

Global Models, Indian Realities: Evaluating the Political Viability of One Nation, One Election in a Diverse Democracy

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Abstract

This paper examines the political viability of India's 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal the plan to synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies, and eventually local bodies, within a single electoral cycle. Drawing on the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, the report of the High-Level Committee chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, and the ongoing deliberations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), the paper situates the Indian debate within a comparative frame that includes South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines the seven jurisdictions the Kovind Committee itself examined. The central argument is that simultaneous elections are administratively coherent and constitutionally engineerable in principle, but their political viability in India is constrained by four structural features that most of the comparator states do not share at the same scale: asymmetric federalism with strong regional parties, a first-past-the-post electoral system prone to amplifying national swings onto state contests, an amendment process that requires either state ratification or a durable cross-party consensus that does not currently exist, and a political economy in which regional identity is itself a governing resource. The paper reviews the constitutional mechanics proposed by the Kovind Committee (amendments to Articles 83, 172, 327, and the insertion of provisions on 'unexpired terms'), maps the positions of the principal political formations, and evaluates three plausible implementation pathways full simultaneity via constitutional amendment, a voluntary phased convergence around 2029, and a coalition-negotiated compromise limited to Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. It concludes that political viability, more than constitutional or administrative design, is the binding constraint on ONOE, and that any durable reform will need to address regional-party anxieties about the dissolution and hung-house provisions before it addresses ballot logistics.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, simultaneous elections, Indian federalism, Kovind Committee, comparative electoral systems, constitutional amendment, regional parties, electoral governance

1. Introduction

India holds elections almost continuously. Between any two general elections to the Lok Sabha, the country typically conducts more than thirty distinct state, by-election, and local body contests, each governed by its own Model Code of Conduct, its own security and administrative mobilisation, and its own campaign cycle. Proponents of electoral synchronisation argue that this near-permanent campaign mode imposes real costs: on the exchequer, on the bureaucracy's capacity to govern between elections, and on the coherence of long-horizon policymaking. Critics counter that the remedy on offer a constitutional restructuring that would compress India's staggered election calendar into a single five-year cycle risks doing more damage to federalism and representative accountability than the disease it proposes to cure.

The idea is not new. India held simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies in 1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967, before premature assembly dissolutions broke the cycle. What has changed is the political salience of the proposal. Since 2014, and especially since the September 2023 constitution of a High-Level Committee under former President Ram Nath Kovind, 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) has moved from a Law Commission footnote to

a live legislative project. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, along with the connected Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024 and referred the same week to a 39-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) chaired by P. P. Chaudhary. As of mid-2026, that committee's tenure has been extended twice, most recently to the last week of the 2026 Monsoon Session, reflecting both the technical complexity of the exercise and the depth of political disagreement it has surfaced.

This paper's contribution is deliberately narrow in scope but, we argue, analytically necessary: it asks not whether simultaneous elections are administratively feasible a question the Kovind Committee's 18,626-page report addresses at length but whether they are politically viable in India's specific federal and multi-party configuration, and what comparative experience from other democracies that hold simultaneous elections can and cannot tell us about that viability. We treat 'political viability' as a composite concept: the probability that a reform can (a) secure the parliamentary supermajorities and, where applicable, state ratifications the Constitution requires; (b) survive judicial review on basic-structure grounds; and (c) be implemented without triggering the kind of federal backlash that produces instability rather than the stability it promises to deliver.

The paper proceeds in eleven further sections. Section 2 reviews the seven comparator countries the Kovind Committee itself studied South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines asking what structural conditions allow those systems to run synchronised elections. Section 3 revisits India's own 1951–1967 experience. Section 4 sets out the present legislative process. Section 5 examines the constitutional mechanics and the basic-structure litigation risk. Section 6 maps party and stakeholder positions. Section 7 focuses on the federalism question, which we treat as the crux of political viability. Section 8 turns to administrative and fiscal considerations. Section 9 draws the comparative and Indian material together into a structured assessment. Sections 10 through 12 set out implementation pathways, recommendations, and a conclusion.

