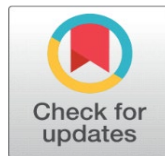
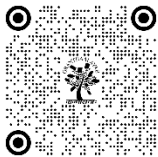


EXPLORING THE MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION' IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" proposes synchronizing elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to streamline India's electoral process, potentially reducing financial costs and governance disruptions. However, its implementation faces significant challenges. The paper aims to identify the managerial challenges in implementing 'One Nation, One Election' in India. The study is based on secondary information drawn from existing literature, expert opinions, policy reports, and government recommendations to highlight various complexities and proposed solutions. By doing so, this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the feasibility and implications of this electoral reform. The study finds that constitutional amendments, particularly Articles 83 and 172 and changes to the Representation of the People Act, pose legal complexities. Logistically, conducting nationwide elections requires substantial resources, and the risk of political instability, especially from mid-term dissolutions, requires contingency planning. Voter behavior and participation could be impacted by confusion and fatigue from simultaneous elections. A phased and strategic approach is essential to ensure success, addressing these challenges while maintaining electoral integrity and federal balance.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Elections, One Nation One Poll, Managerial Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" refers to the idea of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha (India's national Parliament) and all State Legislative Assemblies. This proposal aims to synchronize the election cycles at the central and state levels, enabling voters to cast their ballots for both elections on the same day (Vikash, 2020). Advocates of this idea argue that it can lead to substantial savings in terms of financial resources and administrative effort while reducing the political instability caused by frequent election cycles (Aarif Mohd Waza, 2023). The initiative is seen as a potential solution to the continuous cycle of elections in India, which leads to the recurrent imposition of the model code of conduct, thus halting governance activities (Aditya Kashyap, 2024).

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Simultaneous elections were the norm in India during the initial years after independence. From 1952 to 1967, elections for both the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were held together. (ET Legal World, 2024). However,

this practice was disrupted following the premature dissolution of some state assemblies and the central government, which led to a decoupling of election cycles (Rangarajan, 2024). The frequent fall of governments at both the state and national levels in the late 1960s and early 1970s further widened the gap between national and state election schedules (Khare, 2022). Since then, elections in India have been staggered across different states, with various state governments completing their five-year terms at various times (Sonawane, 2024). The proposal to return to simultaneous elections has gained traction in recent years, with several expert committees and political leaders advocating for its implementation (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021).

The revival of "One Nation, One Election" in the current political climate stems from economic and governance concerns. One of the primary motivations is the excessive cost associated with conducting frequent, staggered elections across India. Managing separate state and national elections requires considerable financial resources, including security personnel, poll workers, and election infrastructure. Proponents argue that synchronizing elections could reduce these costs, freeing up resources for other governance activities (Namita Singh, 2024; Aparajitha Nair, 2024).

Additionally, the continuous election cycle disrupts governance, as government officials are frequently preoccupied with election campaigns, diverting attention from policy implementation. By having simultaneous elections, the government could focus more consistently on development and governance without periodic interruptions (The Indian Express, 2023). Politically, the ruling BJP has positioned the proposal to enhance electoral efficiency and reduce political instability, though critics argue that it may centralize power and undermine regional representation (The Independent, 2024).

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to explore the managerial challenges involved in implementing "One Nation, One Election" in India. Specifically, the study seeks to identify key hurdles that need to be addressed for the successful execution of this electoral reform.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper aims to provide an in-depth examination of these challenges through a management perspective, offering insights on how synchronized elections can be effectively managed in a diverse federal structure like India's. The study will draw exclusively on secondary data, synthesizing existing literature, expert opinions, policy reports, and government recommendations to highlight various complexities and proposed solutions. By doing so, this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the feasibility and implications of this electoral reform.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Managing elections in federal systems like India presents unique challenges due to the complexity of coordinating multiple electoral processes across diverse political and geographical landscapes. Elections in federal structures involve the interaction between national and subnational governments, each with distinct electoral cycles, legal frameworks, and political priorities. This literature review draws from multiple studies and expert opinions to explore the challenges and best practices in managing elections within such systems, focusing on India.

