



Challenges to One Nation One Election in a Diverse India

Dr.S.Bharathi¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Vunki Sannarudrappa Law College, Ballari, Karnataka.

Article Info

Article History:

Published: 26 August 2026

Publication Issue:

Volume 3, Issue 8
August-2026

Page Number:

628-634

Corresponding Author:

Dr.S.Bharathi

Abstract:

One Nation One Election refers to conducting Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections concurrently across India. The goal is to cut expenses, eliminate governance interruptions from frequent polls, and rationalize the electoral system. The approach, which was first used from 1951 and 1967, has recently received more interest as the government investigates its practicality through expert groups and constitutional talks. Presently, the Joint Parliamentary Committee is reviewing the One Nation One Election Bill i.e. 129th Amendment to the Constitution of India. The Law Commission of India (170th Report) also suggested revisiting this system to increase its effectiveness. If adopted, the plan would need elections just once every five years, at both the national and state levels. However, there are many concerns raised in the adoption of this concept through Constitutional amendment. For example, there are concerns that once the One Nation One Election provisions are adopted it may contravene Article 14 (equality before the law) and result in the indirect imposition of President's Rule, giving the Union government effective influence over state governments. This paper tries to analyse the challenges to implementation of One Nation One Election in India and identifies the lacunae in the existing bill pending before the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Keywords: Election in a Diverse India

1. Introduction

Indian legislatures having five-year terms i.e. Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, had simultaneous elections between 1951 and 1967. The elections were discontinued in 1968-1969 when several State Assemblies dissolved prematurely; the Lok Sabha was also dissolved prematurely in 1970 for the fourth time. Since May 1970, elections for State Assemblies have been held at different times than Lok Sabha elections, making it difficult to manage election costs. Several bodies (Law Commission, Parliamentary Standing Committee) have stated that the current election process has large amounts of cost and requires the diversion of significant amounts of administrative resources. They also found that frequent Model Code of Conduct (MCCs) caused by multiple elections makes managing public policymaking, approved development projects, and delivering services more difficult. The government established a high-level committee to determine the feasibility of simultaneous elections in September 2023.¹

The committee found that simultaneous elections would (1) strengthen and ensure continuity and predictability of government, (2) reduce policy paralysis and disruption, (3) reduce expenses, and (4) increase the participation among all eligible voters. Further, it recommends the simultaneous elections be held in two phases. The recommendation for

¹ PRS, The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 [Simultaneous Elections/One Nation One Election], <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-twenty-ninth-amendment-bill-2024>

holding Lok Sabha and State Assembly Elections at the same time has recently been proposed (the Panchayat and Municipal elections would take place within 100 days of this election). To facilitate simultaneous elections, two new bills have been introduced into Lok Sabha: the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024. The two bills are sent through a Joint Parliamentary Committee headed by Mr. P.P. Chaudhary.²

2. Key Features of the Bill

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 grants the Election Commission authority to hold all Lok Sabha and all State Assembly elections simultaneously (termed "Simultaneous Elections"). The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 extends the authority to hold simultaneous elections to all Union Territory Assembly Elections.

Commencement of Simultaneous Elections: The provision for the commencement of simultaneous elections as outlined in the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 would take place when the President provides a notification at the time of the first meeting after a general Lok Sabha election; however, the term for any State or Union Territory Assembly constituted after this date will end with the end date of the full term of Lok Sabha. This means that all future elections for Lok Sabha and all State and Union Territory Assemblies will take place simultaneously.

If a Lok Sabha or a state or UT assembly is dissolved earlier than their full-term (5 year), the election for the Lok Sabha or the state or UT assembly will be conducted for an additional time equal to the balance of the 5-year term. This will result in all Lok Sabha and state assemblies being elected every 5 years.

There will be a new provision in the Constitution that if the Election Commission of India believes that the election for a state assembly cannot be held at the same time as the rest of the assemblies (to be held through simultaneous elections), it will make a recommendation to the President of India to postpone the election for that State assembly until after the other assemblies are elected. If the election for the state Assembly is deferred until after the simultaneous elections are completed and this means the normal term for that State Assembly will be from the date of the simultaneous elections and will finish when the next Lok Sabha is completed and constituted. However, this same process does not exist in other amendments to the UT law.

