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One Nation, One Election, Many Constitutional Questions: Federalism at the Ballot Box

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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" (ONOE), has moved from a recurring electoral reform debate to a concrete project of constitutional amendment. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 proposes the insertion of Article 82A and amendments to Articles 83, 172 and 327 in order to synchronise parliamentary and State electoral cycles. The proposal is defended on grounds of administrative efficiency, reduction of election expenditure, continuity in governance, minimisation of repeated application of the Model Code of Conduct and greater policy stability. Yet its constitutional significance extends far beyond election management. It raises foundational questions concerning federalism, representative democracy, parliamentary accountability, State autonomy, premature dissolution of legislatures, the power of the Election Commission of India, the constitutional position of the President, and the Basic Structure Doctrine. This paper examines the historical evolution of simultaneous elections, the recommendations of the High Level Committee chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, the architecture of the 129th Amendment Bill, and developments before the Joint Parliamentary Committee up to October 2026. It argues that synchronisation is not unconstitutional merely because elections are held together; India itself followed substantially simultaneous electoral cycles until 1967. The constitutional difficulty lies instead in the mechanisms necessary to preserve synchronisation once political events produce different legislative lifespans. Curtailing elected State Assemblies, limiting governments elected after premature dissolution to a "remainder term", and permitting postponement of a State election on the recommendation of the Election Commission potentially alter the working relationship between democratic accountability and federal autonomy. Drawing upon Supreme Court jurisprudence on democracy, federalism, constitutional amendment and free and fair elections, the paper concludes that electoral efficiency cannot by itself justify constitutional centralisation. Any simultaneous election framework must preserve the independent democratic mandate of the States, maintain legislative accountability and incorporate stringent safeguards against arbitrary postponement or manipulation of electoral cycles.

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I. INTRODUCTION: ONE ELECTORAL CALENDAR, MANY CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACIES

Few proposals in contemporary Indian constitutional politics appear as administratively simple yet constitutionally complex as "One Nation, One Election". At first glance, the idea seems to concern little more than timing. Instead of electing the Lok Sabha in one year and different State Legislative Assemblies at different points during the following five years, the electorate would periodically vote for the Union and State legislatures during a common electoral cycle. The apparent attraction is obvious. India is almost perpetually in some stage of electoral mobilisation. Governments campaign, administrative personnel are requisitioned, security forces are deployed, schools are used as polling stations, political expenditure rises and the Model Code of Conduct periodically restricts certain governmental announcements. Simultaneous elections promise to compress this recurring activity into a single national electoral period.[1] Yet constitutional democracy cannot be evaluated only by administrative calendars. Elections are not merely logistical exercises; they are moments at which distinct constitutional governments obtain independent democratic mandates.

The expression "One Nation, One Election" can therefore be misleading if it conveys an idea of one political mandate. India is constitutionally one Union but electorally consists of several democratically accountable governments. Parliament and every State Legislative Assembly derive legitimacy from separate electorates voting on different political questions, governmental performances and distributions of legislative competence. The constitutional controversy is consequently not whether citizens may receive two ballot choices during the same election period. They already do so in States where Assembly and Lok Sabha elections coincide. The controversy concerns what must happen to the constitutional lifespan of elected governments so that this coincidence becomes compulsory and permanent.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 marks the most concrete legislative attempt so far to institutionalise such synchronisation.[2] Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024, it proposes a new Article 82A and amendments to Articles

[1] *See generally* Shazia Majid, Waseem Ahmad Bhat & Javaid Ahmad Bhat, *One Nation, One Election? Federalism, Constitutional Limits, and the Politics of Synchronization in India*, REGIONAL & FEDERAL STUDIES (2026), https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2026.2661952.

[2] The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, Bill No. 275 of 2024, https://sansad.in/getFile/BillsTexts/LSBillTexts/Asintroduced/const%20amdt1217202425225PM.pdf (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

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83, 172 and 327.[3] Once synchronisation is achieved, a premature dissolution of either the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly would lead not to a fresh five-year legislature, but to a legislature serving only the "unexpired term" remaining in the common five-year cycle. The Bill further permits the Election Commission of India to recommend that an Assembly election should not be held simultaneously if it considers simultaneous conduct infeasible, following which the President may order that the particular State election be held later.

These provisions transform ONOE from an argument about convenience into a debate about constitutional structure. The normal parliamentary rule is political rather than calendrical: a ministry continues so long as it commands legislative confidence, while a House ordinarily lasts for five years unless sooner dissolved. Articles 83(2) and 172(1) deliberately contemplate premature dissolution. Indian parliamentary democracy therefore contains constitutional flexibility because governments may fall, coalitions may collapse, alternative governments may be formed, and fresh elections may become unavoidable. Synchronisation seeks to superimpose a common temporal structure upon this politically contingent model.

This creates an inherent tension between two constitutional objectives: stability and accountability. During the framing of the Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar expressly contrasted the presidential preference for stability with the parliamentary preference for responsibility.[4] In the Indian system the executive is continually answerable to the legislature, and a government unable to retain confidence cannot insist upon completing a fixed five-year executive term merely because stability would be administratively desirable. PRS Legislative Research has similarly identified the tension between the proposed synchronisation mechanism and the parliamentary principle that a government survives only while it retains majority support.[5]

The constitutional challenge becomes still deeper when the State governments are considered. Federalism is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.[6] In *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*[7], the Supreme Court established that Parliament's power of constitutional amendment cannot destroy the Constitution's basic structure. The ONOE question must therefore be formulated carefully. Simultaneous voting itself does not extinguish federalism; Indian elections were substantially simultaneous for the first four electoral cycles. But a constitutional framework that repeatedly shortens State mandates, postpones State elections or makes the

[3] INDIA CONST. arts. 83(2), 172(1), 327.
[4] CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES, Vol. VII, Nov. 4, 1948, at 32-33 (statement of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar).
[5] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *Legislative Brief: The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Simultaneous Elections Bills)* 2 (June 5, 2025), https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-and-twenty-ninth-amendment-bill-2024 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).
[6] *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, (1994) 3 SCC 1.
[7] *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, (1973) 4 SCC 225.

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lifespan of every Assembly dependent upon that of the Lok Sabha may potentially affect the operational autonomy of the States.

Free and fair elections are equally constitutionally significant. *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain*[8] recognised democracy and free and fair elections as integral to the constitutional structure. *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India*[9] reaffirmed democracy as a basic feature while acknowledging Parliament's capacity to regulate electoral mechanisms. These cases indicate that not every alteration in the mechanics of elections violates the Constitution; what matters is whether the reform damages democratic representation or another basic feature. Thus, the correct constitutional enquiry is not whether ONOE is innovative. It is whether the chosen method of enforcing synchronisation alters the character of parliamentary and federal democracy.

The contemporary relevance of that enquiry is considerable. The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind submitted its report on 14 March 2024 after 191 days of work. The Union Cabinet accepted its recommendations on 18 September 2024.[10] The 2024 Bills converted the first stage of those recommendations into legislative form and were referred to a Joint Committee of Parliament.

The thesis of this paper is that ONOE cannot constitutionally be assessed in binary terms. The statement that simultaneous elections are either necessarily unconstitutional or automatically desirable obscures the real legal issue. Synchronisation as an electoral objective may co-exist with Indian federalism. The harder question concerns constitutional design. A model that reduces electoral duplication while preserving State mandates, legislative confidence, political accountability, judicial review and strict limitations on election postponement may withstand constitutional scrutiny. A model that subordinates the duration and democratic existence of State legislatures to a Union-centred electoral calendar creates much more serious Basic Structure concerns. The constitutional legitimacy of ONOE, therefore, will ultimately turn less upon the slogan and more upon the safeguards.[11]

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[8] *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain*, 1975 Supp SCC 1.

[9] *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India*, (2006) 7 SCC 1.

