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EMPOWERING DEMOCRACY: UNVEILING THE VISION OF 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'

In terms of democratic administration, the notion of 'One Nation, One Election' has sparked controversies and debates in India. The proposal is to hold all elections in the country at the same time, to streamline the electoral process, lowering costs, and improving governance efficiency. While the notion is not wholly new, its application needs significant thought and planning. Let's look into the notion of 'One Nation, One Election' and its potential for empowering democracy in India.

Ramnath Kovind's commission delivered its "One Nation, One Election" report to President Draupadi Murmu. It supported the notion of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state legislatures in the first phase.

WHAT IS 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'?

In simple words, 'One Nation, One Election' means all the citizens of India will vote to elect center and state representatives at the same time and if not at the same time, then in the same year. The 'One Nation, One Election' concept was part of the BJP's 2019 agenda. In September 2023, the Union Government formed a 'High-Level Committee on One Nation, One Election,' chaired by former President Ramnath Kovind. The Committee has met with national and state political parties

and solicited public and judicial opinions, with probable recommendations anticipated. The plan raises worries about the impact on India's democratic framework and federal system.¹

India, the world's biggest democracy, holds regular elections at the parliamentary, state, and municipal levels. These staggered elections frequently result in an ongoing cycle of electoral activity, diverting attention and resources away from government and development. 'One Nation, One Election' anticipates holding these elections every five years, matching state assembly and parliamentary contests. This synchronization is intended to provide a more focused and efficient governing structure.

HISTORY OF 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'

According to a study written for NITI Aayog by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, the concept is not new. Between 1951 and 1967, elections for the Lok Sabha and all state legislatures were conducted every five years following the promulgation of the Constitution in 1950. Indian citizens voted simultaneously in the years 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967 to elect center and state representatives at that time. The concept of returning to simultaneous polls was recommended in the Election Commission's annual report in 1983. The Law Commission also supported this proposal in 1999, when the RSS-BJP rose to prominence in elections, and leaders like LK Advani were vociferous in their support.

However, due to the early dissolution of various Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle was broken. In 1970, the Lok Sabha was dissolved prematurely, and new elections were conducted in 1971. Thus, until 1970, only the First, Second, and Third Lok Sabhas had a complete five-year tenure. The main reason why the said process was ended was the emergence of some new states and the dissolution of state assembly in the years of 1968-1969.²

¹ DRISHTI IAS, <https://www.drishitias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/examining-one-nation-one-election>, (last visited March 30, 2024).

² Megha Prasad, "One Nation, One Election": Timeline And What Past Governments Did, NDTV, (Mar.27,2024, 10:10 A.M.),<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/one-nation-one-election-timeline-and-what-past-governments-did-4348260>.

PROS OF 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'

> Cost Savings and Electoral Infrastructure:

The cost of staging elections is significant for both the government and political parties. Elections take place at irregular intervals, putting a steady strain on resources for security, logistics, and campaigns. Consolidating elections can greatly decrease financial burden, allowing for better resource allocation to development initiatives and social services. Furthermore, it can reduce the impact of money power in elections, supporting a fairer electoral field.

In the 2019 elections, there were 610 political parties and around 9,000 candidates; poll costs of around Rs. 60,000 crores, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), have yet to be recorded by political parties.³

> Model Code of Conduct's Impact:

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) established during elections postpones important policy decisions at both the national and local levels. Even current projects suffer obstacles as electoral obligations take precedence, resulting in a halt of ordinary administration.

> Promotes voter participation and engagement:

Simultaneous elections reduce residents' concerns about missing names from electoral records. Using uniform electoral rolls for all elections simplifies the process and provides voters with a more easy and trustworthy voting experience.⁴

CONS OF 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'

Nine of the past chief justices of major high courts endorsed simultaneous elections, while three expressed worries or objections. What worries did they raise? What are the hurdles to achieving the "One Nation One Election" and how does the Kovind-led panel handle them in its report? Some of are following,

> Constitutional Amendments:

³ *Supra note 01.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

The implementation will require amendments in some Articles which are, Article 83, Article 85, Article 172, Article 174, and Article 356 of the Constitution of India, 1950. The notion of ONOE raises concerns regarding what would happen if the Central or State governments collapsed in the middle of their tenure. The constitutional structure is complicated by the conundrum of holding elections in all states or imposing President's Rule.

› **Affects Federalism and the Basic structure of the Constitution:**

Simultaneous elections undermine the autonomy and independence of state administrations. This has the potential to erode the federal system while also increasing the conflict of interest between the central government and the states. The tenure of state administrations differs, and certain states are granted exceptional provisions under Article 371 of the Constitution. It is argued that changing the fixed terms for Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies would contravene the Constitution's basic structure, which states that its duration would be five years "unless dissolved sooner".

The introduction of a common election process may violate the Constitution, as highlighted in the S.R. BOMMAI case ⁵where the Supreme Court emphasized the independent constitutional existence of States.⁶

CONCLUSION

To conclude, every concept has its advantages and disadvantages but when choosing one aspect over the other it should be rational enough it should be progressive, and should have a better future with it. Here the 'One Nation, One Election' has very important pros and cons any of which are not ignorable at any cost. So here the conflict arises between the Cost of Democracy, Federalism, and Basic structure vs. the Cost of Election and Political parties. To implement this said concept main question that arises is which thing should be compromised among above mentioned.

In my opinion, the notion of 'One Nation, One Election' is a creative method to enhance democracy in India. By expediting the voting process, lowering expenses, and supporting political stability, it

⁵ S.R. Bommai vs. UOI, AIR 1994 SC 1918.

⁶ Chandrashekhar Shrivastav, 'One Nation, One Election' Explained. What Is It And How It Can Work, NDTV (Mar. 30, 2024, 8:05 P.M.), <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/lok-sabha-election-2024-news-one-nation-one-election-explained-what-is-it-how-can-it-work-5236599>.

has the potential to improve governance efficiency and increase citizen involvement. However, its execution needs a coordinated effort that balances democratic goals with practical constraints. As India continues to strive for an inclusive and strong government, the goal of 'One Nation, One Election' serves as a beacon of hope for a more empowered and vibrant democracy.