

Unified Ballot: The Promise and Challenge of One Nation One Election in India

Dr. Preety Gupta

Formerly, Deptt of Political Science, IEC University, Baddi.

Summary

The necessity of conducting synchronized elections for the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies has been a subject of prolonged debate. Simultaneous elections, in the commonly understood meaning, refer to the occurrence of elections for all three levels of Constitutional institutions - the House of the People (Lok Sabha), State Assemblies (Vidhan Sabha), and Local bodies - happening in a coordinated manner. This essentially means that a voter casts their vote to elect members for all levels of the Government simultaneously. The electoral commission is necessary to supervise the election of the President and Vice President, Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha, legislative committee, state legislature, district assembly, and panchayat. The committee primarily allocated its time to tallying the ballots, verifying the voter roster, and apportioning the constituencies. Our constitution established a quasi-federal structure for the nation. India does not possess a fully federal structure like the United States or a unitary structure like the United Kingdom. Both the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha necessitate elections to select their members. The current article discusses the prospects and obstacles of implementing the concept of "One Nation-One Election" in India.

KEYWORDS: - Democracy, Election, Lok Sabha, Legislative Assembly, Election Commission, policy, Constitutional.

Overview

The recent governmental measures in India seem to be predicated upon the premise of One Nation-One Election. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is founded on the fundamental concept of "One Nation, One Tax." Similarly, the "One Nation-One Curriculum" framework is an integral component of the recently implemented education policy. The concept of "One Nation-One Election" proposes the simultaneous conduct of Lok Sabha and all state legislature elections. The concept of conducting concurrent elections is not novel in India. Following the attainment of independence and the implementation of the constitution, the first election

occurred concurrently in 1951-1952. Elections were conducted concurrently from 1951-1952 to 1967-1968, after which they were interrupted. The concept came to an end when the fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved prematurely. The ideal condition necessitates that a person of integrity and moral uprightness, who is committed to the welfare of the public and desires to serve them, should have the opportunity to run for office and be elected as a representative of the people.

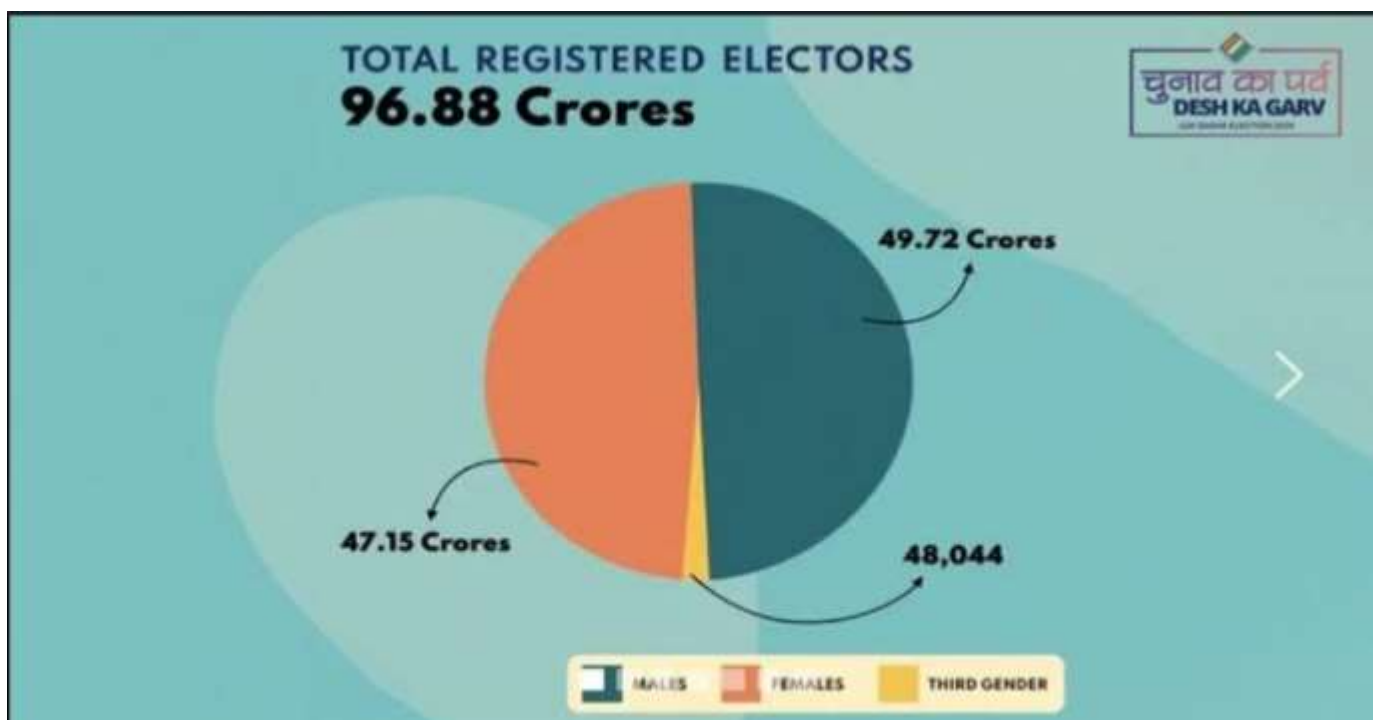
Currently, many Electoral bodies are responsible for conducting elections in accordance with Article 324 of the Constitution. This article empowers the Election Commission of India to oversee, guide, and manage elections for the positions of President, Vice President, both houses of Parliament, State Legislative Councils, and Assemblies. Article 73 and 74 empower the State Election Commission (SEC) to oversee and administer elections at the state level, which occur every 5 years. The concept of One Nation-One Election in India is a suggested electoral reform endorsed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Indian democracy is characterized by a federal system, in which both the central and state governments possess distinct powers and responsibilities. Parliament and state assemblies serve to strike a balance between autocracy and democracy, as well as centralization and decentralization.

