



ELECTION FATIGUE OR FEDERAL FALLOUT? RETHINKING ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This article dives into the “One Nation, One Election” idea by looking at it through the lens of some key constitutional cases, like S.R. Bommai and Kesavananda Bharati. It asks whether holding elections for both the central government and states at the same time fits with India’s core values of federalism and democracy. To gain a better understanding, it also examines how countries like Germany, Sweden, and a few others handle this type of election scheduling. This article highlights that while holding elections all at once may save money and streamline operations, it also risks overshadowing important local issues and could lead to more centralised political power, something that may not align with India’s constitutional framework. As a middle ground, the article suggests maybe syncing some elections but not all, as a way to balance efficiency with respect for India’s unique system.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Elections, Federalism, Basic Structure Doctrine.

INTRODUCTION

The idea behind “One Nation, One Election” is a bold vision to align election schedules across the entire country. This major proposal, led by former president Shri Ram Nath Kovind through the 2024 Constitutional amendment bill, recommends holding elections for both houses of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies all at once, within a tight window of 3-4 months every five years, followed by local elections within 100 days.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, provides the legal foundation for this major electoral reform, introducing specific amendments and new articles to support its implementation. The present government has highlighted two key benefits of

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adopting this system: One big reason this idea is being pushed is the potential to seriously cut down the cost of running elections so often. Instead of spending money over and over, everything would happen in a single, planned-out cycle, which could save a lot. Another reason is that it might help governance run more smoothly. Right now, the model code of conduct kicks in every time there's an election, which slows things down. If elections were held all at once, policies could be carried out with fewer interruptions, and day-to-day administration wouldn't keep getting paused.

Still, the proposal isn't without its serious hurdles. Making simultaneous elections a reality would require major constitutional changes, with amendments needed in several key provisions, like Articles 83(2), 172(1), 85, 177, 356, 324, 325, 243K, 243ZA, and even a new one, Article 324A. That kind of broad restructuring isn't easy in a country as large and politically varied as India. With so many differing regional interests and ideologies in play, getting everyone on the same page is no small task.

The sheer number of constitutional amendments needed brings doubts about whether this reform can be pulled off within any realistic timeframe. India's political setup is built on federalism and a wide range of political voices, and trying to navigate such complex legal changes would take a kind of political cooperation we honestly don't see very often. In a democracy as energetic- and frequently divided- as India's, pulling something like this together would be anything but simple. So now the real question is this: Should India try to hold Lok Sabha and state elections at the same time to make things more efficient? Or would that decision risk damaging the country's federal structure and the democratic values that hold it all together?

ELECTION FATIGUE: THE COST OF DEMOCRATIC FREQUENCY

Election fatigue is a term used to describe the dip in efficiency that comes from holding elections too frequently. In India, elections take place almost every year in one state or another, creating an ongoing cycle of electoral activity. While, in theory, frequent elections might seem like they encourage stronger democratic engagement, the reality often plays out differently. People tend to grow weary, and voter turnout starts to drop with every new round. On the administrative side, repeated enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct slows things down, affecting governance. On top of that, running so many elections puts a major financial strain on public funds, money that could arguably be better spent on long-term development work.

FEDERAL FALLOUT: THE RISK TO REGIONAL AUTONOMY

Federal fallout refers to the possible risk of central dominance in a system meant to balance both national and regional powers. Holding elections at the same time across the country could blur that balance, making state governments more vulnerable to the influence of national political trends. When national issues take centre stage, regional concerns often get pushed to the sidelines. This kind of synchronisation risks drowning out local voices, as voters may start focusing more on central leadership than on state-specific needs. Over time, that shift could upset the delicate federal structure of India's democracy, where state governments are meant to reflect and protect regional interests in their own right. To understand how our present-day, staggered election cycle came to be, it's important to look back at a time when India held synchronised elections—and to explore the key reasons why that system eventually broke down.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENT: THE RISE AND FALL OF SYNCHRONIZED ELECTIONS

The idea of holding elections at the same time isn't new to India's democratic journey. The country's early electoral history shows that synchronised polls were once standard practice, not an exception. Back in 1951, during India's first general election, a unified electoral calendar was set in motion and continued for four straight cycles in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967.

