



One Nation, One Election: An Analytical Study of Its Benefits and Limitations

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Abstract

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) has become one of the biggest constitutional and political reform debates in India, which proposes a concomitant cycle of election of the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies. The model suggests that national and state elections should be conducted at the same time in every five-year period and it is believed that this will enhance efficiency in governance, less financial expenditure, less administrative disruption and enhance policy continuity. Traditionally, India was used to simultaneous elections only until the late 1960s when premature government dissolutions and the emergence of the idea of coalition politics led to staggered elections. Whereas there have been various nations like South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Brazil, Mexico and so on that have implementations of synchronized elections, none of them have such a large scale and federal nature as India itself. The authors compare the benefits of ONOE such as, less spending of money during elections, better use of administrative and security equipment, high voter turnout, less political polarization and better coordination between the central government and the state governments. Simultaneously, the paper also critically analyzes the substantial constraints on constitutional challenges, federalism issues, logistical challenges, political narrative imbalance, threat to regional representation, technological vulnerabilities and the challenge of keeping things synchronized despite the existence of coalition politics. The analysis also brings out the problem of fixed-term legislature, the Model Code of Conduct, socio-cultural diversity and political accountability. Generally, ONOE is set to yield some long term gains but its working model will involve massive constitutional changes, political goodwill, infrastructure and re-evaluation of the democratic and federal framework in India. The research finds that ONOE is not a simple electoral change but a radical structural change, the viability of which should be evaluated with some care, consultation and sensitivity to the socio political diversity of India.

Keywords: One Nation, One Election, Simultaneous Elections, Constitutional Reform, Federalism in India, Electoral Expenditure, Administrative Efficiency

Introduction

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) is a concept that has gained recognition as being one of the most controversial political and constitutional changes in modern India. In the proposal, it is envisaged to synchronize elections to the Lok Sabha and all the State Legislative Assemblies such



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that they all take place at the same time all over the country, preferably after every five years. On the face of it, this model would guarantee efficiency, less spending, administrative simplicity and continuous leadership. But the concept is much more complicated when explored further in a country as extensive, federal and diversified socio-politically as India. The discussion on ONOE has thus necessitated an analytical analysis that encompasses its historical background, worldwide counterparts, governance consequences and constitutional restrictions and viability. This opening is geared to give such an analysis a deeper grounding. India is familiar with the concept of synchronized elections. As a matter of fact, until the fourth general elections (1967), India operated under the system in which Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections were conducted in most cases simultaneously. The electoral cycles only parted ways after the late 1960s when some state governments were prematurely dissolved and later on the Lok Sabha also in 1970. The more the regional parties and federal dynamics were growing stronger over the decades, the harder it was to have the synchronous election cycles. As a result, nowadays India holds elections every year or even several times a year in various states, which creates the effect of a continuous election process. This poses a great challenge to governance and administrative inconveniences, which is the basis of the argument of the people who assume that renewing the legacy of the ONOE model could result in a restoration of electoral sanity. In the world, some countries are carrying out different types of concurrent elections. Countries like South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Costa Rica, Indonesia, Philippines and numerous others hold national and regional elections in coordinated cycles or together. Synchronized elections in such nations result in lower spending, higher voter turnout and newer governance. Nevertheless, no of these nations is as large, densely populated and federal as India is. Thus, global models are quite helpful, although they cannot be implemented in India without any adjustments. So Indian context is to be approached differently since ONOE in India would cut across the biggest electorate in the world (considering that it will comprise over 900 million voters), thousands of constituencies, and multiple tiers of administrative engines.