Federal systems, by design, divide powers between central and regional governments, each operating semi-autonomously within their jurisdictions. This division creates significant challenges in electoral management. According to (Tillin & Pereira, 2017), managing elections in federations requires a higher degree of coordination due to varying election schedules and the need to balance national and regional interests. In India, this complexity is evident as state elections do not coincide with national elections, creating what experts term a "perpetual election mode" (Roshan & Abhishek, 2021).

Moreover, (Elklit and Reynolds, 2005) argue that coordinating elections in federal systems is crucial for maintaining democratic legitimacy and operational efficiency. They emphasize the importance of an independent election management body, such as India's Election Commission, which plays a pivotal role in ensuring free and fair elections across various levels of government. The Election Commission's ability to maintain autonomy from political influence is critical in managing these complex processes (Bairagi, 2022).

The logistical challenges of conducting elections in federal systems are particularly pronounced in large, diverse countries like India. According to (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021), the vast geographical spread and infrastructural diversity in India complicate election management, requiring the mobilization of significant resources, including Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), polling personnel, and security forces. Each state poses unique challenges due to differences in population density, literacy rates, and political climates, making it difficult to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to electoral management (Sharma, 2023).

(Tomar, 2023) highlights the need for decentralized election management in federal systems to accommodate regional diversity. He argues that while central oversight is necessary to ensure uniform standards, the implementation must be tailored to local contexts. This view is supported by (Aarif Mohd Waza, 2023), who emphasizes that India's federal structure demands a nuanced approach to election management, especially in regions with high political instability or insurgent activity, such as Jammu, Kashmir, and the Northeast.

Elections in federal systems can also be financially burdensome. The staggered election cycles in countries like India require repeated deployment of election machinery, incurring significant costs. (Reynolds, 2002) Points out that in federal systems with staggered election cycles, the government must allocate considerable resources for security, voter education, and logistics, often diverting funds from other development activities. The cost of managing frequent elections in India, for example, has been a major driver behind the proposal for "One Nation, One Election" to streamline electoral processes and reduce financial burdens (Namita Singh, 2024).

In federal systems, managing elections also involves dealing with risks related to political instability. (Outlook, 2024) Suggests that electoral management bodies must anticipate risks such as no-confidence motions or the premature dissolution of state assemblies, which are common in federal systems like India. These events can disrupt election cycles, requiring by-elections or full-scale electoral reorganizations. Such disruptions are costly and create uncertainty for governance and electoral management.

(Jatin Rathore, 2024) adds that managing political diversity is another key challenge in federal election systems. In India, regional parties play a significant role in state elections, and aligning national and state elections could diminish their influence, as national issues might overshadow regional concerns. This risk of centralizing electoral power in national parties is often cited as a critical challenge in implementing synchronized elections in federal systems.

The use of technology in elections, particularly Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), has introduced both opportunities and challenges in federal election management. (Sharma, 2023) Observes that while EVMs have improved electoral efficiency in India, they also pose security risks, particularly in regions with political instability. The Election Commission must manage these risks through rigorous testing and security protocols to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

The management of elections in federal systems like India requires a delicate balance of coordination, logistical planning, financial resources, risk management, and technological innovation. While federalism presents challenges in aligning national and regional priorities, strong election management bodies, decentralized operations, and careful resource allocation can help mitigate these issues. The literature consistently highlights the importance of tailoring electoral processes to the specific needs of each region within a federal structure, especially in diverse and populous nations like India.

Managerial Challenges of Implementing 'One Nation, One Election'

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" has sparked extensive debate among experts, policymakers, and scholars due to its various challenges. These challenges range from constitutional hurdles to logistical complexities and have been discussed in several policy reports, news articles, and TV debates.