One Nation-One Election refers to the concept of holding simultaneous elections for all levels of government in a country, such as national, state, and local elections. This means that instead of having elections at different times, all elections would be conducted together, with the aim of reducing the frequency of elections and promoting political stability.

Election Commission of India:

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes in India at both the national and state levels. It administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies, as well as the offices of the President and Vice President in the country. The body operates under the authority of the Constitution per Article 324, and subsequently enacted laws. As of the latest data, there are a total of eight national parties and over 50 state parties registered with the Election Commission of India. National parties include major ones such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian National Congress (INC), and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), among others. State parties are significant in their respective states and include parties like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi and Punjab, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal.

The total number of registered voters in India is over 96.88 crores (Image 1, Image 2) making it the largest electorate in the world. The distribution between male and female voters is nearly balanced, with males constituting approximately 52% and females about 48% of the electorate. This balance indicates an increasing trend of female voter participation in recent years, a significant aspect of the democratic process in the country.



Assembly elections hold significant importance in any democracy, including India, due to several key factors. They allow for the election of representatives at the state level, enabling decentralized governance and ensuring regional issues and local aspirations are addressed more effectively. This is crucial in a federal structure like India's, where powers and responsibilities are divided between the central and state governments, maintaining a balance of power and allowing states to exercise their authority in various sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and law and order.

One nation one election

In India, elections for the state legislature and the Lok Sabha are concurrently conducted every quinquennial. This provision enables voters in a specific constituency to exercise their voting rights for both the state legislature and the Lok Sabha on a single day. However, it does not imply that the Lok Sabha and state assembly elections must be held simultaneously across the entire country. The principle at its basis is "One nation-one election". Despite being hindered by the rapid dissolution of state assemblies, India became well-known for conducting simultaneous elections till 1967. The reason why elections for local governments such as panchayats and municipalities cannot be held at the same time is due to their large quantity and inclusion in the state list.

