

RESEARCH PAPER
ON
CONSTITUTIONAL & LEGAL PERSPECTIVE OF
ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

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Abstract

The proposal for **One Nation–One Election (ONOE)** seeks to arrange elections for our Legislatures, i.e. the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to reduce overall administrative burdens and for improving governance efficiency. While the idea promises fiscal savings and policy continuity, it raises complex constitutional and legal doubts or questions regarding federalism, democratic accountability, legislative tenure, and emergency provisions. This paper aims to examine the constitutional framework governing elections in India and analyses as to whether ONOE can be implemented within existing provisions of Constitution of India, 1950 or requires any such substantial amendments in the Constitution of India, 1950. This study concludes that even though simultaneous elections are legally possible but they necessitate careful constitutional restructuring to preserve federal balance, judicial oversight and representative democracy.

1. Introduction

We know very well that India being the world’s largest democracy, holds elections across multiple layers of the Government, i.e. National, State and Local—at staggered intervals. This system results from constitutional provisions that allow legislative bodies to be dissolved before completing their full tenure. The proposal for **One Nation–One Election** aims to restore arrangements of elections that existed during the early decades after independence.

The main topics of discussion in relation to ONOE have been fiscal savings and the effectiveness of governance. Nonetheless, this proposition has significant legal and constitutional ramifications. Simultaneous elections may have an impact on the federal governance, fixed parliamentary tenure, and democratic accountability processes outlined in the Indian Constitution.

This study aims to analyzes pertinent clauses, court rulings, and institutional functions to investigate ONOE from a constitutional and legal perspective. It aims to determine whether significant structural changes are necessary or if simultaneous elections can be held within the current constitutional framework.

2. Historical Background of Simultaneous Elections in India

Even on facing towards the past, India had conducted simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies in the year of 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, the system of ONOE was collapsed due to premature dissolution of several state assemblies and the Lok Sabha.

The discontinuation of synchronized cycles serves as an example of a basic constitutional fact: India's legislative bodies are not guaranteed a fixed term or tenure. Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution of India, 1950 permits early dissolution, but set a maximum term of five years. Therefore, democratic responsiveness is given precedence over electoral synchronization in the constitutional design. This idea must be balanced with administrative effectiveness in every ONOE implementation effort.

3. Constitutional Framework Governing Elections

3.1 Legislative Tenure and Dissolution

Following provisions are dealing with the tenure of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies :

- **Article 83(2)** – Lok Sabha term of five years unless sooner dissolved
- **Article 172(1)** – State Assembly term of five years unless sooner dissolved

The above said provisions enumerate that legislative tenure is not fixed, in other words rigid. But, it depends upon political stability. Therefore, often premature discontinuation of term guarantees accountability, but always makes difficult or hard synchronization.

ONOE would necessitate procedures to either prolong or shorten legislative terms, which would call into question the morality of the constitution and democratic legitimacy.

3.2 Election Administration

The responsibility for conducting elections lies with the Election Commission of India, established under Article 324 of the Constitution of India.

The Commission's mandate includes supervision, direction, and control of elections. Implementing ONOE would significantly expand its logistical responsibilities, requiring constitutional or statutory clarity regarding electoral scheduling powers.

3.3 Federal Structure and State Autonomy

India's Constitution establishes a federal structure with strong unitary features. Elections are central to maintaining the autonomy of states within this system.

Simultaneous elections may raise concerns about the dilution of state-level political discourse. Regional issues could be overshadowed by national narratives, potentially undermining the spirit of cooperative federalism embedded in the Constitution.

The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly emphasized the importance of federal balance as part of the Constitution's basic structure, meaning reforms must not undermine this principle.

4. Basic Structure Doctrine and Its Relevance

According to the Basic Structure Doctrine, which was established in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)*, Parliament is not allowed to bring changes in the Constitution's essential framework.

Among the essential features of the Constitution, *viz.*

- Federalism
- Democracy
- The judicial review
- Elections that are free and fair

ONOE may encounter constitutional problems if it threatens election fairness or federalism. The judiciary would probably investigate whether synchronized elections diminish state governments' independence or change democratic representation.

Thus, any constitutional amendment introducing ONOE must preserve democratic accountability and institutional balance.

5. Legal Challenges in Implementing ONOE

5.1 Fixed vs Flexible Legislative Tenure

Legislative periods may need to be prolonged or shortened in order to align elections. There are legal issues with both choices.

While shorter terms could jeopardize elected governments' authority, longer periods could go against democratic ideals by postponing voter choice.

Legal scholars argue that such changes would require constitutional amendments supported by states under Article 368, especially because state legislatures' powers would be affected.

5.2 Emergency Provisions and President's Rule

Articles 356 and 365 of the Constitution permit Governments to impose the President's Rule, which can result in assemblies being dissolved or suspended. Election cycles that are synchronized clash with this flexibility.