Constitutional and Legal Challenges: Implementing simultaneous elections would require extensive constitutional amendments, particularly concerning Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174, which govern the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies (Kartavya Singh, 2024). Experts have argued that amending these laws to align election cycles across states and the central government is monumental. Amending the Constitution to allow simultaneous elections would require ratification by at least half of the states, as electoral matters fall under the State List in the Seventh Schedule, making the political process even more challenging (Prime Legal, 2024) (Aparajitha Nair, 2024)). Currently, both bodies are elected for a five-year term from their first sitting unless dissolved earlier. Aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies would require either extending the tenure of some assemblies or dissolving them prematurely, raising concerns over the constitutional integrity of the fixed-term system.

(Anand, 2024) (IQRA IAS, 2024). One of the foremost issues is the need to amend Articles 83 and 172, which currently stipulate that the tenure of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is five years from the date of their first sitting unless dissolved sooner. Introducing simultaneous elections would require adjusting these terms, either by prematurely dissolving some assemblies or extending the tenure of others (IQRA IAS, 2024) (Prime Legal, 2024). Additionally, the concept of dissolving a state assembly before its term to align with national elections poses challenges to India's federal structure. Critics argue that altering the fixed terms for state legislatures could violate the basic structure doctrine of the Constitution, which upholds the autonomy and fixed duration of elected bodies (Mint, 2023). Another major constitutional hurdle is the need to amend the Representation of the People Act of 1951, which governs the conduct of elections in India. According to legal experts, these amendments would be essential to enable simultaneous elections and to avoid contradictions between the act and the proposed electoral framework (IQRA IAS, 2024).

Logistical and Resource Management Challenges: Managing elections on a national scale involves massive logistical coordination and resource allocation. According to expert reports, one of the biggest challenges is ensuring that adequate resources, such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), polling personnel, and security forces, are available to manage elections across all states simultaneously (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). Critics highlight that India's vast geographical and infrastructural diversity makes it difficult to ensure that all regions, especially remote areas, have access to the necessary resources on the same day (The Indian Express, 2023). Logistics experts argue that a nationwide election will stretch the electoral infrastructure, requiring significant investment in both equipment and human resources (Chandok, 2023). A report by the Election Commission of India emphasizes that to handle nationwide elections on a single day, the country would need a significant increase in EVMs and VVPATs. The logistical challenge of maintaining, testing, and deploying these machines in every constituency simultaneously is monumental, particularly in remote and geographically challenging regions (IQRA IAS, 2024) (Prime Legal, 2024). The Election Commission would also need to ensure the training and availability of enough personnel to operate these machines, a task complicated by India's sheer size and population. Another critical issue is the security infrastructure required to maintain law and order during elections. The deployment of security forces must be scaled up significantly to ensure peaceful voting across all states simultaneously. This requires the coordination of central and state security agencies, which may face challenges given the already stretched resources for law enforcement (Anand, 2024). Furthermore, ensuring adequate transportation and communication infrastructure for moving personnel and election materials to remote areas adds another layer of complexity (Prime Legal, 2024). The logistical demands also extend to voter education and awareness campaigns. With different states having unique linguistic and cultural contexts, a nationwide election would necessitate a massive voter education effort to ensure that all citizens are informed about the simultaneous election process. Experts argue this would be particularly challenging in rural and illiterate populations, where understanding electoral procedures is limited (Avgerou et al., 2019). The logistical and resource management challenges in implementing "One Nation, One Election" are immense, requiring comprehensive planning, resource allocation, and coordination across multiple levels of government. These challenges must be addressed to ensure the successful execution of synchronized elections without compromising electoral integrity or security.

Financial Implications: Proponents of "One Nation, One Election" argue that reducing the frequency of elections will result in cost savings. However, critics highlight the high upfront costs associated with synchronizing election cycles. For instance, substantial investment would be required to acquire additional EVMs and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machines to conduct simultaneous voting across India (Aditya Kashyap, 2024). Moreover, financial experts argue that while long-term savings might be possible, the initial expenses and administrative overhaul could outweigh these savings in the short term (Namita Singh, 2024). The Election Commission of India has estimated that the cost of procuring and maintaining additional EVMs and VVPATs for a simultaneous national and state election would be significant, potentially exceeding ₹4,500 crore (The Times of India, 2024). Simultaneous elections would require the mobilization of a large number of security forces across the country to ensure peaceful and fair elections, which would further increase the financial burden on the state (Civils Daily, 2024). Conducting elections at once would reduce the repetitive costs of organizing multiple elections simultaneously, including campaign expenditures and administrative costs. For example, the cost of the 2019 general elections was around ₹60,000 crore, and holding frequent elections for individual states further escalates this expense. (Business Today, 2024). While "One Nation, One Election" promises to reduce long-term electoral costs, the upfront financial investments related to EVM procurement, security arrangements, and logistical preparations present significant challenges that must be carefully addressed.

