



One Nation, One Election

Rahul Saxena

Research Scholar, Government PG College, Fatehabad,
Dr BhimRao Ambedkar university, Agra.
rahulsaxena@aol.in

Dr. Rajkumar Singh

Head, Department of Political Science, Government PG College, Fatehabad,
Dr. BhimRao Ambedkar university, Agra.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

one nation , one election

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.14104469

ABSTRACT

Government of India presents a proposal One Election for One Nation. The initiative seeks to hold all elections, both at the national and state levels, on a unified day or within a designated timeframe. The highlight of the proposal is that elections should be conducted simultaneously in all the 28 states and territories, including Delhi and Puducherry. Historically, from 1951-52 to 1967, elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies were largely held simultaneously. However, this practice was discontinued after 1967, with elections being held at different times throughout the year. Holding elections at different times puts a lot of financial pressure on the government, requires security personnel and election officials to be deployed for long hours from their primary duties and leads to long disruptions in developmental activities due to the long enforcement of the code of conduct. On September 18, the Cabinet endorsed the One Nation One Election proposal, which intends to facilitate simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies. It aims to reduce the frequency of elections, streamline the electoral process and save time and resources. This research paper will describe the history of the One

National One Election proposal, the various committees formed, their reports, and the current status along with their roles and personnel.

INTRODUCTION

The Government of India is currently assessing the One Election for One Nation initiative, which seeks to hold all elections nationwide on a single day or within a designated timeframe. The primary goal of this initiative is to facilitate simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies across all 28 states and eight union territories, including Delhi and Puducherry.

Need of one nation one election

An estimate suggests that the cost associated with Lok Sabha and state assembly elections is more than Rs 4500 crore for the Election Commission of India. This amount does not include the official expenditure incurred by candidates and political parties. The Parliamentary Standing Committee in its 79th report “Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies 2015” recommended that conducting elections in two phases would be a more practical solution. The report submitted last year suggested that the initial phase could be held in November 2016. It advised that all state assembly elections that expire within 6 months to 1 year from the date of election could be coordinated. The Pranam Swarup Committee determined that the term of the assemblies would need to be reduced while others could be extended to hold simultaneous elections. The One Nation One Election strategy reduces the costs associated with deploying security personnel and election officials multiple times throughout the year. Apart from this, the approach also reduces the expenses related to political campaign activities. Additionally, holding simultaneous elections could lead to an increase in voter turnout, which is currently the case in various states during simultaneous elections.

One Nation, One Election Plan

An amendment to the Constitution is necessary for the implementation of the One Nation, One Election initiative. This amendment must receive ratification from both the state governments and the union territory administrations across the nation. Legal experts have warned that failing to secure this amendment could lead to accusations of undermining the federal structure of the country.

Specifically, modifications are required for Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356 of the Indian Constitution. One significant challenge in executing this plan lies in the uncertainty regarding the management of situations arising from the dissolution of legislative bodies or the imposition of President's Rule.

Public opinion polls indicate a favorable reception among the Indian populace for this initiative, with over 21,000 suggestions submitted. Notably, approximately 81 percent of these respondents expressed support for the One Nation, One Election proposal.

High-Level Committee

The GOI on 2 September 2023 issued a notification for the formation of a high-level committee on the proposal of One Election for One Nation. The notification said that from 1951 to 1967, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held simultaneously, but after 1967, these elections started being held at different intervals within 1 year and started happening almost every year. This situation has placed significant financial burdens on the Government and various stakeholders, redirected security forces and electoral officials from their critical responsibilities for prolonged durations, and led to interruptions in developmental projects due to the extended implementation of the Model Code of Conduct, among other difficulties. AND WHEREAS the Law Commission of India, in its 170th Report on Electoral Law Reforms, observed: "The cycle of annual elections, frequently occurring out of season, must be brought to an end. We should return to a system where elections for the Lok Sabha and all Legislative Assemblies take place simultaneously. It is acknowledged that while it is impossible to predict every possible scenario, especially in relation to the enforcement of Article 356 (which has been notably curtailed following the Supreme Court's ruling in S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India), the occurrence of separate elections for a Legislative Assembly should be viewed as an exception rather than a standard practice. In its December 2015 report on the 'Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies,' the Parliamentary Standing Committee proposed a viable and practical approach for conducting simultaneous elections in two phases. Therefore, taking into account the aforementioned considerations and in the interest of the nation, the Government of India has constituted a High-Level Committee to explore the issue of simultaneous elections and to offer recommendations for their implementation nationwide.

