

One Nation, One Election in India: Constitutional Challenges, Democratic Implications and Electoral Reforms

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Abstract

The proposal for “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE), or simultaneous elections, has emerged as one of the most consequential electoral-reform debates in contemporary India. India largely conducted elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously during the first four general-election cycles, but political instability, premature dissolution of legislatures and changes in electoral schedules disrupted this pattern after 1967. The proposal has subsequently been reconsidered by the Election Commission, Law Commission, parliamentary committees, NITI Aayog and, most significantly, the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind in 2023–2024. This paper examines the historical evolution, constitutional feasibility, administrative requirements, federal implications and democratic consequences of simultaneous elections using secondary data and doctrinal-analytical methods. Evidence is drawn from constitutional provisions, Election Commission publications, parliamentary documents, committee reports and academic literature available up to 31 December 2024. The analysis finds that simultaneous elections could reduce repeated administrative mobilisation, rationalise certain election-management costs and provide longer uninterrupted periods for governance. However, these potential gains must be weighed against significant concerns involving federalism, premature dissolution, accountability, regional political representation and the constitutional autonomy of elected legislatures. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 represents a concrete legislative attempt to create a synchronised electoral framework, but its long-term democratic consequences require careful institutional scrutiny. The paper concludes that simultaneous elections are constitutionally conceivable only through carefully designed amendments and safeguards and should not be treated primarily as an exercise in administrative efficiency.

Keywords: One Nation One Election; simultaneous elections; electoral reform; Indian Constitution; federalism; democratic governance; Election Commission of India; electoral administration

Introduction

Regular, competitive and credible elections constitute the institutional foundation of representative democracy. India operates one of the world’s largest and most complex electoral systems, with elections held separately for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and local governments. Because different legislatures complete or lose their mandates at different times, elections are

frequently conducted in one or more parts of the country. The proposal popularly described as “One Nation, One Election” seeks to reduce this temporal fragmentation by synchronising electoral cycles.

The expression needs conceptual precision. Simultaneous elections do not necessarily imply that every election in India would be completed on a single polling day. Rather, the essential idea is that elections to different tiers would follow a common electoral cycle. The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (HLC) envisaged a two-stage framework: elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies would first be synchronised, followed by elections to municipalities and panchayats within 100 days (High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections [HLC], 2024). The legislation introduced in December 2024 focused primarily on synchronising the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, with a separate Bill extending corresponding arrangements to legislative Union Territories (Parliament of India, 2024a, 2024b).

The issue acquired renewed significance because the scale of India’s electoral administration has expanded dramatically. For the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the Election Commission of India (ECI) recorded approximately 968.8 million electors on the final electoral rolls prepared with 1 January 2024 as the qualifying date. Polling was organised in seven phases across 543 parliamentary constituencies, using approximately 10.5 lakh polling stations and a very large administrative and security workforce (Election Commission of India [ECI], 2024a). The ECI subsequently reported 65.79% voter turnout at polling stations during the general election (ECI, 2024b). These figures demonstrate both the extraordinary participatory scale of Indian democracy and the logistical implications of any nationwide electoral restructuring.

Supporters of simultaneous elections argue that repeated electoral cycles increase expenditure, require recurring deployment of public officials and security personnel, keep political parties in continuous campaign mode and periodically trigger restrictions under the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Earlier institutional reports similarly identified public expenditure, administrative disruption and policy continuity as major reasons for reconsidering electoral synchronisation (Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice [DRPSC], 2015; Debroy & Desai, 2017; Law Commission of India, 2018).

Critics, however, argue that elections cannot be evaluated merely through the criteria of cost and administrative convenience. India’s constitutional order distributes democratic authority across the Union and the States. State elections provide autonomous arenas in which regional policies, leadership and government performance can be judged. Altering electoral timing may therefore influence political competition, federal relations and patterns of accountability. Moreover, synchronisation raises difficult questions whenever a Lok Sabha or State Assembly is prematurely dissolved. Against this background, the central research problem of the present study is whether India can construct a sustainable system of simultaneous elections that improves electoral administration without weakening parliamentary accountability, federal autonomy and democratic choice.

