# International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

# Federalism in Flux: A Critical Study of the One Nation, One Election Proposal in India

*Pchamutu S J*[a]

[a] *pachamutu2805.pm@gmail.com*, Assistant Professor, School of Law, VISTAS, Chennai 600117, India

## ABSTRACT

India's proposal for **simultaneous elections** – popularly termed **"One Nation, One Election"** – seeks to align the election cycles of the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and all State Legislative Assemblies (potentially also local bodies) so that polling is conducted in unison across the nation. This research paper examines the feasibility of this ambitious electoral restructuring, its constitutional and legal ramifications, administrative hurdles, and the potential benefits and drawbacks. A qualitative analysis of government reports, constitutional provisions, Election Commission data, and scholarly literature is conducted to assess how **'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE)** might impact India's democracy and federal structure. Key findings indicate that while simultaneous elections could **reduce election frequency** and associated costs, and possibly improve governance continuity, they also pose **significant challenges** – requiring extensive constitutional amendments, consensus-building, and safeguards to protect federalism and the diversity of India's electoral landscape. The discussion explores how ONOE might influence political stability, voter behavior, and the balance of power between the Union and States. The paper concludes with a summary of insights and offers recommendations for a cautious, phased approach to implementing simultaneous elections, emphasizing the need to uphold democratic principles and federal fairness.

*Keywords*: One Nation One Election, simultaneous elections, Indian Constitution, federalism, electoral reform, Election Commission of India, governance, election cycle synchronization

## 1.Introduction

Elections in India have historically followed a staggered schedule, but the idea of synchronizing them – holding **Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls together** – has gained renewed attention in recent years. In the early decades after independence, India *did* conduct simultaneous elections: the first general election in 1951–52 saw both the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies elected together, and this practice continued through 1957, 1962 and 1967. The cycle was disrupted in 1968–69 when some assemblies were prematurely dissolved, breaking the alignment. Since then, elections to various states and the national Parliament have been scattered, resulting in some part of the country voting almost every year. This frequent polling cycle has raised concerns about governance disruptions and high costs, leading to calls to "return" to simultaneous polls.

The concept of **"One Nation, One Election" (ONOE)**, as advocated by current political leadership, is driven by the rationale of reducing the "wastage" of time and resources due to frequent elections and ensuring smoother governance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a vocal proponent of ONOE since 2014, arguing that frequent election cycles impede development work through repeated enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct and massive expenditures. The government's interest culminated in the formation of a **High-Level Committee in 2023** chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind to examine the feasibility of simultaneous polls. This committee submitted a detailed report in March 2024, outlining a possible roadmap and constitutional changes needed to implement ONOE. In parallel, a Constitution Amendment Bill to enable simultaneous elections was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2024, underlining the significance of the proposal in contemporary political discourse.

The push for simultaneous elections, however, raises complex questions that this paper seeks to address. **Is ONOE feasible within India's constitutional framework?** What amendments and legal innovations would be required? What are the **administrative challenges** in conducting a single gigantic electoral exercise in the world's largest democracy? Crucially, how would simultaneous elections affect India's **political dynamics, federal balance, and democratic norms**? This paper explores these questions through a comprehensive review of literature – including scholarly analyses and official reports – and through qualitative assessment of policy proposals. The 2018 **Law Commission of India's draft report on simultaneous elections** provides a foundational reference, as do the recommendations of the 79th Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015) and the recent Kovind Committee report. By examining these sources alongside academic commentary and Election Commission data, the study aims to paint a holistic picture of the ONOE debate.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: The **Literature Review** surveys key studies, reports, and expert opinions on simultaneous elections, with particular attention to constitutional analyses and prior reform proposals (including the Law Commission's 2018 draft and the 2017 NITI Aayog discussion paper). The **Methodology** section outlines the qualitative approach and sources used. The **Key Findings** section presents findings on the political, administrative, and legal implications of implementing simultaneous elections in India. Subsequently, the **Discussion** delves into the potential impact of ONOE on Indian democracy, federalism, and electoral practices, weighing the anticipated benefits against the concerns. Finally, the

**Conclusion** summarizes the insights and offers recommendations for policymakers moving forward, followed by a **References** section of cited works and documents.

---

**Objectives**

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the proposal of **simultaneous elections**—popularly known as *One Nation, One Election*—within the Indian democratic framework. Specifically, the objectives are:

- **To explore the historical background** of simultaneous elections in India and analyze the factors that led to their discontinuation.
- **To assess the constitutional and legal requirements** necessary to implement simultaneous elections, including potential amendments and judicial implications.
- **To examine the administrative feasibility** of conducting simultaneous elections, focusing on logistics, manpower, electoral infrastructure, and coordination mechanisms.
- **To analyze the political implications** of synchronized elections on voter behavior, federalism, party competition, and governance.
- **To evaluate the potential advantages and disadvantages** of implementing One Nation, One Election in terms of cost, policy continuity, electoral fatigue, and democratic accountability.
- **To study comparative perspectives** from other democracies, if any, that have experimented with synchronized electoral cycles.
- **To provide policy recommendations** for a phased, inclusive, and constitutionally sound approach toward the adoption of simultaneous elections in India

---

## Literature Review

Research and commentary on simultaneous elections in India encompass constitutional analyses, electoral data studies, and comparative political perspectives. A number of **government commissions and committees** have examined the idea over the years, creating a foundational body of literature:

- **Law Commission of India (1999 & 2018):** The **170th Report of the Law Commission (1999)** was among the first to formally recommend restoring the simultaneous election cycle. It argued that holding separate state assembly elections out-of-sync with Lok Sabha polls should be an *exception* and not the norm, famously stating *"we must go back to the situation where elections to Lok Sabha and all Legislative Assemblies are held at once"*. Building on this, the **Law Commission's Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections (2018)** provided a detailed roadmap for implementation. Released on August 30, 2018, this draft report acknowledged that simultaneous elections **"cannot be held within the existing framework of the Constitution"** and would require extensive amendments. It proposed specific changes to the Constitution (particularly Articles governing the duration of legislatures), the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and legislative procedure rules. The Commission suggested that at least **50% of states should ratify** the constitutional amendments, given the federal nature of the changes. The 2018 draft report also outlined the expected advantages of simultaneous polls – including **saving public money, reducing burden on the administrative setup and security forces, timely implementation of government policies, and allowing the administrative machinery to focus on development rather than elections**. These anticipated benefits, frequently cited by proponents, set the stage for evaluating ONOE's positive impact.

- **Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015):** The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice examined the "Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections" and submitted its **79th Report in December 2015**. This cross-party committee made a "compelling case" in favor of the idea. It acknowledged that in a parliamentary system, early dissolutions can occur, disrupting any synchronized cycle, yet argued these disruptions could be minimized with appropriate safeguards. The committee's report listed several justifications for simultaneous elections, echoing and expanding on earlier points: (i) **Massive election expenditure** would be reduced – the Election Commission of India (ECI) had estimated the cost of conducting one Lok Sabha general election plus all state assembly elections at roughly ₹4,500 crore. Frequent separate elections multiply such costs. (ii) Repeated enforcement of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** during each election cycle halts development programs and routine governance; with year-round staggered elections, governance faces frequent paralysis. A single synchronized election would confine policy and program disruptions to a short, pre-determined period once in five years. (iii) **Public life and essential services** suffer disruptions from campaign activities – rallies can impede road traffic and create noise pollution. Continuous election mode exacerbates this, whereas a concentrated election period would limit inconveniences to a known window. (iv) **Administrative and security forces** are stretched by recurrent deployments for polling. For example, the 2014 general election (conducted alongside a few state polls) had to be staggered over 9 phases, involving over 1,000 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and thousands of officials for extended periods. Simultaneous elections would free up such manpower for core duties except during the unified election period. The Standing Committee, while advocating ONOE, recognized the **constitutional hurdles**, and thus recommended exploring **alternative methods** such as conducting elections in **two phases** across the country as a practical compromise. Under the two-phase idea, half the states would hold assembly elections mid-way through the Lok Sabha's term, and the rest at the end, ensuring no more than two election cycles in five years – a concept we will revisit in the findings.

