strong regional parties, such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and others. Passing the appropriate laws and gaining the support for constitutional revisions may be severely hampered by political opposition to a unified election schedule.

- ➤ **Logistical Complexities:** It is extremely difficult logistically to have simultaneous polls throughout the nation, especially in a vast and diverse nation like India. Coordinated deployment of electoral personnel, security forces, and resources across large geographic areas would be necessary to manage elections for both the national parliament and state assemblies simultaneously. With more than 600,000 villages and towns and over 900 million eligible voters, it would be extremely difficult to coordinate logistics for just one election in India. The Election Commission would be in charge of making sure that polling places are properly manned and furnished, that there are no interruptions due to security, and that the voting procedure is open and devoid of fraud. A complicated process like this could put a strain on resources and possibly result in mistakes or delays, particularly in remote areas.
- ➤ **Erosion of Federalism:** Another instance where synchronized elections can encounter opposition is India's federal system. State administrations are free to choose their own electoral procedures and schedules under the current system of separate elections. By centralizing the electoral process and possibly weakening the authority of state governments, a move to "One Nation, One Election" could reduce this autonomy. Regional parties have the chance to promote local causes and demonstrate their importance during state elections. Coordinated elections run the risk of obscuring state concerns in favor of national ones, which would reduce the influence of regional parties. Additionally, this would

make it more difficult for state governments to schedule elections according to their own political calendar.

➤ **Impact on Voter Behavior and Political Parties:** Unexpected changes in voter behavior could result from simultaneous elections. Voters may give national issues more weight than local ones, which could affect state-level election results. Since regional parties' strength frequently stems from their capacity to handle state-specific concerns, this change in emphasis could work against them. National parties, on the other hand, may be in control and use their greater financial resources to successfully campaign at all governmental levels. Local people's voices might be muted in favor of national parties with greater resources and influence, which could result in a lopsided political representation. Local voters' particular concerns may also be compromised if political parties are compelled to embrace a more universal agenda that addresses both national and state issues.

➤ **Risk of Early Dissolution of Assemblies:** The possible requirement for an early dissolution of state assemblies is one of the political and logistical difficulties associated with synchronized elections. State assemblies may need to be dissolved before their elected term ends in order for simultaneous elections to take place, which could result in political instability and frequent changes of government. Because it would shorten the tenure of current governments and erode voter confidence, the early dissolution of assemblies could potentially cause political unpredictability. Undermining the integrity of state politics, the early dissolution of assemblies may also encourage political scheming as state administrations attempt to strategically dissolve their legislatures in order to conform to the political climate at the federal level.

➤ **Technological and Digital Infrastructure Issues:** One major obstacle might be the infrastructure and technology needed to enable synchronized elections. Despite being more digitalized, India's election process still has problems like long lines, malfunctioning electronic voting machines (EVMs), and trouble registering voters in rural or remote locations. In order to manage the enormous volume of the elections, synchronized elections would necessitate the development of digital infrastructure. It would become even more crucial to maintain the process's integrity, which includes making sure vote data is transmitted securely and guarding against cyberattacks. Any security lapse or technical malfunction could erode public trust in the election process.

➤ **Disruption of Electoral Focus:** Political parties may find it difficult to concentrate on specific topics at the federal and state levels as a result of synchronized elections. While state elections tend to be more focused, with regional issues taking precedence, national elections usually center on broad policy themes like economic growth, national security, and foreign policy. The influence of state leaders and regional political identities may be diminished if significant state-specific concerns are diluted in favor of national problems during a combined election.

➤ **Strengthening National Parties:** possible growth of national parties, especially those with widespread national The appeal like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is one of the most important political ramifications of simultaneous elections. National parties are already able to conduct coordinated campaigns throughout the nation because they have superior organizational infrastructure, financial resources, and media presence.

➤ They would have the chance to increase their power and deflect attention from regional issues, which are normally the purview of regional parties, if elections were held simultaneously. A more centralized political structure could result from the marginalization of smaller, regional political forces that are often concentrated on issues unique to a certain state.

➤ **Decline of Regional Parties:** In synchronized elections, regional parties—which frequently play a significant role in reflecting local concerns—may have a smaller role. Addressing state-specific issues is a popular strategy for many regional parties, but when national and state elections are held simultaneously, the national

narrative may eclipse their concerns. For instance, national parties that can pool resources for a coordinated election strategy may be harder for parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) or the Trinamool Congress (TMC) to compete with. The diversity and federal nature of India's democracy may be undermined by the possible loss of regional voices.

➤ **Coalition Politics:** Under ONOE, the coalition politics that have been a hallmark of Indian governance may change. Stronger majoritarian governments may result from the need for coalition administrations at the federal and state levels declining as national parties acquire clout. Nevertheless, this could potentially result in a greater concentration of power, so compromising state autonomy. The dynamics of coalition politics may also be altered by regional parties' continued pursuit of partnerships with national parties.

➤ **Electoral Campaign Strategies:** The parties' political tactics would change dramatically. A more streamlined and effective electoral approach would result from national parties crafting a single campaign that appeals to both state and national voters. But in order to adapt, regional parties would have to either build coalitions or change their emphasis to more general problems that have national resonance. This could change how local concerns are represented in the election's debate.

6. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON "ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION"

Other democracies throughout the world have similar ideas to India's "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) initiative. The possible advantages and difficulties of ONOE can be better understood by comparing the election systems of various nations. Depending on their political, cultural, and historical circumstances, several nations have chosen to use alternative models, even if some have successfully conducted simultaneous elections. A better idea of how ONOE might operate in India can be obtained by looking at these comparative viewpoints.