However, that period of alignment didn't last. The system, though orderly on the surface, soon clashed with the unpredictable nature of politics in a diverse democracy. It began to fall apart with early dissolutions of state assemblies starting in Kerala (1964–1967), then Haryana (1967–1968), and a particularly unstable stretch in Uttar Pradesh between 1968 and 1970. These disruptions eventually shattered the synchronised model, giving way to the staggered election schedule we see today, with Lok Sabha and state assembly elections held separately.

The shift away from synchronised elections hit a turning point in 1970, when the Fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved ahead of schedule. What followed was an unusual development during the Emergency period - the term of the Fifth Lok Sabha was extended to 1977, using the powers granted under Article 352 of the Indian Constitution. This rare extension, set against the backdrop of a national emergency, added further complexity to the electoral timeline and helped cement the pattern of staggered elections that remains in place to this day.

170th Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws: The Law Commission's report points to a pressing need to bring elections back in sync, arguing it's not just helpful but necessary for steady governance and national progress. It lays out a plan to hold one major election every five years that would cover both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. To support this, the report outlines various legal and constitutional changes that would be required. One of the more technical ideas it puts forward is using something called the 'list system', which would better reflect proportional representation, important in a country with so many political parties. Another concern raised is how frequent elections lead to ballooning campaign costs; the Commission believes this could be better controlled if polls were streamlined. What's key here is the framing: this isn't just about cutting down the hassle. The report emphasises that synchronised elections are a foundational fix—something meant to improve how Indian parliamentary democracy works, not just how it's managed.¹

Law Commission of India Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections: When the Ministry of Legal Affairs asked the Law Commission to look into simultaneous elections, they came back with a detailed report that was meant to get people talking—and talking seriously—about this whole idea. What the Commission made clear from the start was that "simultaneous" doesn't necessarily mean everything happens on the same day. Instead, they were talking about running elections for both houses of Parliament during the same general period. The report didn't sugarcoat anything. The Commission went through all the pros and cons systematically, being honest about what this would take. Sure, we'd need a lot more Electronic Voting Machines—that's obvious—but they saw this more as a logistics puzzle we could solve rather than some impossible hurdle. It's the kind of practical approach you'd expect when smart people sit down to figure out how to make something work in the real world. It proposed that synchronised elections would reduce challenges caused by the frequent implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and reduce the financial burden caused by separate electoral cycles. Most importantly, the Commission's report extended beyond practical aspects to examine the potential constitutional provisions, carefully mentioning concerns related to federalism, democratic principles, and compatibility with the basic structure of India's Constitution.²

¹ Law Commission of India, 170th Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws (May 1999) https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/cat_electoral_reforms/ accessed 18 May 2025.

² Law Commission of India, Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections (30 August 2018) https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/LCI_2018_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf.

Seventy-Ninth Report on the Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative: The report examines the necessity for simultaneous elections while incorporating the Election Commission's recommendation for a German-style constructive vote of no-confidence that would require proposing an alternative government, thereby preventing premature dissolution. It emphasises establishing fixed terms for both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha while outlining contingency measures for prematurely dissolved assemblies—either appointing an interim government for the remainder of the term or placing the administration under presidential or gubernatorial rule. Despite opposition from political parties like the INC and CPI, who deemed the proposal practically challenging, the document presents a pragmatic two-phase implementation model: Phase 1 addresses states with terms ending within ± 6 –12 months, followed by Phase 2 encompassing remaining states alongside Lok Sabha elections. The framework they came up with is pretty clever—it suggests using Sections 14 and 15 of the Representation of the People Act from 1951 to time elections so they happen about six months before terms expire. It's one of those technical solutions that sounds simple until you realise what it would take to pull off. At the end of the day, the Commission said what most people suspected: yes, holding all elections together would make governing much more efficient, but let's be realistic here. Without some major changes to the Constitution and getting all the political parties on the same page, this isn't happening anytime soon. It's one of those reforms that looks great on paper but faces the messy reality of Indian politics.³

