



## SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS IN INDIA: CONSTITUTIONALISM, FEDERALISM AND THE FUTURE OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

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### ABSTRACT

*The proposal for simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies—popularly described as 'One Nation, One Election'—has become one of the most consequential electoral-reform debates in contemporary India. Its supporters argue that synchronized elections could reduce repeated campaign expenditure, lessen administrative disruption, improve policy continuity and allow governments to devote greater attention to governance. Critics contend that synchronization may alter India's federal political rhythm, privilege national issues over State-level concerns, complicate the handling of premature dissolutions and reshape the relationship between legislative confidence and fixed electoral cycles. This paper examines simultaneous elections from the perspective of constitutionalism, federalism, parliamentary government and democratic representation. It uses a qualitative and analytical methodology drawing on constitutional provisions, parliamentary material, institutional reports and contemporary scholarship. Particular attention is given to the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, which proposes a mechanism for synchronizing Lok Sabha and State Assembly terms and provides for remainder-term elections following premature dissolution. As of July 2026, the proposal remained under examination by a Joint Parliamentary Committee conducting nationwide consultations. The paper argues that the central issue is not administrative efficiency alone. Electoral calendars are embedded in India's parliamentary and federal design; therefore, reform must preserve legislative accountability, State political autonomy, electoral fairness and constitutional legitimacy. The study concludes that simultaneous elections are institutionally feasible only if transition rules, premature dissolution, Election Commission powers, federal safeguards, campaign regulation and logistical capacity are addressed through broad political consensus.*

**Keywords:** simultaneous elections; One Nation One Election; Indian federalism; electoral reform; parliamentary democracy; Election Commission; constitutional amendment

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Elections are the principal mechanism through which citizens authorize and replace governments in a representative democracy. In India, elections occur at multiple levels and at different times because the Lok

Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies have independent electoral cycles. This staggered pattern has become a defining feature of Indian political life.

The proposal to synchronize elections seeks to alter this pattern by creating a common cycle for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. The debate is not entirely new. India experienced broadly simultaneous national and State elections during the early decades after independence. The cycle was disrupted when some State Assemblies and later the Lok Sabha were dissolved before completing their full terms.

Contemporary proposals therefore seek not simply to schedule elections on the same dates but to create constitutional mechanisms capable of maintaining synchronization after political instability or premature dissolution. This makes the reform far more complex than an administrative change to the election calendar.

The present paper evaluates the proposal as a question of democratic institutional design. It asks whether the anticipated gains in administrative efficiency and governance can be achieved without weakening parliamentary responsibility, federal diversity, State-level political competition or the capacity of legislatures to respond flexibly to changing political majorities.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The central problem is a tension between electoral synchronization and the logic of parliamentary government. In a parliamentary system, the executive remains in office only while it commands the confidence of the elected House. Legislatures may therefore end before their maximum five-year term. A permanently synchronized electoral calendar must explain what happens when a government loses confidence or a House is dissolved early.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 addresses this through a remainder-term mechanism: where the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved before completing its full term, the newly elected House would serve only for the unexpired portion of the synchronized cycle. This preserves synchronization but raises normative questions about shortened mandates, voter expectations and federal political autonomy.

The research problem is therefore: Can India institutionalize simultaneous elections while preserving the essential principles of parliamentary accountability, federalism, representative choice and constitutional flexibility?

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the historical evolution of synchronized and staggered elections in India.
- To analyze the constitutional framework proposed for simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.
- To evaluate the principal arguments concerning governance, expenditure and administrative efficiency.
- To examine implications for federalism, regional parties and State-level political issues.
- To assess the relationship between synchronization and parliamentary confidence mechanisms.
- To study the logistical and institutional implications for the Election Commission of India.

- To identify safeguards necessary for constitutionally legitimate and democratically fair implementation.

#### 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What constitutional changes are required to maintain a synchronized electoral cycle?
- Would simultaneous elections strengthen governance or merely reorganize political campaigning?
- How might synchronization affect India's federal structure and regional political competition?
- How should premature dissolution and loss of legislative confidence be handled?
- What institutional safeguards are necessary to protect electoral fairness and State autonomy?

#### 5. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive and analytical research design. It draws upon the Constitution of India, the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, parliamentary research, official consultation material and secondary literature on elections, federalism and parliamentary government.