[10] HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS, *Report of the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections* (2024), https://onoe.gov.in/HLC-Report-en (last visited Oct. 6, 2026); *One Nation, One Election: Committee Recommends Two-Step Approach to Simultaneous Elections*, DT NEXT (IANS) (Mar. 14, 2024), https://www.dtnext.in/news/national/one-nation-one-election-committee-recommends-two-step-approach-to-simultaneous-elections-773895 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026); *Cabinet Approves 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal, Bill Likely to Be Tabled in Winter Session*, THEPRINT (Sept. 18, 2024), https://theprint.in/politics/cabinet-approves-one-nation-one-election-proposal-bill-likely-to-be-tabled-in-winter-session/2273067 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

[11] *See generally* Ashutosh Kumar & Shruti Bedi, *Electoral Synchronicity: Legal-Constitutional Challenges and Implications for India's Federal Democracy*, 34(1) ASIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 211 (2026), https://doi

II. From 1951 to 2026: the historical journey from simultaneous polls to constitutional amendment

Simultaneous elections are not alien to India's constitutional history. Elections to the Lok Sabha and most State Legislative Assemblies were conducted together during the electoral cycles of 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967. Synchronisation was therefore not originally created by constitutional command; it was the incidental consequence of legislatures beginning their constitutional lives at approximately the same time and generally completing their terms without sufficiently disruptive premature dissolutions. The breakdown of this alignment reveals an important feature of the current controversy. India did not consciously abandon simultaneous elections through a constitutional amendment. The electoral cycles separated because parliamentary democracy worked as parliamentary democracy ordinarily does: governments lost majorities, legislatures were dissolved and elections became necessary at different times. State Assemblies were prematurely dissolved in 1968 and 1969, and the Fourth Lok Sabha itself was dissolved in 1970. From that point, electoral calendars increasingly diverged.[12]

The historical distinction between accidental simultaneity and constitutionally enforced simultaneity is central. The pre-1967 experience proves that holding Union and State elections together is compatible with federal government. It does not establish that every constitutional mechanism designed to preserve synchronisation indefinitely is equally compatible. Earlier simultaneity depended upon political circumstances. The contemporary proposal seeks to control those circumstances through rules governing the terms of future legislatures. The first model allows the electoral calendar to yield to parliamentary events; the second requires parliamentary events to yield, at least temporally, to the electoral calendar.

The idea nevertheless enjoyed recurring institutional support long before the current government transformed it into legislation. The Election Commission referred to the desirability of restoring simultaneous elections in its first annual report in 1983. The Law Commission's 170th Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws in 1999 argued that the cycle of elections every year should be brought to an end and that a situation in which elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies occurred once in five years should be considered.[13] The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice addressed simultaneous

.org/10.1080/02185377.2025.2574569.

[12] PRS Legislative Research, *supra* note 5, at 2; The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, Statement of Objects and Reasons, para. 1; *see generally* H.M. Seervai, Constitutional Law of India: A Critical Commentary (4th ed., Universal Law Publishing Co. 2006).

[13] Law Commission of India, *170th Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws* (May 1999), https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/170th_LCI_Report.pdf (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

elections in its 79th Report in 2015.[14] NITI Aayog subsequently examined the subject,[15] and the Law Commission produced a draft report in 2018 dealing with its constitutional and legal feasibility.[16]

The 2018 Law Commission exercise was significant because it exposed the difficulty of converting a political aspiration into a constitutional rule. Synchronising elections requires some combination of extending certain legislative terms, curtailing others, grouping States into electoral cycles, changing no-confidence procedures, dealing with hung Houses and determining what happens following premature dissolution. Each solution affects a different constitutional value. Extending a legislature postpones the electorate's opportunity to renew its mandate. Curtailing a legislature terminates an elected mandate early. A constructive vote of no confidence may increase governmental stability but modifies conventional parliamentary accountability. A remainder-term election respects the common calendar but asks voters to elect a legislature that may exist for only a few months.

The High-Level Committee constituted on 2 September 2023 was therefore required to consider not merely whether simultaneous elections were desirable but the legal structure needed to create them. It was chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind and included senior political, constitutional, legal and administrative figures. The Committee engaged political parties, former judges, former election commissioners, State election commissioners, economists, business organisations and members of the public. Its report, submitted on 14 March 2024, ran to more than 18,000 pages including annexures and was presented after 65 meetings and extensive consultations.[17] Of the 47 political parties that submitted views, 32 supported simultaneous elections.[18]

The Committee recommended a phased model. Elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies would first be synchronised. Elections to municipalities and panchayats would then be held within one hundred days of the parliamentary and Assembly elections. A common electoral roll and common elector photo identity infrastructure were also contemplated.

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[14] DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES, LAW AND JUSTICE, Rajya Sabha, *79th Report on Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies* (Dec. 2015).

[15] Bibek Debroy & Kishore Desai, NITI AAYOG, *Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why" and "How": A Discussion Paper* (2017).

[16] LAW COMMISSION OF INDIA, *Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections* (Aug. 2018).

[17] HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE ON SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS, *supra* note 10; *Committee Recommends Two-Step Approach*, *supra* note 10; Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2023, answered Aug. 2, 2024 (Ministry of Law and Justice).

[18] *'One Nation, One Election' Report Says 32 Political Parties Supported, 15 Opposed*, THEPRINT (PTI) (Mar. 14, 2024), https://theprint.in/india/one-nation-one-election-report-says-32-political-parties-supported-15-opposed/2000685/ (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

Significantly, the Committee's framework treated State ratification differently across these stages. It took the position that the constitutional amendments required for synchronising the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies would not require ratification by one-half of the States, whereas the local-body and common-electoral-roll components would involve matters necessitating such ratification.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 followed on 17 December 2024.[19] The constitutional Bill would govern Parliament and the State Assemblies, while the accompanying legislation would adapt the framework for legislative Assemblies of Union Territories. Both were referred to a Joint Committee of Parliament in December 2024. The parliamentary committee was originally constituted with 27 Lok Sabha and 12 Rajya Sabha members and chaired by P.P. Chaudhary.

The political significance of this referral should not be underestimated. Constitutional amendment Bills normally engage the formal supermajority requirements of Article 368 only when Parliament votes on them; committee scrutiny is not constitutionally mandatory. Yet ONOE involves sufficiently profound institutional consequences that extensive pre-enactment consultation has become central to its legitimacy. During 2025 and 2026 the Joint Committee heard jurists, former Chief Justices of India, constitutional specialists, administrators, political representatives and other stakeholders and undertook regional consultations. Its consultations in Goa in July 2026 expressly addressed mid-term elections, remainder terms, the powers proposed for the Election Commission, federalism and the Basic Structure Doctrine.[20]

The timetable itself continued to evolve. On 29 July 2026, the Lok Sabha extended the Committee's tenure up to the first day of the last week of the Winter Session of 2026.[21] By 5 October 2026, the parliamentary schedule showed the Committee continuing interactions with media representatives and economists, demonstrating that no final parliamentary settlement had yet been reached.[22] The process therefore remains constitutionally unfinished as of October 2026.

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[19] The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Bill No. 276 of 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on Dec. 17, 2024.

[20] LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT, *Joint Constitution Committee Concludes Goa Consultations on 'One Nation, One Election' with Legislators and Other Stakeholders*, PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (July 11, 2026), https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2283737 (last visited Oct. 6, 2026).

[21] *LS Extends Tenure of JPC on One Nation, One Election*, NEWS ARENA INDIA (July 29, 2026), https://newsarenaindia.com/nation/ls-extends-tenure-of-jpc-on-one-nation-one-election/83419 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

[22] *ONOE Panel Hears Economists, Media on Simultaneous Polls Bill*, NEWKERALA.COM (Oct. 5, 2026), https://www.newkerala.com/news/a/onoe-panel-hears-views-eminent-economists-chairman-says-539.htm (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

The historical record generates two competing narratives. Supporters can legitimately argue that simultaneous elections represent restoration rather than revolution: India successfully operated with broadly synchronised elections for the first two decades of the Republic.[23] Critics can respond with equal force that the earlier system survived only so long as governments and legislatures happened to complete aligned terms; compelling all future governments to remain within a single national calendar requires constitutional interventions that the original arrangement never required. Both propositions are true. India's history proves the practical possibility of simultaneous elections but does not itself answer the constitutional question of permanent synchronisation.

The breakdown after 1967 is, in fact, constitutionally instructive. The divergence of electoral cycles reflected the growth of competitive federal politics, the rise of regional political parties, unstable coalitions and differing State-level electoral outcomes.[24] In that sense, asynchronous elections became not merely a scheduling inconvenience but a by-product of political pluralism.[25] A contemporary constitutional reform must consequently distinguish between the administrative burden produced by frequent elections and the political diversity that produces those elections. Efficiency may justify rationalising election administration; it cannot constitutionally justify suppressing the political contingencies inherent in representative government.

III. The constitutional architecture of the 129th Amendment Bill: Article 82A and the rewriting of electoral time

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 is relatively short in textual form but extensive in constitutional effect. Its central innovation is the proposed Article 82A, titled "Simultaneous elections to the House of the People and all Legislative Assemblies". The Bill also proposes changes to Article 83[26] concerning the duration of the Houses of Parliament, Article 172[27] concerning the duration of State Legislatures and Article 327[28] concerning Parliament's legislative power in relation to elections. The architecture is designed

[23] *See generally* SUBHASH C. KASHYAP, OUR CONSTITUTION: AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIA'S CONSTITUTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL LAW (National Book Trust); RAJNI KOTHARI, POLITICS IN INDIA (Orient Longman 1970).