ANALYSIS OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS: THE 'WHAT', 'WHY' AND 'HOW'

Back in 2017, NITI Aayog put out this discussion paper written by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, which dug into whether India should hold all its elections at once. The authors didn't just throw around opinions; they methodically worked through why this might make sense, what problems we'd face, and how we could make it happen. Their main argument was pretty straightforward - the way we do elections now is frankly exhausting for everyone involved. Every few months, there's another election somewhere, which means the Model Code of Conduct kicks in again, basically putting governance on pause. The costs keep piling up, and our security forces are constantly being pulled from one state to another to manage polls. When

³ Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, Seventy-Ninth Report on the Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies (Rajya Sabha Secretariat 2015)
https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/79th_Report.pdf accessed 18 May 2025.

you step back and look at it, the current system seems almost designed to make governing harder than it needs to be. It recommends constitutional amendments to align the terms of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies while acknowledging legitimate concerns regarding potential impacts on voter behaviour and federal balance. The paper advocates for a phased, consensus-driven implementation approach that could reduce electoral costs and enhance governance efficiency without compromising fundamental democratic principles.⁴

THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF SYNCHRONIZING ELECTIONS

Frequent Elections → Administrative Burden, Cost to the Exchequer, Model Code of Conduct, Freezing Governance: India currently experiences elections every 4-5 months, whether for the Lok Sabha or various state assemblies. These frequent electoral exercises bring with them substantial financial and administrative burdens that merit critical examination. According to Election Commission estimates, simultaneous elections in 2029 would cost approximately 7,000 crores—dramatically less than the 60,000 crores spent on Lok Sabha elections alone under the current fragmented schedule. This possible saving—about 12,000 crore rupees every five years—is quite significant. It means those funds could instead be used for important development areas like education, healthcare, and infrastructure. In other words, rather than spending so much repeatedly on elections, the public money would go toward benefits that citizens can see and feel.

Besides the financial side, the Model Code of Conduct brings its own set of governance problems. This code kicks in from the moment election schedules are announced and stays active until results come in, basically putting regular government work and policy actions on pause. During these times, many citizens' concerns go unanswered because the administrative machinery simply stops. If these restrictions happened just once every five years instead of multiple times a year, it would allow for steadier governance and more reliable policy implementation. As the saying goes, "The only thing that stops more than traffic in elections is governance."

The scattered election calendar also adds hidden costs to society by pulling essential workers away from their primary duties. Teachers, for example, who should be educating the next

⁴ Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: the "what", "Why" and "How" (NITI Aayog 2017)
<https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/NITI_AYOG_REPORT_2017.pdf>
accessed 18 May 2025.

generation, end up spending hours at polling stations during various elections held throughout the year. Likewise, medical staff are often diverted from patient care to oversee elections. These repeated shifts in critical human resources take a toll on both education and healthcare systems. On top of that, India already celebrates several festivals and holidays throughout the year—from Holi in March to Diwali in October. Adding several election dates into the mix further breaks up the productive calendar, causing even more interruptions to everyday economic and administrative activities.

ECONOMIC IMPACT AND LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS OF SYNCHRONIZED ELECTIONS

Bringing Lok Sabha and state assembly elections onto the same schedule could bring about notable economic and administrative advantages. By limiting disruptions from the Model Code of Conduct to just once every five years, this unified approach would help maintain steady governance, smoother project execution, consistent budgeting, and more effective policy implementation. Financially, this would mean cutting down costs related to repeated security deployments, logistical arrangements, and cash transfers during campaign periods—resources that could instead be directed toward developmental goals. Furthermore, a reliable five-year electoral cycle could foster a stable policy environment, which might boost investor confidence and attract both domestic and foreign capital.

Rolling out the "One Nation, One Election" system by 2029 will require extensive logistical groundwork and infrastructure upgrades. The Election Commission estimates the need for around 13.6 lakh polling stations nationwide to accommodate synchronised voting. Alongside this, the electoral setup must expand to include roughly 26.5 lakh additional ballot units and 17.8 lakh control units and VVPAT machines, ensuring ample electronic voting capacity across all constituencies simultaneously.