The paper addresses four principal research questions: How has India's system evolved from largely simultaneous elections to asynchronous electoral cycles? What constitutional and legal modifications are necessary for synchronisation? What administrative and governance benefits may reasonably be expected? Finally, what risks may simultaneous elections create for federalism, regional representation and democratic accountability?

Historical Evolution of Simultaneous Elections in India

The idea of simultaneous elections is not entirely new to the Indian constitutional experience. The first general election of 1951–52 established an electoral cycle in which the Lok Sabha and most State Assemblies were elected within broadly corresponding periods. This arrangement continued through elections in 1957, 1962 and 1967.

The 2024 HLC report notes that conscious institutional efforts were made to maintain synchronisation during the early years. Prior to the 1957 general election, Legislative Assemblies in Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were dissolved shortly before their normal expiry dates so that their elections could be aligned with the national election (HLC, 2024).

Table 1: Historical Development of Simultaneous Elections in India

Period/Year	Development	Significance
1951–52	First Lok Sabha and most Assembly elections held within a common cycle	Beginning of broadly simultaneous elections
1957	Second general election; several Assemblies dissolved slightly early	Synchronisation deliberately maintained
1962	Lok Sabha and Assembly elections largely remained aligned	Common electoral cycle continued
1967	Fourth general election	Last general-election cycle in which synchronisation broadly prevailed
1967–1970	Political instability and premature dissolution of several Assemblies	State electoral calendars began diverging
1970–1971	Fourth Lok Sabha dissolved before completion of its	National electoral cycle became further separated

	normal term; general election held in 1971	
1999	Law Commission's 170th Report revived discussion of reducing continuous election cycles	Electoral reform debate re-emerged
2015	Parliamentary Standing Committee examined feasibility	Detailed parliamentary consideration
2017	NITI Aayog discussion paper proposed a roadmap	Administrative and governance arguments developed
2018	Law Commission released Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections	Constitutional alternatives analysed
2023–24	High-Level Committee examined simultaneous elections	Comprehensive contemporary framework
December 2024	Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill introduced	Proposal entered formal legislative process

Source: HLC (2024); DRPSC (2015); Law Commission of India (1999, 2018); Parliament of India (2024a).

The political environment changed considerably after 1967. Coalition instability, changes of government and premature dissolution of State Assemblies produced divergent electoral calendars. The premature dissolution of the Fourth Lok Sabha and the general election of 1971 further disrupted the possibility of maintaining a common nationwide cycle. Thereafter, elections increasingly became asynchronous.

This history is important because it demonstrates two things. First, simultaneous elections are compatible in principle with India's parliamentary system: the country operated broadly under such an arrangement during its early democratic decades. Second, the breakdown of synchronisation was not primarily an administrative failure; it resulted from the flexible tenure inherent in parliamentary government. Restoring synchronisation therefore requires dealing with the political contingencies that originally disrupted it.

Review of Literature

Institutional discussion of simultaneous elections has developed gradually. The Law Commission's 170th Report on electoral reforms argued in favour of reducing the frequency of elections and considered mechanisms for increasing stability in legislatures (Law Commission of India, 1999). The issue subsequently received detailed parliamentary attention in the 79th Report of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2015.

The Standing Committee identified several possible benefits of simultaneous elections, including reduction in repeated public expenditure, lower administrative and security burdens, reduced interruptions associated with the Model Code of Conduct and greater continuity in public administration. At the same time, it recognised that premature dissolution of legislatures represented a central constitutional obstacle and considered a phased system rather than immediate universal synchronisation (DRPSC, 2015).