- **Election Commission and NITI Aayog:** The ECI has generally been supportive of the concept in principle, provided the legal framework is amended suitably. In 2015, the ECI outlined potential mechanisms for synchronization, including the idea of a **fixed term for legislatures** (e.g. fixing start and end dates of Lok Sabha's term, irrespective of dissolution dates) and introducing the requirement of a **"constructive vote of no confidence"**. A constructive no-confidence motion would mean that a government in office can only be removed if an alternative majority government is simultaneously affirmed – preventing untimely fall of governments without an agreed successor. The ECI also mooted limiting the frequency of no-confidence motions to avert repeated attempts to destabilize the government. These suggestions were aimed at ensuring that if ONOE is implemented, premature dissolutions (a key challenge to simultaneous terms) would become rarer. The government's think-tank **NITI Aayog** contributed to the discourse with a 2017 working paper by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai titled *"Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The What, Why and How"*. This paper concurred that implementation would require **significant constitutional amendments and consensus-building** among political stakeholders. It framed simultaneous elections as a reform touching everyone – citizens, parties, administrators – and stressed that *"without general consensus and wider acceptance, its intent and efficacy*

*could be compromised"*. The NITI Aayog paper examined practical timelines for transition. It recommended a **two-tier election schedule** to gradually achieve synchronization: for instance, holding a first set of state assembly elections along with the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and another set mid-term (say 2021), and thereafter aligning all elections in 2024. In fact, the Law Commission's 2018 report offered a similar framework of **Options** – one option being to hold two sets of elections (in 2019 and 2021) to reset the cycle. If some assemblies were due in late 2018, the Commission suggested **extending** their terms by a few months to coincide with 2019 Lok Sabha polls, while for those due shortly after 2019, **curtailing** their term slightly (through voluntary dissolution or law) to pull them back to 2019. The remaining states would then have polls in 2021 (with either extended or shortened terms to make that happen). By 2024, all elections could converge. As a fallback (Option 3), if full simultaneity was not immediately achievable, the Commission recommended at least **holding all elections in a given year together** rather than spread out. These proposals highlight the significant **adjustments** required and the phased approach envisioned by experts to operationalize ONOE.

- **High-Level Committee (Kovind Committee, 2023–24):** The latest official exploration of ONOE came via the High-Level Committee (HLC) constituted in September 2023, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind. The HLC's mandate was to evaluate the feasibility of synchronizing not only Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, but also those of local bodies, and to recommend a workable roadmap. In its report submitted in March 2024 (a voluminous 18,000-page document), the committee reaffirmed the **rationale for simultaneous elections**, observing that frequent polls create an "atmosphere of uncertainty" and that a synchronized cycle would bring **stability and predictability in governance**. The report cited research suggesting that simultaneous elections could be linked to **higher economic growth and lower inflation** in the year following elections, as well as improved public investment outcomes. (For instance, one analysis indicated national GDP growth might be ~1.5 percentage points higher in the year after synchronized elections compared to a preceding year with scattered polls, though such figures are subject to debate.) The HLC's key recommendations included setting an **"Appointed Date"** after the 2024 general election to initiate a new synchronized cycle by 2029. As a one-time measure, **all state assemblies (and possibly local bodies)** would be either **dissolved early or extended** beyond their normal term so that their elections can be aligned with the Lok Sabha elections on that date. Thereafter, elections would occur concurrently every five years. The committee outlined that achieving this would necessitate at least **18 constitutional amendments**, notably to **Article 83** (duration of Parliament), **Article 172** (duration of State Assemblies), and introduction of a new **Article 324A** to facilitate linking state Election Commissions with the ECI for synchronization. Importantly, the HLC proposed a **single electoral roll** for all elections to avoid duplication between the ECI and State Election Commissions. It also addressed the problem of mid-term interruptions: if a legislature (Lok Sabha or Assembly) were to get dissolved prematurely under the ONOE system, the **fresh elections would be for the remainder of the term only**, not a full new five-year term. This ensures that all legislatures realign in the next scheduled simultaneous cycle. The report also opined on whether constitutional amendments for this purpose would require ratification by states – it suggested that amendments related to Parliament and Assemblies' terms might *not* require state ratification (since they do not fall under the federal provisions of Article 368 that mandate it), whereas any changes affecting the conduct of local body elections would require approval by at least half the states. The HLC recommendations thus provide a contemporary blueprint of how ONOE could be implemented and the breadth of legal changes involved.

- **Scholarly Analyses:** Academic discourse on simultaneous elections has been robust, reflecting on the **political and social implications** beyond the technical feasibility. For instance, an insightful analysis by Aejaz Ahmad Wani and Rouf Ahmad Dar (published in *Economic & Political Weekly*, January 2024) examines ONOE in the context of India's **plural society**. They argue that India's democratic stability has historically benefited from **cross-cutting social cleavages** – different elections (national vs state) often emphasize different issues, preventing any single societal division (e.g. religion, caste, region) from becoming an "overarching cleavage" that polarizes all politics. The authors caution that simultaneous national and state polls could cause **sociopolitical issues to overlap dangerously**, as all electoral contests align temporally. In other words, a highly charged national issue might dominate the combined election campaign, overshadowing local issues and fragmenting voters along one dominant line of division, thus **undermining the pluralistic fabric** of Indian democracy. They note that smaller countries have struggled with similar ideas – Nepal, for example, attempted simultaneous polls for different levels in 2007 but abandoned it due to logistical difficulties (Nepal's current practice under its 2015 Constitution is to hold all three tiers within the same general timeframe, though typically in multiple phases). Such comparative insights underline that India must carefully weigh whether the presumed benefits of ONOE might come at the cost of its accommodative, diverse democratic processes.

Scholars also focus on **federalism** concerns. **Elections are a cornerstone of state autonomy in a federation**, and synchronizing them raises fears of diluting that autonomy. As Kanodia (2024) observes, while ONOE could bring efficiency, it *"raises substantial concerns related to federalism... potentially undermining the states' ability to chart their political course independently"*. The worry is that simultaneous elections, by merging the state and national electoral battle into one, might tilt the balance of political power toward national parties and narratives, thereby **overshadowing local issues and regional parties**. This could skew representation, with voters possibly swept up by national-level considerations even when voting for state legislatures. Empirical research provides some evidence on voter behavior in concurrent polls. A study by Balasubramaniam et al. (2020) analyzed Indian election data and found that holding national and state elections simultaneously **increases the likelihood of the same party winning in both levels by 21%**, indicating a significant coattail effect or "single-party sweep" trend. They also found that simultaneous polls tend to **reduce split-ticket voting** (where a voter chooses different parties for national vs state elections) and increase the salience of party allegiance among voters. Interestingly, their study noted that while one might expect national issues to drown out state issues, voters in concurrent elections did not completely ignore state-level factors – the data suggested some shift in voter priority toward state issues in the simultaneous context, and no strong effect on overall voter turnout was observed. Moreover, the study concluded that **economic outcomes** (such as state-level public goods or growth indicators) did not show a statistically significant improvement simply due to synchronization. These findings imply that while **political synchronization** does alter voting patterns (benefiting larger parties or popular fronts uniformly across levels), it may not automatically yield the governance or economic gains often cited by proponents. Other scholars have pointed out that **frequent elections, despite their costs, serve as regular accountability mechanisms** in a democracy – they keep governments on their toes and allow the public to voice discontent more frequently. Removing that frequency could have unintended consequences on democratic accountability, an issue which will be discussed further in a later section.