3. Why is Simultaneous Elections Required?

The Constitution (Amendment) bill's Statement of Objectives and Reasons (SOR) indicates that there are several shortcomings in the current election process. These are: i) elections are very expensive and require a lot of time to complete; and ii) when there is a frequent election cycle between Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, there is an MCC that gets imposed frequently and this halts all development and disrupts the delivery of services. To fix these problems, the bill proposes simultaneous elections. Simultaneous elections can change the nature of political and electoral

² Ahmed, Z., & Kuruvilla, S. J. (2024). The idea of one nation—one election: Its potential risk and significance for India. *Journal of Polity & Society*, 16(2), 115–126.

activities in India. The next question is whether the cost of holding elections along with the effects of the MCC warrant changing the current electoral process. Below we list those areas of concern regarding the current electoral process.³

a. Cost of Expenditure on Elections

According to the Standing Committee on Law and Justice (2015), based on estimates provided by the ECI, the government's total cost of conducting elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was approximately Rs 4,500 crores. These figures account for approximately 0.25% of the Central Government budget for 2015-16 and approximately 0.03% of GDP in 2015-16. The ECI provided a separate set of estimates for the total cost associated with each Lok Sabha election from 1957 through 2014 and they averaged 0.02% to 0.05% of the overall GDP during this period. Therefore, one could argue that the direct government costs associated with conducting elections are not very large.

Candidates and political parties may spend funds in various ways on campaigning, campaigning supplies and assisting candidates during elections. As an example, during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, seven political parties reported total expenses of ₹2,378 crore. The reported expenditure figures are likely to be understated, therefore it is estimated that approximately ₹1.35 lakh crore will be incurred from the expenditure related to the conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in 2024.

b. Length of time taken conducting elections

The number of phases and overall duration of the processes associated with the conduct of Lok Sabha elections has increased over time. For example, there was generally a maximum of 3 to 4 days between the first and final election days or in the elections conducted in the years 1970 and 1980; however, from the 2009 elections until today the maximum number of days has exceeded 25, with the highest number occurring in 2024. The maximum duration between the first election day and final election day was 43 days in 2024. The maximum number of election days held during the period from 1977 through 1998 was four or fewer. The maximum number of election days has increased in recent Lok Sabha elections, with ten election days held in the 2014 elections and seven in both the 2019 and 2024 elections. The total number of phases and duration of each phase for Assembly elections has also seen substantial variations.⁴

The number of voters has increased over those years, but there have also been technological advancements such as the change to EVMs from ballot papers, improved financial resources, improved manpower, and an improved law and order situation throughout the country. This may raise the issue if we could examine the election calendar to reduce the time used for elections and how long the MCC will be in effect.

c. MCC has an impact

³ Ankit, A. (2025). Towards electoral efficiency: Constitutional, political, and logistical dimensions of One Nation, One Election in India. *International Journal of Sociology and Political Science*, 7(4), 115–117.

⁴ Debroy, B., & Desai, K. (2017). Analysis of simultaneous elections: The what, why and how. The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy.

The imposition of MCC when elections are announced creates some restrictions for the party in power so that they cannot use the government to gain an unfair advantage during the elections. Such restrictions can be: (1) restrictions on advertisements paid for out of the public purse and (2) prohibitions on announcing financial grants in whatever form or making any promise regarding financial grants and laying the foundation stones of projects or schemes, (3) prohibitions on making any ad hoc appointments to government posts and public sector undertakings which may have an impact on the elections.

Both the SoR accompanying the Constitution Amendment Bill and the report by the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections have stated that the repeated elections and extended periods of imposition of the MCC will produce a paralyzed policy process and cause disruptions in the overall governing process.⁵

4. Key Issues under the Bill

Multiple Committees have considered that concurrent elections will promote stability in government. In 1948 when proposing that the Constituent Assembly consider the Draft Constitution, Dr, B.R. Ambedkar said that for an Executive to be democratic, it was important that it be both stable and accountable to the people creating the Executive. He went on to state that democracy does not currently provide both for an Executive which has an equal measure of stability or accountability; further adding that the Parliamentary System functions with more emphasis on accountability than with stability. He observed that the need for daily executive accountability to the people as measured by the Parliament through questions, debates, motions and no confidence motions alone, was great enough to warrant a different method of accountability than that which would be afforded to an Executive by the Electoral System currently used in India.

