
ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: THE CUSP OF A NEW DAWN OR THE DUSK OF AN ERA

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the proposal of *One Nation One Election* by presenting a balanced assessment of its potential to enhance governance alongside the democratic challenges it may pose. It traces the historical feasibility of simultaneous elections in India and highlights the contemporary problems arising from frequent, staggered polls, including voter fatigue, governance disruptions due to election protocols, excessive administrative and security deployment, economic uncertainty, and the growing dominance of perpetual campaigning over policy implementation. The article outlines the key arguments in favour of One Nation One election, such as improved electoral participation, reduced public expenditure, administrative efficiency, political stability, and the symbolic value of a unified national electoral exercise.

At the same time, the article underscores the concerns raised by critics regarding the centralisation of the electoral process, possible erosion of state autonomy, premature curtailment of legislative terms, and the overshadowing of regional issues by national political narratives. It argues that these risks may conflict with the constitutional principles of federalism, pluralism, and fair representation. By weighing efficiency-driven benefits against democratic imperatives, the article concludes that any move towards Simultaneous elections must be accompanied by carefully crafted constitutional and institutional safeguards to preserve the integrity of India's diverse and federal democratic framework.

“Every Constitution is expected to endure for a long time. Therefore, it must necessarily be elastic. It is not possible to place the society in a straitjacket. The society grows, its requirements change. The Constitution and the laws may have to be changed to suit those needs. No single generation can bind the course of the generation to come”¹- Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala.

Keywords: Simultaneous elections, Basic structure, federalism, marginalization, democratic governance.

¹ Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, (1973) 4 SCC 225, ¶ 634 (India)

INTRODUCTION

One Nation, One Election refers to a proposal for simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies across India. The concept is based on the aim of bringing about coordination in the electoral calendar of the country so that elections at the Union and State levels take place at the same time. By doing so, the simultaneous elections hopes to decrease the number of elections to the bare minimum, reduce the administrative and financial burden, and allow the government to be engaged in governance and not be always under the pressure of a perpetual election.

Historically, the One Nation One Election is not a new proposition for the Indian democratic setup. From 1951-52 to 1967, India conducted successful simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. During this period, there were four General Election in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967 that were conducted in a synchronized manner which was indicative of political stability and a uniform electoral cycle. The system, however, came to a halt after 1967 due to the premature dissolution of several State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, which was mainly caused by political instability, changing of political groups, and defections was the main reason which led India to the existing practice of staggered elections.

The Union Government has presented One Nation One Election as a game changer for India's electoral and governance architecture. According to the Government, the simultaneous elections would reduce public expenditure to a great extent, avert the repetitive diversion of the administrative machinery and security forces, and stop the continuous imposition of the Model Code of Conduct due to which developmental work comes to a standstill. It is also argued that One Nation One Election would result in the continuity of policies, governance efficiency, and supporting elected Governments in concentrating on work instead of always being in an election mode.

Despite these claims, One Nation One Election has proved to be a controversial reform. Several political parties, civil society organizations, and constitutional experts have expressed their belief that the proposal strikes at the root of the constitutional scheme of India. A prima facie concern is that One Nation One Election may violate the basic structure of the Constitution, especially the undertones of federalism, democracy, and free and fair elections. Critics point out that synchronized elections could hurt the autonomy of States by forcing them into an

electoral cycle that would be unbreakable and dictated by the Centre, thereby disturbing the federal balance of India.

Another critical concern pertains to the sidelining of regional political groups. Detractors contend that simultaneous elections may ostensibly lead to nationalisation of the electoral narrative, where hegemonic national narratives eclipse issues relevant only to the states or local areas. This, they believe, may accrue unfair benefits to national, organisationally and financially well-off parties at the expense of regional parties that play a significant role in the tapestry of India's plural democracy. Such worries have also found echoes among certain sections of civil society, former election chiefs, learned persons from the judiciary, and scholars of constitutional law.

So, the question is: **Is One Nation One Election a reformative move that will further strengthen the foundations of democracy and governance in the country or will such a move undermine the very idea it purports to protect?**

Problem of Perpetual Elections

Governance rooted in democratic tenets is most desired for aspirational India (Bharat). The first and foremost pillar of democracy is the electoral system which authenticates governments and makes them accountable. Since independence, more than 400 elections to the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies have been held. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has won worldwide repute for conducting free and fair election of extremely high standards. While the conduct of elections has undoubtedly been beyond reproach, the architecture and periodicity of the electoral frame of the country increasingly call for objective re-evaluation, especially in terms of their aggregate impact on governance, the economy, and society.

Down the decades, political parties, policy-makers, industrialists, workers, academics, and conscientious citizens have continuously brought to attention the adverse effects of frequent and intrusive elections. **Elections occurring at excessive frequencies impose heavy administrative and logistic burdens, repeatedly derailing security personnel, civil servants, and public resources from the course of governance.** Repeated enforcement of the **Model Code of Conduct** for months on end induces policy paralysis, delays developmental projects, and affects the delivery of public administration. Such derailments deeply extend

beyond governance to economic decisions, investments, and social stability.