In summary, the literature reveals a rich debate: **Government reports** and officials highlight *feasibility strategies* and *efficiency gains* from simultaneous elections, while **academic and constitutional commentators** emphasize potential *pitfalls* regarding federal balance, democratic representation, and practical complexity. The 2018 Law Commission and 2024 HLC reports provide blueprints for how ONOE could be achieved legally and administratively. Conversely, critiques from the likes of Wani & Dar (2024) and Kanodia (2024) urge caution, highlighting that India's socio-political complexity might not neatly accommodate a one-size-fits-all electoral cycle. This paper, drawing on these sources, will now proceed to analyze the methodology of our assessment and present key findings on the implications of implementing One Nation, One Election.

### 1.2. Methodology

This research adopts a **qualitative, document-based analysis** to evaluate simultaneous elections in India. Given the nature of the inquiry – which

involves constitutional interpretation, policy feasibility, and political implications – the study relies on extensive **literature review and document analysis** rather than primary empirical data collection. The steps in our methodology are as follows:

- **Defining Scope:** We first delineated the concept of "simultaneous elections" for the Indian context – focusing primarily on synchronizing Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections (with some consideration of Panchayat and Municipal elections as they feature in recent proposals). This scope guided the selection of relevant sources and questions for analysis.

- **Source Collection:** We gathered a wide range of sources prioritizing **Indian scholarly journals, official reports, legal commentaries, and Election Commission data**. Key documents analyzed include: the Law Commission of India's 2018 Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections (and excerpts of its 1999 and 2015 reports on electoral reforms), the 79th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law & Justice (2015), the NITI Aayog Working Paper (2017) on simultaneous polls, and the High-Level Committee report summary (2024). In addition, scholarly articles (e.g., EPW, SSRN papers) and analysis pieces by constitutional experts were reviewed. Data points such as election costs and frequency were taken from Election Commission reports and research studies. All sources have been cited in-text in the prescribed format (e.g., " 【source†lines】 ") to ensure transparency and verifiability.

- **Analytical Framework:** The analysis was structured around several core dimensions: **feasibility, constitutional requirements, administrative challenges, potential benefits, and broader impacts**. For each dimension, information from the collected sources was extracted and synthesized. For example, to assess feasibility and legal requirements, the constitutional provisions (Articles 83, 85, 172, etc.) and recommended amendments were examined. To evaluate administrative challenges, the study looked at logistical data (number of Electronic Voting Machines needed, security personnel deployment, etc.) and past experiences from election management in India. To gauge benefits and drawbacks, both quantitative findings (like cost savings estimates, voter behavior changes) and qualitative arguments (like impact on federalism, governance) were analyzed.

- **Qualitative Synthesis:** Using a **document analysis approach**, the content of reports and articles was coded for key themes – such as "cost implications," "model code of conduct," "constitutional amendment," "federalism concerns," "voter turnout," etc. The findings were then synthesized in a narrative form. The goal was to present a **balanced view**: wherever possible, claims in favor of ONOE (e.g., cost savings or governance stability) are accompanied by evidence or counterpoints (e.g., cost of new voting machines, or risks to regional representation). This aligns with a **policy analysis methodology**, weighing pros and cons.

- **Comparative Insight:** Although the focus is on India, the methodology included a brief comparative look at other countries or historical instances (drawing from international examples mentioned in literature, like Nepal, Sweden, South Africa) to contextualize the feasibility. This comparative lens helped in understanding if similar proposals succeeded or failed elsewhere and why.

This methodology does have some limitations. The analysis is largely based on secondary sources and written reports; it does not include interviews with stakeholders (e.g., Election Commission officials or party leaders) who might offer practical insights. However, given that our aim is a comprehensive academic review, the selected approach effectively compiles the **existing body of knowledge and arguments** on simultaneous elections. By triangulating between official recommendations, data-driven research, and theoretical critiques, the methodology ensures a nuanced understanding of the ONOE proposal's multifaceted impact.

## 2.Key Findings: Political, Administrative, and Legal Implications

The investigation yielded several key findings regarding the implications of implementing simultaneous elections in India. These findings are categorized into **political**, **administrative**, and **legal** dimensions, though there is naturally some overlap among them.

### 2.1. Political Implications

- **Governance Stability vs. Accountability:** A primary political argument for ONOE is that it would produce more stable governments. With elections happening only once every five years, ruling parties (both at Center and in States) could govern without the constant pressure of impending state polls influencing policy decisions. The Standing Committee in 2015 noted that frequent elections lead to a governance deficit and policy paralysis due to the Model Code of Conduct and populist measures aimed at short-term electoral gains. Simultaneous elections could mitigate this, enabling governments to undertake long-term reforms without fearing immediate electoral backlash. However, our findings also highlight a counterpoint: regular, staggered elections currently act as a series of mid-term **"referendums"** on the performance of governments. Voters get opportunities in state elections to reward or punish the ruling national party (or vice versa), which can serve as a corrective mechanism in the federal system. If all elections are synchronized, the electorate's verdict comes only once in five years across the board. This raises the risk that a government with a large majority might not face any electoral check for a full term, potentially reducing accountability. Political scientist Suhas Palshikar observed that after the end of one-party dominance in the late 1960s, staggered state elections allowed the rise of opposition and regional forces, enriching India's democracy. A single synchronized cycle could, in contrast, amplify **majoritarian sweeps**, especially if one political wave captures the public mood at election time.

- **National vs State Issues – Voter Behavior:** The synchronization of elections is very likely to **blend the national and state campaigns** into one mega-election. Our research confirms that there is a strong tendency towards **"uniform voting"** in concurrent elections. Empirical analysis of past Indian elections found that when elections were held simultaneously, the same party won in both Lok Sabha and Assembly in a significantly higher number of cases (probability up by ~21%) than when elections were separate. This indicates that voters may align their state choice with their national choice, perhaps influenced by the overarching narrative or simply the convenience of a singular decision. The concept of **"split-ticket voting"** (choosing different parties for different levels) diminishes in such a scenario. Politically, this could benefit larger national parties (e.g., the BJP or Congress) at the expense of smaller regional parties. If a popular national leader or issue dominates the discourse, many voters might cast both their votes (for Parliament and Assembly) in favor of that leader's party, overshadowing local candidates or issues. For instance, a "national wave" in favor of a Prime Ministerial candidate could sweep state legislators of the same party into power incidentally. This dynamic has raised **concerns among regional parties** that ONOE would erode the distinctiveness of state elections. The SSRN study by Kanodia (2024) explicitly warns that electoral synchronization might **"shift electoral focus towards national issues, overshadowing local concerns"**, thereby skewing representation. That said, it is noteworthy that voters do not become entirely blind to state issues in simultaneous polls. The Warwick study (2020) suggests voters still weigh state governance issues, and in some cases their priorities can tilt to state issues even during a combined election. This nuance implies that while national narratives gain salience, a competent or popular state government can still hold its own to some degree. The overall political

implication remains that **election campaigning and voter decision-making would transform under ONOE** – likely becoming more nationalized, media-driven, and centered around a few personalities and themes that run across the country, thereby reducing the political heterogeneity that staggered elections currently foster.

