

FAQs

Simultaneous Elections/One nation One Election

Why is this in news?

A. Prime Minister recently pitched for ‘One Nation, One Election’, saying it is the need of the country as elections taking place every few months hamper development works.

What is One Nation One Election?

- Currently, elections to the state assemblies and the Lok Sabha are held separately — that is whenever the incumbent government’s five-year term ends or whenever it is dissolved due to various reasons. This applies to both the state legislatures and the Lok Sabha. The terms of Legislative Assemblies and the Lok Sabha may not synchronise with one another.
- But the idea of “One Nation, One Election” envisages a system where elections to all states and the Lok Sabha will have to be held simultaneously. This will involve the restructuring of the Indian election cycle in a manner that elections to the states and the centre synchronise. This would mean that the voters will cast their vote for electing members of the LS and the state assemblies on a single day, at the same time (or in a phased manner as the case may be).

What is the background for simultaneous elections?

- Simultaneous elections are not new to India. They were the norm until 1967. But following dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 and that of the Lok Sabha in December 1970, elections to State Assemblies and Parliament have been held separately.
- The idea of reverting to simultaneous polls was mooted in the annual report of the Election Commission in 1983.
- The Law Commission’s Report also referred to it in 1999. The recent push came ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls in the BJP manifesto.
- After PM floated the idea once again in 2016, the Niti Aayog prepared a working paper on the subject in January 2017. In the working paper that the Law Commission brought out in April 2018, it said that at least “five Constitutional amendments” would be required to get this off the ground. The final decision on holding simultaneous elections is yet to be taken.

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How will it work?

- There were two proposals to conduct simultaneous elections along with Lok Sabha elections. However, both didn't materialise.
- One proposal was to make the shift to simultaneous polls in a phased manner, where general elections of State Assemblies may be synchronised as the rest of the states are in the middle of their five-year term.
- For such a synchronisation to happen, besides political consensus and extension of term up to six months in some states, amendments to the Constitution have to be made. Elections to the remaining State Legislative Assemblies and Union Territory with Legislature (Puducherry) will be synchronised by the end of 2021. Thereafter, elections to the Lok Sabha, all the State Legislative Assemblies and Union Territories (with legislatures) will be held simultaneously from 2024.
- The second option involved synchronisation in two batches. First, elections to the State Legislative Assemblies and Union Territory would be synchronised with elections to the Lok Sabha. Next, elections to the remaining State Legislative Assemblies will be synchronised with that of Union Territory by the end of 2021. This makes elections across the country synchronised in such a manner that they will be held twice every five years.

What are its expected benefits?

- It will reduce enormous costs involved in separate elections.
- The system will help ruling parties focus on governance instead of being constantly in election mode.
- Simultaneous polls will boost voter turnout, according to the Law Commission.
- It can **help keep a check on the poll expenses, party expenses etc.**
- **The voters will be able to judge the policies and programmes of the government**, both at the state level and the central level. Also, it would be easy for the voters to determine which political party promised what and how it actually implemented the same.
- It will **save public money, reduce burden on administrative setup** and security forces, ensure **timely implementation of the government policies** and ensure that the administrative machinery is engaged in developmental activities rather than electioneering.

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What are the arguments against it?

- National and state issues are different, and holding simultaneous elections is likely to affect the judgment of voters.
- 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 increases accountability.
- When an election in a State is postponed until the synchronised phase, President's rule will have to be imposed in the interim period in that state. This will be a blow to democracy and federalism.

What might be Challenges?

- The term of the Lok Sabha and that of the State Legislative Assemblies needs to be synchronised so that the election to both can be held within a given span of time.
 - For instance, the term of the present Lok Sabha will go upto 2024, but elections to some of the legislative assembly had already taken place last year (for e.g. Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan) and some are due this year (for e.g. Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand), resulting in different dates of completion of the term.
- To sync the term of the State Legislative Assemblies with that of the Lok Sabha, the term of the state legislative assemblies can be reduced and increased accordingly and for the same, **constitutional amendment would be needed in:**
 - **Article 83:** It states that the term of the Lok Sabha will be five years from the date of its first sitting.
 - **Article 85:** It empowers the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha.
 - **Article 172:** It states that the term of the legislative assembly will be five years from the date of its first sitting.
 - **Article 174:** It empowers the Governor of the state to dissolve the Legislative Assembly.
 - **Article 356:** It authorises the Central Government to impose President's Rule for failure of constitutional machinery in the state.
 - The Representation of the People Act as well as related parliamentary procedure will also need to be amended.

Logistical Challenges like additional requirement of the polling staff, difficulty in transporting materials to the polling stations need for **better security arrangements** for simultaneous elections thus **augmenting the Central Police Forces** accordingly.