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## ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION: CONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS IN INDIA

~ *Perarasan.P*

### Abstract

The proposal for “One Nation, One Election” seeks to conduct elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously with the aim of improving administrative efficiency and reducing public expenditure. However, its implementation raises significant constitutional and democratic concerns. It requires substantial amendments to the Constitution, particularly regarding the tenure and dissolution of legislatures, federal balance, and electoral representation. The proposal also raises questions about the autonomy of States and the practical challenges of handling unforeseen political situations. This study critically examines the constitutional validity, legal challenges, and democratic implications of simultaneous elections in India. It evaluates whether the proposal can promote stable governance without compromising the basic structure and federal principles of the Constitution. The paper concludes by suggesting a balanced approach that safeguards both electoral efficiency and constitutional values.

### Keywords

Simultaneous Elections, Constitutional Amendment, Federalism, Democratic Governance, Electoral Reforms, Legislative Tenure, Election Commission of India

### 1.Introduction

India, as the world’s largest democracy, conducts elections at regular intervals for the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies. At present, these elections are held separately because the

terms of different legislatures often end at different times. The proposal of “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) seeks to restore the practice of holding simultaneous elections across the country. The primary objective of this proposal is to reduce the financial burden of frequent elections, minimize administrative disruptions, and allow governments to focus more consistently on governance and development. As the idea has gained significant attention in recent years, it has also become the subject of extensive legal and political debate.

The implementation of simultaneous elections is not merely an administrative reform but a constitutional issue that requires careful examination. It would involve amendments to several provisions of the Constitution relating to the tenure of legislatures, dissolution of elected bodies, and the powers of constitutional authorities. Since India follows a federal system with independent Union and State governments, any reform affecting the electoral cycle must preserve the constitutional balance between the Centre and the States. Questions relating to democratic accountability, the role of regional political parties, and the rights of voters also form an important part of this discussion.

This study examines the constitutional challenges and democratic implications associated with the proposal of One Nation, One Election. It analyses the legal framework governing elections, the need for constitutional amendments, and the possible impact of the proposal on India’s federal structure and representative democracy. By evaluating both the advantages and the concerns surrounding simultaneous elections, the paper aims to present a balanced understanding of whether this electoral reform can be implemented without compromising the core principles of the Constitution.

## **2.Statement of the Problem**

The proposal for “One Nation, One Election” has generated widespread debate over its constitutional feasibility and its impact on India’s democratic framework. While simultaneous elections may reduce costs and administrative burdens, they require significant constitutional amendments that could affect the tenure of legislatures and the federal distribution of powers. The proposal also raises concerns about the autonomy of States, voter representation, and the handling of situations such as premature dissolution of legislatures. There is uncertainty about whether the

expected benefits outweigh the potential risks to constitutional principles and democratic governance. Therefore, a critical examination of its constitutional challenges and democratic implications is necessary to assess its suitability for India's diverse political and federal system.

### **3.Review of Literature**

Law Commission of India (2015) examined the feasibility of simultaneous elections and concluded that constitutional amendments and broad political consensus are essential before implementation. It emphasized preserving India's federal structure.<sup>1</sup>

NITI Aayog (2017) highlighted that simultaneous elections could reduce election expenditure and improve governance. It also acknowledged the legal and practical challenges involved.<sup>2</sup>

Election Commission of India (2018) discussed the administrative and logistical requirements for conducting simultaneous elections. It stressed the need for constitutional and statutory reforms before adoption.<sup>3</sup>

Bibek Debroy (2018) argued that frequent elections affect policy continuity and governance. He supported the idea of synchronized elections while recognizing the need to protect democratic values.<sup>4</sup>

High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024) recommended a phased implementation of simultaneous elections after necessary constitutional amendments. It emphasized balancing administrative efficiency with India's federal and democratic principles.<sup>5</sup>

### **4.Objectives of the Study**

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<sup>1</sup> Law Commission of India, Report No. 255: Electoral Reforms (Government of India, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> NITI Aayog, Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "One Nation, One Election" Proposal (Government of India, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Election Commission of India, Response to the Discussion on Simultaneous Elections (Election Commission of India, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Bibek Debroy, One Nation, One Election: Rationale and Feasibility, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, Report of the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (Government of India, 2024).

