Two day National Seminar on

EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

One Nation, One Election and its implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat

28 & 29 August 2025

Seminar Proceedings

Organized by

Department of Social Work

School of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham,
Arasampalayam, Coimbatore.

Sponsored by

Indian Council of
Social Science Research
New Delhi

Index

1 Acknowledgements

The seminar proceedings is the outcome of the **ICSSR-Sponsored Two-Day National Seminar** on *"Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat,"* held on **August 28–29, 2025**, at **Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore**.

First and foremost, I express my humble gratitude to our beloved Amma, Satgur Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Chancellor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham for her unwavering blessings for all the achievements at our university. The editors express their deep gratitude to the **Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)**, New Delhi, for generously sponsoring this national seminar and for its continued encouragement of academic discourse that strengthens democratic understanding and governance research in India.

With profound reverence, we offer our heartfelt gratitude to **Most Revered Swami Tapasyamritananda Puri** for his divine blessings and spiritual guidance, and to **Br. Matrukripamrita Chaitanya** for his constant support and encouragement. Their presence and inspiration have been a source of strength in all our endeavors.

We record our sincere appreciation to the distinguished dignitaries who graced the **inaugural session** of the seminar:

- **Sri. Narayanan Thirupathy**, Independent Director, REC Ltd. and Chief Spokesperson, BJP Tamil Nadu;
- **Prof. (Dr.) G. Gopa Kumar**, former Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Kerala;
- **Dr. Sudheesh Manalil**, Dean, School of Agricultural Sciences, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham;
- **Dr. P. Rangasami**, Vice Principal, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences; and
- **Mr. Vijay Narayanan**, General Manager – Campus Development & Administration, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham.

Their insightful reflections on governance, democracy, and electoral reform enriched the discussions and set the tone for meaningful deliberations.

We also extend our gratitude to the leadership of **Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham** — **Dr. Venkat Rangan**, Vice Chancellor; **Dr. P. Ajithkumar**, Registrar; and **Dr. Sasangan Ramanathan**, Dean (Engineering and Academics) — for their consistent support in promoting academic initiatives of national relevance. Special thanks are due to **Dr. Bhavani Rao**, Dean, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, and **Dr. Mahadevan S.**, Principal, School of Physical Sciences, for their continued guidance and encouragement.

We gratefully acknowledge the intellectual contributions of the **lead paper presenters**, including **Dr. P. Sakthivel (Annamalai University)**, **Dr. M. Nagalingam (Central University of Kerala)**, **Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda (Central University of Rajasthan)**, **Dr. Namrata Singh (University of Delhi)**, **Prof. Subhabrata Dutta (Assam University)**, **Dr. Nanda Kishor M.S. (Pondicherry University)**, and **Dr. S. Sampath Kumar (Bharathiar University)**, **Padmashri Prof. Upendra Baxi** whose scholarly insights significantly enhanced the quality of academic dialogue.

We extend our appreciation to all participating institutions, including **Mahatma Gandhi University**, **Vel Tech Institute**, **Madras School of Social Work**, **Sri Krishna Arts and Science College**, **Pondicherry University** and **Amrita Alumni**, whose faculty and students actively contributed through presentations and discussions.

The editors express gratitude to **Dr. Kalyani Suresh**, Vice Principal and Head, School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce; **Ar. A. Sakuntala**, Principal, School of Architecture; and all faculty and staff members from the **School of Social and Behavioural Sciences**, **School of Agricultural Sciences**, and **School of Architecture** for their institutional support.

A special acknowledgment is due to our dedicated faculty colleagues — **Dr. V. Priya**, **Dr. Raneesh C.**, **Dr. Rajeev Ramakrishnan**, **Dr. Dipanjan Bhattacharjee**, **Dr. Rajalakshmi S.A.**, and **Mrs. B. Ambika** — for their tireless coordination, academic inputs, and teamwork throughout the planning and execution of the seminar.

We gratefully recognize the assistance of the **Campus Development and Administration**, **Purchase Department**, **AOC Helpdesk**, **Transportation**, **Security**, **Hostel**, and **Canteen teams**, whose efficient arrangements ensured the smooth conduct of the event.

The editors also acknowledge the active participation of **MSW**, **BSW**, and **PGDCP** students of the Department of Social Work, whose enthusiasm and discipline contributed to the success of the seminar. Special thanks to **Gopika** and **Vishal Krishna** for their exceptional coordination and leadership.

We place on record our special appreciation for **Mrs. Kirthika**, Research Scholar, for her exemplary commitment, meticulous organization, and unwavering support in coordinating every aspect of the seminar and publication process.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to all **delegates, paper presenters, reviewers, and contributors** whose research and reflections form the essence of this edited volume. Their contributions have transformed the seminar discussions into a lasting academic resource that advances understanding of India's democratic processes and governance reforms.

It is our hope that this publication will serve as a valuable reference for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in reimagining the democratic future of India and realizing the vision of a truly **Vibrant Bharat**.

Dr. S. Kanagaraj
ICSSR Sponsored National Seminar
Department of Social Work
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore

2   About Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, a multi-campus, multi-disciplinary university established by Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (Amma), is one of India's leading private institutions. It is accredited with an 'A++' grade by NAAC and consistently ranks among the top universities in India, holding the 7th position in the NIRF 2024 rankings. Amrita offers over 300 undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across diverse fields, including Engineering, Medicine, Social Sciences, and more. With nine campuses spread across India, Amrita is known for its commitment to academic excellence, humanitarian values, and global collaborations, making it a hub for transformative education and impactful research.

3   About the SSBS

The School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (SSBS) at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham is a premier institution dedicated to addressing societal challenges through education and research. Spread across three campuses in Amritapuri, Coimbatore, and Faridabad, SSBS offers programs like BSW (Hons), MSW, M.Sc. in Cognitive Science, and Ph.D. in Social Sciences. It is home to India's only UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. SSBS integrates rigorous academics with compassionate research, focusing on areas like social justice, community development, and mental health. Its faculty are engaged in impactful projects that foster sustainable development and positive social change.

Vision:
The vision of the Department of Social Work is LOVING to SERVE and SERVING to LOVE.

Mission:
To prepare the students for specialized, evidence and rights-based practice among the oppressed, at-risk, vulnerable and general populations. The MSW program provides rigorous intellectual base, opportunities for skill development and a value-based educational experience.

4 **Seminar in a Nutshell**

Theme	Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat
Dates	28th & 29th August, 2025
Venue	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Arasampalayam, Coimbatore Campus
Chief Guest (Inaugural)	Sri. Narayanan Thirupathy – Chief Spokesperson, BJP, Tamil Nadu
Chief Guest (Valedictory Session)	
Plenary Speakers	- Dr. Upendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Warwick and Delhi - Dr. Sampath Kumar S, Professor and Head, Department of sociology & Population studies, Bharathiar University. - Dr. Nanda Kishor M S, HOD & Associate Professor Department of Politics and International Studies, Pondicherry University. - Dr. Subhabrata Dutta, Professor, Department. of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar - Dr. Namrata Singh, Professor, Department of Political Science, Miranda House, University of Delhi. - Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda, Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan - Dr. G. Gopa Kumar, Former Vice Chancellor, Central University of Kerala - Dr. M Nagalingam, Associate Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala

	• Dr. P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University
No. of Paper Presented	12
Abstract Released	27
Convener	Dr.S.Kanagaraj Vice Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore
Organized by	Department of Social Work, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Arasampalayam, Coimbatore

5 About the seminar

The National Seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat" brings together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to critically engage with the evolving debate on the feasibility and implications of simultaneous elections in India. The concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) envisions synchronizing Lok Sabha and state assembly elections to reduce electoral costs, improve governance, and minimize policy paralysis. While international examples like South Africa and Sweden offer optimistic models, India's unique federal and socio-political landscape raises important constitutional, administrative, and democratic concerns. This seminar provides a platform for rigorous interdisciplinary dialogue, examining ONOE's potential impact on federalism, political diversity, economic efficiency, civic participation, and electoral integrity. By fostering academic and policy discourse, the seminar aims to contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of India's democratic processes in a way that is inclusive, participatory, and constitutionally sound.

Major themes and sub-themes of the seminar
Track 1: Constitutional, Legal, and Structural Frameworks

Focus: Examining the feasibility, legality, and institutional readiness for ONOE.

Sub-themes:

1. Constitutional Amendments and Legal Pathways for Implementing ONOE
2. Harmonising Terms of Parliament and State Assemblies
3. Institutional Mechanisms and the Role of the Election Commission of India
4. Logistical Challenges in Conducting Simultaneous Elections
5. Judicial Perspectives and Precedents Related to Electoral Reforms

Track 2: Federalism, Political Plurality, and Governance

Focus: Evaluating how ONOE interfaces with India's federal character and governance systems.

Sub-themes:

● Reconciling Centralisation with State Autonomy
● Role and Relevance of Regional Parties in a Unified Electoral Cycle
● Impact on Coalition Politics and Political Negotiation Mechanisms
● Panchayati Raj and Democratic Federalism in the Context of ONOE
● Governance and Administrative Reforms under a Simultaneous Electoral Regime

Track 3: Economic and Developmental Impacts

Focus: Exploring how synchronized elections could affect development and resource utilization.

Sub-themes:

● Cost-Benefit Analysis of ONOE Implementation in a Federal Democracy
● Fiscal Implications for Political Campaigning and Public Expenditure
● Economic Disruptions Due to Frequent Electoral Code of Conduct
● Development Planning Continuity and Electoral Stability
● Potential Impact on Business, Investment Climate, and Market Sentiment

Track 4: Voter Behaviour, Democratic Participation, and Civic Engagement

Focus: Understanding how ONOE could reshape citizen engagement and democratic behaviour.

Sub-themes:

- Voter Turnout Trends in Unified vs. Staggered Elections
- Impact on Voter Awareness and Electoral Fatigue
- Digital Campaigning and Civic Literacy in the Era of Simultaneity
- Role of Civil Society and NGOs in Electoral Education
- Media Representation and Public Discourse on ONOE

Track 5: Social Work, Policy Innovation, and Democratic Deepening

Focus: Positioning social work perspectives in strengthening democracy through local governance and participation.

Sub-themes:

1. Strengthening Local Governance and Inclusive Democracy through Policy Innovation
2. Social Work Approaches to Democratic Participation and Citizen Empowerment
3. Public Sector Performance and Decentralized Governance
4. Leadership, Capacity Building, and Institutional Development in Indian Democracy
5. Role of Social Workers in Fostering Participatory Governance under ONOE

Track 6: Comparative and International Perspectives

Focus: Drawing from global experiences and scholarly insights into election synchronization.

Sub-themes:

1. Case Studies from Countries with Synchronized National and Subnational Elections
2. Comparative Electoral Systems and Lessons for India
3. Global Trends in Electoral Modernization and Governance Reform
4. Regional Cooperation and Election Management in Federal Democracies
5. International Standards for Democratic Processes and India's Adaptation

6   **Contribution of the seminar to the existing body of research:**

Seminar gave fruitful insights on various themes through the plenary sessions and original paper presentations from eminent scholars and field level practicians. All the valuable insights are noted and arranged in the report session wise at the end of each sessions report.

7 Session Wise Plan

S. No	Date and time	Program	Speaker/ Author/s details	Title of the paper
Day 1: 28/08/2025				
1	9.30 am to 11.30 am	Inaugural Program		
2	11.30 am to 11.45 am	Tea Break		
3	12.20 pm to 12.50 pm	Session 1	Lead Speaker: Dr.Namrata Singh Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi	Anchoring Democracy: The Citizen's Power in 'One Nation, One Election
			Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice–Principal, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences	
			Co-Chair: Dr.S A Rajalakshmi Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: Satya Manasa Devi, II MSW	
4	12.50 to 1.00 pm	Q and A Session		
5	1.00 pm to 2.00 pm	Lunch Break		
	2.00 pm to 3.30 pm	Lead Paper Presentations		

6	2.00 pm to 2.20 pm	Session 2	Lead Speaker: Dr.Gyana Ranjan Panda Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan	From Cooperative to Coordinated Federalism: Analysing ONOE's Fiscal Implications through Second-Generation Federalism Theory
			Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II) Department of Politics and International Studies , Pondicherry University	
			Co Chair: Dr. Rajeev Ramakrishnan Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: ASHWIN C ,II MSW	
7	2.25 pm to 2.45 pm	Session 3	Lead Speaker: Dr. M.Nagalingam, Associate Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala	One Nation, One Election: A Pathway to Strengthening Governance and Development in India
			Chair: Dr. G.Gopa Kumar, Former Vice Chancellor, Central University of Kerala	
			Co-Chair: Dr. Raneesh Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: ANN MARIYA JAISON , II MSW	

	2.50 pm to 4.45 pm	Paper Presentations by Presenters: Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II) Department of Politics and International Studies , Pondicherry University		
8	2.50 pm to 3.00 pm	Paper present ations	1 Harshita Priyadharshini and 2 Athira P R Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India.	Rapporteur: Ashwin and Anisha, II MSW
	3.05 pm to 3.15 pm			Inclusive Health Governance: Examining Local Government Initiatives for Women and Transgender Persons in Kerala
	3.20 pm to 3.30 pm		Agna.S. Nath, Arunkumar V*, and Aswathi.K. Department of Mass Communication, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India -641112	The Carbon Footprint of Frequent Elections: Can ONOE Make Indian Democracy More Sustainable?

3.35 pm - 3.45 pm		Sathyapriya B1, Dr. K. Sathyamurthi2 Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Egmore	Bytes and Ballots: Digital Democracy and Civic Engagement in a Simultaneous Electoral Environment
3.50 pm – 4.00 pm		Rajeev Ramakrishnan1, *, Dr.P.Rangasami 2, Malavika K3, Evangelin Sunil4, Ramya R5, Sreenandana B S6 Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India	Insights on One Nation, One Election as Fiscal Reform - a Youth-Centered Study in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Day 2 : 29/08/2025				
	8.30 am to 9.45 am	Paper Presentations by Presenters [Chair: Dr.P.Sakthivel] Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University		
9	8.30 am to 8.45 am	Session 1	Aswathy Sebastian 1 and Dr.k.Sathyamurthi 2 Madras School Of Social Work ,Chennai -8, India	Families as Schools of Democracy: Reimagining Family Social Work for Democratic Deepening
	8.45 am to 8.55 am		1 Khadeeja Sadarudheen and 2 Dr. Kamalaveni Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry	Staggered Elections in Kerala: History and the Implications of One Nation One

		University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India.	Election
8.55 am to 9.05 am		Rajeev Ramakrishnan1, *, Dr. P.Rangsami2, Amrita R Menon3, Sreelakshmi P4	The Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election
9.05 am to 9.15 am		Sandra K1 and K Sathyamurthi2 Madras School of Social Work, Chennai	Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One Election Reform
9.15 am to 9.25 am		Rajeev Ramakrishnan1, *, Dr. P.Rangasami2, Gouri Ullas3, Satya Mansa Devi4 Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India	Democratic Participation and Social Work Interventions Among the Scheduled Caste: A Critical Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal in India
9.25 am to 9.35 am		1Amrutha P and 2Dr. K. Sathyamurthi Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai,	Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election
9.35 am to 9.45 am		Dr. Mohana Priya B Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Sri Krishna Arts and	Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO

			Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.	Interventions and Challenges in India
			Rapporteur: Ann Mariya and Navya , II MSW	
10	10.00 am to 11.00 am	Session 2	Lead Speaker: Dr.Upendra Baxi Emeritus Professor of Law University of Warwick and Delhi	'Seeing Something as Something': Aspects of 'One Nation, One Election'
			Chair: Dr.S.Sampath Kumar Professor and Head, Department of sociology & Population studies, Bharathiar University.	
			Co Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice–Principal and Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences	
			Rapporteur: NAVYA SUNIL , II MSW	
11	11.00 am to 11.15 am	Tea Break		
	11.15 to 1.00 pm	Lead Paper Presentations		
12	11.15 am to 11.35 am	Session 3	Lead Speaker: Dr.P.Sakthivel Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University	One Nation, One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India

			Chair: Dr.Gyana Ranjan Panda Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan	
			Co Chair: Dr.S.Kanagaraj Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: Amrita R. Menon ,II MSW	
13	11.40 am to 12.00 pm	Session 4	Lead Speaker: Dr. Subhabrata Dutta Professor, Dept. of Social Work Assam University: Silchar	Development, Sustainability and Governance in India: Role of One Nation, One Election (ONOE)
			Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice–Principal and Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences	
			Co Chair: Dr. SA Rajalakshmi Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: Amrita R. Menon ,II MSW	
14	12.05 pm to 12.25 pm	Session 5	Lead Speaker: Dr. Nanda Kishor MS HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II) Department of Politics and	Governance without Disruptions: Will One Election Improve Policy Continuity?

			International Studies Pondicherry University	
			Chair: Dr.Sudheesh Manalil Dean, Amrita School of Agricultural Sciences	
			Co Chair: Dr. Rajeev Ramakrishnan, Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
			Rapporteur: Lekshmi Priya ,II MSW	
15	12.30 pm to 12.50 pm	Session 6	Lead Speaker: Dr.S.Sampath Kumar Professor and Head, Department of sociology & Population studies, Bharathiar University. Chair: Dr. V.Priya Chairperson, Dept.of Social Work Co-Chair: Dr.Raneesh C Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work Rapporteur: Antony Sebastian,II MSW	Negotiating Socio-Political Conscience Through Votes: Intricacies in Bridging Electoral Expectations and Electoral practices among Youth Voters
16	1.00 pm to 1.45 pm	Lunch Break		
18	2.20 pm to 3.00 pm	Valedictory Function		

8   Seminar Report

"Exploring The Future Of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election And Its

Implications For Governance & Federalism Towards A Vibrant Bharat"

Organized by: School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (SSBS), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham

Sponsored by: Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

Venue: Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Arasampalayam Campus

Date: 28th and 29th of August 2025

Dignitaries during inaugural programme

Inaugural programme

Time: 09:30 am

Venue: Auditorium, Arasampalayam, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham

Welcome Address: Dr. S. Kanagaraj, Vice Chairperson, Department of Social Work - SSBS Seminar Convener.

Chair: Dr. P. Rangasami, Vice Principal of the School of Social Behavioural Science

Benedictory Address: Swami Tapasyamritananda Puri

Key Note Address: Prof. (Dr.) G. Gopa Kumar, Leading Political Scientist, Former Vice Chancellor, Central University of Kerala

Chief Guest: Sri. Narayanan Thirupathy Independent Director of REC Ltd. A Maharatna PSU under Ministry of Power Chief Spokesperson -BJP, Tamil Nadu

Chair: Swami Matrukripamrita Chaitanya

Vote of Thanks: Dr. V. Priya, Chairperson, Department of Social Work - SSBS

Rapporteur: Ashwathi V R

The Department of Social Work at Amrita University, in partnership with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), hosted a two-day National Seminar titled "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election, and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism." The seminar was intended to serve as an

academic venue for distinguished researchers, policymakers, faculty members, and students from throughout India to examine one of the most significant and timely changes currently under consideration in Indian politics.

Lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries

The first ceremony began with a prayer and the ceremonial lamp lighting by distinguished dignitaries, signifying the customary start of good things to come. The seminar was organized by Dr. S. Kanagaraj, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work, who welcomed everyone and gave an overview of the goals of the meeting. He underlined in his speech the theme's relevance, pointing out the potential benefits of simultaneous elections as well as the financial toll that frequent elections take on the country. The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections made recommendations that he cited, emphasizing how aligning the elections for the State Assembly and Lok Sabha may save important administrative resources, improve governance, and save expenses.

Dr.S.Kanagaraj delivering welcome address

He also stated that the idea has the potential to increase India's GDP and considerably benefit development sectors like as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. His speech represented both the proposal's prospects and challenges, setting the tone for the scholarly discussions that would follow during the seminar.

Professor G. Gopa Kumar, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Kerala and one of India's most eminent political scientists, delivered the keynote presentation. Professor Gopa Kumar offered a detailed examination of India's democratic framework and federal structure, drawing on decades of research and teaching. He reminded the audience that India is the world's largest democracy, with a long and complicated election history, and highlighted the need to critically consider the One Nation, One Election idea from different perspectives. He acknowledged that simultaneous elections could minimize budgetary expenses, but he highlighted serious concerns about the implications for federalism, regional representation, and the multiparty system. delivering keynote address

Prof. (Dr.) G. Gopa Kumar

Swami Tapasyamratananda Puri addressed the crowd, bringing a spiritual and social dimension to the talks. He emphasized the significance of continuity in government for the effectiveness of social policies and development projects. Drawing on his experiences with rural programs, he stated that repeated elections frequently impair long-term planning and the delivery of critical services. He proposed that simultaneous elections may offer stability and enable welfare systems to be implemented more effectively, helping regular residents, farmers, and neglected populations.

Swami Tapasyamratananda Puri addressing audience
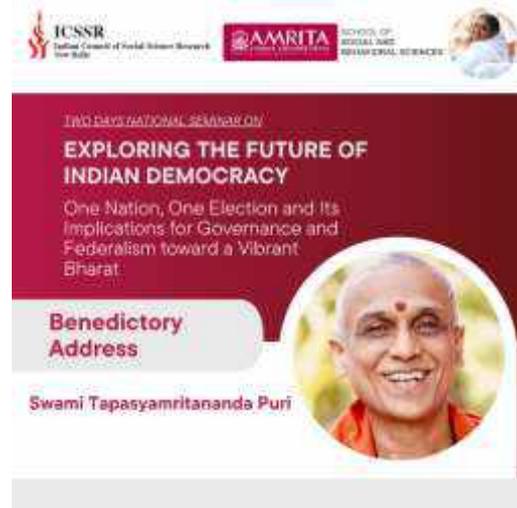
Shri Narayanan Tirupathi, a senior BJP leader, political analyst, and social activist, presented an engaging and thought-provoking address during the opening

ceremony. Concerned about federalism, he emphasized that regional sovereignty would not be weakened, but rather that development and governance would be promoted by tighter cooperation between states and the center. He closed by telling the audience that democracy is built on reforms and adaptation, and the One Nation, One Election idea should be viewed as a step toward a more efficient and united democratic process.
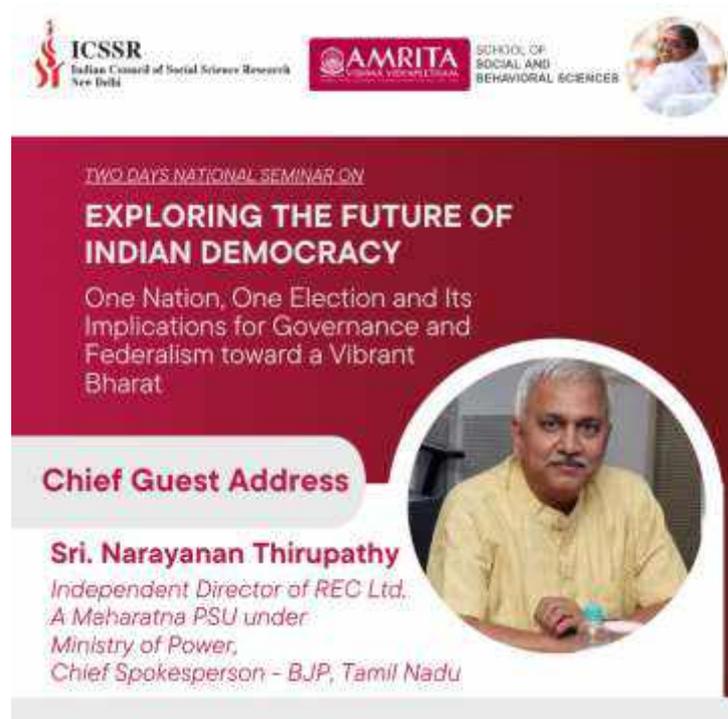
Shri Narayanan Tirupathi delivering chief guest address

Eminent researchers and paper presenters from major universities including Delhi University, Central University of Kerala, Assam University, Pondicherry University, Annamalai University, and Central University of Rajasthan attended the inaugural event.

Faculty and students from Amrita University, as well as attendees from other Indian universities and colleges, added to the seminar's richness and active participation. Their participation reflected the topic's broad national significance and the variety of opinions it attracted.

Release of abstract book

The session ended with a vote of thanks from Dr. V. Priya, Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences. She thanked the Chancellor, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, for her blessings and guidance, and praised the Vice Chancellor, Registrar, organizing committee, prominent guests, faculty members, and students. She expressed her gratitude to the ICSSR for funding the seminar and to all lead speakers and participants for contributing to the event's intellectual and academic liveliness.

Dr. V. Priya proposing vote of thanks

The opening ceremony successfully established the tone for two days of serious scholarly discussion of the issue. It created a balanced tone, with some speakers emphasizing the efficiency and cost-saving benefits of One Nation, One Election, while others expressed concerns about the potential hazards to federalism, inclusion, and regional autonomy. This multiplicity of viewpoints highlighted the issue's complexities and the importance of academic forums in encouraging meaningful discourse on democratic transformation. The ceremony not only marked the start of an important seminar, but it also emphasized universities' responsibility in stimulating critical thought, discussion, and academic contributions to building India's democratic future.

Group photo with all the participants

Inaugural programme invitation

Inaugural picture gallery

9 Session 1: Anchoring Democracy: The Citizen's Power in 'One Nation, One Election

Venue: Auditorium

Title: Anchoring Democracy: The Citizen's Power in 'One Nation, One Election

Plenary Speaker: Dr.Namrata Singh.

Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice–Principal, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Co-Chair: Dr.S A Rajalakshmi, Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Rapporteur: Satya Mansa Devi

Session Report:

The session on electoral reforms, led by Dr. Namarata Singh, centred on the theme of citizen participation as the cornerstone of democracy. She acknowledged the contributions of the organising committee and highlighted the role of youth and students in carrying the democratic message forward. She emphasised that the strength of Indian democracy lies not just with political parties but relies heavily on the active involvement of the citizens. Their role does not stop with voting for the right party for the right reasons, but in ensuring the government and its agencies are working towards the benefit of society. The citizens play a major role in monitoring and holding the political parties and government agencies

accountable for their actions and inactions. Awareness building, informed decision making, opinion polls, debates, and panel discussions are all important tools to build the citizens' capacity.

Dr.Namrata Singh presenting the paper

The speaker addressed the vastness of India's electoral system, coupled with frequent elections at both the National and State levels. She elaborated on the high election costs, administrative pressures, and resource and people management needs for the elections. She also emphasised the disruption in policy formulation and implementation. ONOE allows

for uninterrupted governance, continuity in the policy process and reduction in the election costs, enabling smoother functioning of the governments. She also cautioned about the risks, such as centralisation, which could lead to the minimisation of regional or state-level issues. It also poses changes and risks to the constitutional and legal aspects.

Dr. Namrata highlighted the empowerment of citizens, which is necessary for the success of all reforms, especially with respect to elections. Citizens should demand information-centric campaigns, data-driven websites, usage of digital tools to access and give out the right and verified information that the citizens can utilise to make decisions. This enables transparency and also allows for the questioning and monitoring of the parties. Every citizen, right from the grassroots level to the large-scale level, should be aware of the issues that are persistent in their area, at the national and global levels. This increases the awareness, maturity and knowledge of the citizens and encourages them to ask the right questions to bring out the necessary change in their locality and the country.

Concluding her address, Dr. Namrata posed four tangible action steps for the citizens: citizens must demand greater transparency and issue-based campaigns; civil society organisations should leverage technology and community-led discussions to facilitate informed choice; local governance institutions should be strengthened to ensure regional issues are addressed; and citizens must embrace a watchdog role by engaging in regular monitoring through RTI and digital tools. She reiterated that informed citizens who participate not just in elections but also those who question governance are important for the success or failure of any reform. Citizens, especially youth, need to take ownership of the democratic process.

Question & Answer Session

Question 1. We have seen a rise in claims of Voter choir, election result mismanagement, fraud in voting, etc. Do you think ONOE will increase these issues?

Ans: Even though allegations of electoral fraud are frequently made, it's crucial to base judgments on reliable, fact-based evidence. Finding practical strategies to lessen corruption's effects is just as difficult as combating corruption itself. Election expenditures must be transparent; we must know who is spending the money, how it is being spent, and why. ONOE may simplify procedures by lowering election costs and frequency, but public participation is still crucial. In the end, democracy is a numbers game, and citizens will not undermine electoral integrity if they actively participate and demand accountability using accurate statistics.

Question 2. The majority of the citizens are struggling to fulfil their basic necessities of life; they do not have time to think about these things. So, isn't it unfair to put all the onus on the citizens in such an unfair framework that doesn't allow people to even think?

Ans: While it is true that citizens frequently deal with urgent issues related to their livelihood, democracy cannot exist if accountability is shifted exclusively to one side. The government, people, political parties, and different state institutions must all share responsibility for preserving democratic integrity. People themselves continue to be the cornerstone of democracy, even while community-level initiatives and governmental policies must be improved to better serve individuals. Because citizens are the ones who make decisions and grant authority, their involvement guarantees the maintenance of democratic accountability. In order for citizens to be better able to engage in democratic processes, the government must simultaneously make investments in enhancing their particular capacities.

10 **Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar**

- Democracy - Elections.
- Elections- Citizens- A.
- Anchoring electoral democracy —> Central - State - local (voter participation).
- Balancing Economically.
- Part- saving the many.
- Federal basic- one national policy.
- Historical trajectory- starts from 1951 till reform efforts - validating case for onoe.
- Challenges & Criticisms - Federal, Constitutional, Logistical, citizens- comparitive, appeals for different states.
- Implications for indian federalism.
- "We the people of India'- emphasizes on the citizen's role.(anchoring democracy) - Citizen's empowerment.
- There maybe multiple elections- really popular democracy.
- Citizen participation- benefits the elections.
- Empower the citizens.
- Technological Aspects.
- RTI watchdog .

- Conclusion- Citizens plays a proactive role in ONOE.