Security will also need to be scaled up significantly, with a projected 50% increase in central security forces—about 7 lakh personnel—to maintain order and oversee fair elections throughout the country. Meeting these demands would require establishing some 800 new warehouses spread strategically across India to store and maintain the increased electoral equipment. Though these represent considerable initial investments, supporters of the "One Nation, One Election" policy argue it should be seen not as a cost but rather as an investment that will pay off through greater administrative efficiency and enhanced national economic

productivity. This outlook stresses policymaking focused on long-term development instead of short-term electoral gains.

VOTER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION BENEFITS

A significant advantage of synchronising elections is the boost it gives to voter engagement and participation. When citizens are asked to cast their votes only once every five years, instead of repeatedly for various levels of government, voter turnout tends to rise considerably. Considering India has already successfully digitised over 1.3 billion Aadhaar cards, the task of synchronising as many as 36 election calendars appears to be an administrative challenge that can be managed. Just as our nation once unified 562 princely states to form a single republic—a complex and historic feat—harmonising election schedules need not come at the cost of our democratic spirit. Furthermore, with systems in place to coordinate around 14,000 daily trains across roughly 7,000 stations, organising a single democratic exercise every five years is a realistic and achievable governance objective well within the administrative capabilities of the Country.

THE CASE AGAINST: FEDERAL FALLOUT AND CONSTITUTIONAL TENSIONS

Risks to Federalism: Dilution of State-Specific Issues, and Centralisation of Power:

Synchronised elections aren't something that happens in a vacuum; they come with serious risks, especially when it comes to watering down important state-specific issues and increasing central government control. In such a setup, urgent local problems might get pushed aside by larger national stories. For example, who's going to focus on Bengaluru's dire water shortage if the news and public attention are all about national security threats or high-profile space missions like Chandrayaan-2? When elections happen all at once, there's a real danger that national political trends could sweep through states, potentially wiping out regional parties and voices that stand up for local concerns.

India's Constitution sets it up as a federal country, and protecting this federal structure is key to how our democracy functions. Our nation is a carefully balanced union where each state has its own constitutional identity, reflecting its distinct culture, language, and social and economic conditions. Forcing all states onto a single election timeline would take away the flexibility that allows them to deal with their unique political situations and governance challenges.

There are also practical questions to consider. Suppose the central government falls in the middle of its term—what happens then? Would every state government, no matter how stable or effective, have to cut short its term and hold fresh elections? The “One Nation, One Election” idea doesn’t clearly explain how such cases would be handled. State assemblies sometimes dissolve for valid reasons like coalition breakdowns, no-confidence votes, or governance failures. To keep elections synchronised, governments might have to have their terms cut short or extended unnaturally—both of which conflict with constitutional principles and democratic norms.

For most Indian citizens, elections are rare but powerful moments to influence politics. In our system, people usually get to vote two or three times every five years, and combining all these into one election would greatly reduce the few opportunities people have to hold politicians accountable. Multiple elections spaced out across the cycle give citizens several checkpoints to voice their approval or disapproval of elected officials—something lost if everything is bundled together. The current government argues that the Model Code of Conduct interferes with governance and pulls key workers like teachers and doctors away from their jobs. But this argument doesn’t hold up well on closer look. When elections happen in Punjab, for instance, it doesn’t stop government work in far-off states like Rajasthan or Kerala. The Election Commission applies the Model Code only in the specific areas where voting is taking place, not nationwide. So, government functions continue normally elsewhere, which goes against claims that the whole country’s administration comes to a halt during elections.

The financial case for synchronised elections also doesn’t stand strong under examination. Most of the roughly ₹60,000 crore spent in the 2019 general elections came from political parties and candidates themselves, not government funds. Even if all elections happened simultaneously, parties would still need to spend heavily to campaign across every constituency. And while the government might save some administrative costs, these savings seem small compared to the big democratic costs that come with synchronisation—a trade-off that looks increasingly unfavourable when examined closely. Finally, the proposal doesn’t fully consider how difficult it would be to run elections all at once across India’s huge, diverse landscape. The Election Commission would be pushed to the limit, risking the fairness and security of the voting process—the very foundation of our democracy.

