



## **Exploring the Holistic Dimensions of “One Nation, One Election” in the Indian Landscape: An Analysis**

***Nikita Raj***

Research Scholar (UGC-NET), University Department of Political Science,  
B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, Bihar  
Email [ID-mailnikitasingh10@gmail.com](mailto:ID-mailnikitasingh10@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

In India, an annual ritual unfolds as one state after another gears up for its electoral exercise. While the process might ostensibly appear straightforward for the common voter, its intricacies transcend the realms of mere administration and logistics, delving deep into the labyrinthine world of electoral politics and the sway of vote banks. Notably, the venerable President of India and the esteemed Prime Minister have voiced their endorsement for the idea of conducting simultaneous elections, advocating for the notion of “One Nation, One Election.” However, this aspiration, though noble, has remained largely unfulfilled. The practice of aligning state elections with the general election is not novel in India, as it was the norm until 1967. Regrettably, this synchrony was disrupted due to the early dissolution of the fourth Lok Sabha. This paper undertakes a meticulous examination of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the concept of “One Nation, One Election.” In conclusion, it prompts us to ponder whether democratic India is truly prepared to relinquish its traditional electoral mechanisms in favor of ushering in the era of “One India, One Election.”

**Key Words:** One Nation One Election, Simultaneous Election, Electorate, Lok Sabha, Legislative Assemblies.

### **Introduction**

Elections are the cornerstone of a functioning democracy, serving as the primary method to represent the people’s voice. In India, various states hold elections regularly, but this frequent cycle presents challenges. Campaigning is exhaustive, and costs are exorbitant. To address these issues, the idea of simultaneous elections, often referred to as “one nation, one election,” is gaining traction in contemporary politics. Simultaneous elections entail a single voter participating in both Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections on the same day, with the option for phased elections across states. Nonetheless, a fundamental challenge arises from the Indian constitution, which mandates elections at the state and union levels every five years but remains silent on whether they should occur simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

“One Nation, One Election” is a proposal for consolidating elections, combining Lok Sabha and State elections into a single event rather than separate and continuous processes. The primary rationales supporting this concept include:

- Significantly reduced election expenses.
- Prevention of diversion of security and civil personnel from their core responsibilities.
- Mitigation of disruptions to governance caused by the model code of conduct during elections.
- Minimization of disturbances to ordinary public life.<sup>2</sup>

In recent times, the esteemed President of India and the Honorable Prime Minister have brought forward the proposal of conducting simultaneous elections, endorsing the idea of “one nation, one election.” This has sparked renewed interest and extensive discourse on the matter. The ruling party has also infused a sense of nationalism into this concept, encapsulating it in the catchy phrase “One Nation, One Election.”<sup>3</sup>

“As of now, the BJP holds a simple majority in the Lok Sabha, but not a special majority of two-thirds of the house, which along with the support of half the state legislatures is the support it requires to make amendments to the Constitution to institute simultaneous polling.”<sup>4</sup>

The idea of holding state elections with general election is not new in India as it was in practice Till 1967 but due to early dissolution of fourth Lok Sabha, elections got separated. The 16<sup>th</sup> Lok

Sabha was constituted on 18.5.2014. In the ordinary course, its term comes to an end on 17<sup>th</sup>

May 2019 and the new 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha should be constituted before that.

In the words of E. M. Sudarsana Natchiappan, Congress MP and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, "Now India is a much more stable and mature democracy. The time is ripe for holding simultaneous national and state elections in India."

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### **Advantages of Implementing One Nation One Election:**