2. Global Models: Comparative Experiences with Simultaneous Elections:

The High-Level Committee's own report grounds its recommendations in a comparative review of seven jurisdictions that conduct some form of simultaneous or closely aligned elections: South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. It is worth examining each in turn, not to import their institutional designs wholesale, but to identify the structural preconditions that make synchronisation workable where it exists preconditions that India's federal and party-system architecture may or may not share.

2.1 South Africa

South Africa elects its National Assembly and nine Provincial Legislatures on the same day, using a proportional representation system, though municipal elections are held separately on a staggered five-year cycle. Synchronisation here is aided by a unitary-leaning 'cooperative federalism' model in which provincial premiers are elected by provincial legislatures rather than directly, and in which the National Assembly's composition dominates the political system's centre of gravity. The absence of a directly elected provincial executive reduces the stakes of any national-provincial election mismatch a structural feature quite unlike India's directly elected, and often opposition-controlled, state governments.

2.2 Sweden

Sweden holds elections to the Riksdag (national parliament), county councils, and municipal councils simultaneously every four years, on the second Sunday of September, under a proportional list system. Sweden's political stability rests on a small number of consolidated, ideologically coherent national parties that also contest sub-national elections; regional identity plays a negligible role in structuring party competition. The Swedish case suggests that

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synchronisation is easiest to sustain in a small, unitary, low-diversity state where sub-national elections are effectively an extension of the national party system rather than an arena for distinct regional political projects.

2.3 Belgium

Belgium is the most federally complex of the comparator states and therefore the most instructive for India. Since reforms in the 1990s, Belgium has aligned European, federal, and regional/community elections along a coordinated calendar (with municipal and provincial elections on a separate track), reportedly saving several million euros per cycle and sustaining voter turnout above 87 percent under compulsory voting. Belgium's experience shows that synchronisation is compatible even with deep linguistic and regional cleavages but only where the constitutional order already gives regional and community governments entrenched, non-negotiable powers, so that election-timing changes cannot be read as a centralising manoeuvre. That entrenchment is precisely what Indian states, especially opposition-ruled ones, fear ONOE would erode.

2.4 Germany and Japan

Germany does not hold fully simultaneous federal and Länder elections; rather, the Committee drew on the German 'constructive vote of no-confidence' under which the Bundestag can remove a Chancellor only by simultaneously electing a successor as a mechanism worth adapting to prevent the kind of mid-term government collapses that disrupted India's own simultaneous-election cycle after 1967. Japan's relevance is procedural rather than electoral: the Committee's members flagged the Japanese sequence, in which the Prime Minister is nominated by the Diet and formally appointed by the Emperor, as a model for insulating government formation from premature dissolution. Neither country, notably, actually practises full simultaneity of national and sub-national elections at India's scale, which limits how much direct transplantation is possible.

2.5 Indonesia

Indonesia is the most frequently cited 'successful' large-scale precedent. Since 2019, Indonesia has elected its President, Vice-President, and members of both national and regional legislatures on a single day; the country successfully conducted its second such simultaneous election on 14 February 2024. Indonesia's presidential system, its four-percent parliamentary threshold, and its winner-take-all presidential contest (requiring over 50 percent of the national vote and at least 20 percent in more than half of all provinces) are structurally different from India's parliamentary system, where the head of government is not directly elected and where a national mandate does not automatically confer sub-national legitimacy. The Indonesian case demonstrates that logistical simultaneity at continental scale is achievable, but it does not demonstrate that a parliamentary, multi-party federation with strong regional parties will experience the same election as a coherent single choice.

2.6 The Philippines

The Philippines conducts synchronised national and local elections under a presidential system with a multi-member legislature; its experience is cited by the Committee chiefly for logistics ballot design, counting infrastructure, and staggered mid-term elections for local offices between presidential cycles rather than for federalism-related lessons, since the Philippines is a unitary state.