[24] *See generally* ATUL KOHLI, DEMOCRACY AND DISCONTENT: INDIA'S GROWING CRISIS OF GOVERNABILITY (Cambridge University Press 1990); PAUL R. BRASS, THE POLITICS OF INDIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE (2d ed., Cambridge University Press 1994); GRANVILLE AUSTIN, WORKING A DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE (Oxford University Press 1999).

[25] *See generally* Eesha Shrotriya & Shantanu Pachauri, *Simultaneous Elections and Flexible Legislative Terms: A Constitutionally Preferable Approach*, 5(1) INDIAN LAW REVIEW 106 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/24730580.2020.1868225.

[26] INDIA CONST. art. 83(2).

[27] INDIA CONST. art. 172(1).

[28] INDIA CONST. art. 327.

around three related devices: an appointed date, a common electoral cycle and reduced terms following premature dissolution.

Under proposed Article 82A, the President may issue a public notification on the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha following a general election. That date becomes the "appointed date". Assemblies elected after it would not necessarily enjoy a fresh independent five-year period. Their terms would terminate upon the expiry of the Lok Sabha whose first sitting anchors the synchronisation process. The constitutional significance is immediate. Article 172 currently provides that every Legislative Assembly, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and no longer. Five years is not an absolute guarantee because an Assembly can be dissolved sooner. Yet the ordinary reason for an early termination is a political or constitutional event affecting that particular State. Under ONOE, an Assembly could also receive a shorter life solely because synchronisation requires its next election to coincide with the national cycle.

This is not a minor change in election management. The term of an elected House determines the temporal scope of a popular mandate. If voters elect an Assembly in 2033 but synchronisation is scheduled for 2034, their government may serve only the residual period before the national simultaneous election. PRS has illustrated precisely this possibility, observing that the proposed framework could result in legislatures with terms shorter than one year. It also notes that repeated short-term legislatures may arise later if the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly is prematurely dissolved near the end of the common electoral cycle.[29]

Supporters may answer that Article 172 already says "unless sooner dissolved", demonstrating that five years is a maximum rather than a constitutionally guaranteed minimum. That textual argument is substantial but incomplete. Premature dissolution under the current parliamentary system normally follows loss of governmental viability, failure to form an alternative ministry or another constitutionally recognised breakdown. The proposed ONOE system creates a different category of curtailment: a House remains politically viable but expires early to preserve another institution's electoral timetable. The constitutional issue therefore concerns purpose, not merely duration.[30]

The Supreme Court's treatment of elected State governments demonstrates why purpose matters. In *Rameshwar Prasad v. Union of India*[31], the dissolution of the Bihar Legislative

[29] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 3-4.
[30] *See generally* Hemaalaya R.A. & Divya S., *Electoral Synchronicity in India: A Legislative and Constitutional Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Framework*, 6(7) INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW 663 (2026), https://doi.org/10.65393/ijlrv6i772.
[31] *Rameshwar Prasad v. Union of India*, (2006) 2 SCC 1.

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Assembly was held unconstitutional because the constitutional power had been exercised on impermissible grounds. That decision and *S.R. Bommai*[32] do not directly answer the validity of a constitutional amendment creating remainder terms, but they establish a broader principle: elected State institutions are not merely administrative units whose democratic life may be rearranged without constitutional justification.

The second mechanism is the "unexpired term" model. If a synchronised Lok Sabha is dissolved before completing the normal five-year cycle, the new Lok Sabha would exist only for the remainder of that cycle. The same principle would apply when a State Assembly is prematurely dissolved.

This solution is designed to solve one of the most difficult practical objections to ONOE. Without a remainder-term rule, one premature dissolution immediately breaks synchronisation again. Yet solving the calendar problem creates a representational problem. Why should an electorate voting after the collapse of its government receive a shorter mandate simply because another institution's election is scheduled later? The system changes the constitutional meaning of a general election. At present, a fresh general election ordinarily opens a new potential five-year legislative term. Under ONOE, some general elections become interim elections whose lifespan is determined by the previous House's calendar.

Comparative examples demonstrate that such an arrangement is not conceptually impossible. PRS notes that Sweden provides that an extraordinary election does not restart the normal parliamentary term, while Belgium also links certain early elections to the remainder of an electoral cycle.[33] Yet constitutional transplantation must be approached cautiously. India's scale, party system, bicameral Union structure, federal diversity and frequency of governmental instability differ significantly from those jurisdictions.

The third and perhaps most controversial mechanism appears in proposed Article 82A concerning a State in which simultaneous voting cannot be conducted. If the Election Commission considers that election to a particular Legislative Assembly cannot be held together with the general simultaneous elections, it may recommend postponement to the President. The President may then order that the election be held later. The term of the subsequently elected Assembly would nevertheless end with the Lok Sabha elected in the common cycle.

This provision raises both federal and rule of law questions. The Constitution already contemplates exceptional circumstances in which democratic government in a State may be

[32] *S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6.
[33] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 4.

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interrupted, most prominently Article 356.[34] But Article 356 contains substantial textual and judicial safeguards, including parliamentary approval. Under the proposed ONOE clause, the trigger is worded much more broadly: the Election Commission's opinion that simultaneous election is not possible. PRS has observed that the Bill may lower the threshold for postponing a State election when compared with the constitutional framework applicable under Article 356.[35]

The Article 327 amendment is also significant. Article 327 currently authorises Parliament, subject to the Constitution, to make provisions concerning elections to either House of Parliament and the House or either House of a State Legislature. Expanding the provision to accommodate simultaneous elections gives Parliament express authority to legislate on operational details necessary for the new framework. This may be defensible as electoral regulation, but critics may argue that the aggregate effect is centralising because the entire electoral existence of State Assemblies becomes organised around a national legislative framework.[36]

Finally, the Bill's amendment procedure invites a separate constitutional debate. The High-Level Committee took the view that synchronising parliamentary and State Assembly elections could be achieved without ratification by one-half of the States. The express proviso to Article 368[37] requires State ratification only for amendments affecting specified federal provisions, including certain Union-State executive provisions, Chapter I of Part XI, the Seventh Schedule, representation of States in Parliament and Article 368 itself. Articles 83, 172 and 327 do not expressly fall within this list. Hence the formal argument against mandatory State ratification is strong.

Yet constitutional doctrine looks to substance as well as drafting form. In *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu*[38], the Supreme Court held the provision excluding judicial review in the Tenth Schedule defective for want of State ratification because in substance it affected constitutional provisions concerning the jurisdiction of the High Courts and Supreme Court. More recently, *Union of India v. Rajendra N. Shah*[39] demonstrated the importance of State ratification where a constitutional amendment materially enters an area belonging to the constitutional authority of States. Neither case automatically requires ratification of the 129th Amendment Bill. They

[34] INDIA CONST. art. 356.
[35] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 4.
[36] *See generally* M.P. JAIN, INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW (8th ed., LexisNexis 2023).
[37] INDIA CONST. art. 368.
[38] *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu*, 1992 Supp (2) SCC 651.
[39] *Union of India v. Rajendra N. Shah*, (2022) 19 SCC 520.

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nevertheless caution against determining federal impact solely by asking whether the text formally mentions one of the provisions listed in Article 368's proviso.

The Bill thus restructures something more fundamental than election dates: it creates a constitutional law of electoral time. It determines when representative mandates commence, when they must terminate, what length of mandate follows a governmental collapse, and when a State election may depart from the common calendar. These are questions lying at the intersection of democracy and federalism. Whether the amendment survives future constitutional scrutiny will depend substantially upon whether this temporal restructuring is regarded as regulation of elections or as an alteration of the essential autonomy and accountability of parliamentary government.

IV. Federalism at the Ballot Box: State Autonomy, Democratic Equality and the Basic Structure Doctrine

Federalism constitutes the strongest constitutional objection to ONOE, but the objection must be precisely formulated. It would be incorrect to contend that any simultaneous election is inherently anti-federal. Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, for example, have held Assembly elections along with Lok Sabha elections without ceasing to be autonomous States. Indian constitutional history from 1951 to 1967 similarly defeats any categorical proposition that simultaneous voting is incompatible with a federal polity. The deeper concern is institutional dependence: whether an electoral system makes the democratic lifespan of State institutions constitutionally subordinate to that of the Union.[40]

India's Constitution creates a federation with distinctive centralising characteristics,[41] but States are not mere administrative subdivisions of the Union. *State of West Bengal v. Union of India*[42] rejected the conception of Indian federalism as a compact among pre-existing sovereign States, yet later constitutional jurisprudence developed a robust conception of federalism as a basic feature. The decisive transformation appears in *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*[43], in which the Supreme Court treated federalism as part of the Basic Structure and subjected central interference with elected State governments to judicial review. That doctrine means Parliament possesses wide constitutional amendment power, but it cannot use Article 368 to abolish the essential federal character of the Constitution.

