

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 8 | Issue 2

2025

© 2025 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

This article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact support@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to submission@ijlmh.com.

One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the High-Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections in India (2024) and its Implications for Indian Democracy

NEEYATI TOMAR¹

ABSTRACT

The 2024 High Level Committee (hereinafter “HLC”) Report on “One Nation, One Election” assesses the prospects and implications of conducting simultaneous national, state and local bodies elections across India. The objective is to address electoral redundancies by synchronising election cycles in India, a practice that was followed post-independence until it was phased out by the 1960s. For the implementation, HLC recommends a phased plan and two constitutional amendments along with empowering the Election Commission of India and a unified electoral roll. Furthermore, it also highlights its impact on India’s federal structure and risks to regional representation. Comparative perspectives from countries like South Africa and Germany have been included to ensure the best international practices for fair and transparent elections. The essay undertakes an analysis of the HLC report on One Nation, One Election and its various constitutional, economic and social implications on Indian democracy, along with relevant case laws and international insights.

Keywords: *One nation, one election, federalism, simultaneous elections, high level committee, electoral reforms, election commission, constitution amendments, national and regional parties.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The “One Nation, One Election” (hereinafter “**ONOE**”) proposal has stirred intense debate due to its potential to restructure India’s electoral settings as it envisions simultaneous elections held in phases for Lok Sabha (Lower House), State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies like Municipalities and Panchayats in India. For an aspirational Bharat, governance based on the foundation of democracy is supreme. Since independence, the country has seen more than 400 elections of the House of People and State Legislative Assemblies in more than 7 decades. While the Election Commission has been successful in holding free and fair elections in the

¹ Author is a student at _____, India.

country, the optimality of the design of the framework calls for an objective assessment from time to time and the HLC, constituted by the Gazette notification of 2nd September 2023 by the Government of India, serves that purpose.

The HLC worked for 191 days and its members were eminent members from diverse backgrounds in law, political science, administration, public finance and economics. The report, after extensive public (21,588 responses) and political parties (47 responses) consultation, found that 80% were in favour of One Nation, One Election, mentioning benefits like fewer election expenses, protecting social harmony, stimulating economic development and reduced governance disruptions,² all of which are necessary for @ViksitBharat. The report consists of 11 chapters consisting of 281 pages discussing the constitution of the committee, consultation process, best international practices, simultaneous elections and its implications, benefits, challenges, recommendations, etc. It also mentions the articles that need to be amended and the willingness of the Election Commission regarding logistical arrangements. The HLC report, therefore, aims to balance the benefits of synchronised elections in all three tiers of government with potential implications for Indian democracy while recommending a gradual and cautious plan to achieve the goal of an aspirational India.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE HLC REPORT AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN DEMOCRACY

India's electoral process is the cornerstone of its democracy and any reform of this magnitude demands a cautious, inclusive and phased approach. ONOE concept is not a new concept as it was a part of the Indian democratic system from 1951 to 1967, but due to political instability, the pattern broke off. This disruption burdened the country's resources and administrative capacities as mentioned in the HLC report. Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy, chairman of the Fifteenth Law Commission, stated in its report on election reforms, "*We must go back to the situation where the elections to Lok Sabha and all the legislative assemblies are held at once,*"³ highlighting its need. On October 5, 2017, the Election Commission said that they are ready to conduct polls together by September 2018 if the Government made necessary amendments,⁴ but COVID pandemic took place and the discussion was sidelined. In January 2017, NITI Aayog also formulated a working paper titled "Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The What,

² High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, *Report on Simultaneous Elections in India*, Executive Summary, pp. 1-8, at 2 (2024).

³ Law Commission of India, *Reform of the Electoral Laws*, (Report No. 170, 1999), at Para 7.2.1.1.

⁴ The Wire Staff, *EC Says It will be Ready for Simultaneous Lok Sabha, Assembly Polls by September 2018*, The Wire, Oct. 5, 2017, <https://thewire.in/184565/election-commission-says-will-ready-simultaneous-lok-sabha-assembly-poll-september-2018/>.

Why and How," exploring the prospect of holding concurrent elections for the House of the People and State Legislative Assemblies and discussing ONOE.⁵

Presently, India holds elections at intervals and the HLC suggests holding simultaneous elections at all three levels of government in India and, if not possible, then holding simultaneous elections at centre and state levels and elections of local bodies like Municipalities and Panchayats within 100 days of the synchronised elections in that area. The elections are not to be held together all over India as it is not possible owing to the geography of India but to be held in stages in the parts of India as this would reduce election related disruptions and costs and will lead to a more stable form of government as re-elections before the five year term in India is not a norm, only an exception.