- **Election Frequency and Voter Engagement:** From a civic perspective, simultaneous elections could reduce voter fatigue by consolidating voting into a single period. Citizens would make the effort to go to polling booths less often, which might improve turnout for local and state elections (as they get "merged" with high-stakes national elections). In fact, the Kovind Committee cited that simultaneous elections may **increase voter participation** due to the heightened significance and mobilization around a single big event. However, data on turnout is inconclusive – some concurrent elections in India have seen marginally higher turnout, but others saw little change, suggesting that factors like the competitiveness of the contest or voter enthusiasm for candidates matter more than timing. One potential downside is that local issues that ordinarily drive voters to oust a non-performing state government might not get the same attention if those voters are simultaneously deciding on the national government. If a popular central government is in place, voters might overlook state incumbents' performance (or vice versa). Thus, **electoral accountability at one level could be diluted by performance perceptions at another level**. Politically, this could reduce the incentive for state-level leaders to cultivate an independent base and perform well, as their fate might ride on the national tide.

- **Political Consensus and Readiness:** Implementing ONOE is not just a legal or administrative challenge but a deeply political one. Our review underscores that **achieving consensus among political parties** is perhaps the biggest hurdle. Parties currently in power nationally might favor ONOE if they believe it will amplify their victories, whereas strong regional parties or opposition at the state level often oppose it for fear of losing their distinct voice. The NITI Aayog paper (2017) and others have stressed the need for broad acceptance; otherwise, the reform could become politically contentious and lack legitimacy. This has been evidenced by the reactions to the 2024 amendment bill – while the ruling party projects ONOE as a reform in national interest, many opposition parties have criticized it as impractical or even as an attempt to centralize power. Therefore, a key political implication is that pushing through simultaneous elections will require careful negotiation and possibly phased implementation to get all major stakeholders on board.

## 2.2. Administrative Challenges

- **Logistics and Infrastructure:** Conducting elections across a country as vast and populous as India in one synchronized timeframe is an **unprecedented logistical challenge**. The Election Commission would need to manage polling in **one million-plus polling stations** simultaneously, which currently is mitigated by spreading national elections over several phases. An immediate issue is the availability of **EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines) and VVPATs (Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trails)**. Presently, a set number of machines are rotated from state to state during different election schedules. For one-time concurrent use, **approximately twice or thrice as many machines** would be required upfront. The Parliamentary Committee report cited an ECI estimate that roughly **₹9,284 crore** would be needed to procure sufficient EVMs/VVPATs for simultaneous elections nationwide. This is a huge one-time capital expenditure (though machines can be used for subsequent elections). Storage, maintenance, and transport of this equipment across the country is another concern. Additionally, ballot design and complexity would increase – voters in many states could receive **multiple ballots or EVM units** (for Lok Sabha, Assembly, and possibly local bodies if those were combined or closely sequenced). This necessitates robust voter education to ensure people understand how to cast all their votes correctly on different machines. The possibilities of longer queues and more time per voter in the polling booth must be managed to avoid voter inconvenience on polling day.

- **Manpower and Security:** India's elections are managed by a vast force of polling personnel (often drawn from government services like teachers, clerks, etc.) and secured by local police and central paramilitary forces. One advantage of staggered elections is the **reuse of the same security forces in multiple phases** – they can be moved around to concentrate where needed. In a fully simultaneous election, security forces would be needed *everywhere at once*. The ECI and Home Ministry would thus have to either deploy a dramatically larger number of security companies in a single short span or accept a lower force-to-booth ratio. The Kovind Committee's recommendation implicitly acknowledges this by advising early planning by the ECI on logistical arrangements. We found references to how stretched the forces already are: in 2014, with just a few states plus Lok Sabha, over 1,300 companies of CAPFs were mobilized. Covering all states simultaneously might require even more, or creative scheduling such as holding the national and state votes on slightly different dates (e.g., one week apart) to allow some resource reallocation – but that again complicates the definition of "simultaneous." Training and deploying millions of poll workers at the same time is another task; currently, election training is a rolling process state by state. With ONOE, **training programs, distribution of voter slips, polling booth setup, and voter list management** would all peak concurrently, testing the administrative capacity of the Election Commission of India like never before. The ECI is one of the most experienced election management bodies in the world, and it has indicated confidence in handling the challenge if given adequate resources and a clear legal mandate. Still, as an administrative finding, the margin for error in a simultaneous election would be slim – any shortfall in preparation could affect the entire nation's polling, not just one region.

- **Election Scheduling and Phases:** While the ideal of ONOE is often presented as "one day, one election," practically it might still be conducted in a **phased manner** over a few days or weeks, due to logistical and security reasons. For example, the Lok Sabha election of 2019 was held in seven phases across different states. A fully simultaneous election might compress this, but completely single-day voting for over 900 million voters is likely infeasible. We may anticipate a scheme where the country is divided into perhaps 2–3 broad zones that vote within a very tight window (e.g., within the same month). The **administrative coordination** needed between the Union and all State governments (many of whom might be caretaker governments if dissolved early), and between the ECI and State Election Commissions (for local bodies), is enormous. The High-Level Committee's suggestion to hold local body elections within 100 days of the general elections adds another layer – effectively meaning two mega-polls in quick succession (national/state first, local next). This could strain administrative machinery at the state level for an extended period, though it is still an improvement over continuous elections year-round.

- **Operational Continuity and By-elections:** Even with the best planning, real life will create deviations – vacancies due to resignations or deaths of legislators, for instance. The ONOE idea includes managing such contingencies by holding **by-elections only at fixed biannual intervals** or simply as part of the next big cycle if the seat falls vacant late in the term. There is an administrative trade-off here: filling vacancies promptly is ideal for representation, but under ONOE, it might be considered efficient to let some seats remain vacant for a while to avoid off-cycle polls. For example, if an MLA resigns two years into the term, the proposal might be to hold a by-election but that new MLA would serve only the remaining three years (as per the reduced term principle). Alternatively, if within say one year of the next simultaneous election, perhaps the seat stays vacant (this detail would need legislation). The administrative machinery must be prepared for **continuous maintenance of voter rolls** and election readiness, even in an ONOE regime, because local events (like the fall of a coalition) could trigger a need for interim polls in a state for the short residual term. Managing these "extraordinary" elections without derailing the synchronized calendar requires clear protocols. The Law Commission (2018) and others have mooted the idea of having the President/Governor run a caretaker government (or President's Rule) until the next cycle if a government falls very close to an election year,

but if it's earlier in the cycle, then a mid-term election for the remainder term is to be held. Administratively, conducting an election for a shorter term might be awkward, but the machinery remains the same; it's more a political adjustment.

- **Costs and Resource Allocation:** One of the selling points of ONOE is cost savings – less frequent elections should mean less frequent expense. While that is true in terms of not having to repeatedly set up polling apparatus, our findings show that **upfront costs will spike**. Apart from the EVM procurement mentioned, simultaneous elections would mean that government expenditures (on security, polling staff payments, transportation logistics, etc.) are all **incurred in one big chunk** rather than spread out. The net effect on costs is debated. A cited statistic notes the ECI's own spending for a full cycle of national+state elections is ₹4,500+ crore. If those are consolidated, theoretically it should still be similar or slightly less (due to some economies of scale in combined operations). But importantly, we must factor political campaign spending. Elections spur huge campaign expenditures by parties – the **Centre for Media Studies estimated** that the 2024 general election saw total spending of around ₹1.35 lakh crore (including parties), roughly double the 2014 amount. If all state elections are also clubbed with it, one might expect an even larger singular campaign expenditure, as parties will campaign on every seat in one go. The **administrative implication** is that campaign finance regulation and monitoring (already challenging) would need to be even more robust during an all-in-one election, lest money power and inducements magnify. It's unclear if total spending over five years by parties would reduce or just concentrate; some argue that parties too would save resources by combining efforts, while others fear they would simply spend five times as much in the one event. For the Election Commission, handling **enforcement of election laws** (model code, expense limits, flying squad checks for cash/drugs, etc.) across the entire nation simultaneously will be extremely demanding, perhaps requiring augmentation of regulatory staff or deputation of observers in far greater numbers at one time.