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[40] *See generally* Chanchal Kumar Singh & Mritunjay Kumar, *Law as the Ontology of 'One' and 'Constitutional Reason': India's 'One Nation One Election' Plan, Democracy, Federalism, and Electoral Justice*, VII SHIMLA LAW REVIEW 128 (2024-25), DOI: 10.70556/hpnlu-slr-v7-I1-2024-05.

[41] *See generally* K.C. WHEARE, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (4th ed., Oxford University Press 1963).

[42] *State of West Bengal v. Union of India*, AIR 1963 SC 1241.

[43] *S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6.

The question is therefore one of degree and effect. Does linking Assembly terms to the Lok Sabha merely coordinate election administration, or does it make State democratic legitimacy temporally dependent upon a Union institution? Supporters emphasise that State governments would remain legislatively autonomous during their terms. Their legislative competence under Articles 245[44] and 246[45] and the Seventh Schedule would not be transferred to Parliament. Governors, Councils of Ministers and State legislatures would continue to exist. State voters could continue electing different political parties from those chosen nationally. No formal merger of Union and State governments is contemplated.

This argument demonstrates why an ONOE challenge under the Basic Structure Doctrine would not be straightforward. Basic Structure review does not invalidate every amendment that touches a fundamental constitutional feature. It invalidates amendments that damage or destroy its essential identity. *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*[46] created this limitation, while *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India*[47] made clear that limited amending power is itself part of the Constitution's basic structure. *I.R. Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu*[48] subsequently reinforced substance-based review where constitutional amendments impair essential constitutional rights or principles.

Proponents can therefore say that federalism concerns the division of power rather than the coincidence of polling dates. If State legislatures retain their competence and State electorates continue to choose their own governments, simultaneous voting does not eliminate federalism. The historical precedent strengthens this argument. Indeed, several former Chief Justices who interacted with the parliamentary committee have reportedly expressed the view that simultaneous elections as a concept do not, by themselves, violate the Basic Structure.[49] Former CJI B.R. Gavai was reported in February 2026 as the sixth former CJI heard by the Committee, two of the six having expressed reservations, and in July 2026 the Committee chair stated that the former Chief Justices consulted had not regarded the proposal itself as destructive of the Constitution's basic structure.[50]

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[44] INDIA CONST. art. 245.
[45] INDIA CONST. art. 246.
[46] *Kesavananda Bharati*, *supra* note 7.
[47] *Minerva Mills Ltd. v. Union of India*, (1980) 3 SCC 625.
[48] *I.R. Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu*, (2007) 2 SCC 1.
[49] *Ex-CJIs Flag Some Provisions of ONOE Bill, Assert It Does Not Violate Constitution*, ORISSA POST (PTI) (July 2025), https://www.orissapost.com/ex-cjis-flag-some-provisions-of-onoe-bill-assert-it-does-not-violate-constitution/amp/ (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).
[50] *Former CJI Gavai Deposes Before Parliamentary Panel on Simultaneous Polls; Says Concept Within Constitutional Framework*, THE TRIBUNE (Feb. 13, 2026), https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/india/former-cji-gavai-deposes-before-parliamentary-panel-on-simultaneous-elections-says-concept-within-constitutional-framework/ (last visited Nov. 5, 2026); *JPC to Pitch Anti-Defection Shield in Its ONOE Report*, THE GOAN (July 11, 2026), https://www.thegoan.net/goa-news/-jpc-to-pitch-antidefection-shield-in-its-onoe-report-/150980.html

Yet federalism is not exhausted by legislative lists. Political federalism depends upon the capacity of each State electorate to hold its government independently accountable. Asynchronous elections allow State politics to develop its own democratic rhythm. A State government may be rewarded or removed because of State-specific policies without the election necessarily being submerged in a nationwide campaign. Regional parties may organise electoral narratives around local linguistic, agrarian, fiscal, welfare or cultural questions. When every State election occurs alongside the Lok Sabha election, the same campaign period, national media environment and national leadership contest inevitably interact with State issues.

This does not mean voters are incapable of distinguishing between elections. Indian voters sometimes split their ballots between different parties where simultaneous elections occur. Nevertheless, constitutional structure should not be designed on an assumption that electoral context has no effect. Political science literature has long considered the possibility that simultaneous polls may produce a coattail or nationalisation effect in which the larger national election influences voter attention, campaign finance and media visibility.[51,52,53] Even if that effect cannot be conclusively established in every election, federalism protects political space as well as legal competence.

The more serious constitutional problem arises from term curtailment. Imagine a State government elected with a clear five-year programme shortly before the synchronisation cut-off. If its Assembly is required to terminate early so that its next election coincides with the Lok Sabha, the State electorate loses part of the representative period it reasonably expected under the existing constitutional order. Parliament would effectively use its constitutional-amendment power to determine the endpoint of an otherwise functioning State mandate.[54] Although Article 172 does not guarantee an inviolable five-year term, systematic curtailment for national calendar alignment differs materially from dissolution caused by State-level parliamentary circumstances.

(last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

[51] *See generally* Hiya Maurya & Annette Sara Abraham, *One Nation One Election through the Federal Lens: An Analysis of the 2024 Ram Nath Kovind Panel Report*, 7(3) INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES 2354 (2024), https://ijlmh.com/paper/one-nation-one-election-through-the-federal-lens-an-analysis-of-the-2024-ram-nath-kovind-panel-report/.

[52] *See generally* Marc Meredith, *Exploiting Friends-and-Neighbors to Estimate Coattail Effects*, 107(4) AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW 742 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055413000439.

[53] *See generally* Amuitz Garmendia Madariaga & H. Ege Ozen, *Looking for Two-Sided Coattail Effects: Integrated Parties and Multilevel Elections in the U.S.*, 40 ELECTORAL STUDIES 66 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2015.06.006.

[54] *See generally* THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION (Sujit Choudhry, Madhav Khosla & Pratap Bhanu Mehta eds., Oxford University Press 2016).

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The asymmetry is symbolically significant as well. The proposed model uses the Lok Sabha cycle as the central clock. Assemblies align with Parliament, rather than Parliament and the Assemblies meeting at a constitutionally neutral common point. If the Lok Sabha is dissolved, the replacement Lok Sabha serves the remainder term, thereby preserving the cycle; if an Assembly is dissolved, its replacement likewise serves only the remainder. Formally this applies the same principle to both levels. During initial synchronisation, however, multiple State terms may need to be shortened in order to meet a national reference date. The federal objection is consequently strongest in the transitional phase.

The Supreme Court's federal jurisprudence emphasises constitutional respect for elected State institutions. In *Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix v. Deputy Speaker, Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly*[55], the Court placed limitations upon gubernatorial intervention in legislative proceedings and reaffirmed that the Governor cannot ordinarily become an independent political actor controlling Assembly affairs.

Rameshwar Prasad[56] and *S.R. Bommai*[57] point the same way. The proposed ONOE mechanism is structurally different because it would itself become part of the Constitution if validly enacted. Even so, Basic Structure review asks whether that new constitutional rule undermines the very principle these cases defend.

A further question concerns State ratification. Formally, the Government's position that the first stage ONOE amendment does not require ratification can be defended from the literal text of Article 368. Yet requiring State ratification could supply something that formal legal necessity alone cannot: federal legitimacy. When a reform directly affects the lifespan of every State Legislative Assembly, securing approval from at least half the States would demonstrate that the States are participants rather than subjects of electoral redesign.[58] Constitutional federalism is strengthened not simply by asking whether Parliament possesses power, but by ensuring that power is exercised through procedures appropriate to the institutional interests affected.

This does not imply that judicial review would invalidate the amendment solely because States were not consulted. Political wisdom and constitutional validity are distinct. But the Basic Structure Doctrine has repeatedly operated precisely where the formal amendment procedure was technically followed yet the substance threatened constitutional identity, and *Kihoto*

[55] *Nabam Rebia and Bamang Felix v. Deputy Speaker, Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly*, (2016) 8 SCC 1.
[56] *Rameshwar Prasad*, *supra* note 31.
[57] *S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6.
[58] *See generally* MADHAV KHOSLA, THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION (Oxford University Press 2012).

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Hollohan[59] and *Rajendra N. Shah*[60] show the same attention to substance under the proviso to Article 368. ONOE therefore raises a legitimate question whether an amendment changing the temporal existence of every State legislature should be viewed as merely electoral or as sufficiently federal in effect to demand a more participatory amendment process.

Ultimately, federalism at the ballot box involves two forms of autonomy. The first is institutional autonomy: the constitutional authority of State legislatures and governments to exercise powers assigned to them. The second is democratic autonomy: the ability of State electorates to determine the political life of those institutions on State-specific constitutional timelines. Simultaneous elections need not destroy either.[61] But any version of ONOE that treats State mandates as adjustable components of a national administrative schedule risks transforming cooperative federalism into calendrical centralisation. The better constitutional model would therefore seek coordination without subordination.

