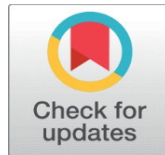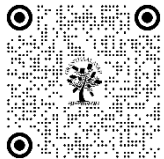# "ONE NATION ONE ELECTION": A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

One of the main characteristics of a democratic system is the periodic holding of elections. Every five years, India conducts regular, fair elections at the national, state, and local levels, which form the foundation of its democratic system. The notion of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has prompted heated discussion among India's political and intellectual elite. It noted that the election campaigns cost a lot of money and take up almost a year. The NDA government has proposed a "One Nation-One Election" plan to reduce the time and energy spent on conducting several state elections. The initiative seeks to coordinate the timing of elections for India's federal parliament and regional legislative bodies, minimizing the number of separate electoral events. Proponents say that ONOE would result in significant cost savings, decrease administrative burdens, and improve governance stability. Critics, on the other hand, highlight to the constitutional, legal, and logistical problems, as well as the possible negative repercussions on the country's federal system. The objective of this paper is to present a thorough examination of the ONOE idea, including its historical background, pro and con arguments, and consequences for the Indian democracy.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, ONOE, Electoral Reforms, Campaign Costs, Cost Saving

1. INTRODUCTION

India has almost 900 million people with voting rights, making it the world's largest democracy. India's electoral system encompasses multiple tiers of governance, with voters participating in separate elections for the parliamentary Lower House (Lok Sabha), state-level legislatures, and municipal/panchayat institutions. India's Constitution, which establishes a federal framework with a distinct division of powers between the federal and state governments, serves as the cornerstone of the country's electoral system. The Election Commission of India (ECI), a permanent and independent entity, is empowered by the Constitution to hold free and fair elections. At the federal, state, and local levels, the ECI is in charge of overseeing, directing, and managing all elections. It has broad regulatory authority over election finance and political parties. The ECI has grown into a well-respected, autonomous organization throughout the years, supporting the legitimacy and integrity of the election process. Unless parliament is dissolved early, Lok Sabha elections have taken place every five years since the first general election in 1951–1952. The 2024 general election featured over 65.79% voter turnout, demonstrating the strength of Indian democracy. However, state assembly elections sometimes occur out of sync with the five-year cycle, leading to frequent election mode (Chakrabarty, 2024). Due to staggered state election

timetables, several regions of India are effectively always in an election cycle. These elections' multiphase format also results in considerable expenses and interruptions to government. For example, the 2024 general elections were held in seven phased from April 19 to June 1, although state elections typically had 1-5 phases. Thousands of polling staff and security guards are sent out nationwide by the ECI to keep an eye on polling stations. Prolonged election periods that enforce the Model Code of Conduct make it more difficult for incumbent state and federal governments to develop and launch infrastructure projects, welfare programs, and important decisions regarding policies. Although voters' desire for anti-incumbency and vibrant multiparty competition has been mostly represented in Indian elections since the 1990s, the fractured electoral schedule presents problems for voter weariness, electoral spending, and government effectiveness. Additionally, it grants the current federal government an excessive amount of authority to target state resources and shape the discourse during concurrent state elections. Among India's various electoral reform initiatives, including voter recall rights, state-funded campaigns, and voting system modifications, the synchronization of elections has emerged as the most debated proposal. The concept of harmonizing election schedules nationwide has gained significant attention in recent policy discussions. This comprehensive electoral restructuring, dubbed "One Nation One Election," envisions a coordinated approach to conducting polls across different governmental tiers. The fundamental goal is to establish a systematic schedule where balloting for the national parliament (Lok Sabha), state legislatures (Vidhan Sabhas), and local administrative bodies occurs either simultaneously or in a clearly defined sequential pattern. The idea represents a significant shift from the current practice of scattered elections throughout the political calendar. While various expert panels have studied multiple aspects of electoral reforms, the synchronized election proposal has generated the most intense debate among policymakers, political analysts, and civil society. This reform initiative aims to streamline the electoral process by creating a more organized and predictable voting calendar. Such harmonization would mark a substantial departure from the present system where elections happen at different times across various states and levels of government (Bairagi, 2022).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

India did not traditionally hold staggered elections. India's first general elections for the Lok Sabha and state legislatures were conducted simultaneously in 1951–52 after India became independence in 1947. Up to 1967, simultaneous elections were still held. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, political unrest at the federal and state levels caused this pattern to break. Premature dissolution of legislative assemblies occurred in a few states, and the decoupling of election cycles was further exacerbated by the 1970 dissolution of the Lok Sabha and the subsequent 1971 midterm elections. Since then, state and national elections have been conducted separately, creating a system in which elections are held in some regions of the nation essentially regularly(Sonawane, 2024). The Law Commission of India made additional requests for the restoration of simultaneous elections in its 170th report in 1999 and the Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2015 after the Election Commission originally suggested doing so in 1983.

