



Common Electoral Roll and Simultaneous Elections

For Prelims: Representation of the People Act, 1951, Articles 243K and 243ZA

For Mains: Merits and Demerits of the concept of Simultaneous Elections for Indian polity, Common Electoral Roll and related challenges and issues.

Why in News?

Recently, the Law and Justice Minister told the [Rajya Sabha](#) that the **Centre was not planning** on amending the [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#) to enable a **common electoral roll and simultaneous elections** to all electoral bodies in the country.

What is the Common Electoral Roll?

▪ About:

- Under the Common Electoral Roll, **only one voter list will be used** for [Lok Sabha](#), Vidhan Sabha and other elections.

▪ Types of Electoral Rolls in India Currently:

- Some state laws allow the SEC (State Election Commission) to borrow and use the Election Commission of India's voter's rolls for the local body elections.
- In others, the state commission uses the EC's voters list as the basis for the preparation and revision of rolls for municipality and panchayat elections.
- Few states have their own electoral rolls and do not adopt EC's roll for local body polls like those of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The distinction stems from the fact that the supervision and conduct of elections in our country are **entrusted with two constitutional authorities – the Election Commission (EC) of India and the State Election Commissions (SECs)**.
 - [Election Commission \(EC\) of India](#): It was set up in 1950, the EC is charged with the responsibility of conducting polls to:
 - the offices of the President and Vice-President of India,
 - to Parliament, the state assemblies and the legislative councils.
 - [State Election Commissions \(SECs\)](#): The SECs, on the other hand, supervise municipal and panchayat elections. They are free to prepare their own electoral rolls for local body elections, and this exercise does not have to be coordinated with the EC.

▪ Need:

- A **common electoral roll and simultaneous elections as a way to save an enormous amount** of effort and expenditure.
 - It is argued that the preparation of a separate voters list causes duplication of the effort and the expenditure.
- **Earlier Recommendations:**
 - The [Law Commission](#) recommended it in its **255th report in 2015** for a single electoral roll.

- The **EC too adopted a similar stance** in 1999 and 2004.
 - The EC pointed out that it adds to the confusion among voters, since they may find their names present in one roll, but absent in another.

▪ **Implementation Process:**

- A Constitutional Amendment to **Articles 243K and 243ZA** is required.
 - **Articles 243K and 243ZA deal with** elections to panchayats and municipalities in the states. These give the power of superintendence, direction and control of preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of these elections to the State Election Commission (SEC).
 - The amendment would make it mandatory to have a single electoral roll for all elections in the country.
- **Persuading the state governments to tweak their respective laws** and adopt the Election Commission's (EC) voters list for municipal and panchayat polls.

▪ **Challenges:**

- The boundaries of the EC's polling station may not necessarily match that of the wards.
- The change would require a massive consensus-building exercise.

What are Simultaneous Elections?

▪ **About:**

- The idea is about **structuring the Indian election cycle** in a manner so that **elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies are synchronised** together so that the election to both can be held within a given span of time.

▪ **Advantages:**

- **Help keep a check on the poll expenses**, party expenses, etc. and also save public money.
- **Reduce the burden on administrative setup** and security forces.
- **Ensure timely implementation of the government policies** and also ensure that the administrative machinery is engaged in developmental activities rather than electioneering.
- **Solve the problem of governance** on the part of the politicians who are ruling. It is generally seen that for short term political gains from a particular assembly election, ruling politicians avoid taking a harsh long term decision which can ultimately help the country in the long run.
- Provide more time to all the stakeholders i.e. political parties, Election Commission of India (ECI), paramilitary forces, civilians for the preparation of elections once in five years.

▪ **Challenges:**

- The **synchronisation is a major problem** considering the traditions and conventions that India's Parliamentary system follows. The government is accountable to the Lower House and it is possible that the government can fall before completing its term and the moment the government falls, there has to be an election.
- It is **difficult to convince and bring together all the political parties** on the idea.
- For holding simultaneous elections, the requirements for **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) will double** as the ECI has to provide two sets (one for election to the Legislative Assembly and second for that to the Lok Sabha).
- There will **also be an additional requirement** of the polling staff and for better security arrangements.

Way Forward

- Elections are held at different places every few months and it hampers the developmental work. Therefore, it's a must to have a deep study and deliberation on the idea in order to prevent the impact of the [model code of conduct](#) on development works every few months.
- There needs to be a consensus on whether the country needs one nation, one poll or not. All political parties should at least cooperate in debating this issue, once the debate starts, the public opinion can be taken into consideration. India being a mature democracy, can then follow the outcome of the debate.

[Source: TH](#)

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