

# One Nation, One Election in India: A Constitutional Feasibility Analysis

S S Ahluwalia

**Abstract:** *The proposal for “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE) has re-emerged as a major theme in debates on electoral reform in India. This article examines whether a constitutionally designed framework for simultaneous elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies is legally feasible, institutionally workable and normatively defensible within India’s parliamentary federal order. The article argues that the proposal cannot be evaluated only in terms of political preference or administrative convenience; it must be tested against constitutional text, the basic structure doctrine, the logic of parliamentary responsibility and the practical realities of electoral governance. Drawing on the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, earlier reports of the Law Commission of India and the Parliamentary Standing Committee and recent academic and policy literature, the article identifies the principal constitutional provisions that would require amendment and examines the associated concerns relating to federalism, democratic accountability, premature dissolution and voter behaviour. The article concludes that ONOE is constitutionally feasible in principle, but only if it is implemented through a carefully limited amendment package, broad-based political consultation, safeguards for state autonomy and a transitional model that avoids disproportionate extension or curtailment of legislative terms. A two-cycle or phased synchronisation model may offer a more prudent path than an all-at-once restructuring. The article therefore treats ONOE neither as an inherent constitutional threat nor as a self-evident institutional remedy, but as a reform proposal whose legitimacy depends on design, proportionality and democratic consensus.*

**Keywords:** *Simultaneous elections, One Nation One Election, Constitution of India, federalism, parliamentary democracy, electoral reform, governance.*

## 1. Introduction

India is the world’s largest democracy, but it is also perhaps the only large democracy that has gradually slipped into what may be called a condition of “perennial electioneering.” Elections are, of course, the lifeblood of representative government; no democrat can complain of the people speaking. Yet democratic legitimacy does not require institutional disorder. A constitutional republic must not only conduct elections fairly; it must also design the electoral calendar in a manner that serves governance, public accountability, administrative economy and national development. The proposal popularly described as “One Nation, One Election” should be seen in this broader constitutional frame.

The central idea is simple. Elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies should, as far as reasonably possible, be held together within a common electoral cycle. Such simultaneity does not imply voting in every constituency of India on a single day. It merely requires that the national and state electoral calendars be aligned so that the country is not repeatedly placed under prolonged campaign mode and recurrent administrative disruption. The recent High-Level Committee chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind concluded that frequent elections impose direct and indirect

costs on governance, investment, social cohesion and public administration and recommended a phased constitutional pathway toward simultaneous elections (High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections [HLC], 2024).

The debate on ONOE has often been framed in sharply polar terms. Some accounts present it as a transformative institutional reform that could reduce the frequency of elections, lower governance disruption and improve policy continuity. Others view it as a potentially centralising measure that may blur the distinction between national and state-level political mandates. A serious constitutional analysis must move beyond both celebratory and alarmist framings and ask a narrower question: whether and under what conditions, simultaneous elections can be accommodated within India’s constitutional structure.

This article approaches that question from a doctrinal and institutional perspective. It does not assume that the status quo is normatively ideal, nor does it assume that synchronisation is desirable simply because it may yield efficiencies. Instead, it evaluates ONOE against four tests: textual feasibility under the Constitution, compatibility with the basic structure doctrine, consistency with the parliamentary form of government and practical viability in a complex federal democracy. The aim is to assess whether ONOE can be designed in a man-

ner that preserves electoral competition, state autonomy and democratic accountability while addressing the costs of persistent electoral asynchrony.