Table 2
Average Turnout During Lok Sabha Elections (1989-2019)
and Assembly Elections (1989-2021)

State Wise Comparative Analysis		
States	Average of turnout in Lok Sabha elections	Average of turnout in
	1989-2019	1989-2021
Andhra Pradesh	67.88	63.23
Assam	66.16	72.59
Bihar	73.83	78.63
Chhattisgarh	58.71	56.2
Delhi	63.12	74.34
Goa	53.75	63.97
Gujarat	59.88	73.37
Haryana	52.44	63.44
Himachal Pradesh	67.99	70.92
Himachal Pradesh	62.37	72.61
Jammu & Kashmir	40.85	56.68
Karnataka	56.99	61.94
Kerala	64.27	68.4
Kerala	73.51	73.91
Madhya Pradesh	56.9	66.08
Madhya Pradesh	56.5	62.99
Mizoram	72.63	87.41
Mizoram	62.83	81.88
Nagaland	62.41	80.41
Nagaland	80.37	79.3
Odisha	63.7	67.42
Punjab	60.41	66.73
Rajasthan	55.28	67.54
Sikkim	77.4	79.03
Tamil Nadu	66.22	69.91
Tamil Nadu	65.88	71.47
Tripura	78.07	86.79
Uttar Pradesh	52.82	54.81
Uttar Pradesh	53.36	62.85
West Bengal	79.88	81.27

history

The issue of one nation, one election is a highly divisive one that is gaining momentum in India. The committee on simultaneous elections to Parliament, state assemblies, and municipal bodies, which was helmed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, submitted the report to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday. The committee, which was established in September of last year to submit recommendations for the nationwide implementation of simultaneous elections, has engaged with representatives from a diverse array of political parties, including

