



## ELECTORAL REFORM 2029: THE ROAD TO ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

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### Abstract

*The idea of One Nation, One Election has emerged as one of the most debated electoral reforms in India's democratic landscape. The proposal envisions synchronizing elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies, thereby reducing the frequency of polls and ensuring a more stable governance cycle. This paper examines the historical context of electoral reforms in India, the constitutional and logistical challenges of implementing simultaneous elections, and the political, economic, and administrative implications of such a transformation. It highlights potential benefits such as cost reduction, efficient use of government machinery, enhanced policy continuity, and minimized disruption to governance. At the same time, it addresses concerns regarding federalism, representation, voter behavior, and the risk of centralization of power. By assessing comparative global practices and India's unique democratic fabric, the paper argues that the road to One Nation, One Election by 2029 requires consensus-building, constitutional amendments, phased implementation, and robust institutional safeguards. Ultimately, this reform has the potential to reshape the future of India's democracy, balancing efficiency with inclusivity, and setting a new precedent in electoral governance.*

**Keywords:** One Nation, One Election, Simultaneous Elections, Indian Democracy, Federalism and Governance, Election Commission of India, Cost of Elections, Voter Participation.

## *Introduction*

India, the world's largest democracy, is distinguished by its vibrant electoral system and frequent elections that ensure representation at both the national and state levels. Since independence, the electoral process has evolved significantly, with the Election Commission of India overseeing free and fair elections across diverse regions and populations. However, the continuous cycle of elections—ranging from the Lok Sabha to State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies—has raised concerns regarding governance, administrative expenditure, and policy disruptions.

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) seeks to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, envisioning a political environment where governance is less disrupted by recurring polls. Originally practiced in the early decades after independence (1952–1967), simultaneous elections broke down due to premature dissolutions of assemblies. Today, the debate has regained momentum as India prepares for future electoral reforms by 2029. Proponents argue that ONOE could reduce the staggering costs of frequent elections, optimize the use of government machinery, and allow policymakers to focus on long-term development agendas. Critics, however, caution that it may undermine the federal structure, marginalize regional voices, and pose significant constitutional and logistical hurdles.

This paper introduces the historical background, examines the arguments for and against simultaneous elections, and evaluates the practical roadmap to achieving ONOE by 2029. By situating the reform within India's democratic ethos and federal balance, it highlights both the promise and the perils of restructuring the electoral system on such a transformative scale.

## *Opinion on National Political Parties*

National political parties are central stakeholders in the debate around "One Nation, One Election." Their position is shaped by both political interests and governance priorities:

### **1. Efficiency and Stability**

National parties generally welcome the idea of synchronized elections, as it reduces the frequency of election cycles and allows governments at the Union and State levels to focus more on policy implementation

than constant campaigning. This could enhance political stability, giving parties a clear five-year governance mandate.

## 2. Resource Optimization

Election campaigns demand massive financial and human resources. National parties stand to gain because a common election cycle allows them to concentrate their resources, messaging, and strategies, thereby reducing campaign costs. Smaller regional elections often fragment their organizational strength.

## 3. National Narrative Building

National parties thrive on broad, pan-Indian issues—development, security, economy, foreign policy. A unified election schedule strengthens their ability to project these issues uniformly across states, potentially overshadowing local and regional concerns.

## 4. Challenges for Inclusivity

Critics argue that national parties may disproportionately benefit from One Nation, One Election. Since they dominate national-level discourse, smaller regional issues might get diluted, weakening the bargaining power of state-based political outfits. National parties must then ensure mechanisms that protect federal principles and state-specific aspirations.

## 5. Democratic Experimentation

While supporting electoral reforms, national parties need to balance their enthusiasm with sensitivity to India's diverse federal structure. The reform should not be seen as a tool to centralize power but rather as a way to strengthen democratic accountability, reduce election fatigue, and ensure smoother governance.

Different parties are broadly positioned on the idea of “**One Nation, One Election**” (simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies):

### *BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)*

- The BJP strongly supports the proposal, calling it a way to save money, reduce the burden on the Election Commission, and avoid the constant cycle of elections.

- It argues that governance will become smoother without the frequent application of the Model Code of Conduct, which often slows decision-making.
- For the BJP, this is also a political opportunity to capitalize on the popularity of central leadership across states simultaneously.