Debroy and Desai (2017), writing in a NITI Aayog discussion paper, conceptualised frequent elections as a governance and resource-allocation problem. They argued that a large country repeatedly entering electoral mode may divert administrative resources and political attention from policy implementation. Their proposed transition framework emphasised phased alignment rather than an instantaneous national change.

The Law Commission's 2018 Draft Report provided one of the most detailed legal assessments prior to the HLC. It concluded that simultaneous elections could not be fully implemented under the existing constitutional arrangement without amendments. It examined mechanisms for modifying legislative terms, managing hung Houses and introducing the principle of a "constructive vote of no-confidence", under which a government would ordinarily be removed only when an alternative government commanded legislative confidence (Law Commission of India, 2018).

Academic literature introduces an important democratic dimension. Nikolenyi's (2010) analysis of Indian parliamentary elections between 1971 and 2004 found that concurrent elections were associated with higher participation in national elections than fully delinked electoral cycles. This suggests that synchronisation may produce participation benefits. However, turnout is only one dimension of electoral democracy. The possibility that simultaneous contests change the way national and regional choices are framed remains important.

Recent scholarship has therefore focused increasingly on federalism and political representation. Maurya and Abraham (2024) argue that although the HLC's institutional proposals contain administratively workable elements, the federal consequences require greater attention. They emphasise the danger that simultaneous national campaigns could reduce the visibility of state-specific political questions and advocate alternatives such as regional clustering and safeguards against destabilising electoral cycles.

Kumar and Kumar (2024) similarly observe that potential administrative and economic gains must be balanced against constitutional and federal risks. Khobung and Sagar (2024) place the proposal within the longer history of electoral reform and conclude that the debate involves competing democratic objectives rather than a straightforward technical reform.

The HLC (2024) brought these discussions into a single institutional framework. It examined historical experience, constitutional law, election management, international models, public consultation and economic arguments. Its final recommendations proposed two stages of synchronisation and measures to preserve the common cycle after a hung House, no-confidence situation or premature dissolution.

A significant research gap nevertheless remains. Much early literature addressed simultaneous elections as a hypothetical or policy proposal. By December 2024, however, the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill had transformed the debate into a specific constitutional design. There is therefore a need to integrate historical, constitutional, administrative, federal and democratic analysis with the actual legislative framework existing at the end of 2024. The present study attempts to fill this gap.

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative, secondary-data-based and doctrinal-analytical research design. No primary survey, questionnaire or interview data have been generated.

The principal sources are the Constitution of India; Election Commission publications; reports of the Law Commission of India; parliamentary committee reports; the 2024 High-Level Committee Report; the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024; the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024; and peer-reviewed academic literature.

Historical analysis is used to trace the emergence and breakdown of simultaneous electoral cycles. Doctrinal analysis examines relevant constitutional provisions and judicial principles. Comparative institutional analysis is used selectively to evaluate international arrangements without assuming that foreign constitutional models can be directly transplanted to India.

A limitation of this methodology is that the principal democratic consequences of nationwide simultaneous elections remain partly hypothetical because India has not operated under a fully restored synchronised system in the contemporary multiparty era.

Constitutional Framework

The constitutional challenge is not whether elections may occur on the same date by coincidence, but whether a common cycle can be legally preserved despite the possibility of premature dissolution.

Article 83(2) provides that the Lok Sabha normally continues for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting unless sooner dissolved. Article 172(1) similarly provides a five-

year term for State Legislative Assemblies unless sooner dissolved. These words—“unless sooner dissolved”—are central to parliamentary democracy because executive governments remain accountable to legislatures rather than enjoying constitutionally guaranteed fixed terms (Government of India, 2024).

Articles 85 and 174 concern the summoning, prorogation and dissolution of Parliament and State Legislatures respectively. Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament and State Legislatures in the Election Commission of India. Article 356 provides a separate constitutional mechanism for situations in which the government of a State cannot be carried on in accordance with the Constitution.