3. IMPLEMENTATION HISTORY IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The notion of simultaneous elections, in which several levels of government—national and regional—are held at the same time, is not unique to India. Variations of simultaneous elections have been held in a number of nations worldwide, and their experiences offer important insights into the advantages and difficulties of this type of system. The history and application of simultaneous elections in a number of significant foreign nations are examined in this section, along with their achievements, difficulties, and applicability to India(Devi et al., 2024).

- **South Africa**

In the post-apartheid era, beginning with the watershed democratic elections of 1994, South Africa adopted and has continued to implement a system where voters cast their ballots simultaneously for both national and provincial representatives. This coordinated electoral pattern has remained unchanged throughout South Africa's democratic journey. Every five years, on the same day, the National Assembly and nine province legislatures are elected under the South African electoral system. In order to streamline the election process and maintain political stability at a period of profound political and social change, this system was implemented as part of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. In addition to highlighting the potential for political stability and cost savings, South Africa's experience with simultaneous elections also highlights the difficulties in guaranteeing that regional issues and smaller political parties

are not overlooked in a system where national and provincial elections are held simultaneously. These issues are especially pertinent to India, a nation whose federal structure heavily relies on regional political dynamics.

- **Sweden**

Since 1970, Sweden has held simultaneous elections for county councils, municipal councils, and the country's parliament (Riksdag). Previously, municipal and national elections were conducted independently. By combining elections into a single event, the reform was intended to streamline the electoral process and promote increased voter turnout. Sweden's experience with simultaneous elections shows how such a system can boost voter turnout and streamline the electoral process. However, it also raises concerns about the overshadowing of local issues by national campaigns—something that could become a significant challenge in India, where regional and local issues often take centre stage in state elections.

- **Belgium**

Elections for the federal, regional, and local levels of government are frequently conducted on the same day in Belgium due to its federal system. In order to lessen political instability and simplify government, simultaneous elections had to be implemented in Belgium due to its complicated political environment, which was marked by language and regional divides. Belgium's experience with simultaneous elections highlights the benefits of cost savings and streamlined governance, but it also illustrates the complexities of managing a federal system with significant regional and linguistic diversity—issues that are also highly relevant in the Indian context.

- **Indonesia**

Since 2004, Indonesia, the third-largest democracy in the world, has had simultaneous elections. The president and the legislature (People's Representative Council) were elected separately in the nation before this. Following the overthrow of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998, a larger attempt was made to solidify Indonesia's democratic reforms, which included the move to simultaneous elections. Indonesia's experience is especially relevant to India because of the parallels in size, diversity, and complexity of the voting system. Even if holding elections at the same time has increased voter turnout and promoted political stability, the logistical obstacles and complexity for voters underscore how challenging it is to put such a system in place in big, varied democracies.

- **Germany**

Germany had its first election following unification in 1871, overseen by Emperor Wilhelm I. The voting system was rebuilt as a result of Wilhelm II's abdication. Germany used a single-member district system for elections prior to this occurrence. Following this tragedy, it decided to hold elections using proportional representation. There have been many ups and downs for this nation's electoral constitution.

- **Spain**

Spain holds elections in accordance with European law, much as Sweden. Changes were made to the election legislation in 1977 and 1985. The electoral constitution's restoration process was made possible by these revisions. The goal of the change was to create balance in the elections and drastically lower election costs in Spain by using a proportional representation system. General elections, municipal elections, European Parliament elections, and regional elections are the four types of elections held in Spain. After rewriting its Constitution, Spain—which had a convoluted voting system—generated international attention. This incident made clear how crucial simultaneous elections are. Since then, other nations have begun to think about implementing this modification to make their electoral processes more harmonious.

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND ONGOING DISCUSSIONS

- **The Committee's Formation and Report Submission:**

  A milestone in India's electoral reform journey was marked when President Droupadi Murmu received the comprehensive report on simultaneous elections from the High-level Committee (HLC), led by former President Ram Nath Kovind. This extensive document, spanning over 18,000 pages, represents nearly six months of rigorous research and consultations since the committee's establishment in September 2023.

- **Committee Composition and Expertise:**

The committee brought together diverse expertise, including Home Minister Amit Shah, former Opposition Leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, and distinguished professionals like N.K. Singh and Dr. Subhash C. Kashyap. The team was further strengthened by legal expert Harish Salve and former CVC Sanjay Kothari. Dr. Niten Chandra served as secretary, while Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal participated as a special invitee.