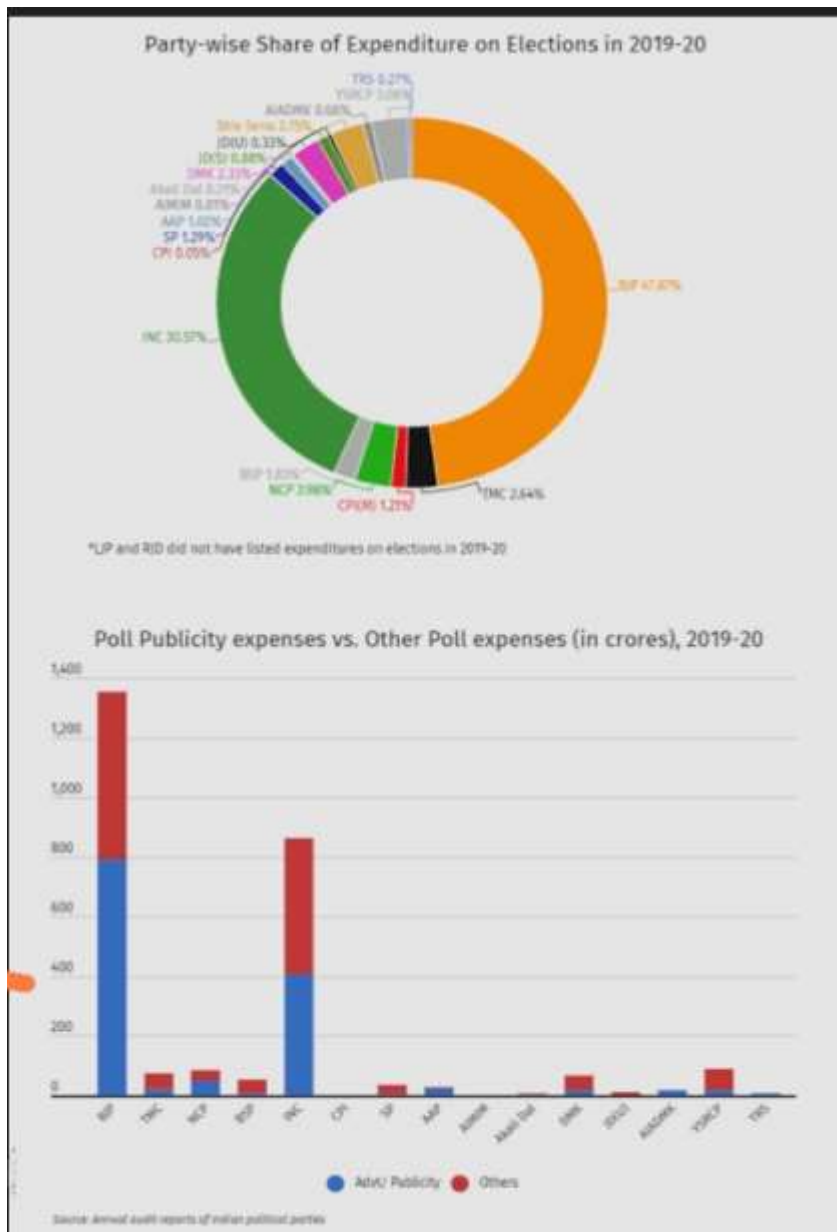
the BJP, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, CPI, CPI(M), AIMIM, RPI, and Apna Dal. The committee received written recommendations from these party representatives. Additionally, the committee had requested public input. The transition to simultaneous surveys may necessitate an extended period of time due to the substantial influence it will have on the nation. The committee's recommendations have established a roadmap for the required modifications, which encompass the standardization of electoral registers and the amendment of the Constitution and laws. TOI disclosed this information. This concept is not novel. The concept of "one nation, one election" has been the subject of investigation and proposal by a variety of entities, including the European Commission, the Law Commission, and parliamentary committees. It has been incorporated into the election manifestos of the BJP. However, political parties have been unable to establish a consensus. In 1983, the European Commission suggested that the feasibility of simultaneous elections be investigated. The Law Commission also recommended simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies in its 170th report in 1999. A report on the feasibility of simultaneous surveys was compiled by a parliamentary standing committee in 2015. The report emphasized the potential benefits of simultaneous surveys, including cost savings and improved administrative efficiency. However, the report also acknowledged the concerns raised by the Opposition parties, which were opposed to the concept and cited its potential impact on federalism. The committee suggested that the mandates of assemblies be reduced by up to 599 days and their tenures be extended by up to 170 days. It was determined that "simultaneous elections may not be feasible in 2016 or for the next decade." The government think tank Niti Aayog published a discussion document in 2017 that examined the concept of simultaneous polls. The paper recognized the importance of addressing concerns about democratic safeguards and federalism, while also underscoring the potential administrative benefits and cost reductions. In September of the previous year, the government established a committee to suggest strategies for transitioning to simultaneous voting. Arguments in favor of a single election for a single nation. The BJP has been a proponent of simultaneous polls for an extended period. Additionally, it was endorsed by LK Advani. For an extended period, the BJP has also been contemplating the idea of a single electoral record for all elections. The BJP's allies, including JD(U), JD(S), SAD, and BJD, have endorsed the concept. The National Conference has expressed reservations regarding the concept, but it has not entirely rejected it. The country's perpetual election mode, which is a consequence of the current system, is the primary argument in favor of simultaneous ballots. In certain states, the duration of the year can be consumed by polls for as many as 200-300 days, as there are multiple elections for panchayats and local bodies in

