



Advancing Towards One Nation, One Election

*This editorial is based on "[Union Cabinet approves 'one nation, one election' Bill](#)" which was published in *The Financial Express* on 12/12/2024. The article brings into picture the ambitious "One Nation, One Election (ONOE)" plan approved by the Union Cabinet, aiming to synchronize India's electoral processes. Based on the recommendations of a high-level panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, the plan seeks constitutional amendments to enable simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies in two phases.*

For Prelims: [One Nation, One Election](#), [India's electoral landscape](#), [Government of India Act, 1935](#), [Parliamentary Standing Committee](#), [Law Commission of India](#), [Model Code of Conduct](#), [Election Commission](#), [Article 356](#), [Sarkaria Commission](#), [Electronic Voting Machines](#), [15th Finance Commission](#).

For Mains: Historical Evolution of ONOE in India, Key Benefits and Challenges Related to One Nation One Election

The **Union Cabinet** has approved the ambitious "[One Nation, One Election \(ONOE\)](#)" plan, a landmark move towards synchronizing **electoral processes across India**. Based on recommendations from a high-level panel headed by former **President Ram Nath Kovind**, the proposal seeks to amend multiple constitutional articles to enable simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. This transformative initiative aims to **implement the simultaneous election model in two phases**, potentially revolutionizing [India's electoral landscape](#).

What is the Historical Evolution of ONOE in India?

- **Pre-Independence Context** The concept of simultaneous elections is rooted in the colonial electoral system under the [Government of India Act, 1935](#).
 - Though fragmented, elections were aligned for legislative bodies under British rule.
- **Post-Independence Era (1952-1967)**
 - **First General Elections (1952):** India began its democratic journey with synchronized elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies.
 - **Continuation:** Simultaneous elections were successfully conducted in **1957, 1962, and 1967**, ensuring political and administrative stability.
- **Disruption of Simultaneity (1968-1969)**
 - The cycle was disrupted due to the **premature dissolution of some State Assemblies in 1968-1969**, notably in **Haryana and Kerala**.
 - In 1970, the **Lok Sabha was dissolved before completing its term**, leading to separate election cycles for the Lok Sabha and various State Assemblies.
- **Attempts to Revisit ONOE**
 - [Law Commission of India \(170th Report, 1999\)](#): Advocated simultaneous elections,

emphasizing the reduction of election-related disruptions and costs.

- **Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015):** Highlighted the benefits of ONOE, including curbing electoral expenses and ensuring uninterrupted governance.
- **NITI Aayog Report (2017):** Proposed a roadmap to reintroduce ONOE.

What are the Key Benefits of One Nation One Election?