1. To examine the concept and constitutional framework of One Nation, One Election in India.
2. To analyse the constitutional amendments required for implementing simultaneous elections.
3. To evaluate the impact of the proposal on the federal structure and Centre–State relations.
4. To assess the democratic implications of simultaneous elections on voter choice and political representation.
5. To identify the legal, administrative, and practical challenges involved in implementing the proposal.
6. To study the views and recommendations of committees, constitutional experts, and the Election Commission regarding simultaneous elections.
7. To suggest measures for implementing the proposal while safeguarding constitutional values, democratic principles, and the basic structure of the Constitution.

## **5.Methodology**

This study adopts a doctrinal (library-based) research methodology, focusing on the critical analysis of existing legal materials relating to the concept of One Nation, One Election. The research primarily relies on primary sources, including the Constitution of India, relevant constitutional provisions, parliamentary enactments, judicial decisions, committee reports, and official documents. It also makes use of secondary sources, such as textbooks, journal articles, research papers, commentaries, government publications, and credible online databases. The collected materials are analysed using a qualitative and analytical approach to examine the constitutional validity, legal challenges, and democratic implications of simultaneous elections.

## **6.Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for the government as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the constitutional, legal, and democratic issues involved in implementing the One Nation, One Election proposal. By examining the constitutional framework, judicial principles, and recommendations of expert committees, the research assists policymakers in evaluating the feasibility of simultaneous elections. It offers insights into how the proposal may influence

governance, electoral administration, public expenditure, and the federal structure of India. The study also highlights the need to balance administrative efficiency with constitutional values, democratic accountability, and the autonomy of States. Overall, the findings can support the government in formulating reforms that strengthen the electoral system while preserving the basic features of the Constitution.

This study is important for me as it deepens my understanding of the constitutional and democratic dimensions of electoral reforms in India. It enables me to critically examine the legal challenges, constitutional amendments, and policy implications associated with the One Nation, One Election proposal. Through this research, I enhance my analytical, legal, and research skills by evaluating constitutional provisions, judicial decisions, and scholarly opinions. The study also broadens my knowledge of federalism, representative democracy, and election laws. Overall, it contributes to my academic growth and provides a strong foundation for future research in constitutional law and public policy.

### **7.Limitations of the Study**

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources, including the Constitution of India, statutes, judicial decisions, committee reports, books, research articles, government publications, and online resources, which may limit the scope of the analysis. The study does not rely on primary data such as interviews, surveys, or consultations with policymakers, election officials, political parties, or voters; therefore, practical perspectives are not directly reflected. It focuses mainly on the constitutional and democratic implications of the One Nation, One Election proposal and does not provide an in-depth analysis of its political, financial, or administrative aspects. Owing to time and resource constraints, every constitutional provision, judicial precedent, and comparative international practice could not be examined comprehensively. The research is confined to the Indian constitutional and legal framework, and its findings may not be applicable to electoral systems in other countries. Consequently, the conclusions are limited to the materials and legal context considered in this study.

### **8.Result and Discussion**

## **Doctrinal Research**

India, as the world's largest democracy, conducts elections at regular intervals for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies. The frequent conduct of elections often results in substantial public expenditure, repeated enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, and diversion of administrative machinery from developmental activities. To address these concerns, the proposal of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) seeks to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies. While the proposal promises administrative efficiency, reduced election costs, and continuity in governance, it also raises important constitutional and democratic questions. The implementation of simultaneous elections requires careful examination of constitutional provisions relating to the tenure of legislatures, federalism, democratic representation, and the basic structure of the Constitution. This doctrinal study critically analyses the constitutional validity, legal challenges, and democratic implications of the proposal.<sup>6</sup>