V. Parliamentary accountability, no-confidence motions and the constitutional problem of the remainder term

The parliamentary system does not promise that elected governments will last five years. It promises that governments will remain answerable to elected legislatures. That distinction is indispensable to the ONOE debate. Articles 75(3) and 164(2) establish collective responsibility of the Union and State Councils of Ministers to their respective popularly elected Houses. A ministry that loses legislative confidence cannot constitutionally continue merely because a uniform election calendar would be administratively convenient. The central design problem of ONOE is therefore how to preserve parliamentary instability, when necessary, without allowing that instability to destroy electoral synchronisation.

The Constitution's framers deliberately preferred accountability to rigid executive tenure.[62] Unlike presidential government, parliamentary government makes political survival dependent upon legislative confidence. *Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab*[63] reflects the constitutional structure in which the formal executive ordinarily acts upon ministerial advice generated by responsible government. *U.N.R. Rao v. Indira Gandhi*[64] similarly illustrates the centrality of the Council of Ministers to the parliamentary scheme. The executive and legislature are not

[59] *Kihoto Hollohan*, *supra* note 38.
[60] *Rajendra N. Shah*, *supra* note 39.
[61] *See generally* Madhav Khosla, India's Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy (Harvard University Press 2020).
[62] *See generally* Granville Austin, The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation (Oxford University Press 1966).
[63] *Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab*, (1974) 2 SCC 831.
[64] *U.N.R. Rao v. Indira Gandhi*, (1971) 2 SCC 63.

separately elected branches with independently fixed political lives; executive legitimacy flows through continuing legislative confidence.

The 129th Amendment Bill attempts to reconcile this principle with synchronisation by avoiding a rigid prohibition upon premature elections. If a government collapses and no alternative ministry can be formed, the House may still be dissolved and voters may still return to the polls. The limitation concerns only duration: the newly elected legislature would continue for the remainder of the common cycle. This is constitutionally preferable to a rule that prevents dissolution altogether, because it preserves an electoral remedy for failed governments. Yet the remainder-term model introduces its own distortions.

Consider a State Assembly dissolved eighteen months before the next simultaneous election. Citizens would vote in a full-scale general Assembly election knowing that the winning government has only eighteen months before another election. Campaign programmes, public expectations and governmental planning would operate within an abbreviated horizon. If collapse occurs only four or five months before the scheduled cycle, a question arises whether a full election for such a short term is rational at all. Postponing it until the simultaneous election would leave the State without a newly elected legislature for months; holding it immediately would impose the very expense and electoral repetition ONOE seeks to avoid.

PRS has highlighted this consequence, observing that the proposed Bills could generate legislatures whose terms are even shorter than a year and questioning whether governments elected for such brief periods can formulate and implement meaningful policy.[65] The remainder-term solution thus internalises electoral frequency rather than completely eliminating it. ONOE may reduce routinely staggered elections, but political instability can still create mid-cycle elections followed by another simultaneous election shortly thereafter.

One solution discussed in earlier reform proposals is the constructive vote of no confidence. Under such a mechanism, a government can be removed only when the legislature simultaneously agrees upon a successor. Germany is the most frequently invoked example. The device reduces the possibility that a successful no-confidence motion automatically triggers dissolution. It could therefore help preserve synchronised legislative terms. Yet importing such a mechanism would substantially change Indian parliamentary practice.[66] A no-confidence

[65] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 3-4.

[66] *See generally* Mamta Pareek, *The Concept of One Nation, One Election in Indian Democracy: A Study of Benefits, Challenges, and Feasibility*, 4(2) RESEARCH REVIEW JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE 13 (2024), https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjss.2024.v04.n02.003; Shivangini Khanduri & Bhavik Kaushik, *One Nation One Election: Weakening Federalism and Undermining Democratic Accountability*, 4(2) PANJAB UNIVERSITY LAW MAGAZINE (MAGLAW) 49, 61 (2025), https://maglaw.puchd.ac.in/index.php/maglaw/article/view/403.

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motion presently communicates a simple constitutional proposition: the incumbent ministry no longer enjoys the confidence of the House. Requiring legislators to produce a replacement majority before withdrawing confidence increases governmental stability but makes removal harder.

Such a reform is not necessarily unconstitutional. Parliamentary systems take diverse institutional forms. But it should be evaluated independently rather than introduced into electoral reform as a technical adjustment. The Supreme Court has consistently recognised the floor of the legislature as the appropriate place for testing governmental majority, as *S.R. Bommai*[67] confirms. Stability mechanisms should preserve, rather than weaken, this principle.

A further proposal sometimes associated with synchronisation is a limited period during which no-confidence motions may be moved, or restrictions upon repeated motions. Such rules raise more serious accountability concerns. The capacity of the legislature to remove an executive that no longer commands its confidence is not simply a matter of House procedure; it lies at the heart of responsible government. ONOE cannot constitutionally become a reason to transform a parliamentary executive into a quasi-fixed-term executive.

The remainder-term principle also affects voter equality conceptually. Formal vote value remains equal within a constituency, but the temporal value of different elections varies. A citizen voting in the scheduled simultaneous election elects representatives for a potential five-year period. A citizen voting after premature dissolution may elect representatives for only eight months. Both exercises are called general elections, yet the democratic mandate conferred is radically different in duration. This is not necessarily an Article 14 violation because different circumstances may justify different treatment, but it demonstrates that synchronisation creates classes of electoral mandates.

The Court's electoral jurisprudence recognises that democracy is more than periodic voting. *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*[68] and *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms*[69] developed the electorate's right to information concerning candidates as part of meaningful electoral choice. *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*[70], concerning the NOTA option, emphasised the importance of voter choice and political expression. These cases collectively support a richer conception of electoral democracy in which the quality and consequence of the vote matter. A constitutional system that deliberately

[67] *S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6.
[68] *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*, (2003) 4 SCC 399.
[69] *Union of India v. Association for Democratic Reforms*, (2002) 5 SCC 294.
[70] *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union of India*, (2013) 10 SCC 1.

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creates short-lived mandates must therefore explain why such compression remains consistent with effective representation.

There is also a possibility of strategic political manipulation. If political actors know that collapse close to the next common election yields only a short remainder term, incentives may change. Opposition parties may prefer to wait for the scheduled election rather than topple a weak government. Conversely, incumbents may attempt to engineer dissolution at strategically favourable moments. Coalition bargaining may increasingly revolve around the national calendar. Simultaneous elections are often justified as reducing the dominance of electoral considerations in governance; paradoxically, a rigid common cycle could make the national electoral date an even more powerful determinant of political behaviour.

A better approach would prioritise government formation over immediate dissolution whenever a ministry falls, without coercively restricting legislative confidence. Governors and the President, as applicable, should first explore whether an alternative government can command a demonstrable majority, consistent with established constitutional principles.[71] Only where no viable government exists should a remainder-term election become necessary. The law could also prescribe transparent procedures and strict timelines so that attempts to preserve synchronisation do not produce prolonged unelected administration.

The parliamentary problem exposes the conceptual core of ONOE. Elections are being synchronised in a system deliberately designed to permit political asynchrony. Coalition breakdown, defections subject to the Tenth Schedule, loss of confidence, hung Houses and regional political realignments are not constitutional abnormalities; they are possibilities inherent in representative government. The Constitution's flexibility absorbs them by allowing different Houses to begin new terms at different moments. ONOE seeks to replace that flexibility with recurring temporal alignment. Such a reform can succeed constitutionally only if the electoral calendar remains subordinate to democratic accountability, rather than accountability becoming subordinate to the calendar.

VI. The Election Commission, deferred State polls and the risk of constitutional power without sufficient standards

Among the least publicly discussed yet most constitutionally sensitive parts of the 129th Amendment Bill is the power associated with deferral of a State Assembly election. This provision appears operational: floods, violence, security emergencies or other extraordinary

[71] *See S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6; *see generally* Singh & Kumar, *supra* note 40.

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circumstances may make simultaneous voting in a particular State genuinely impossible. But the absence of detailed constitutional standards transforms operational flexibility into a potential federal problem.

The Election Commission occupies a distinctive place in the Indian Constitution. Article 324 entrusts it with the superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament, State legislatures and the offices of President and Vice-President. Its independence is essential to free and fair elections. In *Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner*[72], the Supreme Court gave Article 324 a broad functional interpretation, recognising the Commission's capacity to act where legislation is silent so that elections remain effective and fair. Yet *A.C. Jose v. Sivan Pillai*[73] made equally clear that Article 324 is not a source of authority to disregard or supersede valid legislation. Electoral independence is not constitutional absolutism.

