



One Nation One Election

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This article is based on **“One Nation, One Election”** which was published in The Indian Express on 02/06/2021. It talks about the argument for and against the simultaneous elections.

As the elections in four states and one Union territory in March-April are suspected to have contributed to the second wave of Covid infections, a well-reasoned debate on a concept as important as “one nation, one election” is called for.

The concept needs to be debated mainly around five issues: Financial costs of conducting elections; cost of repeated administrative freezes; visible and invisible costs of repeatedly deploying security forces; campaign and finance costs of political parties; and the question of regional/smaller parties having a level playing field.

Simultaneous Election: Background

- The idea has been around since at least 1983, when the Election Commission first mooted it. However, until 1967, simultaneous elections were the norm in India.
- The first General Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in 1951-52.
- That practice continued in three subsequent General Elections held in the years 1957, 1962 and 1967.
- However, due to the premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle got disrupted.
- In 1970, the Lok Sabha was itself dissolved prematurely and fresh elections were held in 1971. Thus, the First, Second and Third Lok Sabha enjoyed full five-year terms.
- As a result of premature dissolutions and extension of terms of both the Lok Sabha and various State Legislative Assemblies, there have been separate elections to Lok Sabha and States Legislative Assemblies, and the cycle of simultaneous elections has been disturbed.

Arguments For Simultaneous Election

A NITI Aayog paper says that the country has at least one election each year; actually, each state has an election every year, too. In that paper, NITI Aayog argued that multiple elections incurs many direct and indirect disadvantages

- **Incalculable Economic Costs of Elections:** Directly budgeted costs are around Rs 300 crore for a state the size of Bihar. However, there are other financial costs, and incalculable economic costs.
 - Each election means government machinery misses out on their regular duties due to election duty and related work.
 - These costs of the millions of man-hours used are not charged to the election budget.
- **Policy Paralysis:** The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) also affects the government's functionary, as no new significant policy can be announced and executed after the elections are announced.
- **Administrative Costs:** There are also huge and visible costs of deploying security forces and transporting them, repeatedly.

A bigger invisible cost is paid by the nation in terms of diverting these forces from sensitive areas and in terms of the fatigue and illnesses that repeated cross-country deployments bring about.

Arguments Against Simultaneous Elections

- **Federal Problem:** Simultaneous elections are almost nearly impossible to implement, as it would mean arbitrarily curtailing or extending the term of existing legislatures to bring their election dates in line with the due date for the rest of the country.

Such a measure would undermine democracy and federalism.
- **Against Spirit of Democracy:** Critics also say that forcing simultaneous elections is against democracy because trying to force an artificial cycle of elections and restricting the choice for voters is not correct.
- **Regional Parties At Disadvantage:** Regional parties are supposed to be at a disadvantage because in simultaneously held elections, voters are reportedly likely to predominantly vote one way, giving the dominant party at the Centre an advantage.
- **Diminished Accountability:** Having to face the electorate more than once every 5 years enhances the accountability of politicians and keeps them on their toes.

Conclusion

It is obvious That the Constitution and other laws would need to be amended for implementing simultaneous elections. However, it should be done in such a way that it doesn't hurt the basic tenets of democracy and federalism.

In this context, the Law Commission has suggested an alternative i.e. categorising states based on proximity to the next general election, and having one round of State Assembly polls with the next Lok Sabha election, and another round for the remaining States 30

months later. But there is still no guarantee that mid-term polls would not be needed.

Drishti Mains Question

Do simultaneous elections compromise democracy and federalism? Analyse.
