

One Nation, One Election

Streamlining Electoral Processes

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Unifying Elections for the Nation

Electoral reforms as the Central Government's agenda

- ❖ Former President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind highlighted these reforms during his parliamentary address in January 2018
- ❖ He emphasized citizens' concerns over frequent elections impacting the economy and development adversely
- ❖ The idea is not a bolt from the blue

Historical context and evolution

- ❖ The Practice existed from 1952 to 1967 which was disrupted by defections, dismissals, and dissolutions of governments
- ❖ Cycle broken in 1959 when Article 356 was invoked to dismiss the Kerala government
- ❖ Defections and counter-defections post-1960 led to separate polls for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies
- ❖ Advocated again in 1999 by the Law Commission chaired by BP Jeevan Reddy
- ❖ Currently, Assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim align with Lok Sabha elections

Duration of Lok Sabhas till 2019

Lok Sabha	Last date of poll	Date of constitution of Lok Sabha	Date of first sitting	Date of expiration of term (Article 83(2) of Constitution)	Date of dissolution of Lok Sabha	Overall Term (in days)	Overall Term
First	21-Feb-52	2-Apr-52	13-May-52	12-May-57	4-Apr-57	1787	5 years
Second	15-Mar-57	5-Apr-57	10-May-57	9-May-62	31-Mar-62	1786	5 years
Third	25-Feb-62	2-Apr-62	16-Apr-62	15-Apr-67	3-Mar-67	1782	5 years
Fourth	21-Feb-67	4-Mar-67	16-Mar-67	15-Mar-72	27-Dec-70	1382*	3 years & 10 months
Fifth	10-Mar-71	15-Mar-71	19-Mar-71	18-Mar-77	18-Jan-77	2132**	5 years & 10 months
Sixth	20-Mar-77	23-Mar-77	25-Mar-77	24-Mar-82	22-Aug-79	880*	2 years & 5 months
Seventh	6-Jan-80	10-Jan-80	21-Jan-80	20-Jan-85	31-Dec-84	1806	5 years
Eighth	28-Dec-84	31-Dec-84	15-Jan-85	14-Jan-90	27-Nov-89	1777	5 years
Ninth	26-Nov-89	2-Dec-89	18-Dec-89	17-Dec-94	13-Mar-91	450*	1 year & 3 months
Tenth	15-Jun-91	20-Jun-91	9-Jul-91	8-Jul-96	10-May-96	1767	5 years
Eleventh	7-May-96	15-May-96	22-May-96	21-May-01	4-Dec-97	561*	1 year & 6 months
Twelfth	7-Mar-98	10-Mar-98	23-Mar-98	22-Mar-03	26-Apr-99	399*	1 year & 1 month
Thirteenth	4-Oct-99	10-Oct-99	20-Oct-99	19-Oct-04	6-Feb-04	1570*	4 years & 4 months
Fourteenth	10-May-04	17-May-04	2-Jun-04	1-Jun-09	18-May-09	1811	5 years
Fifteenth	13-May-09	18-May-09	1-Jun-09	31-May-14	18-May-14	1812	5 years
Sixteenth	12-May-14	18-May-14	4-Jun-14	3-Jun-19	03-Jun-19	1826	5 years

Historical perspective

We started with simultaneous elections

*Mid term polls were held. Dissolution took place before the elections. **Extension due to proclamation of Emergency

Call for Reforms



Current challenges
of electoral system



Frequent elections
and their impact on
Good Governance



Need for increased
Administrative
Efficiency

Initiative of SEC Rajasthan last year towards electoral Reforms to 'strengthen effective grassroots democracy'

Inspired by the spirit of Cooperative Federalism an All-India State Election Commissioners Conference was organized discussing 'Effective Grassroots Democracy' with the following thrust areas:

- 1) Developing a common platform for State ECs for better coordination
- 2) Challenges in State Election Administration
- 3) Learning from past experiences
- 4) Manual v/s Digital platforms
- 5) "Getting out the vote" an inclusive approach
- 6) Dealing with disinformation
- 7) Cyber security & IT solutions



State Election Commissioners with Hon'ble Governor Rajasthan

Case for Reducing Election Expenditures



Increase in Focus on Governance Quality

1. Impact of frequent elections on administrative direction & velocity - a virtual paralysis at various levels

2. Diversion of Manpower diverted from governance to election management every six months

3. Administrative challenges and increasing inefficiencies

Influence of Panchayati Raj & Urban Elections

Free &
Fair

- Curbing the dominance of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and Urban Local Bodies (ULB) representatives on national elections (MP/MLA)

Unbiased

- Ensuring fair representation and unbiased electoral processes by eliminating influence of already elected candidates (Mayors, Sarpanches, etc.)

