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**ADMINISTRATIVE FEASIBILITY OF CONDUCTING
SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA: CHALLENGES,
CAPACITY, AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

India conducts elections on an unprecedented scale unmatched by any other democratic nation in the world. With over **970 million eligible voters** as recorded in the **2019 General Elections**, and electoral contests spanning the **Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and Urban Local Bodies**, the logistical and administrative task of conducting elections is colossal. The Election Commission of India (ECI), a constitutionally mandated authority under **Article 324**, is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that this vast democratic exercise is conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner. The scale of operations involves deployment of millions of polling personnel, security forces, electronic voting machines (EVMs), voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) units, and extensive coordination between central and state administrative machinery.

Over the past several decades, India has followed a **staggered election cycle**, where elections to Parliament and State Assemblies are held at different times. While this system has evolved organically due to political contingencies such as premature dissolution of legislatures, it has resulted in **frequent electoral mobilization**, repeated enforcement of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, and sustained administrative engagement in election-related duties. This has led to growing concerns about governance disruption, administrative fatigue, rising election expenditure, and diversion of public resources from developmental activities.

In this context, the concept of “**Simultaneous Elections**”, commonly referred to as **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)**, has re-emerged as a significant electoral reform proposal. The idea advocates synchronizing elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies so that they are conducted together, either on the same day or within a defined time frame. Proponents argue that simultaneous elections could significantly reduce election-related expenditure, improve policy continuity, strengthen administrative efficiency, and allow governments to focus more consistently on governance rather than perpetual election preparedness.

However, the proposal also raises serious **administrative, constitutional, and federal concerns**. Conducting simultaneous elections would require an extraordinary level of administrative preparedness, including availability of trained personnel, enhanced security arrangements, large-scale logistical coordination, and robust infrastructure capable of handling

concurrent elections across the country. Furthermore, the constitutional implications of altering the fixed tenure of elected legislatures, the impact on India's federal structure, and the autonomy of States under the Constitution present complex legal challenges.

Against this backdrop, this seminar paper undertakes a **critical examination of the administrative feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections in India**. It seeks to analyze whether India's existing electoral machinery possesses the institutional capacity and administrative resilience required for such a reform. The paper also explores the **constitutional provisions, judicial perspectives, and federal principles** implicated in the implementation of ONOE. By weighing the potential benefits against the administrative risks and constitutional constraints, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing academic and policy discourse on electoral reforms in India.

2. BACKGROUND: ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION (ONOE)

Simultaneous elections were not an innovation but rather the **original constitutional practice** adopted during the formative years of Indian democracy. Following the commencement of the Constitution in 1950, elections to the **First, Second, and Third Lok Sabha (1952, 1957, and 1962)** were conducted alongside elections to most State Legislative Assemblies. This synchronization ensured that electoral cycles at the national and state levels were aligned, allowing governments to function with predictable tenures and minimizing administrative disruptions. During this period, India successfully conducted consolidated elections despite limited technological resources, demonstrating early administrative coherence in electoral management.

The breakdown of this synchronized electoral framework began in the **mid-1960s**, largely due to increasing political instability at both the central and state levels. The premature dissolution of several State Assemblies, coupled with the early dissolution of the Fourth Lok Sabha in 1970, disrupted the uniform electoral cycle. The emergence of coalition politics, internal party defections, imposition of President's Rule under **Article 356**, and frequent loss of legislative confidence led to staggered elections becoming the norm rather than the exception. Consequently, elections to State Assemblies began to occur at different intervals, breaking the earlier synchrony with parliamentary elections.

Over time, this staggered electoral calendar became institutionalized. At present, elections to the **Lok Sabha are held every five years** under **Article 83**, while elections to State Legislative Assemblies are conducted independently under **Article 172**, subject to early dissolution. As a result, India now witnesses **multiple elections almost every year**, involving different states or local bodies. This continuous election cycle places a sustained burden on administrative machinery, security forces, and public servants who are frequently requisitioned for election duties.

The transition to staggered elections has had significant **administrative and governance implications**. One of the most notable consequences is the repeated imposition of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, which restricts policy announcements, transfers of officials, and initiation of new welfare schemes during election periods. Frequent enforcement of the MCC has been criticized for slowing down decision-making processes and disrupting long-term developmental planning. In states experiencing back-to-back elections, governance often enters a prolonged phase of policy inertia.

