Future Prospects : 'One Nation , One Election.'(ONOE)

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Abstract

In a representative democracy, elections are a sacred political exercise. Free and fair elections represent the heart and soul of the representative form of government, serving as a means of communication between the public and the government. Electoral reforms have been a topic of intense debate in contemporary India, particularly over the last decade. The time has arrived for us to examine electoral reforms aimed at enhancing the system, ensuring free and just elections, and providing better representation of the popular will. Currently, the most pressing issues related to elections include the frequency of elections, the requirement for extensive election machinery, and the substantial costs and time invested in the electoral process. To streamline the electoral system and its procedures, radical reforms are essential. The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' proposes the simultaneous conduct of elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies in India. This initiative aims to reduce election costs, improve governance, and minimize the disruptions caused by frequent polls; consequently, the idea has gained traction in recent years. This concept presents several advantages, such as administrative efficiency and enhanced political stability, but it also encounters significant challenges, including the need for constitutional amendments, federal concerns, and practical implementation issues. A high-level committee has assessed its feasibility, yet political consensus remains a barrier to its implementation. This paper explores the future prospects, advantages, and drawbacks of the 'One Nation, One Election' concept and its potential for the future.

Keywords

Representative Democracy, Elections, Electoral Reforms ,administrative efficiency , committee, future prospects.

Introduction

The concepts of 'Democracy' and 'free and fair elections' are fundamentally interconnected. Elections serve as the cornerstone of democracy; it is challenging to conceive of democracy in the absence of elections. The establishment of free and fair elections is the primary requirement for the successful functioning of the democratic process. Elections play a crucial role in the political framework, stemming from the essential belief that the populace holds sovereignty. In any democratic system, citizens possess the desire and the right to alter their governments in accordance with their preferences, in a peaceful and organized fashion. The average citizen, in his collective form, exercising his vote at the polls conducts a social evaluation of his Parliament and the political choices made by his representative. Elections provide the executive and legislative branches with the necessary representative quality to embody the will of the populace. Undoubtedly, the most significant feature of democracy is the extensive participation of individuals in elections.

The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' envisions the simultaneous conduct of elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies in India. Although this idea is not new, it has gained momentum in recent years as a potential remedy for the frequent cycles of elections that the country experiences. Proponents of this proposal contend that it will lower costs, enhance governance, and fortify the democratic process. Nevertheless, it is not without its challenges and criticisms. Federal democracies, characterized by the coexistence of national and subnational governmental levels, encounter a distinct challenge regarding the frequency of elections. Over the past decades, India has been facing a similar

issue, with numerous state assembly elections occurring. These frequent elections incur significant costs in terms of finances and administrative efforts, while also causing inconvenience to citizens, political parties, and the government.

This situation has sparked a debate regarding the adoption of 'One Nation, One Election' – simultaneous elections. On September 2, 2023, the Government of India issued a notification establishing a high-level committee to investigate the matter of simultaneous elections. On March 14, 2024, former President Ram Nath Kovind presented the final report, comprising 18,000 pages, prepared by the committee to the current President of India, Draupadi Murmu. Subsequently, on September 18, 2024, the Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, approved the recommendations put forth by the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, chaired by former President Shri Ram Nath Kovind.

Therefore, it can be stated that 'One Nation, One Election' is a concept that envisions simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies in India. Although this idea is not new, it has gained traction in recent years as a potential solution to the frequent cycles of elections that the country experiences. Proponents of the proposal argue that it will reduce costs, enhance governance, and strengthen the democratic process. However, it is not without its challenges and criticisms. As India progresses, the future of this proposal depends on political consensus, legal reforms, and public support.

Objectives

1. This Article focus in the future prospects of 'One Nation, One Election.'
2. This Article explore the advantages of the concept of 'One Nation, One Election'.
3. It deals with the challenges and criticism of the concept of'One Nation, One Election.'
4. It promote National Integration of the Democratic Process.
5. Focus on the Future Possibility.

Review of Literature

1. The Law Commission of India (2018) - The 170th Report of the Law Commission, titled 'Reforms of Electoral Law', examined the viability of conducting simultaneous elections.

2. The Election Commission of India asserted that although simultaneous elections are technically feasible, they necessitate significant legal reforms and a consensus among political parties. It has expressed concerns regarding logistical challenges, particularly in relation to the deployment of security forces, electronic voting machines (EVM), and manpower.

3. S.Y. Quraishi - In his book 'An Undocumented Wonder - The Making of the Great Indian Election', Quraishi recognized the attractiveness of simultaneous elections but warned against compromising the federal structure and the democratic vitality of the nation.

Research Methodology

This article is on ''One Nation, One Election.'is applying qualitative and descriptive methodology drawing upon secondry sources such as government reports , academic publications , media articles.There is lack of Primary Data in this article.