### **1. Meaning and Concept of One Nation, One Election**

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) refers to the proposal of conducting elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously across India. Under this system, voters would cast their votes for both the Union and State governments during the same election period. The primary objective is to reduce the frequent conduct of elections and the associated financial and administrative burden. It also aims to ensure better governance by minimizing disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct. Simultaneous elections are expected to improve policy continuity and enable efficient utilization of public resources and security personnel. India followed this system during the initial years after Independence until the election cycles were disrupted due to the premature dissolution of legislatures. Since then, elections have been held at different times in various States. The proposal seeks to restore synchronized elections through suitable constitutional and legal amendments. At the same time, it emphasizes the need to preserve democratic accountability, federalism, and the constitutional framework while implementing the reform.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Law Commission of India, Report No. 255: Electoral Reforms (Government of India, 2015), Ch. 6; High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, Report of the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (Government of India, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Law Commission of India, Reform of the Electoral Laws (170<sup>th</sup> Report, 1999), Chapter IV.

## **2. Constitutional and Legal Framework**

### **2.1 Constitutional Provisions**

The implementation of One Nation, One Election requires amendments to several constitutional provisions governing the tenure and dissolution of legislatures. Relevant provisions include Articles 83 and 85 relating to Parliament, Articles 172 and 174 concerning State Legislatures, and Article 356 dealing with President's Rule. Any reform must remain consistent with the Constitution and respect democratic governance.

### **2.2 Federal Structure**

India follows a federal system where the Union and States function independently within their constitutional spheres. Simultaneous elections may affect the autonomy of States if legislative terms are extended or curtailed merely to synchronize election schedules. Therefore, the proposal must be examined in light of the constitutional principle of federalism.

### **2.3 Basic Structure Doctrine**

The Supreme Court has recognized that Parliament cannot amend the Constitution in a manner that destroys its basic structure. Principles such as democracy, federalism, free and fair elections, and judicial review form part of this doctrine. Any constitutional amendment introducing simultaneous elections must satisfy these constitutional limitations.<sup>8</sup>

## **3. Objectives of One Nation, One Election**

The primary objective of the One Nation, One Election proposal is to reduce the huge expenditure incurred by governments and political parties during frequent elections. It aims to minimize the repeated enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, which often delays developmental and welfare programmes. The proposal seeks to ensure continuity in governance by allowing governments to focus on policy implementation without regular electoral interruptions. It also intends to improve administrative efficiency by reducing the burden on the Election Commission,

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<sup>8</sup> M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law*, LexisNexis, 8th ed. (2018), pp. 165–185.

security personnel, and government officials. Simultaneous elections would enable better utilization of public resources and administrative machinery. Another objective is to reduce election-related disruptions in public life and governance. The proposal further aims to provide greater political stability by ensuring fixed electoral cycles. Ultimately, it seeks to strengthen effective governance while maintaining democratic principles and constitutional values.<sup>9</sup>

#### **4. Constitutional Challenges**

##### 4.1 Tenure of Legislatures

One of the major constitutional challenges is maintaining fixed election schedules despite premature dissolution of Parliament or State Assemblies. Synchronization may require extending or shortening legislative terms, raising constitutional concerns regarding representative democracy.

##### 4.2 Federalism

The proposal raises questions regarding Centre-State relations. States possess constitutional autonomy, and compulsory synchronization may interfere with their independent electoral mandate.

##### 4.3 Democratic Representation

Frequent elections provide citizens with regular opportunities to hold governments accountable. Critics argue that simultaneous elections may dilute regional issues and reduce the visibility of State-level political concerns, thereby affecting democratic representation.<sup>10</sup>

#### **5. Democratic Implications**

##### 5.1 Electoral Behaviour

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<sup>9</sup> NITI Aayog, Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The “One Nation, One Election” Proposal (2017).

<sup>10</sup> M.P. Jain, Indian Constitutional Law (LexisNexis, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., 2023), pp. 560–590.

Conducting simultaneous elections may influence voting behaviour, as voters may cast ballots based on national issues rather than State-specific concerns. This may benefit larger national parties while reducing electoral space for regional parties.

### 5.2 Accountability

Separate elections compel governments to remain accountable to the electorate at regular intervals. A unified election cycle may reduce opportunities for public evaluation of government performance between elections.