### *Congress*

- The Congress party has been cautious and critical.
- It views the proposal as an attempt to weaken federalism and reduce the independence of state governments.
- The party worries that simultaneous elections would tilt the balance of power further towards the central government, undermining regional voices.

### *NCP (Nationalist Congress Party)*

- The NCP aligns more with the Congress viewpoint.
- It emphasizes that regional aspirations must not be overshadowed by a central narrative.
- The party has argued that practical challenges—like premature dissolution of assemblies—make the proposal less feasible.

### *Communist Parties (CPI, CPI-M)*

- The Left parties are strongly opposed.
- They argue it undermines India's federal character and weakens democratic accountability, as voters may focus only on national issues, ignoring local concerns.
- They also say frequent elections are not a "waste," but a way of ensuring regular democratic engagement.

### *Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)*

- The AAP has expressed skepticism.
- It believes "One Nation, One Election" may favor larger national parties and reduce the chances of regional/state-level issues gaining attention.
- AAP stresses that local governance, especially in states like Delhi and Punjab where it has a base, could be overshadowed by national narratives.

***Overall:***

- Supportive: BJP.
- Critical/Opposed: Congress, NCP, Communist parties, AAP.
- The main divide is between the centralizing narrative of the BJP versus the federal and regional focus of opposition parties.

The idea of “*One Nation, One Election*” (ONOE) aims to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections across India. Advocates argue that this reform will reduce costs, improve governance, and ensure political stability. However, critics highlight constitutional, administrative, and democratic challenges. By 2029, this proposal could fundamentally reshape Indian democracy.

***Merits of One Nation, One Election*****1. Cost Efficiency**

- Frequent elections require significant financial resources for the Election Commission, political parties, and the government. A synchronized cycle could reduce this recurring burden.

**2. Reduced Administrative Disruption**

- Elections involve massive deployment of security forces and officials, often affecting governance and development work. Synchronization could minimize such disruptions.

**3. Stability in Policy and Governance**

- Frequent polls encourage populist schemes rather than long-term policy. ONOE may provide governments at both the Centre and states more time to focus on governance.

**4. Boost in Voter Participation**

- Voters may find a single election cycle less confusing, potentially increasing turnout.

**5. Strengthened National Agenda**

- Supporters argue it may align state and national priorities, fostering unity in policymaking.

## *Criticisms and Challenges*

### **1. Constitutional Hurdles**

- The Indian Constitution guarantees fixed terms for legislatures. To synchronize elections, multiple amendments would be needed to Articles 83, 172, and others.

### **2. Threat to Federalism**

- State governments may lose autonomy in deciding their electoral timelines. Critics argue this could tilt power toward the Union government.

### **3. Practical Imbalance**

- If a state government falls early, should it remain under President's Rule until the next cycle? Or should mid-term elections be held, defeating the purpose of ONOE?

### **4. Voter Choice Dilution**

- National issues might overshadow local concerns, weakening democratic representation at the state level.

### **5. Political Consensus Deficit**

- While the BJP supports ONOE, many opposition parties (Congress, Left, regional parties) resist it, fearing erosion of state power and weakening of multi-party democracy.

## *Comparative Perspectives*

- Germany & South Africa: Regular cycles but independent state elections are respected.
- Sweden: Synchronization exists, but under a parliamentary system with strong federal safeguards.
- India: With its federal diversity, replication is far more complex.

## *Critical View*

While ONOE promises efficiency and stability, its risks outweigh immediate benefits. Centralization may undermine the spirit of Indian federalism, which thrives on regional voices. Political pluralism could be threatened if national narratives dominate local mandates. Also, given India's history of coalition governments, synchronized elections may not guarantee stability.

*Electoral Reform 2029: The Road to One Nation, One Election* represents a bold yet controversial shift. Its success depends on **broad political consensus, constitutional safeguards, and respect for federal balance**. Without these, the reform risks concentrating power and weakening democratic diversity. A more feasible path may be **electoral streamlining** (like curbing excessive poll expenses, strengthening governance during Model Code of Conduct, and digitization of election processes) rather than enforcing full synchronization.

## *Challenges*

### **1. Constitutional and Legal Hurdles**

- Requires multiple constitutional amendments (Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, 356, etc.) to synchronize the tenure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- Need for ratification by at least half of the states, which may not agree due to political and federal concerns.