The ONOE Bill would move the Commission into a different constitutional space. Scheduling election phases is one thing; making a recommendation that results in a State continuing without an elected replacement Assembly after its normal term is another. Such a recommendation may have direct consequences for representative government and could indirectly create conditions in which caretaker administration or Article 356 becomes relevant. PRS has observed that the Bill does not specify a maximum duration for such postponement and does not comprehensively state who governs if the previous Assembly has ceased to exist while the replacement election remains deferred.[74]

The contrast with Article 356 is constitutionally instructive. President's Rule may temporarily displace normal State parliamentary government, but its imposition and continuation are governed by constitutional conditions, parliamentary approval and judicial review, as *S.R. Bommai*[75] establishes. If election deferral under ONOE can create a period without an elected Assembly on a substantially lower threshold, constitutional safeguards surrounding State democracy could effectively be bypassed.

This concern reportedly arose during consultations before the Joint Committee. Former Chief Justices and constitutional experts, while not necessarily opposing simultaneous elections as a concept, have raised questions about the breadth of the Election Commission's proposed authority. Reports concerning the Committee's work identified proposed Article 82A(5) as an

[72] *Mohinder Singh Gill v. Chief Election Commissioner*, (1978) 1 SCC 405.
[73] *A.C. Jose v. Sivan Pillai*, (1984) 2 SCC 656.
[74] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 4-5.
[75] *S.R. Bommai*, *supra* note 6.

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area requiring safeguards.[76] The Committee's Goa consultations in July 2026 similarly included discussion of the powers proposed for the Election Commission and their implications for federalism and the Basic Structure.[77]

Any constitutionally defensible deferral mechanism should therefore satisfy at least four principles, although these can be expressed through statutory design rather than additional constitutional headings. First, the grounds for postponement should be objective and exceptional. A formulation such as "cannot be conducted" should be linked to demonstrable conditions concerning security, natural disaster, electoral integrity or another compelling impossibility rather than administrative preference. Simultaneous election is intended to serve democracy; it should not become a justification for delaying democracy.

Second, the period of deferral must be strictly limited. An elected Assembly cannot be constitutionally absent indefinitely merely because its election missed the national cycle. A fixed outer limit, subject perhaps to narrowly defined emergency provisions, would reduce the risk of discretionary suspension of representative government. The High-Level Committee's own second-stage recommendation that local-body elections be synchronised within a defined one-hundred-day window illustrates the possibility of using temporal safeguards.

Third, the constitutional consequences during the interim must be explicit. If an Assembly's term ends and voting is postponed, does the Council of Ministers remain as caretaker? For how long? With what limitations? When does Article 356 become necessary? Can the outgoing Assembly's term be extended? Article 172 permits extension of an Assembly's term during a Proclamation of Emergency but under specific conditions; a general ONOE deferral should not create an implied extension power inconsistent with that structure.

Fourth, reasons should be recorded and judicial review preserved. *Election Commission of India v. Ashok Kumar*[78] recognised the need to avoid judicial obstruction of an ongoing electoral process while leaving room for appropriate judicial scrutiny. Judicial review should remain available to test whether a postponement recommendation is *mala fide*, irrational or outside constitutional parameters. Because federal democratic representation is involved, deference to election administration should not become immunity.

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[76] *Ex-CJIs Flag Some Provisions*, *supra* note 49; *Ex-CJI Sanjiv Khanna Flags 'Unfettered' Powers to EC Before ONOE Panel*, THE WEEK (PTI) (Aug. 19, 2025), https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/national/2025/08/19/del88-onoe-ex-cji.html (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

[77] LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT, *supra* note 20.

[78] *Election Commission of India v. Ashok Kumar*, (2000) 8 SCC 216.

The role of the President also requires clarity. The Constitution generally operates through ministerial advice. If the President's postponement order is formally issued following an Election Commission recommendation, the relationship among the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the President must be constitutionally intelligible. Does the Commission's recommendation bind the President? Is ministerial advice involved? Can the executive decline the recommendation? Ambiguity on these questions risks politicising what ought to be an independent electoral decision.

T.N. Seshan v. Union of India[79] is relevant not because it answers these precise questions but because it rejects personalised understandings of electoral authority. The Election Commission is a constitutional institution, not an unaccountable fourth branch capable of determining the democratic existence of legislatures free from standards. Independence requires insulation from political pressure; it does not require absence of law.

The operational argument in favour of the Commission's role remains strong. A simultaneous election involving the Lok Sabha and every State Assembly would be among the largest coordinated democratic exercises in the world. It would be unrealistic to draft a constitutional system on the assumption that every State can always vote within an identical period. Some flexibility is indispensable.

Indeed, the Election Commission was reported in July 2026 as indicating readiness to conduct simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections with adequate advance preparation, reportedly six months' notice, if the legal framework were enacted.[80] This supports the argument that the logistical problem is difficult but not necessarily insurmountable. Yet logistical readiness does not resolve the constitutional question. The more ambitious the coordinated election, the more important it becomes to distinguish technical scheduling power from authority to postpone representative government.

The Commission's powers thus represent a broader lesson about ONOE. Constitutional reform often creates new discretion when attempting to solve practical problems. The danger lies not in discretion itself but in insufficiently regulated discretion. If the Bill is ultimately enacted, Article 82A should not become a constitutional blank cheque enabling deferred State elections whenever simultaneous administration is inconvenient. Federal democracy requires the

[79] *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India*, (1995) 4 SCC 611.

[80] *EC Ready for 'One Nation One Election' with 6-Month Notice: Par Panel Chief*, DECCAN CHRONICLE (PTI) (July 15, 2026), https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/ec-ready-for-one-nation-one-election-with-6-month-notice-par-panel-chief-1971202 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

opposite presumption: every State is entitled to timely representative government, and departure from that rule must remain exceptional, reasoned, reviewable and strictly temporary.

VII. Democracy beyond efficiency: voter behaviour, regional representation, cost, governance and the limits of the efficiency argument

The normative case for simultaneous elections often begins with the voter. A citizen asked repeatedly to participate in elections may face electoral fatigue; governments and parties remain in campaign mode; political discourse becomes permanently electoral; and voter mobilisation must be repeatedly organised. Holding elections together appears to simplify democratic participation by allowing citizens to make national and State choices during the same electoral period. The High-Level Committee argued that simultaneous elections could improve participation, predictability and governance.[81] Yet democratic quality cannot be assessed only by the convenience of casting votes. The institutional context in which choices are made also matters.

India's federal democracy provides voters with multiple opportunities to evaluate governments. A national government can remain electorally popular while a State government is voted out, and vice versa. Staggered elections create recurring democratic feedback. Governments receive information about shifting public preferences between national general elections. State elections become occasions for scrutiny of local governance rather than merely intermediate episodes in a national contest. The resulting "permanent election" may be administratively inconvenient, but it is also a form of continuous political accountability.

This point must not be romanticised. Elections impose real administrative and financial burdens. But the frequency of democratic judgment is itself a constitutional value. The Supreme Court's understanding of democracy has consistently moved beyond a minimalist conception: *Association for Democratic Reforms*[82] and the two *People's Union for Civil Liberties* decisions[83,84] suggest that electoral constitutionalism concerns the quality of choice, not merely the regularity of polling.

A principal concern is the potential nationalisation of State elections. When Lok Sabha and Assembly campaigns occur simultaneously, national leaders, national security narratives,

[81] PRS Legislative Research, *supra* note 5, at 2; *see also* Rolly Tyagi, *One Nation, One Election*, 5(5) Indian Journal of Legal Review 634 (2025), https://ijlr.iledu.in/one-nation-one-election/.
[82] *Association for Democratic Reforms*, *supra* note 69.
[83] *People's Union for Civil Liberties (2003)*, *supra* note 68.
[84] *People's Union for Civil Liberties (2013)*, *supra* note 70.

prime-ministerial preferences and nationally funded campaign machinery may occupy a larger share of political attention. Regional issues can still survive, and voters are perfectly capable of differentiating between levels of government. Nevertheless, synchronisation structurally places two separate democratic judgments inside a single campaign environment.[85]

The constitutional problem is not that voters might make the "wrong" choice. Courts and legislatures cannot paternalistically protect citizens from political influence. The concern is institutional pluralism. Federalism benefits from separate political arenas in which State-specific questions can become temporarily dominant.[86] Election timing contributes to that political space even though the Constitution does not expressly guarantee different polling dates.

Regional parties have particular stakes in this arrangement. Indian federalism has evolved through the rise of parties whose political legitimacy is concentrated in particular States. They have influenced coalition governments, federal fiscal debates, language policy, welfare experimentation and Centre-State relations.[87] A simultaneous election does not legally prevent regional parties from competing. However, campaign synchronisation may change fundraising priorities, media attention and the relative visibility of State leadership.