The ONOE debate is important not just in the management of elections, but also in democracy. Democracy is all about elections, and over-election frequency may cause the administration to come to a standstill. Whenever an election is declared, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is put into action which limits the affairs of government, development, policy making and change of administration. The recurrent application of MCC has an impact on long term planning particularly in areas like infrastructure, health, education and rural development. The proponents of ONOE believe that by having synchronized elections, these recurrent upheavals would be eliminated as governments will be able to concentrate on governance rather than being occupied with the preparatory process of an election. The other reason why ONOE is good is the expenses of elections are very high. The implementation of security forces, the polling personnel, electronic voting machines (EVMs), VVPATs, logistics, transportation, and administrative coordination is vast to conduct elections in India. The Election Commission itself and the government agencies



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waste thousands of crores in every few years. Political parties in their turn spend colossal sums of money on campaigning. The proponents of ONOE believe that the synchronized elections would save these costs in a significant way that would enable financial resources to be diverted to developmental priorities. Other than economic and administrative benefits, advocates also note possible political benefits. They state that synchronized elections will hold down over-emphasis on short-term populism and cause political parties to have a more long-term view of development. Moreover, simultaneous elections can also lead to increased voter turnout since one big, national election would most likely create a buzz and interest among voters as opposed to small, divided elections. Nevertheless, the arguments are quite convincing but are balanced with equally important limitations and difficulties. India is a federal country with constitutional freedom among states. Electoral cycles are one of such autonomy. A standardized election time could be seen as a form of usurping the interests of the states to act independently. In the event that a state government is collapsed, either by no-confidence-motion, civil strife, or break-up of coalition, must the whole country be re-elected? Or are we to submit to the next synchronized cycle to President Rule? The two scenarios are very serious constitutional issues. Critics claim that the ONOE would undermine the spirit of federalism since it would compel states to adjust to a common political agenda, irrespective of the political realities of a region.

There are also logistical issues that are significant. This would necessitate colossal administrative ability to hold elections simultaneously of all the states and the union government. India boasts of over one million polling points, millions of polling personnel and enormous need of security agencies. It is a herculean task to manage all these at the same time. Even the Election Commission has recognised that administrative infrastructure changes on a large scale, training and purchase of additional EVMs and VVPATs and substantial investment into capacity building would be necessary. Moreover, political scientists believe that coordinated elections can dislocate the national and state problem. Simultaneous elections may expand the influence of national narratives among the voters (out of local issues and regional party agendas). This could provide an undue advantage to national parties against regional political voices which will eventually change the fragile balance of the multi-party democracy in India. One of the gravest challenges of the ONOE is the constitutional one. The amendments of the Articles 83, 85, 172, 174 and potentially 356 of the Constitution would be required to implement this system. Also, these amendments would require the approval of at least a half of the states to be ratified. It may prove to be extremely challenging to develop such a wide agreement in a politically diverse nation, where regional parties and coalition governments exist. Furthermore, after its implementation, even in the long-term, keeping in line would need a way of constant mechanisms to address dissolutions, resignations, deaths, or political crisis at the mid-term. These limitations notwithstanding, the argument of ONOE is still topical and substantial. It challenges India to be very critical on how its electoral democracy functions and whether current practices are viable to the long term goals of governance. It promotes also the debate of reforms in the election process which include the establishment of



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a fixed-term legislature, a better anti-defection law, constructive no-confidence motions and smoother electoral timetables.

To sum up, the problem of One Nation, One Election is not only about holding elections simultaneously, but it also implies much more serious concerns regarding the Indian political philosophy, federalism, administrative resources and democratic interests. Although the potential benefits of a cheaper price, better governance, administrative effectiveness and higher voter turnout are immense, the issues constitutional, logistical, political and federal are equally significant. Hence, such an initiative to get elections synchronized has to be taken with a wise consideration, wide agreement and thorough planning. This analytical paper aims at examining these dimensions in an overall manner and to determine whether ONOE is viable, desirable and sustainable to the largest democracy in the world. About thirty countries in the world hold national and regional or local elections in a synchronized, or at least partially synchronized manner. These are South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Indonesia, Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Germany, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Elections to the national parliament, president and provincial legislatures or local councils are conducted on the same day or through a synchronized cycle so that the administration in these countries is efficient and low election costs are incurred. Although the nature of synchronization differs between the fixed-term models used in Sweden and South Africa to the consolidated presidential-legislative cycles used in Latin America the purpose is to simplify the governance process and reduce interference. Nevertheless, even with such examples of the world, no nation is as large, diverse in her population, or as complicated in its federal system as India, and therefore, the proposed One Nation, One Election is a reform so unusual that it cannot be easily mitigated.

