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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

One Nation One Election Will Not Fix What Is Actually Broken

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One Nation One Election Will Not Fix What Is Actually Broken

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THE LIFT LINE

A country does not govern better because it votes less often; it governs better when the people it elects are answerable more often.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The proposal to synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and every state Assembly, and later to local bodies, is one of the largest constitutional experiments India has considered in decades. Its backers frame it as a cure for permanent campaign mode, ballooning election costs and repeated disruption of governance by the Model Code of Conduct. Its critics see a quiet centralising move that flattens the federal calendar and dilutes the accountability that comes from frequent, staggered verdicts. For the exam this is a near-perfect GS2 question, because it forces you to reason about the basic structure, the amendment process, and the working of **federalism** (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/federalism/>) rather than simply recall a bill number.

The honest position is that both the promise and the danger are real, and a strong answer refuses to treat the debate as a slogan. Simultaneous elections are not an abstract novelty for India; the country ran them for a decade and a half after Independence, and the cycle broke for reasons that a synchronising law does not, by itself, prevent from recurring.

GS Paper 2: functions and responsibilities of the Union and the states, issues and challenges of the federal structure; separation of powers; the role of the Election Commission; parliamentary processes and constitutional amendment.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024** and the **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024** were introduced in the Lok Sabha in **December 2024** and referred to a **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)**; the **High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections** chaired by former President **Ram Nath Kovind** submitted its report in **March 2024**,

recommending simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, followed by local body elections **within 100 days**; India held simultaneous elections from **1951-52 to 1967** before the cycle broke through premature dissolutions; the proposal inserts a new **Article 82A**; and the debate turns on **Articles 83 and 172** (terms of the House and Assemblies), **Article 356** (President's Rule), and **Article 324** (superintendence of elections by the Election Commission).

For **Mains**, the analytical task is to weigh administrative efficiency against federal accountability, and to ask whether synchronisation treats a symptom or the disease.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

India voted together until the mid-1960s because most governments completed their terms. The cycle broke not by design but by instability: Assemblies dissolved early, President's Rule was imposed, and the calendar drifted apart. That history carries the central lesson of this debate. Simultaneity was never a rule that was abandoned; it was an outcome of political stability that ended when stability ended. A law that forces the calendars back together must therefore answer a hard question: what happens when a government falls mid-term?

The Kovind committee's answer is a system of by-mid-term elections, where a House or Assembly that collapses before its full term is reconstituted only for the **remainder** of the unexpired period, so that the next full synchronised cycle stays intact. This is the engineering heart of the proposal, and it is also where the federalism objection concentrates, because it means a state Assembly could be elected for a truncated term dictated by the national clock rather than by its own **mandate** (<https://ujjayanti.com/vocab/mandate/>).

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The case for synchronising

The efficiency case is not trivial. Continuous elections keep some part of the country under the Model Code of Conduct for much of the year, freezing new schemes and transfers. Repeated polls impose real costs on the exchequer, on security deployment, and on the administrative machinery, and they pull governing attention into perpetual campaigning. Supporters argue that a single national cycle would let governments govern for their full term without the distortion of the next imminent contest, and would reduce the aggregate financial and logistical burden of running the world's largest democracy in installments.

The case against, and it deserves a fair hearing

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CONCERN	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT BITES
Federal accountability	Fewer, bundled verdicts	State issues get subsumed under national narratives
Article 356 pressure	Mid-term collapse must be managed	Temptation to use President's Rule to preserve the cycle
Truncated Assembly terms	By-mid-term elections	An Assembly elected for a partial term weakens its mandate
Voter behaviour	National and state polls together	Evidence suggests coattail effects favour the larger contest
Amendment and consent	Ratification by states	A change to federal balance needs wide political buy-in
Logistics	EVMs, personnel, security at scale	The Election Commission's capacity must expand sharply

The deepest objection is about accountability rather than cost. Staggered elections give citizens repeated, granular opportunities to reward and punish governments on the issues that matter at each level. A mayor, a chief minister and a prime minister answer to different questions, and separating the verdicts is a feature of federal democracy, not a bug. Bundling them invites the larger national narrative to swamp local accountability, which is precisely the coattail effect that studies of simultaneous polling have repeatedly flagged.

The misdiagnosis

The reform is sold as a fix for governance paralysis, but the paralysis it names has other causes: weak intra-party democracy, the anti-defection framework that binds legislators to whips, the criminalisation of politics, and opaque campaign finance. None of these is touched by resetting the calendar. A country can vote on the same day and still govern badly. The risk is that a large constitutional effort is spent on the least binding constraint while the real bottlenecks are left untouched.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Test every structural reform against three questions. First, the diagnostic question: is the calendar actually the cause of the problem it claims to solve, or a visible symptom of something deeper? Here the honest answer is that instability, defection and finance drive most of the dysfunction, and none is fixed by synchronisation. Second, the federal question: does the reform expand or contract the space in which states set their own political rhythm? By-mid-term elections and the pressure to preserve a national cycle both contract it. Third,

the consent question: is a change that alters the working of federalism being built on the wide, cross-party ratification that the [basic structure doctrine \(https://ujjayanti.com/terms/basic-structure-doctrine/\)](https://ujjayanti.com/terms/basic-structure-doctrine/) implicitly demands, or pushed through on a bare majority? The transferable insight is that a reform can be administratively rational and constitutionally costly at the same time, and the useful test is not whether it saves money but whether it preserves the accountability that federalism was designed to protect.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Continuous election calendar -> repeated Model Code of Conduct, high costs, permanent campaigning -> ONOE proposed via Article 82A, new Bills referred to JPC -> mechanism: by-mid-term elections keep the national cycle intact -> gains: efficiency, uninterrupted governance -> costs: truncated Assembly terms, Article 356 pressure, coattail effects, weaker federal accountability -> real causes untouched: anti-defection, campaign finance, criminalisation -> conclusion: synchronise only with wide consent and safeguards, not as a substitute for deeper reform

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Diagnose before legislating.** Anchor any reform in the actual drivers of governance failure, defection, opaque finance and criminalisation, rather than treating the election calendar as the binding constraint, so that political capital is spent where it changes outcomes.
- ❷ **Protect the federal clock.** If synchronisation proceeds, build strong safeguards against the misuse of Article 356 to preserve the cycle, and reconsider by-mid-term truncation so that a state Assembly's mandate is not subordinated to the national timetable.
- ❸ **Build consent, not just a majority.** A change that reshapes the working of federalism should be carried on broad cross-party agreement and genuine ratification by the states, consistent with the spirit of the basic structure, rather than pushed through on a narrow margin.
- ❹ **Strengthen the machinery and the guardrails.** Expand the Election Commission's logistical capacity for large synchronised polls, and pair any move with independent scrutiny of coattail effects on voter choice, so that efficiency does not quietly erode accountability.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has repeatedly examined federalism, the tension between the Union and the states, and the role of constitutional institutions such as the Election Commission. This editorial sits squarely on the federalism and constitutional-amendment axis, rewarding candidates who can argue the efficiency case and the accountability case without collapsing into either.

Practice question: “One Nation, One Election promises administrative efficiency but risks constitutional cost.” Critically examine the case for simultaneous elections in India with reference to federalism and accountability. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/>), *PRS Legislative Research* (<https://prsindia.org/>)

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