Detail of committee are given below: -

Formation of Committee One Election for One Nation on 2nd September 2023. The Chairman of the Committee is Former President of India RAMNATH KOVIND. The purpose of committee is to propose a framework for the synchronization of elections, it is essential to outline the phases and timeline within which simultaneous elections may occur if they cannot be conducted concurrently. Additionally, recommendations for amendments to the Constitution and relevant laws should be provided, along with the suggestion of any necessary regulations that may be required under these circumstances. The Headquarters of the committee is New Delhi. The Secretary General of Committee is Dr. Nitin Chandra. The member of this committee is Amit Shah, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Nand Kishore Singh, Harish Salve, Sanjay Kothari. Linked website of this committee is <https://onoe.gov.in>.

Former President Ram Nath Kovind presented a comprehensive final report, consisting of 18,000 pages, to the current President of India, Draupadi Murmu. This report encompasses a variety of recommendations, prominently featuring the proposal to designate an 'Appointed Date' following the forthcoming general elections, which would initiate a new electoral cycle in 2029. Implementing this proposal would necessitate extending the terms of certain state legislative assemblies that are set to conclude before this date, as well as the premature dissolution of others whose five-year terms would otherwise extend beyond it.

The realization of this proposal requires a total of 18 amendments to the Constitution, particularly focusing on Article 83, which pertains to the duration of the Houses of Parliament, and Article 172, which addresses the duration of state legislative assemblies. Furthermore, states must ratify amendments to Article 324A, enabling simultaneous elections for panchayats and municipal bodies, along with Article 325, which would authorize the Election Commission of India to create a unified electoral roll and voter identification system in collaboration with state election commissions. The committee also sought legal counsel from four former Chief Justices of India, three former Chief Justices of state High Courts, and one former Chief Election Commissioner. Additionally, the Law Ministry reported that out of 21,558 public responses collected, 81% expressed support for the proposal.

Union Cabinet approves One Election for One Nation proposal.

- on 18 September 2024, the union cabinet approved the one election for one nation proposal accepting the report of the committee the chairman of the committee is former President Ram Nath Kovind).
- the One Election for One Nation bill is anticipated to be presented during the forthcoming winter session of parliament.

Reactions from various leaders

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi stated that the findings will be available for discussion among both modern experts and parliamentarians following the committee's report submission. As the largest democracy globally, India exemplifies the evolution of democracy within its own framework. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar indicated that the commission is prepared to conduct elections in accordance with legal stipulations. However, opposition parties have voiced their concerns, arguing that this initiative could adversely affect various regional parties in India. They have characterized it as a move towards a presidential system, which they believe undermines the current federal governance structure and risks transforming the nation from a multiparty democracy into a one-party state.

The Indian National Congress has claimed that the central government is laying the groundwork for a scenario of "one nation, no elections" through this initiative. Congress leader Palaniappan Chidambaram accused the government of hastening the process by establishing a committee that lacks independence. He suggested that the BJP aims to achieve a significant majority and implement extensive constitutional changes by synchronizing national and state elections. Former law minister Kapil Sharma cautioned that the "one nation, one election" policy could lead to the central government's decline, asserting that the Modi administration is engaging in perilous actions.

Government's position in Parliament to pass this bill

In the 2024 general elections, the BJP's position weakened, the NDA alliance fell from 353 to 293 seats. BJP's own majority was cut from 300-3 to 240. Other parties along with the Indian National Congress formed the Bharat Alliance which is playing the role of opposition party today with 233 seats. The One Nation One Election Bill can be passed only with a minimum two-thirds majority in both houses (362 in

Lok Sabha and 167 in Rajya Sabha). On 18 September 2024, the NDA Cabinet approved the One Nation One Election Bill.

One Nation One Election: Merits and Demerits

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the frequency of elections in specific states of India. As a result, both the state machinery and the Election Commission of India are directing their resources and personnel to support assembly elections in these areas. The NDA government is currently contemplating the adoption of the "one nation, one election" policy. This article will examine the potential benefits and drawbacks of this proposed initiative.

Merits and Demerits of “One Nation One Election” –

MERITS OF “ONE NATION ONE ELECTION”

1. Cost Efficiency: A primary argument in favor of simultaneous elections is the potential for significant savings in government expenditure. Implementing the "One Nation One Election" initiative could result in substantial financial benefits. With 4,120 MLAs across 31 states and Union Territories, and a maximum expenditure limit of 2.8 million rupees for larger assemblies, conducting elections simultaneously could lead to an estimated total cost of approximately 11 billion rupees. Typically, around five states hold elections each year.

2. Accelerated Development Initiatives: The implementation of the Model Code of Conduct during election periods frequently results in the suspension of new project initiatives. By embracing a unified election cycle, there would be enhanced consistency in the policies and programs of both the central and state governments.