2.7 What the Comparative Set Does and Does Not Establish

Read together, the seven cases establish that simultaneous elections are technically achievable across very different electoral systems (proportional and majoritarian, parliamentary and presidential) and at scales ranging from Sweden's ten million people to Indonesia's near-280 million. What none of the seven cases replicates is India's specific combination of (i) a parliamentary system in which state governments are directly and separately elected executives

with independent political mandates, (ii) a first-past-the-post system that converts small national vote swings into large seat swings, amplifying any 'coattail effect' from a simultaneous national contest, and (iii) a party system in which regional parties the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Trinamool Congress, the Biju Janata Dal, and others govern large states without a comparable national presence. This combination is closer to India's own pre-1967 experience than to any of the seven comparators, which is why Section 3 treats that domestic precedent as more diagnostic than the international one.

3. India's Historical Experience with Simultaneous Elections (1951–1967)

India's first four general elections were held simultaneously with state assembly elections. This was less a designed feature of the Constitution than an artefact of the country having only just adopted its Constitution in 1950 and having convened its first elections shortly thereafter, with subsequent assemblies and the Lok Sabha originally intended to run co-terminously on five-year terms. The cycle broke down between 1968 and 1971 for reasons that are directly relevant to the present debate: several state governments were dismissed or collapsed before completing their terms, some under Article 356 (President's Rule), some through defections and floor-test failures, and Indira Gandhi's Congress called an early Lok Sabha election in 1971, severing the last vestige of alignment.

The lesson usually drawn from this history by ONOE's proponents is that simultaneity is the 'natural' baseline that was disrupted by contingent political events, and can therefore be restored by constitutional engineering that prevents those events from recurring chiefly by curbing the ability of a mid-term government collapse to trigger a fresh, unsynchronised election. The lesson drawn by critics is the opposite: that the very features which broke the 1950s cycle coalition fragility, defections, the use of central power to dismiss state governments are permanent, structural features of a large, diverse parliamentary federation, not one-off historical accidents, and that any mechanism robust enough to prevent their recurrence would have to either weaken state assemblies' ability to remove their own governments (a democratic cost) or expand central discretion over state governance (a federalism cost). Both readings of the same history are internally coherent, which is itself evidence that the historical record does not settle the political-viability question; it merely clarifies what is actually being asked of a re-engineered system.

4. The Contemporary Push: The Kovind Committee and the 129th Amendment Bill:

The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections was constituted on 2 September 2023 under the chairmanship of former President Ram Nath Kovind. Its other members included Union Home Minister Amit Shah, former Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Chairman of the Fifteenth Finance Commission N. K. Singh, constitutional expert and former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha Subhash C. Kashyap, senior advocate Harish Salve, and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari; Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal served as special invitee. Notably, the Congress's designated representative, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, declined to participate, calling the committee's terms of reference predetermined an early signal of the opposition consensus that would harden over the following two years.

Over 191 days, the Committee held consultations that it describes as extensive: 47 political parties submitted formal views, of which 32 expressed support for simultaneous elections; over 21,500 responses were received from the public, of which roughly 80 percent favoured the proposal; and the Committee consulted four former Chief Justices of India, twelve former Chief Justices of state High Courts, four former Chief Election Commissioners, and apex industry bodies including CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM, which argued that election-cycle disruption has measurable macroeconomic costs through policy delay and administrative diversion. The

Committee submitted its 18,626-page report to President Droupadi Murmu on 14 March 2024; the Union Cabinet approved its recommendations on 18 September 2024.

The Committee recommended a two-step sequence: first, simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies; second, synchronisation of municipal and panchayat elections within 100 days of the general election. It proposed a single electoral roll and a single Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC) across all three tiers of government, prepared by the Election Commission of India in consultation with State Election Commissions. Where a state assembly's term is cut short through a no-confidence vote, a hung house, or dissolution the Committee recommended that fresh elections fill only the 'unexpired term' of the original assembly, so the state would rejoin the national cycle rather than restart a fresh five-year clock. This 'unexpired term' concept is the linchpin of the Committee's design and, as Section 5 discusses, the single most contested element of the entire proposal.