6.1. The United States: Separate Elections for Federal and State Governments:

State and federal elections are conducted independently in the US. The president is chosen every four years, and congressional elections are held every two years. There are different cycles for state elections, including those for state assemblies and governors. The federal character of the American political system, which grants states considerable autonomy in government, is reflected in the division of national and state elections. While national elections address more general concerns of national significance, the U.S. system concentrates on making sure that local issues are given priority in state elections.

On the other hand, India's federal system places more of a focus on holding state and federal elections at the same time. The possible problems of voter fatigue or a misalignment between state and federal governance that could occur in ONOE are avoided in the U.S. system. The alignment of national and state elections is more complicated and may be less indicative of local issues due to the political structure of India and its varied regional interests.

6.2. The United Kingdom: Simultaneous Elections in Certain Contexts.

Although national and local elections have occasionally taken place at the same time, elections for the UK's Parliament and local administrations are typically held separately. The English general and municipal elections, for instance, are frequently arranged to shorten the time between elections. On the other hand, the UK system permits more latitude in the scheduling of these elections, giving local concerns more space for discussion and debate. While simultaneous elections might save election expenses and logistical challenges, the UK's experience shows that careful planning is necessary to prevent local issues from becoming eclipsed by national ones. In the Indian context, ONOE would have to strike a balance between the depiction of regional issues and the centralization of national issues in order to keep local narratives relevant even during concurrent elections.

6.3. Germany: A Hybrid Model

According to Germany's hybrid model, state elections (Landtag) and federal elections for the Bundestag (the country's legislature) are typically held at different times. In several states, however, local and state elections have taken place at the same time, opening up possibilities for voting process efficiency. Germany's political system acknowledges the diversity of regional interests and grants states a great deal of autonomy.

According to the German experience, the ONOE model may jeopardize party representation and state-level autonomy if it is not properly balanced, even while it lowers election frequency and the likelihood of political instability. India's varied political scene, with a heavy emphasis on regional parties, calls for a careful design for ONOE in order to maintain the federal structure and local party significance, in contrast to Germany's more decentralized approach.

6.4. Australia: Simultaneous Federal and State Elections in Some Cases

In several states of Australia, state and federal elections are held concurrently. The procedure, called "double dissolution," prevents the disruption of government that comes with regular elections while also lowering election-related expenses. Elections are normally held at various times depending on the state, therefore this is not always the case. Similar to what would occur in India under the ONOE system, national parties have a propensity to control the political narrative in states where simultaneous elections have taken place. The example from Australia shows that while simultaneous elections may simplify the electoral process, they may also lessen the importance of local problems in state elections, which could impair local party representation and dynamics.

6.5. Brazil: Simultaneous Elections for Federal and State Governments

Local, state, and federal elections are held concurrently under Brazil's political system. Every four years, the nation's state legislatures, the president, and the National Congress are elected, and these elections are typically highly coordinated. The simultaneous election system in Brazil improves political efficiency and lowers expenses. Nonetheless, it has been seen that national parties, possessing superior resources, have a tendency to control the political landscape, displacing regional parties and concerns. Similar to India's proposed ONOE, this arrangement has sparked worries about local voices being ignored and national parties holding a disproportionate amount of influence.

7. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND PATH FORWARD FOR "ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION"

Although the idea of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has many benefits, there are a number of issues that must be resolved for it to be implemented successfully. Here are some possible fixes and a course of action to guarantee that the plan minimizes its negative effects while maximizing its positive effects on India's democratic system.

➢ **Constitutional Amendments:** Although the idea of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has many benefits, there are a number of issues that must be resolved for it to be implemented successfully. Here are some possible fixes and a course of action to guarantee that the plan minimizes its negative effects while maximizing its positive effects on India's democratic system.

➢ **Transition Phase:** A transition period might be taken into consideration given the difficulty of adopting ONOE. In order to match the various election cycles and minimize the disturbance to governance, this would entail holding elections at different intervals over a few years. The Election Commission, voters, and political parties would all benefit from a defined timeline for this transformation.

➢ **Strengthening State Representation:** While ONOE could lead to the dominance of national parties, ensuring strong state representation is vital. A parallel system could be established where states are assured a minimum representation at the national level, irrespective of the outcome of synchronized elections. This would safeguard local interests and prevent the marginalization of regional voices.

➢ **Election Fund Allocation:** More financing from the government and political parties would be needed for simultaneous elections

in order to guarantee an efficient, transparent, and equitable process. In order to ensure that both national and regional parties may effectively campaign without facing financial disadvantage, public funding for elections could be evaluated and distributed fairly.

➤ **Public Awareness and Engagement:** It is essential that voters comprehend the new electoral procedure. The democratic process would be strengthened by a national campaign to increase knowledge of the advantages and subtleties of ONOE, which would guarantee informed voting.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by lowering election costs and frequency, improving governance stability, and encouraging a more effective electoral process, the "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) concept has the potential to completely transform India's electoral system. The potential of marginalizing local concerns and regional parties is one of the major obstacles to its adoption, though. Careful constitutional reforms, a carefully thought-out transition period, and measures to guarantee robust state representation are necessary to allay these worries. Furthermore, public awareness initiatives and sufficient money are essential to ONOE's success. India may implement this model while preserving its federal structure and democratic integrity by striking a balance between regional representation and national efficiency, making ONOE a feasible course for the nation's electoral future.

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