India vs Other Countries on Simultaneous Elections

Comparative analysis of the proposed model of the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) in India with the model of electoral systems across the world indicates deep structural, administrative and socio-political differences that define the possibility of co-ordinated elections. Many other countries, including South African, Swedish, Belgian, Indonesian, Brazilian and Mexican and a number of countries in Latin America hold national and regional elections either entirely together, or on synchronized electoral cycles, but the circumstances that allow countries to do those, vary heavily and do not fit Indian circumstances with its complicated federal and demographic system. The case of South Africa where national and provincial elections are held concurrently after every five years under fixed-term legislatures, backed by a significantly smaller population, homogenous provincial systems and higher political stability, facilitates synchronized elections to controlling power. Likewise, in Sweden, elections to the national parliament and local councils are held together on the same day, which is an advantage of a well-structured welfare state, a smaller electorate and a homogeneous administrative machine. Even a linguistically divided Belgium has



set federal and regional elections periods, which is based on robust constitutional framework and proportional representation that allocates political power in the absence of mid-term disturbances. Conversely, the large and diverse democracies such as Indonesia and Brazil have had to follow a similar almost simultaneous pattern of election, by aligning the presidential, parliamentary and regional elections, yet even they are not comparable to the sheer magnitude of India with more than 900 million voters, 28 states and exceedingly varied socio-political environments. In Latin American nations (Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Peru etc.) similar elections are held but the size of their population, the rigidity of their constitutions and the ability to conduct them is much less and less complex than that of India. The difficulty in the case of India is that there is a need to balance federal autonomy, the presence of coalition governments, dissolution of parliament in the middle of the term, large geographical scope of the country and logistical difficulty of holding the largest democratic process of the world. Although the world knows cases in which simultaneous elections save money, increase voter participation and establish a stable governance system, none of these countries has the same set of regional and multi-level political rivalry combined with staggered electoral processes and constitutional asymmetries that India has. Therefore, despite the efficiency of simultaneous elections in most countries because of the term certainty, smaller administrative units and higher political unity, the political fluidity, the size of population and the federal structure in India contribute to the fact that ONOE implementation is a significantly more difficult issue. This comparison establishes that though India can learn the best practices of operation in other countries, it cannot just seek to borrow the models of other countries directly: it needs to develop its own model that is based on the realities of its democracy.

One Nation, One Election: Pros Advantages

1. Reduction in Election Expenditure

The most important benefits of the One Nation, One Election implementation are that it will greatly decrease the total outlay on the election. Election in India is very resource intensive process that will demand enormous financial expenditures on polling staff, security forces, electronic voting machines (EVMs), VVPATs, transportation, temporary infrastructure and election administration work. This may happen where elections are conducted frequently at times every few months in various states the government will have to continue to use the same logistics and administrative arrangements and therefore this requires allocation of funds. Political parties also pay a lot in terms of rallies, advertisements, campaign materials, and reaching out to the voters. The government can reduce these recurring expenditures significantly by conducting national and state elections simultaneously once every five years so that the public exchequer can be used more efficiently. The Election Commission thinks that synchronized elections would save thousands of crores that could otherwise be channeled into the much needed developmental areas like health, education, infrastructure and rural welfare. Therefore, the issue of saving money is not the only point of the decrease of election spending; it is changing the previous system of governance, which is more efficient and financially-wise, development-focused and less money-driven.