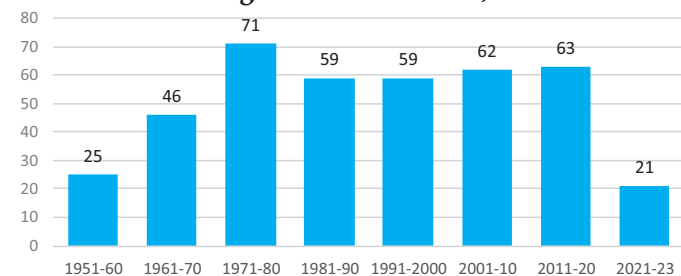
## 2. The Historical Logic of Simultaneous Elections

The ONOE proposal is often described as radical. Historically, it is restorative. India's first four general election cycles broadly followed a simultaneous model. The first general elections under the Constitution, conducted in 1951–52, elected the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies in one integrated democratic exercise. The same pattern continued in 1957, 1962 and 1967. In fact, the second general elections required certain State Assemblies to be dissolved slightly before the expiry of their full terms precisely to preserve electoral synchrony—an indication that the architects and administrators of India's electoral system regarded simultaneous elections as a desirable constitutional norm rather than an accidental convenience (HLC, 2024).

The break came later. The disruption of synchrony was caused by premature dissolutions, unstable governments, fractured mandates and repeated resort to Union Government interventions in state level governance. The High-Level Committee notes that the decadal frequency of elections rose sharply once simultaneity was lost. While the first decade, 1951–1960, saw 25 elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies taken together, the 1971–1980 decade saw 71 such elections, a pattern that remained persistently elevated thereafter (HLC, 2024). The same report observes that since 1986 there has not been a single year without at least one State Assembly election somewhere in India. That is not democratic abundance; it is institutional diffusion. The decadal increase in the number of elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is illustrated in Figure 1.

The historical point is crucial for constitutional analysis. If simultaneous elections had been alien to the constitutional order, the Indian Republic could not have operated on that basis for its formative decades. The original constitutional architecture allowed common terms to function. It was political contingency—not constitutional impossibility—that fractured the cycle. ONOE, therefore, is not the invention of an authoritarian imagination. It is an attempt to respond to a constitutional drift that has produced escalating transaction costs.

**Figure 1: Decade-wise number of elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, 1951–2023.**



Source: Author's chart based on High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Table 1.2, p. 14.

## 3. The Contemporary Problem: Perennial Elections and Interrupted Governance

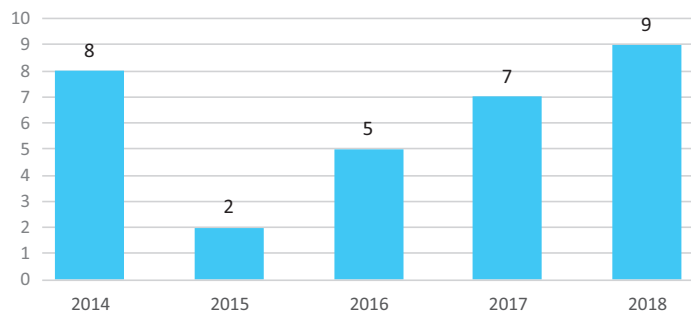
The case for ONOE begins with the lived reality of the Indian state. Contemporary governance is repeatedly interrupted by election notifications, the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), security deployment, redeployment of civil servants, revision of logistical priorities, campaign-driven fiscal behaviour and the diversion of political attention from policy to immediate electoral arithmetic. The problem is not merely that elections cost money. The problem is that the country remains in a near-permanent state of mobilisation.

The HLC's economic appendix makes an important intervention in this debate. It argues that asynchronous election cycles have consequences that extend far beyond official election expenditure. Using comparative evidence between simultaneous and non-simultaneous election episodes, it suggests that real GDP growth at both the national and state levels tended to be higher in synchronous election periods, while inflation was lower; public expenditure also appears to shift more toward capital formation under synchronised cycles (HLC, 2024). Even those who contest the magnitude of these effects must accept the basic channel through which the disruption operates: recurrent elections increase uncertainty and extend the cumulative period during which governments operate under behavioral restrictions associated with elections.

Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai (2017) had earlier argued that in 2014 the imposition of the MCC and the clustering of elections substantially interrupted governance for roughly seven months of the fiscal year. Whether one adopts their exact estimate or not, the broader proposition is difficult to deny. When every level of government must continuously calculate impending elections in one state or another, policy sequencing suffers. Administrative decision-making becomes timid. Public debate becomes short-term. Populism acquires structural incentives.