Risk of Political Instability: One major concern political analysts highlight is the risk of political instability if elections are synchronized. In mid-term dissolutions of the Parliament or state assemblies due to no-confidence motions or other political disruptions, questions arise on how by-elections would be handled (Aarif Mohd Waza, 2023). One of the main concerns is handling situations where either the Lok Sabha or a State Legislative Assembly is dissolved before completing its full term. This challenges synchronized elections, as by-elections or early elections may be needed, defeating the purpose of holding all elections simultaneously (Aparajitha Nair, 2024). Experts note that managing such risks would require careful contingency planning and could involve additional election cycles, defeating the purpose of simultaneous elections (The Independent, 2024). These concerns have been reiterated in several TV debates, with opposition leaders emphasizing the impracticality of aligning state and national elections given the political volatility in certain regions (Sharma, 2023). Implementing "One Nation, One Election" faces significant risks related to political instability, particularly concerning the potential for disruption during mid-term dissolutions of state assemblies or the central government. These challenges highlight the need for careful planning and potential safeguards to ensure that "One Nation, One Election" does not inadvertently destabilize India's political system.

Impact on Federalism and Regional Representation: India's federal structure, where states enjoy significant autonomy, is another point of contention. Critics argue that simultaneous elections could undermine regional parties and diminish the focus on state-specific issues (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Aparajitha Nair, 2024). This could weaken the ability of regional parties to influence policy and governance at the state level, reducing the diversity of political representation in India's highly pluralistic democracy (Sharma, 2023). Furthermore, the synchronization of elections may compromise the federal balance of power by creating a more unified political landscape favoring national parties. State governments might become more dependent on the central government for political survival, potentially altering the dynamics of center-state relations (Anand, 2024). Regional parties, which often play a crucial role in coalition politics, could be marginalized as national parties dominate the electoral landscape and campaign messaging (Mint, 2023). Regional parties have opposed this proposal, stating that synchronized elections could weaken their influence as voters may focus more on national issues rather than regional priorities (The Independent, 2024). Political scientists have also suggested that holding elections simultaneously could tilt the balance of power toward national parties, leaving regional parties at a disadvantage (Political Science Solution, 2024). Simultaneous elections pose significant risks to federalism and regional representation. By prioritizing national issues over state concerns, simultaneous elections may undermine the regional diversity central to India's democratic and federal framework. Careful consideration of these challenges is crucial before moving forward with such a reform.

Voter Behaviour and Electoral Participation: A challenge frequently mentioned in expert discussions is the potential impact on voter behavior. Implementing "One Nation, One Election" presents significant challenges concerning voter behavior and electoral participation. One of the primary concerns is how simultaneous elections may affect voter decision-making by merging national and state-level issues into a single voting event. This could lead to voter confusion, as voters might struggle to distinguish between the priorities of national and state governments when casting their ballots (Sharma, 2023; Anand, 2024). Simultaneous elections could overwhelm voters with information, as they would have to evaluate candidates for both national and state-level offices on the same day. Voters may prioritize national issues over local ones, particularly if national media coverage dominates the election narrative (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). This could skew the results of state elections, where voters may overlook regional concerns in favor of broader national topics, undermining the regional representation of local issues (Aparajitha Nair, 2024). Simultaneous elections could confuse voters by conflating national and state issues, making it difficult to make informed decisions (Sharma, 2023). Studies suggest that voters may be more likely to vote based on national issues, thereby ignoring state-level governance issues (Aarif et al., 2023). Experts also caution against voter fatigue, where the complexity of managing dual ballots on the same day could lead to lower voter turnout or less thoughtful decision-making (Aditya Kashyap, 2024). Experts suggest that voters base their decisions differently in state and national elections. For example, while national elections focus on larger issues like foreign policy, national security, and the economy, state elections often hinge on localized concerns such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Civils Daily, 2024). With "One Nation, One Election," these distinctions may blur, leading voters to make decisions based on national considerations even in state elections, potentially weakening the autonomy of state governments in addressing region-specific issues (Mint, 2023). There is also the risk of voter fatigue, where voters may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of voting for multiple offices in one day, which could reduce overall voter participation. Research shows that elections in large democracies often suffer from low turnout when voters feel disengaged or confused by the electoral process (Sharma, 2023). "One Nation, One Election" might exacerbate this problem, particularly in rural or less-educated populations, where voters may lack access to

