



Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically analyze the One Nation, One Election proposal in light of India's federal structure and diverse regional political landscapes. **(250 words)**

27 Aug, 2024 GS Paper 2 Polity & Governance

Approach

- Introduce by outlining the concept of One Nation, One Election.
- Give Advantages of One Nation One Election
- Delve into the challenges associated with it
- Give a balanced way forward
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The "**One Nation, One Election**" proposal seeks to synchronize elections for the **Lok Sabha and State Assemblies**, aiming to reduce costs, minimize disruptions, and streamline governance.

- Historically, simultaneous elections were the norm until **1967**, but the cycle was disrupted, **leading to frequent elections**.
- The **Law Commission's 170th Report** supports returning to this system, highlighting the benefits of unified electoral timelines.

Body

Advantages of One Nation One Election:

- **Cost Reduction:** Simultaneous elections could significantly **reduce the expenditure on conducting separate polls** for state and national levels.
 - For instance, the **2019 Lok Sabha elections** cost approximately ₹60,000 crore, combining this with state elections could potentially halve the overall expense.
- **Governance Continuity:** It may allow governments to **focus on long-term policies without frequent disruptions** due to model code of conduct implementations.
- **Reduced Burden on Security Forces:** Conducting elections once **would ease the pressure on security personnel** who are often deployed for extended periods during multiple elections.
 - This could be particularly beneficial in regions facing security challenges, such as **Jammu and Kashmir or Naxal-affected areas**.
- **Increased Voter Turnout:** A single election event might encourage **higher voter participation** as citizens would need to vote only once for both state and national representatives.
 - For instance, in the **2024 Lok Sabha elections**, the turnout was **65.79%**, a significant drop from the 2019 elections.
- **Reduced Political Polarization:** Less frequent elections could potentially **decrease the constant state of political campaigning**
 - It may allow for more focused governance periods, potentially **reducing societal divisions** caused by **continuous political rhetoric**.

Challenges Related to One Nation One Election:

- **Reduced Democratic Accountability:** The proposal may undermine the federal nature of the polity by **reducing state autonomy in deciding electoral timing**.
 - Also, national issues might overshadow state-specific concerns.
 - This concern echoes the principles laid down in **S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994)**, which emphasized the **importance of federalism as a basic feature of the Constitution**.
- **Constitutional Amendments:** Requires significant amendments, particularly to Articles 83, 172, 85, and 174.
 - Any such amendments would need to pass the "**basic structure**" test laid down in **Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala (1973)**.
- **Logistical Complexity:** Organizing simultaneous elections across India would pose immense challenges.
 - For instance, the 2024 general elections required 1.048 million polling booths and 5.5 million **electronic voting machines (EVMs)**.
 - Combining this with state elections would **significantly increase these numbers**, straining resources and requiring extensive planning and coordination.
- **Uncertainty in case of government collapse:** There is no clear mechanism to handle situations where a state government falls mid-term.
 - For instance, if a state government like the one in **Maharashtra in 2019 collapses**, it is unclear how the synchronization would be maintained without undermining democratic principles.
- **Diminished Role of Opposition:** Regular state assembly elections, held at different times from **Lok Sabha polls**, give opposition parties frequent chances to highlight government policy failures.
 - Extended five-year terms without regular accountability pressures can **reduce governments' motivation** to reform and adapt.

Way Forward:

- **Phased implementation:** Gradually synchronising elections over multiple election cycles would allow for smoother transitions. This could involve:
 - Starting with a few states whose **terms are ending close to the Lok Sabha elections**
 - Create 2-3 election "clusters" spread over a 5-year period
 - Progressively aligning more states over **2-3 election cycles**
 - Adjusting term lengths slightly (e.g. extending or reducing by a few months) to achieve alignment
- **Strengthen Regional Representation:** Implementing measures to ensure state-specific issues receive adequate attention:
 - Mandate separate state and national manifestos from parties
 - Allocate **specific campaign time** and media coverage for state-level issues
 - Strengthen the **role of state election commissions**
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Develop robust constitutional mechanisms for various scenarios:
 - Clear provisions for **government formation if one level (state or center) loses majority**
 - Establish **rules for caretaker governments and their powers**
 - Define conditions and processes for midterm elections
 - Ensure mechanisms to maintain the autonomy of state legislatures
- **Electoral Reforms:** Introduce broader reforms to address various issues:
 - Implement **stricter campaign finance regulations** and transparency measures
 - Reform the **model code of conduct** to suit simultaneous elections

Conclusion

While the idea of "One Nation, One Election" has merit, its implementation requires thorough **planning, broad consensus, and careful consideration** of long-term effects on India's democracy. As discussions continue, **a balanced approach, possibly phased**, will be crucial for its success.

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