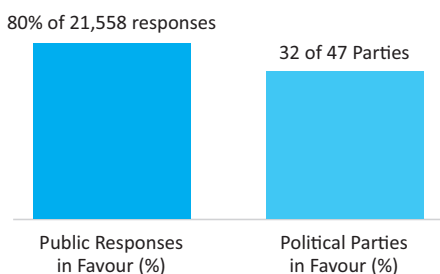
The burden falls not only on governments but also on citizens. Frequent elections require repeated mobilisation of public personnel, schools, security forces and transport systems. Migrant workers incur travel costs and wage losses each time they return to vote. The HLC notes that India's migrant population may exceed 450 million and that repetitive electoral travel burdens those least able to absorb it (HLC, 2024). Industry bodies consulted by the Committee similarly argued that recurrent elections disrupt production cycles and labour continuity (HLC, 2024). A constitutional democracy must remain accessible to voters; it need not remain inefficient for them. The pattern of staggered State Assembly elections in recent years is depicted in Figure 2. The extent of support for simultaneous elections, as recorded by the High-Level Committee, is presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 2: The cycle of State Assembly elections, 2014–2018.**



Source: Author’s chart based on Chetia (2020), Figure 2, drawing on Election Commission of India statistical reports.

**Figure 3: Indicative support registered by the High-Level Committee.**



Source: Author’s chart based on High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Executive Summary, pp. 2–3.

### 4. Constitutional Feasibility: The Core Question

The most serious objection to ONOE is constitutional. India is a parliamentary federation; can such a polity validly adopt a synchronised election cycle? The answer depends on how the reform is designed.

The Constitution currently provides maximum terms—not inviolable fixed terms—for the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies. Article 83(2) provides that the House of the People shall continue for five years unless sooner dissolved. Article 172 provides a similar rule for State Assemblies. Articles 85 and 174 empower the President and Governors, respectively, to summon, prorogue and dissolve the legislatures within the constitutional framework. Article 356 allows President’s Rule in extraordinary circumstances. In short, the existing constitutional design accommodates both regular terms and premature dissolutions. It is this elasticity that has over time produced asynchrony. The key constitutional provisions relevant to the implementation of simultaneous elections, along with their present position and implications, are summarised in Table 1.

Constitutional feasibility, therefore, does not turn on whether the present text already mandates simultaneous elections; it plainly does not. It turns on whether Parliament may amend the Constitution to create a new electoral architecture that defines a common “full term,” recognises the concept

of an “unexpired term” where a House is dissolved early and provides for fresh elections that fill only the remainder of the common cycle. The HLC answers this in the affirmative and proposes insertion of a new Article 82A, together with consequential amendments to Articles 83, 172, 327 and later to Articles 324A and 325 for local-body alignment and a common electoral roll (HLC, 2024).

From an amendment perspective, this is well within the broad amending power of Parliament under Article 368, subject of course to the basic structure limitation. The Constitution has repeatedly been amended to modify legislative terms, electoral arrangements, federal institutions, anti-defection rules, local self-government and reservation frameworks. There is no doctrinal rule that election schedules are constitutionally frozen. The real legal issue is whether synchronisation would damage the basic structure by undermining democracy, federalism or the parliamentary system. In my view, it would not.

**Table 1: Core constitutional provisions impacted by ONOE**

Provision	Present position	Implication for ONOE
Art. 83(2)	Lok Sabha has a maximum five-year term unless sooner dissolved.	Needs alignment with a common full-term framework and the concept of an unexpired term.
Art. 85	President may summon, prorogue and dissolve the House of the People.	Would continue, but dissolution consequences would be linked to the common electoral cycle.
Art. 172	State Assemblies have a maximum five-year term unless sooner dissolved.	Requires a harmonised rule for full term and mid-term replacement.
Art. 174	Governor may summon, prorogue and dissolve the State Legislature.	Would remain, subject to the synchronisation framework enacted by amendment.
Art. 356	President’s Rule may interrupt normal state electoral cycles in exceptional cases.	Its existence explains past asynchrony; ONOE needs rules to restore synchrony after such interruption.
Art. 327 / 328	Parliament and States may legislate on elections within constitutional limits.	Parliament would need enabling authority for consequential legal changes.
Arts. 324A & 325 (proposed/amended)	Separate local-body election management and roll-related duplication persist.	Needed in the second step for local-body synchronisation and a common electoral roll.