Additionally, staggered elections have led to **escalating election-related expenditure**, not only for the Election Commission of India but also for central and state governments. The repeated mobilization of polling personnel, security forces, transportation logistics, and electoral materials significantly increases costs. Administrative fatigue among government employees and security agencies further affects the efficiency of public service delivery, especially in sensitive regions requiring heightened security presence.

It is against this backdrop of **administrative strain, rising costs, and governance disruption** that the proposal of **One Nation, One Election** has regained prominence in contemporary policy discourse. Various expert bodies, including the **Law Commission of India** and parliamentary committees, have revisited the idea of restoring synchronized elections as a structural reform to India's electoral process. While ONOE promises administrative efficiency and cost-effectiveness, its historical evolution underscores the need to carefully examine the political, constitutional, and administrative factors that originally led to the fragmentation of electoral cycles.

Thus, understanding the historical background of ONOE is essential to evaluating its present-day feasibility. The evolution from synchronized to staggered elections highlights both the **administrative advantages of consolidation** and the **democratic challenges**

posed by **political instability**, making ONOE a complex reform that demands careful institutional and constitutional scrutiny.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF INDIAN ELECTIONS

The administrative structure governing elections in India is one of the most extensive and complex institutional arrangements in any democratic system. At the apex of this structure is the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, a permanent constitutional authority established under **Article 324 of the Constitution of India**. The ECI is vested with the power of **superintendence, direction, and control** over the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President. This constitutional mandate ensures the independence of the electoral process from executive interference, thereby safeguarding democratic integrity.

3.1 Election Commission of India (ECI)

The ECI functions as a **multi-member body** comprising the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. Its responsibilities include delimitation coordination, voter registration, recognition of political parties, allocation of election symbols, scheduling of elections, and enforcement of the **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**. Over the years, the ECI has evolved into a technologically sophisticated institution, adopting tools such as **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)**, **Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) systems**, and digital electoral roll management platforms. These innovations have significantly improved transparency, efficiency, and voter confidence in the electoral process.

In the context of simultaneous elections, the ECI would play a central role in coordinating election schedules across multiple tiers of governance. However, such a role would also require expanded logistical capacity, enhanced coordination with state governments, and statutory clarity to manage overlapping electoral jurisdictions.

3.2 Role of State Election Commissions

Parallel to the ECI, **State Election Commissions (SECs)** are responsible for conducting elections to **Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies**, as mandated

under **Articles 243K and 243ZA** of the Constitution. Although SECs operate independently of the ECI, they often rely on the same administrative machinery, personnel, and security forces. This dual structure creates administrative overlaps, particularly during periods when local body elections coincide with state or national elections.

Under a simultaneous election framework, harmonizing the functioning of the ECI and SECs would become a significant administrative challenge, necessitating institutional coordination mechanisms and possible legislative alignment.

3.3 Central Government Ministries and Administrative Support

The successful conduct of elections depends heavily on the cooperation of various **central government ministries and departments**, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Railways, and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. These ministries provide critical support in areas such as **security deployment, transportation of election materials, communication infrastructure, and public awareness campaigns**.

For instance, the deployment of **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)** during elections is coordinated by the Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure a free and fear-free voting environment. In the case of simultaneous elections, the demand for CAPF personnel would increase substantially, raising concerns about overstressing national security resources.

3.4 District Election Officers and Local Administration

At the operational level, the electoral process is administered by **District Election Officers (DEOs)**, who are usually senior civil servants appointed by the ECI. DEOs are responsible for setting up polling stations, appointing polling personnel, managing logistics, ensuring voter accessibility, and coordinating with local law enforcement agencies. Their role is crucial in translating national-level election directives into effective ground-level implementation. Conducting simultaneous elections would significantly increase the workload of district administrations, as they would be required to manage multiple ballots, voter awareness campaigns, and security arrangements concurrently.

3.5 Polling Personnel and Field-Level Execution

The backbone of India’s electoral administration is its vast network of **polling personnel**, including presiding officers, polling officers, booth-level officers (BLOs), and volunteers. These individuals are typically drawn from government departments such as education, revenue, and public works. While their participation ensures administrative reach, it also results in temporary disruption of essential public services.