2. Less Administrative Disruption

One of the strongest points of One Nation, One Election is the fact that there is huge lessening of administrative disruption that is brought about by a number of frequent elections. In India, any election either of the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly demands imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) that limits the decision-making of the government, pauses the new policy announcements and even suspends developmental activities. The MCC is applied many times in the year when eggs are held at varying times in different states making the administrative efficiency appear to be sluggish and welfare plans, infrastructure developments and delivery of public service are delayed. Government, teachers, local administrators are often distracted by activities related to elections like training, verification of voter lists, and polling booths and supervision, which is at the cost of their routine work. This constant redistribution of people interferes with the basic state services, especially in such areas as education, health and rural development. NOE would enable the administration of the country to operate nonstop in election year by synchronization of the elections all over the country once every five years and would mean that during the rest of the years, the government would not need to turn off administrative machinery to restart the process. This guarantees the implementation process of long-term policies is smoother, the project will be completed at a faster rate, and the working side of the administration will be more productive, which will eventually increase the efficiency of government operation.

3. Improved Policy Continuity and Stability

One Nation, One Election can be of great help in enhancing policy continuity and political stability in India. The presence of regular elections with varying time intervals forces governments at the Centre and at the states to always turn their attention towards governance to campaign. This disjointed process of electing fosters a tendency of making short run populist decisions instead of developmental planning. Furthermore, the constant reinstatement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) makes continuous projects to be interrupted, the passages of new schemes and the dilation of the administrative momentum. Simultaneous election conducted after every five years gives the governments a stable straight line of planning and executing policies without the burden of an impending election. This is a conducive governance environment where the process of implementing multi-year development programs is enhanced, inter-government coordination is enhanced and resources allocation is made efficient. Overlapping electoral cycles also lead to a decrease in political instability because simultaneous electoral cycles will not overlap at different times. Consequently, ONOE facilitates a more predictable kind of governance that is geared towards development and able to generate long-term achievement in areas of infrastructure, health, education and economic development.

4. Reduced Burden on Security Forces

The major administrative benefit of One Nation One Election is that it has greatly reduced the strain on the security forces of India. Throughout all elections, big organizations of police



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workforce, paramilitary as well as central armed police force (CAPF) are deployed to provide peaceful polling, security of EVMs, law and order and transportation of election materials. The nature of elections conducted in India where elections now take place at varying times in the year, therefore necessitating recurrent mobilization of security forces, puts a strain to man power and resources and operational preparedness. This perennial election process normally leaves staff without their main task like internal security, combating terrorism, controlling border security and dealing with emergencies or natural disasters. In the case of simultaneous elections, security deployment would only need the deployment once in every five years, which would be easier to plan, organize, and utilize the forces among the states more effectively. It would also help in alleviating fatigue, boost morale and enable security agencies to devote more attention on internal security issues. Therefore, ONOE does not only enhance the safety of elections but also enhances national security due to reduced repetition of diversion of critical security resources.

5. Higher Voter Turnout

With the One Nation, One Election, there are high possibilities of improving the voter turnout as the electoral process becomes easier to the citizens. At present, voters in India are to attend the various elections at various times at different times Lok Sabha, State Assembly, municipal bodies and panchayats resulting in voter fatigue, reduced turnout and unequal participation in elections of different regions. During the routine elections, a large number of citizens, particularly the daily wage earners, the rural areas and the migrant workers have a problem taking time off several times over to vote.

By having just one, nationwide election every five years, this burden would be lessened which would make the voting process more convenient and make it more accessible. Also, a unified election brings more attention to the nation, media and a feeling of civic duty, which would encourage more citizens to vote. The history of practices of other nations that hold synchronized elections also indicates that joint electoral exercises usually have high turnout because of the enhanced awareness and mobilization. Therefore, ONOE might develop a participatory and inclusive democratic process by promoting wider participation by the voters in all regions and socio-economic classes.