There are many such challenges which are faced by the nation due to regular elections in the country:

I. Voter Fatigue and Democratic Disengagement:

One of the gravest consequences of frequent elections is the issue of voter fatigue manifested in the form of dwindled enthusiasm, apathy, and selective participation of the electorate. Recurrent electoral cycles compel citizens to take part in campaigning, voting, and political witnessing again and again thereby causing exhaustion and disengagement over time. This undermines, in very essence, the democratic ideal of mass-based participation.

Empirical research supports this worry. Research carried out by **Prof. Csaba Nikolenyi of Concordia University**² shows that the staggered elections induce partial and disproportionate voter participation, as people start to selectively determine in which elections to vote. Through empirical studies by **Shackel and Dandoy**³ on multi-tiered elections show that staggered elections hurt voter participation due to electoral fatigue and partial political engagement, which takes the form of low turnout in some elections and one-sided democratization. On the other hand, simultaneous elections by synchronizing the voting process in one cycle tremendously increase the voter turnout by relieving the people of the physical and psychological burden inflicted on them by appearing to vote repeatedly.

II. Disruption of Governance and Policy Paralysis:

Frequent elections dislocate governance in a big way due to repeated and protracted deployment of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**. With nearly annual elections in one or other States, government at the Centre and State levels is largely restrained from taking policy decisions in a time-bound manner. **Between 2019 and 2023, India had one General Election and thirty State Legislative Assembly elections** in which the electoral restrictions were obligingly in practice for a significant time during the year.

² Study by Csaba Nikolenyi, "Concurrent Elections and Voter Turnout: The Effect of Delinking of State Elections on Electoral Participation in India's Parliamentary Polls, 1971- 2004

³ Arjan H. Schakel & Régis Dandoy, Electoral Cycles and Turnout in Multilevel Electoral Systems, *West European Politics*, 37:3, 605-623 (2014).

A continuous electoral environment leads to policy paralysis, delaying welfare schemes, postponing infrastructure projects, and leaving governance inert. Even when the MCC is not formally operative countrywide, its indirect chilling effect slows down decision-making and dissuades the government from taking programs that require quick actions. Thus, development and governance remain the worst affected on account of frequent elections.

III. Diversion of Political and Administrative Resources:

The frequent cycle of elections diverts the political leadership, legislators, and the administration from governance to electoral management. Ministers, elected representatives, and political parties remain busy with campaigning, negotiations for coalition arrangement, and drawing electoral strategies often at the expense of legislative scrutiny and delivery of public service.

The administrative burden is immense. During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission of India deployed approximately 70 lakh personnel across over 12 lakh polling stations, averaging six officials per station⁴. Due to such repeated mobilisation, the civil administration, law enforcement agencies, and essential public services get heavily strained which results in reducing institutional efficiency and increasing opportunity costs.

IV. Economic Disruptions Caused by Frequent Electoral Cycles:

Frequent, unsynchronized elections generate large macro-economic costs for the country by disrupting fiscal planning, investment cycles, and quality of public spending. Recurrent electoral cycles create uncertainty in policy continuity and adversely affect capital formation and long-term growth. Repeated elections also distort budgetary priorities by incentivizing short-term populist spending over productive capital expenditure. Long and recurrent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct also limits the ability of governments to approve time-bound public infrastructure projects, deferring economic decisions that have long-term multiplier impacts on employment and growth.

In addition to fiscal waste and inefficiencies, the recurrence of elections has a negative impact on productivity and market stability. The incessant activation of administrative machinery and security forces diverts precious public expenditure away from economic governance, while the

⁴ ECI Letter dtd. 17 March 2023. Refer to Annexure 2 (vii)

uncertainty in the political milieu saps investor confidence. The industries and services, especially those relying on migrant labour, are affected in terms of productivity as the migratory workers travel to their places to participate in elections, thereby incurring loss of wages and spoiling production cycles. Industry bodies such as FICCI and CII have highlighted that continuous electoral uncertainty negatively impacts business planning and investment decisions⁵. Thus, the economic cost of frequent elections extends far beyond election expenditure, manifesting in slowed growth, deferred investments, and weakened economic efficiency.

V. Electoral Behaviour and Political Instability:

These frequent elections are often justified as necessary to preserve federal accountability. However, empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Studies by **CSDS and ADR** reveal that staggered elections frequently produce divergent electoral outcomes⁶, reflecting shifting political calculations rather than enhanced accountability. This volatility contributes to political instability, frequent coalition realignments, and governance uncertainty.

Perpetual elections institutionalise instability by keeping governments in a near-constant campaign mode. The resulting focus on short-term political gains weakens policy continuity and undermines the effective functioning of federal institutions.

One Nation, One Election: A Solution to India's Perpetual Electoral Cycle

The principle of **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)** refers to the conduct of elections of **Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously**, a practice that was prevalent in India historically up to the mid-1960s. The argument for ONOE emerges from the solution it provides to the adverse impact of frequent elections that disrupt the normal functioning of governance, intensify the burden of administration, and create an atmosphere of electoral fatigue in the electorate. Conducting multiple elections together in a single electoral cycle optimizes governance, encourages electoral participation, saves unnecessary expenditure, and ensures continuity of policies and programs. This reform is not just administrative but a crucial effort for fortifying democratic institutions and guaranteeing economic and social-political

⁵ HLC Report, Ch. 7: Rationale of Simultaneous Elections, p. 157 (High-Level Committee on One Nation, One Election, Govt. of India, 2024).

⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/The-case-against-simultaneouspolls/article15000825.ece>.

stability across the nation. In pursuit of the same vision, the **129th Constitutional Amendment Bill presented by Hon'ble Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on December 17, 2024**, seeks to equip the necessary legal and constitutional mechanism for the implementation of simultaneous elections in the country, and is an important step towards institutionalizing this reform that has been in public discourse for decades.

ONOE also encourages greater continuity between national and state governance. As electoral cycles would be synchronized, political parties, policymakers, and the citizenry can focus on effective participation in governance without being mired in constant electioneering. The system provides opportunities for long-term planning, uninterrupted policy execution, and sustained efforts towards development, making ONOE an imperative reform for India's democratic and economic evolution.

There are also multiple benefits which are claimed by the government in relation to the One Nation One Election:

I. Enhancing Voter Participation:

The most attractive feature of ONOE is that it can bring about an increase in voter turnout. Multiple elections lead to voter fatigue, in the sense of apathy, lack of enthusiasm, and selective voting. According to **Prof. Csaba Nikolenyi of Concordia University**⁷, staggered elections reduce the likelihood of citizens voting in every poll; rather, they choose to vote in selective elections, thereby creating irregularity in democratic processes. Historical data from India cites this phenomenon, as simultaneous elections observed an enhancement of nearly **11.5% voter turnout in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh (1999); almost 20% in Kerala (1977); more than 21% in Arunachal Pradesh; and 17% in Assam.**⁸

Dandoy and Shackel⁹ also assert that in studies where simultaneous elections are held, there is an increase in voter turnout due to the concentration of campaigning, large packaging by the media, and the ease of casting multiple votes in a single day. By cutting down on logistical and psychological burdens, simultaneous elections not only rejuvenates enthusiasm but also brings

⁷ Study by Csaba Nikolenyi, "Concurrent Elections and Voter Turnout: The Effect of Delinking of State Elections on Electoral Participation in India's Parliamentary Polls, 1971- 2004

⁸ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections, at 154 (Mar. 2024) (India), available at <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report-en>

⁹ Arjan H. Schakel & Régis Dandoy, Electoral Cycles and Turnout in Multilevel Electoral Systems, *West European Politics*, 37:3, 605-623 (2014).

about engagement at both national and state levels, reaffirming that synchronized elections not only help in boosting participation but also further strengthens the democratic setup of India.

II. Mitigating Policy Paralysis and Administrative Disruption:

Frequent elections are disruptive to governance due to the periodic application of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which inhibits governments at the Union and State levels from making important decisions. **From 2019 to 2023, India had one General Election and thirty State Assembly elections.** This means that elections happened in four to five States every year. These frequent elections delay welfare programs, infrastructure advancement, and administrative reforms, leading to policy paralysis and governance deficits. Even when the MCC is not applied across the country, its indirect repercussions stall decision-making across government departments.

ONOE relieves these disruptions by synchronizing electoral cycles, allowing governments to concentrate on legislative issues and long-term policy matters without repeated interruptions. Synchronised elections allow the administrative machinery to work effectively, welfare schemes to be delivered without interruption, and development projects to make scheduled progress. This continuity promotes political stability, increases governance capacity, and makes sure that the welfare of citizens is prioritized over the model of constant campaigning and elections.

III. Economic Benefits and Resource Optimisation:

The economic burden of frequent elections is enormous. Disparate elections entail huge administrative costs, massive deployment of security forces, and mobilization of personnel. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, for instance, around 70 lakh personnel were deployed at about 12,03,800 polling booths, which comes to an average of 6 officials for each booth¹⁰. Such repetitive mobilization puts immense pressure on public resources and leads to a compromise on law enforcement, administrative efficiency, and economic productivity. ONOE helps in economizing on these resources by combining electoral events, ensuring well-planned deployment of resources, and reducing administrative costs.

¹⁰ ECI Letter dtd. 17 March 2023. Refer to Annexure 2 (vii)

Frequent elections have repercussions for the expenditure pattern of political parties and have indirect implications for the economy. ONOE alleviates this burden while ensuring business and investor confidence by reducing political uncertainty. Reports from **FICCI, CII, and ASSOCHAM** underscore the fact that holding synchronized elections encourages stability, reduces economic turbulence, and strengthens long-term economic growth. By lowering election-related expenditure and optimizing resource allocation, ONOE serves to enhance governance as well as the economy at the same time.

IV. Social and Governance Advantages:

Simultaneous elections play a role in building social harmony and effective governance. Simultaneous elections turn elections into a celebration, a national festivity of democracy, while minimizing disruptions caused to society. Frequent elections disrupt education, law enforcement, and other essential services. Schools battle with staff shortages due to polling responsibilities, law and order machinery is diverted from its duty for security and deployment of forces for elections, and migrant workers leave for their homes on the pretext of voting, affecting national productivity. Frequent elections are a bone of contention as they exacerbate the politics of identity and create issues of social disharmony.

One Nation One Election tackles this by confining electoral disturbances to one defined period. Governance does not come to a standstill, public welfare schemes are not affected, projects and schemes are not held up. At the same time, citizens get only one opportunity to exercise their vote, at the national and state level, each time which brings a sense of unity, accountability, and purpose; mitigates voter fatigue; and boosts civic engagement.