Source: Author’s compilation based on the Constitution of India; High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Chapter 10; and Ministry of Law and Justice (2023).

## 5. Does ONOE Violate the Basic Structure?

The basic structure doctrine, originating in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, protects the essential identity of the Constitution. Federalism, democracy, free and fair elections, judicial review and the parliamentary form are among the recognised features of that basic structure. The doctrine does not prohibit change; it prohibits constitutional destruction.

An ONOE framework would not abolish elections, curtail universal adult franchise, extinguish state legislatures, alter the representative character of Parliament or transform the parliamentary system into a presidential one. Nor would it abolish the possibility of government loss on the floor of the House. What it would do is align electoral terms and provide a legal consequence for mid-term dissolution: a fresh mandate for the balance of the common cycle rather than a new stand-alone five-year cycle. This changes electoral timing, not democratic principle.

Federalism also remains intact. Indian federalism is not a confederal bargain under which the states enjoy sovereign electoral calendars beyond constitutional coordination. Parliament already legislates the broad framework for elections under Articles 327 and 328 and the Election Commission conducts parliamentary and assembly elections across states pursuant to a common constitutional structure. The states do not cease to be states because their elections are held alongside Lok Sabha elections. Their legislative competence, executive authority, representation in national institutions and political pluralism remain untouched.

The stronger objection is psychological rather than doctrinal: simultaneous elections, it is said, would nationalise political discourse and thereby diminish state issues. That is a question of electoral sociology, not of constitutional validity. Even here the evidence is mixed and far from dispositive. The HLC records expert opinion that Indian voters are fully capable of distinguishing between national and regional issues and between national and regional parties (HLC, 2024). Experience across the federal map also shows that voters often split mandates, punish incumbents at one level while supporting them at another and behave with greater nuance than elite commentary sometimes credits them with. To assume that the electorate cannot discriminate is to underestimate the democratic maturity of the Indian citizen.

## 6. The Parliamentary Form and the Problem of Mid-Term Collapse

A more sophisticated objection arises from the essence of parliamentary government: ministries survive only so long as they enjoy the confidence of the House. If a government falls mid-term, must not the electorate or the legislature be free to

generate a new full-term political cycle? The answer is that parliamentary responsibility and electoral synchronisation can coexist, provided the Constitution clearly distinguishes between a “general election” for the full cycle and a “mid-term election” to complete the remainder of an unexpired term.

This is not alien to comparative constitutionalism. Several democracies employ devices such as constructive votes of no confidence, limited remainder terms or pre-set election windows to preserve governmental accountability without allowing every crisis to unravel the national electoral calendar. India need not copy any one model verbatim; it must, however, adopt institutional safeguards against the centrifugal effects of repeated early dissolutions.

The HLC’s proposed scheme offers one possible response. If the House of the People or a State Assembly is dissolved early because of a hung House, a no-confidence vote or another constitutional event, fresh elections may be held for the remainder of the common term rather than for a full five-year cycle. This model seeks to preserve the synchronised framework without denying the parliamentary possibility of mid-term collapse.

Comparative constitutional practice suggests that such mechanisms are not unusual. Several parliamentary systems employ devices such as constructive votes of no confidence, caretaker conventions or remainder terms to reconcile government accountability with electoral stability. Whether India should adopt a constructive no-confidence model is a matter for further debate, but the broader point is that parliamentary government does not logically preclude a synchronised electoral cycle.

## 7. The Federal Objection Reconsidered

No constitutional reform touching elections can be persuasive unless it addresses federal anxieties honestly. India is not a unitary state in administrative disguise. It is a Union of States animated by linguistic plurality, regional identity and local democratic aspiration. ONOE must therefore be defended not against a caricature of federalism but against its serious normative claims.