The paper does not attempt to predict electoral outcomes under a synchronized system. Nor does it assume that administrative savings necessarily produce democratic benefits. Instead, it evaluates the reform according to institutional principles: accountability, representation, federal balance, electoral integrity, stability and governability.

Because the proposal remained under parliamentary committee examination in 2026, the analysis distinguishes between provisions actually contained in the introduced Bill and broader arguments made by supporters or critics. This distinction is essential for avoiding speculation.

#### 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

India's first general elections established a broadly synchronized cycle for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This pattern continued through the elections of 1957, 1962 and 1967. Synchronization was not constitutionally guaranteed; it resulted from the political circumstances in which legislatures broadly completed similar terms.

The breakdown of the cycle demonstrated the inherent flexibility of parliamentary government. Political instability, changes in legislative majorities and premature dissolutions altered election dates. Once different States entered different electoral cycles, restoring synchronization required more than administrative coordination.

This historical experience is important because it reveals that staggered elections are not simply a policy choice. They are partly a consequence of the constitutional principle that governments must retain legislative confidence. Any modern synchronization framework must therefore be designed to survive political events that naturally disrupt fixed calendars.

## 7. THE CONSTITUTION (129TH AMENDMENT) BILL, 2024

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024. According to PRS Legislative Research, it proposes simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies. The President may issue a notification on the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha following a general election, after which State Assembly terms would be aligned with the term of that Lok Sabha. The most important institutional feature concerns premature dissolution. If the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is dissolved before completing the synchronized five-year cycle, a fresh election would be held for a term equal only to the remainder of the common cycle. The proposal therefore prioritizes preservation of synchronization over granting every newly elected House a fresh five-year term.

The Bill also contemplates circumstances in which an election to a particular State Assembly cannot be held as part of the simultaneous election. In such a case, the Election Commission may recommend deferral to the President. A subsequently elected Assembly would nevertheless end when the Lok Sabha elected in the synchronized cycle completes its term.

These provisions demonstrate that the proposal is a constitutional architecture for maintaining a common electoral cycle rather than a one-time decision to conduct elections together.

## 8. PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE EXAMINATION IN 2026

The Bills were referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee after introduction. By July 2026, the Committee was continuing nationwide consultations. Official releases concerning consultations in Goa stated that legislators, officials, legal experts, academia, civil society and other stakeholders discussed mid-term elections, remainder terms, Election Commission powers, federalism and the Basic Structure doctrine.

The continuation of consultations is constitutionally significant. Simultaneous elections affect the working relationship between the Union and States and therefore require scrutiny beyond questions of election management. A durable electoral arrangement depends upon political legitimacy as much as legal validity.

Committee examination can also clarify ambiguities that are difficult to resolve through general political slogans. Questions concerning transition, no-confidence situations, emergency conditions, election deferral and the status of shortened legislative terms require precise legal drafting.

## 9. THE GOVERNANCE ARGUMENT

One of the strongest arguments for simultaneous elections is that frequent elections create a near-continuous campaign environment. Political leaders, administrative personnel and security forces may repeatedly shift attention toward electoral activity. Supporters argue that synchronization would create longer uninterrupted periods for policy implementation.

This argument has intuitive force, but it should be examined carefully. Democratic governments are always politically accountable; campaigning does not disappear between elections. Moreover, policy delays may result from administrative capacity, fiscal constraints, legislative disagreement or judicial review rather than election schedules alone.

The governance benefit should therefore be framed modestly. Synchronization may reduce the frequency of large-scale election mobilization, but it cannot by itself depoliticize governance or guarantee policy continuity. The quality of administration ultimately depends on institutional capacity and accountability.

## **10. ELECTION EXPENDITURE AND ADMINISTRATIVE COST**

Supporters also emphasize the financial cost of repeated elections. Election administration requires polling personnel, security deployment, transportation, electronic voting equipment, voter education and extensive logistical preparation. Political parties and candidates incur separate campaign expenditure.

Simultaneous elections could generate economies of scale in some administrative activities. However, a synchronized national exercise would also require a much larger concentration of personnel and equipment within a shorter period. Cost analysis should therefore distinguish between total expenditure over a five-year cycle and peak logistical requirements at the time of voting.

Campaign expenditure presents an additional complexity. Fewer election periods do not automatically mean proportionately lower political spending. Parties may concentrate resources into larger synchronized campaigns. Electoral-finance reform therefore remains necessary irrespective of the calendar.

