

# One Nation, One Election In Federal Democracies: A Comparative Study Of Global Experiences

Dr. Seema Devi<sup>1\*</sup>, Shashank A Anand<sup>1</sup>, Babu Lal<sup>1</sup>, Shivam Chauhan<sup>1</sup>, Arvind Yadav<sup>1</sup>, Shiva Kashyap<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> Asst. Professor, K.M.G.G.P.G.C., Badalpur (G.B. Nagar), affiliated to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, U.P. (India)

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, K.M.G.G.P.G.C., Badalpur (G.B. Nagar), affiliated to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, U.P. (India)

**Citation:** Dr. Seema Devi, et al (2024), One Nation, One Election In Federal Democracies: A Comparative Study Of Global Experiences, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(5), 10298-10301, Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4265

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" has garnered significant attention and debate in recent years, especially within the framework of federal democracies. This research paper conducts a comprehensive comparative analysis of the global experiences surrounding the implementation or discussion of synchronized elections in countries with federal systems of governance. The primary objective of this study is to examine the practicality, challenges, and implications of harmonizing electoral cycles at various levels of government in federal democracies. It delves into the political, constitutional, and logistical considerations that influence the decision to pursue such electoral reforms. By focusing on a diverse set of countries, including India, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, and South Africa, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the concept's feasibility and impact in distinct federal contexts. The paper explores the historical development and current status of discussions or implementations related to "One Nation, One Election" in each country, taking into account the unique features of their federal systems. It assesses the potential benefits of synchronized elections, such as cost reduction and improved policy continuity, while also considering the potential drawbacks and concerns related to voter fatigue, constitutional constraints, and political strategies.

**Keywords:** Nation, election, federal, global.

## Introduction

Federal democracies, often characterized by the coexistence of national and subnational levels of government, grapple with a unique challenge i.e., the frequency of elections. In the past decades, India has witnessed hundreds of state assembly elections, and the costs associated with these repeated electoral exercises are substantial, both in terms of financial resources and administrative burdens. Data from the Election Commission of India reveals the staggering financial implications of frequent elections. The Election Commission of India estimated that the 2019 Lok Sabha elections cost approximately \$7 billion USD, while state assembly elections added significantly to the overall expenditure. The economic strain stemming from recurrent elections is not unique to India; it resonates across federal systems worldwide. Beyond the fiscal aspect, the sheer frequency of elections disrupts the continuity of governance. Legislative bodies are frequently in election mode, diverting the attention of elected representatives from policymaking to campaign activities. This poses a challenge to effective governance and the timely implementation of key policies and programs. Evidence suggests that frequent elections can lead to voter fatigue and declining voter turnout. Voters may become disenchanted with the constant need to cast their ballots, which could undermine the essence of democratic participation and representation. While "One Nation, One Election" discussions have gained traction in India, it is important to broaden our perspective. "Prime Minister's address at the concluding session of the 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference suggested simultaneous elections at every level, using a common voter list. He proposed using digital innovations in the legislative process."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, "The government considers various proposals and suggestions for electoral reforms, including the concept of "one nation one voter list." These reforms are viewed as an ongoing and continuous process aimed at improving the

<sup>1</sup> Press Information Bureau (PIB) Delhi. (2020, November 26). PM Addresses the Concluding Session of 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference. Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1676032>

accountability and transparency of the electoral process.”<sup>2</sup> Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set up a committee to explore the feasibility of introducing a "One Nation, One Election" system. This proposal entails conducting elections simultaneously for both the Lok Sabha (the national parliament) and state assemblies across India. The committee, led by former President Ram Nath Kovind, marks the fourth attempt to evaluate the practicality of synchronized elections. “The "One Nation, One Election" idea aims to simplify elections, cut costs, and reduce governance disruptions. However, it faces significant constitutional and logistical challenges, including the need for constitutional amendments and political consensus. Opposition parties see it as a power-centralization tactic, citing its timing alongside political challenges for the ruling party.”<sup>3</sup>

