



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**INDIA'S DEMOCRACY NEEDS
DIFFERENT ELECTORAL RHYTHMS**

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INDIA'S DEMOCRACY NEEDS DIFFERENT ELECTORAL RHYTHMS

Context

- The **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024**, seeks to introduce **simultaneous elections** to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, reviving debate over **federalism, accountability and electoral costs**.

About One Nation, One Election (ONOE)

- **ONOE** proposes synchronising elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, so that voters elect both levels of government within the same electoral cycle.
- The proposal does not merely alter election management, it requires significant constitutional and legal changes affecting the tenure and dissolution of legislatures.
- India actually followed simultaneous elections from **1951-52 until 1967**, after which premature dissolutions of State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha disrupted the cycle.

Background

- The **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024**, introduced in Parliament in December 2024, proposes inserting **Article 82A** and amending **Articles 83, 172 and 327** to facilitate simultaneous elections.
- The Bill was subsequently referred to a **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** for examination.
- The **Union and State Councils of Ministers** remain collectively responsible to their respective legislatures under **Articles 75(3) and 164(2)**.
 - ♦ Governments may therefore fall before completing five years if they lose legislative confidence.

Key Committees & Their Recommendations

- **Law Commission, 170th Report (1999)**: Favoured restoring simultaneous elections, while recognising the need for constitutional and institutional safeguards.
- **Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee, 79th Report (2015)**: Examined the feasibility of simultaneous elections and suggested a phased approach.
- **High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (Ram Nath Kovind Committee, 2024)**: Recommended simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, followed by local-body elections within 100 days, along with a common electoral roll.
- The **Election Commission of India** has historically supported the idea subject to adequate constitutional, logistical and security arrangements.

Arguments Favoring ONOE

- **Lower electoral expenditure**: Frequent elections impose recurring costs on the Election Commission, security forces, administration and political parties.
- **Policy continuity**: Supporters argue that repeated elections and the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) can constrain the announcement of new schemes and policy decisions.
- **Administrative efficiency**: Synchronisation could reduce the repeated deployment of teachers, officials, police and security personnel for election duty.
- **Better governance horizon**: Governments may be able to pursue longer-term policies without repeatedly entering campaign mode.

Arguments Against ONOE

- **Tension with parliamentary accountability**: A fixed electoral calendar sits uneasily with a system where governments survive only while enjoying legislative confidence.
 - ♦ If an Assembly falls midway through the cycle, either a short-term government must be elected or constitutional mechanisms such as President's Rule may be invoked. Both raise questions about the democratic mandate.

- **Threat to federalism:** India's federal structure accommodates distinct regional identities and political priorities.
 - ♦ Simultaneous elections may encourage **national issues and national parties to dominate State-level contests**, potentially weakening the political space of regional parties and State-specific concerns.
- **Unequal electoral mandates:** A government elected after a mid-cycle collapse may have to serve only the remainder of the original term.
 - ♦ Yet its mandate would carry the same constitutional authority as a full-term government, creating questions about democratic legitimacy.
- **Risk of premature dissolution:** If the Lok Sabha is dissolved early, maintaining synchronisation could require altering the tenure of otherwise stable State Assemblies.
 - ♦ Conversely, a premature State election could disrupt the national cycle.
 - ♦ Thus, the reform attempts to impose a rigid calendar on an inherently flexible parliamentary system.
- **Expenditure argument needs qualification:** Election expenditure is not confined to the government's administrative spending.
 - ♦ The larger costs arise from political-party campaigning and private expenditure.
 - ♦ Therefore, the fiscal savings from synchronisation should be assessed against the constitutional and logistical costs of restructuring the electoral cycle.

Way Forward: Strengthening Measures

- ONOE should not be treated as an **administrative shortcut**. Any reform must preserve the constitutional principles of **federalism, representative government and legislative accountability**.
- A pragmatic approach could include:
 - ♦ **Phased synchronisation**, rather than an abrupt nationwide reset.
 - ♦ Clear constitutional rules for **hung Houses, no-confidence motions and premature dissolution**.
 - ♦ A mechanism ensuring that mid-term elections do not create permanently truncated democratic mandates.
 - ♦ Strengthening the **Election Commission's logistical and financial capacity**.
 - ♦ Simultaneous reforms in **political funding, inner-party democracy and MCC implementation**.
 - ♦ Wider consultation with States, political parties and civil society before constitutional amendments.

Conclusion

- The central question is not whether India can technically conduct simultaneous elections, but whether it can do so **without subordinating State-level democratic choices to a national electoral clock**.
- Efficiency is a legitimate objective, but in a parliamentary federation, **democratic accountability and federal autonomy must remain the governing principles**.
- ONOE can be considered only if institutional synchronisation strengthens, not diminishes the voter's voice.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Examine how simultaneous elections in India may affect federalism, voter accountability, political representation and governance efficiency.

Source: TH

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