10.1   Photo Gallery

Dr.P.Rangasami honouring the presenter

11 Session 2: From Cooperative to Coordinated Federalism: Analyzing ONOE's Fiscal Implications through Second-Generation Federalism Theory

Venue: Farmers' Hall

Title: From Cooperative to Coordinated Federalism: Analysing ONOE's Fiscal Implications through Second-Generation Federalism Theory

Plenary speaker: Dr. Gyana Ranjana Panda, Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan"

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II)

Department of Politics and International Studies, Pondicherry University

Co-Chair: Dr. Rajeev Ramakrishnan, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Rapporteur: Ashwathi V R, II MSW

The ICSSR-sponsored National Seminar's third technical session focused on the fiscal and governance consequences of the One Nation, One Election plan. The session was presided over by eminent academics, with Dr. Jnana Ranjan Panda, Senior Assistant Professor at the Central University of Rajasthan, presenting the lead paper. Dr. Panda is a well-known academic with over three decades of teaching and research expertise in public policy, fiscal governance, and digital administration. His presentation added a strong theoretical and empirical dimension to the conversation.

Dr. Panda emphasized in his speech that public policies cannot work unless they are financially viable, emphasizing that fiscal planning and budgetary discipline are the foundations of all governance systems. Drawing on his vast field research in Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh, he noted how election timetables frequently cause delays in fund disbursement. Large sums are only issued at the end of each fiscal year, resulting in inefficiencies, rollovers, and, in many

cases, underutilization of money. This, he claimed, affects developmental outcomes and undermines fiscal responsibility.

Dr. Panda enhanced his presentation with a theoretical framework based on the writings of economists Kenneth Arrow, Richard Musgrave, and Paul Samuelson, who have defined the subject of public finance. He emphasized how frequent elections disrupt the rhythm of fiscal federalism, making it difficult for governments to balance voter expectations against limited resources. He contended that simultaneous elections would eliminate administrative disturbances, assure policy continuity, and give fiscal predictability.

He went on to discuss the issues of India's fiscal federalism, specifically the imbalance in which the central government collects the bulk of revenues while the states bear the greater portion of expenditure duties, particularly in healthcare, education, and welfare. This mismatch frequently stresses Centre-State ties, and election cycles exacerbate the issue by encouraging populist policies and short-term spending. To address these issues, Dr. Panda underlined the importance of second-generation fiscal federalism reforms that provide states, municipalities, and panchayats with greater financial autonomy and accountability.

Dr. Panda concluded his speech by emphasizing that, while One Nation, One Election is not a "magic bullet" for all governance issues, it has the potential to improve budgetary discipline and cut waste. According to his words, "good economics must support good politics," and electoral stability could lay the groundwork for more responsible financial governance.

Question and Answer Session

Question 1: You mentioned that One Nation, One Election will cut costs. However, given the additional costs of purchasing, storing, and maintaining electronic voting machines (EVMs), how can the entire expenditure be reduced?

Ans: Dr. Panda reacted by distinguishing between direct and indirect costs. While direct election-related expenses may not fall significantly, the indirect advantages are far greater. He explained that frequent elections cause delays in growth plans, disrupt cash flows, and result in duplicating administrative labor. The state can reduce these inefficiencies by holding simultaneous elections. He emphasized that the savings should be measured not only in monetary terms, but also in terms of administrative energy, governance stability, and consistent policy implementation.

Question 2: In your presentation, you mentioned public choice theory. Could you clarify how it relates to simultaneous elections? Ans: Dr. Panda explained that Public Choice Theory, which is based on Rational Choice Theory, depicts how citizens (principals)

demand services, but governments (agents) are constrained in their delivery. Bureaucrats, who operate as mediators, frequently centralize authority and prioritize expenditures that benefit institutional or political interests rather than public well-being. Regular elections exacerbate this issue by encouraging short-term populist expenditure. He believes that simultaneous elections could lessen this distortion by encouraging longer-term policy perspectives and allowing governments to think beyond current electoral cycles.

Question 3: "Freebies" like subsidies, free electricity, or transportation contribute significantly to economic pressures in Indian governments. Do you think One Nation, One Election can overcome such issues?

Ans: Dr. Panda stated that subsidies should not be considered "freebies" in all instances. Subsidised food distribution is one example of a welfare plan that can help to reduce poverty and inequality. However, fiscal indiscipline, which occurs when states overspend without maintaining accountability mechanisms, causes major consequences. He emphasized that states, like the federal government, should enact fiscal responsibility laws to manage deficits. While One Nation, One Election cannot eradicate populist politics, it can lower the frequency of politically motivated spending during subsequent elections.

Question 4: There is no compelling empirical evidence to suggest that simultaneous elections will cut costs or boost GDP. In the absence of such evidence, how can the plan be justified?

Ans: Dr. Panda acknowledged the limitations of empirical data, but he asserted that governance reforms need not always require perfect evidence. He explained that One Nation, One Election's value comes not only from cost reductions, but also from streamlining governance procedures and boosting fiscal predictability. He also encouraged additional academic research to develop empirical insights, emphasizing that the suggestion should be examined with other reforms, such as proportional representation and tighter electoral legislation.

11.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

● Fiscal Federalism

● Decentralised Finance allows a greater autonomy to work

● Incentivising elections to incentivise the States to think it is worthy to go for ONOE.

● States seems to be on fiscal deficit Since 2014-15

● Good governance will suffer if there are two different Political Parties are power in Center & State

Photo Gallery

12 Session 3: One Nation, One Election: A Pathway to Strengthening Governance and Development in India

Title: one nation, one election: a pathway to strengthening governance and development in India

Hall: Farmers' training hall

Chair: G. Gopa Kumar, former vice chancellor, Central University of Kerala

Co-chair: Dr. Raneesh C, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore

Lead speaker: Dr. M. Nagalingam

Associate Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Central University Of Kerala

Rapporteur: Ann Mariya Jaison
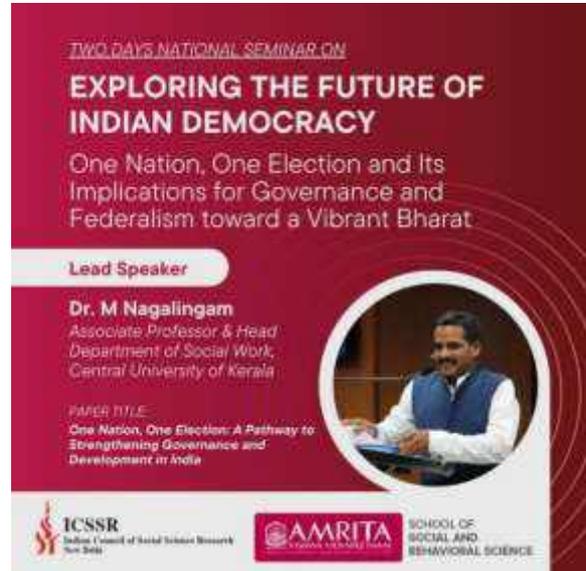
The session started at 3:40 pm on 28/08/2025. It was chaired by Dr. G. Gopa Kumar, Former Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Kerala, and co-chaired by Dr. Raneesh, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work. The lead speaker of the session was Dr. M. Nagalingam, Associate Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala. The chair and the lead speaker were introduced by Dr. Raneesh C. The session was started by the chair giving an overview about the mid-term election and also about how national elections can overshadow the regional issues, and also about who, how the one state one election will be implemented. Later on, the lead speaker carried out the presentation he started by giving an overview of the general election, which was naturally simultaneous, and also how it became disrupted after 1967 due to amendments. Later on, he talked about issues with the current electoral state, which are governance disruption and policy paralysis, administrative burden, high election expenditure, which are caused by of code of conduct, which restricts policy decisions, redeployment of officials like police and army officials during the time of election, and at last the large expenditure of the parties because of the election.

In the next slides, he explained about the election management and administrative disruptions, where he explained about the educational impact as teacher are being asked to help with the election, which disrupts their classes. Then, about the security impact when officials are being deployed during the time of elections. Next, about welfare and developmental schemes as administrative staff are asked to be part of election duties, which gradually slows down the government tasks, even doctors and health staff are being assigned to polling.

In the next slides, he talked about the estimated costs of Lok Sabha elections from the year of 2014, 2019, and 2024. Where parties are spending thousands of crores for the election. Frequent elections create a heavy financial burden on them. He also introduced various committees/bodies based on one nation, one election, in which the Law Commission by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy in the year 1999, where he advocated for the return of simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and assemblies. Law Commission by Justice B. S Chauhan, 2018about the need for constitutional reform to enable simultaneous polls. Parliamentary Standing Committee 2015assessed the feasibility. High-level committee 2023-24 submitted a detailed report on one nation one election after conducting a study nationwide.

Towards the end of the presentation, he discussed ONOE as a pathway to strengthening governance through governance efficiency, reduced expenditure as parties only have to spend money, policy continuity, and strengthening democracy. When talking about ONOE and developmental outcomes, he discussed that the money that is being saved by conducting elections can be channelled into welfare and infrastructure development for people. This can lead to better policy execution in health, education sectors, as well as it can lead to poverty alleviation. Long-term development planning can be developed without electoral disruptions. At last, it can promote political stability conducive to economic growth.

The concerns and challenges which was discussed during the session were about federalism about the risk of centralizing power, and which were gradually leading to undermining the power of the states. Logical feasibility, constitutional hurdles where in order to implement this election policy, multiple amendments have to be made. Political feasibility also becomes an issue, as a lack of consensus among regional parties affects the feasibility.

He concluded by saying that ONOE is a structural shift rather than electoral reform. It holds the potential to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and accelerate development. "If

designed carefully, ONOE can be a pathway to a Vibrant Bharat by balancing governance efficiency with federal inclusivity".

The chair concluded the session by saying that the midterm election is unavoidable. Even though constitutional amendments will be able to do so, judicial scrutiny will be difficult. He also discussed the possibility of a digital election, where anyone can vote using online platforms.

Question & Answer Sessions:

1. How can development plans align with sustainable developmental goals (SDGs)

Ans: He answered that whenever a development comes in front of the government, they focus on sustainable developmental goals, whether they align with SDGs. Based on that, funds are allocated.

2. What is the current need of ONOE? Is it only for reducing the cost of parties?

Ans: He answered it by saying that it is one of the many reasons, but the ultimate question is, what is the need for the election to be conducted multiple times? As this is one of the alternative options, why still continuing with multiple elections?

12.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

1. Mid term elections are unavoidable
2. Political discourses especially manifestos of state will be sidelined and overshadowed by the national political discourses.
3. Judicial scrutiny of the proposed amendment is doubt full. Because election commission has no authority to prepare election of state assembly
4. Create a common calendar for elections for states and parliaments.

Photo gallery
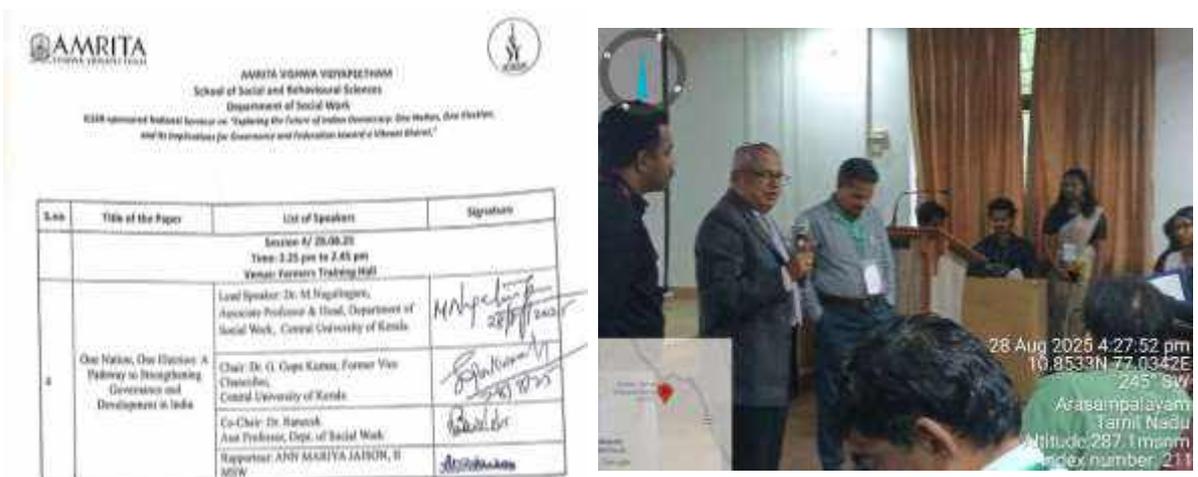
13   Paper presentations

13.1   Paper Presentation: 1: Institutional Innovations and Grievance Redressal: Role of Ombudsman in Promoting Good Governance in Local Self-Government

Venue: Farmers Hall

Title: Institutional Innovations and Grievance Redressal: Role of Ombudsman in Promoting Good Governance in Local Self-Government

Speaker: Ganga J. Darsan, Research Scholar, SILT, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor M S

HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II), Department of Politics and International Studies

Rapporteur: Ashwin C

Ganga J. Darsan presenting her paper

 Report:

The session highlighted the importance of grievance redressal systems in strengthening good governance and building people's trust in institutions. The paper focused on the role of the Ombudsman in Local Self-Governments (LSGs) and stressed the need for a transparent and independent selection process to maintain its credibility. The background of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which empowered Panchayati Raj institutions, was discussed to show why checks like the Ombudsman are essential.

The main objective of the study was to examine the laws and structures behind the Ombudsman system and to assess how well it ensures accountability and transparency. A legal research method was used, looking into policies, laws, and challenges related to the Ombudsman's functions.

The analysis showed that the Ombudsman acts as a link between citizens and local governance, helping to resolve issues like corruption, maladministration, and poor service delivery. Findings revealed that the Ombudsman strengthens accountability, prevents misuse of funds, protects people's rights, and promotes transparency.

The study concluded that the Ombudsman is an effective innovation for improving governance at the grassroots level. It not only strengthens accountability but also

encourages participatory governance by bridging the gap between people and the government.

At the same time, challenges such as a lack of autonomy, a shortage of funds, overlapping powers, and limited public awareness reduce its effectiveness. To address this, the paper suggested reforms such as independent Ombudsman offices free from political influence, the use of technology for complaint systems (like CPGRAMS), public disclosure of decisions, training of local officials, and regular feedback from society.

13.2   Paper Presentation: 2: Inclusive Health Governance: Examining Local Government Initiatives for Women and Transgender Persons in Kerala

Venue: Farmers Hall

Title: Inclusive Health Governance: Examining Local Government Initiatives for Women and Transgender Persons in Kerala

 Speakers: Harshita Priyadharshini & Athira P R, Research Scholars, Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor M S, HOD & Associate Professor, Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II), Department of Politics and International Studies

Rapporteur: Ashwin C

Report:

Harshita Priyadharshini and Athira P R presented their paper on inclusive health governance in Kerala, focusing on how local governments address the health needs of women and transgender persons. Their research combined policy analysis with ground-level realities, examining programs such as the Women Component Plan and transgender welfare schemes.

The study showcased Kerala's innovative steps, including gender-responsive budgeting, Mission Aardram reforms, and gender-affirming healthcare services. While these initiatives mark real progress, the presenters pointed out persistent challenges such as underutilized funds, bias toward traditional gender roles, discrimination in healthcare, and weak coordination between sectors.

They argued that inclusive health governance must go beyond reproductive health, with sustained funding for transgender programs and greater sensitization of healthcare providers. Local self-governments and community health workers were identified as crucial for achieving equity.

Key points:

* Women's Component Plan is effective but still centered on traditional roles.

* Transgender health services are growing but remain underfunded.

* Primary health reforms improved access, but consistent sensitization of providers is needed.

* Monitoring lacks detailed, disaggregated data for tracking outcomes.

The presenters concluded that Kerala's framework is strong but requires better coordination, diversified programs, and stronger accountability to achieve lasting, inclusive health outcomes.

Question and Answer Session:

The discussion was lively, with participants appreciating the focus on marginalized groups. One participant asked why this study was linked to the broader debate on "One Nation, One Election."

The presenters explained that local self-government is vital in understanding community-specific health needs and ensuring inclusive governance. They warned that if "One Nation, One Election" is implemented, the autonomy of local bodies might weaken, reducing their ability to respond effectively to local health challenges. Hence, the connection emphasizes the need to protect decentralized governance while considering national electoral reforms.

13.3   Paper Presentation: 3: The Carbon Footprint of Frequent Elections: Can ONOE Make Indian Democracy More Sustainable?

Venue: Farmers Hall

Title: The Carbon Footprint of Frequent Elections: Can ONOE Make Indian Democracy More Sustainable?

Speaker: Agna S. Nath, Arunkumar V. N.

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor M S, HOD &

Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP

(DRS II), Department of Politics

Agna S. Nath and Arunkumar V. N. presenting their paper

Rapporteur: Ashwin C

Report:

The paper presentation by Agna S. Nath and Arunkumar V. N focused on the environmental impact of frequent elections in India, highlighting the substantial carbon footprint generated through campaign travel, voter transportation, and polling operations. The study used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative estimation of emissions with qualitative case studies and interviews. The research established that Indian elections produce approximately 1.2 million metric tons of CO_2 per cycle. The presenters argued that implementing One Nation One Election (ONOE) could reduce emissions by 35–55% through consolidated campaigns and resource pooling. They further noted that digital initiatives had already contributed to a 9% reduction over the past decade, although disparities across regions persist. The paper concluded that ONOE offers significant sustainability benefits, but implementation should be phased and context-sensitive to avoid deepening federal tensions and digital divides. The study also stressed that electoral reforms should be viewed as part of broader climate action in India and globally.

Question and Answer session:

During the interactive session, the presenters were asked whether the reduction of carbon footprint and environmental relevance is reason enough to adopt ONOE as an alternative to the present system of elections. They were also questioned about the source and method of data collection. The presenters clarified that the primary objective of their study was to assess the difference in carbon footprint between ONOE and the current multi-phase electoral system. They explained that data was collected using election commission statistics, campaign logistics data, surveys with 800 voters, and interviews with 20 officials and experts. They emphasized that ONOE should not only be seen as a political reform but also as a sustainability measure with global implications.

13.4   Paper Presentation: 4: Bytes and Ballots: Digital Democracy and Civic Engagement in a Simultaneous Electoral Environment

Venue: Farmers Training Hall

Title: Bytes and Ballots: Digital Democracy and Civic Engagement in a Simultaneous Electoral Environment

Speaker: Sathyapriya, Dr. K. Sathyamurthi, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Egmore

Sathyapriya presenting her paper

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor, HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II)

Department of Politics and International Studies, Pondicherry University

Rapporteur: Anisha, II MSW

Report:

The session by Sathyapriya examined the convergence of India's *One Nation One Election (ONOE)* proposal with the country's rapidly expanding digital democracy. The discussion highlighted ONOE as an initiative intended to synchronize parliamentary and state assembly elections. While the reform is expected to lower costs, ease administrative pressures, and enable more consistent governance, concerns remain that it may weaken India's federal structure and diminish the visibility of regional and local issues.

Within this context, the study *"Bytes and Ballots"* analyzed how digital transformation shapes civic engagement in a simultaneous electoral environment. With more than 800 million internet users, India's political participation is increasingly mediated through digital platforms. Campaigns today are fast-paced, data-driven, and personalized, yet this also raises challenges of misinformation, algorithmic bias, and echo chambers. A major issue identified was the digital divide, as only 38 percent of rural respondents reported awareness of political content online, underscoring risks of exclusion and inequity in democratic participation.

The research adopted a mixed-method approach, combining surveys across urban and rural districts of Tamil Nadu with interviews of political strategists, campaign managers, Election Commission officials, and civic tech experts. The findings revealed strong support for ONOE, with 65 percent of respondents believing synchronized elections would reduce voter fatigue and improve efficiency. At the same time, a "digital engagement paradox" emerged: digital tools expanded political involvement, particularly among youth and urban voters, but also increased risks of misinformation and offered disproportionate advantages to larger parties with greater online presence, leaving smaller and regional parties at risk of marginalization.

The discussion concluded that while ONOE can improve efficiency, it must be paired with measures that strengthen inclusivity in digital participation. Building an informed and trustworthy digital democracy requires robust regulation, greater accountability of online platforms, and stronger media literacy initiatives. Without these safeguards, synchronized elections may prioritize efficiency at the expense of democratic equity. The session ultimately stressed that the future of electoral reform in India depends on balancing

administrative efficiency with inclusivity, ensuring that both digital democracy and ONOE reinforce rather than undermine the foundations of Indian democracy.

14 Paper Presentation: 5: Insights on One Nation, One Election as Fiscal Reform - a Youth-Centered Study in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Time: 5:30 pm

Venue: Farmers Training Hall

Title: Insights on One Nation, One Election as Fiscal Reform - a Youth-Centered Study in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Speaker: Malavika K, Evangelin Sunil, Ramya R, Sreenandana B S, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India

Chair: Dr. Nanda Kishor, HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II) Department of Politics and International Studies, Pondicherry University

Rapporteur: Ashwin and Anisha, II MSW

Report:

The paper presenters, Malavika K, Evangelin Sunil, Ramya R, and Sreenandana B S look at how young people in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, think about the idea of *One Nation, One Election (ONOE)*. The proposal suggests holding national and state elections at the same time. The main goal is to save money, reduce the pressure of frequent elections on governance, and allow governments to focus more on long-term development. Supporters believe it can improve efficiency and reduce costs, but critics argue that it may weaken India's federal system, reduce regional representation, and affect local accountability. Since young people form the largest voting group in India, their views are especially important.

The research used surveys and focus group discussions with students from different departments, including Agriculture, Architecture, Mass Communication, and Social Work. Out of 609 students, 197 were selected through proportionate sampling to ensure fair representation of both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Most of the respondents were female. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using both statistical and thematic methods.

Findings showed that almost 90 percent of students were aware of ONOE, and about 77 percent knew it meant holding state and national elections together. Many felt that it could reduce costs, improve governance, and promote political stability. At the same time, concerns were raised that it might reduce political accountability, weaken federalism, and disadvantage regional parties. Students were divided on whether the proposal could be practically implemented. Some supported it in principle but preferred testing it in smaller phases before applying it nationwide.

Overall, the study shows that youth in Coimbatore are well aware of the ONOE debate and generally see it as useful for efficiency and cost reduction. However, they remain cautious about its risks, especially for regional voices and inclusivity in democracy. The study suggests pilot testing, stronger voter engagement, fiscal transparency, and safeguards to protect the federal balance before moving toward full implementation. While limited to one location and a youth-dominated sample, the study provides valuable insights into how young voters view this major electoral reform.

Ramya R, Evangelin Sunil, Malavika K and Sreenandana B S presenting the paper

14.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

Paper title: Institutional innovations and grievance redressal: Role of ombudsman in promoting good governance in local self-Government

1. ONOE will lead to better governance by reducing malpractices and corruption

2. Ombudsman should operate without political intervention

3. Citizens participation is crucial for successful functioning of the ombudsman

4. ONOE+Ombudsman= corruption

5. Free governance

Paper title: Inclusive health governance: Examining local government initiatives for women and transgender persons in Kerala

1. Kerala has very strong policy to help women and transgender.

2. Programme budgets and policies suffer from bottleneck such as insensivity, bureaucratic hurdles.

3. Kerala has strong architecture for inclusive health governance for women and transgender.

Contribution of the study

● Conceptual integration

● Empirical mapping

● Identity mechanisms and gaps

● Policy reliance

● Transferable\ initiative lessons

Paper Title: The carbon footprint of frequent elections: can ONOE make Indian democracy more sustainable?

● ONOE can reduce carbon footprints

● Parties and voter behaviour associated with how parties can repower in a concern

● Actionable measures

● Solar lowered policy stations

● Digital campaigning

Paper title: Bytes and ballots: Digital democracy and civic engagement in a simultaneous electoral environment

1   Democracy in digital transportation

2   Emerging concerns associated with misinformation, algorithmic manipulation

3   Urban- rural divide in terms of digital democracy

4   72% of urban voters responded relying on digital platform

5   65% of ONOE support

6   0.622 digital correlations

7   Need to build inclusive digital democracy

8   Smaller parties might not be in a position to spend as bigger parties

Paper tittle: Insights on one nation, one election as fiscal reform- a youth-centered study in Coimbatore, Tamil nadu

● ONOE Aligns with SGD16

● ONOE may reduce accountability

● ONOE difficult to implement was opined by many

● Phased implementation is a possible suggestion

● Pilot tertii has to be done

Photo Gallery

Dr.P. Sakthivel giving remarks

1. Session 5

15 Paper Presentation: 6: Families as Schools of Democracy: Reimagining Family Social Work for Democratic Deepening

Venue: Farmers' Training Hall

Chair: Dr.P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Presenter: Aswathy Sebastian and Dr.Sathyamurthi, Madras School Of Social Work, Chennai

Rapporteur: Navya Sunil

Report

This paper was the first paper of the paper presentations, which was presented by Ashwathi Sebastian, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai. In the introduction, the concept of democracy and family was explained, and also about families as schools of democracy. Therefore, the core idea of the paper is that democracy begins with people, and people begin with family. Two theories were mainly explained: the social capital theory and the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner. Using these two theories, a model was also developed. Articles on sociology, family social work, and political science were used for this study. According to the presenter, strong family relationships are the basis of social capital, and when that is weak, it can have effects. According to the ecological systems theory, democracy doesn't work in isolation; instead, it depends on interactions with different layers or systems. Therefore, it's not about elections but how families work at the grassroots level.

Two principles were also mentioned, which can be applied to the Indian context.

11. Local & direct democracy
12. Bio-regional economics
13. Cultural diversity and equity
14. Ecological resilience
15. Grassroot movements - RTI movement

The main argument of this paper is that simultaneous elections can be risky at the grassroots level of democracy. Other demerits are overshadowing regional issues, a decrease in local accountability, and diversity of representation. Even though it can streamline governance, but cannot ensure a democratic culture. The presenter also pointed out that we should get inspired by other countries, but we should analyze our situation at

the same time. She concluded the presentation with the viewpoint that democracy can be strengthened through families and communities in India.

Question and answer

Prof. Nandakishore remarked that family is considered a happy unit, which is just an assumption. There are many issues, like divorce, single parenting, which can lead to migration. Thus, the concept of family will be romanticized, and this paper also looks at the positive side only.

Prof. Gyana Ranjan Panda also remarked the same and added that everything has changed and that aspects of change in democracy and family should be included in this.

16 Paper Presentation: 7: Staggered Elections in Kerala: History and the Implications of One Nation One Election

Venue:- Farmers Training Hall# Chair:- Dr. P. Sakthivel Professor and Head,

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Rapporteur:- Navya Sunil, II MSW

Presenter: Khadeeja Sadarudheen from Pondicherry University

Title: Staggered Elections In Kerala: History And Implications Of One Nation One Election

Report

The author was not aware of one nation one election. That's why the presenter wanted to know how simultaneous elections would work and why it got staggered in the 1970s. Then she got the reason behind that: dissolution of state legislative assemblies. In the introduction, a very short history of onoe was given, like what is idea of this and it was put forward by our Prime Minister, Sri. Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat state.

The paper tries to look at how initial simultaneous elections got staggered and also assess the impacts of ONOE on federalism and regional dynamics, women's participation, and autonomy of Kerala. It also looks at how national issues overshadow the regional issues. Thus, these are also the research objectives of the paper. The qualitative research method was used to study the same, where the historical analytical method with secondary literature was also used. For analyzing the impact of one on women's participation, reports of Kudumbasree were used.

The paper found that simultaneous elections happened from 1951-52 to 1967, and till this time, Congress was the dominating party. But in 1967, Congress lost its votes, which led to a coalition government. This government was dissolved as there were issues with the

central government. These tensions led to the dissolution of state assemblies like Kerala, Punjab, etc, and Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha, which led to staggered elections

Coming to Kerala's history, the first election happened in 1957, where the communist govt won the elections. But this government had several clashes with elites, NSS regarding policies of land and educational reforms, which then led to a liberation movement named 'Vimochana samaram', which resulted president's rule in the state. In total, eight presidents ruled in the history of Kerala till 1970. The staggered elections in the 1980s actually helped to focus more on regional issues and decentralization of power.

Kudumbasree created a space where women can raise their voices, opinions, which also helped to shape leadership and leaders at the local level.

Another issue of this election is that many constitutional amendments (Articles 83, 85, 132, and 174) have to be brought about to implement this idea. Presidents' rule, premature dissolution, and concentration of power in the center at the time of the president's rule are the concerns that have not yet been looked at. It can also limit the ability of the state to respond to the political crisis through mid-term elections, and these mid-term elections can lead to stagnation in the election.

The paper also tries to say that better-funded, male-dominated campaigns can overshadow because of the simultaneous election.

The limitations of the paper are, the data obtained can't be generalized.

Question and answer session

The question was about how ONOE can affect women's empowerment, and the presenter explained that as one nation one election is on a 5-year basis, it can overshadow regional issues like women's problems or to say marginalized people.

Paper Presentation: 3: The Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election

Venue: Farmers Training Hall

Chair: Dr. P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Title: The Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election

Rapporteur:- Navya Sunil

Report

The paper was presented by Amrita R Menon and Sreelakshmi P. In the introduction, the benefits and drawbacks of simultaneous elections were mentioned. The research objectives are to analyze the concept of One Nation One Election and its intended goals within the Indian democratic framework, to assess the potential impact of simultaneous elections on coalition dynamics, of regional parties and minority interests, and also to evaluate how simultaneous elections may influence voter behavior.

The methodology applied was secondary data analysis, where academic journals, government reports, law commission recommendations, election commission documents, etc. Probable sampling was used.

Policy implications were mentioned like:-

● To adopt One Nation One Election in phases

● Strengthen local governance

● Include constitutional safeguards for regional and minority representation in overall.

● proportional representation in mixed electoral systems

The major findings of the study are that staggered elections generated political-physical strain and also that coalitions can better represent the regional and smaller parties. Lack of empirical evidence on the effect of this election on coalition and accessibility to articles are the limitations of this paper.

Thus, this paper examines the role of coalition formation in simultaneous elections work upon. And some policy-level suggestions were recommended, and the insights of the risk faced by smaller parties in regional representation and marginalization.