## **11. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICY CONTINUITY**

Another frequently cited argument concerns the Model Code of Conduct. Repeated State elections are said to constrain announcements or administrative decisions in affected jurisdictions. Synchronization could reduce the number of periods in which election-related restrictions operate.

Yet the Model Code serves an electoral-integrity function by limiting the possibility that incumbents use public authority to influence voters during an active campaign. The appropriate policy question is therefore not whether such restrictions are inconvenient but whether their scope is proportionate and clearly defined.

Reform of election timing should not be used as a substitute for improving the precision of Model Code rules. A synchronized system may reduce frequency, but fair competition will still require effective restrictions during the common election period.

## 12. FEDERALISM AND STATE POLITICAL AUTONOMY

Federalism is the most important constitutional concern raised by simultaneous elections. State elections allow citizens to judge State governments on regional issues, leadership and policy performance. When national and State elections occur together, campaigns may become more interconnected.

This does not necessarily eliminate regional politics. Indian voters have repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to distinguish among levels of government. Nevertheless, the media environment, campaign finance and national leadership visibility may affect the relative prominence of State issues.

The deeper federal question concerns legislative tenure. Aligning State Assembly terms with the Lok Sabha creates a common temporal framework for institutions that otherwise possess separate democratic mandates. Supporters view this as coordination; critics may view it as an excessive orientation of State electoral cycles around the national legislature.

A legitimate design must therefore preserve the constitutional status of State Assemblies and ensure that synchronization does not imply political subordination.

## 13. REGIONAL PARTIES AND THE NATIONALIZATION OF CAMPAIGNS

India's party system includes powerful regional parties whose electoral bases and policy agendas are rooted in specific States. Staggered elections can create political periods in which regional issues dominate national attention. Simultaneous elections may change this communication environment.

The concern is not simply whether regional parties would win fewer seats; such an outcome cannot be assumed. The more defensible concern is agenda competition. During a synchronized election, national security, national leadership and Union-level economic issues may compete with local concerns for media and voter attention.

Electoral fairness therefore requires equal access to campaign communication and adequate opportunities for State-level debates. Public broadcasters, private media and digital platforms should recognize the distinct character of State contests even when polling calendars overlap.

## 14. PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT AND THE CONFIDENCE PRINCIPLE

India follows a parliamentary system in which the Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the elected House. This principle means that executive tenure depends on legislative confidence, not merely a fixed election date.

Synchronization can create pressure to make legislative terms more rigid. Yet preventing dissolution at all costs could distort parliamentary accountability by allowing an executive without majority support to continue or by forcing artificial political arrangements.

The remainder-term election mechanism offers one solution: permit dissolution and election, but allow the new House to serve only until the next synchronized cycle. This preserves the confidence principle while maintaining the calendar. Its democratic cost is that voters participating in a mid-cycle election may elect a legislature for a significantly shorter term.

The constitutional debate must therefore weigh two legitimate objectives: flexibility to respond to loss of confidence and predictability of the electoral calendar.

## **15. CONSTRUCTIVE VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE**

One reform frequently discussed in debates on political stability is a constructive vote of no confidence, under which a government can be removed only if an alternative majority is simultaneously demonstrated. Such a mechanism is used in some parliamentary democracies to reduce instability.

In the Indian context, this could potentially reduce unnecessary dissolutions, but it would represent a significant change in parliamentary practice. It should not be adopted merely as a technical device to preserve synchronization without separate constitutional analysis.

Any such reform must preserve the ability of legislators to withdraw confidence from an executive that no longer commands a majority. Stability is valuable, but accountability is foundational.

## **16. REMAINDER-TERM ELECTIONS AND THE VOTER'S MANDATE**

The proposal for remainder-term elections is central to maintaining synchronization. It is also one of the most conceptually difficult elements. Democratic elections ordinarily authorize a government for a constitutionally defined maximum term, subject to continued confidence. A shortened term changes the expected duration of that mandate.

Short terms may be constitutionally permissible, but repeated mid-cycle elections could create unusual incentives. Political parties might campaign for a House that is known in advance to have only a limited lifespan. Administrative continuity could also be affected if a government assumes office for a brief remainder period.

Clear public communication and constitutional certainty would therefore be essential. Voters must know the exact term for which they are electing representatives.