addition to assembly and general elections. The perpetual election cycle has resulted in elections dominating the public discourse. Polarizing issues, hate speeches, and intensified political rivalry frequently lead to the degradation of public discourse during elections. The perpetual election mode, which effectively paralyzes the government, also results in the imposition of a model code of conduct for protracted periods. Furthermore, the frequent elections render politicians incapable of focusing on long-term issues, necessitating that they prioritize matters that can be promptly and easily voted upon. Additionally, the frequency of elections necessitates that government officials, including ministers, allocate more time to election-related obligations than to their official duties. Election-related obligations are assigned to bureaucrats and security personnel. Another substantial argument is the substantial expenditure on elections, which also contributes to the widespread corruption. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has unwaveringly supported the concept of "one nation, one election" in its presentation to the Kovind-led committee. While synchronized elections to local bodies, state, and parliament may pose a challenge, they would lead to cost reductions and economic benefits, as has been previously stated. According to CII, a nation that is perpetually in election mode has an impact on infrastructure and capital expenditure-related projects, as this results in delays in project implementation due to a lack of approvals and certifications during the model code of conduct. Elections also restricted the government personnel's capabilities during this period. The private sector is also reported to be hesitant to invest in the months preceding and following the elections. It was also noted that public investment has an impact on economic activity, overall development, and jobs and livelihoods. "Simultaneous elections will reduce the delays and we believe the costs of delay by about half of what it is currently," according to the CII. Arguments against the notion of "one nation, one election" Congress, the largest opposition party, has rejected the concept. The Congress leader in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, resigned from the Kovind-led committee because its mandate was not to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the issue, but rather to suggest methods for conducting simultaneous polls. Numerous other opposition parties, such as TMC, DMK, and AAP, have vigorously opposed the concept. The concept's primary objection is that it will marginalize regional and local issues. In simultaneous polls, more significant national-level issues will eclipse local and regional issues. This will lead to the homogenization of political discourse and make it difficult for minor parties and states to present their ideas to the nation. In order to conduct simultaneous polls, the provision of a no-confidence motion against the government must be either removed or modified, as an abrupt collapse of the government would result in untimely elections. Fixed tenures will undermine

the fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy. Furthermore, the capacity to hold politicians accountable is facilitated by the occurrence of elections at regular intervals. Another argument is that the reduction of the high costs of elections cannot be used as a rationale for the degradation of democratic discourse.

A concise account of the implementation of the "One Nation-One Election" concept in India. Simultaneous elections are not a new concept, as the Indian government has already made repeated attempts to implement them. In 1951-1952, India conducted its inaugural concurrent elections for the State Assembly and Lok Sabha, following its independence by two years. Prior to 1967, it was the prevailing norm. But later, issues with the electoral system simultaneously emerged as a result of the dissolution of various legislative assemblies in 1968 and 1969. Indeed, the Lok Sabha was dissolved in 1970. Therefore, due to the dissimilarity between the state assembly elections and the parliamentary elections,

The Election Commission's 1983 annual report recommended a return to simultaneous polling. The Law Committee also made a comparable remark in its 1999 report. This topic has been the focus of numerous debates and disputes over the past decade. The Bhartiya Janata Party's agenda for the 2014 Lok Sabha election explicitly endorsed the implementation of simultaneous elections as a political system. In 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the potential of reintroducing this concept to India and its political landscape. However, in January of that year, Niti Aayog produced a working paper on the topic. In an April 2018 working paper, the Law Commission of India stated that a minimum of "five constitutional suggestions" are necessary to restore this system. The decision to run the polls simultaneously has not yet been finalized.



Revisions necessary for simultaneous elections

Implementing the policy of simultaneous elections is now not feasible within the existing framework of the constitution. Therefore, it is necessary to make some key adjustments to the constitution in order to enact this policy.

According to Article 83 of the Constitution, we must establish the duration and tenure of the House of People.

According to Article 85 of the Constitution, there are standards for the dissolution of parliamentary sessions. This dissolution should not be based on unclear or confusing circumstances.

Article 172 of the Constitution specifies the length of time for which the state legislature will be in session.

Article 174 of the Constitution: Sessions of the Parliament, prorogation, and dissolution.⁴