V. Empirical Evidence of Political Stability:

Fears that One Nation One Election will stifle regional voices and manifest regional preferences are not supported by evidential history. Experience shows that voters have discerningly differentiated between national and regional preferences even when elections happen simultaneously. In Odisha (2014), the regional party BJD increased its vote share from 37.23% in 2009 to 44.77% when the voter sentiment at the national level shifted towards NDA. Likewise, Delhi (2015) witnessed a pro-BJP wave in the 2014 General Elections but the local

party won decisively in the Assembly elections¹¹.

Studies conducted by organizations like **CSDS and ADR** substantiate the fact that voters make distinct choices at both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections which reflects their political sagacity and electoral wisdom. Simultaneous elections, therefore, does not weaken federal representation. Instead, it reduces instability caused by frequent elections, ensuring coherent policy formulation, continuity in governance, and enhanced political stability across the country.

VI. Expert and Institutional Support¹²:

The concept of simultaneous elections has received a cross-sectional endorsement from a wide array of experts, institutions, and dignitaries, demarcating its importance and sustainability. The list of former Chief Justices of India endorsing it includes, inter alia, **Shri Dipak Misra, Shri Ranjan Gogoi, Shri Sharad Arvind Bobde, and U.U. Lalit**. A number of Chief Justices of High Courts who have also expressed their endorsement includes, inter alia, **Justice Ajit Prakash Shah, Justice Gorla Rohini, Justice Dilip Babasaheb Bhosale, Justice Rajendra Menon, Justice Pradeep Nandrajog, Justice Dhirubhai Naranbhai Patel, Justice Sanjib Banerjee, Justice Prakash Shrivastava, Justice Munishwar Nath Bhandari, and Justice Ramesh Deokinandan Dhanuka**. This shows confidence in the plausibility of conducting simultaneous elections from the point of view of constitutional and administrative enshrinement.

The former Chief Election Commissioners, including inter alia, **Shri Achal Kumar Joti, Shri O.P. Rawat, Shri Sunil Arora, and Shri Sushil Chandra**, have also endorsed the initiative. The former State Election Commissioners who have expressed endorsement include, inter alia, **Shri Sanjay Prasad, Shri B. Basavaraaju, Shri U.P.S. Madan, Shri V. Palanikumar, Shri Madhukar Gupta, Shri Anil Kumar Khachi, Shri Sanjay Srivastava, and Dr. Dalip Singh**. This clearly shows that the initiative finds credibility from the point of view of its feasibility and tedious electoral effort for administration including logistics management, manpower management, and security management also has got endorsement.

Beyond Judiciary and election management authorities, a plethora of institutions and

¹¹ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections, at 153 (Mar. 2024) (India), available at <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report-en>

¹² High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections 71–100 (Mar. 2024) (India), available at <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report>

professional bodies has supported simultaneous elections. Notably, the Bar Council of India, chaired by Shri Manan Kumar Mishra, and trade and industry bodies, including **ASSOCHAM, FICCI, CII**, and the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad. Besides the opinions expressed by the Regional Committee and the Conference of Chief Ministers of States, the representatives of sixteen States and Union Territories and professional bodies like Railway Board. During the consultation with HLC, **32 national and regional political parties also expressed their endorsement** which is a testament to political spirit, national spirit, regional spirit, and the spirit of fraternity including the unity of diverse components in oneness.

All these cross-sectional endorsement by judicial experts, election type authorities, professional bodies, and political representatives manifests that simultaneous elections are not only good to be thought of but the same has got wide acceptance as one of the steps towards the end of rejuvenating governance and political engagement in India.

It is also germane to mention here that there have been certain constitutional amendments introduced by the HLC report related to the Simultaneous elections in the Parliament:

Constitutional Reforms for Simultaneous Elections: Streamlining Governance and Democracy

The **High-Level Committee (HLC) on One Nation One Election** was constituted to analyse the problems brought in by frequent elections and short-lived governments straining the public exchequer, causing delays in policy-making and execution thereof by bureaucracies on one hand and leading to political restlessness and lack of engagement of citizens with the election process across the nation. The inefficacy of recurrent elections has been well-documented in literature, and the need for systemic reforms is urgent. A fortiori, the disruption of the life of common people caused by multiple elections across country requires immediate remedial action. Persistent unending cycle of elections has negative effects on governance and citizen participation in the democratic process cum oneness of our culture. In this context, the HLC proposed to undertake structural reforms with a view to **the synchronization of elections for Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies** to enhance administrative efficacy and continuity in public policy administration.

To operationalise simultaneous elections, the HLC recommended **specific constitutional**

amendments, including revisions and amendments to **Articles 83¹³, 172¹⁴, 327¹⁵**, and the insertion of **Article 82A** and other articles too, which are as follows:

a. '82A. Simultaneous elections to the House of the People and all Legislative Assemblies.