6. More Efficient Use of Resources

One Nation, One Election makes the administrative, financial and human resources utilisation a much more efficient endeavor than in separate elections which are otherwise overstretched and over again. Currently, all elections, both national and state, involve marshaling of polling booths, EVMs, VVPATs, transport, polling staff, security agencies and temporary infrastructure in various localities. Such duplication of effort leads to a lot of wastage of time, money and manpower. With synchronized system of election, the identical resources would be used once, rather than more than once, and the available resources could be planned optimally and the coordination of operations would be enhanced and the overlapping operation even reduced. The Election Commission would also be in a better position to distribute equipments and staff more efficiently, and the government



departments would not need to constantly redirect the staff to work in the election at the expense of the basic services. Also, the logistical burden in transportation, communication systems and warehousing facilities would be much less, and the process of electoral conduct would be more facilitated and systematized. ONOE, therefore, would lead to efficiency of resources by integrating election related activities into one and well coordinated exercise at the national level.

7. Encourages Long-Term Governance over Short-Term Populism

One Nation, One Election encourages long term governance because it would ease the stress that governments have on the impending elections thus they are likely to make short term populist decisions. With national and state elections being held on a regular basis (that is, with each other) and having no ties to each other, the political parties in the present system are inclined to cater to short-term electoral incentives, whereby they declare schemes of immediate benefits, subsidies or act of populism to sway the electorate in the short term.

With this repetitive process of election based policy making, the focus on long term development agenda through infrastructure, education, health, economic reforms and environmental sustainability is sidelined. Consecutive elections give governments a definite span of five years without interruption to work out and carry out thorough and sustainable policies without intimidation of constant electoral scrutiny. Consequently, policymaking is more strategic and development oriented and future oriented as opposed to reactive and politically oriented. Moreover, ONOE would contribute to the consistency in the governance of the states and the Centre and make the national programs that involve long-term commitments more coordinated. In such a way, when the influence of short-term populism is minimized, there is more stable, responsible and development-oriented type of governance that simultaneous elections promote.

8. Reduces Political Polarization and Campaign Intensity

One Nation, One Election can help decrease the level of political polarization and intensity of election campaigning which are now the more eminent characteristics of the contemporary electoral cycle in India. The high rate of election every year makes political parties to be in constant campaign mode and they will engage in aggressive rhetoric, divisive messages and mobilization in order to capture the attention of the voters. Such a perpetual political confrontation does not only increase social tensions, but also leads to the polarization of communities along ideological, caste, religious or regional divides.

Concurrent elections would assist in reducing the time and occurrence of such intense campaigns as political parties would not carry out the major election activities every five years but just once. This is because one general campaign season will cut down on the clatter of political rallies, inflammatory speeches, untamed advertising and media saturation, which makes the public a better and more productive place. It also enables the citizens to be more balanced in their political discourse as opposed to being constantly bombarded with polarized accounts. In this way, ONOE will enhance a more healthy democratic environment, which minimizes politics of conflict and lessens social and psychological exhaustion that arises due to unceasing electoral mobilization.



9. Strengthens Economic Stability

One Nation, One Election can greatly enhance the economic stability because it will minimize economic disturbances that may often be experienced due to staggered elections described all over India. The temporary uncertainty caused by every election, be it national or state, makes investment choices stagnate, and business temperance is impacted by the establishment of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) coupled with the excessively political environment. Election years also change government spending trends whereby, due to limited policy making, new economic projects cannot be initiated and thus, approvals and execution delays. Repeat cycles of low economic activity are therefore caused by frequent elections. With simultaneous elections held once every five years, ONOE reduces such interruptions, which facilitates markets, industries and investors to operate in a more predictable and stable environment. One, unified, election process will also guarantee that fiscal policy, infrastructure developments and long term economic changes can go on without disruptions every now and then. Furthermore, there is less spending of campaigns, whether by governments or political parties, which in turn helps in fighting overfluous finances of the election which indirectly leads to more transparent and financially accountable system. Through this, ONOE contributes to the long term economic growth, through continuity, predictability and a stable policy environment which is a prerequisite to long term growth.