- **Streamlining Governance and Reducing Policy Paralysis:** Frequent elections force governments into perpetual campaign mode, delaying long-term decision-making.
 - For example, during the recent elections, over **24 key development projects were stalled in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh due to Model Code of Conduct restrictions.**
 - ONOE would limit the MCC's imposition to once every five years, ensuring uninterrupted governance.
 - Additionally, **policymaking becomes more efficient as governments** focus on development rather than short-term electoral gains.
- **Significant Reduction in Electoral Costs: Simultaneous elections can drastically cut down the enormous financial burden on the government and political parties.**
 - For instance, the **2019 Lok Sabha election** went as a watershed election as the election expenditure escalated to **₹55,000 crore from ₹9,000 crore in 1998**
 - It is estimated that diminishing the frequency of elections could result in savings ranging from **Rs 7,500 crore to Rs 12,000 crore.**
 - This money could instead be allocated to infrastructure, healthcare, and education.
- **Enhanced Voter Engagement and Turnout:** Repeated elections lead to **voter fatigue, with participation often dropping in by-polls and local elections.**
 - The **2024 Lok Sabha elections witnessed a voter turnout of 65.79%.** This highlights a moderate level of electoral participation across the country.
 - By consolidating elections, **ONOE can re-energize the democratic process,** ensuring voters engage in fewer but more impactful electoral events, potentially boosting overall turnout by **5-10%.**
- **Curtailment of Electoral Malpractices:** The frequency of elections creates multiple opportunities for **vote-buying, misuse of state resources, and deployment of money power.**
 - For example, in the 2024 **state assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand,** as well as various bye-polls, enforcement agencies seized over **₹1,000 crore worth of cash, liquor, drugs, and freebies.**
 - ONOE can significantly reduce such practices by **restricting election timelines,** making oversight by the Election Commission more focused and effective.
- **Optimized Utilization of Security Forces:** Elections require heavy deployment of security forces, straining their primary duties.
 - For instance, the **Election Commission** sought **3.4 lakh Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) personnel** for deployment in a phased manner during the **2024 Lok Sabha election** and Assembly polls in **Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim,** leaving gaps in border and internal security management.
 - ONOE would consolidate these deployments into a single cycle, **ensuring better utilization of resources and enhanced national security preparedness.**
- **Minimizing Disruptions to Economic Activity:** Frequent elections disrupt local economies through extended bans on business activities, such as **transport restrictions, liquor sales, and labor diversions.**
 - For instance, the **Karnataka government faced a ₹150 crore revenue loss** due to the liquor ban imposed during the 2023 state elections.
 - By aligning electoral schedules, ONOE can ensure uninterrupted economic activity.
- **Grater Alignment in Development Goals:** Simultaneous elections can strengthen cooperative federalism by aligning the terms of central and state governments.
 - During the implementation of the **Goods and Services Tax (2017),** synchronized efforts between central and state governments accelerated the policy's rollout.
 - ONOE can institutionalize such collaboration, ensuring unified strategies in areas like healthcare, education, and climate action, leading to more cohesive national development.

What are the Key Challenges Associated with One Nation One Election?

- **Constitutional and Legal Complexities:** Implementing ONOE requires amendments to several constitutional provisions, such as **Articles 83, 85, 172, and 356**, which govern the tenure and dissolution of legislatures.
 - For instance, **synchronizing state elections would necessitate curtailing or extending the tenure of certain assemblies**, raising questions about their democratic validity.
 - Furthermore, **Article 356 (President's Rule)** could disrupt synchronized terms if misused.
- **Potential Threat to Federalism: Critics argue that ONOE may dilute the autonomy of states, as local issues could be overshadowed by national campaigns and agendas.**
 - During the 2019 Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections held simultaneously, campaigns largely focused on national issues like the Balakot airstrike.
 - As a result, critical state-level issues, including agricultural distress in Odisha and unemployment in tribal areas, received limited focus in public debates.
 - The [Sarkaria Commission](#) (1988) also warned against excessive centralization. This could erode the spirit of cooperative federalism enshrined in the Constitution.
- **Logistical and Operational Challenges:** Conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies would require massive administrative and logistical planning.
 - The Election Commission of India (ECI) estimates that implementing simultaneous elections would require **₹10,000 crore every 15 years** for the procurement and replacement of new [Electronic Voting Machines](#) (EVMs).
 - Additionally, **managing over 900 million voters simultaneously across 1 million polling stations** (as of 2019) poses unprecedented challenges, especially in remote and conflict-prone areas.
- **Disruption of Democratic Accountability:** Frequent elections act as a **continuous accountability mechanism**, allowing voters to assess governments regularly.
 - For instance, the **2022 Punjab Assembly elections** reflected public dissatisfaction with governance, resulting in a complete regime change.
 - ONOE, by reducing election frequency, **may weaken this system of periodic checks**, giving governments more leeway to delay addressing pressing issues until the end of their term.
- **Political Resistance and Lack of Consensus:** The idea of ONOE faces resistance from various political parties, **particularly regional ones**, who fear losing relevance in a synchronized system.
 - During consultations on 'One Nation, One Election,' 32 political parties supported the proposal, while **15 opposed it**, as per former President Ram Nath Kovind.
- **Disruption Due to Premature Dissolutions:** If a government collapses prematurely in a state or at the center, the **entire synchronized election cycle would be disrupted.**
 - For instance, the **fall of the Karnataka government in 2019** and **Maharashtra in 2022** led to unplanned elections.
 - Synchronizing timelines would either require reimposing President's Rule frequently, **raising concerns about democratic integrity**, or holding **interim elections**, **undermining the cost-efficiency of ONOE.**
- **Delayed Electoral Justice and Dispute Resolution:** Simultaneous elections could create a **bottleneck for the judiciary in addressing election-related disputes.**
 - Currently, staggered elections allow courts to handle cases in phases, but ONOE would lead to a surge in simultaneous petitions, delaying resolutions.
 - The 2019 elections saw **130 election petitions filed**, the highest ever among all general elections. ONOE could further delay the declaration of results and disrupt governance continuity.