On this legislative foundation, Law Minister Meghwal introduced the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, together with the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, in the Lok Sabha on 17 December 2024, alongside connected legislation aligning election timing in Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, and Puducherry. The government issued a three-line whip to NDA MPs to ensure attendance. Opposition MPs, led by figures including Congress's Manish Tewari, DMK's T. R. Baalu, and the Samajwadi Party's Dharmendra Yadav, objected forcefully on the floor, with Tewari characterising the bills as 'a direct assault' on the Constitution's basic structure and beyond the House's legislative competence. Home Minister Amit Shah, responding, indicated the government's own preference to refer the bills to a JPC for detailed discussion rather than force an immediate floor vote a tactical concession that both defused an immediate confrontation and, by keeping the bills in committee rather than bringing them to a vote the government was not certain of winning, bought time. The Lok Sabha duly approved a 39-member JPC (27 from the Lok Sabha, 12 from the Rajya Sabha, constituted on a pro-rata party-strength basis and chaired by BJP MP P. P. Chaudhary) on 19 December 2024. As of mid-2026, that committee's reporting deadline has been extended to the last week of the Monsoon Session 2026, with the panel continuing to hear witnesses including, notably, Ghulam Nabi Azad, who had earlier served on the Kovind Committee itself.

5. Constitutional Architecture and Legal Contestation

The Kovind Committee's report proposes fifteen amendments to the Constitution, delivered through two Constitution Amendment Bills, on the premise that these amendments require only Parliament's ordinary special majority (two-thirds of members present and voting, with an absolute majority of total membership, in each House) and not ratification by state legislatures, because they do not, in the Committee's reading, alter the 'federal' entrenched provisions listed in Article 368(2)'s proviso. This is the single most legally contested claim in the entire proposal, and it is worth setting out its moving parts.

5.1 The Core Amendments

- Articles 83(2) and 172(1) would be amended to define the five-year duration of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies explicitly as the 'full term.'
- New Articles 83(3) and 172(3) would define the 'unexpired term' the remaining time left on a dissolved house's original five-year clock.
- New Articles 83(4) and 172(4) would provide that a house elected to replace a prematurely dissolved one serves only for that unexpired term, not a fresh full term the mechanism designed to prevent the 1968–71 desynchronisation from recurring.
- Article 327 would be expanded to bring 'the conduct of simultaneous elections' explicitly within Parliament's law-making power over elections.

- Article 325 would be amended to enable a single electoral roll and single EPIC across all three tiers though the Committee itself notes that changes bearing on panchayat and municipal elections (a State List subject under the Constitution) and this particular amendment will require ratification by at least half the state legislatures, unlike the Lok Sabha–Assembly synchronisation amendments.

Legally, the government's position reinforced by Committee member and senior advocate Harish Salve's involvement is that these amendments alter the timing of elections, not the federal distribution of legislative, executive, or fiscal power between the Union and the States, and therefore fall outside the categories in Article 368(2)'s proviso that mandate state ratification (which include the manner of election of the President, the extent of executive power of the Union and states, and the representation of states in Parliament). The opposition's position, voiced most forcefully by Manish Tewari and reiterated by Congress leaders including P. Chidambaram and Kapil Sibal, is that timing is not severable from substance: a constitutional design that curtails a state assembly's ability to serve a genuinely independent term, or that ties a state's electoral calendar to the Union's, does alter the federal structure as it functions in practice, whatever the formal text says, and therefore implicates the 'basic structure' doctrine articulated in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) under which no constitutional amendment, however procedurally valid, may destroy the Constitution's basic features, among which the courts have at various points included federalism, democracy, and free and fair periodic elections.

