



Quest for Simultaneous Elections in India

For Prelims: [Simultaneous elections](#), [Lok Sabha](#), [Model Code of Conduct](#), [Electronic voting machines](#), [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail Machines](#).

For Mains: Benefits and Challenges Related to Simultaneous Elections Stance of Law Commission on Simultaneous Elections

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Why in News?

In a move towards electoral reform, the Union Government set the wheels in motion in September 2023 by **forming a six-member panel** tasked with the **mammoth responsibility of exploring the feasibility of [simultaneous elections](#) for the [Lok Sabha](#), [State assemblies](#), and [local bodies](#).**

What are Simultaneous Elections?

- **About:**
 - Simultaneous elections refers to the **idea of holding elections for the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament), State legislative assemblies, and local bodies like municipalities and panchayats** across the country at the same time.
 - This concept proposes to synchronize the electoral cycles of these different tiers of governance, aiming to conduct all elections together, **ideally once every five years**.
- **Historical Simultaneous Elections in India:** The initial four general elections in India **synchronized Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections**.
 - Presently, Lok Sabha elections align with Assembly polls in **Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim**.
- **Benefits of Simultaneous Elections:**
 - **Resource Efficiency:** Conducting [elections](#) at various levels requires significant financial resources. Synchronizing elections would consolidate these expenses, leading to **substantial cost savings for the government**.
 - **Optimized Administration:** Simultaneous elections would **streamline the deployment of security forces and administrative staff**, minimizing disruptions caused by election-related duties and allowing officials to focus more consistently on governance and development.
 - **Continuity in Policies:** With elections occurring simultaneously, there would be **fewer interruptions in policy implementation due to the [Model Code of Conduct](#)**, ensuring more sustained and consistent governance.
 - **Enhanced Voter Turnout:** Reducing the frequency of elections **might combat voter fatigue and increase voter participation**, leading to more representative outcomes and increased legitimacy for elected representatives.
 - **Increased Accountability:** When voters cast their ballots for various levels of governance together, **politicians are held accountable for their actions across different tiers**, fostering a more comprehensive accountability structure.

- **Reduced Polarization:** Simultaneous elections could potentially **diminish the influence of regional, caste-based, or communal politics** by bringing national issues to the forefront, thus encouraging more inclusive campaigning and policy-making.
- **Associated Challenges:**
 - **Constitutional Amendments:** Synchronizing elections requires **amendments to various constitutional articles.**
 - Changes in tenure provisions, dissolution of legislative bodies, and **aligning different election cycles** pose substantial legal challenges.
 - For example, **Articles such as 83(2), 85(2), 172(1), and 174(2)** govern the duration and dissolution of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, allowing premature dissolution under certain circumstances, which would need repeal for simultaneous elections.

Note

- **Article 85 (1) and 174 (2)** allows the President and the Governor to dissolve the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly before the completion of their tenure of five years, under the circumstances mentioned in the Constitution.
- **Article 83(2)** allows the tenure of the Lok Sabha to be extended for one year at a time in case of an Emergency being proclaimed under **Article 352.**
- As of now, after the passage of the **anti-defection law enshrined in the 10th Schedule (52nd Amendment Act, 1985)** and later the Supreme Court judgment in S.R. Bommai case (1994) followed by the High Court judgment in Rameswar Prasad (2006), the decision to dissolve the **State Legislative Assembly** and impose President Rule under Article 356 is subject to judicial review.
 - The Court can revive the Assembly and restore the government if it does not find the grounds of the President's rule to be constitutionally valid as has happened in recent years in the case of **Nagaland, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh.**
- **Federalism Concerns:** India's federal structure involves multiple states with varying political landscapes.
 - Any move towards simultaneous elections needs **widespread consensus among states**, which **may have differing political agendas.**
 - Also, linking general and local body elections faces hurdles due to local governance being a state subject, **requiring changes in diverse state laws (56 legal provisions from 28 states' Panchayati Raj Acts and Municipal Acts).**
- **Technology and Infrastructure:** Upgrading technological infrastructure, such as [electronic voting machines \(EVMs\)](#) and [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail Machines \(VVPATs\)](#), on a large scale poses challenges in procurement, maintenance, and ensuring reliability.
- **By-elections and Legislative Councils:** Synchronizing all elections might **exclude by-elections and elections to legislative councils**, leading to potential gaps in representation and governance.
- **Diverse Political Landscapes:** India's multi-party system involves **diverse political ideologies and regional priorities.**
 - Simultaneous elections may overlook regional issues and dilute the representation of smaller or regional parties.

What is the Stance of Law Commission on Simultaneous Elections?

- The [Law Commission's draft report on Simultaneous Elections](#), released in August 2018, examined the challenges and proposed solutions for conducting simultaneous elections in India.
- **Proposed Framework for Election Synchronization:**
 - **Reducing Election Cycles:** Recommends holding elections twice in five years.
 - **Conducting All Elections in a Calendar Year:** If simultaneous elections are not feasible, propose conducting all elections falling in a calendar year together.
 - **Constructive Vote of No-Confidence Motion:** Recommends **replacing the 'no-confidence motion' with a 'constructive vote of no-confidence'** to ensure confidence in an alternate government before ousting the existing one.

- **Hung House Resolution:** Proposes a **process for resolving situations where no party secures a majority to form a government**, involving an opportunity for the largest party/alliance to attempt government formation before midterm elections.
- **Timely Disqualification:** Suggests **amending anti-defection laws** to ensure the swift resolution of disqualification issues within six months by the presiding officer.
- **In late October 2023**, the panel tasked to check the feasibility of simultaneous elections had an interaction with the Law Commission to discuss the roadmap to synchronize **Parliamentary and Assembly elections by 2029**.

Conclusion

Achieving simultaneous elections in India requires a **measured, consultative approach, balancing the benefits of streamlined governance with the complexities of diverse regional dynamics**. Incremental steps, stakeholder consultations, and adaptable frameworks can pave the way for a synchronized electoral process that respects federal structures while enhancing administrative efficiency.

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