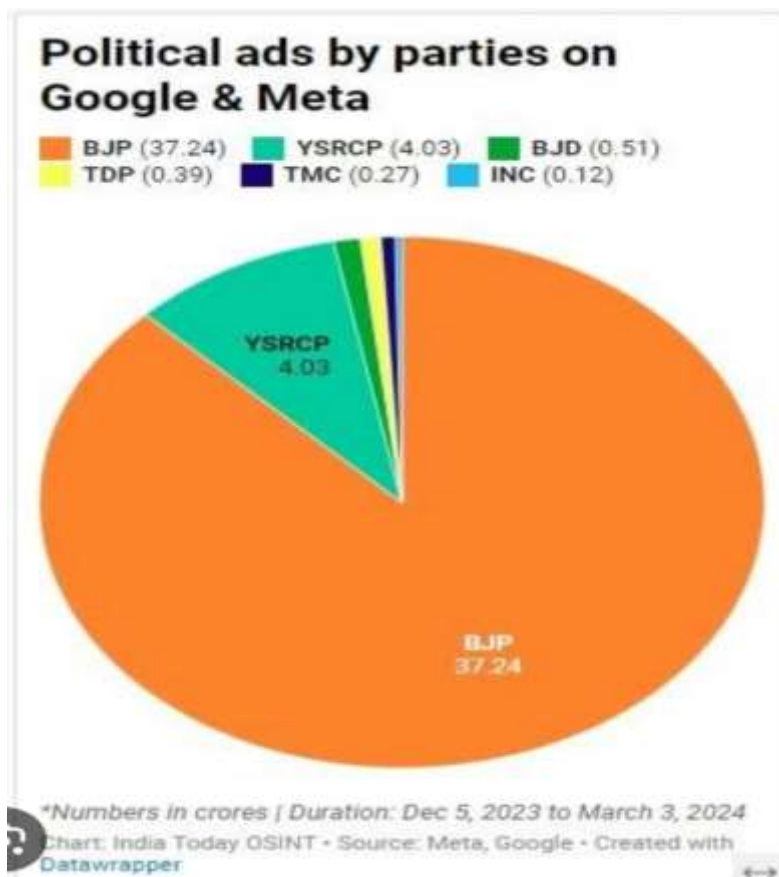
How to implement One Nation-One Elections in India

As indicated previously, the table below briefly demonstrates the NITI Aayog model on how simultaneous elections can be executed.

IMAGE

Economical Drive

Election planning and management typically cost the government hundreds of crores. Most of the cash are used on arrangements, salaries, and security. Simultaneous voting will result in substantial savings for the government that can be put to better use.



More Time for Development Work

Political parties and ministers are continuously in election mode due to the irregular schedule of elections. As a result, parties delay reforms or make decisions based on short-term interests, disrupting and distorting agendas and depriving the public of clear policy. By conducting concurrent elections, the ministers will be able to dedicate a solid four years to enacting initiatives and assisting their constituencies.

Better Deployment of Security Forces

The utilization of security people is the second crucial resource that must be available in big amounts, in addition to money. By having the Lok Sabha and state legislature elections at the same time, it will free up the security officers, who are taken away from their core duty for each election.⁶

Saving Money Tips

The primary rationale for conducting concurrent elections is the potential cost savings for the government. The adoption of the "One Nation, One Election" approach will result in substantial financial savings for the nation. There are a total of 4120 Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the 28 states and 8 Union Territories (UTs). The maximum expenditure allowed for larger assemblies is Rs. 40 lakhs. If all the states and Union Territories had a single election, the cumulative expenditure would amount to around Rs. 11 billion. Approximately five states regularly conduct elections on an annual basis.

Accelerated Development Efforts

It has been observed that new initiatives are not initiated during the implementation of the election model code of conduct. Thus, a solitary election will ensure coherence in the policies and endeavors of the federal and state governments.

Analyze black money funds

The utilization of "dark money" in elections is widely acknowledged. A substantial sum of illicit funds was converted into legitimate funds during the country's elections. Consequently, the continuous holding of elections may give rise to a parallel economy within the country.

Efficiency of governance

In the absence of annual elections, the government would not be obligated to attract the population with appealing programs and policies based on caste and religion. State and federal governments can make economically beneficial decisions without the need to deliver a profitable budget every year.

timesaving:

The process of conducting elections is a substantial, challenging, and time-intensive undertaking that occurs continuously throughout the year. In order to guarantee the seamless, tranquil, and unbiased conduct of elections, the Election Commission of India requires the assistance of a substantial number of polling officials, together with the military forces. Furthermore, conducting a solitary election will result in significant time and cost savings. The security forces will be utilized more effectively for internal purposes.