Three concerns are usually raised. First, that simultaneous elections will privilege national parties over regional parties. Second, that local issues will be submerged beneath national leadership narratives. Third, that shortening or extending some Assembly terms during transition would itself be constitutionally suspect.

The first two objections are not trivial, but they should be stated with precision. Regional parties do not derive their relevance solely from electoral timing; they are also rooted in language, social coalitions, leadership networks and state-specific issues. At the same time, electoral simultaneity may alter

campaign incentives and media attention in ways that advantage larger parties or national narratives. The constitutional response is therefore not to dismiss the concern, but to ask whether legal and regulatory design can mitigate it.

Much depends on institutional safeguards: separate ballots, distinct campaign finance disclosures, clearly demarcated manifesto requirements, debate formats that preserve state issues and media practices that prevent the complete subsumption of assembly contests within national narratives. ONOE is therefore best understood not as a single legal act, but as a package of constitutional, statutory, administrative and political measures.

The transition question is more difficult. To establish synchrony, some legislatures may need one-time curtailment or extension. Any such adjustment would need to be modest, transparent and justified by a publicly stated transition framework. Excessive or selectively applied term alterations would invite serious constitutional objection, not only on grounds of fairness but also because of their potential effect on representative choice.

## 8. Electoral Administration, Common Roll and the Role of Institutions

The feasibility of ONOE is not purely legal; it is administrative. India's election management system is among the most respected in the world. Yet synchronised elections on a national scale would require significant logistical preparation: additional EVMs and VVPATs, expanded storage capacity, polling personnel, transport arrangements, security deployment, training modules and inter-institutional coordination. The challenge is substantial, but it is not prohibitive.

The viability of ONOE depends not only on constitutional amendment, but also on procurement, storage, personnel training, security deployment, polling station readiness and interoperable administrative systems. The HLC further recommends that the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions prepare a detailed joint plan and updated cost estimate before implementation (HLC, 2024). This is a significant institutional point.

The proposal for a common electoral roll also warrants careful examination. In principle, harmonisation could reduce duplication and improve administrative efficiency. Yet the relationship between the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions must be structured in a way that respects constitutional boundaries and operational autonomy. A common roll should be seen as a governance reform requiring cooperative design, not as a purely technical afterthought.

Institutional trust is therefore central. Any move toward ONOE would be more credible if preceded by white papers,

parliamentary scrutiny, state-level consultations and transparent rule-making. In a reform of this magnitude, process legitimacy is closely connected to constitutional legitimacy. The timeline of upcoming State and Union Territory Assembly term completions is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Upcoming State/UT Assembly terms ending between 2024 and 2028**

Year	States/UTs	Term-end dates
2024	Arunachal Pradesh; Sikkim; Andhra Pradesh; Odisha; Haryana; Maharashtra	2 Jun 2024; 2 Jun 2024; 11 Jun 2024; 24 Jun 2024; 3 Nov 2024; 26 Nov 2024
2025	Jharkhand; Delhi; Bihar	5 Jan 2025; 23 Feb 2025; 22 Nov 2025
2026	West Bengal; Tamil Nadu; Assam; Kerala; Puducherry	7 May 2026; 10 May 2026; 20 May 2026; 23 May 2026; 15 Jun 2026
2027	Manipur; Goa; Punjab; Uttarakhand; Uttar Pradesh; Gujarat	13 Mar 2027; 14 Mar 2027; 16 Mar 2027; 28 Mar 2027; 22 May 2027; 19 Dec 2027
2028	Himachal Pradesh; Meghalaya; Nagaland; Tripura; Karnataka; Telangana; Mizoram; Madhya Pradesh; Chhattisgarh; Rajasthan	1 Jan 2028; 5 Mar 2028; 19 Mar 2028; 23 Mar 2028; 21 May 2028; 8 Dec 2028; 11 Dec 2028; 17 Dec 2028; 18 Dec 2028; 19 Dec 2028

*Source: Author's compilation based on High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Table 9.2, pp. 244–245.*

## 9. Costs, Savings and the Developmental State

Much of the public discussion on ONOE collapses into the question: how much money will be saved? That question is relevant but incomplete. Elections are not a burden to be regretted; they are a constitutional necessity. But the manner in which they are scheduled can either support or impede the developmental state.