Table 2 :Major Constitutional Provisions Relevant to Simultaneous Elections

Article	Subject	Relevance
Article 83	Duration of Houses of Parliament	Establishes normal five-year Lok Sabha term unless sooner dissolved
Article 85	Sessions, prorogation and dissolution of Parliament	Relevant to premature dissolution of Lok Sabha
Article 172	Duration of State Legislatures	Establishes normal five-year Assembly term unless sooner dissolved
Article 174	Sessions, prorogation and dissolution of State Legislature	Relevant to premature dissolution of Assembly
Article 324	Election Commission of India	Vests control of parliamentary and Assembly elections in ECI
Article 327	Parliamentary power regarding elections	Relevant to Parliament's election-law competence
Article 356	Failure of constitutional machinery in States	Relevant where normal State government cannot constitutionally continue
Article 368	Constitutional amendment	Governs procedure for constitutional changes

Source: Government of India (2024).

Any arrangement that simply guarantees every legislature an inflexible five-year tenure irrespective of legislative confidence would transform the logic of parliamentary government. The more constitutionally compatible approach is therefore not necessarily to prevent mid-term elections, but to ensure that an election held after premature dissolution covers only the unexpired portion of the common electoral cycle. This is the central principle adopted in the 2024 legislative proposal.

Constitutional amendments must also be examined against the basic-structure doctrine developed in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973). Federalism and democratic government have received strong constitutional protection, particularly in *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994). This does not establish that simultaneous elections are inherently unconstitutional. It does mean, however, that electoral synchronisation cannot legitimately be designed in a manner that destroys the constitutional status of the States or substantially eliminates representative accountability.

High-Level Committee and the 2024 Legislative Framework

The Government of India constituted the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections on 2 September 2023 under the chairmanship of former President Ram Nath Kovind. Its terms of reference included constitutional amendments, parliamentary and State elections, local-body elections, contingencies such as hung legislatures and no-confidence motions, EVM and VVPAT requirements, manpower, security, and the possibility of a common electoral roll (HLC, 2024).

The committee worked for 191 days and held 65 meetings. A public consultation generated 21,558 responses. According to the committee's own report, 80% of these responses supported simultaneous elections. Forty-seven political parties submitted their views; 32 supported the proposal and 15 opposed it (HLC, 2024).

Table 3: Selected HLC Consultation Data, 2024

Stakeholder category	Number
Citizen responses	21,558
Political parties	47
Former Chief Justices of India	4
Former Supreme Court judge	1
Former Chief Justices of High Courts	12
Former Chief Election Commissioners	4
State Election Commissioners	8
Economists	14

Political parties supporting proposal	32
Political parties opposing proposal	15

Source: HLC (2024).

These figures should be interpreted cautiously. The consultation demonstrates the breadth of inputs considered by the committee, but it was not a randomly sampled national opinion survey. The reported 80% support among respondents therefore cannot automatically be generalised to the entire electorate.

The HLC recommended implementation in two stages. The first stage would synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The second would align municipal and panchayat elections so that they occur within 100 days of national and State elections. The committee also proposed a single electoral roll and Electoral Photo Identity Card architecture prepared through coordination between the ECI and State Election Commissions (HLC, 2024). For circumstances involving a hung House, loss of confidence or comparable instability, the committee recommended fresh elections for only the “unexpired term” of the relevant common electoral cycle. This mechanism is intended to prevent one premature dissolution from permanently breaking synchronisation.

The constitutional debate entered a new phase when the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024. The Bill proposed inserting a new Article 82A and amending Articles 83, 172 and 327 (Parliament of India, 2024a). Under the proposed Article 82A, the President could issue a notification on the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election establishing an “appointed date”. Legislative Assemblies constituted after that appointed date would have their terms conclude when the full term of the Lok Sabha concluded. Thereafter, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections would be conducted together.