In a simultaneous election scenario, the requirement for polling staff would multiply, raising concerns about availability, training quality, and administrative efficiency. Ensuring uniform standards of training and conduct across the country would be a major challenge.

Table 1: Key Administrative Actors in Indian Elections

Stakeholder	Role
Election Commission of India (ECI)	Supervisory authority ensuring free and fair elections
State Election Commissions	Conduct elections to Panchayats and Municipalities
Central Government Ministries	Logistics, security coordination, funding
Police & CAPF Units	Maintenance of law and order, election security
District Election Officers	Local-level election management
Polling Staff and Volunteers	On-field execution of polling process

4. FEASIBILITY: STRENGTHS AND READINESS

The feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections in India depends primarily on the **institutional strength, administrative preparedness, and technological capacity** of the electoral machinery. India’s experience in conducting elections at an extraordinary scale provides a strong empirical basis to assess whether such a reform is administratively achievable.

4.1 Institutional Capacity

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** is widely regarded as one of the most robust and credible election management bodies in the world. It has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to conduct elections involving hundreds of millions of voters across diverse

geographical, linguistic, and socio-political contexts. The institutional strengths of the ECI form the foundational basis for considering the feasibility of simultaneous elections.

One of the key strengths of the Indian electoral system is its **extensive polling infrastructure**, comprising more than one million polling stations across the country. The ECI has consistently ensured voter accessibility, even in remote and difficult terrains such as mountainous regions, forested areas, deserts, and island territories. This nationwide physical infrastructure significantly enhances administrative readiness.

Technological integration has further strengthened institutional capacity. The introduction of **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** and **Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** systems has improved efficiency, transparency, and voter confidence. Digital platforms such as the **Electoral Roll Management System (ERMS)**, online voter registration portals, and mobile applications for election monitoring have streamlined administrative processes and reduced manual errors.

Another critical aspect of feasibility lies in **human resource training and deployment mechanisms**. The ECI has developed standardized training modules for polling personnel, presiding officers, and sector magistrates. These training systems ensure uniformity in electoral conduct across states. The Commission's experience in conducting **multi-phase elections**, often spanning several weeks, demonstrates its capacity to manage complex scheduling, logistics, and inter-agency coordination.

Example:

The **2019 General Elections**, conducted in **seven to eight phases** across the country, involved coordination among central ministries, state administrations, security forces, and polling staff across multiple time zones. The successful execution of this exercise highlights the ECI's logistical competence and crisis-management capabilities. This experience strengthens the argument that, from an institutional standpoint, the ECI possesses the foundational capacity required for simultaneous elections, provided adequate legal and administrative support is extended.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

Despite strong institutional capacity, the implementation of simultaneous elections presents significant **administrative challenges** that must be critically examined. These challenges relate primarily to **human resources, logistics, security, and governance continuity**.

5.1 Human Resources

India's electoral workforce constitutes one of the largest temporary administrative mobilizations in the world. It includes election officers, booth-level officers (BLOs), teachers, clerical staff, engineers, revenue officials, and security personnel drawn from both central and state services. While this decentralized workforce enables widespread coverage, it also places a heavy burden on the regular functioning of government departments.

Simultaneous elections would require the **deployment of a much larger, fully trained workforce across all districts at the same time**. This raises concerns regarding availability, training quality, and administrative fatigue. Longer and more intensive training cycles would be necessary to ensure that personnel are adequately prepared to handle multiple ballots, voter identification procedures, and polling protocols simultaneously.

Challenge Example:

Estimates suggest that conducting nationwide simultaneous elections could require the deployment of **approximately 10–11 million polling officials** at once. Such large-scale mobilization risks overstressing administrative capacity, disrupting essential public services such as education, healthcare, and local governance.

5.2 Logistical Constraints

Logistics constitute one of the most complex dimensions of election management. Simultaneous elections would necessitate the **printing, transportation, storage, and distribution of EVMs and VVPAT units** for both parliamentary and assembly constituencies at the same time. Ensuring secure movement of election materials across states, especially in sensitive or remote areas, would significantly increase logistical pressure.