The Election Commission's first annual report as far back as 1983 recommended simultaneous elections because separate elections generated avoidable expenditure, repeated revision operations and prolonged diversion of administrative machinery from normal developmental work (ECI, 1984). The Law Commission (1999) likewise argued that the cycle of annual and out-of-season elections ought to end and that the rule should be "one election once in five years" for the Lok Sabha and all Legislative Assemblies. The Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015) again found merit in simultane-

ous elections and proposed a practical two-phase model. The consistency of institutional opinion across decades should not be ignored merely because the issue has now acquired contemporary political salience.

The broader economic argument has also evolved. Material presented to the HLC associates synchronous election episodes with different patterns of fiscal behaviour, public spending composition and growth. These findings are relevant, but they should be treated with methodological caution: electoral timing interacts with many other variables and causal claims must therefore be stated carefully. Even so, the literature supports the narrower proposition that election frequency can generate measurable administrative and economic effects.

For that reason, the case for ONOE should not be reduced to direct expenditure savings alone. The more substantial question is whether a less fragmented electoral calendar could improve institutional continuity without disproportionately sacrificing federal responsiveness or mid-term accountability.

## 10. The Social and Moral Case

The constitutional case for ONOE is often supplemented by a democratic and administrative one. Frequent elections undoubtedly create recurring moments of political accountability, but they also require repeated mobilisation of public personnel, educational infrastructure and security resources. The relevant question is not whether elections are valuable - they are - but whether the existing pattern of electoral dispersal imposes avoidable costs on ordinary governance.

This issue is especially visible in sectors that rely heavily on local administration. Schools are converted into polling centres, teachers and public officials are repeatedly reassigned to election duty and security personnel are diverted for extended periods. These disruptions do not invalidate elections; rather, they form part of the constitutional policy context within which proposals for reform must be assessed.

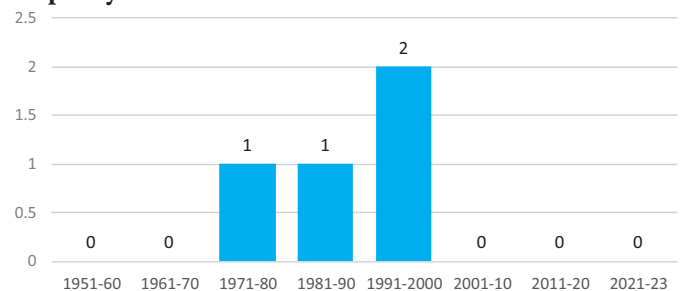
Accordingly, the normative debate should be framed in terms of institutional balance. A constitutional democracy must combine periodic electoral choice with administrative continuity. ONOE may assist in that balance, but only if it does not unduly weaken the representational distinctiveness of state politics.

## 11. Comparative Constitutional Practice

Comparative experience does not furnish a ready-made blueprint for India, but it does rebut the claim that synchronised elections are inherently inconsistent with democracy. Federal and quasi-federal systems have adopted various models to reduce electoral fragmentation. South Africa conducts national and provincial elections together, while municipal elections follow on a different but regular calendar. Sweden, too, holds elections to the Riksdag, county councils and municipal councils on a common date every four years. Indonesia moved toward simultaneous elections in stages, seeking to reduce frag-