If the Lok Sabha or an Assembly were dissolved before the completion of its full term, the newly elected House would serve only for the remainder of the original five-year cycle. The Bill also created a mechanism under which an Assembly election could be deferred when the Election Commission considered simultaneous conduct impracticable, while the resulting Assembly would nevertheless remain aligned with the common cycle (Parliament of India, 2024a). A separate Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 proposed corresponding changes for the Legislative Assemblies of Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir (Parliament of India, 2024b).

By the end of December 2024, these proposals had entered parliamentary committee examination. They had not become an operational simultaneous-election system. This distinction is essential for academic accuracy.

Electoral and Administrative Dimensions

The 2024 general election demonstrates the scale against which any synchronisation proposal must be evaluated.

Table 4: Selected Indicators of India’s 2024 General Election

Indicator	2024 figure
Electors on final rolls	Approximately 968.8 million
Parliamentary constituencies	543
Polling phases	7
Approximate polling stations	10.5 lakh
Approximate election/security personnel mobilisation	1.5 crore
Polling-station voter turnout	65.79%

Source: ECI (2024a, 2024b).

Synchronisation could reduce the frequency with which such machinery must be mobilised independently for national and State elections. Polling personnel—including teachers and other government employees—are repeatedly diverted from their ordinary administrative responsibilities during elections. Security forces also have to be deployed and moved between regions.

At the same time, synchronisation concentrates logistical requirements. A nationwide exercise covering the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies would require sufficient EVMs, VVPATs, reserve machines, storage facilities, transportation systems, technical support, polling personnel and security arrangements at the same time. The HLC therefore recommended advance planning by the ECI and State Election Commissions rather than assuming that synchronisation automatically simplifies electoral administration (HLC, 2024).

The same distinction applies to electoral rolls. Elections to Parliament and State Assemblies are supervised by the ECI, whereas local-government electoral administration involves State Election Commissions under separate constitutional provisions. A unified voter-roll architecture could reduce duplication, but it would require constitutional and institutional coordination that respects the distinct responsibilities of these bodies.

Electoral Expenditure, Governance and the Model Code of Conduct

Cost reduction is among the most prominent arguments advanced for simultaneous elections. Separate elections require repeated expenditure on polling arrangements, transport, security, training, election materials and administrative mobilisation. The Standing Committee, NITI Aayog discussion paper and HLC all treated duplication of election-management expenditure as an important concern (DRPSC, 2015; Debroy & Desai, 2017; HLC, 2024).

Nevertheless, financial arguments require careful interpretation. Election expenditure has at least three dimensions: government expenditure on election administration, legally declared candidate expenditure, and expenditure by political parties and associated campaign organisations. A reduction in the first does not necessarily produce an equivalent reduction in total political spending.

Furthermore, simultaneous elections could require substantial initial investment in election technology, warehousing, staffing and logistics. It is therefore methodologically safer to say that synchronisation has the potential to reduce recurring duplicated election-management costs, rather than claim a predetermined amount of national savings. Governance arguments similarly require balance. The MCC is enforced from the announcement of an election schedule until completion of the electoral process. Among other restrictions, governments cannot announce certain new financial grants, schemes or projects that may influence voters (ECI, 2024c). Where elections occur frequently, governments may therefore face repeated periods of electoral restrictions.

However, the phrase “policy paralysis” can exaggerate the MCC’s actual operation. Ongoing administration does not cease, and existing programmes can continue subject to the Commission’s guidelines. The democratic purpose of the MCC is to prevent the incumbent government from exploiting public resources and announcements for electoral advantage. Its costs must therefore be assessed alongside its role in maintaining a level electoral playing field. Simultaneous elections could reduce the frequency of MCC periods, but this benefit should not be treated as a justification for weakening electoral safeguards.

Implications for Indian Federalism

Federalism is arguably the most significant normative issue in the ONOE debate. India’s States are not merely administrative divisions. They possess constitutionally established governments, legislatures and spheres of political authority. State Assembly elections provide voters with opportunities to evaluate state-level parties, leadership, welfare policies, development strategies and regional concerns independently from national political competition.