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Public Response:**

  The committee conducted an impressively inclusive consultation process. Of the 47 political parties that provided input, a significant majority - 32 parties - endorsed the concept of simultaneous elections. The initiative also garnered substantial public support, with 80% of the 21,558 citizen responses favouring the reform.

- **Expert Consultations:**

  The committee's thoroughness was evident in its wide-ranging consultations with legal luminaries, including former Chief Justices, Election Commissioners, and the Law Commission chairman. Their expertise provided crucial insights into the constitutional and administrative aspects of implementing simultaneous elections.

- **Economic Impact Assessment:**

  Notable business associations including CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM provided valuable input on the economic implications. They highlighted how scattered elections can trigger inflation and hamper economic growth. These organizations emphasized that frequent elections not only disrupt social harmony but also negatively impact public spending efficiency and educational outcomes.

- **Implementation Strategy:**

  The committee proposed a pragmatic two-phase implementation approach. The first phase aims to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The second phase extends this synchronization to local bodies, ensuring municipal and panchayat elections occur within 100 days of national and state polls.

- **Electoral Infrastructure Reform:**

  A significant recommendation involves streamlining the electoral process through a unified electoral roll and standardized Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) across all governance levels. This proposal aims to enhance efficiency and reduce administrative complexity in the election process.

This comprehensive review and its recommendations represent a significant step toward reforming India's electoral system, balancing practical considerations with democratic principles while addressing various stakeholder concerns. (PIB, 2024).

Following its mandate to investigate the mechanism for simultaneous elections and taking into account the Constitution's current framework, the Committee has crafted its recommendations so that they are consistent with the spirit of the Indian Constitution and would only necessitate minimal constitutional amendments. After thorough consideration, the Committee comes to the conclusion that its suggestions will greatly improve voter comfort, trust, transparency, and inclusion. Strong support for having simultaneous elections will promote social cohesiveness and the development process, strengthen the foundations of our democratic framework, and fulfil India's aspirations—that is, Bharat.

5. LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Indian Constitution does not provide for a regular electoral cycle for simultaneous elections. According to Article 83(2) and the Indian Constitution's Article 172(1), the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, respectively, have a five-year tenure unless they are dissolved sooner (Team, "One Nation, One Election": A Game-Changer in the Indian Electoral System, 2024). Nevertheless, the Constitution has no clear clause that forbids or requires simultaneous elections. A number of constitutional amendments would be necessary to implement ONOE(Kaushik & Goyal, 2019). For instance, Article 356 of the Constitution, which authorizes President's Rule in states, and Article 85, which deals with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, ought to be carefully reviewed in order to ensure the synchronization of elections. Additionally, it might be necessary to change the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which governs the conduct of elections in India. Coordinating elections for the State Legislative Assembly and Lower House will be greatly aided by the aforementioned amendments.(Bansal, 2019). Although the Constitution permits voluntary tenure reductions under the provision "unless sooner dissolved," the only method to prolong the term is to amend the Constitution. Aside from the

already mentioned, the Constitution has no provisions extending the term of State Assemblies. Article 356 addresses the President's authority in the State and comes into play when a State's constitutional apparatus breaks down. Regretfully, elections cannot be synchronized using this framework; instead, Article 172 of the Indian Constitution would have to be amended. Similarly, a new provision might be added to the article to allow for the necessary Extension or reduction in the State Legislative Assembly ability to synchronize elections. Regarding the "Representation of the People Act, 1951," which deals with the notification of elections for State Legislative Assemblies and the lower House, a revision is also necessary as a temporary, if not permanent, alternative. An alternate strategy may also be taken into consideration, as the implementation and acceptance of simultaneous elections rely on a number of factors(Bhagat & Pokharyal, 2020). The idea behind this strategy might be based on the notion that all of the elections which are due in the same year should be held at the same time. It could be necessary to amend Articles 174(1) and 85(1) of the Constitution within sections fourteen and fifteen of the 1951 Representation of People Act, 1951 in order to enforce this particular approach, as it may result in a slight extension or curtailment of the tenure of several State Assemblies.

6. ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

Proponents contend that this election reform will significantly lower costs, increase the effectiveness of government, lessen pressure on political parties, restrain populist policies, and foster a more cogent perspective on national issues. Governments may concentrate on long-term policymaking instead of short-term electoral issues by avoiding periodic election mode. Effective administration is being hampered by the state and federal administrations' constant campaign mode(Das, n.d.).