In sum, administratively, simultaneous elections present a **Herculean coordination task**. Our findings recognize that none of these challenges are insurmountable per se – the ECI's successful conduct of large multi-phase general elections suggests it has the competence – but the **scale and synchrony** of ONOE would be a new frontier. It would require significant investment in equipment, personnel training, and perhaps a permanent increase in the Election Commission's infrastructure to be ready for such an event every five years. The need for meticulous advance planning and contingency management cannot be overstated.

### 2.3. Legal and Constitutional Implications

- **Constitutional Amendments:** Implementing ONOE strikes at the heart of several constitutional provisions. The Constitution of India prescribes a **five-year term** for the Lok Sabha (Article 83(2)) and similarly for State Legislative Assemblies (Article 172(1)), *"unless sooner dissolved"*. To synchronize terms, one-time measures to adjust terms (either by extension or curtailment) must be backed by constitutional amendment – because, ordinarily, extending the life of a legislature beyond five years is permissible only under Emergency (Article 352) and even then by maximum one year at a time. The last time such extension happened was during the 1975-77 Emergency. So, for ONOE, **amending Articles 83 and 172** to carve out a special provision (for example, "Notwithstanding the five-year term, the terms of specified Assemblies may be extended/reduced for the purpose of aligning elections") would be necessary. As noted earlier, the Kovind Committee identified **18 constitutional amendments** in total. These likely include amendments to: Article 85 and Article 174 (which deal with dissolution and summoning of Parliament and Assemblies – to fix commencement dates of sessions or terms); Article 356 (maybe to handle President's Rule nuances if a state is without an elected government until the synchronized date); Article 324 and a proposed **Article 324A** (to empower the ECI to supervise elections to local bodies in coordination with State Election Commissions, enabling a common electoral roll and possibly common polling where feasible). Additionally, the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and state election laws would have to be extensively revised to change election notification procedures, incorporate the concept of a reduced term for mid-term polls, and enforce the new no-confidence rules.

- **No-Confidence Motion Reform:** A critical legal change suggested is introducing the concept of a **"constructive vote of no-confidence"** in India's parliamentary system. This concept (borrowed from the German and some other European systems) requires that any no-confidence motion against a government also include a nomination of an alternate Prime Minister (or Chief Minister) who would take over if the motion passes. The Law Commission (2018) recommended this to ensure that the defeat of an incumbent does not automatically trigger fresh elections. Legally, this would mean amending **Rules of Procedure** of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies and possibly adding a constitutional clause to mandate it at the Union and State levels. The benefit is clear: it would prevent legislatures from simply toppling governments without a ready alternative, thereby reducing premature dissolutions. Our findings underscore that while this is a sound measure to support stability, it is a **significant change to the nature of executive-legislative relations** in India. It alters the calculus of parliamentary opposition and coalition politics. Passing such an amendment would need broad political agreement since it limits the ability of opposition parties to force an election. Also, enforcing a limit (e.g., one no-confidence motion per session or year) has been floated, but that too curtails parliamentary privilege to some extent. The constitutional implication is that India's **parliamentary system would take on a more fixed-term character**, inching towards a hybrid of parliamentary-presidential systems to ensure the election calendar is respected.

- **Federalism and State Autonomy:** The Constitution's Article 368 lists certain provisions whose amendment requires ratification by half of the state legislatures (for instance, election of President, extent of executive power, etc.). Changing the terms of state legislatures might *not* explicitly fall in that category, which is why the HLC opined state ratification may not be needed for those amendments. However, from a federal political standpoint, not seeking state concurrence would be contentious. Many experts argue that altering the fundamental timing of state elections without the states' ascent goes against the spirit of cooperative federalism. There could even be a **Basic Structure doctrine** challenge: one can argue that federalism and democracy are part of the unamendable basic structure of the Constitution. If an amendment aggressively truncated or extended elected bodies' terms arbitrarily, it might attract judicial scrutiny. For example, imagine a state assembly elected in 2026 that, due to a new ONOE amendment, is told its term will end in 2029 instead of 2031 to align with Lok Sabha – the voters of that state might claim their democratic right to a five-year mandate is being infringed. Conversely, extending a legislature's term beyond what voters voted for (even by a few months) raises a question of democratic legitimacy. The only precedent for term extension, the Emergency period, is widely acknowledged as a dark exception. Legally, if it's done via constitutional amendment, it is lawful, but the **normative principle** of fixed electoral accountability every five years is altered. To mitigate these concerns, the likely strategy will be one-time extensions/curtailments packaged as a necessity and ensuring subsequent terms remain five years.

- **Judicial and Legal Challenges:** Another finding is that even after amendments, the ONOE framework could face continuous legal questions. For instance, suppose a mid-term election is held for a state and the new government knows it has only say 3 years to serve (since next synchronized polls due). If circumstances change, can they call for an early election to seek a fresh five-year mandate? Under ONOE rules, presumably not – because that would break the cycle. That could lead to tension between constitutional rules versus the **political right to call an election**. In current practice, a Chief Minister or Prime Minister can advise dissolution and early election (as we saw in 2004 at the Centre, or various states). Under ONOE's fixed cycle, that discretion is curtailed. Legal provisions would likely explicitly disallow premature voluntary dissolution except under extraordinary conditions. The locus of power may shift somewhat from the executive to the

constitutional framework – which might be good for stability but is a change in conventional understanding. Furthermore, what if a government loses majority and no alternative government can form (hung assembly with no coalition possible)? The Law Commission 2018 suggested the President/Governor could invite the largest party/alliance or even convene an all-party meeting to find a solution. Failing that, President's Rule could be imposed till the next election cycle.This implies a **readiness to keep a state under unelected rule for perhaps a couple of years** if needed to maintain the cycle. That is legally achievable through Article 356, but from a democratic perspective, keeping an Assembly in suspended animation for long might be challenged in court as violating representative democracy. Courts in India have generally disapproved of excessive use of President's Rule (since the S.R. Bommai case). ONOE would demand a rethinking of such scenarios: either allow short-term elections (which the HLC does, but only for the remainder term) or hold off and let a neutral administration run the state. Each approach has constitutional implications and would likely be tested in courts the first time it occurs under the new system.

- **Election Commission Empowerment:** Legally, to conduct simultaneous polls, the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** might need enhanced powers of supervision and coordination. Currently, ECI is constitutionally in charge of elections to Parliament and state legislatures (Article 324), while State Election Commissions (SECs) handle local body elections under state laws. If local bodies are to be included in ONOE (even if just in the same year frame), a new **Article 324A** as recommended would constitutionally empower the ECI to prepare a common voters' roll for all elections and possibly to coordinate schedule. State Election Commissions might be bound to conduct local elections in alignment as decided. This marks a shift towards centralization in electoral management. It could be efficient (one voter list for all elections avoids duplication and discrepancies), but states may resist if they see it as encroaching on their domain of local governance scheduling. The constitutional amendment would clarify roles to avoid any legal void about who controls what in a simultaneous scenario.

- **Legal Feasibility Summary:** In essence, our findings confirm that **sweeping constitutional restructuring** is imperative for ONOE. The challenges are more in the political realm of passing these amendments than in crafting them – legally, they can be drafted as evidenced by the existence of a Bill and prior proposals. It is notable that multiple official bodies (Law Commission, HLC) have independently converged on similar prescriptions: fixed terms with limited exceptions, constructive no-confidence, truncated mid-term election tenures, and clustered amendments across Articles. This indicates a fair degree of technocratic consensus on the *"what"* and *"how"* from a legal standpoint. However, implementing this would be one of the biggest constitutional changes in Indian electoral law since perhaps the introduction of anti-defection or lowering of voting age – and likely more complex than both.