What are the Recommendations of the One Nation, One Election Panel?

The **One Nation, One Election** panel, chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, proposed **11 recommendations** to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local bodies.

- **Phased Synchronization:**

- **Phase I:** Align election dates for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.
- **Phase II:** Synchronize municipal and panchayat elections with these, to be conducted within 100 days of the state and Lok Sabha elections.
- **Continuation of Synchronization:**
 - The President may declare the date of the Lok Sabha's first sitting as the 'appointed date,' ensuring synchronization continuity.
- **Term Adjustment for New Assemblies:** Newly-formed state assemblies may have **shortened terms to align with the next general elections.**
- **Governance and Implementation**
 - **Implementation Group:** A dedicated group should oversee and facilitate the execution of simultaneous election reforms.
 - **Legislative Amendments:**
 - **Article 324A:** Proposed introduction to facilitate simultaneous elections for Panchayats and Municipalities.
 - **Article 325:** Suggested amendment to establish a unified voter roll and photo ID card for all elections.
- **Managing Hung Houses and No-Confidence Scenarios**
 - **Election in Case of Hung House:** If a hung house or no-confidence motion occurs, fresh elections will be held.
 - The newly elected body will serve only until the term of the ongoing Lok Sabha or state assembly expires.
 - **Term Limitation:** For a newly elected Lok Sabha, the term will extend only until the next synchronized general election. State assemblies will continue until the Lok Sabha's term ends, unless dissolved earlier.
- **Operational Enhancements**
 - **Procurement of Election Equipment:** The Election Commission must proactively plan for procuring essential equipment, such as EVMs and VVPATs, to ensure smooth election management.
 - **Unified Electoral Infrastructure:** The panel recommends a unified voter roll and ID card system across all elections, requiring constitutional amendments and ratification by States.

What can India Learn from Other Countries Regarding One Nation, One Election?

- **Indonesia:** Indonesia switched to the '**One Nation, One Election**' format in 2019, where the President, Vice-President, and members of both national and regional legislative bodies are elected on the same day.
 - In 2024, Indonesia successfully conducted the **world's largest single-day elections**, involving nearly 200 million voters across five levels: President, Vice-President, Parliament, Regional Assemblies, and Municipal elections.
- **South Africa:** Voters cast ballots for both the **National Assembly and Provincial Legislatures simultaneously**. However, municipal elections are held separately, following a five-year cycle.
- **Sweden:** Sweden operates a proportional electoral system where seats in the **Parliament (Riksdag), County Councils, and Municipal Councils** are allocated based on vote share.
 - These elections occur every four years. Municipal elections follow a five-year cycle, occurring once every five years.

What Measures can be Adopted for Effective Implementation of One Nation, One Election?

- **Pilot ONOE in Union Territories: Begin implementing ONOE reforms in Union Territories (UTs) as a proof of concept.**
 - UTs like **Delhi, Puducherry, and Chandigarh** have smaller electorates and simpler governance structures, making them ideal for pilots.
 - This allows refinement of the ONOE model before national rollout.