- **Decrease in Electoral Expenses:** The substantial cost reductions that ONOE may produce are its strongest defence. It takes enormous amounts of resources to hold several elections in several states at regular periods. The Election Commission spends a lot of money on logistics, security personnel, and poll workers. Election synchronization might simplify these processes and cut down on effort duplication, which would improve the utilization of public funds(George, 2023).

- **Emphasis on Governance:** Because political parties and government representatives are frequently distracted by campaigning, frequent elections have a tendency to upset governance. By eliminating the need for governments to often switch into campaign mode, ONOE might result in a more stable and consistent governing circumstances. Without the distraction of upcoming elections, politicians and bureaucrats could concentrate on developing and implementing long-term policies.

- **Minimal Political Disruption:** Under the existing electoral system, ongoing government initiatives are frequently hampered by the model standards of conduct that are enforced each time elections are declared. This disturbance would be reduced with ONOE, allowing the government to operate without frequent disruptions.

- **Increased Voter Turnout:** Since voters would only have to cast ballots once every five years, simultaneous elections are thought to increase turnout since they make voting more convenient. As a result, elected officials' democratic mandate may be strengthened.

- **Political Stability:** Especially at the state level, synchronizing elections may result in increased political stability. There may be less chance of midterm elections brought on by political unrest or coalition dissolutions if elections are held at regular, predictable periods(Kumar, n.d.).

7. CHALLENGES

Critics contend that concurrent elections will weaken federalism, lessen state government responsibility, and dilute regional problems. For synchronization to be possible, significant constitutional modifications and broad political agreement are needed. Regional parties feel that national parties get an unfair advantage. During a set tenure, incumbent governments will have too much power and be less motivated to carry out their duties and resolve complaints(Pandit, n.d.).

- **Implications on Federalism:** One of the main objections to ONOE is that it would make states less independent. India has a federal political structure, and regional issues and concerns are frequently reflected in state elections.

Election synchronization raises the possibility that national problems may eclipse state-level ones, marginalizing regional parties and local governance concerns(Parthasarathy, 2023).

- **Administrative and logistical challenges:** With over 900 million eligible voters dispersed among 28 states and 8 Union Territories, India is a large and varied nation. It would be extremely difficult to deploy election officials, provide sufficient security, and coordinate voter outreach if elections were held nationwide at the same time. The Election Commission and other governmental organizations engaged in the electoral process may experience further hardship as a result.

- **Voter fatigue:** Voter tiredness is a possibility even if holding elections at the same time may appear more convenient. Voters may get overwhelmed if they are asked to choose representatives for both the federal and state legislatures at the same time, which might result in ill-informed decisions and a decline in the standard of representation(Willnat & Aw, 2009).

- **Political Diversity at Risk:** There are many different national, regional, and municipal political parties in India. Regional parties may lose influence as a result of ONOE's potential to consolidate political power in the hands of larger, national parties, which is one of its primary complaints. Simultaneous elections may lead to a homogeneity of political alternatives in states where voters' preferences may vary between national and state elections(Parthasarathy, 2023).

- **Political Party Consensus:** Reaching an agreement between India's many political parties would be extremely difficult. Regional parties may see ONOE as a danger to their independence and political significance, while national parties may support it since it strengthens their broader organizational structures.

8. CONCLUSION

"One Nation, One Election" is a daring and creative initiative that aims to solve some of the major issues with India's election system, such as exorbitant expenses, unstable politics, and disruption of government. Although ONOE has a lot of potential advantages, its adoption would necessitate carefully weighing the logistical, legal, and constitutional issues. Even if holding elections at the same time seems sense, there are real-world challenges. Concerns about regional representation, accountability, campaign emphasis, and the division of power between the federal government and the states arise when the electoral calendar for a large, varied nation like India is synchronized with a federal system. Although the reform offers substantial advantages, there are also serious governance issues that need careful consideration. The major problem in the ongoing discussion is to reach a workable consensus. India, i.e. Bharat, is a unique blend of diverse cultures, traditions, languages, consuming food habits and regional resources. As a result, every state has unique and important problems, therefore we must be extremely attentive while designing and executing the One Nation One Election idea so that our confidence in democracy and the federal system is maintained. If we truly believe in God and put the needs of our country first, then nothing is impossible. We, the Indian people, are blessed with a great visionary and committed Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, who has vigorously promoted this idea once more with a strong desire to put it into practice through open discourse and the proper legal system. In addition to enhancing our democracy, it will serve as a model for other democratic nations, both established and developing. Additionally, it will be a wonderful homage to our Constitutional legend frames. There is a need for behavioural adjustment in thought process.

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