Question and answer

One of the questions was how to strengthen the people at the grassroots level. The first and only solution is that awareness should be given about One Nation, one election. Dr. Sakthivel said that if the government is removed, new elections will come, and they will tune the people to think in such a way in the political discourse. No confidence motion can set back the government and policies, and it can affect.

17 **Paper Presentation: 8: Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One Election Reform**

Venue : Farmers' training hall

Chair: Dr.P.Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Presenters: Sandra K and K Sathyamurthi, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai

Title of the paper: Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One   Election Reform

Report

The presenter presented on the topic Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One Election Reform. In the introduction, she discussed ONOE as a demographic shift and said that this rapid aging trend makes elderly inclusion in electoral reforms like ONOE a national priority. Elderly people face lots of problems during the time of the election. The research objectives of the study: Critically examine how ONOE impacts elderly voter participation in terms of accessibility and inclusivity. Identify the key structural, logistical, and socio-technical challenges affecting senior citizens in the electoral process. Propose an Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework to safeguard elderly voters' democratic rights.

The research methodology of the study is a conceptual approach to evaluate the inclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities (ONOE and the elderly) in electoral processes. This involved a comprehensive review of relevant legal frameworks, including the Constitution of India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, and guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The major findings elderly voters face physical barriers like inaccessible polling stations, long queues, and travel difficulties, especially in rural areas. Social changes and low awareness limit their participation, with older women and those lacking digital access being particularly vulnerable. International and national frameworks, including the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, CRPD, and India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, support accessible voting. Programs like SVEEP and postal ballots for seniors help promote their inclusion in elections. Then the presenter discussed about inclusive electoral participation framework. Later, she discussed the limitations and contributions of the study.

Question and Answer

The main question that was asked by most of the people was with regard to the new implementation by the Election Commission, which is voting from home, where the voting

is being done from the home itself, which already settles the issue to some extent. She explained that the policy exists, but still, many people are not aware of this.

18 **Paper Presentation: 9: Democratic Participation and Social Work Interventions Among the Scheduled Caste: A Critical Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal in India**

Venue: Farmers Training Hall

Chair: Dr.P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration,

Annamalai University

Presenters: Rajeev Ramakrishnan, Dr. P.Rangasami, Gouri Ullas, Satya Mansa Devi, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India

Title Of The Paper: Democratic Participation and Social Work Interventions Among the Scheduled Caste: A Critical Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal in India

Report

In the introduction explained the concept of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) which proposes conducting national and state elections simultaneously. This study examines the potential impact of ONOE, focusing on key concerns related to its effects on federalism, local democracy, and the political participation of Scheduled Castes (SC). The objectives of the study: Critically analyse One Nation One Election's implications on SC political participation. Examines ONOE's alignment with constitutional safeguards. Assess social work's role in enabling SC political empowerment and participation under ONOE.

The research methodology used in the study was secondary in nature, where the secondary data were used with the scheduled caste as the sample size. The next two slides explained the literature reviews and the major findings based on the review, and also identified the literature gap. In the next slide explained about implications & future research directions and policy-level gaps, which are still prevalent as the impact on SCs has also not been compared with other marginalized groups, pointing to a need for intersectional and comparative studies. The major findings of the study show that the influence of SC political groups may decrease, and social work integration in electoral reforms is essential for sustaining SC empowerment. The contribution of the study is that it offers field-based evidence on the political participation of Scheduled Caste (SC) communities under ONOE,

examines its constitutional alignment, and provides comparative international insights to guide policymakers in enhancing democratic participation for SCs.

Question and Answer

In Q & A section, based on their presentation, one of the suggestions by the lead speaker was that in the presentation, they mentioned that ONOE can lead to a lack of representation of the scheduled caste, but the speaker said that it won't happen. With regard to the methodology part asked to mention the methods used elaborately.

19 Paper Presentation: 10: Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election

Venue: Farmers Training Hall

Chair: Dr.P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration,

Annamalai University

Presenters: Amrutha P. and Dr. K. Sathyamurthi, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai

Title Of The Paper: Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election

Report

The presenter presented on "Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election". In the introduction explained that Equal participation is the cornerstone of democracy, and explains the participation of disabled people in elections from 2019-2024, where we can view an increase in the participation of disabled people. But still, they face barriers like inaccessible polling stations and, lack of transport. The need for this study is that, as the nation is moving towards ONOE, to understand that centralization will ignore local realities.

The research objectives are to analyse the opportunities and challenges that the ONOE proposal presents for the electoral participation of Persons with Disabilities. To review existing constitutional provisions, legal safeguards, and policy measures that ensure voting rights for PW Ds in India. To propose a comprehensive framework for strengthening disability-inclusive electoral participation under ONOE.

The research methodologies used in the study approaches are qualitative and interpretive. The research design is exploratory in nature and method, desk-based document review.

The major findings are based on legal and constitutional aspects of the rights of PWD. Later, explained the implications of ONOE for PWD with both challenges and opportunities. The challenges include the risk of centralized planning overlooking local realities, a dilution of state-level autonomy in disability outreach, and uneven accessibility infrastructure across states. There could also be an administrative overload during simultaneous elections and a deficiency of data for voter mapping. PW Ds may face attitudinal barriers and social stigma, and the reduced election cycle could mean a shorter window for issue-based advocacy. Finally, physical and climatic constraints and a lack of monitoring and feedback mechanisms could also hinder their participation. Despite these challenges, ONOE also offers opportunities such as the standardization of accessibility norms, optimized resource allocation, and improved implementation of home voting and postal ballots. It could lead to a better use of technology, streamlined training of polling officials, and stronger voter awareness campaigns. The policy could also create a greater focus on disability-inclusive governance and allow for the replication of best practices across different states.

In the next slide explained about inclusive electoral participation, which is 4 A model that includes accessibility, awareness, accountability, and adaptiveness. Accessibility ensures a barrier-free voting environment through features like barrier-free booths, Braille ballots, and assistive technologies, as well as options like home voting. Awareness involves educating voters through disability-specific campaigns and providing voter education materials in accessible formats. Accountability is maintained through compliance checklists, dedicated helplines, and the establishment of monitoring committees to ensure that these measures are implemented effectively. At last, adaptiveness allows for a culturally sensitive and geographically responsive approach, which includes the use of mobile booths.

The presentation was concluded by saying that ONOE may create chances to standardize accessibility standards, maximize resources, spread best practices across the country, and include disability inclusion in election laws.

Question and Answer

1. Whether the Four model would be adopted, or it is an ideal model to be implemented in a country like India

I have trained this model considering the geographical constraints and the different contexts of the basic variables. That's why I proposed this model, because, as you

mentioned, I have to ensure that PWS from this hill area should be accessible to the election.

2. What are the variables that you consider while preparing the model?

Geographical, cultural, political.

3. In the last election, the election commission proposed the idea of coming to the houses of elderly people for the election; this can be applied to people with disability. What are your opinions?

Yes, sir, and it's applicable for persons with disabilities, like having a benchmark disability, more than 40 percent. It applies to them also. But there are barriers, gaps in the implementation parts. We have policies, we have accessibility measures by the Election Commission of India that I have mentioned earlier. But the challenges exist in its implementation.

Paper Presentation: 11: Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO Interventions and Challenges in India

Hall: Farmers Training Hall

Chair: Dr. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Presenters: Dr. MohanaPriya B, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Sri Krishna Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

Title Of The Paper: Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO Interventions and Challenges in India

Report

The presenter in the introduction and in study background A complex interaction of linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic issues hinders the electoral literacy of India's Scheduled Tribe groups, even though it is essential for inclusive democracy. Targeted actions to enhance education, infrastructure, and culturally sensitive communication techniques are needed to remove these obstacles. By increasing electoral literacy, tribal groups will be better equipped to engage in the democratic process and make sure their opinions are heard in decision-making.

● The main objective of the study is to examine the socio-cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural barriers that limit electoral literacy and participation among tribal and remote communities in India.

- To analyse the role of NGOs in designing and implementing context-specific, culturally sensitive electoral literacy programs in underserved regions.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of NGO led interventions in improving voter awareness, registration rates, and participation, with a focus on women and first-time voters.

The research methodology is a mixed method; both qualitative and quantitative methods were used interviews, focus group discussions with tribal people. The major findings of the study were that tribal people face problems due to their language, even with awareness, also the problems of the people cannot be addressed. NGOs are particularly effective where they translate electoral content into local languages, employ culturally embedded media folk theatre, storytelling. Tribal and remote communities face multiple barriers, such as language gaps, low literacy, gender norms, poor infrastructure, and environmental challenges, that limit political participation. Information campaigns alone are insufficient without addressing logistical issues. NGOs help by culturally adapting content and building trust, while gender-sensitive programs boost women's participation. Combining traditional and digital media improves outreach, but funding and sustainability remain challenges. Trusted local actors and institutional partnerships enhance effectiveness and scale. Evaluations should measure knowledge, registration, and turnout to capture true impact.

Question and answer

- So, ma'am, you conducted FGD with the tribals, right? Yes. So, I would like to know your personal reflections from that FGD, and also what type of questions and the responses from the tribals.

So first, they hesitated to enter into this particular type of discussion because they thought that it was related only to the political view. But we need to express for what purpose we need to conduct this, and we need to create trust among them so that then only they will open up with their thoughts. First, we started with a general discussion about how the NGOs are coming and how they are approaching in what ways they are supporting, so later, we included the election in this discussion, and the maximum number was 12 participants. The ratio of men and women women more in favour of women when compared with men. They are aware of elections, but they need more awareness.

2. Which NGO works for tribals in the electoral sector?

There is no NGO that directly works on election-related issues of tribals. But many NGOS focus on health, education, environment.

3. Based on one of my friends' research, which was based on the tribals were it shows that they feel like they are not part of the nation. Why it occurs and how to address.

Whatever we are doing for them, it makes, of course, a small impact. But how can we totally do it's a very great challenge for the NGOs, not only the NGOs, all the individuals, if we go and approach the people. So it's very difficult for us to make people come out of their territorial boundaries. So they are being very strict in their boundaries. And they never allow any outsiders to come, and they like us to come and to work for them.

The chair of the session ended by saying that to work with tribals, we have to earn their trust first, then only they will allow us to be part of their community.

19.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

Paper title: Staggered elections in Kerala: History and the implications of One Nation One Election

- Why ONOE- meaning
- Historical analysis of elections in Kerala
- Implication of ONOE for Kerala & India's federation
- Qualitative analystical method used
- Findings- taken from 1952-1967 – elections
- Studies focused on Kerala's electoral history
- President rule imposed on several occasions
- Need to amend constitutional articles
- National issues will overshade local issues

Paper title: Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election

1. ONOE idea gained popularity.

2. Coalition Partners must negotiate not only in seat sharing.

3. Analyzed the Concept of potential impact ONOE.

4. Methodology- Qualitative data analysis and purposive sampling

5. Key insights from literature

6. Policy implication of ONOE

7. How to allow and permit smaller parties- ONOE

8. Risk in ONOE- regional and smaller parties

Paper title: Inclusive Ballots: addressing the needs of Senior Citizens, under the One Nation, one Election Reforms

9. Address the needs of ONOE- senior citizen

10. Aging trend & growing number of senior citizens.

11. ONOE affects Senior Citizens.

12. Methodology is not clear.

13. Major findings- Senior citizens approach to polling.

14. Digital divide affects ONOE

Paper title: Democratic participation and social work interventions among the scheduled caste: A critical analysis of the 'One nation One election' proposal in India

15. ONOE implication for SC/ST

16. Sample of SC population

17. SC participation in elections

18. SC political participation will be affected

19. Smaller SC parties will loose significance

20. SC representation affected?

21. You mentioned low political awareness among SC?

Paper title: Strengthening democratic participation: Disability right in the context of One nation One election

22. Issues faced by the PWDS in election hiring

23. Exploratory R/D used

24. Legal and constitutional frameworks article 14,15,41-Disability Act

25. PWDs has the right to vote in the election

26. Opportunities and challenges

27. 4 A model suggested- Accessibility awareness, accountability adaptiveness

Paper title: Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO Interventions and Challenges in India

● Electoral Literacy among Tribals living in remote areas.

● 8.6% people are living in hills areas/remote areas.

● NGOs are playing a major role in health and Environment.

● NGO's role in Literacy rate among Tribals is very essential.

● Focus group discussion conducted-

- Political Apathy play a crucial role in non-voting behaviour.

- NGOs – First time voters

Photo gallery

AMRITA
VISHWA VIDYAPEETHAM

AMRITA VISHWA VIDYAPEETHAM
School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Department of Social Work
ICSSR-sponsored National Seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election, and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat,"

ICSSR

Paper Presentations by Presenters Chair: Dr.P.Sakthivel Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University			Signature
Session 1 Date: 29.08.2025 Time 8.30 am to 9.45 am Venue: Farmers training Hall			
Timings	Paper Presenters	Paper Title	
8.30 am to 8.45 am	1 Khadeeja Sadarudheen and 2 Dr. Kamalaveni Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India	Staggered Elections in Kerala: History and the Implications of One Nation One Election	
8.45 am to 8.55 am	Rajeev Ramakrishnan1, *, Dr. P.Rangsami2, Amrita R Menon3, Sreelakshmi P4	The Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election	
8.55 am to 9.05 am	Sandra K1 and K Sathyamurthi2 Madras School of Social Work, Chennai	Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One Election Reform	
9.05 am to 9.15 am	Rajeev Ramakrishnan1, *, Dr. P.Rangasami2, Gouri Ullas3, Satya Mansa Devi4 Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India	Democratic Participation and Social Work Interventions Among the Scheduled Caste: A Critical Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal in India	
9.15 am to 9.25 am	1Amrutha P and 2Dr. K. Sathyamurthi Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai,	Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election	
9.35 am to 9.45 am	Dr. Mohana Priya B Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Sri Krishna Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.	Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO Interventions and Challenges in India	29/8/2025
Signature of the Rapporteur: Ashwin Arun Mowya Jaison Anisha Navya Susil			Arun Jaison Navya
Aswathy sebastian 1 and Dr.K. Sathya -Murthi 2 Madras School of Social Work Chennai - 8, India		Families as schools of Democracy: Remaining Family Social Work For Democratic Deepening.	

20 **Session 4: 'Seeing Something as Something': Aspects of 'One Nation, One Election (Online)**

Lead Speaker: Padmashri Dr.Upendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Warwick and Delhi

Chair: Dr.S.Sampath Kumar, Professor and Head, Department of sociology & Population studies, Bharathiar University.

Co-Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice–Principal and Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Rapporteur: Navya Sunil

The first session on Day 2, 'Seeing Something as Something': Aspects of 'One Nation, One Election' by the lead presenter, Dr. Upendra Baxi. The session was online as Dr. Bakshi was not able to be physically present due to personal reasons. Dr S. Kanagaraj introduced the chief guest to the seminar participants and also welcomed him. Dr. Upendra Baxi was born in Rajkot, Gujarat, graduated from Rajkot Vidarbha University, read law at the University of Bombay, holds an LLM degree from the University and the University of California, Berkeley in 1973, also awarded a doctorate in Juristic Sciences. He began his law teaching career in the Department of Jurisprudence and International Law at Sydney Law School from 1969 to 1973 and served as a Professor of Law at, University of Delhi, 1973 to 1996. He also served as the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University in 1994, and as well as the Vice-Chancellor of University of South Gujarat, Surat, 1982-85. As the monitoring director of the Research Indian Law Institute, 1985-1988, and the President of the Indian Society of International Law, 1992-1995. He was a Professor of Law. He has led publications, besides more than 250 articles in learned journals. for his contribution to legal and political affairs, he was awarded the third-highest civic honour, Padmashree, by the President of India in 2011. So, Professor Bakshi was also the recipient of an award for his contribution to constitutional law by the Chief Justice of India and his companion Justice, the Supreme Court of India on August 36, 2016.

He mainly talked about two things:- one nation one lection from the viewpoint of other disciplines (particularly philosophy) and the Report of Ramnath Kovind on one nation one election. In the first aspect, he discussed Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is a British Philosopher and also an analysis of analytical philosophy.

According to him, the future of India depends on its citizens and voting system, and also, voting is not a fundamental right, which is true. It's not mentioned anywhere. He talked about three prudences:-

1. Jurisprudence- It is the first principle of law.
2. Legis prudence - wisdom and theory of legislating
3. Demos prudence - wisdom of the people

He had an opinion that simultaneous elections would not work practically in India, as we are diverse in terms of people and culture. Importance of avoiding the tyranny of the singular, and there is always the opposite to the singular, like the other word of justice is injustice, and that aspect in the opposite should be necessarily looked upon.

Unity in diversity and unity in perversity, these are the ways to achieve unity, and our constitution promotes both. He also reminded us that it's very important to be aware of every aspect of one nation and one election. According to him, the Ram Nath Kovind report refutes the idea of one nation, one election. In that report, there is no mention of one nation one election anywhere.

Thus, through this session, he challenged the idea of simultaneous election both philosophically and practically.

20.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

- Seminar by Prof.Upendra Baxi on one nation one election was informative
- He said past, present, future of india depends largely by people's representation
- He added that cultural and other diversity of state should be considered when ONOE is implemented
- He stressed to look into the three sections of disabled or marginalised gap i.e., women, SC/ST, disabled and their representation
- People have constitutional right to be part of electoral role
- He said citizens should be limited from exercising constitutional rights
- The integrity of the election commission should be assured

Photo Gallery

AMRITA VISHWA VIDYAPEETHAM
School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Department of Social Work
ICSSR-sponsored National Seminar on *"Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election, and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat,"*

S.no	Title of the Paper	List of Speakers	Signature
		Session 2 **Time: 10.00 am to 11.00 am** **Venue: Farmers Training Hall**	
2	'Seeing Something as Something': Aspects of 'One Nation, One Election'	Lead Speaker: Dr.Upendra Baxi Emeritus Professor of Law University of Warwick and Delhi	
		Chair: Dr.S.Sampath Kumar Professor and Head, Department of sociology & Population studies, Bharathiar University.	_(signature)_ 29/8/25
		Co Chair: Dr.P.Rangasami, Vice-Principal and Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences	_(signature)_ 29)8)25
		Rapporteur: NAVYA SUNIL , II MSW	Navya
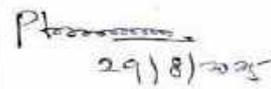
21 Session 5: One Nation, One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India

Venue: Farmers Hall

Title: One Nation One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India.

Lead speaker: Dr. P. Sakthivel, Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University

Chair: Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda, Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan

Co-Chair: Dr. S. Kanagaraj, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work"

Rapporteur: Amrita R. Menon
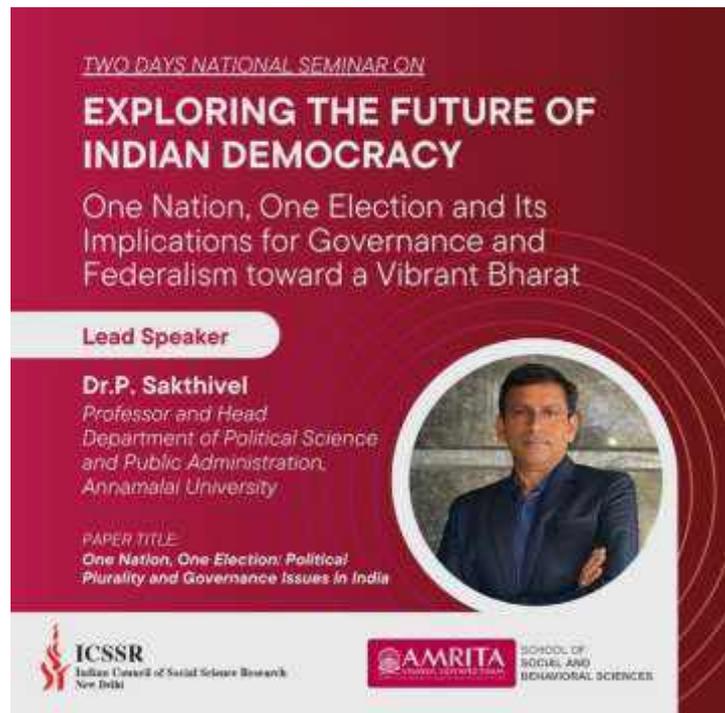
Dr. P. Sakthivel presenting his lead paper

Report

The ICSSR-sponsored National Seminar's third technical session on Day 2, 29-08-2025, focused on the One Nation One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India. The Session started with By introduction of Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda and Dr. P.

Sakthivel. Dr. Gyana is a well-known scholar with over 30 years of teaching and research experience in public policy, fiscal governance, and digital administration. Dr. P. Sakthivel, the Lead Speaker of the session, was introduced. With 1030 research papers, publications including prominent newspapers, as well as three edited books, the political writer a researcher has travelled to foreign countries and has delivered more than 450 special lectures.

Dr. Sakthivel conducted the session on the topic "One Nation One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India". Sir started the session by looking at to previous day's discussion on the elections to India, Sir mentioned how the Election Commission of India has a Herculean task to conduct elections, and India has conducted more than 400 elections in India spanning from the national parliament to the state legislature, local bodies, and the grass-roots level, that is, rural and local bodies. So, the greatest contribution of the Election Commission of India was pointed out during the session. He also mentioned another aspect, which is about how psychologists the politics in psychology and the influences in Voter Behaviour shaped the influence of which was also mentioned as another aspect in the whole behaviour. He also looked into the political science aspect of what we see in the elections, where What are the issues prompting the local people to cast their vote in the election? On whether it is a national election, whether it is a local election, he mentioned how elections in Orissa, wherein people have a clear-cut understanding, and people are politically sensitive. Then, coming to the main as of my paper, not just mentioning that there is a constitutional issue or constitutional amendments are required when you implement the one nation one election. He provided examples, regarding the article 83 of Indian Constitution, article 85 of Indian Constitution are related to the national part of it. He pointed out the introduction of one section as class(A), wherein the duration can be reduced. He also emphasised the role of the Election Commission in conducting elections and that the commission should ensure free and fair elections are conducted in the country. The reduced expenditure is also mentioned in, and people should be thinking over the process of ONOE. The EVM machines used for elections, if not, the way it subject to scrutiny. He mentioned the integrity of the Election Commission after the revision of special electoral votes was another point made out by Sir. existing that a very important one. He mentioned the electoral dissolution, and the implementation of ONOE, which will not raise any legal issue, and the requirement of state support duties for the implementation part.

He also looked on to how the interest affects the state where the government should be ratifying in the ONOE is mentioned, He also mentioned the difficulties of teachers when going for election, the way we can't neglect the views expressed by political parties were also mentioned in his discussions, He also pointed whether they will focus on both the issues and the role of local issues were mentioned by him and how it will be addressed. The equalise of the election process, the cutting of the expenditure, the absence of scientific study, the integrity, what part on the issue of political apathy, political the regional disparities were mentioned throughout the session.

Question and Answer

- How do you think ONOE relates to Unemployment?
- How can you make sure that the bigger parties still get entered at one and the smaller parties for the big parties don't get a greater advantage, and the regional parties don't lose their voices?
- Reducing the regional parties' voices and the National parties getting advantages.
- Introducing Online payment in Parliament and how it will function with online payment will undermine the quality.

Dr. Sakthivel answered by wherein how it doesn't have setbacks, and ensuring that the elections are conducted at regular intervals of time by ensuring it happens every 5 years, and the misconceptions of political autonomy, empower the people and political parties. The coalition and the combination will ensure. And it will ensure the flow the employment opportunities, each state is different and generalisation cannot be brought in. Around 7,000 crore transactions take place was answered.

Dr. Gyana also gave his observation on how the points are part of the system and how it is not unchanging, and also mentioned about tow some of the problems mentioned happen only in the last government, and the cyclic process taking place, how the choice of model of issues, how one year transactions in one day in US and how the UPI transactions and how digitalisation can be successful, and the dangers from digital and fake news, financial area and how state and central works on it, was delivered by sir. Dr. Gyana Honoured the Leader Paper Presenter, Dr. P. Sakthivel.

21.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

- India's Election a tenacious and continuous adventure anchored by ECI
- Besides identifying behaviour for elections, the issues are equally important.

- Constitutional Amendments are revised (Article 83,172, 324(A)) with ratification of State legislation (legal Roadblock), procurement of logistics, extrafermity personnels to manage large-scale Simultaneous elections 1951. Representative of people's act.
- Ratification by state legislatures (Halt of the States)
- Conducting Polling in different areas.
- Governance concerns
- Lack of National Consensus
- Role of regional Parties/local issues)
- Undermine Basic structure of Constitution
- Role of local parties
- Casting expenditure needs to be proved
- Priority of local issues at the National level.
- (Showing Paps cutting/evidences)
- Integrity of the ECI (Giving intrusive revision of Bihar elections)
- Issues of conducting election (large scale) and at the national level
- Vote fatigue
- Adminstrative Stagnatism
- Addressing legal issues, & Governance issues
- Identifying misunderstanding about simultaneous elections is fully important
- Issues which influence voting behaviour
- How will it make the ONOE better off and worse off

AMRITA VISHWA VIDYAPEETHAM
School of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Department of Social Work
ICSSR-sponsored National Seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election,
and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat."

| S.no	Title of the Paper	List of Speakers	Signature
		Session 3 Time: 11.15 am to 11.35 am Venue: Farmers Training Hall	
2	One Nation, One Election: Political Plurality and Governance Issues in India	Lead Speaker: Dr P.Sakthivel Professor and Head, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Annamalai University	
		Chair: Dr Gyana Ranjan Panda Faculty, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan	
		Co Chair: Dr S.Kamaraj Asst Professor, Dept. of Social Work	
		Rapporteur: Amrita R. Manoj ,II MSW	

Photo Gallery

Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda presenting memento to Dr.P.Sakthivel

22 Panel Discussion

`On the Topic: 1. Development, Sustainability, and Governance in India: Role of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) 2. Negotiating Socio-Political Conscience Through Votes: Intricacies in Bridging Electoral Expectations and Electoral Practices among Youth Voters 3. Governance without Disruptions: Will One Election Improve Policy Continuity?

Panel discussion

Venue**:** Farmers Training Hall

Title: Governance without Disruptions: Will One Election Improve Policy Continuity?

Speaker: Dr. Nanda Kishor MS, HOD & Associate Professor | Coordinator- UGC-SAP (DRS II) Department of Politics and International Studies Pondicherry University

Chair: Dr.Sudheesh Manalil, Dean, Amrita School of Agricultural Sciences

Co-Chair: Dr. Rajeev Ramakrishnan, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Rapporteur**:** Lekshmipriya U

Dr. Nanda Kishor MS presenting his view points

Report

The presentation highlighted four major points on the debate around One Nation, One Election (ONOE).

First, the speaker emphasized that policy continuity in India is rooted in national interest and institutionalisation rather than election synchronisation. Illustrating this, he cited India's nuclear doctrine and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) as examples where long-term policy was sustained across governments due to strong institutional frameworks.

Second, he raised concerns regarding accountability, noting that citizens themselves often become participants in corruption by accepting "recommendations" from politicians, whether in the form of jobs, admissions, or welfare benefits, instead of demanding transparency and policy-based governance. This, he argued, weakens the democratic purpose of elections.

Third, drawing on the example of Germany's Bundestag, he highlighted the importance of educating citizens to ensure effective governance. He pointed out that in India, major reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) system are often implemented without adequate clarity or preparatory work. He stressed that citizens must be aware of such reforms, for only then can they take ownership and ensure their successful implementation. He also raised a structural concern: under the ONOE framework, if no party secured a majority or failed to form a coalition, political instability could result. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the idea could help reduce costs and improve governance, provided that proper safeguards are in place.

Finally, he underlined the role of strong regional parties in sustaining India's federal balance and warned that their voices must not be overshadowed by centralised electoral discourse. He concluded by stressing that ONOE should not be imposed on people; instead, citizens must be educated, engaged, and encouraged to take ownership of the idea for it to succeed.

Question and Answer session:

During the discussion, a PhD scholar observed that if the One Nation, One Election framework were introduced, it might consolidate power in the hands of the government. He argued that frequent elections currently serve as a check, compelling political parties to respond to voter concerns and fulfil their manifesto promises. In response, the presenter noted that more elections could indeed enhance accountability by keeping governments answerable at regular intervals. However, he cautioned that frequent elections may also become an advertising strategy, where parties make populist promises to attract votes. Such promises often generate unreasonable expectations, creating additional fiscal pressure on the state. To tackle this pressure, governments may resort to measures such as increasing electricity charges and other indirect burdens on citizens, thereby weakening the very accountability that elections are meant to promote.

Title: Negotiating Socio-Political Conscience Through Votes: Intricacies in Bridging Electoral Expectations and Electoral Practices among Youth Votes

Lead speaker: Dr. S. Sampath Kumar, Professor and Head, Department of Sociology and Population Studies, Bharathiar University

Chair: Dr. V.Priya, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Co-Chair: Dr.Raneesh C, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Rapporteur: Antony Sebastian
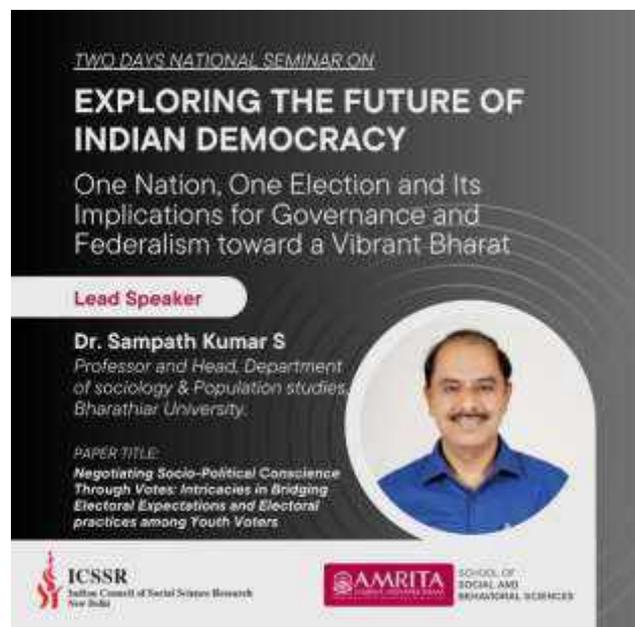
Dr. S. Sampath Kumar presenting his views based on the paper

Report:

Dr. S. Sampath Kumar's presentation "Negotiating Socio-Political Conscience Through Votes: Intricacies in Electoral Expectations among Youth Voters in Tamil Nadu" examined how first-time voters in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections shaped their voting preferences. Using an exploratory qualitative design with video content analysis and Goffman's framing theory, the study highlighted that young voters' choices were strongly influenced by their socio-political conscience and expectations from democracy. Key concerns included issues like welfare freebie culture, growing fatigue with such promises, and the desire for greater freedom and meaningful participation. Their electoral expectations went beyond short-term benefits, focusing instead on ideology-driven decisions, transformative leadership, constructive governance, and addressing the developmental needs of disadvantaged groups. The study also emphasized the powerful role of social media in manufacturing mindsets and shaping youth perceptions. Overall, the presentation argued that the voting conscience of first-time voters reflects both their immediate concerns and their aspirations for a more accountable and development-oriented democracy.