The above political, administrative, and legal implications demonstrate that **One Nation, One Election is not a mere adjustment of dates**; it amounts to a structural change in how Indian democracy functions. These findings provide the groundwork to discuss the broader impacts on democratic practice, federalism, and electoral processes, which we turn to in the next section.

## 3.Discussion: Impact on Indian Democracy, Federalism, and Electoral Practices

The proposal for simultaneous elections carries profound implications for the **nature and quality of democracy in India**, the functioning of **federalism**, and the established **electoral practices** that have evolved over decades. In this discussion, we synthesize the key insights from the findings, weighing potential impacts – both positive and negative – in a broader context.

### 3.1. Democratic Deliberation and Voter Choice:

One of the cornerstones of a healthy democracy is the ability of voters to make **informed choices** specific to each election. India's staggered election system arguably helps in this regard by compartmentalizing national issues for national elections and state/local issues for respective elections. ONOE would blur these lines. Voters would be bombarded with a cacophony of issues all at once – from local potholes to national security. On one hand, this may elevate the level of debate (local candidates might be forced to address national questions and vice versa, leading to more holistic campaigning). On the other hand, there is a risk that the **nuances of local governance get drowned** in the noise. Local grievances or niche community issues might fail to gain attention when political parties focus on broad themes that resonate nationally. This could leave sections of the electorate feeling unheard, potentially reducing the representational function of elections. The **democratic discourse** might become more uniform, centered on a few polarized topics, potentially exacerbating divisions if not managed. The EPW analysis pointed out the danger of overlapping social cleavages – e.g., if religion or nationalism becomes the single dominant axis of debate everywhere, it could weaken the cross-cutting, issue-based alliances that have so far kept India's democracy stable and inclusive. Thus, while ONOE might simplify the electoral schedule, it could complicate the social fabric of electoral politics.

Another aspect is **frequency of feedback**: frequent elections, though seemingly a bane for governance, are a boon for democracy in that politicians have regular incentive to remain responsive to the public. With ONOE, the electorate's formal feedback via the ballot box will come only once in five years uniformly. If a government is underperforming, currently citizens in some part of the country register their protest within a year or two (in state polls), which often pushes mid-course corrections at the Union level as well. For example, state election losses have historically prompted central policy adjustments. In an ONOE regime, a popular government could theoretically ignore discontent in a region until the next election cycle, knowing there is no immediate electoral repercussion. This could **dampen democratic accountability** between elections. Mitigating this would require strengthening other forms of accountability – parliamentary oversight, media, civil society – because the ballot box as a feedback mechanism becomes less frequent.

### 3.2. Federal Balance of Power:

Indian federalism is often described as **quasi-federal** with a strong Union government, but politically, state elections create a de facto balance by empowering regional leadership. If simultaneous elections cause national issues and leadership to dominate state elections, it could lead to more **uniform political alignments across states**. We might see fewer instances of opposition parties ruling states while another party rules the Centre, which is currently a common phenomenon and arguably a check on central power. A single party or alliance sweeping both levels gives it a near-uniform mandate, concentrating power. From a governance standpoint, that could reduce Centre-State policy friction (which proponents say might speed up development programs nationally). However, from a **federalism standpoint, it might reduce pluralism and the strength of regional voices** in the national narrative. Smaller parties often rely on state elections to establish their sphere and then bargain in national politics. If those state elections are overshadowed, their rise could be stunted. There is also the symbolic issue: Will Chief Ministers still be seen as autonomous power

centers if their election is perceived as just a byproduct of a national wave? Perhaps less so. As Kanodia (2024) highlighted, election synchronization *"impedes [states'] autonomy"* in setting their political course. States might lose the flexibility to choose the timing of their electoral battles (for instance, sometimes a state facing instability might prefer an early election to resolve the mandate – that option would vanish under a fixed cycle).

On the positive side, simultaneous elections could enhance **cooperative federalism** in certain ways. If governments at Centre and State are elected together, there is a greater probability (as evidence showed) they may be of the same party or alliance. This alignment can facilitate smoother implementation of central schemes at the state level, as there is political congruence. It might reduce policy paralysis caused by Centre-State partisan conflicts, benefiting citizens through more coordinated governance. Also, if elections are aligned, the **administrative cooperation** during the polls between the Union and States could improve (shared resources, single electoral roll as recommended, etc.), which might persist beyond elections into governance synergy.

### 3.3. Continuity vs. Flexibility in Governance:

A fundamental change with ONOE is moving towards a **fixed-term legislature** norm. This brings continuity – governments can plan for five-year intervals confidently. Development projects, economic policies can be plotted without fearing sudden election-induced halts. Some economic analyses, like those cited by the HLC, suggest that this continuity might encourage more stable investment and hence growth. Indeed, the India Today report noted metrics like higher capital formation and lower inflation in simultaneous election periods, implying that when elections are not perpetually looming, governments possibly take harder long-term economic decisions that benefit macro-stability. However, the loss is in **flexibility**. The political system currently has an in-built safety valve: if a government becomes unviable (due to internal splits, public pressure, etc.), it can be dissolved and a fresh mandate sought. In an ONOE setup, political actors will be constrained to make it work somehow until the fixed time (or install an interim arrangement) rather than let voters decide mid-term. One could argue this might allow unpopular governments to limp along, disconnected from the public will. For democracy, that is not ideal; yet, frequent government changes are also destabilizing. It's a trade-off between stability and adaptability.

### 3.4. Electoral Culture and Campaigning:

Another impact area is how election campaigns would be conducted. Currently, national elections have their own flavor and state elections theirs, often focusing on local leadership and issues. If combined, campaigns might become more presidential in style – with the Prime Ministerial face overshadowing local candidates everywhere. This might further diminish the importance of legislators and encourage a cult of personality at the top. Smaller parties may find it cost-prohibitive to campaign across the whole country at once, potentially reducing the diversity of voices. On the flip side, citizens might appreciate the carnival of one big election, and the clear distinction of "campaign season" versus "governance season." As it stands, some part of India is in campaign mode every few months, and the media and public discourse is perennially electoral. ONOE would concentrate electioneering to a specific period, potentially resulting in a sharper but shorter frenzy. Outside of that, perhaps governance and policy could take center stage in media coverage. This could **elevate public discourse** during non-election years as issues are debated on merits rather than electoral calculus – an optimistic scenario.

### 3.5. Administrative and Policy Planning:

With a fixed election calendar, the bureaucracy can plan development work better (no sudden MCC stoppages unexpectedly) and the government can time its big policy decisions (budgets, reforms) more strategically. Currently, the MCC (Model Code of Conduct) is a frequent guest – national schemes, transfers, new projects often get postponed due to one state or another having elections. Simultaneous elections would impose MCC nationwide in one go, likely for a similar total duration as a national election (say 2 months once in five years). This could greatly **reduce cumulative governance disruption**. From our findings, officials lament how MCC periods slow everything; under ONOE, four years out of five would be completely free of any election MCC, which might improve the continuity of development programs. However, one must be mindful that during that one big MCC period, governance at all levels will be on hold – which could be problematic if an urgent situation arises during that time (disaster response is exempt from MCC, but routine decision-making halts). Overall though, policy planning stands to benefit, and perhaps governments can better **synchronize policy rollouts** right after elections with fresh mandates.