A synchronised campaign could potentially bring these different democratic arenas into a common national narrative. National security, prime-ministerial leadership or country-wide economic questions may receive greater media attention than state-specific matters. Regional parties therefore fear that simultaneous elections could structurally favour nationally organised political parties.

Such an outcome is not inevitable. Indian voters are capable of distinguishing between electoral levels, and even elections held simultaneously can produce different verdicts for Parliament and State Assemblies. Consequently, the assertion that ONOE would automatically eliminate regional parties is not empirically justified. The more credible concern is subtler: synchronisation may alter campaign agendas, media attention, campaign financing and party mobilisation in ways that change the relative salience of national and regional issues. Maurya and Abraham (2024) therefore

argue that federal effects deserve greater consideration than they receive in purely administrative analyses.

Federal concerns also arise from the shortening of Assembly terms during the transition. Suppose a State elects an Assembly with a democratic mandate expected to last five years. If constitutional synchronisation subsequently requires that Assembly's term to end earlier, the immediate administrative logic of alignment conflicts with the voters' original temporal mandate. Any transition mechanism must therefore provide clear constitutional authority, sufficient advance notice and the broadest possible political legitimacy.

Democratic and Electoral Implications

Simultaneous elections could affect democratic participation in several directions. On the positive side, voters may find it more convenient to participate in two elections during a single mobilisation. Nikolenyi (2010) found evidence that concurrent elections in India were associated with higher turnout in national elections than fully delinked cycles. The HLC similarly argued that synchronisation may reduce voter fatigue (HLC, 2024).

Yet frequent elections also perform democratic functions. Separate State and national elections allow citizens to send political signals at different points in time. A government losing popular support does not necessarily have to wait an entire five-year national cycle before voters can express dissatisfaction in another electoral arena.

Staggered elections also ensure that electoral accountability remains continuously present within India's political system. Governments are periodically tested, opposition parties remain mobilised and evolving public concerns enter electoral debate. There is consequently a genuine democratic trade-off. Synchronisation may reduce excessive electioneering, but excessive concentration of electoral choice could reduce the frequency of electoral feedback.

Another concern involves political communication. When parliamentary and Assembly campaigns occur simultaneously, voters receive information concerning two governments, multiple candidate sets and different policy domains within a common campaign environment. This need not make rational voting impossible, but it increases the importance of voter education and balanced media coverage.

Advantages and Major Challenges

The strongest case for simultaneous elections lies in reducing repeated institutional mobilisation. Election administrators, security forces and public employees could spend less time moving repeatedly between electoral exercises. Governments may experience longer periods without MCC-related restrictions, while political parties may face fewer permanent campaign cycles. Potentially, some duplicated public expenditure could also be avoided. The system may additionally create predictability. A known common electoral calendar could assist election

authorities with procurement, staffing and long-term logistical planning. Citizens would also know the principal national and State electoral cycle well in advance.

These benefits, however, are conditional rather than automatic. The greatest challenge is maintaining synchronisation after political instability. A hung Assembly, collapse of a coalition, loss of confidence or inability to form a government can produce a constitutionally legitimate need for a fresh election. The “unexpired term” mechanism proposed in 2024 is a practical response, but it means voters could occasionally elect a legislature for a substantially shorter period than five years.

A second challenge concerns transition. Establishing the first common cycle necessarily requires adjusting the terms of some legislatures. A third challenge is logistical concentration. Simultaneous elections reduce frequency but increase the scale of each electoral mobilisation.

A fourth challenge concerns political consensus. Electoral rules shape competition among governments and political parties. A major restructuring adopted without broad consultation could weaken the perceived neutrality and legitimacy of the electoral system. Finally, simultaneous elections cannot substitute for wider electoral reforms relating to political finance, criminalisation, party transparency, internal democracy, misinformation or equitable political competition. ONOE addresses electoral timing; it does not resolve every structural weakness in electoral democracy.