In a Presidential System of Government there is an established fixed term of Office for the Executive; in a Parliamentary System of Government the duration of the Executive's term is dependent on the continuous Majority of Legislators in the Legislature whom the Executive has to maintain. Legislators hold the Executive accountable on a daily basis within the Legislature and throughout their Period of Office via questions from the constituents, debates on pertinent issues and voting on Resolutions and No Confidence motions; furthermore, Legislators will be accountable to their constituents directly via regular Elections.

The proposed legislation would allow for elections for Lok Sabha and Assemblies to be held concurrently. To implement the provisions, the President could publish a notification of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha following a General Election. The term of all State/UT Assemblies constituted after the publication of the notification would end on expiry of the full term of the Lok/Sabha. The five-year period will run from the date of the first sitting of Lok Sabha. If the Lok Sabha or a State/UT Assembly is dissolved prior to the full term, an election for a remainder of the five-year term will take place. Every five years, this will ensure synchronization of elections for Lok Sabha and all Assemblies.

⁵ Singh, A. P., & Srivastava, A. (2024). Legal perspectives on the feasibility of 'one nation, one election'. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 7(2), 3427–3442.

The Bill could impose limits on the length of time Legislatures remain in office in some circumstances. The framework proposed under the Bill may create situations where Legislatures are in office for short periods of time both at the inception and ongoing.⁶

Governments having a limited time in office will not have time for an adequate governing process. Having a short-term legislature will not give any minister adequate time to become familiar with the governing process, which will result in either governing or creating policies. These issues contributed to establishing five-year terms in the Constitution. Initially, a four-year term was incorporated in the Draft Constitution. Upon further review, the Constitutional Czechoslovakian advisor, Mr. B. N. Rau, consulted with then Prime Minister De Valera of Ireland in 1947 and revised it to provide for five-year terms. Mr. De Valera indicated that under parliamentary systems of government, ministers will generally require approximately one year at the start of the ministerial term to become familiar with the governing process. The last year of the ministerial term is typically used for preparing for the next electoral period. In a four-year term, there would be a minimum of two years in which to have a successful ministerial term, which would not be sufficient for effective planned governance or government.

If the Bill is passed into law, it could result in assemblies or Lok Sabha elections held within a very limited time frame (e.g., possibly as little as a year or shorter). There are not many countries with short legislative terms (less than one year), unlike those with long terms (more than four years). Among parliamentary democracies, Sweden has legislation comparable to that outlined in the Bill. This means that if an election is held before the end of the parliamentary term, the elected parliament will only hold office until the end of that parliamentary term (which is typically four years from the date of being elected). Early elections were not held in Sweden after it moved to a "unicameral" or one-chamber government in 1971.

Belgium adopted a similar system to Sweden in addition to their previous legislation and established that all legislative elections would also be held on the same day as European Parliament elections in 2014. Whenever an early election is called, the newly elected legislature will only have authority for the remaining five years. This occurred in 2018 when the Belgium Federal Government lost a confidence vote and was asked to remain in office as a "caretaker" government to avoid conducting further elections in close proximity to the original election.

The Election Commission (ECI) may recommend that the President postpone elections for state legislature under the proposed legislation. If the ECI believes that it is not feasible to hold elections for both the State Legislature and the Lok Sabha together at the same time, it may recommend that the President issue an order for the delay of elections to the State Legislature that are later than any election for the Lok Sabha that was previously scheduled to occur at the same time as the delay of State legislative elections. If the elections to the State Legislative Assembly are postponed,

⁶ Dr. Prasanna Vijay, "Harmonizing Democracy: Assessing The Feasibility And Implications Of One Nation One Election In India" *Journal of Legal Studies and Research*, Volume 9 issue 6 November- December 2023

the term of that State Legislative Assembly may be reduced in accordance with future elections aligning with the future scheduled election cycles of the State Legislature and Lok Sabha.⁷