### 3.6. Voter Turnout and Engagement:

There is a mixed perspective on whether ONOE will invigorate or dampen voter engagement. One argument is that a combined election becomes a larger spectacle that could drive higher turnout (since everything is at stake once). Additionally, voters in states that historically have lower turnout might be carried by the enthusiasm of the national election taking place simultaneously. Conversely, some voters could be overwhelmed by the complexity (multiple votes, long candidate lists) and disengage. The evidence we saw suggests turnout might not be significantly affected either way, though we might expect a marginal increase given one-trip voting convenience. Importantly, if turnout does increase uniformly, it could enhance the representative legitimacy of elected governments. Yet if the increase is mostly in Lok Sabha-centric voters, state politics could see a dilution of local voices.

### 3.7. Risks of Implementation Failure:

It is worth discussing the scenario where ONOE is attempted but runs into unforeseen difficulties. For example, suppose the system is in place and by the next cycle, multiple states have unstable politics. Despite constructive no-confidence, a few state governments collapse and no alternatives are viable, forcing, say, three or four states into President's Rule for extended periods until the synchronized election. This could cause public discontent or even unrest in those states, fueling criticism that ONOE denies people their immediate democratic rights. If any major election under ONOE were to be marred by administrative shortcomings (e.g., EVM shortages or long waiting times widespread), it could shake faith in the process given the entire country is affected at once. Thus, the **stakes of each election would be extremely high**. Any controversy (like claims of rigging or EVM malfunction) would take on a truly national scope, potentially destabilizing trust in the system if not managed transparently. The ECI would need to bolster its capacity to address such issues swiftly and convincingly on a nationwide scale.

### 3.8. Transitional Challenges:

The journey to ONOE itself could impact democracy and federalism. The transitional step of cutting short or extending terms will have political repercussions. Voters in some states might have to wait longer to exercise their vote, others might have their elected government end early. Although a one-time measure, it could cause resentment ("why was our state assembly curtailed while another's extended?"). Managing that narrative requires consensus and maybe even compensation (like states that lost a year might get President's Rule with some assurances). The credibility of the transition plan is vital – if seen as favoring one party (e.g., extending terms in states where a certain party is in power), it could be perceived as partisan. To maintain the **integrity of democratic process**, the transition would need to be done in a uniform, fair manner, perhaps via a neutral mechanism.

In conclusion, the impact of simultaneous elections on Indian democracy can be **double-edged**. On one hand, it promises **efficiency, stability, and a reduction in election fatigue**, potentially freeing the system to focus more on governance for long stretches. It could also lead to more decisive election outcomes and cohesive mandates at all levels, arguably simplifying the voters' choice to a clear program for five years. On the other hand, it poses **risks to the finely balanced mosaic of India's federal democracy** – reducing the salience of local issues, potentially undermining the diversity of political representation, and concentrating political power. It challenges the adaptability of the system to respond to mid-term shifts in public opinion. The federal structure could tilt further toward centralization, not by law of competences (states will still have their powers), but by the political reality of synchronized mandates.

The net impact will depend on **how well the implementation is designed and executed**, and on complementary measures: e.g., if ONOE is coupled with electoral reforms like stronger anti-defection enforcement (to ensure stability), campaign finance reform (to control money power in one big election), and robust federal institutions (like empowering Inter-State Council for continual Centre-State dialogue, since elections won't break stalemates as often).

Ultimately, whether ONOE strengthens or strains India's democracy will come down to the **intent and good faith of political actors**. If used as a tool to streamline governance while preserving the spirit of federal pluralism, it could be a milestone reform. If it is used to entrench one-party dominance or sideline dissenting voices under the guise of efficiency, it could harm the democratic fabric. The discussion reveals that simultaneous elections are not a panacea; they must be accompanied by a **"nuanced and balanced approach"** that Kanodia (2024) urges – one that *accommodates both the advantages of synchronization and the imperative principles of federalism*.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The examination of the concept of simultaneous elections in India – *"One Nation, One Election"* – reveals a complex interplay of potential benefits, challenges, and far-reaching implications. **Feasibility is not merely a question of logistics or law, but of political will and constitutional acceptability.** The idea is technically feasible given sufficient legal amendments and administrative preparation, but whether it should be pursued must depend on a careful weighing of its impact on India's democratic ethos and federal balance.

**Summarizing Insights:** Historically, India began with simultaneous elections and drifted away as political realities changed; the current revival of the idea is rooted in legitimate concerns about the cost and disruption of frequent polls. There are clear advantages to ONOE: it can **save public money, reduce the burden on governance and security apparatus, and allow governments to undertake policy uninterrupted by perpetual electioneering**. It could also simplify the voter's experience by consolidating electoral participation and possibly increase voter turnout and engagement in local elections due to the simultaneity with national elections. A synchronized cycle offers **stability**, with governments guaranteed a fixed tenure (barring extraordinary situations) to implement their agenda, which might improve policy continuity and long-term planning.

However, **the challenges and risks are equally significant**. Constitutionally, a move to simultaneous elections requires rewriting fundamental provisions and rethinking conventions like no-confidence motions and dissolution powers. Administratively, it demands **unprecedented coordination** and upscaling of resources – effectively conducting a general election and 30+ state/UT elections as one. Politically, it raises concerns of **centralizing tendencies**, potential marginalization of regional issues and parties, and reduced frequency of direct democratic accountability. The social fabric of voting, where different issues dominate different elections, could be altered in ways that might heighten polarization on singular axes. These insights imply that ONOE is not a one-dimensional reform; it touches the core of how India's democracy functions.

### 4.1. Recommendations:

In light of this comprehensive analysis, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by policymakers, constitutional experts, and stakeholders:

- **Build Broad Political Consensus:** Before any implementation, it is imperative to achieve consensus across the political spectrum. A constitutional amendment of this scale should not be passed on a narrow majority or amid partisan boycott. A **cross-party committee** (perhaps expanding on the Kovind HLC by including all major party representatives) should further deliberate on the modalities, ensuring concerns of opposition and regional parties are addressed. If consensus is elusive, a phased or pilot approach should be preferred over a sudden overhaul.

- **Phased Introduction via Two-Cycle Model:** Instead of moving immediately to one synchronized election, India could adopt the **two-phase election cycle** as an intermediate step (as suggested by the Standing Committee 2015 and Law Commission). For example, align roughly half the states with the mid-term of Lok Sabha and the other half with the end-term. This would mean elections twice in five years (a significant reduction from the status quo) while still allowing some stagger. This phase can serve as a real-world test of the logistical and political implications. If it proves beneficial, a further unification to single-cycle can be considered later. This approach also spreads out the transition adjustments (some states adjust to one cycle, others later), making the change less disruptive.

- **Constitutional Safeguards and Amendment Design:** In drafting amendments, care should be taken to include **safeguards that protect federalism and democratic rights**. For instance, if a state's term is being extended as a one-time measure, perhaps include a clause that this is a special case and cannot be used as precedent to extend terms arbitrarily in future. Ensure that the amendment providing for reduced

terms in mid-term elections explicitly limits such legislature's tenure to the remainder of cycle – this has been recommended and should be codified clearly to avoid ambiguity. The introduction of **constructive no-confidence** must come with accompanying changes in legislative rules and perhaps a clause to allow an alternate government formation within a reasonable time frame before dissolution is considered, to avoid stalemates. Anti-defection law enforcement should be tightened (perhaps by shifting adjudication to an independent authority or time-bound decision by presiding officer as Law Comm suggested) so that governments are not destabilized by engineered floor-crossing.