Additionally, polling stations would need to be equipped to manage **multiple ballots or voting units**, voter queues, and extended polling hours. The demand for

transportation, warehousing, communication networks, and technical support would increase substantially, thereby amplifying costs and administrative complexity.

6. CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS

Beyond administrative feasibility, the proposal of simultaneous elections raises **serious constitutional questions**, particularly concerning federalism, democratic accountability, and legislative autonomy.

6.1 Federalism and State Autonomy

India's Constitution envisages a **federal structure** with clearly defined legislative tenures for Parliament and State Assemblies. Under **Article 83**, the Lok Sabha has a fixed term of five years, while **Article 172** prescribes a similar tenure for State Legislative Assemblies. Any attempt to synchronize elections would require **constitutional amendments** to these provisions.

Moreover, altering assembly tenures—either by extending or curtailing them—raises concerns about **democratic legitimacy** and voter mandate. The frequent use of **Article 356 (President's Rule)** to manage premature dissolutions further complicates the feasibility of maintaining synchronized election cycles.

6.2 Impact on Special Provisions

Certain states such as **Nagaland, Assam, and Jammu & Kashmir (prior to reorganization)** have historically operated under special constitutional or statutory arrangements due to security, demographic, or political considerations. Imposing uniform election schedules on such states without tailored safeguards could undermine regional autonomy and constitutional flexibility. Therefore, ONOE would require **context-specific constitutional accommodations** rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

7. CASE LAWS AND JUDICIAL VIEWPOINT

The Indian judiciary has not directly adjudicated upon the constitutionality of simultaneous elections but has laid down important principles relevant to the debate.

7.1 Rojer Mathew v. South Indian Bank Ltd. (2019)

In this landmark judgment, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, emphasizing that constitutional amendments must not disturb fundamental constitutional principles such as **federalism, separation of powers, and democratic governance**. Although the case did not deal with ONOE directly, it is relevant in assessing whether amendments facilitating simultaneous elections could withstand judicial scrutiny.

7.2 Judicial Silence and Interpretative Guidance

The Supreme Court has not declared ONOE unconstitutional. However, judicial observations in various cases suggest that while **Parliament possesses the power to amend the Constitution**, such amendments must preserve the federal balance and democratic ethos. Thus, ONOE is legally permissible only if implemented through **carefully drafted constitutional amendments** that respect state autonomy.

8. COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL INSIGHT

Country	Election Type	Frequency
United States	Staggered elections	Every 2 years
United Kingdom	General + Local elections	Occasionally concurrent
Brazil	Presidential + Parliamentary	Every 4 years
Indonesia	Presidential + Legislative	Every 5 years

Lessons from Comparative Democracies

Comparative analysis indicates that **unitary or semi-presidential systems** find it easier to conduct simultaneous elections. Federal democracies, on the other hand, often adopt staggered election cycles to preserve regional autonomy. India's federal complexity makes ONOE administratively and constitutionally more challenging than in countries like Brazil or Indonesia.

9. EMPIRICAL DATA, TABLES AND CHARTS

Table 1: Estimated Election Expenditure

Year	Type	Estimated Cost (INR)
2014	Lok Sabha	₹3,000 crore
2016	State Elections	₹1,500 crore
2018	State Elections	₹2,000 crore
2019	Lok Sabha	₹4,000 crore
Total	2014–2019	₹10,500 crore

Frequent elections significantly increase public expenditure and administrative mobilization.

10. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Phased Administrative Roadmap:** A gradual transition over 10 years.
2. **Constitutional Amendment Commission:** Bipartisan and consultative.
3. **Infrastructure Strengthening:** Enhanced EVM, VVPAT, and digital systems.
4. **Security Planning:** Dedicated election logistics and security units.
5. **Pilot Simultaneous Elections:** Limited implementation in selected states.

11. CONCLUSION

Simultaneous elections offer potential administrative efficiency, cost reduction, and governance continuity. However, the reform presents formidable challenges related to **human resources, logistics, constitutional structure, and federal balance**. While the Election Commission of India possesses strong institutional capacity, successful implementation of ONOE requires **constitutional consensus, administrative strengthening, and phased execution**. Without these safeguards, the reform risks undermining democratic pluralism rather than enhancing it.

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