The Bill does not provide any guidelines for the ECI to evaluate with regard to its recommendations for the action to be taken by the President regarding the proposal for postponing State Legislative Assembly elections. It is not clear what events will allow the ECI to take such actions. The Constitution of India, Article 356, provides a three-part test to determine if elections should be postponed due to an emergency in that State and/or due to the declaring of Presidential Rule in that State and/or due to finding it would be difficult for the ECI to conduct an election in that State. Both the emergency being declared and Presidential Rule must receive approval from both Houses of Parliament; however, the Bill does not provide for such approval and therefore reduces the threshold for the ECI being able to submit a recommendation for the delaying of elections.

There is uncertainty surrounding the governance of states if elections are delayed following the dissolution of the State Assembly. According to the Constitution, a State Assembly expires five years after it is established. Normally, by the time the next simultaneous elections are held, the corresponding State Assembly would have already completed its mandated five-year term. In addition to the provisions for holding simultaneous elections, the Bill allows for elections to state assemblies to be extended indefinitely, based on a recommendation from the ECI. The timeframe for any such extension remains unspecified in the Bill. Because of this, a situation may develop in which there is no assembly in a state while the elections are held.

Should an election be delayed without an assembly present in that state when the election occurs, there is currently no information in the Bill regarding how the state will have its government operated and what authority will exist for doing so. Most likely in this situation, either a caretaker government or President's Rule will be necessary until elections are held. A caretaker government is established by the Governor and operates only until elections occur. If President's Rule is imposed, it must be ratified by Parliament within a two-month period. Since both of these scenarios exist, thus involving the actions of constitutional bodies other than the ECI, it would seem clear that the ECI's enabling legislation can result in creating an undefined situation where there are no actions nor available processes to rectify this scenario.

5. Conclusion

The Constitution Amendment Bill's Objects and Reasons Statement states that elections cost too much and take too long. Furthermore, the frequent conduct of elections results in the implementing of the Model Code of Conduct multiple times, causing disruption to development activities. The question is whether these issues are sufficient justification to change the electoral process.

If the Bills were to pass state Legislative bodies would be elected for a shorter period of time than previously established, in some situations, this could be less than one year. If this were to occur, there would be little to no time

⁷ Singh, A. K., & Grewal, U. (2024). Application and challenges to the concept of one nation—one election in India. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Projects and Studies*, 12(2).

for the Minister to become familiar with his or her Departments to (for that minister to run an effective government). Currently, the Constitution provides statutory authority through Article 356, to delay the conduct of the election for a State Assembly (government). An election of State Assembly under Article 356 may be delayed under certain limited and specific circumstances, also requiring that this delay be approved by Parliament. The ECI under the new Bill may only request the President that a State Assembly election be delayed without meeting any requirements or specifications. The Constitution Amendment Bill does not place a time limit on the length of time a State Assembly election may be deferred; therefore it remains possible that a State will exist without an Assembly for longer durations. These challenges also need to be addressed by the present JPC Committee.

References

1. Ahmed, Z., & Kuruvilla, S. J. (2024). The idea of one nation–one election: Its potential risk and significance for India. *Journal of Polity & Society*, 16(2), 115–126.
2. Ankit, A. (2025). Towards electoral efficiency: Constitutional, political, and logistical dimensions of One Nation, One Election in India. *International Journal of Sociology and Political Science*, 7(4), 115–117.
3. Debroy, B., & Desai, K. (2017). Analysis of simultaneous elections: The what, why and how. The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy.
4. Dr. Prasanna Vijay, “Harmonizing Democracy: Assessing The Feasibility And Implications Of One Nation One Election In India” *Journal of Legal Studies and Research*, Volume 9 issue 6 November- December 2023
5. PRS, The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 [Simultaneous Elections/One Nation One Election], <https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-twenty-ninth-amendment-bill-2024>
6. Singh, A. K., & Grewal, U. (2024). Application and challenges to the concept of one nation–one election in India. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Projects and Studies*, 12(2).
7. Singh, A. P., & Srivastava, A. (2024). Legal perspectives on the feasibility of ‘one nation, one election’. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 7(2), 3427–3442.