### 5.3 Political Stability

Supporters argue that synchronized elections provide political stability by reducing frequent electoral campaigns and enabling governments to focus on governance and long-term policy implementation.<sup>11</sup>

## **6. Administrative and Financial Implications**

Simultaneous elections are expected to reduce the overall expenditure incurred on election management, security deployment, and administrative arrangements. Conducting elections at one time would help save public funds and ensure better utilization of government resources. Government officials, teachers, and security personnel assigned to election duties would spend less time away from their regular responsibilities. This would improve administrative efficiency and reduce disruptions in public services. At the same time, the Election Commission would require extensive logistical planning to implement the system successfully. Adequate numbers of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), VVPAT units, trained election personnel, and secure storage facilities would be necessary. Strong coordination between the Union, States, and election authorities would also be essential. Therefore, while simultaneous elections may generate long-

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<sup>11</sup> Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Ethics in Governance (Government of India, 2007), pp. 167–172.

term financial savings, they would require substantial initial investment and careful administrative preparation..<sup>12</sup>

## **7.Judicial Perspective**

The One Nation, One Election is guided by several constitutional principles established through landmark decisions of the Supreme Court. The Court has consistently upheld free and fair elections as the foundation of democracy. It has also recognized democratic accountability, federalism, and the rule of law as essential features of the Constitution. Any electoral reform must therefore respect these constitutional values. The proposal for simultaneous elections should not weaken the autonomy of the States or the representative nature of the democratic system. Accordingly, any constitutional amendment introducing One Nation, One Election must satisfy the requirements of the basic structure doctrine and remain consistent with the Constitution.<sup>13</sup>

## **8.Comparative Perspective**

Many countries, including South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, and Indonesia, conduct simultaneous or partially synchronized elections under their respective constitutional systems. These models have helped reduce election costs and improve administrative efficiency. In several of these countries, fixed legislative terms make synchronized elections easier to implement. However, their constitutional, political, and federal structures differ significantly from those of India. Therefore, these experiences cannot be directly applied to the Indian context. They nevertheless provide useful insights into the practical advantages and challenges of simultaneous elections. Any Indian model should be designed in accordance with the Constitution, democratic principles, and the federal structure. Thus, comparative experiences may serve as guidance, but reforms must be tailored to India's unique constitutional framework.<sup>14</sup>

## **9.Challenges in Implementation**

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<sup>12</sup> Election Commission of India, Report on the Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections (New Delhi, 2015), pp. 12–18.

<sup>13</sup> Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225.

<sup>14</sup> International IDEA, Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005), pp. 45–52.

The successful implementation of One Nation, One Election requires broad political consensus and extensive constitutional amendments. One of the major challenges is managing situations where the Union or State governments lose their majority before completing their fixed tenure. The proposal must also address the conduct of by-elections without disturbing the synchronized election cycle. Ensuring uninterrupted democratic representation while maintaining fixed election schedules is another significant concern. It is equally important to balance administrative convenience with constitutional principles such as federalism and democratic accountability. Differences in political interests among the Union, States, and various political parties make consensus difficult to achieve. Therefore, careful planning and widespread consultation are essential for the effective implementation of the proposal.<sup>15</sup>

## **10.Recommendations**

The proposal for One Nation, One Election should be implemented only after a comprehensive constitutional review and broad consultation with all stakeholders. State Governments, constitutional experts, political parties, and the Election Commission should actively participate in the decision-making process. Necessary constitutional safeguards must be incorporated to protect federalism, democratic accountability, and judicial review. Any reform should preserve the autonomy of the States and the basic structure of the Constitution. A phased implementation strategy may be adopted to ensure a smooth and practical transition. Adequate administrative and legal preparations should be completed before implementation. Such a balanced approach would help achieve electoral efficiency while safeguarding the constitutional and democratic rights of citizens.<sup>16</sup>

## **11.Future Scope**

The proposal for One Nation, One Election represents an important area of electoral reform and constitutional debate in India. Although it has the potential to improve administrative efficiency and reduce election expenditure, its implementation must remain consistent with constitutional supremacy and democratic values. Future research may examine its impact on voter participation,

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<sup>15</sup> Report of the High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections in India (Government of India, 2018), pp. 25–33.