- **Strengthen the Election Commission of India:** The ECI will be the fulcrum of this massive exercise. It should be further empowered and resourced. This includes completing the switch to **single electoral rolls** (which many states already use ECI rolls for local elections, but make it uniform), and enhancing the ECI's staff and technological capabilities. A one-time investment in EVMs/VVPATs is inevitable; the government should ensure timely procurement and upgrades of machines as needed. Adequate funds must be allocated for voter education campaigns to explain the simultaneous voting process to the electorate well in advance. The coordination between ECI and State Election Commissions should be institutionalized, possibly via the new Article 324A and subsequent statutes. This could involve regular joint planning meetings for elections and a mechanism to resolve disputes if a state EC feels local conditions demand a delay (for example, if a natural disaster strikes, etc.).

- **Maintain Flexibility for Exceptional Situations:** While the goal is a fixed cycle, the legal framework should retain some **flexibility for exceptional cases**. For example, if a major constitutional crisis or war or nationwide emergency occurs, how are elections handled? The Constitution already has provisions for emergency extension of terms – those remain, but perhaps new scenarios may need consideration (like a pandemic, as happened in 2020, which delayed some elections). Additionally, provisions could be made for a scenario where simultaneous elections cannot be held in a particular state due to insurgency or disturbance – maybe allowing a slight deviation but bringing it back on cycle as soon as possible. The principle should be to not disenfranchise areas or compromise safety for the sake of exact simultaneity.

- **Protect Local Issues and Federal Spirit in Campaigns:** This is more of a normative guideline than a legal one, but nonetheless important. Political parties should, in an ONOE scenario, commit to issuing **separate manifestos for national and state elections** (even if released together) to delineate their vision at each level. This could help voters make informed choices for each tier. The media and civil society can also play a role by ensuring that local governance issues are not ignored in coverage. One recommendation is to schedule the **state legislature campaign debates** and the **national campaign events** distinctly (e.g., dedicate certain weeks in the campaign period more to state-level debates). These are voluntary measures, but worth pursuing to maintain the richness of democratic debate.

- **Continuous Evaluation and Course Correction:** If ONOE is implemented, its impact should be continuously studied by independent bodies. The Election Commission, along with perhaps the Law Commission or academic institutions, can be tasked to report on how the simultaneous election affected voting patterns, governance metrics (like policy implementation speed, etc.), and federal relations. If adverse effects are observed – say a drastic decline in representation of regional parties or a consistent pattern of certain local issues being neglected – then corrective measures (maybe even reverting to staggered polls in some form) should be considered. Essentially, the reform should not be seen as irreversible if it does not yield the intended outcomes or causes new problems; a democratic system must allow introspection and change.

- **Public Awareness and Buy-in:** Finally, the public's understanding and buy-in is crucial. A recommendation is to conduct **voter outreach programs** explaining why ONOE is being done, how it benefits the common citizen (e.g., one voter list, one-time voting convenience, saving taxpayer money that can be used for development, etc.), and also how it safeguards democratic choices. Public trust will be key – especially in the first simultaneous election, which will be under intense scrutiny. Ensuring a smooth experience for voters in that first outing (minimal confusion at polling, clear communication on casting multiple votes, etc.) will set the tone for acceptance of the new system.

### 4.2. Conclusion:

"One Nation, One Election" is a visionary idea aiming to streamline India's electoral process. This research has shown that it holds promise for improving governance efficiency and reducing electoral fatigue, but it also carries substantial risks that cannot be ignored. Constitutionally, it demands rewriting rules of the game; politically, it could advantage certain players over others; socially, it might reshape how issues unify or divide voters. The concept strikes at the delicate balances India has maintained – between Centre and State power, between stability and change, and between national and local interests.

The prudent path forward is one of **gradual implementation with safeguards**, guided by expert input and all-party consensus. If India chooses to embark on this path, it would likely become one of the most significant electoral reforms in independent India's history, potentially studied by democracies worldwide. Success will depend on meticulous planning and the continued commitment to democratic principles of representation, accountability, and federalism. In aiming for one synchronized election, India must ensure it remains **"One Nation"** with **"Many Voices"** heard and respected within that one election. With cautious optimism and due diligence, simultaneous elections could be crafted to serve India's unity and diversity alike – but the journey must be undertaken with the utmost respect for the constitutional and democratic values that underpin the republic.

## REFERENCES

1. Law Commission of India (2018). *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections*. Released August 30, 2018. Key recommendations summarized the need for constitutional amendments and cited benefits such as cost saving and governance stability.
2. Law Commission of India (1999). *170th Report on Reform of Electoral Laws*. Recommended a return to simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, stating separate out-of-sync elections should be an exception, not the rule.
3. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law & Justice (2015). *Seventy-Ninth Report: Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies*. Presented to Rajya Sabha on 17 Dec 2015. It made a compelling case for ONOE and proposed a two-phase election schedule, highlighting justifications like reduced election expenditure (~₹4500 cr per cycle) and less frequent Model Code of Conduct disruptions.
4. Election Commission of India – Suggestions (2015). ECI advocated for changes such as a fixed term for legislatures and **constructive no-confidence motions** to prevent premature dissolutions, as recorded in the Standing Committee report. Estimated one-time cost for additional EVMs/VVPATs ~₹9,000 crore for simultaneous polls.
5. NITI Aayog (Bibek Debroy & Kishore Desai, 2017). *Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why" and "How"*. Working Paper. Emphasized need for significant constitutional changes and broad consensus for ONOE's efficacy. Outlined possible timeline aligning elections in 2019 and 2021 as transition.

6.  High-Level Committee on One Nation, One Election (2023–24). **Kovind Committee Report**. Recommended simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha, all Assemblies (and local bodies within 100 days) from a common start point (e.g., 2029). Proposed 18 constitutional amendments (incl. Articles 83, 172, and new 324A) and noted expected benefits: more stable governance, higher economic growth (1.5% GDP boost in post-election year), higher voter participation, etc.

7.  Wani, Aejaz A. & Dar, Rouf A. (2024). "Simultaneous Elections in Plural Societies," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 59(1). A scholarly perspective that cautions ONOE could make social cleavages overlap dangerously and undermine the cross-cutting nature of issues in India's democracy. It references how initial simultaneous polls (1952–1967) ended with the rise of multi-party competition.

8.  Kanodia, Janvi (2024). *The Case for Simultaneous Elections in India*. SSRN Working Paper (April 5, 2024). Focuses on federalism, arguing that ONOE might constrain state autonomy and shift power towards national narratives, overshadowing local concerns. Recommends a balanced approach to reconcile synchronization with federal principles.

9.  Balasubramaniam, V. et al. (2020). "Synchronized Elections, Voter Behavior and Governance Outcomes: Evidence from India." Warwick Economics Research Paper. Found that simultaneous elections increased same-party victories in both tiers by ~21%, reduced split voting, and did not significantly affect turnout or economic outcomes. Suggests voter decisions become more homogeneous when elections are concurrent.

10. India Today (2024). "'One Nation, One Election' savings: Half of our health expense." *India Today – Data Intelligence Unit report*, Sep 20, 2024. Summarized economic analysis from Kovind Committee: simultaneous polls could add 1.5 percentage points to GDP growth (FY2024), slightly raise fiscal deficit due to synchronized public spending, and increase public capital expenditure. It also reported ECI's cost for elections (₹4,500+ cr) and total spending estimates for Lok Sabha 2024 (~₹1.35 lakh cr).

11. Wikipedia (2025). "One Nation, One Election." (For general reference on history and recent developments). Notes the introduction of the 2024 Constitutional Amendment Bill, the formation of the 2023 Kovind Committee, and excerpts the 170th Law Commission report quote on ending the cycle of frequent elections. (Used as a secondary source to corroborate facts from primary reports.)