5.2 The Hung House Problem

The single most frequently raised technical objection including from within the JPC's own hearings is that neither the original Kovind Committee report nor the 129th Amendment Bill fully resolves what happens when a state election under the synchronised cycle produces a hung assembly, or when a government loses a confidence vote mid-term. The Committee's report gestures toward the Sarkaria Commission's sequencing for government formation in a hung house inviting a pre-election coalition, then the largest single party, then a post-election coalition but does not specify what happens if no government can be formed at all for an extended 'unexpired term,' during which the state would either sit under President's Rule (raising Article 356 concerns about central overreach) or hold a fresh election that would, under the Committee's own logic, still need to terminate at the next national cycle date. Opposition members, including Congress's Digvijaya Singh, have pressed this point directly: an unstable state government could, in the worst case, spend years under central administration awaiting the next synchronised polling date, a outcome that critics argue is a more severe democratic deficit than the staggered-election status quo it replaces.

6. Political Viability: Mapping the Stakeholders

Political viability in the Indian constitutional context is not a matter of public opinion alone the Kovind Committee's cited 80 percent public approval figure, drawn from a self-selected respondent pool, is a weak proxy for the two-thirds parliamentary supermajority the amendment actually requires. It is a matter of counting votes in both Houses of Parliament, and of anticipating litigation risk and state-level resistance. Table 1 summarises the position of the principal formations as reflected in JPC submissions, parliamentary debate, and public statements through mid-2026.

Formation	Stated Position	Core Rationale
BJP / NDA constituents	Strongly supportive; whipped attendance for the bill's introduction	Administrative efficiency, cost savings, governance continuity, alignment with 2029 target

Formation	Stated Position	Core Rationale
Indian National Congress	Opposed; contests the bill's constitutional competence	Basic-structure and federalism concerns; scepticism about a 'puppet committee' process
DMK (Tamil Nadu)	Opposed; calls the bill 'anti-federal'	Fear of national-issue dominance overshadowing state-specific contests; five-year mandate concerns
Trinamool Congress (West Bengal)	Opposed	Regional-party disadvantage in a nationalised single-day contest; federalism
Samajwadi Party	Opposed, aligned with INDIA bloc position	Solidarity with opposition federalism concerns
Smaller NDA allies (e.g., TDP, JD-U issue-dependent)	Broadly supportive but seeking safeguards	Alliance discipline balanced against regional-party self-interest
Election Commission of India	Institutionally neutral; states readiness to implement	Statutory duty to conduct elections 'as per legal provisions'
Industry bodies (CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM)	Supportive	Cited macroeconomic costs of frequent Model Code of Conduct disruptions

Table 1. Summary of principal stakeholder positions on the 129th Amendment Bill, as of mid-2026.

Two features of this map matter for viability analysis. First, the arithmetic: the NDA's own Lok Sabha strength fell from 353 to 293 seats between the 2019 and 2024 general elections (with the BJP alone falling from 303 to 240), while the INDIA bloc rose to 233 seats a shift that, combined with the two-thirds-of-those-present-and-voting threshold (roughly 362 of 543 Lok Sabha seats and 167 of the Rajya Sabha's 245), leaves the government well short of a guaranteed majority for a constitutional amendment without either opposition defections or a level of NDA-ally unity that is not assured, since several allies govern states that would themselves be affected by the reform's timing provisions. Second, the geography of opposition is instructive: resistance is concentrated precisely among the strongest regional parties governing large, economically significant states Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and (via Samajwadi Party's influence) Uttar Pradesh's opposition space which is to say, among the parties whose electoral fortunes are most plausibly threatened by a nationalised single-day contest that tends, empirically, to favour whichever party or coalition is dominant at the national level.

7. Federalism, Regional Parties, and the Politics of Timing

This section develops what we regard as the paper's central analytical claim: that the binding constraint on ONOE's political viability is not constitutional drafting or election-management logistics, both of which are solvable engineering problems, but the structural incentive of regional parties to preserve electoral cycles that let them fight state elections on state-specific terms, insulated from national tides.