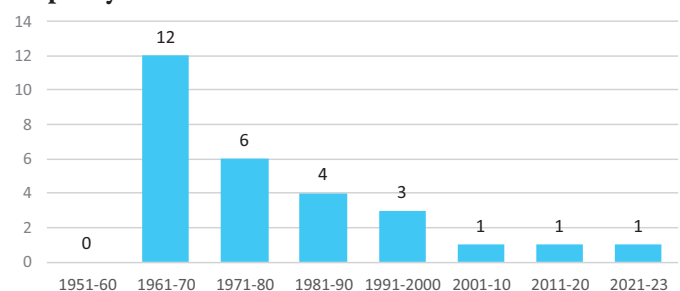
mentation and improve clarity of mandate. The lesson from these jurisdictions is not that India should mechanically imitate them. The lesson is that electoral simultaneity is a legitimate constitutional choice for plural societies, provided it is backed by clear law and robust institutions (Chadha, 2024). India's scale and complexity are greater, but our administrative capacity is also far greater than it was in the early years of the Republic. We already manage general elections of astonishing logistical depth. The constitutional question, therefore, is not whether India is too complex for synchronisation; it is whether India is willing to build the legal architecture necessary for synchronisation. Comparative constitutionalism strengthens the case for confidence, not complacency. It tells us that if the constitutional text clearly defines the rules of dissolution, replacement, term completion and institutional responsibility, democratic systems can successfully maintain regular election cycles without sacrificing pluralism. The structural sources of electoral asynchrony in India are reflected in patterns of institutional instability across parliamentary history. As illustrated in Figure 4, premature dissolutions of the House of the People have occurred periodically, disrupting the continuity of electoral cycles. Complementing this, Figure 5 shows the trend of no-confidence motions, indicating phases of political contestation and challenges to government stability. Further, Figure 6 highlights the occurrence of hung Houses, reflecting fragmented electoral mandates and coalition uncertainties. Taken together, these trends underscore how political and institutional dynamics have historically contributed to the breakdown of synchronised elections in India.

**Figure 4: Premature dissolutions of the House of the People by decade**

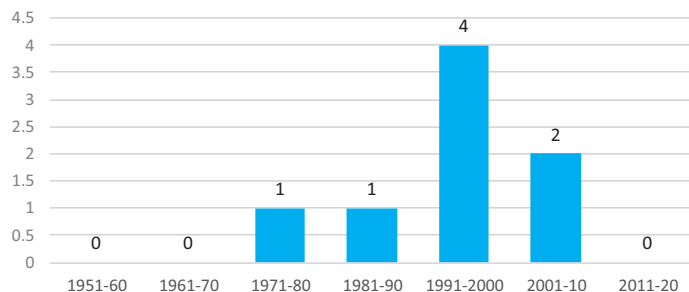


Source: Author's chart based on High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Table 9.3, pp. 250–251.

**Figure 5: No-confidence motions in the House of the People by decade**



Source: Author's chart based on High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024), Figure 9.2, p. 251.

**Figure 6: Hung House instances in the Lok Sabha by decade**

Source: Author's chart based on *High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2024)*, Figure 9.3, p. 252.

Defenders of the present system sometimes treat asynchronous elections as though they were the natural constitutional baseline. That framing is incomplete. The current pattern emerged through a series of premature dissolutions, political breakdowns and institutional contingencies rather than through any deliberate constitutional commitment to staggered elections. Recognising this history does not resolve the debate, but it does clarify that the burden of justification cannot rest exclusively on reformers.

The status quo therefore also merits constitutional scrutiny. It may encourage short electoral horizons, repeated campaign mobilisation and recurrent administrative diversion. Whether those costs are sufficiently weighty to justify reform is debatable, but they cannot be ignored when assessing ONOE.

In that sense, the constitutional question is comparative: which institutional arrangement better reconciles democratic accountability, federal pluralism, parliamentary responsibility and administrative continuity? A persuasive answer requires careful calibration rather than categorical preference.

## 12. The Judicial Dimension

Would ONOE survive judicial scrutiny? No responsible scholar can predict with confidence how a future constitutional challenge would be resolved. However, a carefully drafted amendment package would likely be assessed in relation to federalism, democracy, free and fair elections and the parliamentary form - all of which are basic-structure concerns. The stronger the safeguards, the stronger the reform's constitutional position.

Courts may also consider whether transitional provisions are temporary, even-handed and proportionate; whether state institutions retain meaningful autonomy; and whether the amendment preserves the possibility of governmental accountability within the common cycle. Judicial review would thus turn less on the abstract idea of simultaneity and more on the specific architecture adopted.