<sup>16</sup> Law Commission of India, Report No. 170: Reform of the Electoral Laws (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 78–85.

governance, political competition, and Centre–State relations after implementation. It may also assess the long-term effects on federalism and democratic accountability. Comparative studies with other democratic nations can provide further insights into its practical effectiveness. A balanced approach that combines electoral efficiency with strong constitutional safeguards will contribute to strengthening India’s democratic system.<sup>17</sup>

### **Case laws**

#### 1. Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, 1973

The Supreme Court held that Parliament has wide powers to amend the Constitution under Article 368, but it cannot alter or destroy its basic structure. The Court identified principles such as democracy, federalism, and the rule of law as part of this basic structure. This judgment is highly relevant to the One Nation, One Election proposal because any constitutional amendment introducing simultaneous elections must preserve these essential features. If the proposal weakens federalism or representative democracy, it may be challenged as unconstitutional. The case remains the cornerstone for examining the constitutional validity of major electoral reforms.<sup>18</sup>

#### 2. S.R. Bommai v. Union of India, 1994

In this landmark judgment, the Supreme Court emphasized that federalism is a basic feature of the Constitution. It held that State Governments cannot be dismissed arbitrarily and that constitutional machinery must function within democratic limits. The decision strengthened the autonomy of State Governments and restricted the misuse of Article 356. Since One Nation, One Election may require changes in the tenure of State Assemblies, this judgment highlights the need to protect the constitutional balance between the Union and the States.<sup>19</sup>

#### 3. Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain, 1975

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<sup>17</sup> Niraja Gopal Jayal & Pratap Bhanu Mehta (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 120–128.

<sup>18</sup> *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, (1973) 4 SCC 225.

<sup>19</sup> *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, (1994) 3 SCC 1.

The Supreme Court ruled that free and fair elections are an essential part of India's democratic framework and form part of the Constitution's basic structure. The Court invalidated provisions that attempted to place election disputes beyond judicial review. This case is relevant because any reform relating to simultaneous elections must ensure that electoral fairness, equality of opportunity, and judicial oversight are fully preserved. Administrative convenience cannot override democratic principles.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu, 1992

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the Tenth Schedule relating to anti-defection while permitting judicial review of the Speaker's decisions. The judgment recognized the importance of maintaining stability in elected governments without sacrificing democratic accountability. This principle is significant for One Nation, One Election because stable governments are necessary for synchronized election cycles. At the same time, democratic safeguards and constitutional checks must continue to operate effectively.<sup>21</sup>

#### 5. People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of Indian, 2013

The Supreme Court recognized the None of the Above (NOTA) option as an important aspect of the voter's freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a). The judgment reaffirmed that voter choice and electoral participation are central to a healthy democracy. It emphasized that electoral reforms should strengthen, rather than weaken, democratic rights. In the context of One Nation, One Election, the case underlines that any reform must protect voter autonomy, electoral fairness, and meaningful democratic participation.<sup>22</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

The proposal for One Nation, One Election represents a significant electoral reform that aims to improve administrative efficiency, reduce election expenditure, and ensure continuity in governance. At the same time, it raises important constitutional questions relating to federalism,

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<sup>20</sup> Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain, 1975 Supp SCC 1.

<sup>21</sup> Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu, 1992 Supp (2) SCC 651.

<sup>22</sup> People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India, (2013) 10 SCC 1.

the tenure of legislatures, democratic accountability, and the basic structure of the Constitution. Any attempt to implement simultaneous elections must be supported by carefully drafted constitutional amendments and broad political consensus. The reform should not compromise the autonomy of States or the democratic rights of citizens. A balanced approach that respects constitutional values while addressing practical challenges is essential for its successful implementation. If introduced with adequate legal safeguards and institutional preparedness, the proposal has the potential to strengthen India's electoral system while preserving the spirit of its constitutional democracy.

### **10.Suggestions**

1. Ensure broad political consensus before implementing One Nation, One Election.
2. Introduce constitutional amendments without affecting the federal structure.
3. Protect the autonomy and fixed tenure of State Legislatures.
4. Strengthen the capacity of the Election Commission for nationwide simultaneous elections.
5. Safeguard democratic values, free and fair elections, and voter representation at every stage.

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