Historical Background

The limited number of general elections following India's independence were conducted concurrently with the elections for state legislative assemblies. This practice persisted until 1967, but the system of simultaneous elections was interrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the early dissolution of certain state assemblies. Since 2014, Narendra Modi, who was the Chief Minister of Gujarat at that time, has advocated for simultaneous elections, arguing that it would minimize the waste of public funds and facilitate the uninterrupted progress of development initiatives,

which tend to be hindered when the model code of conduct is implemented. In India's immediate vicinity, Pakistan conducts simultaneous elections for its national parliament and state legislatures, while Nepal has been holding simultaneous elections across all three levels of government (parliamentary, provincial, and local) since the introduction of its new constitution in 2015. Additionally, Sweden conducts elections for all three levels of government at the same time, whereas Belgium holds its parliamentary and provincial elections concurrently with the EU elections. In August 2018, the Law Commission of India published its draft report advocating for the simultaneous conduct of all direct elections in the country, ranging from the panchayats to the Lok Sabha, within a specified timeframe of one year.

In recent years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has revived the concept, receiving support from the Law Commission, NITI Aayog, and various political analysts.

In 2023, the Indian government established a High Level Committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind to assess the feasibility of 'One Nation, One Election.' The committee's mandate includes investigating the constitutional, legal, and administrative modifications necessary for the implementation of this idea. As of 2025, the committee has presented a report; however, achieving consensus among political parties continues to be challenging. Some states, particularly those led by opposition parties, have voiced their skepticism.

Need for Simultaneous Elections:

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   1. Financial Burden: Holding simultaneous elections has the potential to greatly reduce the financial expenses linked to conducting multiple election cycles.   This approach minimizes the costs associated with deploying resources such as personnel, equipment, and security for each separate election.

2.   Economic Impact: Non-simultaneous elections lead to uncertainty and instability, hindering supply chains, deterring business investments, and stunting economic growth.

  3. Disruption to Governance and Policy Paralysis: The frequent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) results in policy paralysis and hampers the progress of developmental programs.

  4.   Voter Participation Challenges: Staggered elections create 'voter fatigue' and pose a considerable challenge in securing voter participation.

  5. Operational Efficiency and Resource Optimization: Conducting simultaneous elections would decrease the incidence of election-related offenses and disputes, thereby alleviating the burden on the judicial system.

High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections

The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, led by former President Ram Nath Kovind, was established by the Government of India on September 2, 2023. Its main aim was to assess the viability of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The committee gathered extensive feedback from the public and political entities, and engaged with experts to evaluate the possible advantages and challenges related to this proposed electoral reform. This report provides a comprehensive summary of the committee's findings, its suggestions for constitutional amendments, and the expected effects of simultaneous elections on governance, resources, and public opinion.

Key Takeaways:

1. Public Response: The Committee received more than 21,500 responses, with 80% supporting simultaneous elections. These responses originated from various regions across the country, including Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Nagaland, Dadra, and Nagar Haveli. The

highest number of responses came from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh.

2. Responses from Political Parties: A total of 47 political parties provided their opinions. Among these, 32 parties endorsed simultaneous elections, citing advantages such as resource optimization and social cohesion. Conversely, 15 parties expressed concerns regarding potential anti-democratic consequences and the marginalization of regional parties.

3. Expert Consultations: The Committee engaged with former Chief Justices of India, former Election Commissioners, and legal experts. A significant majority endorsed the idea of simultaneous elections, stressing the wastage of resources and socio-economic disruptions caused by frequent electoral processes.

4. Economic Impact: Business organizations, including CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM, backed the proposal, emphasizing its positive influence on economic stability by minimizing disruptions and costs linked to election cycles.

5. Legal and Constitutional Analysis: The Committee suggested amendments to Articles 82A and 324A of the Indian Constitution to facilitate simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local governing bodies.
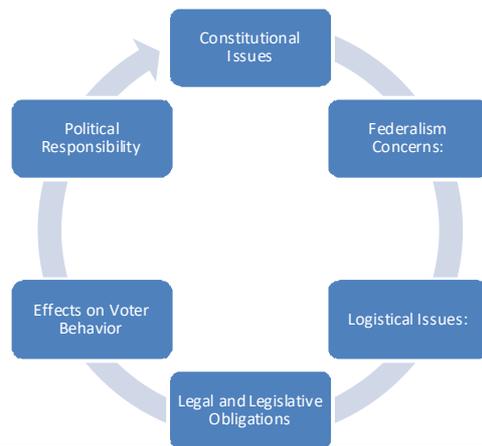
6. Phased Approach to Implementation: The Committee advised a two-phase implementation of simultaneous elections:

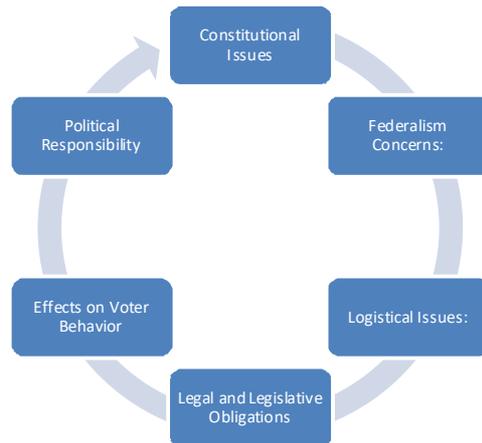Phase 1: Aligning Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies elections.