Frequent Elections vs Synchronized Elections



Pros

1. Focused Governance: Efficient use of administrative resources
2. Continuity in Policy Decisions : Enhanced political stability
3. Reduced Deployment of Security Forces
4. Reduced Horse Trading
5. Reduced 'Freebies' and Improved State Finances
6. Reduced election-related expenditure



Cons

1. Constitutional & Logistical Challenges
2. Overshadowing the Regional interests
3. Higher chances of winning political part/alliance winning both Lok Sabha & Assembly Election in a State
4. Against the Idea of Federalism
5. Election Expenses aren't always Bad: stimulates private consumption to expand the economy
6. In short term costs of deploying far larger numbers of EVMs & VVPATs will increase significantly

Pre requisites

- I. Assessment of gaps in Elections : defining election & non election years
- II. Building consensus among all political parties and states on the need and feasibility of simultaneous elections through dialogue, consultation, and deliberation among various stakeholders.
- III. Addressing Legal Challenges in the existing framework of the Constitution
 - Representation of People Act 1951 and Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies would require appropriate amendments to conduct simultaneous polls
 - Requirement of receiving ratification from at least 50% of the States

Upgrading Legal Provisions

Relevant Constitutional and Statutory Provisions

Suitable changes in the following relevant provisions:-

1. **Article 83 & Article 172(1)** of the Constitution regarding Term of House of People and State Legislative Assemblies
2. **Section 14(2) and 15(2)** of The Representation of People Act, 1951 bind ECI not to issue notification for General Elections beyond 06 months of the completion of tenure for Lok Sabha & State assemblies
3. It could be increased by a relevant amendment to **one year** or even more
4. The legal framework has to be upgraded to deal with situations like **no confidence motions, premature dissolution of assemblies, hung parliaments, etc. that may arise during simultaneous elections**
5. Explore the possibility of **imposing Presidential rule** if the remaining term after dissolution is **less than 1 year** and for holding **fresh elections** if the remaining tenure of the house is more than one year

Identifying the process to bring about change

- Synchronization could be a gradual process and not an event as it entails many challenges in a federal structure
- ECI initially should try to combine maximum elections for States with Parliament elections. Like forthcoming States assembly elections to be conducted in 4 States within 6-8 months could be held along with the upcoming parliamentary elections
- As a second step Lok Sabha & State Legislative Assemblies could be progressively combined
- SECs to begin with should endeavor to have their Municipal & Panchayat elections together in the entire country
- Gradually move forward in a phased manner to bringing national, state & local elections in sync
- Developing a common platform for ECI and State ECs for better coordination in election related issues

Macro Prescriptions for the future

- Simultaneous elections could be held over a period of three months to optimally use Manpower, Security Forces and Logistics
- Large States like Rajasthan can conduct all elections in 2 to 3 phases
- Smaller states like Haryana can carry out the elections processes in 1 or 2 phases
- In cases of premature dissolution of assembly of any state the re-election could be conducted for that state in the next cycle
- It should be ensured that the party based elections in Parliament, State Assemblies or Municipalities do not adversely impact existing harmony in non-party based Panchayati Raj elections
- Simultaneous elections should be constructed as elections which are held over 3-4 months at the national, state and local levels but where the results are declared on one day

Case Studies - Using Elements of their success



Nepal

- Nepal had the experience of holding national and state elections simultaneously once in 2017
- It's EC had concerns about difficulty of organising such concurrent elections across the country
- The government then went for two-phase elections with a gap period



South Africa

- 9 African Provincial and National elections are held simultaneously every 5 yrs
- Separate voting papers are provided to voters to cast ballots
- South Africa's electoral system is based on a proportional representation (PR) framework



Sweden

- Sweden holds elections for county and municipal councils concurrently with general elections every 4 years
- All elections in Sweden take place on the same day
- Sweden has a proportional electoral system



Belgium

- Federal Parliament elections are held every five years in sync with European elections which impact regional elections

Way Forward



Building a national consensus



Aligning the electoral cycles at three levels over time



Upgrading legal framework to deal with situations like no-confidence motions, premature dissolution etc.



Investing in right infrastructure and technology



Creating awareness among the voters & stakeholders