## **17. ELECTION COMMISSION: POWERS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The Election Commission of India would carry exceptional responsibility under a synchronized system. It would need to coordinate one of the world's largest recurring electoral exercises across national and State constituencies within a common period.

The 2024 Bill also proposes a role for the Commission where a State election cannot be held with the common election. This raises questions about the criteria for deferral, the evidentiary basis for recommendations and the relationship between the Commission's assessment and presidential action.

Electoral independence requires that such powers be exercised through transparent and objective standards. Decisions affecting the timing of a State election are politically consequential and should therefore be supported by publicly intelligible reasons, subject to legitimate security exceptions.

## **18. LOGISTICAL CAPACITY: PERSONNEL, SECURITY AND VOTING EQUIPMENT**

Simultaneous elections would require substantial logistical preparation. Polling stations may need to handle multiple ballots or electronic voting units, while security forces and election personnel would be deployed on a very large scale.

The proposal does not necessarily mean that every constituency must vote on the same day. Official committee statements in 2026 emphasized that simultaneous elections could still be conducted in phases. This distinction is important: synchronization concerns a common electoral cycle, not necessarily a single polling date.

A phased common election could reduce some operational pressure while preserving the principle of synchronized terms. Nevertheless, procurement, storage, testing and reserve capacity for voting equipment would require long-term planning.

## **19. VOTER BEHAVIOUR AND ELECTORAL CHOICE**

A common concern is that simultaneous elections may encourage voters to support the same party at national and State levels. Empirical claims about such effects should be treated cautiously. Voters are capable of split-ticket and differentiated voting, and Indian electoral behavior varies across regions and periods.

Even if synchronization produces some interaction between national and State voting, this does not automatically make the system undemocratic. Election schedules already influence political context. The normative issue is whether voters continue to receive adequate information and meaningful alternatives for each level of government.

Ballot design, voter education and campaign coverage should therefore make the distinction between Lok Sabha and Assembly choices unmistakable.

## **20. REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL ISSUES**

State elections often provide opportunities for concentrated debate on agriculture, employment, regional development, State welfare programmes, language, local infrastructure and leadership. A synchronized campaign could compress these debates into a crowded political information environment.

This risk can be mitigated institutionally. Media debates can be organized separately for State and national contests, party manifestos can clearly distinguish policy jurisdictions, and voter education can explain which level of government controls particular functions.

Federal democratic citizenship is strengthened when voters understand not only who is contesting but which government is responsible for which policy.

## **21. CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE BASIC STRUCTURE DEBATE**

Any major alteration to the working of elections invites examination under the Constitution's basic structure doctrine. Federalism, democracy and parliamentary government have all been recognized as fundamental constitutional principles in Indian jurisprudence.

The existence of a basic-structure question does not predetermine the validity of simultaneous elections. The relevant inquiry is whether the specific constitutional design damages or merely reorganizes the operation of these principles.

As reflected in the 2026 parliamentary consultations, federalism and basic-structure concerns remain part of the formal debate. The safest constitutional path is therefore one based on narrow drafting, clear safeguards and broad political consent rather than an assumption that administrative efficiency can override structural concerns.

## **22. DEMOCRATIC ADVANTAGES OF A COMMON ELECTORAL CYCLE**

A carefully designed synchronized system could offer genuine democratic advantages. Citizens might encounter a more predictable electoral calendar, election authorities could plan on a stable cycle, and governments might experience fewer periods of intense election deployment.

Synchronization could also encourage political parties to develop integrated national and State policy platforms. If campaign regulation ensures adequate visibility for regional issues, voters may benefit from comparing how parties connect Union and State responsibilities.

The potential advantages are therefore real, but they depend on institutional design. Synchronization is not inherently democratic or undemocratic; its effects follow from the rules surrounding it.

## **23. DEMOCRATIC RISKS**

The principal risks include excessive nationalization of political debate, shortened State mandates, concentration of campaign finance, pressure on election administration, and possible weakening of the flexibility traditionally associated with parliamentary government.

There is also a transition risk. Moving from staggered elections to a common cycle necessarily requires adjusting the terms of some legislatures. Such adjustment affects existing democratic mandates and must therefore be constitutionally explicit and politically justified.

A reform of this magnitude should be evaluated according to its most difficult scenarios, not only the ideal case in which every government completes a stable five-year term.