The more defensible concern is concentration of campaign power. National and State election expenditure occurring simultaneously could create unprecedented demand for advertising, digital platforms, political consultants, transportation, security and campaign personnel. Wealthier parties with national organisational structures may enjoy economies of scale. Smaller regional parties could benefit from a shorter consolidated campaign period, but they may also struggle to compete for political attention.[88]

The Model Code of Conduct is another area in which democratic and administrative narratives diverge. Supporters contend that repeated elections mean repeated periods in which governments are constrained from announcing policies, sanctioning projects or making certain

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[85] *See generally* Tejaswini S., *One Nation, One Election: Balancing Efficiency and Representation in Indian Politics*, 8(4) INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND GOVERNANCE 65 (2026), https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2026.v8.i4a.985.

[86] *See generally* Arjan H. Schakel & Valentyna Romanova, *Towards a Scholarship on Regional Elections*, 28(3) REGIONAL & FEDERAL STUDIES 233 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2018.1473857.

[87] *See generally* Christophe Jaffrelot & Gilles Verniers, *A New Party System or a New Political System?*, 28(2) CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA 141 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2020.1765990; Pradeep Chhibber & Rahul Verma, *The Rise of the Second Dominant Party System in India: BJP's New Social Coalition in 2019*, 7(2) STUDIES IN INDIAN POLITICS 131 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023019874628.

[88] *See generally* INDIA'S POLITICAL PARTIES (Peter Ronald deSouza & E. Sridharan eds., Sage Publications 2006); Vikramjeet Singh & Tanish Dahuja, *One Nation, One Election: An Analysis Through the Lens of Cooperative Federalism*, 4(2) PANJAB UNIVERSITY LAW MAGAZINE (MAGLAW) 119 (2025), https://maglaw.puchd.ac.in/index.php/maglaw/article/view/388.

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appointments, producing policy paralysis. The concern appears prominently in the Statement of Objects and Reasons and in the High-Level Committee's reasoning. Yet the Election Commission has previously clarified that the Model Code does not stop existing schemes, completed payments, emergency measures or all governmental activity. PRS therefore records the Law Commission's observation that the Model Code does not cause administrative paralysis but leads to a governance deficit through the avoidance of policy decisions.[89]

This matters because the constitutional cure should be proportionate to the problem. If the principal difficulty is overbroad or prolonged operation of the Model Code, reforming the Model Code may be less constitutionally intrusive than restructuring the terms of every legislature. Constitutional amendment should ordinarily be justified by a problem that cannot adequately be addressed through less disruptive institutional reform.[90]

A related question concerns turnout. The High-Level Committee associated simultaneous elections with potential increases in voter participation. Consolidated polling may indeed reduce the cost of voting for citizens who travel, take leave from work or face logistical difficulties. On the other hand, national elections already attract substantial participation, while some State elections generate even higher turnout because of intense local competition. Whether simultaneous polls systematically increase turnout is therefore an empirical question rather than a self-evident constitutional fact.

The potential effect on campaign discourse is equally complex. Repeated elections are criticised for encouraging short-term populism because political parties continually prepare for the next contest. Simultaneous elections could theoretically create a longer post-election governance window in which difficult policy decisions are politically easier. But the same five-year synchronised cycle might produce an enormous nationwide campaign in which short-term promises, identity politics and national narratives dominate every tier simultaneously. The frequency of campaigning would decrease while the intensity and concentration of campaigning could increase.

The Constitution does not require any particular quantity of elections beyond regular democratic renewal, nor does it protect political parties from changes in electoral strategy. These considerations therefore may not independently invalidate ONOE. Their importance lies in constitutional evaluation under the Basic Structure Doctrine. When Parliament alters the

[89] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 3.
[90] *See generally* A. Ranjithkumar, *One Nation, One Election: A Constitutional and Governance Perspective on Simultaneous Elections in India*, 59 JOURNAL OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY STUDIES 113 (2025), https://www.printspublications.com/journal/article/journal-of-constitutional-and-parliamentary-studies/4108.

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architecture of elections, courts may ask whether the change preserves genuine representative choice and political pluralism. *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India*[91] illustrates the judicial distinction between permissible electoral regulation and destruction of democratic principles. ONOE would likely be judged similarly: not by whether it modifies political behaviour, but by whether its cumulative operation damages democratic federalism.

A well-designed model should consequently recognise that India is not merely a nation holding many elections; it is a constitutional Union containing many democratic arenas. Synchronisation may coordinate those arenas in time, but it should not seek to homogenise their political content.

The phrase "One Nation, One Election" should therefore never become "One Nation, One Political Question". The Indian electorate possesses several constitutional identities simultaneously: citizen of India, resident of a State and participant in local self-government. Each level addresses different legislative and administrative responsibilities. If simultaneous elections are implemented, the success of the reform should be measured not merely by how few days are spent voting, but by whether these different democratic judgments remain meaningful.

A constitutional critique of ONOE is incomplete without taking seriously the problems the proposal seeks to solve. India's election administration is extraordinarily resource intensive. Political parties themselves remain engaged in near-continuous fundraising and campaigning.[92] The cumulative burden is not imaginary.

The scale of modern national elections is particularly striking. According to PRS, the 2024 Lok Sabha election involved approximately 97.9 crore registered voters and was conducted across seven poll days, with 43 days between the first and last voting dates.[93] If several major Assembly elections follow in different months, much of the political system remains oriented toward electoral competition even after the national contest ends.

Governmental expenditure provides one argument for consolidation, although the figures require context. The Parliamentary Standing Committee had previously relied upon Election Commission estimates placing public expenditure for Lok Sabha and State elections at several thousand crore rupees. PRS notes that direct governmental election expenditure has historically

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[91] *Kuldip Nayar*, *supra* note 9.

[92] *See generally* A. Shaji George, *One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India*, 2(3) PARTNERS UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL 40 (2023), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8348173.

[93] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 3, 5.

constituted a relatively small proportion of GDP, while non-governmental estimates of total political expenditure can be dramatically higher. It cites estimates placing total expenditure associated with the 2024 Lok Sabha election at approximately ₹1.35 lakh crore, though such non-official estimates include categories extending far beyond the Election Commission's administrative budget.[94]

The economic argument therefore should not be framed simply as "democracy is too expensive". Elections necessarily cost money, and constitutional rights cannot be reduced to accounting exercises. The more compelling argument concerns repeated mobilisation. If the same infrastructure, security personnel and administrative workforce can conduct Lok Sabha and Assembly voting during a common period, coordination may produce genuine economies of scale.

During the continuing 2026 parliamentary examination, economic arguments remained prominent. In October 2026 the Chief Economic Adviser reportedly told the Joint Committee that frequent elections could alter governmental spending incentives and divert attention from longer-term capital expenditure, while other economists expressed support for simultaneous polls as a means of reducing repeated disruptions.[95] Such arguments are relevant, but causal claims require careful empirical scrutiny. Government expenditure decisions are affected by numerous political, fiscal and macroeconomic variables.[96] Establishing that asynchronous elections cause lower capital expenditure nationally is more difficult than showing that governments often announce politically attractive schemes around elections.

National security and deployment of central armed police forces form a related consideration. Elections require substantial security arrangements, particularly in areas affected by insurgency, communal tension or electoral violence. Repeated deployment can interfere with ordinary policing and security functions. Simultaneous elections might reduce the number of separate mobilisation cycles. At the same time, conducting nearly every major election in one coordinated period could create extraordinary peak demand for security personnel. The comparison is therefore between repeated moderate burdens and a less frequent but extremely large burden.

Electronic voting equipment poses a similar challenge. Simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly voting requires separate voting units, control units and VVPAT arrangements for the two

[94] PRS LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH, *supra* note 5, at 3.
[95] *ONOE Panel Hears Economists*, *supra* note 22.
[96] *See generally* M. Govinda Rao & Nirvikar Singh, *The Political Economy of India's Fiscal Federal System and Its Reform*, 37(1) PUBLIUS: THE JOURNAL OF FEDERALISM 26 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjl014.

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contests across an enormous number of polling stations. Procurement, warehousing, maintenance, testing and replacement create substantial upfront expense. Some savings from repeated use may emerge later, but initial transition costs should be transparently calculated.

The difficulty emerges when administrative advantages are converted into claims of constitutional necessity. Efficient government is undoubtedly valuable, but the Constitution often deliberately adopts inefficient arrangements to preserve liberty, deliberation and federalism. Bicameralism slows law-making. Judicial review delays executive finality. Federal division duplicates administrative institutions.[97] Periodic elections consume enormous resources. These are not design failures; they are costs accepted because constitutional democracy distributes power rather than maximising administrative speed.