## 13. Political Consensus and the Ethics of Reform

Not every constitutionally permissible reform should be en-

acted on the strength of formal legality alone. Election law has a special democratic sensitivity and changes to the electoral calendar affect both competition and representation. For that reason, any serious move toward ONOE would benefit from the widest possible inter-party and inter-governmental consultation.

Political consensus may not be total and constitutional reform does not require unanimity. Yet the closer a reform comes to altering the rhythms of electoral competition, the greater the value of broad parliamentary debate, state consultation and public justification. Process, in this field, is not secondary to substance; it is part of substance.

## 14. A Constitutionally Sensible Roadmap

The most cautious route appears to be the phased or two-step approach discussed in prior committee reports and reiterated by the HLC. In the first stage, elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies could be synchronised within a common cycle. In the second stage, elections to local bodies could be aligned through a separate but coordinated timetable. This sequencing may reduce institutional shock while permitting administrative learning.

Any amendment package would need to address at least four matters: the constitutional basis for a common cycle; the treatment of premature dissolutions; transitional arrangements for assemblies whose terms do not neatly align; and the relationship between national and state election-management bodies. The legitimacy of the reform would depend not only on the text adopted, but also on the proportionality of the means chosen.

Equally important are the surrounding conventions. Political actors would need to avoid opportunistic dissolutions for timing advantage and election regulators would need to preserve clear distinctions between parliamentary and assembly contests. In practice, constitutional design and political behaviour would have to reinforce each other.

## 15. Responding to Critical Scholarship

A balanced assessment must engage with the principal objections in the scholarship and policy debate. Critics raise four recurring concerns: erosion of federal balance, nationalisation of electoral discourse, logistical overload and the possibility that synchronisation may prove unstable if legislatures or governments collapse prematurely. These are serious objections and should be addressed as constitutional design questions rather than dismissed as merely political resistance.

At the same time, some critiques assume that the current pattern of asynchronous elections is constitutionally neutral or institutionally costless. That assumption is difficult to sustain. The present system is itself the product of historical disruptions, repeated dissolutions and evolving political practice. It also carries governance, fiscal and administrative consequences of its own. The appropriate comparison is therefore

between two imperfect institutional arrangements, not between a flawed proposal and an idealised status quo.

The relevant constitutional test is one of proportionality and structural compatibility: does the reform pursue a legitimate objective, use constitutionally available means, preserve the essential features of democracy and federalism and incorporate safeguards sufficient to prevent disproportionate harm? ONOE should be judged against that composite standard.

## 16. Conclusion

India has reached a stage in its constitutional development where the question of electoral timing can no longer be treated as merely tactical. The problem of recurrent, overlapping elections has become a structural issue touching governance, institutional planning and federal practice. ONOE is therefore a serious reform proposal deserving constitutional evaluation rather than sloganistic endorsement or rejection.

This article has argued that simultaneous elections are constitutionally feasible in principle, but feasibility is conditional rather than absolute. It depends on a carefully drafted amendment package, a restrained transition framework, credible institutional preparation and safeguards that preserve the distinctiveness of state politics within a common electoral cycle.

The desirability of ONOE is correspondingly qualified. The reform may reduce some of the governance and administrative costs associated with persistent electoral asynchrony.

The generation that framed the Constitution gave India universal franchise before it had universal literacy. That was an act of democratic faith. Our generation must now show equal faith in the maturity of the Indian voter by giving the Republic a more rational electoral rhythm. Simultaneous elections can remove one deep structural impediment to good governance. For that reason and in the national interest, the constitutional case for One Nation, One Election deserves to be carried forward.

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## About Author



### **S S Ahluwalia**

S S Ahluwalia is a veteran parliamentarian, former Union Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader with long service in both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. Trained in science and law, he has represented constituencies in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal and is noted for his work in parliamentary affairs, Urban Development, agriculture, Information Technology and public policy. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, he contested from Asansol, West Bengal.

Email: [ssahluwalia@gmail.com](mailto:ssahluwalia@gmail.com)