Due to the present situation, some parts of the nation are always in election mode which leads to policy paralysis.⁶ A critical advantage assessed by the HLC report is that the ONOE will allow governments and policy makers to focus more effectively on long term, development oriented initiatives for the region instead of short term gains decisions that are a part of campaign strategies. The decision makers will be able to make bold decisions instead of giving in to the pressure to make populist policy decisions owing to the constant engagement in electioneering every year. Between 2014 and 2023, India has conducted more than ten state assembly elections on average every year.⁷ By implementing a unified electoral schedule, the HLC argues that policymakers could better prioritise governance and polity and will also have more working days as the Model Code of Conduct was implemented for around 300 days across various states between 2014-2019,⁸ giving time for making welfare schemes, thus benefitting the nation as a whole.

The HLC report states that constitutional amendments are achievable to implement ONOE, however, it overlooks the practical legal and procedural hurdles involved. ONOE will require key articles to be amended in the Constitution that currently regulates electoral cycles of the state and the centre. To achieve this, the central government will need the support of both the Parliament and the majority of state legislatures (two-thirds) involving major amendments, particularly in Articles 82, 83, 85, 172, 174, 243, 324 and 356. Therefore, this could be difficult pertaining to the political opposition and diversity of India's regional parties. Communism,

⁵ Government of India, "Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "What", "Why" and "How"" (NITI Aayog, 2017).

⁶ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections in India (2024), Chapter 8 pp.159.

⁷ Election Commission of India, *Media & Publications*, available at: <https://www.eci.gov.in/media-publication> (last visited Nov. 15, 2024).

⁸ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections in India (2024), *Economic and Social Implications of Simultaneous Elections*, pp. 167.

casteism and regionalism are at their peak during elections and, therefore, at their peak in one part of the country or another every year, leading to derogation of the environment of the country.

Furthermore, the report anticipates that ONOE would improve voter turnout as they would only need to come once in five years, which is fundamental to democracy. A research undertaken by Shackel and Dandoy, has demonstrated that simultaneous elections significantly impact voter turnout.⁹ It can also be seen that voter turnout is often higher in concurrent elections (national and state elections held in the same year). For instance, states that hold concurrent elections with the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saw an average voter turnout above 60%, while those state elections held in separate years had a lower average turnout.¹⁰ The ONOE proposal will also reduce the cost due to postal votes and the simplification of the voting cycle would lead to the strengthening of democratic participation.

The HLC envisions enormous savings in election expenses, including costs for security, polling stations and campaign expenditures which could be used towards the development of the country. The ONOE can lower corruption and crony capitalism, which are the result of fund generation by political parties. The expenses involved in conducting a Lok Sabha election have risen steadily over the years. For instance, during India's first election in 1951-52, which spanned 68 phases, the cost was a modest Rs 10.5 crore. Fast forward to 2019, and the cost had skyrocketed to a staggering Rs 50,000 crore (\$7 billion), according to a report by the Centre for Media Studies. The report further highlights ONOE will benefit the gross domestic product (GDP) growth of the country, reduce fiscal deficit and help in curbing inflation.¹¹ Based on previous years' trends, the 2024 election is expected to cost approximately double the amount of the last election, amounting to a staggering Rs 1,00,000 crore.¹²

The HLC report presents synchronised elections as a means to reduce election related costs by eliminating repeated elections at different times across states. The staff required during elections, such as CRPF personnel, local police and polling officers can be reduced and that manpower can be used for other purposes like more focus on solving crimes and the government institutions can continue harmoniously without obstructions as teachers will have to go on

⁹ Arjan H. Schakel & Régis Dandoy, Electoral Cycles and Turnout in Multilevel Electoral Systems, *West European Politics*, 37:3, 605-623 (2014).

¹⁰ Election Commission of India, *Media & Publications*, available at: <https://www.eci.gov.in/media-publication> (last visited Nov. 15, 2024).

¹¹ High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections in India (2024), *Economic and Social Implications of Simultaneous Elections*, pp. 161–163.

¹² "Lok Sabha Election 2024: How Much Does it Cost to Hold Elections in India?", *Business Standard*, available at https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/lok-sabha-election-2024-how-much-does-it-cost-to-hold-elections-in-india-124041900352_1.html.

government duty once in five years. Moreover, after the delimitation exercise in 2026, there will be an increase in the Lok Sabha seats, which will put an additional burden on the Election Commission if the present situation continues.¹³

The critics refer to the Election case in which the Hon'ble Supreme Court held that free and fair elections and democracy are part of the basic structure.¹⁴ However, synchronised elections suggested by the HLC report emphasise only the conducting of elections for Lok Sabha and all state assemblies at a fixed time. The manner of conducting free and fair elections is not affected. Only the timing of conducting the election is fixed.¹⁵ To ensure free, fair and impartial elections, the Constitution establishes the election commission, a body autonomous in character and insulated from political pressure and executive influence. Care has been taken that the commission functions as an independent agency free from external pressures from the party in power or the executive of the day.¹⁶

India is a federal country characterised by a balance of power between the centre-state governments. While the report lays down that simultaneous elections will not hamper Indian federal structure, the critics refer to the “basic structure” doctrine laid down by the 11-judge bench in *Kesavananda Bharti v. Union of India* (1973),¹⁷ cautioning that ONOE could challenge the state autonomy and eclipse regional representation. The National parties’ influence may be amplified due to higher media visibility and financial resources. National parties also tend to support this proposal seeing it as a pathway to streamline governance and reduce costs, whereas regional parties express concerns over the potential erosion of state level representation, fearing a system that could concentrate power at the national stage.

