



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the implications of simultaneous elections on cooperative federalism in India. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce with a brief definition of simultaneous elections.
- Examine its implications on cooperative federalism in India.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The concept of "One Nation, One Election," or simultaneous elections, proposes aligning the electoral cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, allowing voters to cast ballots for both on the same day. This reform aims to reduce costs and streamline governance. However, it raises concerns about its impact on cooperative federalism in India, which relies on mutual respect and autonomy between the central and state governments. The High-Level Committee report on simultaneous elections had proposed simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step, and municipal and panchayat polls within 100 days of the general election in the next phase.

Body

Positive Impact on Cooperative Federalism:

- **Resource Optimization:** Simultaneous elections would reduce the **financial burden on both central and state governments**, as they could pool resources for electoral management.
 - **E.g.** In **2019**, the cost of conducting **Lok Sabha elections** alone was estimated at around **Rs. 60,000 crore**, with additional costs for state elections. Simultaneous elections would cut these costs by combining administrative resources, infrastructure (such as **EVMs**), and law enforcement.
- **Political Stability:** A **unified electoral cycle** could bring about synchronized mandates for both central and state governments, potentially **reducing political fragmentation**.
 - This **synchronization** may lead to more collaborative decision-making, focusing on long-term policy goals including state specific policy goals.
- **Reduced Electoral Disruptions:** Simultaneous elections would **reduce disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**, which often delays important governance decisions and development projects at the state level.
 - **Example:** During the **2019 Lok Sabha elections**, several states, including **Karnataka** and **West Bengal**, faced delays in the implementation of new schemes like **PM-Kisan** and **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** due to MCC restrictions. These delays can hinder the timely delivery of services and public welfare schemes.

Challenges for Cooperative Federalism:

- **Centralization of Power:** Simultaneous elections could result in national political narratives overshadowing regional issues, as national parties may dominate the discourse, weakening state governments' autonomy to address local concerns.
 - Simultaneous elections could lead to a reduction in the diversity of political voices at the state level. For instance, states with regional parties, like North-East India may face challenges in emphasizing their unique issues if the central government's agenda dominates the electoral discourse.
- **Concerns for State Autonomy:** Constitutional amendments to align the terms of Lok Sabha and state assemblies can be done without state ratification. However, changes affecting local governance such as municipalities and panchayats, require state consent.
 - **E.g:** A centralized election cycle could weaken state influence in local governance, **diminishing autonomy granted by the Constitution**, particularly for states with special provisions under **Article 371**.
- **Constitutional and Logistical Challenges:** Implementing simultaneous elections would require significant constitutional amendments.
 - **Articles 83(2) and 172**, outline the tenure of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, would need to be revisited. Handling mid-tenure collapses, premature dissolutions, or extensions of assembly terms would pose logistical challenges.

Conclusion

Simultaneous elections offer benefits like cost reduction and governance efficiency but pose challenges to cooperative federalism, including centralization of power and sidelining regional issues. Recommendations from the **High-Level Committee, Law Commission**, and **Parliamentary Standing Committee** call for a phased approach and constitutional amendments. While it has advantages, the long-term impact on India's federal structure needs careful consideration.