



Decoding One Nation, One Election

This editorial is based on [One nation, one election: Better for voter, better for citizen](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 05/09/2023. It talks about the drawbacks associated with the idea of having simultaneous elections for both the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies - an idea mooted by the Union Government.

For Prelims: [One nation, One election](#), [Article 356](#), [Model Code of Conduct \(MCC\)](#), [Law Commission](#), [Federalism](#), [Electronic voting machines \(EVMs\)](#), [Voter-verified paper audit trail \(VVPAT\)](#), [Representation of the People Act 1951](#), [Anti-defection law](#), [No-confidence motions](#)

For Mains: One Nation, One Election: Benefits, Challenges and Way Forward

[One nation, One election](#) is among the critical reforms in the current central government's agenda. In fact, the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, in his address to Parliament in January 2018, mentioned this as one of the reforms proposed by the government. He said that citizens are concerned about frequent elections in one part of the country or another, which adversely impact the economy and development. The Prime Minister has spoken emphatically about the desirability of having one election across the country. Therefore, the idea is not a bolt from the blue.

What is the Central Idea behind One Nation, One Election?

- The central idea behind [One nation, One election](#) is to synchronize the timing of Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections across all States to reduce the frequency of polls throughout the country.
- This concept was the practice till 1967, but it was disrupted due to various reasons such as defections, dismissals, and dissolutions of government.
 - The cycle was **first broken in 1959** after the Centre invoked [Article 356](#) to dismiss the then-Kerala government.
 - Subsequently, due to defections and counter-defections between parties, several Legislative Assemblies dissolved post-1960, which eventually led to separate polls for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
 - Currently, the assembly polls in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha are held together with the Lok Sabha elections.
- The idea of conducting simultaneous elections was **advocated in 1999 by the [Law Commission](#)** headed by BP Jeevan Reddy.

What are the Benefits of having One Nation, One Election?

- **Focused Governance:** It enables the government to concentrate on governance once the elections are over. **Today, there is some election or the other in some part of the country, at least every three months. The entire attention of the country becomes focused on these elections. From the Prime Minister to Union ministers, from chief ministers to**

ministers to MPs, MLAs and panchayat members — everyone gets deeply involved with these elections, as nobody wants to lose.

- There is a virtual paralysis of administration at various levels in varying degrees. This reflects very badly on India's growth prospects.
- **Continuity in Policy Decisions:** The [Model Code of Conduct \(MCC\)](#) comes to play just after the elections are announced by the [Election Commission \(EC\)](#). No new policy decisions are taken during elections due to the MCC. Therefore, key policy decisions get delayed both at the Centre and in the states and local bodies.
 - Even **when no fresh policy decision is necessary, implementation of ongoing projects gets derailed during election periods** as the political executive as well as government officials would be engaged with election duties, neglecting routine administration.
- **Reduced Cost of Elections:** One of the main reasons for political corruption is frequent elections. **An enormous amount of money has to be raised at every election. Election expenses of political parties can be reduced drastically if elections are held simultaneously.** There would be no duplication of fundraising. This would save the public and business community from a lot of pressure for election donations, multiple times.
 - According to a report, during 2019 Lok Sabha Elections, Rs 60, 000 Crores were spent.
 - Furthermore, the expenses incurred by the [EC](#) can be reduced if elections are held simultaneously.
 - Of course, the EC would have to invest a considerable amount of money initially to put in place the necessary infrastructure.
 - Moreover, the **same electoral rolls can be used for all the elections.** This will save a tremendous amount of time and money spent in updating electoral rolls.
 - It will also make it easier for the citizens as they would not have to worry about their names missing from electoral rolls once they are enlisted.
- **Reduced Deployment of Security Forces:** A large number of police personnel and paramilitary forces are engaged to ensure that elections are conducted peacefully. **This involves massive redeployment, involving huge costs. It also diverts key law enforcement personnel from their critical functions.** Such deployment can be curtailed with simultaneous elections.
- **End of Horse Trading:** Holding elections at specific periods **could potentially reduce horse-trading** by elected representatives, which remains a concern even with [anti-defection law](#) in place. **Holding elections at fixed intervals can make it harder for them to switch parties or form alliances for personal gains.**
- **Reduced Freebies and Improved State Finances:** Frequent elections lead to governments taking policy decisions to woo the electorate at every election. Even though **this cannot be stopped fully, the frequency with which governments have to announce freebies will come down.** Frequent elections have led to a situation where many state governments are broke. With a smaller number of elections, their finances could be in better shape.