Phase 2: Coordinating elections for Municipalities and Panchayats with Lok Sabha and State Legislative elections within a 100-day timeframe.

7. Electoral Roll and EPIC Harmonization: The Committee pointed out inefficiencies in the preparation of electoral rolls by State Election Commissions and recommended the establishment of a Single Electoral Roll and Single EPIC for all three levels of government. This initiative would minimize duplication and errors, thereby ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.

Issues Related to Concurrent Elections

Constitutional Issues

Federalism Concerns:

Logistical Issues:

Legal and Legislative Obligations

Effects on Voter Behavior

Political Responsibility

1. **Constitutional Issues:** The imposition of President's Rule may be exploited to ensure synchronization.

2. **Logistical Issues:** With over 96 crore voters in India (2024), more than one million polling stations and substantial security resources are necessary. The execution of concurrent elections could overwhelm administrative capabilities.

3. **Federalism Concerns:** Constitutional Amendments regarding the duration of state legislative assemblies under Article 172 can be enacted without state ratification. Consequently, the input and influence of states are diminished.

4. **Effects on Voter Behavior:** Concurrent elections might result in the "nationalization" of local matters, causing voters to favor national parties over regional issues, thereby diminishing the representation of smaller parties.

5. **Legal and Legislative Obligations:** Modifications to several constitutional articles (such as Articles 83, 172, 327) and amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 are necessary.

6. **Political Responsibility:** Regular elections ensure that lawmakers are held accountable, whereas fixed terms may offer undue stability without performance evaluation, undermining democratic values.

Critical Evaluation of 'One Nation, One Election.'

Advantages

Following the analysis of this concept, it is evident that it possesses both advantages and disadvantages. It would lead to a reduction in public expenditure, significantly lowering costs associated with logistics, security, staff deployment, and the utilization of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The administrative machinery would be employed in a manner that lessens the burden on government operations, while simultaneously allowing for better resource allocation with less frequent deployments. Public institutions, such as schools and various services, would experience fewer disruptions. Governance would maintain continuity with fewer interruptions due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), which restricts the announcement of new schemes during election periods. One of the most promising aspects of this concept

is that it would free the government from the pressures of constant elections, enabling a focus on long-term policy planning rather than short-term populist measures. The advantages of this concept include improved participation, resulting in higher voter turnout, and a reduction in political polarization, which would alleviate ongoing complaints and promote a more stable political environment. Additionally, elections would enhance national unity and foster a sense of national integration, opening the door for broader electoral reforms in campaign financing, transparency, and accountability. This concept would also lessen the burden on political parties, thereby conserving financial and manpower resources.

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), while endorsing the idea, has presented the following points for consideration:

"While we support the simultaneous elections for both Parliament and State Assemblies, there are still several debatable issues outlined below:

A crucial point to consider is that if a hung Assembly is formed in any State, as was recently the case in Delhi, what mechanism would be available? Since President's Rule cannot be imposed for the entire remaining term of the Legislative Assembly in such a scenario, what should be the term of the Assembly constituted in the event of a re-election due to any circumstances? Such solutions must be carefully evaluated. Considering the aforementioned reasons, the Shiromani Akali Dal endorses the conduct of Simultaneous Elections for the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies in the interest of the public.

Disadvantages

The ONOE concept presents several drawbacks. As India is a federal nation, the implementation of simultaneous elections poses a threat to federalism, undermining the autonomy of state governments and allowing national issues to overshadow state-specific concerns. Additionally, there are logistical challenges that could heighten the risk of technical failures and administrative bottlenecks. Furthermore, amendments to the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act of 1951 are necessary. There exists the potential for disruption of the voter mandate, leading to legal and ethical dilemmas. One significant drawback is the weakening of local democracy, resulting in state governments becoming excessively reliant on the Centre. National issues are likely to overshadow local matters and elections. Moreover, the possibility of mid-term or hung assemblies could undermine the objectives of ONOE. Some individuals and political parties argue that this could lead to a loss of political space for national parties. A major drawback is that voters may be compelled to cast their votes for two or more levels of government on the same day, which could create confusion and negatively impact voter behaviour and election outcomes.

Future Potential of ONOE

If this concept proves effective, there exists a significant likelihood of Constitutional and Legal Reforms, along with Electoral Reforms.

Conclusion

The ONOE concept represents a reform that holds the potential to decrease election-related expenses, facilitate governance, and enhance administrative efficiency. However, it also brings forth substantial concerns; its disadvantages may pose serious threats to democracy, governance, and the constitutional framework. Any efforts to implement this idea must be approached with caution, inclusivity, and legal soundness. The future of ONOE does not lie in haste but rather in careful and collaborative execution.

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