The critics argue that the report does not adequately address the risks that ONOE might pose to India’s federal structure and regional diversity like national parties will be stronger than regional parties during the synchronised elections and will lead to a “coattail effect.” The elections will be more on centrally focused agendas and will sideline the regional parties that advocate for local issues and community specific issues but if closely seen, it is more of a voter awareness situation. The voters must be educated about the differences in the issues at all three levels and vote accordingly. For instance, in 2024, 2019 and 2014, the Bhartiya Janta party won all seven

¹³ B. Muthu Kumar, *One Election, Two Votes: The Feasibility of Reviving the Past Trend*, (2018) 5 GNLU L. Rev. 139.

¹⁴ *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain*, 1975 Supp SCC 1: AIR 1975 SC 2299.

¹⁵ Shrangika Jaju and Ramla Kalim, *One Nation, One Election: Question of Desirability or Feasibility*, (2018-19) 8 CNLU L.J. 166.

¹⁶ M.P. Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law* 827 (7th edn., 2014).

¹⁷ *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, (1973) 4 SCC 225.

Lok Sabha seats¹⁸ but in the Vidhan Sabha election of Delhi, the Aam Admi Party, which was a regional party in 2014 and 2019 won the Vidhan Sabha seats by the majority. Similar voting patterns can be seen in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. Therefore, the voters are able to identify that Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha elections are distinct and federalism is not in danger.

Federalism has been declared as part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution,¹⁹ and the step towards simultaneous elections can also make a government authoritarian as they will only have to face the public once every five years, risking democratic accountability and insulating leaders. For instance, if these simultaneous elections are held in two phases, then the chance of holding accountability will only be at two times in a 5-year term. In the current system, since elections are being conducted many times for different states they are in a better position to hold the government responsible for its actions.²⁰

The report also gives insights from international countries like South Africa, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Indonesia and the Philippines trying to implement their benchmarking simultaneous election practices in India. Sweden and Germany elect their Prime Ministers and Chancellors every four years. In South Africa, where simultaneous elections are held for national and provincial governments, the country has reported cost savings of over 30% in administrative expenses related to election management. Additionally, voter engagement remained consistent, showing that simultaneous elections can promote fiscal efficiency without reducing civic engagement.²¹ Although, the report does not discuss first-world countries like the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom, where simultaneous elections also take place.

Finally, the HLC report presents a phased implementation method but lacks clarity on how this would be done across a country as vast and politically complex as India. The report did not lay down a systemic timeline regarding the synchronisation of election schedules transition and whether elections will be held before the five year term states or after their five year term in some due to the implementation of simultaneous elections as it will lead to injustice to the elected party, which could not complete its five year term due to implementation of simultaneous elections. Hence, the HLC report brings into the limelight the importance and need for a One Nation One Election proposal by thorough analysis and its social, political,

¹⁸ Members of Parliament from Delhi, Delhi Legislative Assembly, available at <https://delhiassembly.delhi.gov.in/dlas/members-parliament-delhi> (last visited Nov. 15, 2024).

¹⁹ S.R. Bommai v. Union of India, (1994) 3 SCC 1: AIR 1994 SC 1918.

²⁰ Kihota Holothon v. Zachilhiu 1992 Supp (2) SCC 651: AIR 1993 SC 412.

²¹ Election Commission of South Africa. *Annual Report on South Africa's Electoral Process*, 2023, Available at: <https://www.elections.org.za> (Accessed: 15 November 2024).

economic and legal impacts on Indian Democracy.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations for holding Simultaneous elections are:

1. Phased and piloted implementation in a few states with simultaneous of state and local bodies to assess feasibility, identify challenges and refine operational framework before implementing nationwide.
2. Launch voter education campaigns and programs to help citizens understand the difference between national, state and regional issues and vote accordingly in all three elections when held simultaneously thus choosing the government they need at the respective level.
3. Establish an annual review mechanism to assess the impact of ONOE on governance, federalism and voter behaviour, also allowing adoptive changes based on these reforms.
4. Synchronisation of Elections could be done in the month of April as the summer season is not at its peak, the winter season has ended and most institutions are done with their respective exams.

IV. CONCLUSION

The HLC report on “One Nation, One Election” is a thorough and ambitious blueprint for simultaneous elections in India, showcasing the aspirations and challenges of synchronising elections in a diverse and federal democracy like India. It seeks to bring a synchronisation in all the three tier elections and achieve cost reduction, polity continuity and promote social harmony. However, it also raises some concerns related to India’s federal framework and diverse democracy but it is overpowered by the enhanced transparency, inclusivity and confidence of the voters, which will be brought by implementing the recommendations of the report. The overwhelming support for ONOE will spur the development process and social cohesion along with the deepening of the foundations of our democratic rubric and aligning with the aspirations of our India, that is Bharat.