(1) The President of India may by notification issued on the date of the first sitting of the House of the People after a general election, bring into force the provision of this Article, and that date of the notification shall be called the Appointed date.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in Art. 83 and 172, all the State Legislative Assemblies constituted in any general election held after the Appointed date shall come to an end on the expiry of the full term of House of the People

(3) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution or any law for the time being in force, and after the expiry of the full term referred to in sub Article (1), the Election Commission shall conduct General elections to the House of the People and the Legislative Assemblies simultaneously and the provisions of Part XV of the Constitution shall apply to these elections mutatis mutandis with such modifications as may become necessary and which the Election Commission may by Order specify.

(4) If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the elections to any Legislative Assembly cannot be conducted at the time of the General Election, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an Order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date.

(5) Where the elections to a State Legislative Assembly is deferred under sub-article (3), then notwithstanding anything contained in Art. 172, the full term of the Legislative Assembly shall end on same date as the end of the full term of the House of the People constituted in the General Election.

b. Amendment of article 83: Duration of the House of the People

83(2) The Five-year period would hereinafter be referred as the full term.

¹³ Constitution of India art. 83

¹⁴ Constitution of India art. 172

¹⁵ Constitution of India art. 327

(3) Where the House of People is dissolved sooner than the expiry of its full term, the period between its date of dissolution and five years from the date appointed for its first meeting shall be referred to as its unexpired term.

(4) Notwithstanding anything in Article 83(2), where the House of the People is dissolved sooner than the expiry of its full term, the next House of the People constituted pursuant to elections occasioned by such dissolution, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for such period as is equal to the unexpired term of the immediately preceding the House of the People and expiration of the term shall operate as a dissolution of the House.

c. Amendment of Article 172: Duration of the State Legislature

172 (1) Five- year term would hereinafter refer to as full-term.

(3) Where the State Legislative Assembly is dissolved sooner than upon the expiry of its full term, then the period between its date of dissolution and the period of five years from the date appointed for its first meeting shall be referred to as its unexpired term

(4) Notwithstanding anything contained in Art. 172(1), where the State Legislative Assembly is dissolved sooner than the expiry of its full term, and a new State Legislative Assembly is constituted pursuant to elections occasioned by such dissolution, then such new State Legislative Assembly unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for such period as is equal to the unexpired term of the immediately preceding State Legislative Assembly and the expiration of this period shall operate as a dissolution of the Assembly.

d. Amendment in Article 327: Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures

After the words “delimitation of constituencies” the words “conduct of simultaneous elections” to be added.

There were also certain other amendments which were made in other articles for implementing simultaneous elections at local levels too in Article 324A¹⁶, 325(2),¹⁷ and (3).¹⁸

¹⁶ Constitution of India art. 324A..

¹⁷ Constitution of India art. 325(2).

¹⁸ Constitution of India art. 325(3).

The power of Parliament now allows it to create laws regarding synchronized elections. These reforms are intended to **align the tenure of all State Assemblies with the Lok Sabha**, limit the frequency of the Model Code of Conduct, and ensure that elected governments can focus on development rather than recurrent electoral cycles, balancing democratic rights with administrative feasibility.

The HLC's recommendations have received wide **institutional and political backing** which includes support from former Chief Justices of India and High Court judges and former Chief Election Commissioners and State Election Commissioners as well as industrial organizations FICCI and CII and ASSOCHAM and 32 national and regional political parties. The extensive backing for these reforms demonstrates their credibility because multiple organizations agree that **constitutional changes are necessary to implement simultaneous elections** which will improve governance and increase voter participation and create long-term political stability in India.

The following sections describe the objections which have emerged against implementing simultaneous elections together with the proposed constitutional amendment bill.

Critiques of Simultaneous Elections: Concerns for Federalism, Democratic Integrity, and Free & Fair Polls

I. Violation of the Basic Structure Doctrine:

The **proposed 129th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2025**, which enables simultaneous elections, has raised significant concerns under the Basic Structure Doctrine. The Supreme Court in **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**¹⁹ established that the Constitution contains permanent elements which include federal structure and democratic system and national unity and territorial integrity and power distribution between branches. The Amendment attempts to establish a uniform election schedule between Lok Sabha and State Assemblies which undermines State federal independence and disrupts democratic operations thus endangers fundamental constitutional values.

The Amendment inserts Article 82A, amends Articles 83, 172, and 327, and seeks to synchronise State Assembly terms with the Lok Sabha. The synchronization process needs

¹⁹ Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973) 4 SCC. 225 (India).

State Assembly dissolutions which the Governor holds under Article 174²⁰ and the President through Article 356²¹ during emergency situations. The bypass of constitutional safeguards by Parliament has led to an abuse of power which goes beyond the limits set by Article 368²² and threatens the federal system.

II. Precedents Supporting Federal Autonomy and Democracy:

Judicial precedents further reinforce these concerns. In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)*²³, the Supreme Court emphasised that “*States have an independent constitutional existence and they have as important a role to play in the political, social, educational and cultural life of the people as the Union. They are neither satellites nor agents of the Centre*” and “*Decentralisation of power is not only valuable administrative device to ensure closer scrutiny, accountability and efficiency, but is also an essential part of democracy*”. Dissolving independent legislatures for administrative convenience undermines this principle and is inconsistent with the federal character of the Constitution. Similarly, in *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018)*,²⁴ the Court held that “**States are not mere administrative units**” but constitutional entities whose autonomy must be respected to ensure democratic governance and *that it is the basic tenet of a democracy*.

