

Feasibility of 'One Nation, One Election'

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Context:

The majority of the over 20,000 responses received by the high-level committee on 'One Nation, One Election' favoured the idea of holding simultaneous elections

About "One Nation, One Election":

1. The idea of "One Nation, One Election" envisages a system where elections to all states and the Lok Sabha will have to be held simultaneously.
2. This will involve the restructuring of the Indian election cycle in a manner that elections to the states and the centre synchronise.
3. This would mean that the voters will cast their vote for electing members of the LS and the state assemblies on a single day, at the same time (or in a phased manner as the case may be).

Purpose :

1. Reduce expenditure : It is reported that the 2014 general elections cost the public exchequer an estimated ₹3,870 crore.
2. It is argued that common elections for the Union Parliament and State Assemblies would reduce expenditure significantly.
3. Proper functioning of Government: the Model Code of Conduct comes into effect twice in a five year cycle, which affects the seamless conduct of government business and results in 'governance downtime'.
4. The system will help ruling parties focus on governance instead of being constantly in election mode.
5. Turn out increase: It will boost voter turnout, according to the Law Commission.
6. It will also reducing the strain on the administrative setup and security forces,
7. It will ensure Timely implementation of government policies, and administrative focus on development activities rather than electioneering.

Criticism :

1. Impacts voters judgement : National and state issues are different, and holding simultaneous elections is likely to affect the judgement of voters.
2. Against federalism: When an election in a State is postponed until the synchronised phase, President's rule will have to be imposed in the interim period in that state.
3. This will be a blow to democracy and federalism.
4. There are occasions where a government may not complete a full term of five years, and elections may be held again. Such occurrences are expressions of the democratic system and ought to be accepted.
5. Reduce accountability: Since elections will be held once every five years, it will reduce the

government's accountability to the people.

6. Repeated elections keep legislators on their toes and increase accountability.

Legal concerns:

1. In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court declared that the States have an independent constitutional existence, and they have as important a role to play in the political, social, educational and cultural life of the people as the Union.
2. The Constitution provides for a specific tenure for the State Legislatures, which is five years from the date appointed for the first meeting.
3. A similar provision also exists for the tenure of the Union Parliament.
4. Therefore, the introduction of a common election process would necessarily require alteration of the existing duration of a number of State Legislatures.

Feasibility :

1. As per the recommendations of the Law Commission, it would necessitate at least five constitutional amendments: in Articles 83, 85, 172, 174, and 356.
2. Article 83(2) and 172 of the Constitution stipulates that the tenure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies respectively will last for five years unless dissolved earlier and there can be circumstances, as in Article 356, wherein assemblies can be dissolved earlier.
3. The Law Commission's 2018 draft report on simultaneous elections also suggested that at least 50 per cent of the States should ratify the constitutional amendments.

Steps of the government:

1. In September 2023, the Union Government set up a 'High Level Committee on One Nation, One Election' under the chairmanship of former President of India, Ramnath Kovind.
2. The High Level Committee has met on three occasions and sought the views of various national and State political parties on the subject of a common elections schedule.

Conclusion and Way Forward :

1. The outcome of 'One Nation, One Election' has the potential to alter the fundamentals of democratic set-up and reset the federal structure, it is necessary to examine the legal issues at the earliest juncture.
2. The current committee will have to examine and recommend whether the amendments to the Constitution require ratification by the States and analyse and recommend a possible solution in a scenario of simultaneous elections.
3. Safeguards will also be required to ensure the continuity of the cycle of simultaneous Elections.
4. There is a need to reduce expenditures incurred on continuous elections and yet maintain the balance of federal polity and effective governance.