A growing empirical literature on 'coattail effects' documents that when national and state elections are held on the same day, voters are considerably more likely to vote for the same party or alliance at both levels than when the elections are held separately a pattern found consistently in Indian state-level data comparing simultaneous and staggered election years. For a party whose entire political project is built on regional distinctiveness the DMK's Dravidian identity politics, the Trinamool's West Bengal-specific coalition, the Biju Janata Dal's Odia regionalism this is close to an existential concern, not a tactical inconvenience. A single-day national election tends to nationalise the campaign narrative around the Prime Ministerial choice, television coverage, and national issues, potentially crowding out the state-specific concerns on which regional parties build their support base. Recent modelling work on simultaneous elections in polarised, multi-party democracies similarly finds that synchronisation systematically raises the probability of single-party or single-alliance sweeps across both levels of government, relative to staggered cycles a finding that maps directly onto opposition parties' stated fear that ONOE would 'ensure the BJP wins the Lok Sabha poll with a two-thirds majority and win enough states' to entrench further constitutional change, as Congress leader P. Chidambaram put it during the Committee's deliberations.

It is important to state this argument in its strongest and most balanced form, because it cuts in a direction that is easy to caricature as merely partisan. The claim is not that any particular party benefits from either simultaneity or staggering as a permanent structural fact; coattail effects flow toward whichever formation holds the stronger national position at the time of a synchronised election, and an opposition alliance that built a commanding national lead would benefit symmetrically from the same mechanism the current opposition now resists. The claim is narrower and more durable: regional parties, almost by definition, are structurally disadvantaged by any mechanism that increases the correlation between national and state voting behaviour, regardless of which national formation is ascendant at a given moment, because their entire electoral proposition depends on voters treating state elections as a distinct decision. This is why opposition to ONOE has been more consistent among regionally rooted parties than among nationally organised opposition parties, and why the debate cannot be fully resolved by reassuring critics about the current government's intentions the structural incentive persists across electoral cycles and governments.

A second federalism concern operates through Article 356 (President's Rule). Because the 'unexpired term' mechanism discourages fresh full-term state elections outside the national cycle, critics worry it will, in practice if not in explicit text, increase reliance on central administration to fill governance gaps in states between a premature dissolution and the next synchronised polling date precisely the provision whose historical misuse the Supreme Court constrained in *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994). The Kovind Committee's report acknowledges this tension but treats it as a manageable residual risk rather than a structural flaw, a framing opposition parties dispute.

8. Administrative and Fiscal Dimensions

Simultaneous elections are frequently justified on cost and governance-continuity grounds, and these arguments deserve serious, non-partisan treatment alongside the federalism concerns above, since the administrative case is where much of the 80-percent public support the Committee reports is likely rooted.

8.1 The Cost and Continuity Case

Industry bodies consulted by the Committee CII, FICCI, and ASSOCHAM argued that the recurring imposition of the Model Code of Conduct across staggered election cycles measurably delays public investment decisions, disrupts migrant labour patterns around polling dates, and imposes recurring security and administrative mobilisation costs on both central and state exchequers. Belgium's reported savings of roughly twelve million euros per synchronised

cycle, while not directly scalable to India's size, is cited by the Committee as illustrative of the underlying mechanism: fewer discrete election events mean less duplicated logistical mobilisation of the Election Commission, security forces, and polling personnel.

8.2 The Logistics Case Against

The scale problem, however, is real and Indian-specific: India would need to simultaneously deploy Electronic Voting Machines and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail units, polling personnel, and paramilitary and state police security cover across roughly one million polling stations, for both Lok Sabha and state assembly contests, on effectively the same set of election dates a logistical undertaking with no true precedent at this scale even among the Committee's own comparator states, none of which combines India's population, geographic spread, and security environment (including insurgency-affected and border districts where staggered, phased polling is currently used precisely to manage force deployment). The Committee's own recommendation that the Election Commission, in consultation with State Election Commissions, prepare a detailed procurement and deployment plan for EVMs, VVPATs, and personnel implicitly concedes that this capacity does not yet exist and would require substantial lead time and capital investment, separate from the constitutional and political process.