Thus, cost-benefit analysis must distinguish three questions. First, are repeated elections administratively costly? Clearly yes. Second, would simultaneous elections reduce some of these costs? Probably yes, although the magnitude requires transparent empirical evaluation. Third, do those savings justify shortening mandates, restructuring parliamentary terms and creating new postponement powers? That is a constitutional, not merely economic, question.

Proportionality offers a useful analytical analogy even though the Basic Structure challenge to a constitutional amendment is not conventionally decided through the ordinary fundamental rights proportionality test. Where less constitutionally disruptive alternatives can achieve a substantial portion of the same objective, the case for structural amendment becomes weaker. Election periods can be shortened. State elections due within a few months of each other can voluntarily be grouped. MCC rules can be clarified. Security deployment can be planned more efficiently. Election financing can be reformed. Legislative terms can be gradually aligned rather than abruptly curtailed.

Voluntary synchronisation deserves particular attention. Several States already vote with the Lok Sabha. Others could, where their constitutional and political circumstances permit, choose dissolution close to a national election and gradually align themselves. The problem is that synchronisation would again break whenever an Assembly falls prematurely. Yet this illustrates a broader point: complete and permanent synchronisation requires the most constitutionally intrusive rules, while partial synchronisation may deliver many administrative benefits with substantially lower federal costs.

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[97] *See generally* AREND LIJPHART, PATTERNS OF DEMOCRACY: GOVERNMENT FORMS AND PERFORMANCE IN THIRTY-SIX COUNTRIES (2d ed., Yale University Press 2012); IRFAN NOORUDDIN, COALITION POLITICS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: CREDIBILITY AND THE STRENGTH OF WEAK GOVERNMENTS (Cambridge University Press 2011).

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The economic case therefore supports reform but does not dictate a single model. Administrative efficiency is a legitimate constitutional consideration; it cannot be the master constitutional value. India's electoral system exists to maintain accountable government, not to minimise the cost of electing it. ONOE will be constitutionally persuasive only when its proponents demonstrate that savings and governance benefits can be achieved without degrading representative autonomy.

VIII. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND CONCLUSION: SYNCHRONISATION WITHOUT CENTRALISATION

As of 6 October 2026, ONOE remains a live constitutional proposal rather than enacted constitutional law. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 continue to be examined by the Joint Committee of Parliament. The Committee's tenure was extended in July 2026 to the first day of the last week of the Winter Session of 2026, and consultations continued into October.[98] This continuing scrutiny is constitutionally appropriate because the proposal affects not simply how elections are administered but how democratic terms are constructed.

A proposed 6 October 2026 interaction between the parliamentary committee and sitting Supreme Court judges was called off. The Supreme Court communicated that because the proposed constitutional amendment could subsequently become the subject of judicial review, an administrative side discussion was not considered expedient or desirable.[99] The episode itself reflects sound separation of powers concerns. Sitting judges who may later adjudicate a Basic Structure challenge should not appear to prejudge the constitutionality of proposed legislation through informal consultation with the legislative committee examining it.

The continuing parliamentary process provides an opportunity to redesign the Bill before enactment. The strongest version of ONOE would not simply defend the existing text but introduce safeguards responsive to the constitutional concerns identified during scrutiny. Besides those on transition, ratification, deferral and confidence argued above, four deserve mention.

First, remainder-term elections should be accompanied by special provisions dealing with extremely short residual periods. The Bill currently accepts the possibility of legislatures

[98] *LS Extends Tenure of JPC*, *supra* note 21; *ONOE Panel Hears Economists*, *supra* note 22.

[99] *Supreme Court Declines Meeting with 'One Nation, One Election' Panel*, OUTLOOK (Oct. 2, 2026), https://www.outlookindia.com/national/supreme-court-declines-meeting-with-one-nation-one-election-panel (last visited Nov. 5, 2026); Manu Sebastian, *Supreme Court Judges Not Meeting 'One Nation One Election' Committee*, LIVELAW (Oct. 1, 2026), https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/supreme-court-judges-not-meeting-one-nation-one-election-committee-552737 (last visited Nov. 5, 2026).

existing for very brief terms. Where only a few months remain, Parliament must confront the democratic and financial irrationality of two general elections in rapid succession. Yet simply postponing the first election would be constitutionally worse. A carefully drafted threshold, perhaps involving temporary arrangements subject to strict judicially reviewable conditions, deserves fuller debate. There is no perfect solution because premature dissolution and rigid synchronisation are inherently in tension.

Second, the Model Code of Conduct should be independently reformed. If governance paralysis constitutes a major rationale for ONOE, policymakers should demonstrate that they have attempted to reduce unnecessary MCC disruption directly. Existing programmes, routine administration and emergency measures should be insulated from excessive political caution. This would ensure that constitutional amendment addresses genuine structural problems rather than deficiencies that ordinary electoral regulation could cure.

Third, political pluralism requires institutional safeguards even though no constitutional rule can prevent national political issues from influencing State elections. Public broadcasting arrangements, voter education and campaign-finance disclosures should distinguish clearly between national and State contests. State manifestos and State leadership debates deserve electoral visibility even within a common voting period. Synchronisation should remain temporal, not political.

Fourth, robust logistical planning is indispensable. The Election Commission's reported position in 2026 that simultaneous elections are operationally manageable with adequate notice supports feasibility but does not eliminate resource challenges. Sufficient EVM and VVPAT capacity, security planning, warehouse infrastructure, polling personnel and audit mechanisms must exist before the appointed date is notified. Electoral integrity cannot be compromised in pursuit of the reform's timetable.

The likely judicial question, if Parliament ultimately passes the amendment and litigation follows, will not be whether courts prefer staggered elections. Courts do not possess a general power to veto constitutional policy merely because another arrangement appears wiser. The question under *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*[100] and subsequent Basic Structure jurisprudence will be whether the amendment, individually or in cumulative operation, damages democracy, federalism, free and fair elections, judicial review or another essential constitutional feature.

[100] *Kesavananda Bharati*, *supra* note 7.

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A narrow challenge asserting that any simultaneous election violates federalism should therefore fail. Historical practice demonstrates the contrary. State and Union elections can co-exist on the same polling date while voters choose different governments. Nor does Article 172 establish an immutable right to a five-year Assembly term. The Constitution expressly contemplates earlier dissolution. Parliament has considerable amending authority to re-design electoral mechanisms.

A stronger challenge would target specific mechanisms. If State mandates are systematically curtailed merely to fit a Union-centred electoral clock, if State elections may be postponed without a strict temporal limit, if the Election Commission receives insufficiently structured authority capable of leaving a State without an elected Assembly, or if parliamentary confidence is artificially constrained to preserve the schedule, the cumulative effect may implicate the Basic Structure.

The ratification question could also become significant. After *Kihoto Hollohan*[101] and *Rajendra N. Shah*[102], whether ONOE crosses the ratification threshold remains an open constitutional question and should not be presented as conclusively settled before enactment and adjudication.

The debate is ultimately about the constitutional meaning of efficiency. There is nothing constitutionally virtuous about inefficiency for its own sake. Parliament is entitled, indeed expected, to consider reforms that make elections less disruptive. The mistake would be to treat electoral administration as if it were detached from constitutional structure.

A sustainable reform must recognise that the calendar exists for democracy; democracy does not exist for the calendar. If an elected government collapses, constitutional accountability must prevail over synchronisation. If a State election can be held, electoral convenience must not justify its postponement. If State mandates must be adjusted, the adjustment should be minimal, transparent and federally legitimate. If efficiency can be achieved through less disruptive reforms, those alternatives deserve serious consideration.

The strongest constitutional conclusion is therefore neither unconditional acceptance nor categorical rejection. Simultaneous elections are constitutionally possible; permanent synchronisation is constitutionally demanding. The former concerns when citizens vote. The latter determines how long governments survive, when legislatures expire, what occurs after loss of confidence, whether State elections can be deferred and which constitutional authority controls those decisions. Those questions reach the core of Indian federal democracy.

[101] *Kihoto Hollohan*, *supra* note 38.
[102] *Rajendra N. Shah*, *supra* note 39.

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"One Nation" in the Constitution signifies political unity, not institutional uniformity. Federalism permits different governments to receive different mandates at different moments because democratic diversity is part of India's constitutional design. "One Election" may be administratively attractive, but it can acquire constitutional legitimacy only by respecting that diversity. The objective should therefore be simultaneous elections without simultaneous centralisation; electoral efficiency without diluted accountability; stability without fixed executive immunity; and national coordination without reducing State democracy to a timetable determined elsewhere. If those safeguards are incorporated, ONOE may evolve into a defensible electoral reform. Without them, the project risks solving the inconvenience of frequent elections by creating a considerably more serious problem: weakening the federal and parliamentary principles that make those elections constitutionally meaningful.

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