Beneficial for the Government's fiscal resources

An important argument supporting the idea of simultaneous elections is that they will alleviate the financial strain on the government's treasury. By opting for this course of action, India would effectively decrease expenses. The budget ceiling for larger assemblies is raised from 28 to 40 lakhs. Hence, if all the states and Union Territories conducted a unified election, the cumulative expenditure would amount to approximately \$11 billion. Currently, only approximately 5 states have annual elections. This feature indicated above helps to the sagacity of the "one nation, one election" policy. Simultaneous elections would aid in resource conservation by decreasing the quantity.

The allocation of both time and financial resources required for frequent elections. Moreover, there is an expectation that a greater number of individuals will venture out of their residences to exercise their right to vote.

The challenges associated with implementing the concept of One Nation-One Election in India.

Challenging Period for Local Political Parties

Regional parties will lack the ability to match the election spending and electoral strategy of national parties, which is directly connected to the reason outlined above. State assembly elections place significant importance on local concerns and the preferences of local voters.

Consequently, the regional parties will not endorse a singular election. This reiterates the issue of political consensus.

Election results have been postponed.

The majority of regional parties are presently advocating for the use of ballots in conducting elections. When elections are conducted in a single instance, all the processes occur simultaneously, resulting in a significant time delay before the results can be declared. There are numerous polls being conducted nationwide. Producing a consolidated product will require a significant amount of time.

The necessity for large-scale machinery and abundant resources

Organizing concurrent elections in all states, Union Territories, and the Lok Sabha would be a formidable challenge due to India's status as the world's largest democracy.

Integration of National and State Issues-

Considering both races will need the integration of state and federal issues. The state would be eclipsed by national problems, resulting in politicians allocating it less attention. The implementation of One India, One Election with proper policy and regulatory measures, together with addressing the increasing need for skilled administrative and security staff, will be a beneficial advancement. If the required facilities are absent, it will unavoidably lead to more problems than it would resolve. A significant number of individuals endorse and advocate for the concept. If the relevant prerequisites are met, there is no reason why it would not be advantageous for the nation's electoral processes.

Cost efficiency is a challenge as well.

To address the issue of the high cost of conducting individual elections, a viable solution would be to implement a stringent limit on election expenditures for all political parties. Before the implementation of the model code of conduct, they were often seen spending. If restrictions were implemented, it would be impossible for the expenses to increase.



Challenging Assignment-

Conducting elections for the assembly, panchayats, and the Lok Sabha is a complex task. Both rural and urban communities will face various challenges as they make preparations for voting. In addition, there may be an insufficient number of security and administrative staff to manage the procedure. Inadequate focus in the voting booths may result in increased conflict and unrestricted corruption. Individuals would not be inclined to accept booth capture in return for time savings.

Amendments to the constitution

These revisions require exceptional supermajorities in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in order to be approved. The administration would face a challenging task in attaining consensus among the many political organizations, each of which possesses its own biases. The rules undergo a meticulous process prior to any modifications, as they provide the fundamental basis of the constitution and their implementation may pose obstacles from several perspectives.

Blur Feasibility

The electoral processes for panchayats, assemblies, and the Lok Sabha are more complex than they may seem. As the urban and rural areas gear up for the upcoming election, many challenges are expected to arise. There is a possibility of a scarcity of security, logistics, equipment, and administrative people. Inadequate vigilance at the voting locations may result in increased challenges and unchecked corruption, such as booth capture and rigging.

Federalism

refers to a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and regional or state governments.

The federal principles, which allow each state to establish its own system for political competition, prohibit concurrent elections. Therefore, SE has a significant influence on the political autonomy of a state.

Demanding significant resources

Owing to a significant scarcity of resources, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) has lately dismissed the possibility of conducting simultaneous elections. SE would greatly benefit from the implementation of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and voter-verifiable paper audit (VVPAT) devices. Another logistical challenge is to ensure the availability of Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) in all states.