8.3 The Single Electoral Roll Proposal

The Committee's recommendation for a single electoral roll and EPIC across Lok Sabha, state assembly, and local body elections is, notably, one of the least politically contested elements of the package even several opposition-aligned commentators have welcomed it as a reduction in the duplication and error currently arising from separate rolls maintained by the Election Commission of India and State Election Commissions. Because this specific amendment (to Article 325) requires ratification by at least half the state legislatures regardless of the fate of the broader simultaneity provisions, it may prove more achievable as a standalone reform than full electoral synchronisation, and could plausibly proceed on a separate, faster legislative track.

9. Global Models Meet Indian Realities: A Structured Comparison

Table 2 draws together the comparative material from Section 2 and the Indian-specific findings from Sections 5 through 8 into a structured assessment of which preconditions for successful synchronisation are present in India and which are not.

Precondition for Stable Synchronisation	Present Elsewhere (Example)	Status in India
Unitary or cooperative-federal structure limiting independent state executive mandates	South Africa	Absent Indian states have directly elected, independent executives
Small, ideologically consolidated party system with limited regionalism	Sweden	Absent India has strong, electorally dominant regional parties
Constitutionally entrenched regional powers immune to perceived central overreach	Belgium	Contested Article 356 history fuels distrust of central intent
Mechanism to prevent government collapse from breaking the cycle (e.g., constructive no-confidence)	Germany (concept)	Proposed in Kovind Committee report, but hung-house scenario left unresolved

Precondition for Stable Synchronisation	Present Elsewhere (Example)	Status in India
Presidential system with single national mandate reducing party fragmentation effects	Indonesia	Absent India is parliamentary with fragmented, multi-party state contests
Large-scale logistics precedent at India's population and security scale	None among comparators	Absent Indonesia is closest by population but not by internal security complexity
Cross-party consensus prior to constitutional change	Belgium (multi-decade negotiation)	Absent process has been government-led rather than negotiated

Table 2. Structured comparison of preconditions for synchronised elections, comparator states versus India.

The pattern that emerges is not those simultaneous elections are inherently unworkable in a diverse federation Belgium's linguistically and regionally fractured polity is proof to the contrary but that Belgium's success rests on a precondition India has not yet met: a multi-decade, negotiated constitutional settlement in which regional and community governments received entrenched guarantees before, not after, electoral timing was centralised. India's process, by contrast, has proceeded largely on the government's own initiative, through a committee whose composition opposition parties characterise as predetermined, toward a JPC process now in its second extension. Whatever the merits of the underlying policy, the sequencing legislate first, negotiate federalism guarantees later, if at all is itself a source of the political resistance the proposal has generated, independent of its substantive content.

10. Three Pathways Forward

Given the arithmetic and federalism constraints set out above, three broad pathways for ONOE's political trajectory appear plausible over the medium term, and it is useful to state each on its own terms rather than treat only the government's preferred outcome as the relevant scenario.

10.1 Pathway One: Full Simultaneity via Constitutional Amendment

Under this pathway, the JPC recommends the bills largely as introduced, the government secures the requisite two-thirds majorities whether through NDA consolidation, opposition defections, or a favourable shift in Rajya Sabha composition following state elections and full Lok Sabha–Assembly synchronisation is targeted for implementation around the 2029 general election, the terminal date most frequently cited in government commentary as the natural convergence point for the current election calendar. This pathway carries the highest implementation risk: it requires either dissolving or extending several state assemblies' terms by executive and legislative fiat to align them to a common date, a step that is itself likely to generate fresh litigation from affected states, and it assumes continued NDA parliamentary strength through the JPC and passage process that current seat arithmetic does not guarantee.