RELEVANT CASE LAWS

SR Bommai v. Union of India (1994): The landmark judgment in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994) reinforced the constitutional principle that federalism forms a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution. In this case, the Supreme Court laid down crucial limits on the misuse of Article 356, emphasising that state governments are not subordinate to the Centre, but possess an independent constitutional status. The Court firmly rejected the notion that India is a unitary state and affirmed that states have the democratic right to govern according to their political mandates and timelines. When applied to the proposal of "One Nation, One Election," the Bommai judgment raises significant concerns. By advocating simultaneous elections across all states and the Centre, such a reform risks eroding the federal autonomy guaranteed by the Constitution. It could effectively constrain a state's ability to dissolve its assembly or hold elections based on its unique political realities, thereby undermining the very federal structure that Bommai sought to protect.⁵

Kesavananda Bharti v State of Kerala (1973): The seminal case of *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) laid down the foundation of the Basic Structure Doctrine, a cornerstone of Indian constitutional law. In this historic ruling, the Supreme Court held that while Parliament has wide powers to amend the Constitution under Article 368, it cannot alter or destroy its basic structure. Key elements identified as part of this basic structure include democracy, federalism, judicial review, and the separation of powers.

In the context of "One Nation, One Election," this judgment assumes critical importance. The proposal to synchronise elections across the Centre and all states may infringe upon multiple core principles of the Constitution. For instance, if a state government collapses prematurely and elections are postponed merely to align with a national schedule, it would undermine democratic governance and electoral federalism. Additionally, the reduction in periodic electoral engagement may dilute electoral freedom and citizen participation. Even if pursued through a constitutional amendment, the Kesavananda precedent makes it clear that such changes cannot violate the basic structure, placing a substantial constitutional check on the feasibility of One Nation, One Election.⁶

⁵ *S R Bommai v Union of India* (1994) 3 SCC 1 (SC); AIR 1994 SC 1918

⁶ *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala* (1973) 4 SCC 225 (SC); AIR 1973 SC 1461

COMPARATIVE JURISPRUDENCE AND GLOBAL MODELS

The High-level Committee is on a mission to investigate the viability of simultaneous elections in India. They are studying how other countries explore their electoral processes and reviewing the timing and coordination of elections in several democratic countries like Sweden, Germany, Belgium, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The committee aimed to comprehend how various democracies strike a balance between administrative efficiency and constitutional fidelity and democratic integrity by closely examining the experiences of other countries, while hoping to find solutions that will make India's democracy more efficient and effective.

Imagine a country where the rhythm of democracy beats strong, where elections are like a big, synchronised dance. That's Sweden's highly integrated electoral model, where the Swedish system simultaneously holds municipal, regional, and national parliamentary elections every four years, which makes the process super-efficient. But what stands out is Sweden's system balances coordination with regional identity. To ensure clarity and transparency in the electoral process, voters use colour-coded ballots to differentiate between the various tiers of government. The provision of extraordinary elections is also a great feature, as it allows them to respond to changing circumstances without compromising the larger framework. This clause protects against rigidity and recognises that political developments may call for early polling.

Germany's model of partial synchronisation offers a nuanced approach to electoral reform that may be especially relevant in the Indian Context because of its strong federal structure. A healthy balance between regional autonomy and national coordination is made possible by allowing state elections to function independently while maintaining their federal elections on a set schedule. The German federal constitutional court has supported this strategy by ruling in favour of maintaining the Länder's economic autonomy. For countries like India, where states enjoy a significant degree of autonomy, by adopting a similar approach, India could potentially achieve a more harmonious balance between national and state-level electoral processes.