The "One Nation, One Election" concept has garnered attention in various federal countries, including India, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, and South Africa. In India, discussions around synchronized elections aim to reduce the staggering cost of conducting separate state and national elections, estimated at over \$6 billion in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls alone. The United States, with its decentralized election system, faces a similar debate. “The Congressional Research Service reported that the 2018 midterm elections cost \$5.2 billion, and while synchronized elections could potentially reduce expenses, implementing such a system would require substantial changes to state election laws.”<sup>4</sup> Canada and Australia have also considered the idea as a cost-saving measure, though their federal structures pose challenges. In Germany, a federal parliamentary republic, debates have centered on synchronizing elections to streamline the process, but differences in state election schedules and autonomous election procedures complicate the matter. South Africa, with its federal structure, has explored synchronized elections to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness, but its complex political landscape adds layers of intricacy to the proposal. These discussions highlight the multifaceted nature of the "One Nation, One Election" concept, with feasibility and impact varying across distinct federal contexts. The adoption of this system in multiple countries could reshape electoral practices, governance, and political dynamics globally. While it offers potential benefits, such as cost savings and political stability, it also raises questions about voter engagement and the balance between frequent elections and effective governance. It may lead to greater predictability, increased diplomatic activity, and alignment of international events. However, synchronized elections may amplify nationalistic rhetoric and focus on internal issues, potentially affecting diplomatic ties. While drawbacks exist, synchronized elections may offer political stability and longer-term planning benefits in some cases.

## Case Studies of Federal Democracies

### ➤ United States

The U.S. holds elections at various levels of government, including presidential, congressional, and state elections. Synchronizing these elections has been a topic of debate, particularly as it relates to congressional and presidential elections. According to “the Federal Election Commission, the 2020 election saw a total spending of \$14.4 billion. This amount is more than double the cost of the previous record-breaking 2016 election.”<sup>5</sup> In simple terms, the 2020 election was the most expensive in history by a significant margin. “The latest suggests that the Policymakers may need to weigh the advantages of consolidated election calendars, such as cost savings and increased voter participation, against the potential impact on the quality of political representation in the democratic process.”<sup>6</sup> The decentralized nature of U.S. elections and the constitutional framework pose significant challenges to synchronizing elections across the country. While there have been discussions about synchronizing certain elections, such as local and national elections, there hasn't been nationwide implementation of "One Nation, One Election."

### ➤ Sweden

In Sweden, parliamentary elections are held every four years on the second Sunday in September, a chance for the voters to visit the polling stations to determine which individuals will represent them in parliament. Elections to the regional and municipal councils are also held on the same day as the parliamentary elections. On a similar note, India could consider a fixed election schedule to reduce the frequent disruptions caused by elections at different levels (local, state, and national).

<sup>2</sup> Press Information Bureau. (2022, December 16). Government takes appropriate steps in consultation with various stakeholders to make election process more accountable and transparent. Ministry of Law and Justice. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1884153>

<sup>3</sup> Dasgupta, S. (2023, September 2). 'One Nation, One Election', Fourth Committee. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/government/one-nation-one-election-fourth-committee>

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Director. (2018). Annual Report Fiscal Year 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/crs18\\_annrpt.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/crs18_annrpt.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Evers-Hillstrom, K. (2021, February 11). Most expensive ever: 2020 election cost \$14.4 billion. OpenSecrets News & Analysis. Retrieved from <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2021/02/2020-cycle-cost-14p4-billion-doubling-16/>

<sup>6</sup> Hartney, M. T., & Hayes, S. D. (2021). Off-Cycle and Out of Sync: How Election Timing Influences Political Representation. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 0(0), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2020.6>

However, comparing this to a small country like Sweden, it is almost impossible to conduct Municipal, Panchayats, state, and central legislature elections on the same day. It would require some state of art level technology to be developed to provide innovative solutions to this.

### ➤ Belgium

Belgium implemented synchronized elections in 1993, which involved holding national and regional elections on the same day. “This move significantly reduced the administrative burden and saved €12 million per election cycle. Belgium also adopted proportional representation in 2002, ensuring more equitable governance and accurate representation of voter preferences. They maintained consistently high voter turnout, exceeding 87%, through measures like compulsory voting and proxy voting. Efficient resource allocation was another benefit, as the integration of elections led to fewer polling stations and saved €3.3 million per election cycle. Belgium embraced technology, including e-voting trials in 2012, to modernize the electoral process.”<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, India has recently proposed the concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE), aiming to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections across all states to reduce the frequency of polls. This idea, although not new, has gained prominence in India. “The article suggests that India can learn efficiency lessons from Belgium, such as administrative streamlining, proportional representation, measures to increase voter participation, resource optimization, and technology integration, to enhance its electoral system.

