

# ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

*A Reform for Electoral Efficiency?*

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# AGENDA

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Rationale

How it Works?

Benefits, Challenges & Criticisms

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# INTRODUCTION

- **What is One Nation, One Election (ONOE)?**
  - Proposal to hold Lok Sabha, State Assembly and Local Body elections simultaneously
  - Aims to reduce the frequency of elections to enhance governance efficiency, reduce costs and minimize disruptions
- **Historical Context**
  - Simultaneous elections held from 1951-1967
  - Cycle disrupted due to premature dissolutions and political instability
- **Current Scenario**
  - Elections held separately for all tiers
  - Some argue frequent polls cause administrative and financial burdens, MCC disrupts governance
- **Current Status:** Bill introduced in Lok Sabha, December 17, 2024  
Referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (39 members)

# KEY PLAYERS & DEVELOPMENTS

- **Leadership**
  - Championed by PM Narendra Modi since 2014
  - In 1983, the EC and then in 1999, a Law Commission report suggested reviving ONOE
- **Kovind Committee**
  - High-level panel led by former President Ram Nath Kovind (September 2023)
  - Its terms of reference included examining feasibility and suggesting a framework for conducting elections of Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local bodies at the same time.
  - Submitted 18,626 page report in March 2024
- **Legislative steps**
  - Constitution (129<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Bill, 2024 and Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced. Bills seek to empower the Election Commission of India to conduct simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies.
  - Referred to Joint Parliament Committee to examine the feasibility and framework of conducting simultaneous elections. Tenure extended until Monsoon Session 2025

# WHY ONOE? THE RATIONALE

- **Cost Efficiency:** Reduces election expenses (e.g. Rs 60,000 crore was the estimated expenditure in 2019 GE)
- **Governance Continuity:** Minimizes disruptions and policy paralysis from frequent elections and Model Code of Conduct
- **High Voter Turnout:** Reduces voter fatigue, potentially increases participation
- **Economic Boost:** Kovind Committee: GDP could rise one-time by 1.5% post-simultaneous elections
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Help mitigate the diversion of government machinery and resources of public institutions.
- Enhance **opportunities for political workers** in elections.
- **Reduced scope of electoral malpractices** such as black money and vote bank politics

# HOW IT WORKS?

- **Proposed Mechanism**
  - Two-phase approach:
    - Phase 1: Lok Sabha and State Assemblies together
    - Phase 2: Local body elections within 100 days
  - "Appointed Date" set after general elections to sync cycles: all State Assemblies and Local Bodies should be dissolved, irrespective of the remaining term as a one-time measure.
- **Adjustments**
  - State terms shortened or extended to align with Lok Sabha
  - Fresh elections for unexpired/reduced terms if a government falls.

The reduced term = remaining period of the five-year cycle for the simultaneous election.

**This implies that if a fresh election for a State Assembly or Lok Sabha is held two years after the simultaneous election, its term will be only three years**

# KEY PROVISIONS OF THE BILLS

1.

**Insertion of new Article 82A (1), (2), (3) & (4):** The President may issue a notification on the date of the first sitting of Lok Sabha after a general election. The terms of all State Assemblies constituted after the date of the notification will expire with the expiry of the full term of Lok Sabha. The provisions of simultaneous elections extend to UT Assemblies. Hence, elections to Lok Sabha and all State and UT Assemblies thereafter will be conducted together.

# KEY PROVISIONS OF THE BILLS

2.

**Insertion of Article 82(5), (6) & (7):** If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the election for a particular State Assembly cannot be held as part of the simultaneous election, it may make a recommendation to the President in this regard. Upon this recommendation, the President may issue an order to conduct election for this State Assembly at a later date. Where the election for a State Assembly is deferred to after the simultaneous election, its term will end with the end of Lok Sabha constituted in that simultaneous election.

3.

**Amendment of Article 83:** If Lok Sabha or a State Assembly or a UT Assembly is dissolved sooner than its full term of five years, fresh election will be held for a term equal to the remainder of the five-year term.



# ARGUMENTS FOR

- **Administrative Efficiency**

- Fewer elections = less strain on security forces and officials
- Mitigating diversion of govt machinery & resources of public institutions

- **Policy Stability**

- Governments focus on governance, not constant campaigning
- Policy paralysis & govt deficit due to imposition of MCC

- **Resource Optimization**

- Unified electoral roll, fewer EVMs needed over time
- Optimizes utilization of financial & human resources

# ARGUMENTS FOR

- **Enhanced opportunities for political workers**
  - Paradigm shift in distribution of political opportunities within parties
  - Party leadership has the freedom to field different candidates for different elections
- **Reduced financial burden**
  - Reduces election expenditure; savings can be reinvested
  - Mitigate impact on economic growth, fiscal deficit, quality of public expenditure & investments
- **Civic Cohesion & National Unity**
  - Aligns electoral focus across India's diverse states
  - Enhance voter participation and diminish voter fatigue
  - Reinforce bonds of citizenship & fraternity

# CHALLENGES & CRITICISMS

- **Misinterpretation of the MCC**

- MCC does not ask for existing programmes to be put on hold at all.
- ECI only says, “no new announcement will be done, which would seduce the voter.”
- MCC period to the “bare minimum” required from the date of announcement to completion of election process.
- Merely prevents the party in power from attempting to misuse the fact of it being power to acquire unfair advantage over the opposing parties/candidates

- **Logistical Hurdles**

- Over 96 crore voters, 1 million+ polling booths
- At least three times the current number of EVMs and VVPATs
- Deployment of a large number of security forces all over the country.
- Holding local body elections in 100 days is a new election requiring logistical preparation again
- Paradoxical as this would entail enormous expenditure
- Will the EC be able to manage country-wide elections in a single phase?