What are the Challenges associated with ONOE?

- **Feasibility: Article 83(2) and 172 of the Constitution** stipulates that the tenure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies respectively will last for five years unless dissolved earlier and there can be circumstances, as in [Article 356](#), wherein assemblies can be dissolved earlier. Therefore, the ONOE plan raises serious questions:
 - What would happen if the Central or State government collapses mid-tenure?
 - Would elections be held again in every State or will the President's rule be imposed?
- **Logistical Challenges:** It will pose logistical challenges in terms of availability and security of electronic voting machines, personnel and other resources. EC may face difficulties in managing such a massive exercise.
- **Against the Idea of Federalism:** The idea of ONOE does not square with the concept of ['federalism'](#) as it is established on the notion that the entire nation is "one" contradicting the content of Article 1 which envisages India as a "Union of States".
- **Legal Challenges:** The [Law Commission](#) headed by Justice B. S. Chauhan reported the simultaneous elections are **not feasible within the existing framework of the Constitution.**
 - It said that the Constitution, the [Representation of the People Act 1951](#) and the [Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies](#) would require appropriate **amendments** to conduct simultaneous polls.

- The commission also recommended to **receive ratification from at least 50% of the States** which may not be an easy peasy task.
- **Overshadowing the Regional interests:** The present form of recurrent elections can be seen as beneficial in a democracy as it allows voters to have their voices heard more frequently. As the underlying issues of national and State polls are different, the present framework prevents the blending of issues, ensuring greater accountability.
 - A 2015 study by the IDFC Institute found **“a 77% chance that the winning political party or alliance will win both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in that state when held simultaneously”**. - undermining the distinctive demand and needs of each state.
- **May Not be so Cost Effective:** Various estimates by the [Election Commission, NITI Aayog](#) show that the **costs of conducting all State and parliamentary elections in a five-year cycle work out to the equivalent of Rs. 10 per voter per year**. The [NITI Aayog](#) report has also said that when elections are synchronized, it will cost the equivalent of Rs. 5 per voter per year.
 - In the short term, simultaneous elections will increase the costs for deploying far larger numbers of [EVMs and VVPATs](#). So, amending the constitution to **save Rs 5 for every voter in a year may not be a good idea**.
- **Election Expenses aren't always Bad:** There is economic research to suggest that such election spending by parties and candidates actually benefits the economy and the government's tax revenues by boosting private consumption and serving as a stimulus.

What can be the Way Forward?

- **Building consensus** among all political parties and states on the need and feasibility of simultaneous elections. This could be done through dialogue, consultation, and deliberation among various stakeholders.
- **Amending the Constitution**, the [Representation of the People Act 1951](#), and the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies to enable simultaneous elections.
 - This would require a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament and ratification by at least half of the states.
- **Investing in the infrastructure and technology** required for conducting simultaneous elections, such as [electronic voting machines \(EVMs\), voter-verified paper audit trail \(VVPAT\)](#) machines, polling booths, security personnel, etc.
- **Aligning the electoral cycles** of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies **by either extending or curtailing their terms**, as per a one-time constitutional amendment.
- **Establishing a legal framework to deal with situations such as [no-confidence motions](#)**, premature dissolution of assemblies, hung parliaments, etc., that may arise during simultaneous elections.
 - It can be **held twice in a year**, so that if the assembly of any state is dissolved prematurely, the re election can be conducted for that state in the next cycle.
- **Creating awareness among the voters** about the benefits and challenges of simultaneous elections, and ensuring that they are able to exercise their franchise without confusion or inconvenience.

Conclusion

The Government should not implement ONOE in a hurry, it should conduct additional study, evaluate the data, and solicit feedback from voters, opposition party leaders, and local parties on how to implement the concept. Hence, let India decide whether it needs “One Nation, One Election” to be implemented or not.

Drishti Mains Question:

Critically analyze the concept of One Nation, One Election, highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with the idea. Also, suggest some measures to make it feasible.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2020)

1. According to the Constitution of India a person who is eligible to vote can be made a minister in a State for six months even if he/she is not a member of the Legislature of that State.
2. According to the Representation of People Act, 1951, a person convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to imprisonment for five years is permanently disqualified from contesting an election even after his release from prison.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (d)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

Answer: (d)

Mains

Q. 'Simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will limit the amount of time and money spent in electioneering but it will reduce the government's accountability to the people' Discuss. (2017)