3. Mitigation of Black Money: It is commonly acknowledged that elections frequently receive funding from illegal sources. A considerable volume of unaccounted money is transformed into lawful currency during electoral seasons. Holding elections year-round may contribute to the development of a shadow economy.

4. Efficient Government Operations: The government allocates considerable resources and personnel to ensure the conduct of free and fair elections at both national and state levels. This allows educational institutions to operate normally, enabling teachers and officials to fulfill their duties, thereby enhancing the convenience for the general populace.

5. Enhanced Governance Efficiency: By reducing the frequency of elections, the government would not be compelled to appeal to the public through attractive schemes or caste and religion-based initiatives. With less frequent elections, elected representatives could concentrate on governance rather than campaigning, facilitating more effective policy execution.

6. Increased Voter Participation: Holding simultaneous elections may lead to higher voter turnout, as citizens would have the opportunity to cast their votes for multiple positions in a single event, potentially resulting in a more engaged electorate.

DEMERITS OF “ONE NATION ONE ELECTION”

1. Overlooked Regional Concerns: Elections for state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are characterized by differing focal points. Regional parties tend to concentrate on local issues, while national parties engage with wider national topics. As a result, regional parties may face challenges in effectively promoting local concerns.

2. Challenges for Regional Parties: Regional parties face significant difficulties in competing with national parties regarding election funding and strategic planning. Assembly elections are inherently linked to local issues and the preferences of local voters, making it unlikely that a unified election approach would be embraced by regional parties.

3. Prolonged Election Results: Currently, many regional parties are advocating for elections to be conducted using ballot papers. If elections are held simultaneously, the announcement of results may be significantly delayed.

4. Constitutional Challenges: The prospect of conducting simultaneous elections appears nearly unfeasible within the democratic framework of the nation. Even if elections are held concurrently, there is no guarantee that all state and central governments will achieve full majority status. Additionally, the formation of coalition governments may lead to instability, necessitating potential re-elections across the country before the completion of a five-year term.

5. Need for Extensive Resources and Infrastructure: Given that India is the largest democracy globally, organizing simultaneous elections across all states, union territories, and the Lok Sabha presents a formidable challenge.

6. Potential for Centralization: This approach may disproportionately benefit national parties at the expense of regional ones, as the greater visibility and resources of larger parties could overshadow local issues, thereby reducing their representation.

Constitutional Amendments needed for simultaneous Elections;

1. Article 83 deals with the duration of the Houses of Parliament.
2. Article 85 pertains to the President's authority to dissolve the Lok Sabha.
3. Article 172 addresses the length of time for which state legislatures are in session.
4. Article 174 concerns the dissolution process of state assemblies.
5. Article 356 relates to the enforcement of President's Rule within a state.

To maintain stability in the tenure of both Parliament and state assemblies, it will be essential to amend the Representation of People Act, 1951.

list of countries which regulate simultaneous elections: -

1. Sweden
2. Indonesia
3. South Africa
4. Germany
5. Spain
6. Hungary
7. Belgium
8. Poland
9. Slovenia
10. Albania

In the current context, implementing the "One Nation One Election" system appears challenging, as regional parties are unlikely to support it due to their significant losses in the recent Lok Sabha elections. Therefore, prior to achieving consensus among all political parties, the central government must undertake necessary preparations for this initiative. A recent survey indicates a 77% likelihood that Indian voters will choose the same political party in both state and central elections when these elections occur simultaneously. This phenomenon can be explained by India's framework as a union of states, wherein the central government allocates substantial financial resources to state governments led by the same political party.

Conclusion

The "One Nation, One Election" initiative aims to synchronize the electoral timelines for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies across India, thereby reducing the number of elections held. This proposal has generated considerable discussion, with both proponents and opponents presenting compelling arguments. While the initiative could potentially streamline the electoral process and improve governance, it also raises important issues regarding voter participation and representation. A comprehensive assessment of its consequences is essential prior to any implementation. Although "One Nation, One Election" presents possible advantages in terms of cost savings, efficiency, and political stability, it also introduces significant constitutional, logistical, and democratic challenges. Any steps toward its realization would necessitate extensive discussion, a national consensus, and meticulous planning to address concerns related to federalism and regional representation.

References

1. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cabinet-clears-plan-for-simultaneous-elections-101726685578502.html>
2. <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report-en>
3. https://m.economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/government-pushes-for-simultaneous-elections-right-from-panchayat-level-to-lok-sabha/amp_articleshow/64199104.cms
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Nation,_One_Election
5. <https://legalaffairs.gov.in/one-nation-one-election>