The Amendment also contradicts principles established in *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992)*²⁵ and *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975)*²⁶, which explicitly recognise that **free and fair elections, democracy, and rule of law are part of the Basic Structure**. By enforcing simultaneous elections, the Amendment risks concentrating power at the Union level and undermining independent electoral choice at the State level.

III. Undermining Free and Fair Elections:

The national ruling party receives an excessive benefit from simultaneous elections. The national and state elections that occur at the same time enable the ruling party at the Centre to promote their accomplishments in Union subjects which include defence and foreign policy

²⁰ Constitution of India art. 174.

²¹ Constitution of India art. 356.

²² Constitution of India art. 368.

²³ *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, (1994) 3 SCC 1 (India).

²⁴ *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* (2018) 8 SCC 501 (India).

²⁵ *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* 1992 SCR (1) 686 (India).

²⁶ *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975) 4 SCR 1

and national programs that State governments cannot control. Regional or State-level parties face difficulties in promoting their accomplishments which leads to an **imbalanced advantage** that breaks down the fair competition between candidates and violates the core of democratic elections.

The judicial system has established rules which show that courts protect their independence for the entire judicial structure. During the 1975 Supreme Court case *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain*²⁷ the court determined that free and fair elections serve as a fundamental democratic base which also constitutes part of the Basic Structure. Any systemic arrangement that privileges one political party over others, even indirectly, conflicts with the Constitution's democratic ethos and the principle of electoral fairness.

Empirical evidence also supports this concern. The **NUJS Law Review** conducted research on voter patterns during concurrent elections which found that **73.91% of voters selected the same political party for both national and state elections when using a 10% variation threshold to define meaningful changes. Voter behaviour showed a shift of 47.83% when researchers established a 6% threshold for change**²⁸. The system of simultaneous elections creates a barrier for voters to differentiate between state and national matters which benefits the leading party and threatens the democratic system's proper representation.

IV. Pre-Mature Dissolution of State Assemblies:

The practical implementation of simultaneous elections necessitates the **premature dissolution of existing State Assemblies** before the completion of their constitutionally mandated terms. **Article 172**²⁹ of the Constitution protects State Legislatures from dissolution except under two conditions which include **Article 174**³⁰ that allows the Governor to act in extreme cases and **Article 356**³¹ that enables President's Rule when a State's constitutional system fails. The 129th Amendment violates these constitutional safeguards by giving Parliament the power to control States without following the established constitutional procedures.

²⁷ *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975) 4 SCR 1

²⁸ The NUJS Law Review, Response Paper and Recommendations to the 2024 HLC Report on Simultaneous Elections 20 (2024).

²⁹ Constitution of India art. 172.

³⁰ Constitution of India art. 174.

³¹ Constitution of India art. 356.

This approach mirrors the concept of “**colorable legislation**”, a principle recognised by the Supreme Court in **K.C. Gajapati Narayan Deo v. State of Orissa (1953)**³², which cautions against Parliament doing indirectly what it cannot do directly. By attempting to synchronise the terms of all State Assemblies with the Lok Sabha, the Amendment undermines **federalism**, diminishes the independence of State governments, and raises serious questions about the **legality and constitutional propriety** of the exercise.

V. Threat to Democratic Will and Citizen Choice:

Synchronising elections at the national and State levels **compromises the electorate’s ability to exercise independent choice**. Historical electoral data, including analysis from the **NUJS Law Review**³³, shows that in simultaneous elections, voters often replicate their national-level preferences at the State level, with similar voting patterns observed in **24 out of 46 cases**. This indicates a **subordination of State-level priorities to national narratives**, potentially eroding the principle of representative democracy by marginalising regional parties and issues.

The Supreme Court established in its 2007 *M. Nagraj v. Union of India*³⁴ that constitutional principles including democracy and reasonableness and social justice and secularism function as fundamental principles which no Parliamentary law can eliminate. By overriding State autonomy and altering electoral timing purely for administrative convenience, the Amendment violates these constitutional safeguards, distorting the delicate balance between Union and State powers.

VI. One nation One Election Marginalizes Regional Parties

A main reason against One Nation, One Election exists because holding elections together at the same time leads to national voting patterns that exclude regional parties and state-specific matters. The results from simultaneous elections reveal that voters tend to support the same party at both national and state levels because 73.91% of all recorded cases show less than 10% difference between Lok Sabha and State Assembly vote shares. The research shows that national themes including leadership appeal and national policy themes take precedence over

³² K.C. Gajapati Narayan Deo v. State of Orissa AIR 1953 SC 375 (India).

³³ The NUJS Law Review, Response Paper and Recommendations to the 2024 HLC Report on Simultaneous Elections 19 (2024).

³⁴ M. Nagraj v. Union of India (2007) 8 SCC 212 (India).

regional matters which reduces the number of electoral opportunities for regional parties during simultaneous elections.

Further, critics argue that this voting alignment disproportionately benefits national parties due to campaign asymmetries. Simultaneous elections significantly raise campaign intensity and financial demands, favouring parties with nationwide organisational reach and resources. Historical trends reinforce this concern: after the decline of synchronised elections post-1967, regional parties expanded rapidly, and by the 1990s, regional and state-based parties together accounted for **over half of the total state-level vote share**. This correlation is used to suggest that staggered elections provided greater political visibility and autonomy to regional parties, whereas ONOE risks compressing electoral competition into a national frame.