# CHALLENGES & CRITICISMS

- **Better alternatives exist**

- There are other seemingly easier and more effective options
- Cap on campaign expenditure by parties (170th and 255th Law Commission reports).
- Curb populist measures/schemes and reduce the burden on the exchequer.
- Single phase election where possible
- Inner party democracy, criteria for ticket distribution, holding political contestants accountable for their actions and inactions, rightful implementation of existing laws, implement reforms suggested by various committees
- Central leadership can focus on governance instead of campaigning for state elections

- **Ratification by states**

- Undermines their constitutional position as autonomous units.
- No representatives from state governments or regional parties in the HLC committee

- **Defeats the original purpose**

- The candidates and parties would end up spending crores on an election for a truncated term which could be as short as one to two years.
- It will be even more difficult to promote long-term thinking

# CHALLENGES & CRITICISMS

- **Impact on voter behavior**

- Synchronized elections, compared to closely timed but asynchronous elections, result in a 21% higher probability of the same political party winning across tiers. (Research Study)
- 77% of the time, the results matched for Parliamentary and assembly constituencies. (Study by Praveen Chakravarty)
- Synchronization does not have a significant impact on the economic development of the area.
- Voters are more confused about election issues. Mix up regional and federal issues in their campaigns. (Evidence from Belgium)
- Voters are significantly less likely to participate in campaign activities

- **Lack of data-based evidence**

- Savings to the country on account of simultaneous elections are marginal.
- No analysis of total public expenditure incurred on the conduct of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections separately or together and the expected savings (Former EC Ashok Lavasa)

# CHALLENGES & CRITICISMS

- **Centralization of Indian Politics**

- May weaken state autonomy, favor national parties
- One nation One party: Single party governance in the Centre and the States impact federal structure
- Further diminish the focus on elected local bodies and turn them into nondescript representatives of their central leadership
- Overshadow regional issues, leaders and alternative voices

- **Shrinks scope for public participation & accountability**

- Relatively regular and frequent elections allow for more extended public participation and debate
- Frequent elections at least ensure that politicians 'show their face' to the people regularly.
- Separate elections provide space for course correction, for voter feedback that informs better economic policies in the long run.

- **Other Issues**

- Simultaneous elections are likely to see an explosion of horse-trading.

# CONSTITUTIONAL & LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Amendments Needed**

- Articles 82(A), 83, 85, 172, 174, 327, 356 and more
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 changes
- Article 324A to synchronize local body elections
- Relevant sections of the GNCTD, 1991; GUT Act 1963; J&K Reorganization Act, 2019

- **Process**

- Two-thirds majority in Parliament
- Some amendments need state ratification
- To give effect to this single electoral roll, a constitutional amendment will be required (Article 325).

- **Timeline**

- Earliest implementation likely in 2034

# GLOBAL EXAMPLES

## Countries with Simultaneous Elections

- **Sweden:** National, regional and local polls together
- **Indonesia:** Unified elections since 2019
- **South Africa:** National and provincial polls synced

## Lessons for India

- Fixed dates for elections to assemblies and federal parliaments are a more common feature than simultaneous elections at different levels of the political structure in a country.
- Potential shift to a List Party Proportional Representation (LPPR) system used alongside ONOE, which is practiced in countries like South Africa, Belgium, and Sweden that have been successful in practicing ONOE.
- These are nations with far smaller populations and geographical areas compared to India (with a FPTP system)



# PUBLIC & POLITICAL SENTIMENT

- **Support**

- 32 of 47 parties consulted by Kovind Committee in favor
- BJP and allies highlight cost and governance benefits
- 80% of 21,558 responses to Kovind Committee

- **Opposition**

- INC and regional parties fear loss of federal diversity
- Concerns over "One Nation, No Election" scenario
- Potential voter confusion and the marginalization of regional issues

- **Public Debate**

- Transparency and consensus remain key
- Logistical challenges
- Lack of data-based evidence, as per experts

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# THE ROAD AHEAD

- **Next Steps**

- Parliamentary committee review ongoing
- Wider consultations with states, parties and all relevant stakeholders
- Public consultations

- **Logistical Preparation**

- Election Commission to scale up EVMs, staff, polling stations, security personnel etc

- **Potential Impact**

- A transformative shift in India's democracy
- Balances efficiency with federal integrity
- Quality of democracy: 'most effective 'or 'least expensive'?

# CONCLUSION

- **Summary:** ONOE aims to unify India's electoral cycles.
- Promises efficiency but poses challenges
- Proponents highlight efficiency, cost savings, and governance benefits, supported by historical success and economic projections.
- Opponents emphasize threats to federalism, logistical complexities, and potential democratic erosion, underscoring the need for consensus among political parties and states and careful execution. Promises efficiency but poses challenges
- The debate hinges on balancing these trade-offs. Need for flexibility
- **Call to Action**
  - Engage in the debate: Does it strengthen or strain democracy?
  - Weighing pros and cons based on available evidence and ongoing developments



# QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

What are your thoughts on ONOE?