Question and Answer session:

There were a few questions regarding corruption and its relevance to ONOE.

He said there are two major concerns in India those which are Education and Health. He also mentioned Maslow's Hierarchy and its depiction in this scenario. This hierarchy is fulfilled by these two concerns.

ONOE makes it more reliable and meaningful. In educational settings, it is not taught what a person has to consider really by all the concerns. Or what an individual should look into while voting or choosing a person to vote. Everyone is after freebies and personal growth. Not for the nation's benefit of the nation or the overall human race. Money talks.

Title: Development, Sustainability, and Governance in India: Role of One Nation One Election(ONOE)

Lead speaker: Dr. Subhabrata Dutta, Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University: Silchar

Chair: Dr. P. Ranagasami, Vice Principal and Chairperson, Dept. of Social Work, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Co-Chair: Dr. S A Rajalakshmi, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Social Work

Rapporteur: Amrita R. Menon

Dr. Subhabrata Dutta presenting his views based on the paper

Dr. Subhabrata mainly concentrated on the development wherein he specially focused on human development and how it sustainable human development and how it is required to govern the come up. He mentioned on the economic growth and how PDS Public distribution system distributed when we have India is the third largest economy and as he mentioned about seeing the poverty in US and how it is to see the vulnerable condition and the vulnerability, the challenges they was also emphasized, the people living in railway station, where economic growth not only means were GDP and GNP are growing simultaneously and focusing social development and they have equilibrium problem and because of which Social development is alike, he emphasized the balance of economic as social development , the choices we have shelter, education and the government enacting it and the governance is ensured. The history was looked on and how in Panchayath and Municipality, the local issues emphasized. In MP elections about how it widely considered and he put out a question of how it can be combined, the time lag happening, the challenges developed how the saved up can be used in different sector, the guarantee on how it will be used in different sectors, he gave an example of how many students opting for higher education, whether it can be doubled, how development is focused and ONOE contributed by testing, were the major ideas mentioned by him. Dr. Subhabrata was honoured and he gave two books as donation to the library.

Question and Answer Session

21. Dilution of the voices

Dr. Subhabrata gave his opinion on the opinion of the Phd scholar, about the how the development is not taking place due to the shortage of fund, the reception is also there on thinking and the unsustainable nature and to emphasise on bringing up sustainable projects upon, own capacity and the mindsets work on it, and should work on the issues previously itself was emphasised in his opinion.

The Statutory of 73rd and 74th amendment, and in central or state where aspiration can be actualised but at the same time how their interest is on local or regional areas., these are should be taken care, an pointed the statement "Poor in Kerala and poor in Manipur and the needs are different and these should be kept in mind in a central level".

22.1   Key Takeaways of the session – Contribution of the seminar

1. Dr Subrabrata Datta – Assam university- It needs to be tested and developmental context.

2. Dr Nanda Kishor – It should not be forced

3. Dr. S. Sampath Kumar- Sociology Bharathiar University

4. Needs testing and need integration

5. Accountability to fuel populist promises

6. Local elections short term benefi

Photo Gallery

23 **Valedictory Session**

Date: 29-08-2025

Hall: Farmers Training Hall

Time: 2:15 Pm

Welcome Speech: Dr. Raneesh C

Seminar Report/Vote Of Thanks: Dr. S Kanagaraj

Rapporteur: Raniya Jahana K

The two-day National Conference on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and its Implications for Governance towards Vibrant Bharat" came to a close on 29th August 2025 with a meaningful and engaging valedictory ceremony. The closing session reflected on the lively debates and thought-provoking discussions that unfolded during the conference. It reminded the audience that the true strength of any academic gathering lies in open dialogue and exchange of ideas. Referring to Amartya Sen's description of the "Argumentative Indian," it was observed that debate has always been part of India's cultural tradition. This spirit was clearly visible in the conference, where scholars and students engaged wholeheartedly. A special mention was made of the active participation of young researchers and students whose questions and reflections added great value to the sessions.The valedictory ceremony began with a warm welcome to the distinguished guests, including Prof. (Dr.) Anil G. Variath (Dean, Amrita International School of Law), Dr. P. Rangasami (Vice Principal), Dr. S. Kanagaraj (Seminar Coordinator and Vice-Chairperson, Department of Social Work), Dr. Sai Krishna (Amrita International School of Law), and other members of the management. Faculty members, lead paper presenters, research scholars, and students were also gratefully acknowledged for their enthusiastic presence and contributions.

A brief report of the two-day conference was then presented. Mentioned The inaugural session on 28th August which began with a benedictory address by Swami

Tapasyaamritanandha Puri, which set a reflective and inspiring tone. This was followed by a keynote address by Prof. G. Gopakumar (former Vice Chancellor, Central University of Kerala) and a chief guest address by Sri Narayan Tripathi (Independent Director, REC Limited; Chief Spokesperson, BJP Tamil Nadu). In his remarks, Mr. Tripathi

emphasized how the idea of One Nation, One Election could strengthen governance and ensure financial responsibility. The highlight of the inaugural was the release of the Book of Abstracts, featuring 27 scholarly contributions from across India.
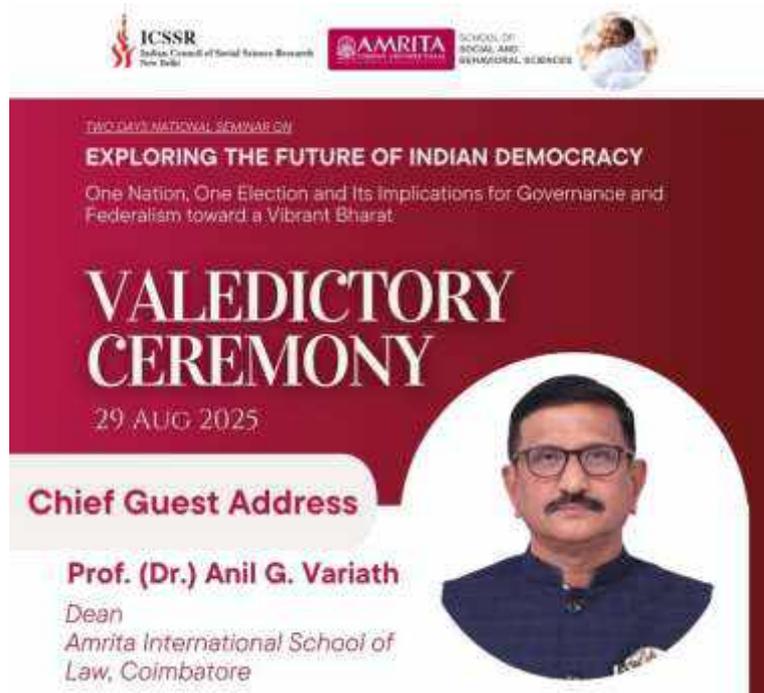
It was indeed a matter of great honor to have Prof. (Dr.) Anil G. Variath, Dean of the Amrita International School of Law, as the Chief Guest for the Valedictory Session. In his comprehensive and insightful address, Dr. Variath provided a deep analytical overview of the evolving debate on "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) — one of the most discussed electoral reforms in contemporary Indian politics. His address traversed the historical, constitutional, political, and administrative dimensions of the topic, emphasizing both its transformative potential and the complex challenges it presents to Indian democracy.

1. Historical Context: The Disruption of Simultaneous Elections

Dr. Variath began by revisiting the historical context in which India initially held simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies until the late 1960s. He traced the disruption of this synchronization to political developments during the era of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

He recalled key events such as the 1969 Congress Party split and the 1971 snap elections, which, while politically expedient at the time, led to the permanent desynchronization of electoral cycles. He emphasized that this disruption was more a product of political strategy than of institutional necessity, setting in motion the fragmented electoral calendar India experiences today.

2. Indian Federalism and Political Discourse

Touching upon the nature of Indian federalism, Dr. Variath underscored that India's system remains unique and adaptive, balancing the needs of a diverse polity with a strong central framework. He argued that debates about the federal structure being undermined often arise from political narratives rather than genuine structural concerns, particularly when central agencies investigate corruption cases involving state leaders. He urged that such debates must separate political rhetoric from constitutional reality, highlighting that accountability mechanisms do not necessarily threaten federalism.

3. Advantages of Simultaneous Elections

The Chief Guest elaborated on the key advantages of ONOE, noting that it could lead to:

Significant cost reduction in election expenditure;

Continuity in governance, as the Model Code of Conduct frequently stalls developmental initiatives; and

Reduced electoral fatigue among voters, encouraging higher turnout and sustained engagement.

Citing examples from states like Uttar Pradesh, he observed how frequent elections hinder governance for nearly half the year, leading to administrative slowdowns.

4. Counterarguments and Challenges

Dr. Variath also provided a balanced view, acknowledging the valid concerns and constitutional hurdles associated with implementing ONOE. He discussed that voters in India often differentiate between national and state-level choices, reflecting the country's political diversity. For instance, in states such as Kerala, voting behavior varies distinctly between Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

He also addressed fears that simultaneous elections might disproportionately favor strong national leadership models, potentially marginalizing regional voices. Moreover, he highlighted the legal complexities, including the challenge of dealing with mid-term dissolutions of assemblies and ensuring parity across state and national election cycles.

5. Concluding Reflections

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Variath called upon academicians, researchers, and citizens to approach the issue of ONOE with intellectual neutrality and democratic responsibility. He emphasized that the reform must be seen not through partisan lenses but as a constitutional and administrative question requiring broad-based deliberation. He concluded with optimism, expressing confidence that with constructive dialogue and policy innovation, India can evolve a model that preserves federal balance, democratic integrity, and governance efficiency.

The address was followed by a vote of thanks and felicitation ceremony, where Dr. P. Rangasami honored Dr. Variath for his thought-provoking and balanced perspective that captured the essence of the seminar's deliberations.

Throughout the two days, the conference was acknowledged by the presentations of eminent scholars including , Dr. Nanda Kishor M S HOD and Associate Professor/coordinator -UGC-SAP(DRS) , Dr. Sampath Kumar (Bharathiar university) Dr. P. Sakthivel (Annamalai University), Dr. M. Nagalingam (Central University of Kerala), Dr. Gyana Ranjan Panda (Central University of Rajasthan), Dr. Upendra Baxi (Emeritus professor of law university of warwick and Delhi), Prof. Subharata Dutta (Assam University)and Dr. Namrata Singh (University of Delhi), among others. Their insights encouraged deep reflection and opened new perspectives on the theme.

The convenor expressed heartfelt gratitude to the institutional leaders—Vice Chancellor Dr. P. Venkat Rangan, Registrar Dr. P. Ajith Kumar, and Dean, School Of Social And Behavioural Science Dr. Bhavani Rao—for their constant encouragement and support. A special note of thanks was offered to Mr. Vijay Narayanan, General Manager (Campus Development), whose efforts played a key role in ensuring the smooth conduct of the event.

The valedictory ceremony closed with a sense of accomplishment and collective pride. The conference was celebrated as a fruitful academic journey, filled with rigorous debates, fresh perspectives, and a spirit of collaboration. It successfully brought together experts, faculty members, and young scholars to reflect critically on One Nation, One Election and its possible impact on Indian democracy and governance.

Photo Gallery

Dr.S.Kanagaraj presenting seminar report

Group photo after valedictory programme

24 **Certificate Distribution**

25   Media Coverage

THE COVAI MAIL

ENGLISH & TAMIL WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

Amrita hosts National Seminar on 'One Nation, One Election'

The dignitaries of the national seminar releasing the Book of Abstracts on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy : One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat."
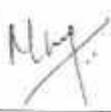
The Covai Mail

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, in collaboration with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), recently hosted a two-day national seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat."

The seminar featured 12 lead papers, 27 abstracts,

Selected papers from the seminar will be published in Discover Global Society (Springer Nature)

and panel discussions with eminent speakers.

Narayanan Thirupathy, Chief Spokesperson of BJP Tamil Nadu, was the Chief Guest for the seminar and emphasised the advantages of conducting simultaneous elections.

Padmashri Upendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, and Gopa Kumar, former Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Kerala, were among the other prominent speakers.

Scholars, researchers, and students from across India deliberated on the constitutional, governance, fiscal, and socio-political dimensions of synchronised polls.

Key highlights of conducting simultaneous elections included reduced election costs, policy continuity, strengthened Centre-State coordination, environmental benefits, digital civic engagement, and inclusive reforms for youth, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities.

The seminar concluded with a valedictory address by Anil Variath, Dean of the Amrita International School of Law. Selected papers from the seminar will be published in Discover Global Society (Springer Nature).

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham Hosts National Seminar on "One Nation, One Election"

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, in collaboration with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), hosted a two-day National Seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat." Narayanan Thirupathy, Independent Director, REC Ltd. & Chief Spokesperson, BJP Tamil Nadu, Chief Guest for the seminar. Padmashri Dr. Upendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, and Prof. (Dr.) G. Gopa Kumar, former Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Kerala, were the other prominent speakers during the seminar. The seminar concluded with a valedictory address by Dr. Anil G. Variath, Dean, Amrita International School of Law.

നൽചർച്ചകൾ, പ്രഭാഷണപരമ്പരകൾ എന്നിവയും സംഘടിപ്പിച്ചു.

05/09/2025 COIMBATORE Pg 02

Reference: https://covaimail.com/amrita-hosts-national-seminar-on-one-nation-one-election/

The Kovai Herald

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham Hosts National Seminar on "One Nation, One Election"

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, in collaboration with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), hosted a two-day National Seminar on "Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat." Narayanan Thirupathy, Independent Director, REC Ltd. & Chief Spokesperson, BJP Tamil Nadu, Chief Guest for the seminar. Padmashri Dr. Upendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, and Prof. (Dr.) G. Gopa Kumar, former Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Kerala, were the other prominent speakers during the seminar. The seminar concluded with a valedictory address by Dr. Anil G. Variath, Dean, Amrita International School of Law.

Online:

https://covaimail.com/amrita-hosts-national-seminar-on-one-nation-one-election/

26 Annexures

27.1. Sample Mementos for Chief
Guests

27.2. Seminar kit given to the paper presenters and participants
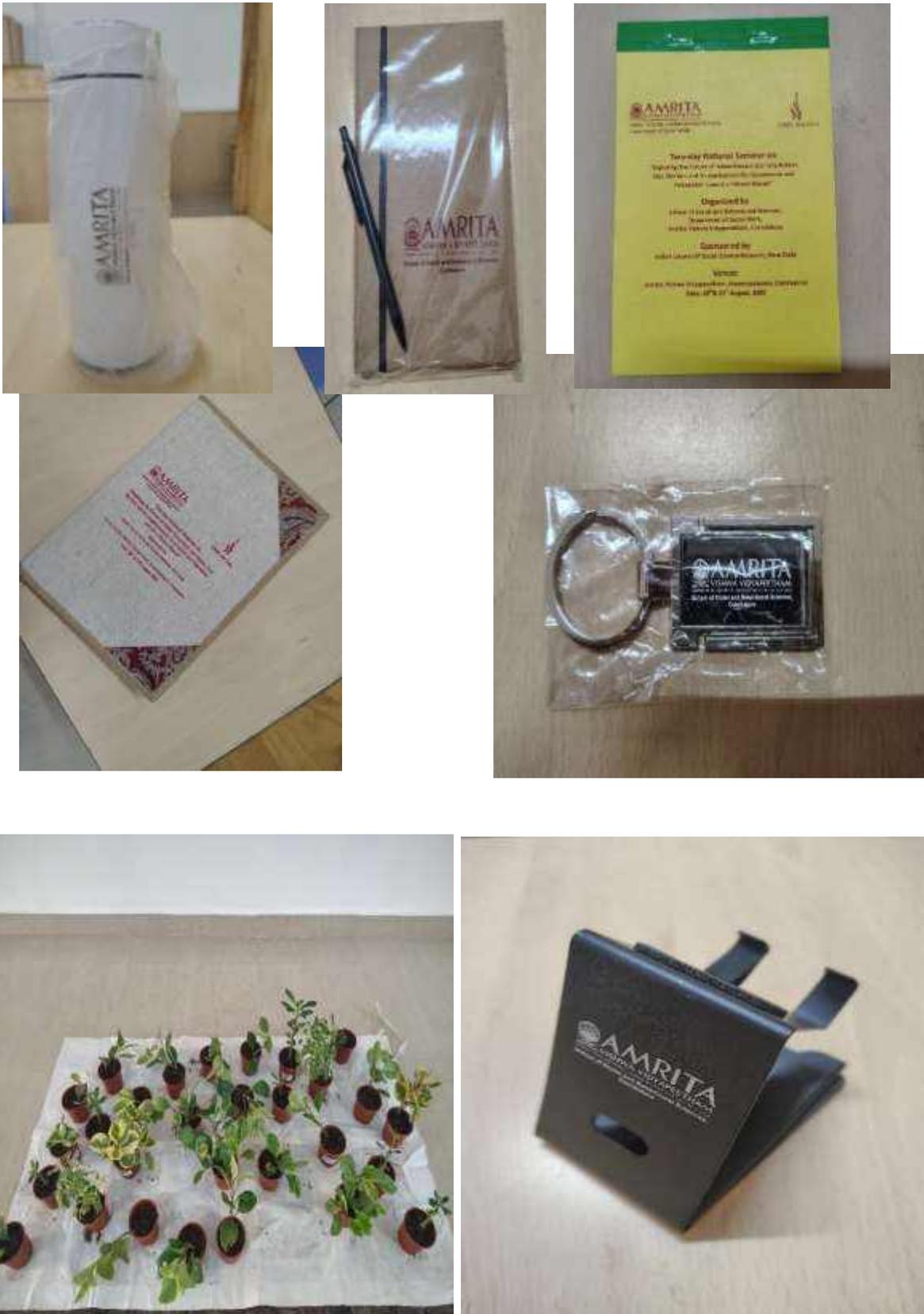
27.3. Sample Certificates

27.4. Sample Certificates filled

27.5. Paper presenters list (Scanned copy)

27.6. Participants list (Scanned copy)

27   Feedback form

1. Name

2. Designation

3. Institution

4. Role in the Seminar

5. How do you rate the overall theme relevance of the seminar?

6. Were the sessions and sub-themes useful and informative?

7. Which session or aspect of the seminar did you find most valuable and why?

8. How do you rate the organization and coordination of the seminar?

9. How satisfied were you with the Registration process

10. How satisfied were you with the Communication and Information sharing

11. How satisfied were you with the Venue, Logistics and Hospitality Services

27.8 Feedback received

Designation
10 responses
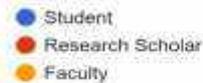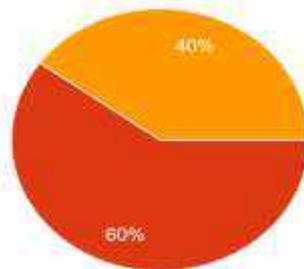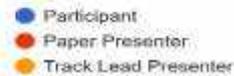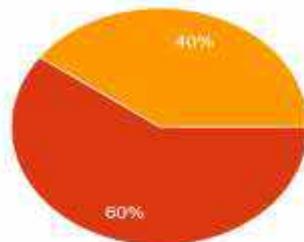
- Student
- Research Scholar
- Faculty

Role in the Seminar
10 responses

- Participant
- Paper Presenter
- Track Lead Presenter

How do you rate the overall theme relevance of the seminar?

10 responses

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Needs Improvement
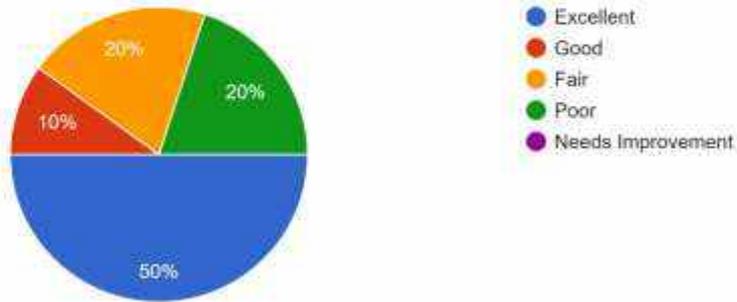
Were the sessions and sub-themes useful and informative?

10 responses
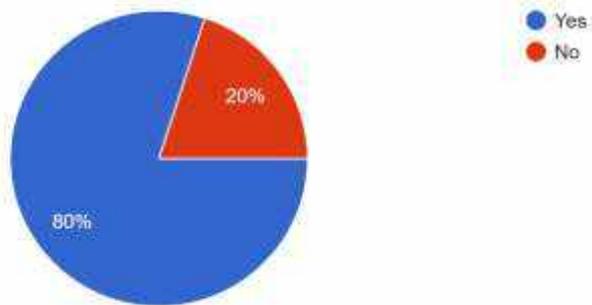
- Yes
- No

How do you rate the organization and coordination of the seminar?

10 responses

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
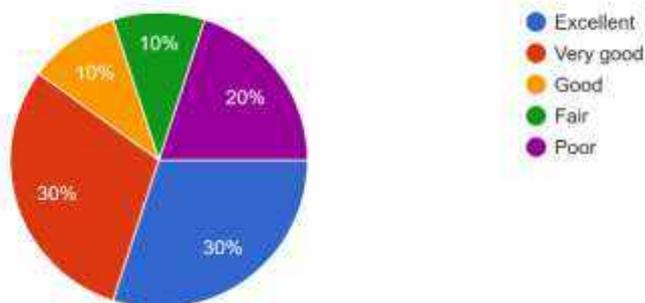
How satisfied were you with the Registration process
10 responses

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
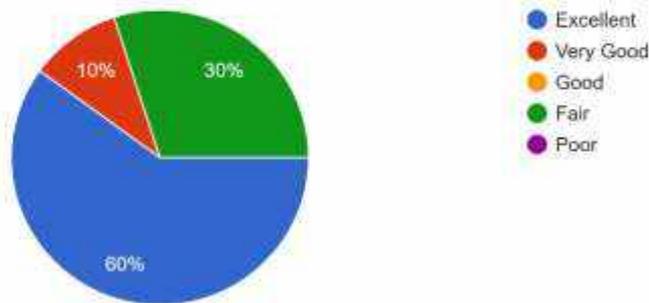
How satisfied were you with the Communication and Information sharing
10 responses

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
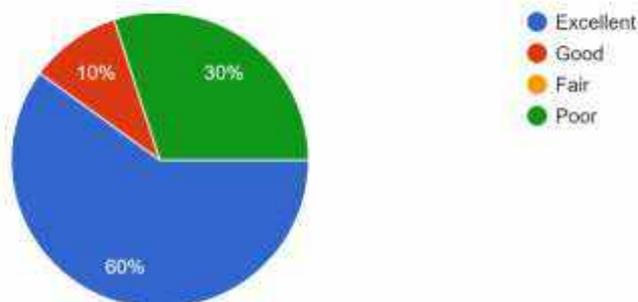
How satisfied were you with the Venue, Logistics and Hospitality Services
10 responses

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
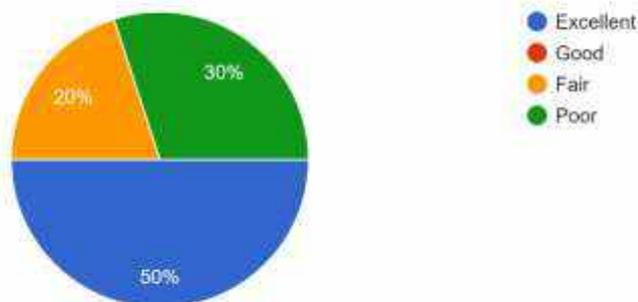
27.9 Takeaways of the seminar shared by the participants and paper presenters

1. More to work and attend on offline conferences regarding contemporary topics. Since one nation one election can be a serious discussion in future days, this seminar helps me to know more information in economic, social and political fields.

2. I got to learn about one nation and one election, and it's implication. Also, I got to know about how to present in a better way, and how to prepare for a conference.

3. Interest among students and scholars and their presentations on the topic of the conference is praise worthy.

4. Quality Debates, critical inputs received from papers presented in the seminar etc.

5. There are challenges too in ONOE initiative and it needs long time to implement

6. ONOE has a lot more limitations than advantages and should not be implemented

7. Got on whole understanding about one nation and one election

8. Knowledge about One nation one election.

9. About ONOE

10. Nothing

27.10 Suggestions by the participants and paper presenters about the seminar

● As genuine feedback, the team coordinated well internally but failed to coordinate with the outside participants. Before reaching the seminar venue, it was easy to communicate, but after reaching the venue, many hurdles were across. As outside participants, we had to reach out to the committee for everything, and we ourselves needed to search for the venue and halls and nobody assisted us in anything. Room was fine but the hostel fee was high for an ICSSR-sponsored seminar. Paper presentations were scheduled at 8.30 but food was not ready at the cafeteria. We were not supposed to eat at the hostel mess also. It was after a lot of time of calling and communicating, they allowed us to eat from the mess. Whenever we tried to ask someone, nobody knew anything. But later it was resolved. I suggest, in the upcoming seminar and conferences, to improve your communication and coordination with the outside participants also.

● Parallel sessions can be arranged to accommodate more no of papers. Time to be followed properly between the sessions. bring an edited volume with selected papers, besides the journal publications.

- Coordination of the overall session find difficult for us, hospitality was poor, encountered with many difficulties, spent more than enough money.

- It is necessary to focus on the timing of the seminar, including the inaugural function and sessions

- The stay was slightly on the higher end. Otherwise everything else was good.

- Everything were executed very well.

- Provide free accommodation

- Hospitality

- Nil

27.11 Seminar flyer

27.12 Seminar brochure

Welcome banner

28 Edited volume Book front pages

Exploring the Future of Indian Democracy: One Nation, One Election and Its Implications for Governance and Federalism toward a Vibrant Bharat

First Edition

Editor
Dr. S. Kanagaraj

Sponsored by,
Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR),
New Delhi, India.

Published by
CiiT Publications
#156, 3rd Floor, Kalidas Road, Ramnagar,
Coimbatore – 641009, Tamil Nadu, India.
Phone: 0422 – 4377821, Mobile: 9965618001
www.ciitresearch.org

ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

29 Group photo of the seminar

Inaugural

Valedictory

30 Papers presented in the seminar

30.1 One Nation, One Election: Governance Issues and Concerns

Dr.P.Sakthivel

Professor. Dept of Political Science and Public Administration,
Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu.
sakthiraji@rediffmail.com

Abstract

India's democracy endures primarily because of regular elections to the Parliament, State Legislatures, and, importantly, to local bodies in both urban and rural areas. Political leadership at both the central and state levels has often called for early elections to secure a decisive majority. Naturally, this has disrupted the possibility of conducting simultaneous elections in India. The idea of ONOE, also known as simultaneous elections, proposes aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. This would allow voters to cast their ballots for both tiers of government on the same day in their constituencies, though voting could still occur in phases across the country. By synchronizing these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimize disruptions caused by frequent elections.

The paper argues that the ONOE proposal, initiated by the NDA-led government, will lay the groundwork for a complete revamping of India's democratic and electoral system by conducting simultaneous elections. At the same time, the concerns and apprehensions regarding simultaneous elections cannot be dismissed without public discourse, and it is the duty of the government to address any doubts raised by the people, political parties, and civil society organizations. The interests and concerns of regional political parties, as well as of people residing in different parts of the country—some politically apathetic or disillusioned by the petty politics of narrow and parochial-minded parties and organizations, and not associated with any political party—need to be addressed before the implementation of ONOE, especially in the context of state autonomy, governance issues, legal hurdles, financial waste, and the overall necessity of conducting elections in India.

Key Concepts: Simultaneous Elections, Voter Fatigue, Political Apathy, State Autonomy, Governance etc.

Introduction

India's democracy survives mainly because of democratic elections conducted at regular intervals to the Parliament, State Legislatures, and significantly, to local bodies in both urban and rural areas. It is estimated that since independence, more than 400 elections have been conducted in a free and fair manner, owing to the strenuous efforts of the Election Commission of India (ECI). Elections to the House of the People and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously from 1951 to 1967. However, since then, political turmoil and instability have resulted in elections to the House of the People and State Legislatures being conducted separately—either at the end of their tenure or due to early dissolution caused by the loss of majority support in Parliament or the State Legislatures.

Political leadership at both the Centre and the State levels have often called for early elections in order to secure a thumping majority. Naturally, this has disrupted the conduct of simultaneous elections in India.

Experiences from other Countries

Some countries already hold simultaneous elections, such as Belgium, Sweden, Brazil, and South Africa, and to some extent even the USA. But does that mean India should also adopt the same system? The answer is not so simple. Belgium and Sweden, for instance, follow a different electoral system. In India, we follow the *first-past-the-post* system, where the candidate with the highest number of votes wins. In contrast, countries like Belgium follow *proportional representation*, where if a party wins 30 percent of the votes, it gets 30 percent of the seats. Similarly, in the USA, there are only two dominant political parties—the Republicans and the Democrats. In India, however, we have six national parties, 54 state parties, and more than 2,000 unrecognized parties. Therefore, blindly following another country's pattern will not work. What we need at this juncture is an '*Indian version*' of simultaneous elections. (Choudhary Anika, 2024).