The Committee's examination of hybrid electoral systems in different nations demonstrates the range of approaches taken by democracies worldwide to electoral reform. For example, Belgium has made a deliberate effort to respect its multilingual and multicultural identity by choosing to schedule federal elections separately and hold regional and European Parliament elections simultaneously. South Africa adopts a different approach, allowing local

governments to independently conduct municipal polls while aligning with national and provincial elections. Then there are nations like Canada and Australia, where electoral practices are heavily influenced by the strong emphasis on state and provincial autonomy. There is no one-size-fits-all model, as these examples highlight. Building inclusive and sustainable communities requires recognising regional diversity and modifying systems to suit particular national contexts.

A clear takeaway from this comparative analysis is that while many democracies experiment with some form of electoral synchronisation, none of them enforce strict uniformity at the expense of federal autonomy. In countries with federal systems, courts have time and again highlighted the need to preserve the electoral independence of states or provinces. In Europe, the idea of subsidiarity often comes into play—essentially, the belief that decisions should be made as close to the people as possible. This principle not only supports decentralised governance but also strengthens the case for keeping separate election cycles, so that regional issues and priorities can be addressed on their terms.

When we bring these ideas into the Indian context, one thing becomes evident: any proposal for synchronised elections has to be more than just administratively efficient—it has to respect the spirit of the Constitution. The Supreme Court, in the *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* case back in 1994, made it clear that federalism isn't just a feature of our governance—it's part of the Constitution's very core. States aren't meant to function as mere branches of the central government. They have their own political realities, timelines, and democratic responsibilities. So, if India is to move toward a common election schedule, it has to be done thoughtfully and carefully. It can't come at the cost of the independence and diversity that define our federal structure. In that sense, the German model—with its balance between coordination and respect for state autonomy—might offer a more sensible and adaptable path for India than fully uniform systems like Sweden's.

One of the most valuable takeaways from international examples is the role of built-in flexibility. Countries that have implemented synchronised elections successfully haven't treated it as a rigid rulebook. Instead, they've allowed room for the system to adapt when politics takes an unexpected turn—be it the fall of a coalition or a no-confidence vote. These safeguards ensure that the democratic process remains responsive, not restricted. In India, where early dissolutions of both Parliament and State Assemblies have occurred more than once, such flexibility wouldn't be a luxury—it would be a necessity. Any move toward aligning

elections must reflect the unpredictable nature of democratic politics and be designed to accommodate it, not override it. Without that room to adapt, synchronisation could end up clashing with the very democratic values it aims to strengthen.

Multiple nations within the scope of the Committee took a rather long time to fully synchronise elections and opted for an incremental approach instead. They had the opportunity to observe how things worked in practice and adapt to the changing political climate. Perhaps this is precisely the approach India needs. A phased or hybrid approach would improve coordination of elections, while still respecting the federalism balance between the central government and the states, instead of an overnight overhaul. It would enable adaptability and ensure that changes, if any, are made in a tempered and systematic manner consistent with the core tenets of India.

The experiences of other nations make one thing clear: with thoughtful planning and respect for institutional values, synchronised elections can be implemented without undermining democratic or federal principles. But these examples are not templates—they are reference points. Every country must navigate reform through the lens of its own political culture and constitutional framework. For India, the path forward cannot be a simple replication of external models. Our democracy is built on extraordinary diversity—of language, region, identity, and belief—and anchored in a complex federal structure that gives space for this diversity to thrive. Any meaningful reform, especially one as far-reaching as synchronising elections, must reflect this reality. It requires more than administrative coordination; it demands a sensitive, inclusive approach rooted in our constitutional values. Ultimately, the goal should not be change for the sake of efficiency alone, but change that strengthens the democratic fabric, ensuring that every voice, every region, and every layer of our Republic continues to be heard, represented, and respected.

Other countries can teach us a lot, but their experiences aren't roadmaps for us to follow blindly. India has its own story, shaped by its struggles, its hopes, and the values enshrined in its Constitution. Any conversation about synchronising elections here has to begin with that understanding. It's not just about logistics or efficiency; it's about what kind of democracy we want to be. Real change can only happen when there's honest, widespread dialogue—when every voice, especially from the states, is heard and respected. Whatever direction we choose, it must be built on consensus and a legal foundation that protects the federal spirit that holds this country together.