10. Provides Equal Opportunity for All Political Parties

One Nation, One Election can offer a level playing field to all political parties especially smaller and regional parties which are usually unable to compete with each other due to the frequent and fragmented elections in India. According to the existing system, those parties that have greater financial resources are better placed to continuously campaign, bring voters together and have all-time presence during various elections, conducted at different times. This gives an unfair advantage to the national parties which are larger and the regional or resource strained parties struggle to maintain recurrent campaigns. One, combined election which takes place every five years means that no party, no matter its size or resources, plans and runs their campaign on the same time scale, and removes the economical and logistical strain of numerous elections. Moreover, simultaneous elections mean the electorate is able to compare all parties at once and diddle out the effect of long campaign periods and election burnout which is likely to distort the minds of the electorate. Through restricting the amount of money used in the campaigns, travelling expenses and advertising requirements, ONOE enhances a fairer political landscape, where the electoral victory should be based on policies and popular backing, and not financial power. Therefore, concomitant elections make the democratic fairness stronger, as it provides even the smaller in size parties with an equal chance to compete.

11. Better Coordination Between Centre and States

One Nation, One Election has the potential of greatly benefiting the coordination between the Centre and the states by synchronizing their political and administrative cycles. In the existing system, there is a tendency of the national and state governments to be at different times of the day



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in terms of the election, and thus a resultant impact on continuation and alignment of key developmental programs, welfare programmes and policy agendas which involve long term collaboration. In case a government is already in the active governance phase, and another in election mode, the decisions are delayed, the approval is delayed and joint projects are interrupted. ONOE addresses this disparity by setting the two tiers of government on the same timetable of 5 years, which helps in improving communications, and better alignment of policies and the application of centrally sponsored schemes in a more uniform manner. With political leaderships at the various levels not bothered with frequent elections, coordinated governance is facilitated where they can concentrate on joint planning in other aspects like infrastructure, agriculture, health, education and management of disaster. Moreover, coordinated elections acute the desire of states to make politically motivated decisions near their election times, which leads to the creation of a more cooperative federal economy. In this way, ONOE can enhance the inter-governmental coordination, as well as, it will lead to a coherent administrative system in the country.

Limitations

Although the concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) sounds promising in the economic and administrative sense, there are a few deep-seated drawbacks of the model, which cast doubts on its feasibility, constitutionality and potential long-term effects of democracy in a country as big and diverse as India. Among the most inherent issues is connected to the federal system in India, in which states have constitutional powers of independence, such as the ability to hold independent electoral cycles. The imposition of a standardized election cycle might be understood as a violation of this freedom and undermining the principle of cooperative federalism by compelling states to conform to the political schedule of the Union government in spite of how politics work in their region. A huge problem comes in thinking about the premature dissolution of state governments or the Lok sabha is a common occurrence in India owing to coalition crumbles, internal party wrangles and no-confidence motions. Under ONOE whenever a state assembly falls prematurely of the stipulated time, the nation is left with a choice of either conducting a new national election, President's Rule or of establishing interim plan until the next synchronized round. All these possibilities have severe constitutional and political implications, which are causing concern regarding the stability of democracy. Also, ONOE is complicated by the fact that massive constitutional amendments such as those to Articles 83, 85 and 172 and 174 and potentially 356 would require a special majority in the legislature, and, since many states in India might not support any reform of their discretionary powers, would have to be passed by half of the states in India. Other than the constitutional issues, there are massive logistical problems in India that has complicated the possibility of simultaneous elections. Holding elections in the whole country with more than 900 million citizens, approximately ten thousand polling stations, thousands of legislative districts and enormous geographical areas would entail an administrative coordination on a scale never seen before. The number of EVMs would be many more, the VVPATs, trained staff, security forces and transporting facilities would require much more than these days.