There is no specific definition of the term simultaneous election. Sugato Dasgupta *et al.* described "simultaneous general elections" as elections that are held at the same time for several types of offices. It can therefore be concluded that the term refers to the conduct of elections to various bodies at the same time in order to elect officeholders (Sapna Chadah, 2024). It is observed that there is no uniform model for simultaneous elections, as countries follow different systems to elect political representatives from the union to the grassroots level. In most cases, elections are conducted simultaneously for national, provincial, and district or city-level bodies. In some countries, simultaneous elections are also held for the highest political executive—for instance, the President or Prime

Minister—along with members of the national parliament and state legislatures, either on the same day or within a short period of time.

One Nation One Election in India

The idea, also known as simultaneous elections, proposes aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. This would allow voters to cast their ballots for both tiers of government on the same day in their constituencies, though voting could still occur in phases across the country. By synchronising these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimise disruptions caused by frequent elections. It is significant to note here, on September 18, 2024, the Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the recommendations of the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections headed by former President of India Ram Nath Kovind. The proposal outlines a two-phase implementation strategy. In the first phase, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies will be held together. The second phase will cover local body elections—panchayats and municipalities—within 100 days of the general elections. A common electoral roll will be prepared for all levels of elections to ensure uniformity. To carry out this plan, the government intends to hold nationwide consultations and set up an implementation group. Additionally, three Bills will be introduced in Parliament, two of which involve constitutional amendments, to enable phased simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local bodies (Sapna Chadah, 2024).

Reports of Various Committees

Even before India's independence, the Franchise Committee constituted in 1932 suggested the concept of simultaneous elections, highlighting the efficiency, convenience, and coherence attainable through synchronized electoral cycles. The Election Commission, in its first Annual Report in 1983, supported the idea of conducting concurrent elections for both the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies. Compelling reasons for holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies were put forward. The Commission recommended simultaneous elections mainly to reduce election expenditure, minimize the diversion of staff from routine work to election duties, and avoid excessive engagement of the administrative machinery in the conduct of elections. It also highlighted issues such as the frequent transfer of government officials for election-related work and the adverse impact on governance as key reasons for its recommendation.

The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, headed by Justice M.N. Venkatachalaiah in its Report, 2002 had also recognized the need to restore simultaneous elections. The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, chaired by Dr. E.M. Sudarsana Natchiappan, conducted a systematic study in 2015 on the issues involved in holding elections. The Committee submitted its report on *"Feasibility of Holding Simultaneous Elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha) and State Legislative Assemblies"* on December 17, 2015. The Law Commission in its report (1999, 2015 and 2018 (draft)), emphasized the need for conducting simultaneous elections In its reports of the Commission has recommended the adoption of the practice of simultaneous elections to reduce the encumbrances of asynchronous elections on citizens, political parties and government authorities. (Sapna Chadah, 2024).

In 2017, NITI Aayog released a working paper titled *"Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The What, Why and How,"* which examined the proposal for conducting elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies at the same time. The paper reviewed the relevant constitutional provisions, as well as the financial and logistical challenges associated with the proposal. It also highlighted multiple reasons supporting the desirability of holding simultaneous elections.

Report of High Level Committee (2024)

The High-Level Committee, headed by former President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind, after seeking opinions from political parties and the general public, suggested the following recommendations to the Government of India.

1. Simultaneous elections will promote political stability and good governance by reducing disruptions and policy paralysis.

2. Simultaneous elections will help increase voter turnout while also reducing expenses.

3. The Committee recommended necessary amendments to the Constitution.

4. To harmonize elections, the Committee suggested that state legislatures and local bodies be dissolved so elections can be conducted on the same day or within the same period.

5. Simultaneous elections for the House of the People, all State Assemblies, and local bodies should be held within 100 days.

6. The Committee also recommended introducing a Constitutional Amendment Bill in Parliament to amend Articles 83, 172, and 324(A), with ratification by the State Legislatures.

Article.83 of the Indian Constitution deals with the duration of the Houses of Parliament. It specifies that the Council of States (Rajya Sabha) is a permanent body not subject to dissolution, with one-third of its members retiring every two years. The House of the People (Lok Sabha), on the other hand, has a normal tenure of five years, unless dissolved earlier. **Article 172** provides for the duration of State Legislatures. It states that every Legislative Assembly shall continue for five years from the date of its first sitting, unless dissolved sooner, and the duration can be extended during a national emergency for a period not exceeding one year at a time. **Further, Article 324** vests the power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission of India (ECI). This includes the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President (GOI, 2024).

Governance: Issues and Concerns

The BJP-led government at the Centre argues that there are several reasons for introducing simultaneous elections in India. Frequent elections, both at the Union and State levels, severely hamper the governance process, as the Model Code of Conduct remains in force for nearly 80 to 90 days, during which the government is unable to implement social welfare measures or schemes for the people. The announcement of new welfare schemes, appointment of officials to government posts, and transfer of officials require the approval of the ECI, which often leads to undue delays in the process. Further, the party's justification for ONOE is that political parties, both at the Centre and in the States, devote nearly three months to campaigning, contesting elections, and engaging in other electioneering processes, which often leads to the announcement of populist schemes aimed at attracting votes from the common people.

Another argument put forth by those who support the proposed ONOE is that the normal life of people is affected by the electioneering process, causing a series of inconveniences. Frequent elections also result in political instability, disruption of supply chains, and setbacks to micro businesses, reduced business investment, and an overall adverse impact on economic growth. Overall, attention to governance has become less significant for political parties at the helm of affairs, both at the State and Central levels. It is evident that there has been a complete shift from core issues, which are of paramount concern to the people, towards election-related activities and vote-capturing tactics in India.

Administrative Machinery in Doldrums

Frequent elections pave the way for the deployment of government officials—such as civil servants, teachers, faculty members in higher education, and security forces—for election-related work for nearly three months, which certainly hampers administrative efficiency and teaching activities in educational institutions. In some cases, educational institutions where the ECI stores EVM machines remain closed for several months, forcing authorities to conduct classes in makeshift locations. Furthermore, due to poor arrangements in many places, government officials and teachers faced several practical difficulties in conducting the elections, which naturally caused great disappointment among the concerned stakeholders.

Despite all the hardships, the supporters argued that the proposed ONOE could potentially increase voter turnout, as the nation has not been able to achieve more than 70 percent polling in past general elections. Political analysts have also opined that conducting simultaneous elections in India would address the issue of 'voter fatigue.'

Conducting simultaneous elections would significantly reduce the financial costs associated with multiple election cycles. The ONOE model will also reduce expenditure related to the deployment of resources such as manpower, equipment, and security for each individual election (PIB, 2024). The uncertainty faced by MSME businesses during elections, due to the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, must be debated in the public sphere. Evidence shows that, on several occasions, micro businesses experienced a marginal decline during election periods due to restrictions in cash flow and the seizure of transported goods by security forces, which often cited that the products were intended for distribution to voters. For instance, textile industries in Erode, Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Salem, and other districts in Tamil Nadu faced this issue, as observed by the researcher through personal experience.

Governance Concerns

The proposed 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) initiative has drawn severe criticism and generated significant public discourse, both online and offline. The biggest challenge lies in achieving political consensus among national and regional political parties, such as the Congress, CPI, CPI(M), TMC, and other regional political parties. Responses were received from 47 political parties. Barring 15 political parties, the remaining 32 political parties not only favoured the system of simultaneous elections. The Regional parties, including the DMK, TMC, AAP, BSP, SP, argue that if elections are conducted simultaneously, it would erode the autonomy of state governments in conducting elections,

significantly reduce the role of regional parties in the overall electioneering process, and allow national parties to secure a majority of seats.

The AAP, Congress, and CPI(M) rejected the proposal, stating that it undermines democracy and the basic structure of the Constitution, according to the report. The BSP did not explicitly oppose the initiative but highlighted concerns regarding the country's vast territorial extent and large population, which could make implementation challenging. In its submission, the Samajwadi Party argued that if simultaneous elections are implemented, state-level parties would struggle to compete with national parties in terms of electoral strategy and expenditure, leading to increased discord between these two sets of parties (Business Standard, 2025). Further, there are chances that national issues will dominate or overshadow regional issues in the ONOE, and eventually the national political parties will benefit, while the regional political parties might struggle (Choudhary Anika, 2024).

Another major argument put forward in support of ONOE is that the initiative would cut expenditure by nearly ₹5,000 crore annually. However, whether this is a reasonable justification for holding simultaneous elections in India remains a matter of nationwide debate. In the absence of any scientific study or reliable data, either from the government or private sources, it would be unreasonable to claim that ONOE will save the government a significant amount of money.

Legal Roadblocks

A NITI Aayog paper supporting the ONOE observed that the central government would need to invest over ₹9,000 crore to procure additional EVMs and VVPAT systems. It would also require extra security personnel and government officials to manage large-scale simultaneous elections. Furthermore, the increased number of EVMs and VVPATs would necessitate additional warehouses for safe storage and to address any potential judicial scrutiny.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the implementation of ONOE would require amending the relevant provisions of the Constitution of India. For instance, Articles 83 (duration of the House), 85 (dissolution of the Lok Sabha), 172 (duration of state legislatures), 174 (dissolution of state legislatures), and 356 (failure of constitutional machinery) of the Indian Constitution, along with certain provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, would need to be amended. Furthermore, ratification by at least half of the state legislatures is also mandatory in the process. One point is clear: in the current situation, the BJP-led NDA government enjoys a substantial majority in both houses of Parliament, and

control of more than half of the state legislatures would enable it to pass the constitutional amendment without difficulty.

There is a valid apprehension among various stakeholders that if ONOE is implemented, the focus on regional issues in a diverse and complex country like India may get diluted amidst the din of national issues. It is unlikely that national political parties and their leaders would give sufficient attention to regional or local issues during election campaigns, and there is a less possibility of including them in electoral manifestos. In such a scenario, state autonomy and the concerns of the people at the state level may not be adequately considered by political parties and their leaders (Rajiv Sharma, 2024).

Conclusion

The ONOE proposal, initiated by the NDA-led government, will lay the groundwork for a complete revamping of India's democratic and electoral system by conducting simultaneous elections. It is presumed that simultaneous elections will address longstanding challenges associated with frequent elections, including governance issues, administrative stagnation, high expenditure on conducting separate elections for Parliament and state legislatures, and 'voter fatigue'. At the same time, the concerns and apprehensions regarding simultaneous elections cannot be dismissed without public discourse, and it is the duty of the government to address any doubts raised by the people, political parties, and civil society organizations.

It is the paramount duty for the centre government to clarify certain concerns expressed by the stakeholders of the society including, will the ECI empowered such a level to conduct simultaneous elections to all the states and union territories that to national parliament, state legislatures, rural and urban local governments in India without any damage to its commitment of conducting 'free and fair elections' in India. Amidst the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar, which involves verifying voter details and removing ineligible or duplicate entries, the process has evoked significant criticism and protests from opposition parties. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is now in a position to demonstrate its integrity and commitment to conducting free and fair elections in the country.

Will people residing in remote areas of India have the opportunity to demonstrate their political will and exercise their franchise in simultaneous elections based purely on regional or local issues? Furthermore, are our voters sufficiently empowered to distinguish between elections for the national Parliament, state legislatures, and local bodies when casting their votes in each election? India is an economically progressive country at the global level and is capable of conducting elections by investing a few thousand crores.

This can be considered a worthwhile democratic exercise. If that is the case, how can the argument of cutting expenditure or avoiding unnecessary wastage of money by conducting separate elections for Parliament, state legislatures, and local bodies withstand public scrutiny?

The interests and concerns of regional political parties, as well as of people residing in different parts of the country—some politically apathetic or disillusioned by the petty politics of narrow and parochial-minded parties and organizations, and not associated with any political party—need to be addressed before the implementation of ONOE, especially in the context of state autonomy, governance issues, legal hurdles, financial waste, and the overall necessity of conducting elections in India. The success of the ambitious ONOE initiative depends on effectively addressing the genuine concerns of people and stakeholders, and clarifying misunderstandings and misconceptions about conducting simultaneous elections.

References

1. Choudhary, A. (2024). *Is the idea of India's one nation, one election a miracle or a disaster?* Indian Institute of Public Administration. https://www.iipa.org.in/GyanKOSH/posts/is-the-idea-of-indias-one-nation-one-election-a-miracle-or-a-disaster

2. Chadah, S. (2024). *Theme paper on "One Nation, One Election."* Indian Institute of Public Administration.

3. Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, Legislative Department, Official Languages Wing. (2024). *The Constitution of India.*

4. Press Information Bureau. (2024). *One Nation, One Election.* Government of India.

5. Choudhary, A. (2024). *Is the idea of India's one nation, one election a miracle or a disaster?* Indian Institute of Public Administration. https://www.iipa.org.in/GyanKOSH/posts/is-the-idea-of-indias-one-nation-one-election-a-miracle-or-a-disaster

6. Business Standard. (2025). 32 parties supported, 15 opposed one nation one election, says report. https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/32-parties-supported-15-opposed-one-nation-one-election-says-report-124031400507_1.html

7. Sharma, R. (2024). One nation, one election: A heinous conspiracy to destroy the constitution. *INC Sandesh.* https://inc.in/congress-sandesh/comment/one-nation-one-election-a-heinous-conspiracy-to-destroy-the-constitution

30.2   Governance without Disruptions: Will One Election Improve Policy Continuity?

Dr. Nanda Kishor M. S.

Head & Associate Professor, Department of Politics & International Studies,

Pondicherry University

srijankishor@pondiuni.ac.in

Abstract

The proposition of "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) has reignited debates on the future of Indian democracy, governance, and federalism. Among the central claims advanced by its proponents is that simultaneous elections will reduce governance disruptions and enable policy continuity. This paper critically examines that assumption by situating it within India's constitutional design, political culture, and administrative structures. Frequent elections, while costly and time-intensive, also serve as mechanisms of accountability and avenues for regional expression. Yet, they often stall policy decisions due to the Model Code of Conduct, disrupting developmental projects and governance efficiency. This study investigates whether synchronizing electoral cycles would mitigate such disruptions or merely centralize political rhythms at the expense of federal dynamism. Drawing upon comparative federal experiences (notably Germany and South Africa), the analysis highlights the trade-offs between efficiency and pluralism. It also explores whether institutional innovations—such as phased elections, staggered state synchronisation, or digital electoral management—can balance continuity with representational diversity. Ultimately, the paper argues that while ONOE may reduce administrative disruptions, policy continuity in India depends less on electoral calendars and more on structural reforms, coalition management, and robust institutions of accountability. The discussion underscores the need to rethink governance not merely in terms of electoral efficiency but through deeper democratic strengthening to sustain a vibrant Bharat.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Governance, Policy Continuity, Federalism, Democracy

Introduction and Study background

India is widely celebrated as the world's largest and most vibrant democracy, with an electorate of nearly **970 million voters in 2024**, representing a level of democratic participation unmatched globally (Election Commission of India, 2024). Since the first general elections of 1951–52, India has successfully conducted **17 Lok Sabha elections** alongside over **400 State Assembly elections**, illustrating both the resilience and dynamism of its democratic institutions (Guha, 2017; Palshikar, 2020). However, this electoral vibrancy has also created a situation where the country is almost perpetually in election mode. Between 2014 and 2019, India witnessed **5–7 major elections annually**, resulting in a near-constant mobilisation of political parties, administrative machinery, and financial resources (NITI Aayog, 2017). There are arguments in favour and against. The **ONOE debate** revolves around a critical tension between the **need for uninterrupted governance** and the **principles of federalism and democratic diversity**. Election fatigue for both voters and administrators is seen as a growing challenge (Kapur & Vaishnav, 2021). Scholars also highlight concerns over constitutional feasibility, requiring significant amendments to Articles 83, 172, and 356 to align the terms of state assemblies and Parliament (De, 2018). These amendments, critics argue, could disturb the delicate balance of India's federal polity.

Research Objectives

- Does the ONOE proposal ensure policy continuity and efficiency, or does it impose excessive costs on federalism and democratic representation?
- To explore this problem, the paper pursues three interrelated research questions:
- Does synchronisation improve governance efficiency by reducing disruptions and costs?
- What are the institutional and political costs to federalism and democratic diversity?
- What innovative alternatives exist to balance continuity with representation in India's democratic framework?

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach. It draws upon secondary data from government reports, scholarly literature, and institutional documents, combined with comparative case studies of other federal democracies such as Germany, South Africa, and the United States. By situating the ONOE debate within India's constitutional design, political culture, and governance practices, the paper seeks to provide a balanced, evidence-based understanding of its implications for the future of Indian democracy.

Analysis Done

Public Choice Theory and Elections. Public Choice Theory, rooted in rational choice economics, views political actors—politicians, bureaucrats, and voters—as self-interested individuals seeking to maximise benefits (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962). In electoral contexts, frequent elections can create perverse incentives for short-term populist policies aimed at securing immediate voter approval rather than long-term governance stability (Mueller, 2020). For instance, loan waivers before state elections in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra demonstrate the populist bias induced by electoral competition (Srinivasan, 2018). ONOE proponents argue that synchronisation may mitigate these distortions by providing governments uninterrupted terms to focus on governance rather than perpetual campaigning (NITI Aayog, 2017). However, critics highlight that reducing electoral frequency could also diminish accountability by limiting voters' ability to signal dissatisfaction in staggered state elections (Palshikar, 2020). Thus, from a public choice perspective, ONOE represents a trade-off between governance efficiency and democratic accountability.Institutionalist theories underscore that strong institutions, rather than electoral cycles, underpin policy continuity and governance stability (March & Olsen, 2011). Institutions such as the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Supreme Court, and independent regulatory bodies play vital roles in ensuring that governance transcends partisan shifts. For example, India's nuclear policy, articulated in 1999, has enjoyed continuity across successive governments because it was institutionalised through doctrine and supported by bureaucratic expertise rather than left vulnerable to electoral politics (Pant, 2018). Similarly, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) introduced in 2017 illustrates how cooperative federal institutions—like the GST Council—can sustain policy continuity despite contentious electoral politics (Rao, 2019). These cases highlight that democratic institutions provide a stable foundation for long-term policies even when elections are staggered. Institutionalism thus suggests that ONOE is not a prerequisite for continuity; instead, the resilience of governance depends on the strength of formal rules, norms, and organisational capacity.

Major Findings
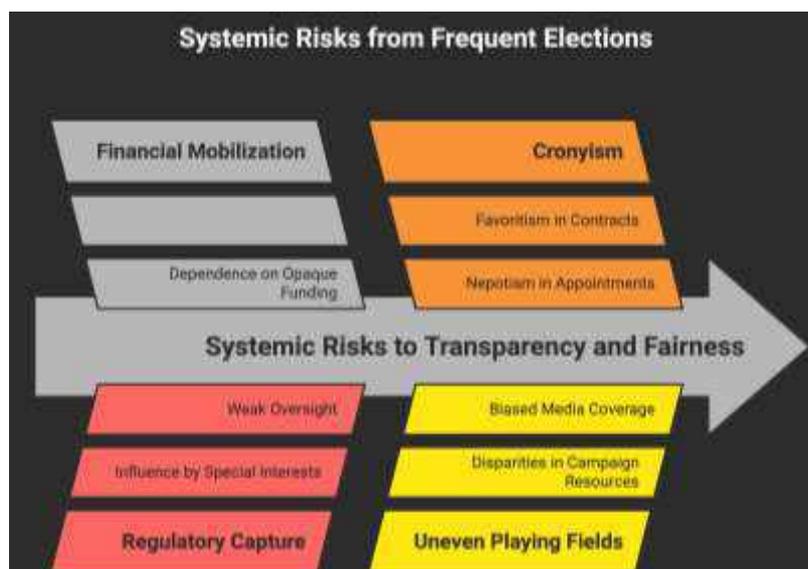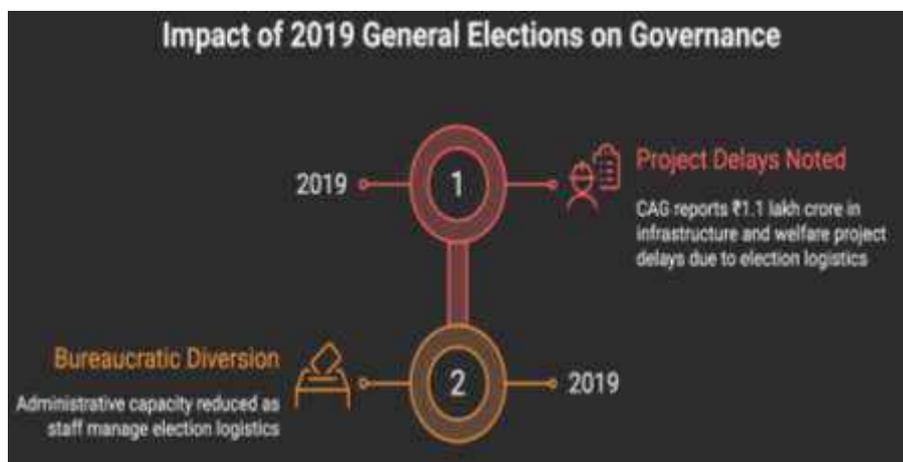
The Positive Side: Elections as Accountability Forums

- While frequent elections generate costs and disruptions, they also provide avenues for accountability and democratic renewal.

- State-level elections, in particular, have been crucial for reflecting voter dissatisfaction with governance and enabling regime change.
- For instance, Nitish Kumar's electoral victory in Bihar in 2005 marked a rejection of entrenched misgovernance, while Mamata Banerjee's triumph in West Bengal in 2011 displaced decades of Left Front rule (Yadav & Palshikar, 2009).

Federalism at Risk: Centralisation of Political Discourse

- States such as Tamil Nadu and Punjab exemplify how regional parties shape policy and identity politics:
- Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu (DMK, AIADMK) have historically mobilised on linguistic, social-welfare, and state-specific development issues.
- Punjab's politics has long revolved around agrarian interests and regional identities (Yadav, 2019; Palshikar, 2018).
- The Law Commission itself warned that any move to synchronise elections must reckon with the constitutional distribution of powers and the need for broad political consensus, including significant state ratification for amendments (Law Commission of India, 2018; PRS Legislative Research, 2018).

Conclusion

Germany provides a contrasting model to the ONOE proposal. As a federal republic, Germany operates under a parliamentary system where the Bundestag is elected every four years, while elections for the Länder (state legislatures) are staggered and occur independently. This system fosters accountability at both state and federal levels, ensuring that electoral cycles capture local political dynamics (Jeffery, 2014). Governance continuity in Germany is less a product of synchronised elections and more a function of coalition agreements. Stable coalition arrangements, underpinned by proportional representation, allow for policy stability across different electoral cycles (Saalfeld, 2005). This model highlights that staggered elections do not necessarily disrupt governance; instead, institutional safeguards and a coalition-driven culture ensure continuity. South Africa offers a hybrid model. National and provincial elections are held simultaneously every five years, while municipal elections occur separately.This design preserves local autonomy and prevents the dominance of national narratives at the grassroots level (Southall, 2014). Proponents argue that simultaneous elections enhance voter participation by reducing fatigue and logistical costs, while the separation of local polls ensures that

grassroots concerns are not overshadowed (Booysen, 2011). The United States demonstrates another trajectory. Presidential elections are fixed every four years, while Congressional elections occur every two years, with the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate elected each cycle (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011). Additionally, gubernatorial and state legislature elections are staggered across states, often held in odd-numbered years or midterms. This ensures near-constant electoral accountability, distributing political competition across time rather than concentrating it in a single cycle (Key, 1958). A comparative perspective underscores that policy continuity is not inherently linked to synchronised elections. For India, a country characterised by strong regional political identities and coalition politics, the lesson is clear: institutional design and federal negotiation mechanisms are more decisive in ensuring continuity than synchronisation alone

References

- Austin, G. (1999). *Working a democratic constitution: The Indian experience*. Oxford University Press.

- Bar & Bench. (2018). *Law Commission draft report on simultaneous elections* (PDF). https://images.assettype.com/barandbench/import/2018/08/Law-Commission-Draft-Report-on-Simultaneous-Elections-watermark.pdf

- Chhibber, P., & Verma, R. (2018). *Ideology and identity: The changing party systems of India*. Oxford University Press.

- Choudhry, S. (2020). *Federalism in India: Balancing unity and diversity*. Oxford University Press.

- De, S. (2018). Constitutional challenges to simultaneous elections in India. *Indian Journal of Constitutional Law, 12*(1), 45–67

- Indian Express. (2023, May). Supreme Court verdict on Maharashtra: What was the 2022 crisis? https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-politics/supreme-court-verdict-maharashtra-shiv-sena-explained-8603432/

- Law Commission of India. (2018). *Draft report on simultaneous elections* (30 August 2018). https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/LCI_2018_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf

- Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS). (2019). *National Election Study: Methodology and findings* (post-poll surveys).

https://www.lokniti.org/media/PDF-upload/1565073104_34386100_method_pdf_file.pdf

- Palshikar, S. (2018). Simultaneous elections: A democratic reform or political convenience? *Economic and Political Weekly, 53*(28), 12–15.

- PRS Legislative Research. (2018). *Summary: Draft report on simultaneous elections*. https://prsindia.org/policy/report-summaries/draft-report-simultaneous-elections

- Rane, Y., & Nayak, S. (2025). Federalism, democracy, and the idea of One Nation One Election. *Vidhi Legal Policy Blog*. https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/blog/federalism-democracy-and-the-idea-of-one-nation-one-election/

- The Hindu. (2019). *Karnataka political crisis 2019: Timeline and analysis*. (See detailed coverage of resignations and change of government.) https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/

- Yadav, Y. (2019). Regional politics and federal democracy in India. *Journal of South Asian Studies, 42*(4), 621–640.

30.3   One Nation, One Election: A Pathway to Strengthening Governance and Development in India

Dr Nagalingam M
Associate Professor, Dept. of Social Work,
Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod
nagalingam.m@cukerala.ac.in

Abstract

India adopted its Constitution on 26 January 1950 and became a Republic. The first general elections, held between October 1951 and February 1952, marked the beginning of India's electoral democracy. These elections were conducted for the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously. This practice continued naturally in 1957, 1962, and 1967. The idea of holding simultaneous elections, popularly known as One Nation, One Election (ONOE), seeks to conduct national and state-level elections together across the country. ONOE is envisioned as a reform to streamline governance, reduce the frequency and costs of elections, and ensure administrative efficiency. The present system poses challenges such as high expenditure, excessive diversion of administrative machinery, and governance disruptions due to the repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The MCC restricts governments from announcing or implementing new development projects, causing delays in decision-making and policy execution. However, while efficiency reforms are necessary, they must not undermine India's federal fabric. Balancing national stability with state autonomy, ensuring inclusivity, and safeguarding regional voices remain critical. ONOE thus represents both an opportunity for reform and a challenge to democratic federalism. The broad objective of this paper is to examine ONOE from the perspective of governance and development. The method of the work is normative and analytical approach using reports of committees (Law Commission, NITI Aayog), and academic debates and comparative insights from other democracies with synchronized elections.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Governance, Administrative Efficiency, Development, Electoral Reforms

Introduction

India's first general elections (1951-52) were simultaneous (naturally). This practice continued in the years 1957, 1962, and 1967 (Oberoi, 2020). Cycle disrupted after 1967 due to premature dissolutions certain State Assemblies. First elected government in Kerala (1959) was dismissed by the Centre under Article 356 & Several states in the late 1960s, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc. The 4th Lok Sabha was dissolved early in 1970 before completing its full term. This led to today's changed election schedule. Frequent elections burden governance and resources.

Historical Debate of Simultaneous Elections in India

- Debate initiated by the first Hon'ble Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru & Election Commission of India (ECI) in 1950s
- ECI raised again during (1980s), discussed under the Hon'ble Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999)
- The debate gained momentum in the 2010s under the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who strongly advocated ONOE for efficiency and stability.

Issues with the Current Electoral System

- Governance disruption & Policy Paralysis: Model Code of Conduct (MCC) restrictions halts policy decisions, delays development projects.
- Administrative burden: redeployment of officials, security forces.
- High election expenditure: drain on exchequer and parties.
- Short-term populism: policies framed for electoral gains, not long-term development.

Election Management and Administrative Disruptions

- Thousands of school teachers are diverted from classrooms for election duties.
- Leads to long teaching gaps, affecting student learning.
- Example (2019 Lok Sabha): Teachers in states like UP and Bihar missed 2–3 weeks of classes for election duty; In Delhi, 12 teachers from one school were absent nearly a month for poll duty

Security Impact:

- Heavy redeployment of police and paramilitary forces.
- Routine law-and-order duties get disrupted.

- *Example-1*: Over 70,000 central forces deployed in West Bengal elections, reducing normal policing.
- Example-2 (2014 Lok Sabha): Mobilization of 11 million security personnel for elections reduced availability for regular policing across India.

Election Management and Administrative Disruptions

Welfare & Development Schemes:

- Administrative staff diverted for election logistics.
- Election duties of district collectors and block officers slow down regular governance tasks.
- Example (Andhra Pradesh 2019): Officials reported delays in MGNREGA and housing fund disbursement due to election-related duties.
- Doctors and Health Staff: Medical officers are often assigned to polling or election-related duties.
- Example (West Bengal 2021): Election duty of doctors and nurses caused staff shortages in district hospitals, affecting patient care.
- Documented disruptions in fund disbursements and project execution.

Estimated Costs of Lok Sabha Elections

Year	Estimated Cost (₹ Crore)	Remarks
2014	₹3,500 crore	Official estimate by the Election Commission of India.
2019	₹55,000 crore	Estimated by the Centre for Media Studies; includes campaign spending by political parties.
2024	₹1,35,000 crore	Projected total expenditure, including government, Election Commission, political parties, and candidates.