WAY FORWARD: IS A MIDDLE PATH POSSIBLE?

Trying to impose fully synchronised elections across all levels of government in India might seem like a neat solution on paper, but in practice, it could create a tangle of new issues. India's democracy is vast, layered, and deeply federal. A "One Nation, One Election" system, while appealing in its simplicity, doesn't quite align with the on-the-ground political diversity we see across states. Rather than pushing for complete electoral uniformity, which might clash with constitutional principles and cause administrative headaches, it would be far more reasonable to consider a phased or partial synchronisation approach. This middle path offers a more balanced and realistic way forward.

The current system already shows some level of natural alignment. It's not unusual for elections in two or three states to be held close together. This tendency could be nurtured into something more structured—say, forming clusters of four or five states that vote around the same time. This wouldn't require a drastic constitutional overhaul but could still help streamline resources and reduce redundancy. More importantly, it avoids the democratic risk of national issues overwhelming local ones, which is a key concern when all elections are held simultaneously.

India's federal framework was never designed for absolute uniformity. Our Constitution deliberately gives states the power to govern on their own timelines. Imposing a central schedule on them undermines that autonomy. Partial synchronisation, by contrast, respects this structure. It allows states to retain control over their political calendars while still promoting some coordination where it's practical. It's a solution that works with the system, not against it. Another big argument in favour of synchronising elections is cost. There's no denying that elections are expensive affairs, especially for the public machinery and security forces involved. But here too, the solution doesn't have to be extreme. Instead of merging all elections into a single national event, we could focus on smarter spending. Tighten rules on campaign finance. Introduce spending caps that are enforced. Encourage states to pool resources where possible. These kinds of reforms would save money without disturbing the foundational federal structure.

What's also worth considering is the flexibility that partial synchronisation allows. If we try a phased approach, we get room to observe how things play out—how it affects voter turnout, political campaigning, administrative workload, and more. If something doesn't work, we can adjust. It's a safer, more responsible way to reform an institution as crucial as our electoral

system. After all, rushing into a fully synchronised model without fully understanding the consequences could backfire in ways we can't undo.

In politics, the best solutions are often not the flashiest ones, but the most balanced. Partial synchronisation may not sound revolutionary, but it's rooted in constitutional realism. It's respectful of India's diversity, mindful of logistical challenges, and grounded in democratic values. It doesn't try to fix what isn't broken—it simply tries to make what already exists work a little better. And maybe that's the kind of reform Indian democracy needs right now: thoughtful, careful, and inclusive.

CONCLUSION

The idea of "One Nation, One Election" is not a new one. It's a model that India tried in the past, only to see it gradually fade as the country's political and constitutional complexities came into play. If the government hopes to revive this concept today, it must do so with a clearer understanding of the realities on the ground. That means crafting more workable, well-designed mechanisms that account for the diverse challenges such a reform would inevitably face.

There's no denying that the proposal promises certain benefits, chief among them improved administrative efficiency and the potential for national unity during election cycles. But these gains cannot be pursued in a vacuum. The biggest obstacle remains the Indian Constitution itself. Any attempt at reshaping the electoral landscape must first pass the test of constitutional legitimacy. At the heart of the matter lies the principle of federalism—one of the Constitution's most deeply embedded values. No reform, however efficient or cost-saving it may appear, can be allowed to erode the foundational ideas of democracy and state autonomy. If a fully synchronised model proves incompatible with these principles, it would be wiser to shift focus. Instead of forcing uniformity, the government could aim for gradual improvements—tightening rules around election spending, strengthening the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, and making administrative processes more transparent and accountable.

The goal should not be to implement synchronisation at any cost, but rather to find a path that reflects both constitutional integrity and practical governance needs. In India, democratic strength has never come from shortcuts or rigid uniformity. It has always come from respecting the country's legal framework, its cultural plurality, and the independence of its institutions. In the end, meaningful reform must be rooted in principle. It should not come at the expense of

the very values it seeks to protect. Preserving federal balance and deepening democratic processes must remain the touchstones of any change we undertake.