Comparative Perspective

The HLC examined countries including South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Indonesia and the Philippines (HLC, 2024). These experiences demonstrate that democratic systems can organise elections at multiple governmental levels within coordinated schedules. However, comparative borrowing requires caution. Presidential, parliamentary, federal and unitary systems differ in how executives are formed and removed. Germany’s constructive vote of no-confidence, for example, promotes government stability by requiring an alternative majority before a Chancellor is replaced. The Law Commission considered a comparable idea relevant to maintaining India’s electoral cycle (Law Commission of India, 2018). Such mechanisms cannot simply be copied. India’s constitutional system combines parliamentary responsibility, strong regional political diversity, bicameralism in some States and a distinctive federal structure. International examples should therefore serve as institutional reference points rather than ready-made constitutional templates.

Discussion

The evidence indicates that the debate is often incorrectly framed as a binary choice between administrative efficiency and democratic principle. A more useful approach is to separate four questions: constitutional possibility, operational feasibility, economic desirability and democratic legitimacy. First, simultaneous elections are constitutionally possible in principle. India’s own early electoral history demonstrates that parliamentary and State elections can occur within a common cycle. The real difficulty is maintaining the cycle when parliamentary governments lose legislative confidence.

The 2024 Bill addresses this problem more realistically than a rigid fixed-term model. Instead of prohibiting early elections, it proposes that a House elected following premature dissolution serve only for the remainder of the common cycle. This preserves the possibility of returning to the electorate while maintaining synchronisation. Second, operational feasibility is demanding but not inherently impossible. The ECI already conducts an electoral exercise involving nearly one billion electors. Administrative capacity exists, but a simultaneous Lok Sabha–Assembly election would require substantial advance procurement, storage, testing, staffing and security planning.

Third, the financial case is plausible but frequently overstated. Duplicated election-management spending can be reduced, but total democratic expenditure cannot be equated with government polling expenditure. Political parties may continue substantial campaign spending even during a common election. Initial infrastructure costs must also be considered. Fourth, the democratic case remains contested. Synchronisation could increase convenience and potentially turnout, but it may also change the relationship between national and State political debates. Federalism requires not merely the legal existence of States but meaningful political spaces in which state-level mandates are independently formed and evaluated.

The proposal should consequently be judged according to safeguards rather than slogans. A constitutionally defensible model would need to preserve legislative confidence, protect state-specific political competition, ensure impartial election administration and avoid using synchronisation as a justification to artificially sustain governments that have lost democratic legitimacy. The most significant development of 2024 was therefore not that India adopted One Nation, One Election—it did not—but that the policy debate acquired a specific constitutional mechanism through the 129th Amendment Bill.

Major Findings

The study produces eight principal findings. First, simultaneous elections have a clear historical precedent in India, as elections to the Lok Sabha and most State Legislative Assemblies were broadly synchronised during the first four general-election cycles. Second, the eventual breakdown of this synchronisation was primarily the result of political and constitutional developments, particularly the premature dissolution of legislatures and the emergence of differing electoral cycles, rather than any technical inability to conduct elections simultaneously. Third, the existing constitutional framework does not provide an automatic and permanent mechanism for maintaining nationwide electoral synchronisation, indicating that constitutional amendments would be necessary for establishing a durable system. Fourth, the High-Level Committee's proposed unexpired-term mechanism attempts to address the principal historical cause of electoral de-synchronisation by ensuring that a legislature elected after premature dissolution serves only for the remainder of the common electoral cycle; however, this arrangement may occasionally result in legislatures being elected for shorter terms. Fifth, simultaneous elections may generate administrative savings by reducing the repeated deployment of election personnel, security forces and associated logistical resources, although the precise extent of net financial savings cannot be

established without comprehensive cost accounting. Sixth, a synchronised electoral cycle may reduce the frequency of Model Code of Conduct periods and continuous campaign mobilisation, but it is important to recognise that routine governance does not completely stop during the operation of the Model Code of Conduct. Seventh, the implications for federalism and democratic representation remain among the most uncertain aspects of the proposal because national and State elections perform overlapping yet constitutionally distinct representative functions. Finally, broad political legitimacy and consensus are essential for the successful implementation of simultaneous elections because any reform of the electoral calendar directly affects the institutional rules under which political parties compete and State governments receive democratic mandates.