Parties spent in the State Assembly Elections in India

Total Campaign Spending by Political Parties:

- 2017 UP Assembly: Parties spent over ₹5,500 crore; ~₹1,000 crore allegedly on vote-buying.

- 2022 UP Assembly: Spending may have exceeded ₹8,000 crore.
- UP elections are highly resource-intensive, with large undisclosed expenditures.
- Frequent elections create a heavy financial burden on public funds and party finances

Budget of the Welfare Programmes

- **Smart City Projects:**
  Total estimated cost: ₹1.64 lakh crore for ~8,000 projects across 100 cities.
- **MGNREGS :**
  - Annual central allocation: ₹86,000 crore

"One Nation, One Election" concept in India - key committees and bodies

Committee / Body	Year	Key Contribution
Law Commission (Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy)	1999	Advocated a return to simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha and assemblies
Law Commission (Justice B. S. Chauhan)	2018	Highlighted need for constitutional/legal reform to enable simultaneous polls
Parliamentary Standing Committee	2015	Assessed feasibility; noted reduction in cost and disruption as key benefits
High-Level Committee (Kovind-led)	2023–2024	Submitted detailed, 18,600+ page report after nationwide consultations
Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)	2024	Tasked with legislative scrutiny and recommending way forward to Parliament

Countries with Simultaneous Elections

- South Africa
- Sweden
- Belgium
- Indonesia
- Philippines
- Nepal
- South Africa, Sweden, and Indonesia are particularly cited in Indian government and Law Commission reports as international models of simultaneous elections.

ONOE as a Pathway to Strengthening Governance
ONOE proposes to hold elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, ideally every five years.

- Governance Efficiency

- Reduced Expenditure
- Policy Continuity
- Strengthening Democracy

ONOE and Developmental Outcomes

- Cost savings channelled into welfare and infrastructure.
- Better policy execution in social sectors (health, education, poverty alleviation).
- Long-term developmental planning (5-year or 10-year vision) without electoral interruptions.
- Promotes political stability conducive for economic growth.

Concerns and Challenges

- Federalism: risk of centralizing power, undermining states.
- Logistical feasibility: managing scale of synchronized elections.
- Constitutional hurdles: multiple amendments required.
- Political feasibility: lack of consensus among regional parties.

Conclusion

ONOE is more than electoral reform; it is a structural shift in governance. Holds potential to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and accelerate development. Risks must be addressed through inclusive, phased implementation. Build national consensus through dialogue with parties and states. If designed carefully, ONOE can be a pathway to a Vibrant Bharat by balancing governance efficiency with federal inclusivity.

References

- Centre for Media Studies. (2019). *Poll expenditure in 2019 Lok Sabha elections*. New Delhi: CMS.

- Election Commission of India. (2019). *Model Code of Conduct for the guidance of political parties and candidates*. New Delhi: ECI.

- Kumar, A. (2020). Federalism and the debate on simultaneous elections in India. *Journal of Indian Public Policy, 12*(3), 45–57.

- Law Commission of India. (2018). *Draft report on simultaneous elections*. New Delhi: Government of India.

- NITI Aayog. (2017). *Discussion paper on simultaneous elections: A constructive debate*. New Delhi: NITI Aayog.

- Norris, P. (2014). *Why elections fail*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Oberoi, H. (2020). Electoral cycles and governance in India: A historical overview. *Indian Journal of Political Science, 81*(1), 11–28.

- Palshikar, S. (2019). Simultaneous elections and the federal question. *Economic and Political Weekly, 54*(15), 25–29.

30.4   Negotiating Socio-Political Conscience Through Votes: Intricacies in Bridging Electoral Expectations and Electoral Practices among Youth Voters

[1] *Dr. S. Sampath Kumar,* [2] *Dr. Indhirapriyadharshini Manickam,* [3] *Mr. Jogy George*

[1] *Professor and Head, Department of Sociology and population studies, Bharathiar university, Coimbatore*
[2] *Guest faculty, Department of Sociology and Population Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*
[3] *Doctoral scholar, Department of Sociology and Population Studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore*
drsampathkumar@buc.edu.in

Abstract

Socio-political conscience embraces electoral practices and expectations in making larger voter turnout and informed voters in a democratic republic. For a majority youth populous state, it is significant to have a high socio-political conscience for confining moral responsibility transcending the exercise of mere duty. In this backdrop, this study aims to explore the complex interplay between electoral expectations and electoral practices that shape voting trends among youth population. The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design. The data for the study were collected from 15 news video clippings relating to first time voters in Tamil Nadu. Through textual analysis of the data, three themes were generated, they are: 1) popular aspirational homogeneity (conformity), 2) identity driven vote banks, 3) distorted opinion, 4) Moral grandstanding. Findings of the study showed that whatever the expectations the young voters have, they are not ready to cast vote for a new party due to the lack of trust regarding its sustainability. Further, analysis highlighted that voting trend among young voters are heavily influenced by the legacy of established mainstream political parties.

Keywords: Socio-political conscience, Electoral practices, Electoral expectations, Identity voting, Moral responsibility

Stable Democracy & Republic: When are voters politically competent?

A stable democracy is sustained when citizens are politically competent and aware. Political competence refers to the ability of voters to understand electoral processes, evaluate parties, leaders, and policies, and make informed decisions. The critical question

is whether young voters, particularly first-time voters, are adequately prepared to make such decisions in the complex socio-political environment of Tamil Nadu.

Whose Electoral Expectations Are We Concerned With and Why?

Electoral expectations represent what voters anticipate from governance and political leadership. In the case of first-time voters, these expectations are shaped by socio-political conscience, exposure to social media, and the influence of peers and family. Addressing whose expectations matter ensures inclusivity and acknowledges diverse aspirations.

Research Framework: The 4W's + H

• What? – Electoral expectations of voters as a causal factor influencing voting preferences in a democracy.

• When? – Contextualized before the 2021 Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly elections.

• Who? – First-time voters of the 2021 elections, selected through purposive sampling.

• Why? – Because socio-political conscience significantly influences first-time decisions.

• How? – Exploratory qualitative research design, employing video content analysis and an interpretive approach.

Objectives of the Study

- To probe into the concerns while making voting preferences.
- To explore the expectations developed by first-time voters.
- To scrutinize the implications of social media on voting behavior and electoral decision-making.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in Erving Goffman's Framing Theory, which explains how issues are socially constructed and presented. Frames influence how individuals perceive and interpret socio-political realities, thereby shaping voting preferences.

Concerns of First-Time Voters

Young voters often face dilemmas while voting. Their concerns include:

• Freebie welfare patronage – Government schemes offering monetary or material benefits.

• Freebie fatigue – Disenchantment due to over-reliance on welfare politics.

• Freedom aspects – Desire for greater autonomy and reduced dependency.

This reflects the Freebie–Freedom Nexus, where voters balance welfare benefits against aspirations for empowerment.

Electoral Expectations of First-Time Voters

Youth electoral expectations are framed as 'Ballots for Betterment,' where voting is seen as a tool for progress. They include:

- Assertive and ideology-driven vote bank creation.
- Demand for transformative leaders who inspire change
- Expectation of constructive governance that delivers results.
- Fulfillment of developmental needs, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

How Does Social Media Play a Part?

Social media acts as a double-edged sword. It provides platforms for awareness, engagement, and political participation, but also contributes to the creation of a manufactured mindset. Youth perceptions are shaped by digital narratives, memes, influencers, and targeted political campaigns.

Conclusion

The study highlights that first-time voters' electoral expectations in Tamil Nadu are a product of socio-political conscience, exposure to social media, and lived realities of welfare politics. Understanding these dynamics is essential for fostering youth participation in democratic processes and ensuring stable governance.

30.5   Anchoring Democracy: The Citizen's Power in 'One Nation, One Election'

Prof. (Dr.) Namrata Singh

Department of Political Science, Miranda House,
University of Delhi, Delhi
namrata.singh@mirandahouse.ac.in

Abstract:

The proposition of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) in India, which aims to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections, represents one of the most significant electoral reforms contemplated in the nation's history. While proponents advocate for it as a panacea for policy paralysis, exorbitant costs, and governance deficits caused by a perpetual election cycle, critics raise alarms about its potential to undermine India's federal structure and voter cognizance. This essay argues that while ONOE presents formidable challenges to informed citizen choice, it simultaneously offers a pivotal opportunity for the Indian citizenry to redefine and deepen their democratic role. By analyzing the potential impacts on voter behavior and drawing comparative insights from countries like Sweden, South Africa, and Germany, this paper contends that the success or failure of ONOE in strengthening democracy will ultimately be determined not by legislative mechanics but by the proactive, informed, and assertive power of the Indian citizen.

The Indian Electoral Conundrum

India is the world's largest democracy, but its electoral system faces a unique challenge: frequent elections. With elections held separately for the central government, state legislatures, and local bodies, the cycle of constant campaigning leads to several issues:

- **Governance delays** – The Model Code of Conduct restricts major policy decisions during elections, slowing down developmental projects.
- **High costs** – Conducting separate elections consumes enormous financial and human resources.
- **Policy disruptions** – Governments often prioritize short-term populist measures over long-term reforms due to continuous election pressures.

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election (ONOE)* seeks to synchronize elections at all levels to reduce costs, bring efficiency, and ensure smoother governance. But this raises a fundamental debate: Can efficiency be achieved without compromising India's federal balance?

Historical Trajectory

- **1951–1967**: Simultaneous elections were the norm in India's early years. This created stability and smooth functioning.

- **Post-1967**: Political instability and the rise of coalition politics disrupted the cycle. Governments began to fall before completing their terms, breaking synchronization.

- **1970s–1990s**: Regional parties grew stronger, resulting in fragmented election schedules and frequent state-level contests.

- **Today**: Elections are held almost every year, consuming both time and resources.

Reform Efforts

Several institutions have examined ONOE:

- Law Commission Reports (1999 & 2018) – Highlighted feasibility and constitutional requirements.

- NITI Aayog (2017) – Suggested phased reforms to gradually achieve synchronization.

- Parliamentary Committees (2015) – Emphasized reducing disruptions and enhancing governance efficiency.

The idea has strong backing in principle but requires wide political consensus and significant constitutional amendments.

The Case for ONOE

1. Governance Efficiency – Reduces frequent disruptions caused by elections and ensures smoother policy implementation.

2. Cost Reduction – Could cut election expenditure nearly by half, saving taxpayer money.

3. Policy Continuity – Long-term developmental reforms can proceed without interruption from electoral cycles.

Challenges and Criticisms

While ONOE has clear advantages, critics raise several concerns:

- Federal Autonomy – States may lose decision-making independence if elections are centralized.

- Constitutional Hurdles – Implementing ONOE requires multiple constitutional amendments.

  - Logistical Complexity – Conducting simultaneous polls in 31 states and the Centre is a huge operational challenge.

- Voter Confusion – Citizens may find it difficult to separate state and national issues when voting at the same time.

Comparative Global Insights

Experiences from other countries show mixed outcomes:
- **Sweden** – Achieved high turnout and informed voting with synchronized elections.

- **South Africa** – National issues overshadowed local/provincial concerns.

- **Germany** – Staggered polls preserved federal balance, ensuring states retained autonomy.

- **Indonesia (2019)** – Saved costs but faced serious logistical overload.

Lesson: ONOE's success depends on the maturity of democratic institutions and voter awareness.

Implications for Indian Federalism

Adopting ONOE could reshape Indian democracy:
- Possible **centralization of power** at the expense of states.

- Regional parties may lose their distinct space and relevance.

- Voter issue differentiation may blur, weakening accountability.

Thus, robust **federal safeguards** are essential if ONOE is to be implemented.

The Citizens' Role: Anchoring Democracy

The future of ONOE rests not only with lawmakers but also with the people. Citizens must:

- Stay informed about the implications of ONOE.

- Remain engaged in political debates and democratic processes.

- Use their vote responsibly, recognizing its power to shape governance.

Ultimately, the true anchor of democracy is the citizen. The inked finger is not just a mark of voting but a symbol of responsibility toward the nation.

Conclusion

One Nation, One Election presents both promise and peril. It can enhance efficiency and reduce costs, but it also risks weakening federalism and marginalizing regional voices. The path forward requires:

- Political consensus across parties,

- Constitutional and logistical preparedness, and

- Most importantly, **citizen participation** in safeguarding democracy.

The strength of Indian democracy lies in its people. The success of ONOE will depend on how actively and responsibly citizens embrace their role as the **anchors of democracy**.

30.6   From Cooperative to Coordinated Federalism: Analysing ONOE's Fiscal Implications through Second-Generation Federalism Theory

Gyana Ranjan Panda [1], Ph.D and Shivendra Rajpoot [2]

[1] *Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan,* [2] *Research Scholar Department of Public Policy, Law and Governance, Central University of Rajasthan*
gyana_pplg@curaj.ac.in

Abstract

This paper examines the historic One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal formulated by Central Government through federalism perspectives. It applies the second-generation federalism theory to analyse the potential transformation of centre-state fiscal relations in India from cooperative to coordinated federalist paradigms. Employing theoretical analysis using Wallace Oates' second-generation fiscal federalism framework, Barry Weingast's market-preserving federalism conditions, and Bridget Fahey's coordinated federalism paradigm, the research analyses constitutional amendments proposed by the Ram Nath Kovind Committee, particularly modifying certain provisions under Articles 82A, 83, and 172 alongside India's existing fiscal architecture, including GST Council operations and Finance Commission mechanisms. The analysis reveals that ONOE represents a fundamental shift toward coordinated federalism characterised by joint decision-making processes and integrated administrative coordination which can prevails post simultaneous elections both at the Union and States level. In Weingast's market-preserving conditions, reduced Model Code disruptions may strengthen common market protection and policy certainty, but unprecedented intergovernmental coordination requirements may strain hierarchical governance and subnational autonomy. States may lose midterm electoral leverage in Finance Commission and GST Council talks due to fiscal ramifications. The implementation cost of ₹7,951 crore requires direct fiscal coordination, while lower election frequency may compromise democratic responsibility for federal balance. The paper concludes that ONOE's federal trajectory depends critically on implementation design and institutional safeguards, requiring the maintenance of constitutional autonomy while enabling systematic coordination, preserving competitive elements alongside cooperation, and ensuring democratic accountability while minimising electoral disruption. The ONOE may strengthen public services delivery, policy implementations and governance through vertical transfer of power fiscally, politically and administratively. The

timeline set for 2034 offers important opportunities for preparing federal adaptation and required safeguards necessitates for its effective implementations.

Keywords: ONOE, fiscal federalism, coordinated federalism, second-generation federalism, centre-state relations, democratic accountability and Finance Commission

About ONOE in Brief

The concept of *One Nation One Election (ONOE)*, also referred to as *simultaneous elections*, seeks to synchronize the electoral cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Under this arrangement, voters would cast their votes for both levels of government on the same day in their respective constituencies. While polling may still occur in phases across the nation, the critical change lies in aligning the terms of Parliament and State Assemblies.

This proposal is intended to address long-standing issues such as the logistical complexities of holding frequent elections, the rising financial burden on the Election Commission, political parties, and the exchequer, and the disruptions caused to governance by repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

The idea of simultaneous elections is not new. After the adoption of the Indian Constitution, elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951–52, 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, this synchronization was disrupted due to premature dissolutions of Assemblies and the Lok Sabha in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since then, with some terms being cut short and others extended, a cycle of staggered elections has emerged.

In 2024, the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections released a comprehensive roadmap outlining how ONOE could be operationalized. The Union Cabinet accepted its recommendations on 18 September 2024, marking a significant step toward electoral reform.

Rationale for Simultaneous Elections

The argument in favor of ONOE is grounded in multiple governance, administrative, and fiscal considerations:

1. **Promotes Consistency in Governance**

   Frequent elections divert the focus of political leaders and bureaucrats towards campaigning and electoral strategy rather than governance. A synchronized election

cycle would enable governments to devote their energy towards developmental policies and welfare delivery.

2. **Prevents Policy Paralysis**

The imposition of the MCC during elections halts ongoing administrative processes and delays the launch of new initiatives. With simultaneous elections, the frequency of MCC interruptions would reduce, ensuring continuity in governance.

3. **Strengthens Focus on Development**

Political parties today invest more time in electoral mobilization than in fulfilling governance commitments. A single election cycle would shift their emphasis towards performance, accountability, and long-term development goals.

4. **Reduces Financial Burden**

Conducting elections requires massive resources—security forces, manpower, equipment, and campaign expenditures. A synchronized model would drastically reduce duplication of efforts and improve fiscal efficiency, creating a more stable environment for investment and growth.

Second-Generation Fiscal Federalism (SGFF)

Fiscal federalism studies how resources are allocated between different levels of government. While *First-Generation Fiscal Federalism (FGFF)* assumed benevolent planners who allocate resources purely for social welfare, *Second-Generation Fiscal Federalism (SGFF)* recognizes that political and fiscal incentives play a vital role in shaping outcomes.

The foundations of SGFF were laid by scholars like Kenneth Arrow, Richard Musgrave, and Paul Samuelson, who emphasized welfare maximization. However, SGFF moves beyond this by highlighting how institutions, local tax incentives, and accountability mechanisms influence federal performance.

Key insights include:

- Subnational governments are more likely to pursue growth-oriented policies if they retain a substantial share of the revenues generated from economic activity.

- Transfer systems should be designed not only for equalization but also to preserve local governments' incentives to foster prosperity.

- The alignment—or misalignment—of political officials' incentives with citizens' welfare explains the varied performance of federal systems.

Instruments of SG Fiscal Federalism

SGFF emphasizes the role of fiscal mechanisms and institutions in strengthening federal structures. The main instruments include:

- **Transfer Systems & Equalization Mechanisms**: Balancing vertical (Centre–State) and horizontal (inter-State) fiscal disparities.

- **Fiscal Interest in Political Market Design**: Ensuring fair and efficient fiscal arrangements that encourage competition and accountability.

- **Fiscal Incentives & Local Autonomy**: Creating space for states and local bodies to raise revenues independently.

- **Citizen-Centric Governance**: Designing fiscal systems that link revenue generation to citizen welfare.

- **Democracy & Decentralization**: Promoting local participation and ownership of development outcomes.

Fiscal Scenarios in India

Indian federalism is constitutionally entrenched, with Articles 268–293 outlining the division of financial powers. Some important provisions include:

- **Taxation Powers**: Articles 268–270 describe taxes levied by the Union but assigned or shared with States.

- **Grants-in-Aid**: Article 275 mandates financial assistance to States in need, based on Finance Commission recommendations.

- **GST Council**: Article 269A ensures joint fiscal decision-making in matters of inter-State trade taxation.

- **Finance Commission**: A constitutional body responsible for recommending resource devolution between Centre and States.

- **State Finance Commissions**: Institutions reviewing local government finances and recommending resource-sharing within States.

- **Seventh Schedule & Local Government Provisions**: Lists I, II, III define fiscal competencies of Union, State, and Concurrent subjects, while the 11th and 12th Schedules extend fiscal federalism to Panchayats and Municipalities.

Thus, India's fiscal federalism is multi-layered, involving Union–State as well as State–local relations, making SGFF highly relevant.

Possibility of Acceptance at the State Level

The ONOE proposal will only succeed if it is backed by broad political consensus. Its adoption depends on:

- **Political Bargaining & Consensus-Building**: States will require both fiscal and administrative incentives to align their electoral cycles with the Centre.
- **Fiscal Realities**: With mounting fiscal stress, States may ultimately find the ONOE model cost-saving and efficient.
- **Policy & Governance Networks**: Effective reforms and governance frameworks would increase acceptance of the proposal.
- **Citizen Empowerment**: Stronger local bodies and fiscal independence would push States to adopt ONOE as a tool for efficiency.

Conclusion: From Cooperative to Coordinated Federalism

The ONOE proposal is not just an electoral reform but a potential reconfiguration of India's federal system. By aligning governance incentives with fiscal structures as envisioned under SGFF, India could move from *cooperative federalism*—where Centre and States collaborate—to *coordinated federalism*, where electoral and fiscal systems are streamlined for efficiency, accountability, and growth.

In this sense, the age-old debate—*Is good politics good economics, or is good economics good politics?*—finds an answer: **good economics ultimately strengthens politics, and sound political choices reinforce economic prosperity.**

30.7   Seeing Something as Something': Aspects of 'One Nation, One Election

Padma Shri Dr. Upendra Baxi

Emeritus Professor of Law
University of Warwick and Delhi
baxiupendra@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the discourse on 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) through the prism of three 'prudences'—jurisprudence, legisprudence, and demosprudence—emphasizing that while the ICSSR Seminar aims to provide a roadmap, much of it is already shaped by ongoing developments in legislative and popular domains. Central to the discussion is the 2024 High-Level Committee Report chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, which proposed a two-phase approach to synchronize elections for Parliament, State Assemblies, and local bodies, alongside a unified electoral roll and voter ID system. The Report, grounded in extensive consultations with political parties, experts, and civil society, highlights the economic, administrative, and governance benefits of simultaneous elections while acknowledging significant dissent rooted in federalism, the basic structure doctrine, and cultural pluralism. Philosophically, the paper engages with Wittgenstein's concept of 'aspect dawning' and Cavell's idea of 'soul blindness' to argue for a shift from adversarial, partisan framing of ONOE to a broader ethical and constitutional perspective. The analysis underscores how ONOE reflects both historical continuities—such as early post-independence simultaneous elections—and contemporary aspirations for stability, efficiency, and democratic renewal. At the same time, it warns of potential risks including over-centralization, misuse of electoral powers, and erosion of institutional autonomy, particularly that of the Election Commission of India. By integrating legal, political, and philosophical dimensions, this paper contends that ONOE represents a moment of 'aspect change' in Indian democracy—an opportunity to rethink electoral reforms within the framework of constitutional morality, inclusive governance, and respect for diversity.

We live under the theory of three 'prudences'. The first is the knowledge of the first principles of law, which we think we know but really do not (jurisprudence., Second,

legisprudence (the prudence of the legislatures-- an unexplored area of the dignity of theory and practice of lawmaking by legislatures). Third, an area of what I call *'demosprudence'* (the prudence of people. [Baxi, 2016, 2024]. A consideration of the three prudences in play in the 'one nation, one election' discourse is of course desirable; the provision of a 'roadmap' by this Seminar is almost rendered superfluous because it stands already provided by dynamic developments in legisprudence and demosprudence.

The painstaking and participation-based former President Ram Nath Kovind Committee Report, 2024, which recommended a two-phase approach for simultaneous elections-- phase one directed towards synchronising Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections, and Phase two to synchronise Municipality and Panchayat elections (within 100 days of the first phase). The committee also suggested a single electoral roll and EPIC for all three tiers. In favour of this proposition, it is argued that such a system could 'reduce election-related expenditures, enhance administrative efficiency, and promote policy continuity.' These are grounds which will be examined in the ongoing JSC and Parliament when it enacts the necessary changes in the election law and the Constitution. This Report has already been accepted in principle by the Union Executive and now the legislative proposals, including the text of possible constitutional amendments, is under scrutiny by the Joint Committee of Parliament [JPC], whose term has recently been extended until this winter session.

It had already had presentations from former Chief Justices of India Justices-- Jagdish Singh Khehar, D Y Chandrachud, and D.R. Khanna. All of them seem to be of the view that while the proposed reforms will safely run the gauntlet of the basic structure of the Constitution. At least one of them has been reported as having sai (as per the media reports) that while clause 82A(5), rightly empowers the Election Commission of India (ECI) to defer assembly elections, there is some appropriate scope for 'strong safeguards to prevent potential misuse of these powers'. It would be premature to say how, and why, the JPC may finally recommend but the anxieties about wide conferral of powers is already a cause of concern for the Supreme Court, sitting or retired Justices.

Most progress in human affairs is made, however, by what the great philosopher of the 20th Century Ludwig Wittgenstein (and post-Wittgensteinian thinkers) talked about-- the notion of ' aspect dawning'. which began with a simple- looking observation in his famous *Philosophical Investigations*, he wondered:

'*Could there be human beings lacking in the capacity to see something as something- and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have?* Would this defect be comparable' to 'colour-blindness or tn not having absolute pitch? -We will call it "aspect-blindness"- and will next consider what might be meant by this.' (emphasis added).[Phlilosophical Investigations.

Wittgenstein thus posed a germinal question, in my view, relevant to any activity and action relating to the emergence of social action for social transformation. In party political discourse, ONOE is seen largely as an 'us' v 'them' terms. The accompanying party-political discourse thus then impugns the ruling party motivation behind a legislative proposal. But I here suggest a way forward though the change of discourse to 'aspect', and 'meaning' blindness', with an imprtant caveat on the ableist diction deploying the term 'blindness'—theorists ought to pursue and further freedom from ableism, patriarchy, speciesism, and any kind of oligarchy. They ought to pose newer ways of perceiving political and social change and should change themselves in the first place, and totally avoid discrimination based on sex, gender, ability, place of birth and all kings of 'ethne'-ethic justifying all sorts of predatory and violent practices. necessarily involved in devising policies and in making laws--- a command of Article 15, and in general, of the Indian constitutionalism.Of course, Ludwig Wittgenstein embarked on the philosophical/linguistic/aesthetic ecology where terms and concepts were not confronted with challenges now emerging from the large discursive contexts of contemporary human rights (Baxi, 1993, 2026, 4th edition, forthcoming). Yet his concepts of aspect and meaning 'blindness' remain pertinent to the three 'prudences' (mentioned in Para 1).

We come to a different understanding of aspect-dawning with Heidegger, whose great insight was the notion of being as entities, enabling the grasp of relation of being of things - objects, assemblages – and the being termed 'human.' Being human always entails entering into relationships with the world of beingful things, a vast array of 'wordless objects,' these non-human entities which remain 'ready-to-hand' (though never fully 'present-at-hand') for use and manipulation and for 'concernful dealings' by human beings. At stake in Wittgenstein remain the issues concerning seeing and representation; with Heidegger we arrive at the threshold of complexity of relationship between the beings of things (being) and being human (Being.) In both, 'seeing in the world' or 'noticing an aspect' remains crucial. Aspect- dawning in both, though very differently, draws attention, to repeat, to 'an occupation with the object which is the focus of experience.'[see Mulhall

at 106-120; see also the contemplations by William Day (2010).] Stanely Cavell has extended the Wittgenstein concept of aspect dawning to 'soul blindness ' arising from the failure   By this term, Cavell means the failure to see 'others or ourselves as human" not in the sense of 'Homo sapiens as a biological kind but in the sense of humanity as an ethical kind', Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen apply the notion of soul dawning to say that it consist of 'acknowledging the humanity of others without erasing of discourse'[at 740].

I suggest that aspect dawning has taken place through the ONOE discourse, because the earlier expereice of simultaneous elections, which absuptly, came to an end with the imposition of the first Presidential Rule in the State of Kerla, followed nearly by 100 President's Role rule regimes, resulted in a severe discontinuity in the timetable of the State elections [Rajeev Dhavan, Lokendra Malik] .Various reports of the Law Commission of India , and even Election Commission, had proposed simultaneous elections   but the aspect change only became available through the ONOE discourse. The discourse of diversity through monism (or 'oneism) in elections was preceded by several experiments in that direction, like one nation, one tax – as in GST--, or one nation, one law (state Uniform Civil Codes)[Yamini Aiyar & Louise Tillin].

Many questions at least need further considered. The first, which we do not here pursue, is the question of reversibility of aspect dawning, in Wittgenstein and beyond. True, this is the 'expereice of meaning' (in Wittgenstein's words) but when do some visual stimuli act towards a 'reorganization', or dis-organization, of the field of perception? And whose, which, perceptions (experiences of meaning) do the talk about—for example, those who manage to organize/disorganize perception or those who continue to struggle against the states of rightlessnes , and/or peacefully and non-violently protest the wanton acts of evil such as genocide, femicide, democide, ecocide, or epistemicide?   Perhaps, the events/elements of the crimes aganst humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression in the Statute of the International Court of Justice (known also as Rome Treaty, subscribed to by a very large number of States as to be eligible for description as near-universal law making treaty regime) may furnish some concrete guidelines to adjudge both the violation of human rights and the core right to be, and to remain, human?

The second question is about the gains of ONOE. The Kovind Committee's main recommendations may perhaps be summarized as follows. First its rationale for simultaneous election is that frequent elections create an 'atmosphere of uncertainty' and simultaneous election will ensure stability and predictability in 'governance by minimising disruption and policy paralysis'. It also mentions increased voter participation, a higher

economic growtha lower inflation, increased investments, and improved quality of government expenditure. The Committee recommended a framework for holding simultaneous election which will require constitutional amendments. At the time of the next election for Lok Sabha, all state assemblies and local bodies should be dissolved, irrespective of the remaining term as a one-time measure. This will synchronise all elections. The Committee recommended holding elections for Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies at the same time, and that of local bodies within 100 days from then. Of course, recognizing that a hung legislature at any point of time would render them out of synchronisation for the next simultaneous election, the Committee recommended that fresh election should be held for a hung legislature or a local body for a reduced term which will be equivalent to the remaining period of the five-year cycle for the simultaneous election. This implies that if fresh election for a state assembly or Lok Sabha is held two years after the simultaneous election, its term will be only three years. This will synchronise all elections every five years. Further, it also said that the constitutional amendments in relation to terms of Parliament and state assemblies will not require ratification by states, except for the local bodies that would require ratification by at least half of the states. But ratification by half the states is constitutional necessity if its recommendation of a single electoral roll were accepted because for local bodies the   preparation of electoral roll by State Election Committees (SECs) is governed by respective state laws, which allow them to prepare separate electoral rolls, whereas others require them to utilise the electoral roll prepared by ECI. The Committee observed that these amendments will also require ratification by at least half of the states. Further, it recommended that ECI and SECs should carry out planning and estimation for logistical arrangements around.