There have been certain judicial experts and other associations and political parties have denied these claims and stated how simultaneous elections are for the welfare of the nation and it doesn't interfere with the basic structural principles of the constitution which are explained as below:

Defending Simultaneous Elections: Constitutional Validity and Expert Endorsements

The following sections undertake a closer and more objective look at simultaneous elections, which prima facie indicates that many of the criticisms against this reform are overstated and legally unsustainable. Looked at through various prisms of constitutional authority, national welfare, and informed expert opinion, simultaneous elections do not seem to be a retreat from democratic principles but an enabling governance reform instead. The Constitution unmistakably grants Parliament the power to regulate electoral processes, the national interest undoubtedly favours administrative stability and continuity in policy; and, importantly, a broad consensus among judicial and election experts exists on this reform being one to undergird democratic efficiency rather than undermine it.

I. Compatibility with the Basic Structure Doctrine:

The basic structure doctrine requires that essential constitutional principles including democracy and federalism and free and fair elections must remain protected from any constitutional amendment according to *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)*.³⁵The

³⁵ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)* 4 SCC. 225 (India).

core values of democracy remain intact through simultaneous elections because this system protects citizens' voting rights and maintains the representative nature of legislative bodies. The reform maintains the regular election schedule but introduces simultaneous voting to unify election dates while keeping elections competitive and fair. The democratic system continues to operate while constitutional institutions maintain their independence from external control.

The statements of respected constitutional experts confirm this understanding. Former Chief Justices of India, including Justice Dipak Misra, Justice Ranjan Gogoi, Justice S.A. Bobde, and Justice U.U. Lalit, have expressly stated that the proposal of simultaneous elections is neither anti-democratic nor violative of the basic structure. The reform receives support from multiple High Court Chief Justices and Chief Election Commissioners³⁶ who argue it will strengthen governance stability and voter participation while protecting constitutional principles. The expert analyses demonstrate that simultaneous elections align with constitutional fundamental principles.

II. Parliamentary Competence under the Constitutional Scheme:

The Constitution of India clearly vests the authority to regulate elections in the hands of Parliament. Entry 72 of the Union List³⁷ empowers Parliament to legislate on elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President. Simultaneously, Entry 37 of the State List³⁸ permits States to legislate on elections to their Legislatures, but expressly makes such power subject to laws enacted by Parliament. This hierarchical allocation of powers demonstrates that electoral regulation is primarily a matter of national importance. Consequently, any legislation or constitutional amendment facilitating simultaneous elections lies squarely within the legislative competence of Parliament and cannot be assailed as ultra vires.

III. Articles 246 and 327: Exclusive Legislative Authority of Parliament:

Article 246(1)³⁹ of the Constitution grants Parliament exclusive power to legislate on matters enumerated in the Union List, notwithstanding State legislative powers. The constitutional

³⁶ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections 71–75 (Mar. 2024) (India), available at <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report>

³⁷ India Const. sched. VII, List I, entry 72.

³⁸ India Const. sched. VII, List II, entry 37.

³⁹ Constitution of India art. 246(1).

supremacy receives additional support through Article 327, which allows Parliament to create laws for all election-related matters including electoral rolls, and delimitation, and procedures needed for legislative body formation. The election timing and conduct reform authority of Parliament becomes obvious when these provisions are read together. Therefore, synchronising elections through constitutional amendment is firmly rooted in explicit constitutional text.

IV. Indian Federalism: Indestructible and Not Contractual:

The Indian federal system stands apart from classical federations because it exists as an unbreakable structure rather than being based on treaties between independent States. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stated in the Constituent Assembly⁴⁰ that India exists as a "Union of States" without any compact-based formation. States do not possess the power to withdraw from the Union. The constitutional philosophy creates a powerful central authority which aims to maintain unity among diverse elements. The process of electoral synchronisation does not affect State independence in running their affairs or passing laws, instead it creates a more organized electoral schedule. Indian federalism operates within a framework which makes simultaneous elections compatible with its structure.

V. Judicial Precedents Affirming Union Supremacy:

The Indian Supreme Court has held time and again that the Indian Constitution is based upon a strong Federal Centre as a means of maintaining the unity of the country. In the case of *State of West Bengal v. Union of India (1964)*⁴¹, it was held that the Indian Constitution is not a federation of sovereign states but a Union Constitution having a centralized structure. The powers of the states flow from the Indian Constitution itself. This has once again been reiterated in the case of *State of Karnataka v. Union of India (1978)*⁴².

Moreover, in the case of *Union of India vs. V. Sriharan (2016)*⁴³, a Constitution Bench asserted again that parliamentary power was pre-eminent in matters having a bearing on national interest and constitutional governance. The Court held that if Parliament was granted power through the Constitution, it cannot be truncated based solely on the consideration of federal balance.

⁴⁰ Motion re. Draft Constitution, 4th November 1948; Constituent Assembly Debates Official Report, Vol. VII Reprinted by Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, Sixth Reprint, 2014.

⁴¹ State of West Bengal v. Union of India (1964) 1 SCR 371 (India).