### **2. Federalism Concerns**

- States may perceive it as centralizing power, reducing their autonomy in deciding electoral cycles.
- Regional parties often argue that state-specific mandates could be overshadowed by national issues.

### **3. Logistical and Administrative Barriers**

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) would face a massive burden in conducting simultaneous polls across 28 states and the Union government.
- Requirement of huge security deployment, polling staff, and electronic voting machines (EVMs) all at once.

### **4. Political Resistance**

- National parties like BJP support the idea, but opposition parties (Congress, Left, regional outfits) see it as politically motivated.
- Aligning political consensus across ideological divides is extremely difficult.

### **5. Impact on Voter Behavior**

- Risk of voters blurring the distinction between national and state issues, which may harm democratic representation.

- Local governance concerns may get overshadowed by central narratives.

## **6. Financial and Resource Implications**

- Although supporters argue it reduces frequent election costs, holding one massive election requires enormous upfront expenditure and logistics.
- Maintaining sufficient EVMs and VVPAT machines for both Lok Sabha and state elections simultaneously is a challenge.

## **7. Handling Mid-term Dissolutions**

- If a government (state or central) collapses before its full term, synchronizing elections again becomes difficult.
- Solutions like “no-confidence with constructive vote” or President’s Rule extensions may create constitutional controversies.

## **8. Representation of Diversity**

- India’s political and social diversity means synchronized elections may weaken smaller, regional parties.
- Could tilt balance in favor of national parties, thereby reducing political pluralism.

## ***Recommendations***

### **1. Constitutional and Legal Clarity**

- Amendments must clearly define the structure of simultaneous elections while protecting federal principles, state autonomy, and democratic accountability.

### **2. Strengthening the Election Commission of India (ECI)**

- Empower the ECI with adequate resources, independence, and advanced technology for free, fair, and efficient conduct of simultaneous elections.

### **3. Phased Implementation**

- Begin with synchronizing elections of urban local bodies and panchayats with either state or national elections to test feasibility before rolling out nationwide.

#### **4. Infrastructure and Technology Investment**

- Expand use of VVPATs, blockchain-based voter authentication, remote voting for migrants, and robust cyber-security measures to ensure credibility.

#### **5. Political Consensus Building**

- Establish an all-party parliamentary committee to deliberate concerns of regional parties and ensure reforms are not perceived as favoring any single political force.

#### **6. Financial and Administrative Planning**

- Create a central fund for election expenditure to reduce costs and limit financial burden on states and parties.

#### **7. Safeguarding Representation and Federalism**

- Ensure that fixed tenures and synchronized elections do not undermine state governments' accountability to their people between elections.

#### **8. Voter Education and Awareness**

- Conduct awareness campaigns on the significance, processes, and benefits of simultaneous elections to increase participation and reduce voter fatigue.

#### **9. Contingency Mechanism**

- Frame rules for scenarios such as dissolution of assemblies, hung parliaments, or emergencies so that electoral stability does not undermine democratic flexibility.

#### **10. Regular Review Mechanism**

- Set up an independent commission to evaluate the working of "One Nation, One Election" every five years and recommend adjustments.

### ***Conclusion***

The vision of *Electoral Reform 2029: The Road to One Nation, One Election* represents a transformative step in India's democratic journey. By synchronizing parliamentary and state assembly elections, the reform seeks to reduce the financial burden on the exchequer, minimize the disruption of governance due to repeated electoral cycles, and enhance long-term policy planning. It has the potential to create a more stable political environment, improve voter participation, and strengthen

the federal structure by ensuring uniformity in the democratic process. However, the path to realizing this reform is neither simple nor without challenges. It demands constitutional amendments, consensus across political parties, logistical preparedness, and robust safeguards to protect the federal spirit of the nation. The debate, therefore, is not only about efficiency but also about preserving the inclusivity and vibrancy of India's democracy. Ultimately, *One Nation, One Election* could redefine the contours of India's electoral system by 2029, provided it is implemented with foresight, inclusiveness, and a commitment to balancing efficiency with representation. It is not merely an administrative reform but a test of India's ability to adapt its democratic framework to the aspirations of a rapidly evolving society.

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