Furthermore, the article emphasizes the potential role of blockchain technology in India's electoral process to improve transparency and security. By utilizing blockchain for voter registration, identity verification, and secure voting, India can enhance the integrity of its elections, aligning with global trends in electoral transparency and security.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, India has the opportunity to redefine its electoral landscape, promoting a more inclusive, efficient, and trustworthy democracy for its citizens.

### Examining the Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections in India

The Law Commission of India, under the leadership of Justice B.S. Chauhan, unveiled its draft report on Simultaneous Elections on August 30, 2018. This comprehensive report delved into the legal and constitutional intricacies surrounding the concept of holding simultaneous elections in India.

One of the primary recommendations from the Commission was “the need for constitutional amendments, modifications to the Representation of the People Act 1951, and adjustments to the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies. These changes were seen as necessary steps to facilitate the synchronized conduct of elections to both Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies. Furthermore, the Commission proposed that for such a transition to occur, at least 50% of the states should ratify these constitutional amendments, emphasizing the importance of consensus among states.”<sup>9</sup>

The advantages of simultaneous elections were highlighted in the report. These included substantial cost savings, a reduced burden on the administrative setup and security forces, timely implementation of government policies, and a shift of the administrative machinery's focus towards development activities rather than election-related tasks.

Synchronized elections can lead to significant cost savings. By holding multiple elections together, governments can reduce the expenses associated with printing ballots, hiring election personnel, and conducting campaigns. Streamlining election processes can reduce the administrative burden on election commissions and government agencies. Fewer elections mean less administrative work, which can free up resources for other essential government functions. The merits of One Nation One Election include cost savings, as synchronized elections reduce financial burdens. It promotes stable governance by reducing the frequency of elections, allowing for better planning. Efficient resource allocation benefits political parties and candidates, optimizing campaigns. Fewer election cycles reduce voter fatigue, potentially increasing voter turnout. Moreover, it enhances policy focus, allowing politicians and governments to concentrate on governance and policy-making. The concept of One Nation One Election, while promising efficiency and cost savings, comes with several significant drawbacks. Coordinating elections across India's vast and diverse landscape presents substantial logistical and administrative challenges. Implementing such a system may require complex constitutional changes, potentially leading to protracted disputes. Smaller regional parties may feel disadvantaged, hindering regional representation. Longer election cycles might reduce accountability, fostering complacency among

<sup>7</sup> Difford, D. (Guest Contributor). (2023, February 1). Why did Belgium adopt proportional representation? Electoral Reform Society. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/why-did-belgium-adopt-proportional-representation/>

<sup>8</sup> Kintsugi, S. (2013, September 5). Synchronizing Elections: ONOE's Efficiency Lessons from Belgium. Retrieved from [https://medium.com/@shailesh\\_55183/synchronizing-elections-onoes-efficiency-lessons-from-belgium-4f8ce6b851ed](https://medium.com/@shailesh_55183/synchronizing-elections-onoes-efficiency-lessons-from-belgium-4f8ce6b851ed)

<sup>9</sup> PRS Legislative Research. (Year). Law Commission Report Summary, Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections. Retrieved from [https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy\\_committee\\_reports/LCI%20Report%20Summary%20-%20Simultaneous%20Elections-edits%20v2%20FINAL%20FOR%20UPLOAD.pdf](https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy_committee_reports/LCI%20Report%20Summary%20-%20Simultaneous%20Elections-edits%20v2%20FINAL%20FOR%20UPLOAD.pdf)

elected officials. Additionally, voters could suffer from fatigue and information overload, impacting their informed participation. These concerns emphasize the need for careful consideration before implementing such a system in India.