Policy Suggestions

A sustainable approach should prioritise institutional safeguards rather than rapid calendar alignment. First, implementation should be phased. The ECI should prepare a detailed publicly available logistics assessment covering EVM/VVPAT requirements, storage capacity, polling personnel, security-force deployment, transport and contingency reserves before any synchronised election. Second, the treatment of premature dissolution must remain consistent with parliamentary accountability. A government that loses legislative confidence should not be artificially preserved merely to protect an electoral calendar. The unexpired-term principle provides one possible solution, while a carefully designed constructive vote of no-confidence could be considered to reduce avoidable instability.

Third, State governments and political parties should participate substantively in institutional design. Even where a particular constitutional amendment may not legally require ratification by one-half of the States, federal legitimacy benefits from genuine State consultation. Fourth, the ECI and State Election Commissions should develop interoperable electoral databases while preserving constitutional responsibilities. A common electoral roll should be pursued only with clearly defined data-governance, revision and accountability mechanisms. Fifth, explicit safeguards should protect regional political discourse. Public broadcasters, election debates and voter-education programmes should distinguish parliamentary and Assembly responsibilities so that voters can assess each tier independently. Sixth, the fiscal case for ONOE should be evaluated through a transparent cost-benefit study comparing government expenditure, infrastructure requirements, recurrent administrative costs and potential transition expenditure.

Conclusion

One Nation, One Election represents a significant proposal to restructure the temporal organisation of Indian democracy. Its historical roots demonstrate that simultaneous elections are not alien to India's constitutional experience. Elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies broadly shared a common cycle until 1967, after which political instability and premature dissolution progressively separated electoral calendars.

The contemporary case for synchronisation is substantial but not conclusive. India's 2024 general election involved approximately 968.8 million electors, around 10.5 lakh polling stations and a massive deployment of personnel. Repeated mobilisation at this scale imposes administrative and financial costs. Reducing unnecessary duplication, limiting constant electioneering and providing longer uninterrupted periods for governance are therefore legitimate objectives.

Yet electoral efficiency cannot be the sole measure of democratic institutional design. India's States possess independent political mandates within a federal constitutional structure. Assembly elections provide citizens with opportunities to evaluate state governments and regional issues in their own political context. Any change that alters these electoral spaces requires scrutiny extending beyond financial savings.

The High-Level Committee's 2024 report represents the most comprehensive official case for restoring simultaneous elections. Its phased framework, provisions for local-body elections, common electoral-roll proposals and mechanism for managing premature dissolution attempt to address many practical obstacles. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 subsequently converted part of this framework into a concrete legislative proposal by introducing the idea of an appointed date, a common electoral cycle and unexpired terms following premature dissolution.

Nevertheless, as of 31 December 2024, simultaneous elections remained a proposed constitutional reform rather than an implemented electoral system. The ultimate question is therefore not simply whether India can technically conduct elections together. It is whether synchronisation can be designed without undermining parliamentary responsibility, federal autonomy, electoral competitiveness and the ability of voters to hold different levels of government independently accountable.

A carefully phased model with constitutional safeguards, strong Election Commission preparedness, transparent fiscal assessment and broad federal and political consultation may make simultaneous elections institutionally feasible. Conversely, implementation driven principally by administrative convenience or partisan advantage would risk weakening the legitimacy of the reform itself.

The appropriate objective should consequently be neither permanent electioneering nor mechanical synchronisation. It should be an electoral system that combines administrative efficiency with constitutional federalism, meaningful political competition and continuous democratic accountability.

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