1. **Ensures Full Term:** This approach ensures that Lok Sabha serves its full five-year term, as envisioned in the Constitution.
2. **Boosts Accountability:** The regular election cycle keeps politicians vigilant and accountable. As Prime Minister Modi stated to Zee News, "Our government is led by politicians, and elections are contested by politicians, so their attention is divided, which can hinder the nation's progress. For instance, I must allocate time and attention to elections. Without them, I could focus more effectively."<sup>5</sup>
3. **Time Efficiency:** Eliminating name-calling and blame games saves significant time for politicians, which could be channeled into more productive endeavors. Additionally, it simplifies the voting process for the general public by allowing them to cast both their votes in a single election.
4. **Cost Savings:** One Nation One Election reduces the overall cost of elections, as political parties would no longer need to invest heavily in separate election campaigns. As cited by Modi, Rs 1,100 crore was spent on the 2009 election, and Rs 4,000 crore was spent on the 2014 ones. These figures were also supported by Amita Singh, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University.<sup>6</sup>
5. **More Focus on Development:** Currently, a significant portion of the year is spent by politicians on campaign strategies. This reform would enable senior leaders to concentrate on their ministerial work without frequent campaigning.<sup>7</sup>
6. **Model Code of Conduct:** Consolidating elections reduces the time under the model code of conduct, allowing legislatures more time to discuss policy matters.
7. **Hassle-Free Method:** Utilizing government staff for a single election reduces issues like black money and booth capturing while increasing vigilance.
8. **Reduce Disruption of the Service Sector:** Over a crore government employees, including teachers, are involved in elections. This reform would help mitigate this disruption.
9. **Security Concerns:** One nation one election would alleviate the diversion of security forces for electoral work, as highlighted by Prime Minister Modi.<sup>8</sup>
10. **National Election Reform:** KC Tyagi of the Janata Dal (United) emphasized that this is a national election reform, not limited to a specific political party.<sup>9</sup>
11. **Encouraging Policymaking:** A single election procedure would provide ample time for policymakers to focus on policies without the constant concern of gaining or losing votes.
12. **Lowering Vices:** Frequent elections contribute to issues like casteism, communalism, corruption, and partiality. The concept of one nation one election can help address these problems.<sup>10</sup>
13. **Good for Outside Residents:** This reform benefits residents living abroad, allowing them to vote in all elections at once, simplifying their participation in the democratic process.

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### **Disadvantages of Implementing One Nation One Election:**

1. **Constitutional Amendments:** To implement simultaneous elections at both levels, numerous amendments to the Indian constitution would be required.
2. **Reduced Public-Politician Interaction:** Fewer elections could lead to decreased interaction between politicians and the public for the remainder of the term.
3. **Varying Term Lengths:** Achieving simultaneous elections would necessitate convincing some states to shorten their house terms while convincing others to extend theirs.
4. **Administrative and Security Challenges:** There may be shortages of administrative staff and security personnel to manage the complex procedure.
5. **Mixing National and State Issues:** Holding both elections together could blur the lines between national and state issues.
6. **Political Consensus Challenge:** The primary obstacle to simultaneous polls is gaining political consensus from all parties.

7. Voter Behavior: "There is clear empirical evidence that most Indian voters tend to choose the same party when elections are held simultaneously for both the Centre and the State, with the relationship diminishing as elections are held farther apart."<sup>11</sup>
8. Impact on Political Autonomy: Implementing this reform could affect the political autonomy of individual states.<sup>12</sup>
9. Potential for Similar Parties at State and Center: There's a possibility of having similar governments at both levels, as observed in the elections of 1952, 1957, and 1962.
10. Regional Party Consensus: Holding elections simultaneously at both levels could be challenging for regional parties due to the tendency of voters to favor the same party in both state and national elections.<sup>13</sup>

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## Conclusion:

The concept of One India, One Election is undeniably intriguing, but its potential to alleviate existing issues requires thorough debate and consideration. The announcement of the General Election in 2019 demonstrated that this concept remained unimplemented. However, if executed with precision, adhering to the necessary rules and regulations while addressing the pressing need for competent administrative staff and security, it has the potential to revolutionize India's electoral system. The standing committee rightly pointed out that finding solutions to reduce the frequency of elections in India could grant the government machinery and the election commission much-needed time for other administrative tasks.<sup>14</sup>

While immediate implementation of this system may not be feasible, it is a topic worthy of continued debate and exploration. In today's political landscape, every action is often viewed through the lens of gaining votes or undermining opposing parties. Thus, the pivotal question remains: Is democratic India prepared to depart from the traditional election mechanism and pave the way for One India, One Election?

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