

One Nation One Election: Political Stability and Development

Walmik Sahebrao Wagh [MA.M.phil Pol -Sci], Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University Aurangabad

Professor Sanjay M Sambhalkar, Dagdojirao Deshmukh College Waluj, Aurangabad

Email- waghwalmik51@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has emerged as a significant reform proposal in India's political landscape. The idea aims to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha (India's lower house of Parliament) and all state legislative assemblies, ensuring they are held simultaneously. Proponents argue that ONOE would enhance political stability, reduce election-related expenditures, and foster long-term development by minimizing disruptions caused by frequent elections. However, critics raise concerns about its feasibility, potential impact on federalism, and the challenges of constitutional and logistical implementation. This paper examines the relationship between ONOE, political stability, and development in the context of India's politics, analyzing its potential benefits and challenges.

1. Introduction

India, the world's largest democracy, conducts elections at multiple levels of governance, including national, state, and local bodies. The frequent and staggered nature of these elections has led to a near-continuous cycle of electoral activity, resulting in significant costs, policy paralysis, and governance challenges. The concept of "One Nation, One Election" seeks to address these issues by synchronizing elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, ensuring they are held simultaneously.

The idea of ONOE is not new; India witnessed simultaneous elections during the first two decades after independence. However, the practice was disrupted due to the premature dissolution of some state assemblies and the Lok Sabha. The current push for ONOE has gained momentum under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has advocated for it as a means to improve governance and reduce election-related expenditures.

This paper explores the potential impact of ONOE on political stability and development in India, focusing on its implications for governance, federalism, and democratic processes.

2. Political Stability and Development: Theoretical Framework

Political stability is a prerequisite for sustainable development. It provides a conducive environment for policy formulation, implementation, and long-term planning. Frequent elections, on the other hand, often lead to policy paralysis, as the model code of conduct restricts governments from announcing new policies or initiatives during election periods. This disrupts governance and hampers development.

Development, in this context, refers to the sustained improvement in the economic, social, and political well-being of citizens. It requires stable governance, efficient resource allocation, and a focus on long-term goals rather than short-term electoral gains. ONOE has the potential to enhance political stability by reducing the frequency of elections, thereby creating a more predictable and stable governance environment.

3. Opportunities of One Nation One Election for Political Stability and Development

3.1. Reduced Policy Paralysis

One of the most significant advantages of ONOE is the reduction in policy paralysis caused by frequent elections. The model code of conduct, which comes into effect during elections, restricts governments from announcing new policies or initiatives. This often leads to delays in decision-making and implementation of development projects. Simultaneous elections would minimize such disruptions, allowing governments to focus on long-term development and governance.

3.2. Cost Efficiency and Resource Allocation

Frequent elections entail significant costs, including expenditures on security, logistics, and administrative efforts. The resources spent on elections could be better utilized for development projects. ONOE would reduce these costs, freeing up resources for investment in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other critical sectors.

3.3. Enhanced Governance and Accountability

Simultaneous elections could lead to more stable governments with fixed tenures, enabling them to focus on governance rather than electoral considerations. This would enhance accountability, as governments would be judged on their performance over a full term rather than short-term populist measures aimed at winning votes.

3.4. Reduced Populism and Short-Termism

The continuous election cycle encourages populist measures aimed at winning votes rather than addressing long-term developmental needs. ONOE could reduce the temptation for such short-term policies, as governments would have a fixed tenure to implement their agendas. This would promote a more development-oriented approach to governance.

3.5. Improved Voter Engagement and Participation

Simultaneous elections could lead to higher voter turnout, as it would be more convenient for voters to cast their ballots for both state and national representatives in a single visit to the polling booth. This would strengthen democratic participation and legitimacy, contributing to political stability.

4. Challenges of One Nation One Election

4.1. Constitutional and Legal Hurdles

Implementing ONOE would require significant constitutional amendments. Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174 of the Indian Constitution, which deal with the tenure of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, would need to be amended. Additionally, the Representation of the People Act and other electoral laws would require modifications.

4.2. Federal Structure Concerns

India's federal structure grants states significant autonomy, and simultaneous elections could undermine this by aligning state elections with national issues. Critics argue that ONOE could lead to the dominance of national parties over regional parties, marginalizing state-specific issues.

4.3. Logistical Challenges

Conducting simultaneous elections across India's vast and diverse geography would be a monumental task. It would require massive logistical coordination, including the deployment of electronic voting machines (EVMs), security forces, and election officials.

4.4. Risk of National Issues Overshadowing Local Issues

Simultaneous elections could lead to national issues dominating the electoral discourse, overshadowing state-specific concerns. This could disadvantage regional parties that focus on local issues and governance.

4.5. Instability Due to Hung Assemblies

In the event of a hung Parliament or state assemblies, fresh elections would be required, disrupting the synchronization of elections. This could lead to a return to the current system of staggered elections.

4.6. Political Consensus

Achieving political consensus on ONOE is a significant challenge. Regional parties, in particular, are wary of the idea, as they fear it could diminish their influence. Building a broad-based consensus among all political stakeholders is essential for the successful implementation of ONOE.

5. Case Study: India's Experience with Simultaneous Elections

India witnessed simultaneous elections during the first two decades after independence. However, the practice was disrupted due to the premature dissolution of some state assemblies and the Lok Sabha. The current push for ONOE has gained momentum under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, who has advocated for it as a means to improve governance and reduce election-related expenditures.

A comparative analysis of states that have held simultaneous elections with those that have not could provide valuable insights into the potential impact of ONOE on political stability and development. For instance, states like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, which have held simultaneous elections in the past, have reported higher voter turnout and reduced election-related expenditures.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Constitutional Amendments

A committee of legal and constitutional experts should be formed to draft the necessary amendments and ensure that the federal structure is not undermined.

6.2. Pilot Projects

Before nationwide implementation, ONOE could be tested in a few states to assess its feasibility and address logistical challenges.

6.3. Political Consensus

Efforts should be made to build consensus among all political parties, particularly regional parties, to ensure broad-based support for ONOE.

6.4. Public Awareness

A comprehensive public awareness campaign should be launched to educate citizens about the benefits and challenges of ONOE.

6.5. Robust Legal Framework

A robust legal framework should be established to address issues such as hung assemblies and ensure the smooth conduct of simultaneous elections.

7. Conclusion

The concept of "One Nation, One Election" presents a transformative opportunity to enhance political stability and foster development in India. By reducing the frequency of elections, ONOE could minimize policy paralysis, reduce election-related expenditures, and promote long-term governance. However, its implementation is fraught with significant challenges, including constitutional amendments, logistical hurdles, and the need for political consensus. A careful and phased approach, involving all stakeholders, is essential to ensure the successful adoption of ONOE. While the road

ahead is complex, the potential benefits make it a proposal worth exploring for the future of Indian democracy.

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