information about both national and local candidates (Aparajitha Nair, 2024). With simultaneous elections, voters may not have the opportunity to thoroughly research the candidates and issues across national and state elections, leading to less informed voting choices (Anand, 2024).

Governance Disruptions: The Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which comes into force during elections, is another key issue. Critics argue that the frequent imposition of the MCC during staggered elections hampers governance and policy implementation (The Indian Express, 2023). However, experts warn that a nationwide election could lead to longer periods of MCC enforcement, causing extended delays in decision-making at both the national and state levels (Sharma, 2023). This, in turn, could result in policy paralysis, where governments focus solely on electioneering rather than governance during the election cycle (The Independent, 2024). During this time, governments' normal functioning, particularly in implementing development projects or making key decisions, is often slowed or halted. This is particularly problematic in a diverse country like India, where different states have varying needs and timelines for policy interventions. Simultaneous elections could exacerbate these challenges, as governments would be constrained by the MCC across all states simultaneously, delaying crucial governance activities (Mint, 2023). Another challenge is the strain on administrative efficiency. Election duties require a sizeable portion of the bureaucratic and administrative machinery, pulling resources away from regular governance. With simultaneous elections, a larger segment of the government apparatus would be diverted to election-related activities, reducing the ability of both central and state administrations to deliver essential public services during the election period (Aparajitha Nair, 2024). Implementing "One Nation, One Election" would lead to significant governance disruptions due to the extended enforcement of the MCC, diversion of administrative resources, and potential focus on short-term populism. These disruptions could undermine the effectiveness of governance at both the central and state levels, particularly in addressing long-term policy needs.

The literature underscores the complexities of implementing "One Nation, One Election," with challenges spanning constitutional, logistical, financial, political, and governance dimensions. While the concept promises cost savings and governance efficiency, the hurdles presented by India's federal structure, logistical diversity, and political volatility make its implementation a formidable task. The voices of opposition and expert critiques emphasize the need for a more detailed, phased approach to electoral reform.

6. KEY FINDINGS

The findings from the challenges of implementing highlight significant hurdles across several dimensions. "One Nation, One Election"

Constitutionally, implementing simultaneous elections would require significant amendments to Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174, governing the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Electoral matters fall under the State List in the Seventh Schedule, requiring ratification by at least half of the states, adding complexity to the legal process. Aligning election cycles may disrupt the constitutional integrity of the fixed-term system, leading to either premature dissolutions or term extensions. Altering the election cycle could violate the basic structure doctrine, which upholds elected bodies' autonomy and fixed terms. Amendments to the Representation of the People Act of 1951 are essential to manage the logistics of simultaneous elections and avoid contradictions with the current electoral framework.

Logistically, conducting simultaneous elections nationwide would require a significant increase in EVMs and VVPAT machines. India's vast and diverse geography presents logistical challenges, particularly in ensuring that remote and underdeveloped regions have adequate voting infrastructure. A simultaneous election would require more trained personnel to manage voting machines and ensure smooth operations in every constituency. The need for additional security forces to maintain law and order across the country is a major logistical hurdle, given the stretched resources of law enforcement agencies. A large-scale voter education campaign would be necessary to ensure citizens across different regions and linguistic backgrounds understand the simultaneous election process.