Recommendation and Path Ahead

While simultaneous elections can be readily implemented, their consequences are uncertain and demanding. However, although the implementation of fundamental poll reforms may be difficult, they provide enduring advantages for the parliamentary democracy and federal system that we have selected. Possible alterations may include:

It is possible to hold elections for various legislative assemblies during the midterm cycle of the Lok Sabha, which occurs six months to a year before or after the election date. The elections for the remaining states could be conducted simultaneously with the general Lok Sabha polls.

Implementing a hybrid or proportional representation system (FPTP) as a replacement for the first-past-the-post election system. Increasing transparency and promoting internal party democracy, while subjecting them to the provisions of the Right to Information Act. Enhancing the efficacy of the Election Commission as an overseer of transparent and impartial elections by meticulously monitoring all electoral expenses and employing IT-enabled methods such as electronic voter ID cards to eliminate fraudulent voters from the electoral register. mulling over the potential of government support for elections.¹³

Conclusion

Due to the different electoral systems in operation at the local, state, and federal levels, adopting one nation-one election is more complicated than it appears. Integrating the "One Nation-One Election" policy with support from all parties, including the average person, is one of the

primary difficulties facing the administration. Although the notion of one nation, one election may be good, its execution in practical practise is problematic due to the opinions of the amendment in the fundamental architecture of the constitution.

The basic structure of the constitution is thought to be unchangeable despite amendments at any level, and it is one of the challenges facing the government to implement it with the updating of the foundation of the constitution and election system at various levels, including village, district, state, and central. Another challenge is to incorporate an effective mechanism to reduce the cost of centralising elections, which can cause chaos in the future in response to changes in the foundation of the It is safe to say that "One Nation, One Election" is not necessary but rather an open attack on the democratic and Federalist values of our country and, for the time being, will continue to be a topic of debate and discussion in webinars and online workshops after discussing the underlying political agenda and the serious harm it is capable of doing to the Constitution.

Additionally, the implementation of the "one nation one election" policy is a complex task due to the variations in the election systems at the regional, state, and central levels. One of the primary obstacles for the administration is to successfully implement the concept of one nation one election, while obtaining permission from all parties, including the general public. The notion of implementing one nation one election may have potential efficacy, but its practical integration is challenging due to the need for adjustments to the fundamental framework of the constitution. The fundamental framework of a constitution is regarded as immutable, regardless of any amendments made at various levels. This poses a challenge for the government to implement updates to the constitution's foundation and electoral system at different levels, such as the village, district, state, and central levels. Additionally, there is a need to establish an efficient mechanism to minimize costs associated with centralized elections, which could potentially lead to chaos in the future due to changes in the constitution's core principles.

1. Kumar, A. (2019). One Nation, One Election: Analyzing the Pros and Cons. *Indian Journal of Political Science, 80*(3), 451-465.

2. Singh, M., & Gupta, R. (2020). Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections in India. *Journal of South Asian Studies, 15*(2), 202-215.

3. Chhibber, P. K., & Verma, R. (2018). Electoral Systems and Party System Stability in India. *Electoral Studies, 53*, 142-150.
4. Sharma, S. (2021). One Nation, One Election: Historical Context and Modern Implications. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 29*(1), 112-125.
5. Saxena, A. (2019). The Economic Impact of Simultaneous Elections in India. *Journal of Public Policy and Governance, 6*(4), 333-348.
6. Palshikar, S. (2020). Political Reforms and Simultaneous Elections: Issues and Prospects. *Economic and Political Weekly, 55*(35), 45-52.
7. Deshpande, R. (2018). One Nation, One Election: Can It Work for India?. *Contemporary Indian Politics, 11*(1), 79-91.
8. Bhatnagar, R. (2017). Examining the Constitutional Challenges of Simultaneous Elections. *Indian Law Review, 1*(2), 160-173.
9. Prakash, A., & Thakur, S. (2021). Simultaneous Elections and Voter Turnout: A Study of State and National Elections in India. *Electoral Politics Quarterly, 22*(3), 289-305.
10. Khosla, M. (2019). One Nation, One Election: Legal and Constitutional Perspectives. *Indian Constitutional Law Review, 8*(2), 97-109.