### Conclusion

In closing, the "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) concept, while offering potential benefits, necessitates a systematic and inclusive approach to its implementation. Building a consensus among all political parties and states is foundational, achieved through transparent dialogue, consultations, and deliberations among stakeholders. The legal framework underpinning ONOE, requiring constitutional amendments and modifications to electoral laws, demands careful examination and parliamentary support, emphasizing the need for a united front.

Practical preparations are equally critical. Investment in electoral infrastructure and technology, like electronic voting machines and security personnel, is essential to ensure the smooth conduct of simultaneous elections. Aligning the electoral cycles of national and state legislatures, coupled with a legal framework to address potential challenges, forms a significant component of the transition process. This framework should be designed to handle scenarios such as no-confidence motions and premature assembly dissolutions that may arise during synchronized elections.

Furthermore, raising voter awareness about the advantages and challenges of simultaneous elections is paramount. It ensures that voters can exercise their democratic rights without confusion or inconvenience. In summary, ONOE is a multifaceted proposal that warrants careful study, data evaluation, and feedback from various stakeholders. The decision on its implementation should be a collective one, reflecting the complexity of the task and the diverse perspectives within India's democratic landscape. The future of ONOE in India should be a result of thorough consideration, with due respect for its potential impact on the country's democratic processes.

### References

1. Bansal, M. (2019). The Concept of One Nation One Election: An Analysis from Indian Perspective. *Think India Journal*, 22(4), 3077-3084.
2. Kaushik, A. K., & Goyal, Y. (2019). The desirability of one nation one election in India: Simultaneous elections. *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, 44(1/2), 110-120.
3. Bhagat, P., & Pokharyal, M. P. (2020). CONCEPTUAL REFORMS ONE NATION–ONE ELECTION. *Ilkogretim Online*, 19(4), 3929-3935.
4. Khare, S. (2022). One Nation One Election in India. *Issue 3 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, 5, 1309.
5. Shivani. (2021). One Nation One Election: A New Electoral Reform in India. *Supremo Amicus*, 24, 201.
6. Bairagi, A. (2022). One Nation One Election in India: A Contemporary Need vis-a-vis a Matter of Mere Discussion. *Issue 2 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.*, 5, 1726.
7. Press Information Bureau (PIB) Delhi. (2020, November 26). PM Addresses the Concluding Session of 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference. Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1676032>
8. Press Information Bureau. (2022, December 16). Government takes appropriate steps in consultation with various stakeholders to make election process more accountable and transparent. Ministry of Law and Justice. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetail.aspx?PRID=1884153>
9. Dasgupta, S. (2023, September 2). 'One Nation, One Election', Fourth Committee. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/government/one-nation-one-election-fourth-committee>
10. Office of the Director. (2018). Annual Report Fiscal Year 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/crs18\\_annrpt.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/crsinfo/about/crs18_annrpt.pdf)
11. Evers-Hillstrom, K. (2021, February 11). Most expensive ever: 2020 election cost \$14.4 billion. OpenSecrets News & Analysis. Retrieved from <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2021/02/2020-cycle-cost-14p4-billion-doubling-16/>
12. Hartney, M. T., & Hayes, S. D. (2021). Off-Cycle and Out of Sync: How Election Timing Influences Political Representation. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, 0(0), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2020.6>
13. Difford, D. (Guest Contributor). (2023, February 1). Why did Belgium adopt proportional representation? Electoral Reform Society. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/why-did-belgium-adopt-proportional-representation/>
14. Kintsugi, S. (2013, September 5). Synchronizing Elections: ONOE's Efficiency Lessons from Belgium. Retrieved from [https://medium.com/@shailesh\\_55183/synchronizing-elections-onoes-efficiency-lessons-from-belgium-4f8ce6b851ed](https://medium.com/@shailesh_55183/synchronizing-elections-onoes-efficiency-lessons-from-belgium-4f8ce6b851ed)
15. PRS Legislative Research. (Year). Law Commission Report Summary, Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections. Retrieved from [https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy\\_committee\\_reports/LCI%20Report%20Summary%20-%20Simultaneous%20Elections-edits%20v2%20FINAL%20FOR%20UPLOAD.pdf](https://prsindia.org/files/policy/policy_committee_reports/LCI%20Report%20Summary%20-%20Simultaneous%20Elections-edits%20v2%20FINAL%20FOR%20UPLOAD.pdf)