## 24. COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONAL LESSONS

Comparative democracies use different combinations of fixed and flexible electoral terms. Presidential systems commonly have fixed calendars because executive survival does not depend on legislative confidence. Parliamentary systems face a more complex relationship between stability and flexibility.

India should therefore avoid importing institutional mechanisms without regard to its own federal and parliamentary structure. Comparative experience can offer tools—such as constructive no-confidence mechanisms or fixed election windows—but their compatibility with Indian constitutional practice requires independent evaluation.

Institutional borrowing is most successful when adapted to domestic political conditions rather than treated as a ready-made solution.

## 25. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Simultaneous elections require a durable constitutional mechanism, not merely administrative coordination of polling dates.
- The 2024 Bill's remainder-term mechanism is the core device for preserving synchronization after premature dissolution.
- The strongest potential benefits concern predictability, reduced frequency of election mobilization and administrative coordination; these benefits should not be overstated as guarantees of better governance.
- Federal concerns arise both from campaign nationalization and from aligning State legislative terms with the Lok Sabha cycle.
- Parliamentary accountability must remain superior to calendar stability; a government that loses confidence cannot be preserved solely to protect synchronization.
- The Election Commission would require clear legal standards, resources and transparent procedures for any power affecting deferral of State elections.
- Regional political competition can remain viable under synchronization, but institutional and media practices should protect State-level issue visibility.
- Transition rules are among the most politically sensitive aspects because they may shorten or otherwise adjust existing legislative terms.
- Broad inter-party and State-level consultation is essential because electoral rules structure competition among the very actors asked to approve them.

## 26. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build broad constitutional and federal consensus before implementation rather than treating simultaneous elections as an ordinary administrative reform.
- Define the transition mechanism precisely, including how existing Lok Sabha and Assembly terms will be aligned.
- Preserve the parliamentary confidence principle and allow legitimate government change even when it complicates the common electoral cycle.
- Clarify remainder-term rules so voters know in advance the duration of every mid-cycle mandate.
- Establish objective statutory criteria and reason-giving requirements for any Election Commission recommendation to defer a State election.
- Conduct independent logistical assessments of voting equipment, personnel, security and storage requirements before fixing an implementation date.
- Strengthen campaign-finance transparency to prevent synchronized elections from producing excessive concentration of political expenditure.
- Ensure separate visibility for State and national manifestos, debates and policy issues during common campaigns.
- Develop voter-education material explaining the distinct responsibilities of Union and State governments.
- Consider stability mechanisms such as constructive no-confidence only through separate constitutional scrutiny and not as an automatic appendage to synchronization.
- Provide robust judicially reviewable procedures for disputes concerning election timing and term calculation.
- Periodically review the system after implementation, with parliamentary reporting on cost, turnout, administrative performance and federal effects.

## 27. CONCLUSION

The debate over simultaneous elections is ultimately a debate about the architecture of Indian democracy. Its significance extends far beyond the convenience of holding elections together. Electoral timing interacts with parliamentary confidence, State autonomy, political communication, campaign finance, election administration and the duration of representative mandates.

The case for reform is strongest when framed around predictable election management and reduction in repeated administrative mobilization. It becomes weaker when synchronization is presented as a guaranteed solution to governance problems that arise from many other institutional causes. Likewise, criticism is strongest when it identifies concrete risks to federalism or accountability rather than assuming that any common electoral cycle must necessarily centralize politics.

India's constitutional system has historically combined unity with political diversity and parliamentary flexibility. Any new electoral framework should preserve these characteristics. The remainder-term mechanism proposed in the 2024 Bill demonstrates that synchronization can coexist formally with premature dissolution, but it also creates new democratic questions concerning shortened mandates and voter expectations.

As of 2026, continued Joint Parliamentary Committee consultations demonstrate that the proposal remains an evolving constitutional project rather than a settled electoral arrangement. This deliberative stage is important. Rules governing elections should command legitimacy across governments, opposition parties, States and citizens because those rules define the conditions under which political power is contested.

Simultaneous elections may be institutionally possible, but constitutional feasibility should not be confused with democratic desirability. The appropriate standard is whether reform strengthens electoral administration while preserving federalism, parliamentary responsibility, political pluralism and meaningful voter choice. If these safeguards are secured through transparent drafting and broad consensus, synchronization could become a significant electoral reform. Without them, administrative efficiency would be an insufficient justification for altering the political rhythm of the world's largest electoral democracy.

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