

Simultaneous Elections - One Nation, One Election

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Why in news?

- The government has constituted a **committee headed by former President of India Ram Nath Kovind** to explore the possibility of **"one nation, one election"**.
- Assembly polls are due in five states in November-December of 2023 and they will be followed by the Lok Sabha elections in May-June next year.
- However, the recent moves by the government have thrown open the possibility of advancing the general elections and some state polls, which are scheduled after and with the Lok Sabha contest.

Simultaneous elections in India:

- The concept of “One Nation, One Election” envisions a system in which all state and Lok Sabha elections must be held simultaneously.
- This will entail restructuring the Indian election cycle so that elections to the states and the centre coincide.
- This would imply that voters will vote for members of the LS and state assemblies on the same day and at the same time (or in a phased manner as the case may be).

History of Elections in India

• Era of simultaneous elections

- The first general elections of free India held simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assemblies of the States in 1951.
- The **next three cycles of elections** also witnessed concurrent Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly elections barring a few stray cases like:
 - Kerala where a mid-term election was held in 1960 on the pre-mature dissolution of the Assembly, and
 - in Nagaland and Pondicherry where the Assembly was created only after the 1962 general elections.
- The last occasion when we had **near-simultaneous elections was in 1967**.

• Beginning of the end of simultaneous elections

- The fourth Lok Sabha constituted in 1967 was dissolved prematurely in 1971. This was the beginning of the end of simultaneous elections.
- Extension of the term of Lok Sabha during the National Emergency declared in 1975 and the dissolution of Assemblies of some States after the 1977 Lok Sabha election further disturbed the cycle of concurrent elections.

• Current status

- After the two pre-mature dissolutions of the Lok Sabha in 1998 and 1999, only four State Assemblies have been going to polls along with the Lok Sabha elections in the last two decades.
- We now have **at least two rounds of Assembly general elections every year**.

Idea of returning to simultaneous elections:

- The idea of returning to simultaneous elections was raised in the Election Commission’s annual report in 1983. It was also mentioned in the Law Commission’s Report in 1999.
- Following the Prime Minister of India’s reintroduction of the idea in 2016, the NITI Aayog prepared a working paper on the subject in 2017.
- The Law Commission stated in its 2018 working paper that at least “**five Constitutional recommendations**” would be required to make simultaneous elections a reality in India again.
- In June 2019, PM Modi said that a **committee would be formed** to examine the issue and a meeting with leaders of political parties would be called.

- In July 2022, the issue of holding simultaneous Parliamentary and Assembly elections has been referred to the Law Commission in order to develop a workable roadmap and framework.

Benefits of simultaneous elections:

- **Report of Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2015:** The Committee in its Report on “Feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies” noted several justifications for holding simultaneous elections –
 - The massive expenditure that is currently incurred for the conduct of separate elections. Simultaneous polls will reduce enormous costs involved in separate elections
 - Simultaneous Election would mean saving on transport, accommodation, storage arrangements, training, remuneration, and so on.
 - This will also mean saving in terms of human resources. Another area of saving would be in the deployment of the Central Police Force.
 - The policy paralysis that results from the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during election time.
 - Impact on delivery of essential services.
 - Burden on crucial manpower that is deployed during election time.
 - This means, the system will help ruling parties focus on governance instead of being constantly in election mode.
- According to the Law Commission, simultaneous polls will boost voter turnout.

Challenges:

- **Constitutional challenges:**
 - The Indian Constitution provides for the dissolution of the legislature if the ruling party loses majority by passing a vote of no confidence.
 - Clause (2) of **Article 83, Article 172(1)** of Indian constitution deals with the term of Lok Sabha and State Assemblies respectively.
 - These Houses can be dissolved ahead of the scheduled expiry of the term of five years [**Articles 85(2)(b) and 174(2)(b)**].
 - However, there is no provision for extension of the term unless a proclamation of Emergency is in operation.
 - Bringing the terms of all the Houses to sync with one another necessarily calls for either extending the terms of several of the Houses or curtailing of terms or a combination of both, that too by two to three years in some cases.
 - In such a case, simultaneous elections could not be held within the existing framework of the Constitution.
 - These could be held together through appropriate amendments to:
 - the Constitution,
 - the Representation of the People Act 1951, and
 - the Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

- Since it will affect federal character, at least 50% of the states will require to ratify the constitutional amendments.
 - **Legal safeguards needed to avoid mid-term dissolution**
 - Even if the terms are synchronised as a one-time measure, we will still need adequate legal safeguards to avoid mid-term dissolution.
 - For maintaining the electoral cycle, some countries have legal provisions:
 - Eg., For a 'no-confidence motion' to be brought up against the government in office, the proposed resolution should also contain a constructive '**vote of confidence**' in an alternative government with a named leader to head it.
 - **Affects judgement of voters:**
 - National and state issues are different and holding simultaneous elections is likely to affect the judgement of voters.
 - **Reduced accountability of government:**
 - Since elections will be held once in five years, it will reduce the government's accountability to the people.
 - Repeated elections keep legislators on their toes and increase accountability.
 - **Logistical issue:**
 - In terms of resource allocation (manpower, preparing electoral rolls, etc), conducting simultaneous elections will be a challenge for the Election Commission of India (ECI).
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Q1) What is No-Confidence motion?

A "no-confidence motion" is a parliamentary procedure used in many countries to test the confidence of the legislature (usually the lower house of parliament) in the government or a specific officeholder, such as the Prime Minister or President. The motion is typically brought forward by members of the opposition or dissatisfied members of the ruling party or coalition. Its purpose is to determine whether the sitting government or officeholder continues to enjoy the support and trust of the legislative body.

Q2) What is Model Code of Conduct (MCC)?

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of guidelines and ethical standards that govern the behavior of political parties, candidates, and government officials during election campaigns in India. It is designed to ensure free and fair elections by preventing the misuse of government resources, maintaining a level playing field for all candidates and parties, and promoting ethical conduct throughout the electoral process.

Source: ['One nation, one election': Terms of 10 State Assemblies to end before or around 2024 Lok Sabha elections](#) | [Indian Express](#) | [iPleaders](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/simultaneous-elections/>

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