⁴² State of Karnataka v. Union of India (1978) 4 SCC 608 (India).

⁴³ Union of India v. V. Sriharan (2016) 7 SCC 1 (India).

These judgments, cumulatively, strengthen that Parliament enjoys the power to effect structural changes of a national scope, and this would also extend to electoral reforms like simultaneous polls.

VI. Absence of Colourable Legislation:

It is further submitted that this harmonized framework on simultaneous polls is not affected by the doctrine of colourable legislation. The doctrine of colourable legislation is attracted only when the legislature oversteps its authority due to lack of competence within its fold and brings about an ultra vires aim by cloaking it with an ultra vires form. However, in this given matter, Parliament is well within its clearly demarcated powers within Articles 246 and 327 read with Entry 72 of the Union List. This aim of bringing about this legislation on improving governance by ironing out incongruities in election timelines is well within its clearly demarcated powers. There is no ulterior or masked aim of indirectly trespassing within State or democratic powers. It does not intend to bring about something that is ultra vires within our Constitutional framework but step within something that is ultra vires within our Constitutional framework. Therefore, this doctrine is clearly not attracted.

VII. One Nation One Election Does Not Marginalize Regional Parties

The empirical evidence bears out the fact that there **is nothing in the ONOE that puts the regional parties at a disadvantage** since the voters have the capacity to separate between the national and state decisions. The fact that when the bar of meaningful variability was set low, only 47.83% of the voters voted the same way highlights that almost half the voters deliberately drew a distinction between voting in the parliamentary and Assembly elections. Also, the difference in the Lok Sabha and Assembly share in some states with regional identity has stayed below 5%.⁴⁴

Notably, in most places where there has been a large difference in voting, regional parties are among the main beneficiary groups. Of nine recorded situations where there has been a large difference in voting, **eight situations have been where regional parties or independent candidates are observed to gain at the cost of national parties rather than vice versa.** National parties lost a double-digit margin in Assembly votes in many states with

⁴⁴ The NUJS Law Review, Response Paper and Recommendations to the 2024 HLC Report on Simultaneous Elections 20 (2024).

corresponding gains in regional parties. These outcomes indicate that One Nation one election does not structurally erode regional political strength. Constitutionally and institutionally, State autonomy, legislative powers, and electoral safeguards remain unchanged, suggesting that regional party success depends more on leadership strength and voter mobilisation than on election timing alone.

VIII. Enhancing Democratic Participation and Safeguarding Free and Fair Elections

Frequent elections also lead to voter fatigue, which affects voter enthusiasm and turnouts. Research, including the findings of the NUJS Law Review, indicates that simultaneous elections can lead to increased turnouts by 11.5% to 20%⁴⁵ or more in the states where various levels of the government are simultaneously voted into power. Scholarly opinions, including those of the High-Level Committee (2025), also recommend "One Nation, One Election" as a remedy where frequent elections lead to campaigning fatigue and misinformation as voters can focus on substantial issues of a policy nature.

ONOE does not adulterate the integrity of free and fair elections. Citizens are left with unrestricted rights to exercise their votes voluntarily, and the Election Commission is left to promote transparency, objectivity, and observance of the Model Code of Conduct. Vote secrecy, equal campaign rights, and autonomous counting are left entirely untouched and protected with further integration of the election timetable by the ONOE as it promotes enhanced citizen participation and overall governance efficacy

CONCLUSION

The discussion over Simultaneous elections essentially epitomizes the larger constitutional struggle between the need for an efficient governance regime and the need for a democratic regime of pluralism. The proposal meets, on the one hand, a very real and empirically verifiable problem arising out from India's recurrent electoral cycle, voter fatigue, disruptions in governance, policy paralysis, and economic inefficiencies. The evidence on enhanced turnout, reduced disruption of the model code of conduct, optimised management of security and administrative machinery as well as improved policy continuity in governance clearly indicates

⁴⁵ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections, at 154 (Mar. 2024) (India), available at <https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report-en>

that synchronized elections can reinvigorate democratic participation and governance capacity, not necessarily at the cost of electoral integrity.

The discussion over ONOE thus basically epitomizes the larger constitutional struggle between the requirement of an effective governance regime and the requirement of a democratic regime of pluralism. The proposition meets, on the one hand, a very real and empirically verifiable problem arising out from India's recurrent electoral cycle, voter fatigue, disruptions in governance, policy paralysis, and economic inefficiencies. The evidence on enhanced turnout, reduced disruption of the model code of conduct, optimised management of security and administrative machinery as well as improved policy continuity in governance clearly indicates that synchronized elections can reinvigorate democratic participation and governance capacity, not necessarily at the cost of electoral integrity.

When viewed from a wider horizon, ONOE by itself is neither an elixir nor a sin in the Indian Constitution. Its success largely depends on the process of its execution, a reshape in terms of generosity, a gradual transition to simultaneous polls, a strong guarantee of the basic tenets of federalism, the active involvement of the agency designated as Election Commission of India, and imbuing electoral equality with greater significance to the Indian polity. When ONOE with some degree of care and democratic maturity in terms of the Indian constitution pervades Indian politics, it can re-orient the Indian election system to stability and efficiency in governance, while retaining its federal diversity.