- **Flexible Election Cycles Based on Regional Readiness:** After syncing Union Territories, transition with introducing region-specific election synchronization rather than enforcing nationwide **uniformity**.
 - States could be grouped regionally (**e.g., North, South, East, West**) to synchronize elections within those zones over 5-10 years.
 - This allows states like **Jharkhand or J&K, which face governance or security issues**, to align election cycles gradually without disrupting national-level synchronization.
 - This approach balances logistical feasibility with federal concerns.
- **Creating a Digital Electoral Management System: Develop a comprehensive digital platform to manage ONOE's complex logistics.**
 - DEMS could integrate **voter rolls, polling booth allocation, candidate filing, and result management**.
 - Pilot **blockchain-based technology for vote recording and counting** to enhance transparency and accuracy.
 - This minimizes administrative delays and ensures robust election management.
- **Strengthening Federal Safeguards for Regional Representation: Ensure mechanisms are in place to prevent the overshadowing of state-level issues.**
 - Introduce **mandatory regional debates** or **televised state-specific forums** during synchronized elections to give visibility to local issues.
 - Political funding caps could be tailored to ensure regional parties remain competitive despite large-scale national campaigns.
 - This protects the **democratic diversity crucial to India's federal structure**.
- **Use of Artificial Intelligence for Election Resource Allocation: AI can help allocate election resources like personnel, EVMs, and security forces based on region-specific needs.**
 - AI-powered simulations can predict **voter turnout, identify high-risk areas (e.g., conflict-prone regions)**, and ensure resource optimization.
 - For instance, algorithms similar to those used in disaster management systems can be adapted for elections.
 - This reduces inefficiencies and prevents delays in simultaneous election management.
- **Conditional Financial Incentives for States to Align Terms: Offer states financial incentives like higher devolution of central funds for aligning their election cycles with ONOE.**
 - States agreeing to shorten or extend their assembly terms could **receive additional funding for development projects**.
 - For instance, the **15th Finance Commission** recommended **state performance-linked grants**, a model that can be repurposed for ONOE compliance. This incentivizes cooperation without imposing mandates.
- **Decentralized Election Monitoring Cells: Set up regional election monitoring cells to oversee the simultaneous electoral process in a decentralized manner.**
 - These cells would operate under the Election Commission but **focus on specific regions, reducing the burden on the central ECI**
 - This localized approach ensures real-time problem-solving and smooth operations.
- **Citizen Engagement through Participatory Democracy Mechanisms: Encourage citizens to participate in shaping synchronized elections.**
 - **Host public consultations, online opinion polls, and stakeholder forums** to build awareness and gauge public opinion.
 - For example, **Kerala's participatory budgeting model** can be adapted to gather citizen input on ONOE reforms
 - **Introduce mandatory mid-term reviews for governments to maintain accountability between synchronized elections.**
 - These reviews could include **public feedback surveys, parliamentary performance audits, and RTI-based transparency mechanisms**.
 - For instance, **an online platform like MyGov** could host citizen scorecards for elected officials, ensuring continuous accountability.
This mitigates the concern that ONOE reduces voter oversight over governance.
- **Establishment of a Contingency Election Fund: Create a contingency fund exclusively for handling unexpected elections due to government collapse.**

- This fund would be maintained by the Election Commission and **used to manage mid-cycle elections or by-elections** without disrupting synchronization efforts.
- This avoids financial strain during emergencies while keeping ONOE timelines intact.
- **Gradual Integration of Digital Voting Platforms: Introduce secure digital voting mechanisms for certain categories of voters, such as NRIs or urban migrants.**
 - Digital voting could reduce logistical burdens and enable wider participation in synchronized elections.
 - **Estonia's 2005 digital voting model** can serve as a benchmark. This innovation enhances inclusivity and reduces physical resource requirements.

Conclusion

The "One Nation, One Election" proposal marks a transformative shift in India's electoral landscape, aiming to bring **greater efficiency, reduced costs, and streamlined governance**. The implementation of ONOE will require **careful planning, legislative amendments, and the ability to balance federal autonomy with national interests**. By learning from global precedents and taking a phased approach, India can address these challenges, ensuring that the reforms lead to a more cohesive and functional electoral system

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the potential benefits and challenges of implementing 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) in India. What can India Learn from Other Countries Regarding One Nation, One Election?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

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

Ans: (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)**