Unless constitutional safeguards ensure fixed tenure even during political crises, ONOE may be unsustainable. However, restricting emergency powers could weaken constitutional mechanisms designed to protect governance stability.

5.3 No-Confidence Motions and Government Stability

No-confidence motions can topple governments in parliamentary democracies. For ONOE to stay in sync even in the event of a government collapse, protections would be necessary.

Possible mechanisms include :

- Constructive vote of no confidence
- Caretaker governments until next fixed election
- Mid-term elections only for the remainder of the term

These solutions require constitutional amendments and statutory changes.

6. Role of Constitutional Bodies and Committees

Several institutions have examined ONOE:

6.1 Law Commission of India

The Law Commission of India suggested that simultaneous elections may be feasible but require

extensive constitutional amendments and consensus among states.

It also emphasized the necessity of protections to uphold democratic accountability, legal reorganization, and logistical difficulties.

6.2 Parliamentary Committees

Through committees and discussions, the Indian Parliament has addressed ONOE. While recognizing the complexity of the constitution, these discussions place a strong emphasis on administrative effectiveness, governance continuity, and cost savings.

7. Federalism Concerns

The federal structure of India divides authority between the states and the Union. Elections serve as a mechanism through which regional political identities and governance priorities are expressed.

Simultaneous elections may:

- Strengthen national parties at the expense of regional parties
- Reduce policy responsiveness to local issues
- Increase central influence over state politics

If these outcomes occur, ONOE could be challenged as undermining the federal structure, which is part of the Constitution's basic structure.

8. Democratic Accountability and Representation

Voters can regularly assess governments thanks to frequent elections. This periodic accountability is central to parliamentary democracy.

ONOE may reduce opportunities for mid-term voter feedback, potentially weakening democratic responsiveness.

However, proponents argue that synchronized elections do not reduce accountability but merely

reorganize its timing. Governments would still face elections every five years, and parliamentary oversight mechanisms would remain intact.

Thus, the constitutional issue is not whether elections occur but whether citizens retain effective mechanisms to challenge governance failures.

9. Judicial Review and Potential Litigation

Any attempt to implement ONOE would likely face judicial scrutiny. Courts may examine the following aspects, *viz.*

- Whether legislative tenure modifications violate democratic rights
- Whether federal balance is compromised
- Whether election synchronization affects free and fair elections

The judiciary's role in safeguarding constitutional principles means ONOE must be carefully drafted to withstand legal challenges.

10. Comparative Constitutional Perspectives

While some democracies hold elections in tandem, most federal systems keep their cycles distinct in order to retain regional autonomy. India's constitutional framework combines parliamentary democracy with federal governance.

Thus, reforms must reflect both features rather than adopting models from unitary states. Comparative analysis suggests that simultaneous elections are legally feasible but must incorporate safeguards to ensure institutional balance.

11. Possible Constitutional Amendments Required

Implementing ONOE may require amendments to:

- Articles 83 and 172 (legislative tenure)
- Articles 85 and 174 (dissolution powers)
- Articles 356 and 365 (emergency provisions)
- Representation of the People Act provisions
- Anti-defection and no-confidence rules

These amendments would need ratification by at least half of the states, as they affect federal arrangements.

12. Advantages from a Legal Perspective

From a constitutional perspective, ONOE could provide:

1. Increased electoral predictability
2. Less administrative red tape
3. Better continuity of government
4. The possibility of institutional planning being strengthened

Synchronized elections could improve democratic processes' effectiveness without compromising constitutional principles if they are well planned.

13. Risks from a Legal Perspective

Following Key risks include:

- Weakening federal autonomy
- Concentrating political power
- Reducing flexibility during political crises
- Increased constitutional litigation

Therefore, ONOE must be accompanied by institutional safeguards protecting state autonomy, judicial oversight, and democratic rights.

14. Analysis

From the above study, following three principles must be balanced for ONOE to be constitutionally viable:

1. Democratic accountability – voters must retain control over governments
2. Federal balance – states must maintain political autonomy
3. Institutional stability – elections should not disrupt governance excessively

Simultaneous elections are not unconstitutional *per se*. However, the legal architecture

supporting them must preserve the Constitution's basic structure. This requires carefully drafted amendments, broad political consensus, and administrative preparedness.

15. Conclusion

A key institutional reform with important constitutional and legal ramifications is the One Nation–One Election concept. Simultaneous elections present important issues about federalism, legislative tenure, and democratic accountability even though they may increase the effectiveness of governance and lessen administrative burdens.

According to the study's findings, ONOE is only legally possible with significant constitutional safeguards and modifications. The reform must guarantee that synchronized elections do not erode representative democracy or the fundamental framework of the Constitution.

To ensure that efficiency does not compromise democratic integrity, ONOE should be implemented cautiously through constitutional reform based on consensus rather than administrative experimentation.

References

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