10.2 Pathway Two: Voluntary Phased Convergence

A less centrally mandated alternative would use the Kovind Committee's own 'unexpired term' logic not as a compulsory constitutional rule but as a standing option that state governments and the Union could invoke by mutual agreement allowing states whose election calendars are already close to the national cycle to align voluntarily, while states with strong federalism objections opt out for a longer transition period. This pathway is more consistent with cooperative-federalism norms and would likely draw less basic-structure litigation risk, since

it would not compel non-consenting states to alter their assemblies' terms, but it also would not deliver the full cost and administrative-continuity benefits the Committee's economic case rests on until a critical mass of states join.

10.3 Pathway Three: A Narrower, Negotiated Compromise

A third pathway would decouple the most administratively popular and least politically contested elements of the reform package the single electoral roll and EPIC, and improved coordination of Election Commission and State Election Commission logistics from the constitutionally and politically fraught question of forcing state assembly terms into alignment with the Lok Sabha. This pathway trades the full cost-saving case for a materially higher probability of passage, since the roll and EPIC provisions already command support extending beyond the NDA, and would leave the harder federalism questions for a future, more deliberately negotiated constitutional process along the lines suggested by the Belgian precedent one that begins with entrenched guarantees for state governments rather than treating those guarantees as a downstream implementation detail.

11. Recommendations

- Separate the single electoral roll and EPIC reforms from the state-assembly-synchronisation provisions in the legislative package, allowing the less contested element to proceed on its own track and building demonstrable trust before the harder question is revisited.
- Resolve the hung-house and mid-term-collapse gap explicitly in the bill's text including a binding timeline for President's Rule under the 'unexpired term' scenario rather than leaving it to post-enactment convention or Sarkaria Commission-style informal guidance.
- Convene a genuine pre-legislative negotiation with regional parties, modelled loosely on Belgium's multi-decade approach to sequencing federal reform, focused specifically on guarantees against the coattail-effect concern for example, through electoral system adjustments, differentiated ballot design, or state-specific campaign finance rules that reduce national-narrative dominance in state contests.
- Commission an independent, non-partisan costing and logistics audit of simultaneous deployment of EVMs, VVPATs, and security personnel at full national scale, published before any binding implementation date is legislated, to test the administrative feasibility claims against India's specific security and geographic constraints.
- Consider a judicial reference or advance Presidential reference under Article 143 to the Supreme Court on the basic-structure question before the bills reach a final floor vote, reducing the risk of prolonged post-enactment litigation that could itself destabilise the election calendar the reform is meant to stabilise.
- Whichever pathway is chosen, sequence the process so that federalism guarantees are legislated and entrenched before, not after, any state assembly's term is altered to fit the new cycle inverting the order the process has followed so far.

12. Conclusion

'One Nation, One Election' is best understood not as a single up-or-down policy question but as a bundle of at least three separable reforms administrative consolidation of electoral rolls, cost and continuity gains from fewer election events, and a constitutional restructuring of the relationship between state assembly terms and the national electoral calendar that have been legislatively packaged together. The comparative evidence from South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines shows that the first two of these reforms are broadly achievable across very different political systems. The third is where Indian political viability runs into a structural, not merely tactical, obstacle: a federal system built around strong, independently mandated state governments and electorally dominant regional

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parties, operating under a first-past-the-post system in which national and state election coattail effects are empirically real and asymmetrically threatening to exactly the parties whose consent the constitutional amendment process requires. The Joint Parliamentary Committee's repeated extensions most recently to the 2026 Monsoon Session are themselves evidence that this obstacle has not yet been resolved through drafting alone. Political viability, in the end, will depend less on the elegance of the 'unexpired term' mechanism than on whether the process that adopts it can first convince India's regional parties that federalism, not just fiscal efficiency, is being taken seriously as a design constraint rather than an afterthought.

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