Financially, Substantial upfront investments are needed to procure EVMs and VVPAT machines, estimated to exceed ₹4,500 crore. Mobilizing security forces nationwide for a single election would further increase the financial burden on the state. Although there are potential long-term savings, the initial expenses related to the campaign and administrative adjustments may outweigh these benefits in the short term. Holding fewer elections over time would lower repetitive administrative and organizational costs, offering potential financial savings. Additional expenses for

transportation, communication infrastructure, and resource management would be required to manage the logistical needs of a simultaneous election.

Politically, if either the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved mid-term, it could necessitate by-elections, undermining the purpose of simultaneous elections. Managing political risks like no-confidence motions would require extensive contingency planning to prevent governance disruptions. Political instability in certain states could complicate the alignment of state and national elections. Synchronizing elections could limit the flexibility of governments to address sudden political crises, increasing the risk of instability. By-elections or early elections might still be needed, creating additional election cycles and defeating the goal of a synchronized election process.

Regionally, Simultaneous elections could weaken regional parties and shift focus on national issues, undermining state-specific concerns. The synchronization of elections could centralize power, making state governments more dependent on the central government. Regional parties fear their influence will be reduced as national parties dominate the electoral narrative, leading to a loss of regional diversity in governance. Simultaneous elections could alter the balance of power between the central and state governments, affecting India's federal structure. National issues might overshadow regional concerns, reducing the focus on local governance during election campaigns.

Electorially, Simultaneous elections could lead to voter confusion, as individuals may struggle to differentiate between national and state-level issues when casting their votes. Voters may prioritize national issues over regional concerns, especially if national media coverage dominates the election narrative, potentially affecting the outcome of state elections. Managing multiple ballots on the same day could overwhelm voters, leading to lower turnout and less thoughtful voting decisions, particularly in rural or less-educated populations; with the simultaneous election cycle, voters may not have adequate time to research national and state candidates, resulting in less informed decision-making. Voters base decisions on different criteria for national and state elections, such as focusing on foreign policy in national elections and local governance in state elections, which may blur under simultaneous voting.

Administratively, Simultaneous elections would lead to longer periods of MCC enforcement, potentially causing delays in policy implementation and governance activities at the national and state levels. Governments may focus primarily on electioneering rather than governance during the simultaneous election cycle, leading to short-term populist measures instead of long-term policymaking. A substantial portion of the government's administrative machinery would be diverted toward election-related duties, reducing its capacity to deliver essential public services. Due to the simultaneous election process, key development projects and decision-making processes could be delayed, especially in states with urgent governance needs. Simultaneous elections would impose a one-size-fits-all approach, which could disrupt governance in states with diverse political and administrative timelines.

These findings underscore the potential risks to voter engagement and governance efficiency posed by the simultaneous implementation of "One Nation, One Election." These findings illustrate the need for a carefully phased and managed approach to overcome the constitutional, logistical, and political challenges of "One Nation, One Election."

7. CONCLUSION

The proposal for "One Nation, One Election" promises improvements in financial efficiency and governance by reducing the frequency of elections and the administrative burden. However, its implementation faces constitutional, logistical, financial, and political challenges. Constitutional amendments, such as changes to Articles 83 and 172 and the Representation of the People Act, are legally complex. Logistically, conducting nationwide elections requires substantial resources like EVMs and security forces, which involve significant upfront costs. The risk of political instability, especially due to mid-term dissolutions, and concerns about voter behavior—such as confusion and fatigue—further complicate the proposal. A phased and strategic approach is essential to address these challenges while maintaining electoral integrity.

Future research on "One Nation, One Election" should focus on exploring the long-term impacts of simultaneous elections on voter behavior, especially in voter turnout and informed decision-making. Additionally, studies could analyze the political dynamics between national and regional parties to assess how synchronized elections influence power distribution and regional representation. Finally, more research is needed on logistical challenges, including the financial feasibility of implementing such reforms in diverse federal systems like India and how technological innovations might mitigate these challenges.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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