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Providing both safety and fairness at all the polling stations would be a daunting endeavor given that, in some cases where insurgency affects terrain or political violence, it will be prudent to do so. The other constraint is based on the influence on the political discourse of the region. During concurrent elections, there is a tendency of nationalization of issues, leaders, and political campaigns taking over the voter sentiment. This runs the danger of drowning the local problems like water management, agriculture, unemployment, public health, caste relations or local development problems which are supposed to be emphasized by the state elections. Consequently, local parties can become unwelcoming through elections and lose their political power, which undermines the pluralistic and multi-party nature of Indian democracy. Furthermore, the concomitant election can enhance political waves at the national level, and consequently, voters can tend to vote the same party at the national and state level, which can decrease the diversity in the political sphere and cause the increase of the power centralization. According to critics, this change could compromise the democratic balance in India, where the regional parties are instrumental in the process of promoting the local identities and the socio-cultural complexities. The other severe drawback is that the Indian politics is ever evolving; alliances are not fixed, there is a tendency of parties dividing and coalition government is a norm. Compelling such a dynamic political environment into a hard five-year cycle might not represent ground realities. Introduction of ONOE would involve strict provisions such as fixed term legislatures or constructive no confidence motions that would constrain the power of legislators to voice their dissent and make the governments less accountable. This may undermine democratic checks and balances. There are also administrative issues when the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is taken into account. Under ONOE, MCC would be enforced nationwide every 5 years, although the enforcement of it would be significantly larger and, probably, disruptive. Although MCC being regularly imposed in individual elections is an issue, a one nationwide MCC that spans a few weeks may postpone a national and state policy-making at the same time, which will impact the running of all sectors. The fact that financial savings are the most commonly mentioned advantage of ONOE should also be regarded with a grain of salt; the initial expenses of the infrastructure expansion buying millions of new EVMs and VVPATs, staff training and storage/security facilities would be too huge to allow the long-term benefits to counterbalance them. The other weakness is brought about by the socio-cultural diversity in India. Various states have varied agricultural seasons, weather patterns, religious holidays and socio-economic facts. To take an instance, in one area, elections might be practicable in the monsoon or harvest-time and in another area most inconveniently difficult. One election timetable may not be able to suit the needs of all regions equally which may influence property turnout.

Political accountability is also of concern. The common nature of elections makes governments to be sensitive and accountable to their citizens. With a synchronized election system governments can feel secure to a given term of five years and thus can be less responsive in-between elections. In addition, mass, concurrent elections can bring about mass campaign activities and media



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propaganda, which poses greater chances of polarization and misinformation since all the attention of the people is focused on one nation-wide political race. ONOE also increases operational risks, in case of any disruptions that involve the elections, natural calamities, security threats or legal issues, they may also halt the whole process of national and state elections at the same time. The reliance on technology further adds threats to the fact that any technical failure of EVMs or VVPATs in one, mega-election might cause chaos throughout the country and trigger a lack of confidence in voters regarding the electoral system. Finally, the adoption of ONOE would need a high level of political consensus, which is not present at present. Many local parties are very against the notion and see it as a centralizing action that lessens the political importance of states and undermines the federal equilibrium. Unless there is an overall political consensus, ONOE would not be smoothly implemented even in case it is implemented, its sustainability would be doubtful. All in all, despite the efficiency-enhancing nature of the concept of One Nation, One Election, the restrictions show severe conflicts with the constitutional principles, the freedom of the federal government, logistical capabilities, political plurality and political responsibility. These difficulties suggest that ONOE is not just an administrative reform, but a structural change in the Indian system of democracy, which must be deliberated on, with a lot of consensus and realistic estimation of the long-term outcomes.

