

## **One Nation One Election**

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India is a land of plurality and elections are the mirrors through which the citizens express themselves in a formal set up. Basically, it would not be exaggerated to say that Elections are the pillars of a democratic nation but when the same elections turn into a hurdle rather than an enabler, the essence of the country stands jeopardized. With state assembly elections, local body polls, and by-elections happening so frequently, the administrative and economic machinery of the nation stays under constant strain. To solve this problem, the One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment Bill, 2024 was tabled in the Lok Sabha, proposing simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State/Union Territory Legislative Assemblies with the insertion of Article 82(A).

The ONOE basically refers to the simultaneous elections to the state assembly, legislative assembly and local bodies, all at the same time. If the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved before its five-year term, mid-term elections will only cover the remainder of the original tenure. The goal is to move away from the current fragmented and staggered election cycle toward a more orderly and efficient governance model. Ujjwal Singh and Anupama Roy, in their book on the Election Commission of India, argue about the importance of ‘Election time’ highlighting that how it is a ‘Special Time’ where the normal conditions of running a nation are put to halt. It thus, becomes important to understand the ramifications when this special time stretches for too long.

Historically, simultaneous elections were the norm during the first two decades after independence. The first four general elections, held in 1951, 1957, 1962, and 1967 were conducted simultaneously for both the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies. The 1951-52 election was described as the ‘biggest experiment in democracy in human history’ conducted at a time when 85 percent of the population was illiterate and poor. This cycle finally ended due to premature dissolutions of state assemblies and the House of the People, triggered by the use of Article 356 of the Constitution. By the late 1960s, the emergence of regional parties and shifting political dynamics meant that different states began following their own five-year cycles, leading to the frequent elections.

There are multiple reasons why this concept can become, as the Prime Minister quoted’ biggest reform in the history of elections. The first one being about its ability to put an end to policy paralysis caused by the impact of Model Code of

conduct. The MCC is a set of norms that stay for over 45 days on political parties to ensure fair play at elections. During this period, governments are restricted from launching new development projects, welfare schemes, or major policy decisions. This leads to essential public services and progress being put on hold, hindering the nation's overall development.

Secondly, the economic burden of elections is incredibly high. Beyond government spending, political parties and candidates spend massive amounts on campaigning and publicity. Synchronizing elections would enable substantial savings by avoiding the duplication of administrative efforts and reducing the campaign costs for political parties. These saved funds could instead be invested in core sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Thirdly, the administrative and security hurdle can also be tackled well with this initiative. Every election requires a massive deployment of manpower. Approximately 25 lakh civilian officers and staff, along with hundreds of thousands of police and security personnel, are pulled away from their primary duties for months at a time. Because polling booths are often located in schools, the education of children is frequently disrupted as teachers are drafted for election duty. Furthermore, constant deployment keeps security forces locked in election cycles, preventing them from focusing on their core functions of maintaining internal security.

While the benefits are many but ONOE scheme also faces significant challenges. Those opposing it argue that simultaneous elections might prioritize national issues over local ones. They fear that the regional concerns of smaller states could be overshadowed by national narratives, potentially turning a federal structure into a unitary one. Also, implementing ONOE would require major amendments to the Constitution, specifically regarding the duration of the Houses of Parliament and State Legislatures. These changes would need approval by a two-thirds majority in Parliament and ratification by at least half of the states. Moreover, the Logistical Complexity of the process can also not be ignored at all. The scale of holding simultaneous elections is enormous. It would require a massive increase in the number of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and VVPATs. Estimates suggest the government would need to invest over Rs 9,300 crore just to procure additional equipment and build safe storage facilities. In addition to this, the fact that there will be an interim government if a government falls mid-term, would mean low incentive and less long-term policies by this government for the people.

The Constitution of India is a 'living document' that must adapt to the changing needs of the people and the society. While the 'One Nation, One Election'

proposal offers a path toward stability, economic efficiency, and better governance, it must be implemented without compromising the basic features of the Constitution, such as federalism and fair representation. What we need is a consultative approach and the goal should be to create an electoral system that is not only free and fair but also sustainable for the long-term progress of Viksit Bharat. As Mahatma Gandhi suggested in his talisman that any step we take should be tested by whether it restores the poorest and weakest to take control over their own life and destiny. A streamlined election system that ensures continuous development and minimal disruption may very well be a step toward that ideal.