India vs South Africa, Sweden, Belgium

Aspect	India	South Africa	Sweden	Belgium
Election Cycle	National & State elections held separately; no alignment	National & Provincial elections held simultaneously	National, Regional & Local elections held on same day every 4 years	Federal, Regional & Community elections mostly synchronized within fixed cycles
Term Duration	5 years (Assemblies may dissolve early)	Fixed 5-year term for all levels	Fixed 4-year term	Fixed 5-year term for Federal & Regional Parliaments
System Type	Large federal democracy (28 states, 8 UTs)	Federal-style unitary system with 9 provinces	Unitary parliamentary democracy with decentralized local councils	Complex federal state with linguistic regions & communities
Voter Size	~900 million voters	~27 million voters	~7.5 million voters	~8.2 million voters
Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections	Difficult due to large population, diversity & mid-term dissolutions	Very feasible; successfully implemented since 1994	Highly feasible; long-standing tradition	Feasible due to fixed terms & strong constitutional design



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Governance Impact	Frequent MCC disrupts policies & delays development	Minimal disruption; stable long-term governance	Predictable governance & efficient policy implementation	Stable political cycles but coalition formation may be complex
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Comparative analysis between India and other countries like South Africa, Sweden and Belgium also shows that there is a very noticeable difference in structure and administration that determine the possibility of simultaneous elections. South Africa has the national elections and provincial ones jointly after a fixed time span of five years in a fixed-term system which is facilitated by a smaller population, homogenous provincial framework and comparatively stable politics. This renders the synchronized elections viable and effective. Sweden is also a highly structured model in electoral processes and the elections are conducted at nation, regional and local levels on the same day in every four years. Its unitary system of governance, fewer voters as well as well-organized administration system makes it the easiest country to apply simultaneous elections hence predictable policy cycles and ease of governance. In spite of its language and cultural diversity, Belgium has managed to have co-ordinated elections to the federal parliament, the regional parliaments, and community assemblies because of the constitutionally determined terms and solid legal frameworks. It has had a lesser number of voters and has a coherent coalition system which makes the election cycle alignment not to topple governance. On the contrary, the much less centralized system of India, composed of 28 states, divided political systems, 900 million electorate, and regular mid-term dissolvability, makes coordination much more difficult. The unstable nature of fixed-term politics, the constant presence of coalition politics, the diverse socio-economic status and monumental logistic demands make One Nation, One Election somewhat complicated. Although the fixed terms serve the advantage of South Africa, Sweden and Belgium, due to the size, diversity and dynamism of political environment, India requires a more conservative and context-driven stance. Therefore, global models can be of useful insights but India cannot apply them directly with major constitutional, administrative and political changes.

Conclusion

One country, one vote scandal is a complicated constitutional, administrative, political and federal issue. On the one hand, the advantages of the proposal will be significant: the amount of money saved on the expenditure related to the election process will be overwhelming, the number of disruptions connected with the frequent implementation of the Model Code of Conduct will be reduced, more security and administrative resources will be used to implement it, and the turnout among voters will increase, and the presence of the policy will be enhanced. All these advantages imply that synchronized elections would lead to a greater transparency and stability of Indian government. But the drawbacks of ONOE are enormous, and they cannot be overlooked. The federal Indian system accommodates states independence as is the case with the independent election. The advantage of enacting uniformity would be helpful in undermining the federalism, the multi-party democracy and the regional political manifestation in India. All the elections that



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are to be served at the same time cannot be logistically served in terms of the number of voters in India, complexity of terrain and administration. The modifications made in the constitution that were needed to make the legislature of fixed term, influence on premature dissolution and the political instability also make ONOE difficult. Moreover, the synchronized elections can interfere with local agendas in support of the large national agendas hence the unfair advantage over the regional agendas in support of the national parties. The study of the situation in South Africa demonstrates that coordinated elections can be successful in case there are minor and politically stable federal systems, but the situation in India is quite different as it is a giant country with its diversity and active politics. Thus, even though ONOE has its merits, it cannot be cited as the necessity to extend it to the national level with a considerable amount of caution as it involves a lot of political indulgence and demands rather a situational change than a radical one. In conclusion, One Nation, one election is an initiative that is ground breaking, which has many potentials and enormous challenges. It can only succeed by a sacrifice of industry and democratic plurality, of governmental convenience, and constitutional rectitude and national integrity and regional autonomy. This is a commendable shift in the best democracy in the world which ought to be provided with a prudent participative and informed policy framework prior to its adoption.

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