This second aspect may perhaps require some extended discussion on how the voting lists should be prepared in the light of developments since the Kovind Committee. I refer to the developments surrounding   forthcoming elections in Bihar where the ECI has initiated its SIR (Special Intensive Revision), as a prelude to a nationwide SIR later. No doubt, Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the 'superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for the conduct of elections to Parliament and State legislature shall vest with the EC' but Article 326 provides that every citizen who is not less than 18 years of age shall be entitled to be registered as a voter (elector). Section 19 Representation of Peoples Act requires that the person is not less than 18 years of age on the qualifying date and is ordinarily resident in the constituency, and Section 16 disqualifies a non-citizen from being enrolled in the electoral roll.

The upshot of this SIR exercise revealed 65 lakhs non-included voters, because of various reasons. In an ongoing adjudication, the Supreme Court of India has upheld the 'voters right to know' and 'to preserve their constitutional right to remain on the electoral roll'. Serving these rights, Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi have ordered that the physical 'lists have to be displayed on the notice boards of the booth level officers (BLOs)/block deveopment/panchayat office to facilitate manual access'. Moreover, the 'interim order would act as a precedent in future legal disputes regarding SIR in other states. The unmediated requirements of giving full reasons for deletion should not be impeded by the will and convenience of the block level officers to to know why they have been deleted from the roll'. Put it differently, far from being the exercise of sheer bureaucratic power, fundamental constitutional duties of the right to remain on the roll from henceforth has become the basic grundorm of all action entailed in the labours of SIR.

Awaiting further normative and empirical studies, one has still to say thatthe current 'vote chori' campaign tends to endanger somewhat the integrity status of the ECI. If so, this is a net loss to the Indian constitutionalism, soon after we celebrated the diamond jubilee of the Indian Republic. However, the present ONOE moment offers plentiful scope to at least re-think the composition of the ECI. Should it not have more social presence, or may we continue the present process of structuring than the ECI being the sole preserve of distinguished bureaucrats? How may we, consistent with the near exclusive E 'control' and 'supremacy' have at least additional mechanisms for consultations with the worst-off peoples (or underclasses). Further, is it too early to anticipate the future generations presaged by Generation X and beyond?

References

- Yamini Aiyar & Louise Tillin (2020) "One nation," BJP, and the future of Indian Federalism, I*ndiaRevie*w,19:2,117-135, DOI10.1080/14736489.2020.1744994
- Upendra Baxi, 'Basic Structure: A "Solid Foundation" or a "Fragile Basion"? in V.K.Ahuja, Ram Niwas Sharma, Himagshu Rajan Nath (ed), *Revisiting Kesvananda Bhrarthi Verdict on its 50th Anniversary* (Gauhati, National Law University, and Judicial Academy, Assam, 2024)
- Upendra Baxi, 'Demosprudence and Socially Responsible/Response-Able Criticism: The NJAC Decision and Beyond, *NUJS L. Review,* 9:153-172 (2016).
- Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights*, (2013, Third Edition; 4th edition, in press, forthcoming 2026).

- Willam Day, 'Wanting to Say Something', Aspect Blindness and the Language'' in William Day & Victor J. Krebs, *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (2010).
- Rajeev Dhavan, *President's Rule in the States* (Bombay, N.M.Tripathi ,1979).
- Jonathan Hovercraft and David Owen, 'Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière', *Political Theory,* 44:6; 739-763 (2016).
- Lokendra Malik, *The* Power *Of Raisina Hill- The Constitutional Position, Functions And Powers of The President Of India* (Delhi, Lexis-Nexis,2015)
- Stepen Mullhal, Heidegger and Being and Time (New York, Routledge, Second Edition, 2005
- Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953, T.E. M. Abscom, tr, 1953) at 213f.

30.8   Development, Sustainability and Governance in India: Role of One Nation, One Election (ONOE)

Dr. (Prof). Subhabrata Dutta

Professor, Former Head, Department of Social Work, Former Dean, Students' Welfare, Assam University (A Central University), Silchar, Assam.

sduttasw@gmail.com

Abstract

Development will be very short lived and self-destructive unless it is sustainable in the sense that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment and Development: 1987). This suggests that economic, environment, migration policies, international law, and health must be systematically coordinated for sustainable economic, social and political development (Ramanathan, Link, 2004, 1999; Rogge: 2001; GCM: 2018; Dutta 2023). Development is to be truly fruitful and to be sustainable in nature with a long-term vision. Resources like land, forest, water, minerals are limited and these limited resources to be utilized most efficiently and economically to get full value benefits out of them. Development has also to give due regard to equity and social justice (Agarwal: 2004, Dutta: 2018). Development is to be delivered by multiple agencies including the state. The state has to limit itself or contract its role so that other players like market and civil society are given adequate space and scope to contribute to development. Pluralisation has been necessitated as the state alone cannot respond to the diverse needs of the development. Different actors who came into the picture for development include, under *State*, local and national governments and multilateral agencies (public sector banks and other financial agencies under dominant control of state), under *Market*, local traders, national and multinational companies, and under *Civil Society*, citizens, community based organisations (CBOs), and national and international NGOs. Thus governance as a paradigm includes real multiplicity or plurality of institutions acting in unison to influence development from different levels. In the present global context, it is natural that 'Governance' is considered as an attempt to widen the scope of public administration by stretching beyond formal governments. According to the World Bank, governance is "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". Here, the concept of governance is concerned directly with the management of the development process, involving both the public and the private sectors. Moreover In

a global economy, in developmental debates, in developing, emerging, and advanced economies, "Governance" has become a key concept.

Therefore, to achieve sustainability in development process a proper policy needs to be framed. Moreover, the pace of development needs to be enhanced. India is a federal country and different provinces (states) have their own government. These governments are formed in different years and come to an end after its five years tenure. This election system acts as roadblock to proper implementation and timely execution of many development programmes, Moreover, expense for development programmes is being increased. Accordingly, the Union cabinet of India has approved "<u>One Nation, One Election (ONOE)</u>" plan, a landmark move towards synchronizing electoral processes across India as per recommendations from a high-level panel headed by former President Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Under these circumstances, this paper will discuss the concept of development through governance from sustainable perspective and the potentialities of ONOE for strengthening this process.

Keywords: Development, Sustainability, Governance, Democracy, Election.

Introduction

Human beings, as social beings, aspire for basic needs—housing, healthcare, income, education, and safe drinking water—for a desirable standard of life. Beyond material needs, humans seek well-being, community, and dignity. Development, governance, and sustainability are intertwined concepts that collectively shape these aspirations.

Development

- Development thrives when society recognizes opportunities and challenges, responding collectively.

- Government policies, laws, and programs can **stimulate and support development**, but they cannot enforce it without people's participation.

- True development is people-centered; it should release people's action, not substitute for it.

Key Idea: Development moves communities from underdeveloped situations to improved states. Human beings are the ultimate resource, and their awareness, aspirations, and attitudes determine progress.

Human Development

- Since the 1990s, **human development** has emerged as a central idea in global development debates.

- Development is no longer judged merely by economic growth but by holistic progress in political, social, cultural, and environmental spheres.

- The **goal is to create enabling environments** where people live long, healthy, productive, and creative lives.

Mahbub-ul-Haq's Human Development Paradigm emphasizes empowerment, cooperation, equity, sustainability, and security as foundations of human well-being.

Goals of Sustainable Development (SDGs)

The **17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030)** outline priorities:

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation, infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

Governance

- Development is impossible without effective governance that prioritizes **human capital development**.

- The World Bank and IMF introduced governance as a concept in the late 1980s, stressing its role in ensuring equitable growth.
- Governance ensures efficient administration, responsiveness, and inclusivity.

Good Governance

- Governance is "good" when it delivers commitments efficiently, transparently, and accountably.
- It minimizes corruption, respects minority voices, and ensures vulnerable groups are heard.
- **Eight Characteristics of Good Governance:**
    1. Participation
    2. Transparency
    3. Responsiveness
    4. Consensus Orientation
    5. Equity & Inclusiveness
    6. Effectiveness & Efficiency
    7. Accountability
    8. Rule of Law

Impact: Good governance ensures sustainable human development, protects marginalized communities, and addresses poverty.

Issues for Sustainable Development in India

- Agricultural productivity and food security
- Forest, soil, and water conservation
- Tackling global warming
- Biodiversity preservation
- Waste treatment and recycling
- Energy efficiency
- Population control
- Literacy and education
- Disease control and public health
- Community participation in development activities

One Nation, One Election (ONOE)

A proposed reform to synchronize elections at national and state levels. Supported by recommendations of a high-level panel led by former President Ram Nath Kovind.

Advantages

- One-time election every five years reduces disruption.
- Financial savings due to reduced election expenditure.
- Administrative efficiency as governance won't be frequently interrupted.
- Reduced strain on government offices and transport systems during elections.

Challenges

- India's diversity makes synchronization complex.
- State and central governments may follow different political policies.
- Local contexts (villages, cities, Sixth Schedule areas) have unique development needs.
- Awareness among rural voters may remain low.
- Risk of mid-term crises leading to instability.

Conclusion

Development, sustainability, and governance are deeply interlinked. While ONOE promises efficiency and reduced costs, it must balance India's diversity and democratic federal structure. Good governance, citizen participation, and inclusive policies are critical to ensuring that reforms like ONOE contribute positively to India's long-term development and sustainability.

30.9   Bytes and Ballots: Digital Democracy and Civic Engagement in a Simultaneous Electoral Environment

Sathyapriya B[1], Dr. K. Sathyamurthi[2]

[1] PhD Scholar (FT), Madras School of Social Work, Egmore-08
[2] Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Egmore-08
bsathya2000@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the intersection of digital democracy and the proposed One Nation One Election (ONOE) policy in India. It examines how synchronized elections, when combined with digital tools such as e-governance platforms, social media campaigns, and civic literacy programs, influence voter behavior and public participation. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys, content analysis, and expert interviews, the research assesses the impact of digital engagement on political awareness, voter mobilization, and representation across urban and rural populations. While digital platforms offer potential for enhancing inclusion and reducing electoral fatigue, the study also identifies challenges related to algorithmic bias, misinformation, and the digital divide. The findings highlight the need for ethical frameworks and inclusive digital infrastructure to ensure that technological advancements genuinely support democratic values in a simultaneous electoral environment.

Keywords: One Nation One Election (ONOE), digital democracy, civic engagement, voter awareness, electoral participation, digital campaigning, social media, electoral literacy, misinformation, digital divide, algorithmic influence, political communication.

Introduction: Democracy in Digital Transformation

India's democracy is at the crossroads of two significant transitions:

One Nation, One Election (ONOE) – A policy proposal aimed at synchronizing parliamentary and state assembly elections to streamline governance.

- Promises reduced costs and administrative burden.
- Enables continuity in governance by avoiding repeated interruptions due to elections.
- Allows governments to focus on long-term policy reforms.

- Critics caution that it could weaken India's federal character and reduce the influence of regional political voices.

Digital Transformation – With over 850 million internet users, India is one of the world's largest digital democracies.

- Political participation is now heavily mediated by social media and digital platforms.
- Traditional campaigning merges with algorithm-driven targeting and influence.
- Information dissemination has become instantaneous, yet often distorted.

This study explores how ONOE and digital democracy intersect to influence civic engagement, voter behavior, and the health of India's democratic process.

Current Electoral System

- India conducts Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections at staggered intervals, creating a near-continuous electoral cycle.
- ONOE proposes synchronizing elections to improve efficiency, cut costs, and avoid campaign fatigue.

The Digital Landscape

- India has more than 850 million internet users.
- Social media is now central to political communication. Campaigns are:
  - Data-driven – targeted based on personal profiles.
  - Personalized – reaching voters with tailored messages.
  - Rapid and viral – memes, videos, and reels spread quickly.

Emerging Concerns

- Misinformation – Fake news and doctored visuals spread widely.
- Echo chambers – Algorithms reinforce existing biases, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.
- Algorithmic manipulation – Parties with resources can amplify narratives disproportionately.
- Digital divide – Marginalized and rural populations remain excluded, raising issues of equity.

Research Focus

This study seeks to answer:

- How do digital platforms shape voter behavior in synchronized elections?

- Will ONOE amplify civic voices or marginalize them in the digital space?

- What safeguards are required for an inclusive, informed digital democracy in India?

Research Methodology

Quantitative:

- Survey of **500 respondents** (urban and rural Tamil Nadu).

- Variables: voter awareness, social media usage, exposure to political content, trust in digital platforms, attitudes toward ONOE.

Qualitative:

- Content analysis of Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) political campaigns during 2023–24 elections.

- Interviews with 10 stakeholders: political strategists, campaign managers, ECI officials, civic tech experts.

- Data analyzed with SPSS (correlations) and thematic coding.

Key Findings

- Urban digital reliance (72%) – Urban respondents cited social media as their main election information source; only 38% rural respondents did so.

- Support for ONOE (65%) – Majority saw synchronized elections as reducing fatigue and improving governance.

- Digital engagement correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$) – High positive correlation between social media engagement and likelihood of voting.

Content Analysis:

- Ruling parties emphasized *national unity & development*.

- Opposition focused on *regional autonomy & social justice*.

- Short-form content (memes, reels, videos) attracted maximum youth engagement.

- **Misinformation** gained more traction than verified content.

Stakeholder views: Smaller parties risk marginalization in a synchronized, digital-first campaign environment.

Triangulated Insights

- **Digital Engagement Paradox** – Social media boosts participation but also increases vulnerability to misinformation.

- **ONOE Perception** – Positive for efficiency, but risks drowning out local issues in favor of national narratives.

- **Trust Mechanisms** – Regulation, digital literacy, and fact-checking are essential for maintaining credibility.

Discussion: Digital Democracy in a Synchronized Context

1. **Digital Platforms and Voter Behavior**
   - Engagement increases participation, especially among youth.
   - Simultaneously, misinformation undermines informed decision-making.

2. **Civic Voice Amplification vs Marginalization**
   - ONOE could amplify dominant national narratives.
   - Regional and smaller actors risk being sidelined due to limited online visibility.

3. **Building Inclusive Digital Democracy**
   - Need for **media literacy campaigns**.
   - Strong **fact-checking institutions**.
   - **Algorithmic accountability** to prevent bias.
   - Integrating **offline civic engagement** to include rural citizens.

Conclusion: Balancing Efficiency and Inclusivity

- ONOE, combined with digital democracy, is a **double-edged sword**.
- It can improve efficiency and participation but risks reinforcing inequalities and sidelining local concerns.
- The outcome depends on:
  - Strong institutional safeguards,
  - Regulation of digital campaigns,
  - Closing the digital divide, and
  - Active citizen engagement.

If implemented responsibly, ONOE could become a catalyst for a **more vibrant and participatory democracy**. Without safeguards, it risks deepening polarization and weakening inclusivity.

30.10   Inclusive Ballots: Addressing the Needs of Senior Citizens under the One Nation, One Election Reform

Sandra K[1] and K Sathyamurthi[2]

[1] *PhD Scholar,Full Time, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai*
[2] *Associate Professor, Madras School Of Social Work, Chennai*
sandrasurendran732@gmail.com

Abstract

India's electoral reforms, particularly the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal, seek to synchronize national and state-level elections to enhance administrative efficiency and reduce policy disruption. While promising in intent, such reforms raise critical questions about the inclusivity of the democratic process—especially for elderly voters, a rapidly growing and often marginalized demographic. It further examines the readiness of the Election Commission of India, reviews inclusive frameworks like SVEEP and postal voting, and integrates global best practices and rights-based approaches. The paper proposes a layered model of inclusive electoral participation for the elderly under ONOE and recommends targeted reforms to ensure democratic equity. Findings underscore the need for age-sensitive electoral planning to prevent the systemic marginalization of older adults and to uphold constitutional mandates of universal suffrage and non-discrimination.

Keywords: Elderly voters, One Nation One Election, electoral reform, inclusive democracy, political participation

Introduction

India's democratic journey, since the first general elections in 1951–52, has been characterized by continual evolution in electoral policies, voter engagement, and institutional frameworks. With over 900 million eligible voters, the country's electoral process must cater to an immensely diverse population spanning different regions, languages, castes, socioeconomic groups, genders, and age brackets. Among these, elderly voters represent a growing and often overlooked constituency whose full participation is essential to a truly inclusive democracy. Elderly individuals often perceive electoral participation not merely as a civic duty but as a meaningful avenue to assert identity, agency, and belonging in a society that increasingly renders them invisible, many older adults express a yearning to be "seen, heard, and counted" in public and civic spaces,

viewing acts like voting as vital expressions of continued relevance in a changing nation.(sandra & sathyamurthi,2025)

The 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal aimed at synchronizing elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies has sparked a nationwide debate regarding its feasibility, desirability, and long-term democratic impact. Rooted in the idea of holding simultaneous elections every five years, ONOE promises to reduce election-related expenditure, minimize the frequency of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) restrictions, and provide administrative continuity for governance and policy implementation. Proponents argue that the current cycle of frequent and staggered elections across states hampers development initiatives, disrupts public administration, and drains financial resources. According to the Law Commission of India (2018), simultaneous elections would enhance efficiency in electoral management and allow governments to focus more on governance rather than constant campaigning.

Constitutionally, the right to vote is enshrined under Article 326 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees universal adult suffrage to all citizens aged 18 and above, regardless of caste, gender, or socioeconomic status (Government of India, 1950). This legal provision implies not only the right to cast a vote but also the responsibility of the state to facilitate access to the electoral process.The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and various Supreme Court judgments reinforce accessibility as a component of non-discrimination, mandating the government to ensure barrier-free participation for all, including elderly and disabled citizens (Government of India, 2016). These constitutional and legal considerations make it imperative that any electoral reform,especially one as expansive as ONOE must be examined through the lens of inclusivity and accessibility.

Elderly citizens, who comprise a growing proportion of India's population due to increased life expectancy and declining birth rates, already face multiple structural barriers to voting. The shift to synchronized, large-scale elections could intensify these challenges. Higher voter turnout on a single election day may lead to overcrowded polling booths, long waiting times, and logistical congestion, disproportionately affecting senior citizens with mobility, health, or sensory issues.Centralized election planning could result in a "one-size-fits-all" model that undermines region-specific innovations that currently support elderly participation, such as mobile polling stations or staggered polling schedules. Without a deliberate strategy for inclusivity, ONOE could inadvertently sideline elderly voters, undermining the very democratic ideals it seeks to strengthen.

To address these complex interactions between electoral reform and elderly inclusion, this paper introduces the Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework for the Elderly under ONOE. This proposed model conceptualizes electoral participation as a multi-layered system shaped by systemic, operational, and individual-level factors. At the systemic level, it accounts for constitutional mandates and international obligations promoting accessibility. The operational level assesses the role of election machinery, including SVEEP campaigns, postal voting, and infrastructural readiness. It also centers the specific needs of elderly voters—physical accessibility, transportation support, digital literacy, and civic education—while recognizing mediating factors such as regional disparities, gender-based exclusion, and institutional preparedness. The framework ultimately envisions an outcome of active, empowered, and dignified political engagement for elderly voters.

By applying this framework, the paper aims to critically evaluate whether ONOE, as currently conceptualized, supports or impairs elderly voter participation. Through this lens, the study calls for policy attention not only to cost-efficiency and political synchronization but also to age-inclusive electoral planning,reaffirming India's democratic commitment to equity, participation, and constitutional rights for all citizens.

Challenges faced by elder voters

Elderly voters in India encounter a range of structural and socio-technical barriers that inhibit their ability to participate in elections meaningfully. Physical inaccessibility remains a primary challenge; many polling stations lack essential infrastructure such as ramps, wheelchairs, and seating, making it difficult for voters with mobility impairments to cast their ballots comfortably (HelpAge India, 2020),long queues and prolonged waiting times disproportionately affect seniors, especially those with chronic illnesses or limited stamina. These issues are exacerbated in high-turnout constituencies where elderly voters are not prioritized.Physical and functional limitations,including mobility impairments, chronic health conditions, and age-related disabilities—often restrict the ability of older adults to travel to polling stations, particularly in rural regions where health infrastructure is weaker and travel distances are longer (UNFPA & HelpAge India, 2020). These difficulties are compounded by the erosion of traditional joint family systems, which historically offered elders the support required to navigate civic duties. The decline of intergenerational support structures increasingly leaves many seniors—especially widowed or single elderly women—without adequate assistance to reach or access voting facilities (UNFPA, 2017).Polling stations themselves are frequently ill-equipped to accommodate

the elderly, lacking essential features such as ramps, handrails, seating, or even adequate signage for those with sensory impairments (ECI, 2021).

Socio-economic disadvantages also play a critical role in disenfranchisement. Elderly individuals from lower-income backgrounds or with limited formal education are less likely to be aware of their voting rights, electoral procedures, or special provisions such as postal ballots, thereby exacerbating their exclusion. Rural–urban disparities deepen this divide, as older voters in remote areas contend with poor public transportation, scattered polling infrastructure, and minimal outreach. Gender disparities further intensify the problem; older women, particularly those living alone or with disabilities, face heightened vulnerability to neglect, isolation, and even abuse, which can serve as powerful deterrents to political participation (HelpAge India, 2020). These intersecting barriers underscore the urgent need for targeted electoral reforms and inclusive infrastructure to safeguard the constitutional rights of India's ageing population.Transportation is another critical factor limiting access. In rural and semi-urban areas, inadequate public transportation infrastructure often results in elderly voters being unable to reach polling stations without assistance (UNFPA & HelpAge India, 2020). The shift towards digitalization in electoral services—such as online voter registration, e-EPIC downloads, and SMS-based communication—has further alienated elderly populations who frequently lack digital literacy or access to smartphones and the internet (UNFPA, 2017).

Impact of ONOE on elderly voter participation

While ONOE might reduce the frequency of elections, its impact on elderly voters is multifaceted and requires closer examination of its structural and logistical implications.

- Increased Voter Density: One of the primary consequences of simultaneous elections is the increase in voter turnout at polling stations due to the consolidation of state and national elections. This can result in crowded environments, longer waiting periods, and overstressed polling infrastructure. For elderly voters—particularly those with health issues, reduced mobility, or sensitivity to high-density settings—such congestion can be a strong deterrent to in-person voting (Palshikar, 2019; UNFPA & HelpAge India, 2020). Without mechanisms such as dedicated counters or priority lanes, ONOE could unintentionally exclude seniors from active participation.

- Reduced Local Flexibility: Under the current staggered election model, local electoral bodies have some discretion to implement voter outreach and accessibility strategies

suited to their demographic needs. ONOE's standardization across states may limit this flexibility, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that overlooks region-specific challenges. As a result, the elderly—whose needs vary significantly between urban and rural areas—might find themselves underserved by centralized outreach and scheduling strategies (Law Commission of India, 2018).

- Centralized Logistics: While a synchronized electoral calendar might improve logistical efficiency at the national level, it could also lead to diminished attention to micro-level voter inclusion needs. The complexity of coordinating a nationwide electoral event risks deprioritizing specialized services such as mobile polling units, assisted transport for immobile voters, and tailored communication materials for the elderly. If not addressed with targeted policies, the centralization inherent in ONOE could marginalize older adults by failing to acknowledge their unique voting requirements (ECI, 2021; UNFPA, 2017).

These aspects suggest that while ONOE may reduce systemic costs and frequency of elections, it simultaneously poses a risk of deepening existing barriers for elderly voters unless mitigated by inclusive planning and localized execution strategies.

Institutional preparedness

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has initiated several measures to enhance electoral inclusion, such as priority queues for senior citizens, postal voting options for those above 80 years of age, and awareness drives under the SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) program (ECI, 2021). However, these efforts remain unevenly implemented across states and often lack consistency and monitoring (UNFPA & HelpAge India, 2020). The electoral staff are not uniformly trained to address the specific needs of elderly voters, highlighting a preparedness gap in institutional response.

Recent empirical analyses also underscore that the design and operation of India's electoral framework often fail to account for the functional diversity of its ageing population. As noted by Bhattacharya and Banerjee (2021), mobility-related challenges, lack of access to assistive devices, and absence of door-to-door voter support mechanisms have rendered the electoral process exclusionary for many older adults. Rural elderly populations are disproportionately affected due to limited availability of transport and lower infrastructural development at polling booths. The situation is compounded by the absence of community-

based electoral support systems, which could otherwise offer logistical and emotional assistance to older voters.

Moreover, the psychological impact of persistent neglect and social invisibility contributes to self-exclusion among elderly citizens, many of whom believe their participation holds little value in influencing policy or political outcomes. This perception is reinforced by a lack of targeted political messaging and campaigning toward senior citizens, despite their growing demographic and electoral significance. Bhattacharya and Banerjee (2021) also observe that the current electoral apparatus lacks a monitoring mechanism to measure age-specific participation or assess accessibility barriers, further sidelining the issue within mainstream electoral reforms.

These systemic omissions reflect not only logistical gaps but also a broader absence of age-sensitive policy integration within India's democratic institutions. As the ONOE reform seeks to centralize and streamline the voting process, failure to address these existing deficiencies could widen the democratic deficit for elderly citizens. Therefore, institutional preparedness must go beyond piecemeal provisions and move toward a comprehensive inclusion framework that actively anticipates and accommodates the diverse needs of the aging electorate.

Global and national frameworks for elderly electoral participation

Globally, several countries have adopted targeted electoral practices to support the political participation of older adults, recognizing it as both a democratic necessity and a matter of human rights. International frameworks such as the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasize inclusive civic engagement as a key component of well-being in later life. However, the absence of a binding international convention specifically dedicated to the rights of older persons has contributed to their continued invisibility in electoral policy and practice (Paiola,2024). While legal protections and best practices exist in many nations—such as postal voting in Germany and the UK, mobile polling stations in Australia and Canada, and assistive services at polling booths in Nordic countries—implementation remains uneven, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Studies show that even in countries with strong legal provisions, older adults—especially those aged 85 and above, those with disabilities, or older women living alone—continue to face challenges such as limited physical accessibility, lack of transportation to polling sites, and difficulty understanding or accessing postal voting systems (AGE Platform Europe,

2021). Moreover, the digitalization of electoral information and registration processes, while beneficial to many, often excludes those with low digital literacy, disproportionately affecting the elderly(Purdam, K., & Taylor, H. 2023). These challenges underscore the need for a rights-based approach to electoral inclusion that goes beyond basic accessibility and incorporates targeted outreach, voter education, and support systems. Such measures are critical to empowering elderly voters as informed agents of change, rather than passive recipients of electoral policy.

Framework	Scope	Key Provisions for Elderly Voters
Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing	International	Encourages removal of political participation barriers for older persons
UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)	International	Promotes age-friendly systems, including voting accessibility
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	International	Mandates accessible voting for persons with disabilities (includes many elderly)
Constitution of India (Art. 326)	National (India)	Universal adult suffrage including elderly voters
Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016	National (India)	Requires accessible election materials and polling booths
SVEEP (ECI)	National (India)	Voter education targeting senior citizens
Postal Ballot Provisions (ECI, 2020 onward)	National (India)	Enables remote voting for voters above 80
National Policy for Senior Citizens (2011/2019)	National (India)	Recommends active political engagement of elderly

Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework for the Elderly under ONOE
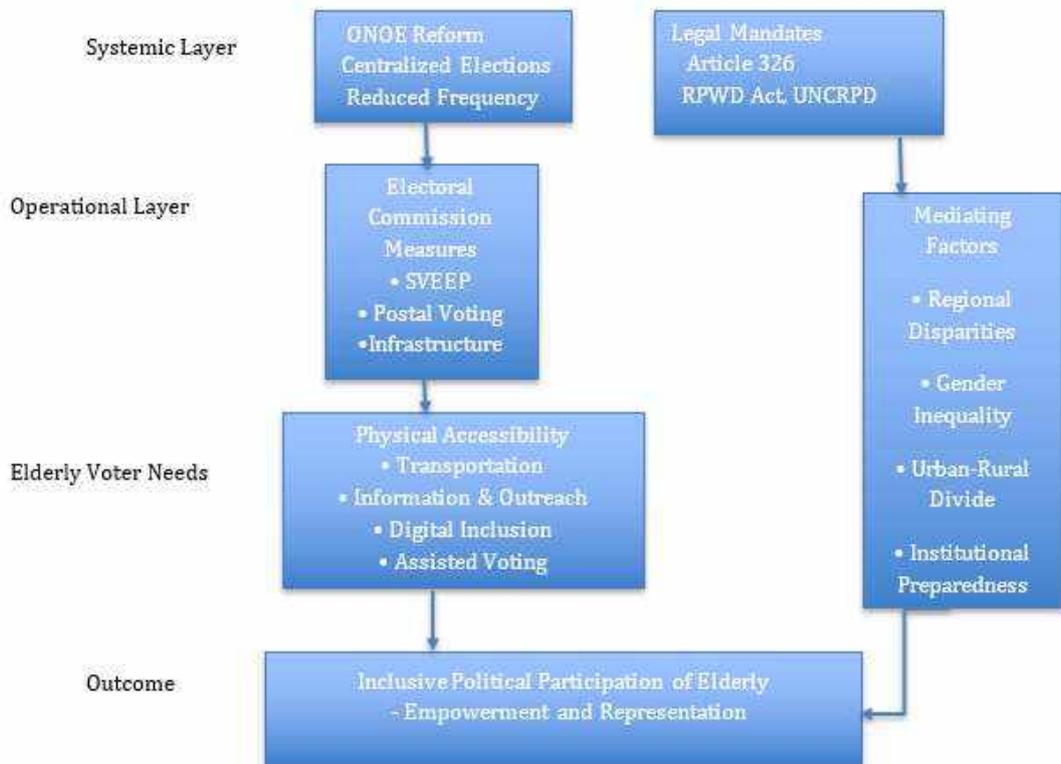
The model illustrates the multi-layered dynamics influencing elderly voter participation in the context of India's proposed One Nation, One Election (ONOE) reform. It integrates systemic, operational, and individual-level factors to outline how various components interact to either facilitate or hinder the inclusion of elderly voters.

The Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework for the Elderly under ONOE encapsulates five interrelated layers that collectively determine the extent to which elderly voters are included in the electoral process. At the systemic level, the ONOE proposal introduces centralized, synchronized elections, governed by constitutional and legal instruments such as Article 326 of the Indian Constitution, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These provisions establish the legal basis for ensuring that voting remains accessible and non-discriminatory for all citizens, including older adults. The operational layer refers to the on-ground implementation mechanisms spearheaded by the Election Commission of India and associated bodies. This includes targeted initiatives such as SVEEP campaigns, postal ballots for voters aged 80 and above, accessible polling infrastructure, and emerging home voting options—each intended to reduce barriers to participation. At the center of the

framework are the specific needs of elderly voters, encompassing physical accessibility, reliable transportation, digital literacy support, assisted voting services, and age-sensitive voter education. These needs must be met to enable older citizens to participate meaningfully and independently. Mediating factors, such as regional disparities in electoral preparedness, urban-rural divides, gender-based exclusion, and variations in institutional capacity, influence the effectiveness of reforms and interventions. When all these layers interact positively, the desired outcome is realized: inclusive, active, and dignified political participation of elderly voters. This model emphasizes that without deliberately addressing the unique challenges faced by older adults, reforms like ONOE may risk deepening their marginalization rather than fostering democratic equity.

Conclusion

The proposal for One Nation, One Election (ONOE) represents a pivotal shift in India's electoral architecture, promising greater efficiency, cost reduction, and administrative streamlining. However, as this paper has demonstrated, the implementation of such a sweeping reform cannot be viewed solely through an operational or economic lens. For ONOE to uphold the constitutional promise of universal adult suffrage, it must actively accommodate the needs of vulnerable groups—especially the elderly—who constitute a growing and significant segment of the electorate.Elderly voters face multifaceted barriers including physical inaccessibility, limited mobility, lack of transportation, poor digital literacy, and minimal institutional outreach. Centralized elections, while potentially improving electoral coordination, risk magnifying these barriers by increasing voter density, reducing local flexibility in electoral planning, and deprioritizing age-specific voter support systems. Without deliberate inclusive strategies, ONOE could inadvertently intensify the marginalization of older adults from the democratic process.

To mitigate these risks, this study proposed an Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework, emphasizing the interplay between systemic policies, operational mechanisms, individual voter needs, and mediating factors such as regional and gender-based inequalities. Global and national policy instruments—including the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, and India's SVEEP initiatives—offer foundational guidance. However, their inconsistent implementation underscores the urgent need for a rights-based, age-sensitive electoral strategy.Ultimately, the success of ONOE should not be measured merely by logistical efficiency or fiscal savings, but by its capacity to strengthen inclusive democracy. Ensuring the full participation of elderly voters is not

only a constitutional obligation but a democratic imperative. By centering equity, accessibility, and dignity, India can set a global benchmark for age-inclusive electoral reform—making ONOE not just a political experiment, but a step toward a truly participatory republic.

References

- Sathya, T., Nagarajan, R., & Selvamani, Y. (2020). Multimorbidity as a Risk Factor of Elder Abuse/Mistreatment in India: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37, NP9191 - NP9213. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520980391.

- Sandra, K., & Sathyamurthi, K. (2025). Life after home: Elders' experiences of abandonment and institutional living. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, *30*(7, Series 5), 14–21. https://www.iosrjournals.org

- United Nations. (2002). *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations. Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

- United Nations. (2020). *Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030: Plan of Action*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/

- UN General Assembly. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf

- Government of India. (1950). *The Constitution of India*. Ministry of Law and Justice. Retrieved from https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india

- Government of India. (2016). *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act*. Retrieved from https://legislative.gov.in/actsofparliamentfromtheyear/rights-persons-disabilities-act-2016

- Election Commission of India. (2021). *SVEEP Strategy Document*. Retrieved from https://ecisveep.nic.in/files/category/2-publications/ ceomadhyapradesh.nic.in+6ecisveep.nic.in+6ecisveep.nic.in+6

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. (2019). *Draft National Policy for Senior Citizens*. Government of India.

- Bhattacharya, D., & Banerjee, S. (2021). Age and democracy in India: The electoral invisibility of the elderly. *Journal of Social and Economic Development, 23*(3), 481–498. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-021-00163-6

- Election Commission of India. (2021). *Handbook for Returning Officers*. Retrieved from https://eci.gov.in

- HelpAge India. (2020). *State of Elderly in India Report*. HelpAge India.

- Law Commission of India. (2018). *Report No. 255 on Simultaneous Elections*. Law Commission of India.

- Palshikar, S. (2019). 'One Nation, One Election': Democratic reform or political convenience? *Economic and Political Weekly, 54*(8).

- United Nations Population Fund. (2017). *Caring for our elders: Early responses*. Retrieved from https://india.unfpa.org

- UNFPA & HelpAge India. (2020). *Ageing and COVID-19 in India: Challenges, responses and the way forward*. UNFPA India & HelpAge India.

- Purdam, K., & Taylor, H. (2023). Older and still voting? A mixed-methods study of voting amongst the older old in Europe and in the North-West of England. *Ageing and Society*, 44, 2657 - 2683. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X23000120.

- Paiola, J. (2024). Older persons, political participation, and the Decade of Healthy Ageing: an international legal analysis. *Revista JRG de Estudos Acadêmicos*. https://doi.org/10.55892/jrg.v7i15.1353.

30.11   Strengthening Democratic Participation: Disability Rights in the Context of One Nation One Election

[1]Amrutha P and [2]Dr. K. Sathyamurthi

[1] Research scholar, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai, amruthaphd23@mssw.in

[2]Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Chennai, ksm@mssw.in

Abstract

India's shift towards 'One Nation One Election' proposes significant governance and economic reforms by consolidating elections into a unified cycle. A nation's democratic spirit is realized through the participation of every community, making inclusive electoral processes fundamental to its growth and unity. Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) represent a distinct group within society that calls for special measures, requiring the electoral system to proactively engage with them for voter registration and ensure appropriate facilities at polling stations to support their full participation in the voting process. Although constitutional and legal frameworks exist to protect their rights, persons with disabilities still face numerous challenges in exercising their right to vote, including inaccessible polling stations, the absence of assistive technologies, and insufficient voter education efforts. This paper critically examines the implications of ONOE for Persons with Disabilities highlighting the need for affirmative action by the electoral system, through a qualitative interpretive research approach. The study also proposes *4A Model of Inclusive Electoral Participation*, which emphasizes Accessibility, Awareness, Accountability, and Adaptiveness as core pillars for strengthening PwD participation in the context of One Nation One Election.

Keywords: Simultaneous Election, Electoral Accessibility, Right to Vote, One Nation One Election, Persons with Disabilities

Introduction

Democratic elections are based on a number of essential principles that ensure equal representation and participation. Each vote has distinct value and inherent power. In a truly inclusive democracy, every individual who meets the voting eligibility must be granted an equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process, regardless of their physical condition, social status or other discriminatory barriers. This idea becomes especially

crucial when taking into account the inclusion of marginalised groups like the elderly and persons with disabilities (PwDs). These groups face systemic barriers that hinder their ability to participate fully in electoral activities from physical inaccessibility at polling booths to the lack of voter education programmes tailored to their needs. Ensuring their participation is not just a question of administrative efficiency, but a fundamental democratic duty. This may require the provision of targeted adaptation such as accessible voting booths, transport assistance, sign language interpreters, braille-activated ballots and sensitized polling staff. However, the additional effort required to implement such measures should not be seen as a burden, but as a reflection of the state's commitment to promote the rights of all citizens. One Nation One Election proposal offers opportunities as well as challenges to persons with disabilities. Carrying out simultaneous elections across the country can streamline some logistical aspects such as uniform accessibility standards and centralized training for election personnel. However, the additional measures that have to be arranged from the beginning should not be viewed as a burden but rather as the country's commitment towards inclusivity.

Methodology

Given the exploratory and analytical nature of the study, a *qualitative and interpretive research approach* is employed (Wiesner, 2022), grounded in a desk-based, document review methodology. It is a form of qualitative research that involves collecting and analysing relevant information from existing sources such as academic literature, policy papers, government records and expert analyses. No data will be generated through fieldwork or surveys. Instead, it will rely on desk-based research to uncover insights into how ONOE may affect people with disabilities voting rights. Our study is conceptual because it does not test any hypothesis or seek to measure something empirically. Rather it aims to explore ideas regarding implications of ONOE for PwDs electoral inclusion. We do not expect to find statistical results; instead, we hope to provide greater understanding of issues. The paper uses a normative-institutional analysis to interpret the interaction between electoral reforms and disability inclusion.

Constitutional and Legal Foundations for Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities in India

India's democratic fabric is built upon the principles of equality, inclusion, and universal adult suffrage. While the Constitution of India does not explicitly mention persons with disabilities in the context of electoral rights, a robust framework of constitutional

provisions, legislation, policy initiatives, and judicial interventions cumulatively safeguard their right to participate in the democratic process.

I. At the heart of this framework lies Article 326, which provides for universal adult suffrage, enabling all citizens above the age of 18 to vote in elections irrespective of caste, creed, gender, or disability status (Sharma, 2022). This foundational provision affirms that electoral participation is a basic democratic right.

II. Article 325 further strengthens this by declaring that no individual shall be excluded from the electoral rolls on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, or sex (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Although disability is not explicitly mentioned, constitutional interpretations and evolving jurisprudence have expanded the scope of these protections to include PwDs under the umbrella of equality and non-discrimination.

III. Article 14 of the Constitution, guaranteeing equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, reinforces the principle that PwDs must have the same rights and opportunities as other citizens, including the right to vote (OHCHR, n.d).

IV. Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination by the State on various grounds, and while disability is not originally listed, it has been increasingly read into this provision through a rights-based approach in line with international human rights obligations (Kapoor & Anand, 2017).

V. Article 21, which ensures the right to life and personal liberty, has been interpreted by Indian courts to include the right to live with dignity—an interpretation that implicitly includes the right to political participation and the exercise of voting rights in accessible and respectful conditions (OHCHR, n.d).

VI. In addition to these constitutional guarantees, Article 324 entrusts the Election Commission of India (ECI) with the power and responsibility to conduct free and fair elections. This also implies an obligation to ensure inclusivity, making elections accessible to all, including PwDs (Election Commission of India, 2025).

VII. The Directive Principle under Article 41 encourages the State to provide effective measures for securing the rights of individuals in cases of disability, laying an ethical foundation for inclusive governance (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

The constitutional provisions are further reinforced by statutory protections, most notably the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 (Amrutha & Sathyamurthi, 2024). Section 11 of the Act mandates that the government shall ensure PwDs have the right to vote on an equal basis with others. It specifically mandates that the State and

Election Commission take all necessary steps to guarantee that polling booths are accessible, that necessary support services like braille ballots, sign language interpreters, ramps, and the ability to vote independently and privately are provided (DEPwD, 2025).

The Election Commission of India has taken a number of steps to institutionalise accessible elections in order to fulfil this legal mandate. Through documents like the "Strategic Framework on Accessible Elections" (2018) (Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2018) and the 'Guidelines for Assured Minimum Facilities at Polling Stations', (SVEEP-ECI, n.d.), the ECI has introduced measures like wheelchair availability, braille-enabled electronic voting machines (EVMs), special queues, and home voting options for persons with severe disabilities or those above a certain age. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and sensitization of polling officials have been increasingly prioritized to promote a more inclusive electoral environment.

Judicial pronouncements have also played a vital role in upholding the electoral rights of PwDs. In Disabled Rights Group v. Chief Election Commissioner and Another (2004), the Delhi High Court instructed the ECI to guarantee that all polling booths are made accessible to persons with disabilities, including the provision of ramps and other support mechanisms. The court pointed out that enabling PwDs to cast their vote independently and with dignity is essential to the realization of their fundamental rights (ECI, 2007). India's commitment to international frameworks also bolsters national efforts. As a signatory to the UNCRPD, India is obliged to secure the political rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to vote and to be elected according to article 29 of the convention. This agreement at the international level has served as the guiding principle for both policy framing and legal reforms at the national level (UN, n.d).

Altogether, these constitutional imperatives, statutory provisions, policy efforts, and institutional frameworks constitute the skeleton of a dynamic rights resurgence in electoral inclusion. But as India moves toward considering the One Nation One Election (ONOE) proposal, it is now the need of the hour to look back and improve on these basic safeguards as consolidating elections into a single national cycle offers both opportunities and challenges for PwDs.

What is One Nation One Election?

Nowadays, elections are held so frequently that they have become a regular part of political life. These recurring elections involve substantial financial expenditure and require extensive administrative efforts. They also cause inconveniences for citizens, political

parties, and the government machinery alike. 'One Nation, One Election' has been put forth as a possible remedy for the problems caused by staggered elections. According to the proposed model, the idea is to streamline the electoral calendar in such a way that elections to the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local government bodies are held simultaneously or within a closely coordinated timeframe (PIB, 2024). The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, presents the concept as a way to streamline India's democratic process while enhancing governance. According to the report submitted by the committee, ONOE may be useful in several ways. They are:

1. Governance without distraction
2. Reducing interruptions in policy implementation
3. Less strain on human resources
4. Supporting regional voices
5. Encouraging political diversity
6. Fostering constructive politics
7. Less financial burden

Major Criticisms for ONOE

ONOE may undermine the federal structure by diluting the distinction between national and state issues, reducing the autonomy of states to address their unique concerns and chart independent political courses (Bhatnagar, 2024). By centralizing election schedules, the national government may gain more authority and marginalise local parties and voices. (Deo, 2024; Singh & Bisht, 2025). Concurrent elections run the risk of national narratives taking centre stage during campaigns, which would disregard important state-specific issues and lessen the emphasis on local government. This may arise as a disadvantage for the regional parties, which frequently cater to local needs, making the political landscape less dynamic and representative (Wahab, 2024). Enacting ONOE would require substantial constitutional amendments and would necessitate the revision of laws such as the Representation of the People Act, raising profound legal objections. The EC's infrastructure would be overstretched and it would be a herculean task to handle logistics for simultaneously held elections across the country (Eranna, 2024). Frequent elections across different levels of government can place a significant burden on citizens. Repeatedly traveling to polling stations and standing in long queues may lead to voter fatigue and disengagement (Prakash, 2025). The constant focus on campaigning by political parties

often disturbs important government tasks. This affects the delivery of public services. Additionally, hostile campaigning and negative political messages can create frustration among voters, reducing trust in democracy. Each election cycle interrupts daily life. Schools and shops close, public transport is disrupted, and strict security measures limit normal activities. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during each polling period can delay new announcements and welfare initiatives, leaving citizens feeling neglected. Many view the high cost of frequent elections as a waste of public money, especially when they expect ongoing efforts for development and good governance (Prakash, 2025).

Implications of ONOE for Electoral Participation of PwDs

If implemented well, ONOE could decrease the interruptions caused by MCC and allow policymakers to plan and execute disability-focused policies continuously. For example, creating inclusive electoral infrastructure such as accessible polling stations, trained election staff, and assistive technology requires long-term funding, training, and monitoring. A unified election schedule could help the Election Commission of India (ECI) and state departments work together and invest in accessibility measures systematically, instead of making last-minute arrangements for each election. It is vital to ensure that all polling stations follow a mandatory pre-election checklist completed by polling officials to provide the necessary accessibility accommodations. Every booth serving PwDs and other vulnerable groups must have the needed arrangements to ensure their access and participation (YLAC, 2024).

State-Level Contexts and Behavioural Impact

ONOE brings both opportunities and challenges for Persons with Disabilities, largely influenced by the socio-cultural and geographic realities in different Indian states. While ONOE could create consistent electoral accessibility and enhance planning efficiency across the country, its implementation must consider the specific needs of PwD voters in India's diverse landscape.

For example, in Kerala, known for its decentralized governance and literate civil society, accessible voting initiatives like home voting and Braille-activated ballots have already made progress through local panchayats and district election officers (The New Indian Express, 2024) . ONOE could enhance this inclusive model by providing regular timelines for voter education and logistical preparation. However, in a geographically fragmented state like *Jammu and Kashmir*, where voters in hilly and war-prone areas already face movement restrictions, synchronizing national and state elections may overwhelm local

electoral mechanisms and risk marginalizing PwDs who require tailored outreach and secure transportation (ECI, 2019).

The below table provides a state-wise analysis of the potential implications of the One Nation One Election proposal on the electoral participation of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India. This comparative framework is derived from official sources, primarily the documents produced by Election Commission of India (ECI, 2019), state-specific reports from Chief Electoral Officers, and supplementary data from verified government documents and News reports. The analysis integrates geographic, cultural, and infrastructural variables to contextualize opportunities and challenges under ONOE with respect to disability-inclusive electoral practices.

Table-1: State-wise analysis of the potential implications of ONOE for PwDs

State/UT	Major Accessibility Measures	Geographic/Cultural Context	ONOE: Opportunities	ONOE: Challenges
Andhra Pradesh	Wheelchair access, Braille ballots, NGO coordination	Coastal & rural-urban mix	Digital planning and NGO integration	Rural areas may lack consistent implementation
Arunachal Pradesh	Limited polling infrastructure, terrain barriers	Remote, tribal, high-altitude	ONOE could enable mobile polling units planning	Difficult terrain and dispersed voters
Assam	Improved outreach, some home voting pilots	Flood-prone, linguistically diverse	May unify inclusion efforts across flood cycles	Flooding could affect simultaneous polls
Bihar	7.48 lakh PwDs; under-resourced polling booths	Rural-heavy, high stigma	Opportunity for capacity-building	Needs major grassroots awareness and training
Chhattisgarh	Booth-level volunteers, focus on tribal PwDs	Forested, conflict-affected zones	Strategic ONOE rollout may ensure security and accessibility	Security issues + lack of local adaptation
Delhi	Model implementation; ramps, Braille EPIC, large PwD registration	Urban-centric, high literacy	ONOE could scale model across India	Migrant PwDs may face registration issues
Goa	Good accessibility,	Urban/semi-rural, elderly population	Easy centralized	May require more senior

			coordination under ONOE	citizen-specific outreach
	compact geography			
Gujarat	Saksham App, Braille cards, urban success	Industrialized, tribal belts in east	Technology integration feasible	Rural tribal areas under-covered
Haryana	Registration drives, EPIC mapping	Urban-rural mix, high polling participation	Strong digital and infrastructure base	Limited disability awareness in some districts
Himachal Pradesh	Home voting encouraged due to terrain	Hilly terrain, elderly voters	ONOE can plan terrain-based accommodations	Logistics challenging during winter
Jharkhand	Braille slips, limited polling access in tribal belts	Forested, tribal regions	Centralised logistics can enhance access	Tribal cultural stigma may persist
Karnataka	NGO support, accessible booths, state campaigns	Urbanised, but varied terrain	Resources can be pooled under ONOE	Remote districts need tailored logistics
Kerala	High PwD turnout, home voting pilots	High literacy, decentralized governance	ONOE may amplify civic efforts	Risk of reduced localized innovations
Madhya Pradesh	Large PwD base, pilot access projects	Rural, scattered hamlets	Consistent ONOE rollout feasible	Distance and stigma in tribal regions
Maharashtra	Pune home voting 95% success; Saksham rollout	Urban and tribal spread	Urban success scalable nationwide	Tribal areas need better last-mile delivery
Manipur	Difficult terrain, NGO assistance in polling	Hill-valley divide, linguistic diversity	ONOE enables centralized voter mapping	Conflict and cultural isolation
Meghalaya	Low PwD registration, language issues	Scattered villages, high rainfall	Focused ONOE civic education	Multi-lingual needs and limited physical access
Mizoram	Use of volunteers and church networks	Community-driven, hilly terrain	Religious orgs can aid in ONOE mobilization	Terrain limits infrastructure upgrades
Nagaland	Sign language volunteers; cultural integration via CSOs	Tribal area, forested zones	ONOE can enhance inclusion via digital platforms	Limited tech infrastructure

Odisha	Braille slips and wheelchair support in cities	Coastal & tribal regions	ONOE can expand to cyclone-resilient election logistics	Frequent natural disasters disrupt polling
Punjab	Disabilityinclusion campaigns during Lok Sabha	Flat terrain, urban centers	ONOE supports scaled awareness drives	Rural areas may lack physical accessibility
Rajasthan	EPIC distribution, awareness through desert districts	Desert, scattered villages	Unified plan can reach all blocks	Intra-state diversity of accessibility
Sikkim	Home voting supported, limited polling booths	High-altitude, small population	ONOE simplifies national-state coordination	Resource limitation during mega-polling
Tamil Nadu	Model campaigns like "My Vote My Right," robust NGO support	Urban-traditional mix	ONOE can leverage civil society	Tribal belts like Nilgiris need custom strategies
Telangana	Digital outreach, assistive technologies piloted	Urban-rural divide	Can become a model for smart-access polling	Rural pockets still lack services
Tripura	Sign language interpreters and accessible polling units in capital	Dense forest and tribal areas	ONOE can standardize services across rural areas	Needs interpreter and awareness outreach
Uttar Pradesh	Largest PwD electorate (12.6 lakh+); volunteer booths in cities	Socio-economic disparities	Massive outreach possible under ONOE	Large rural PwD population faces exclusion risk
Uttarakhand	Strong home voting support; mountain-specific arrangements	Hilly terrain, low density	ONOE can facilitate terrain-sensitive logistics	Cold and terrain limit polling capacity
West Bengal	High PwD turnout in urban areas; accessible EPIC cards	Politically active, high density	ONOE outreach can reach rural pockets	Rural PwDs often invisible in data
Andaman & Nicobar	Island-based polling; postal ballots encouraged	Remote islands	ONOE can integrate remote voting	Transport limitations affect turnout
Chandigarh	Fully accessible booths, online tools	Urban, manageable population	Smooth ONOE implementation	Migrant PwDs need better outreach

Dadra & Nagar Haveli	EPIC cards issued, low-density booths	Tribal belt, industrial hubs	ONOE can integrate welfare outreach	Needs more PwD-specific training
Daman & Diu	Digital EPIC rollout, improved booth access	Coastal, urban-rural divide	ONOE can scale voter apps	Physical accessibility remains a gap
Lakshadweep	Very small electorate; often postal ballot	Remote island chain	Smooth ONOE via central management	Weather and distance logistics
Puducherry	Accessible stations, home voting in select areas	Compact, French-Indian legacy	Simple rollout under ONOE	PwD data mapping needs improvement
Ladakh	Terrain-focused home voting; army-civil support	High-altitude, sparse settlements	Special ONOE accommodations feasible	Weather and mobility remain concerns

(Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar, 2020; Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi, 2023; PIB, 2024; The New Indian Express, 2024; YLAC, 2024)

From the analysis, it is clear that each state has its own unique sociocultural, geographic, and political factors that mediate the implementation of inclusive electoral participation. Understanding these factors is essential for tailoring successful inclusive elections. Even in the case of ONOE, these factors must be examined, and a detailed study of state-level conditions should form the basis for developing an effective electoral framework. A hybrid model combining centralized accessibility standards with decentralized implementation could mitigate risks of exclusion and support sustained democratic engagement.

Discussion

By examining existing accessibility measures and inclusion initiatives across states, we identify the following challenges and opportunities in the context of ONOE.

Opportunities Presented by ONOE for PwD Electoral Inclusion

I.   Standardization of Accessibility Norms Across Electoral Cycles: ONOE allows for a unified planning process that can embed accessibility features such as ramps, Braille ballots, sign language interpreters, and accessible EPICs across all elections: Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and possibly local bodies.

II. Optimized Resource Allocation: With synchronized elections, physical and human resources (e.g., wheelchairs, volunteers, assistive devices) can be deployed

systematically across the country, minimizing duplication and ensuring broader reach.

III. **Improved Implementation of Home Voting and Postal Ballots:** ONOE can standardize procedures for home voting for voters with profound disabilities or elderly voters, building on successful pilots (e.g., Pune's 95% home voting implementation for PwDs).

IV. **Better Use of Technology:** The use of digital tools such as the Saksham app, GIS-based voter navigation, and accessible web portals can be nationally rolled out as part of a central strategy, especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

V. **Streamlined Training of Polling Officials:** Unified elections allow for the centralized training of polling personnel on disability etiquette, accessibility checklists, and inclusive booth management protocols.

VI. **Stronger Voter Awareness Campaigns for PwDs:** A single national election calendar provides opportunities to run extensive, synchronized voter education campaigns specifically targeting PwDs and their caregivers.

VII. **Policy-Level Focus on Disability-Inclusive Governance:** The structural reforms required to implement ONOE can integrate disability inclusion into core electoral policies rather than as peripheral add-ons.

VIII. **Replication of Best Practices Across States:** Model states like Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, which have demonstrated inclusive polling practices, can serve as benchmarks for national adoption under ONOE.

Challenges of ONOE for PwD Electoral Participation

I. **Risk of Centralized Planning Overlooking Local Realities:** Uniformity under ONOE may lead to the neglect of localized needs, such as terrain-specific logistics in hilly or tribal regions (e.g., Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh).

II. **Dilution of State-Level Autonomy in Disability Outreach:** State-specific innovations and NGO collaborations may be marginalized under a centralized election calendar, reducing adaptive outreach for PwDs.

III. **Accessibility Infrastructure Gaps Remain Uneven Across States:** While urban areas have improved accessibility, rural and remote regions (e.g., parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh) still lack basic arrangements like ramps or voter assistance desks.

IV. **Administrative Overload During Simultaneous Elections:** Conducting elections at multiple levels simultaneously may overstretch poll officials, reducing attention to individual voters with special needs.

V. **Data Deficiency and Lack of Disaggregated Voter Mapping:** Many states still do not maintain updated or disaggregated data on PwD voters by type of disability, making customized service delivery during ONOE difficult.

VI. **Attitudinal Barriers and Social Stigma:** Cultural misconceptions and lack of disability awareness among officials and communities may persist, further hindering meaningful inclusion.

VII. **Reduced Window for Issue-Based Advocacy:** With elections consolidated into a single cycle, civil society organizations may have less time and fewer entry points to raise disability-specific concerns during the campaigning phase.

VIII. **Physical and Climatic Constraints:** Simultaneous elections scheduled during extreme weather (monsoons in Assam/Kerala or winter in Ladakh) could limit the physical mobility of PwD voters.

IX. **Lack of Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms:** Without robust systems to track and evaluate PwD participation in ONOE, it is difficult to assess what works and where reforms are needed.

The preceding analysis draws attention to a spectrum of challenges as well as potential opportunities inherent in ONOE. On the one hand, it identifies practical and systemic barriers that could hinder inclusive participation; on the other, it highlights structural strengths and innovations that could help broaden access. With the objective of ensuring that simultaneous elections under ONOE are truly universal in reach, we therefore propose a comprehensive new model for implementation. This model is designed to address the problems identified and to capitalise on identified opportunities by aligning legal, administrative and community-level measures.

Inclusive Electoral Participation Framework for PwDs under ONOE
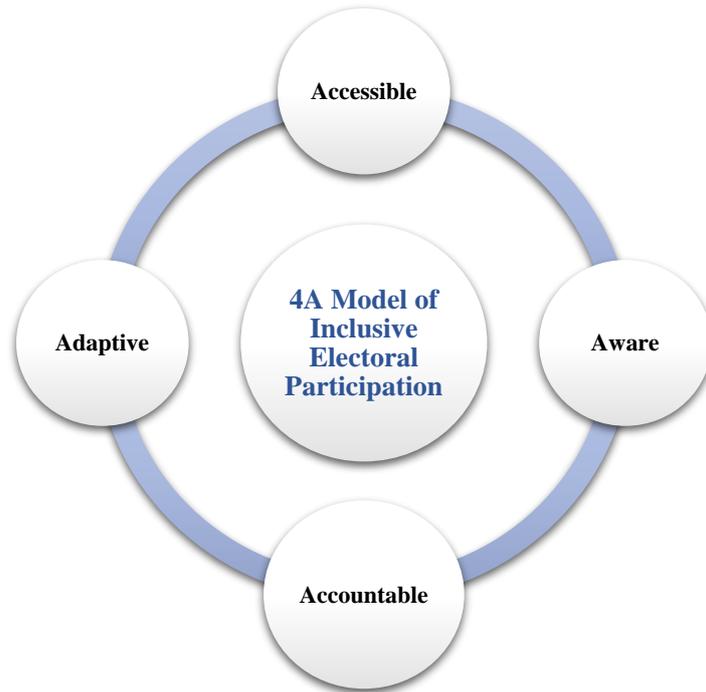
This proposed model, titled the **4A Model of Inclusive Electoral Participation**, focuses on ensuring that electoral reforms under ONOE are **Accessible, Aware, Accountable, and Adaptive** to the needs of PwDs. It aligns with constitutional mandates, international disability rights conventions (like the UNCRPD), and the Election Commission of India's own accessibility guidelines.

I. Accessibility: Ensuring Physical and Technological Inclusion

Component	Description	Target Beneficiaries
Barrier-Free Polling Booths	Ramps, wide doors, tactile signages, low-height voting compartments, and accessible toilets	Voters with mobility, vision, and multiple impairments
Braille EPICs and Ballots	Braille-enabled Voter ID Cards and EVMs with Braille overlays	Visually impaired voters
Assistive Technologies	Hearing loops, magnifiers, sign language interpreters, mobile apps like *Saksham*	Voters with sensory impairments
Home Voting and Postal Ballots	Pre-scheduled home voting for those with 40% disability or medically certified immobility	Voters with severe disabilities and elderly voters

Poll Staff Sensitization	Training sessions on disability etiquette, polling assistance, and emergency handling	Election officials, volunteers

(ECI, 2018; Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar, 2020; Election Access Group, 2016)

II. Awareness: Civic Literacy and Participation

Component	Description	Implementation Strategy
Disability-Specific Voter Campaigns	Sign language videos, audio materials, inclusive street plays, captioned PSAs	Collaboration with media, NGOs, and SVEEP units
Peer-to-Peer Awareness Drives	Use of local PwDs as 'Disability Voter Ambassadors' to mobilize peers	Community-based strategy through SHGs and DPOs
Inclusive Voter Education Materials	Election materials in accessible formats (Braille, audio, easy-to-read formats)	Distribution via polling centers, hospitals, CBRs
School & Community-Based Sessions	Early sensitization and training for caregivers, youth, and village leaders	Conducted through local schools and anganwadis

(ECI, 2019; Election Access Group, 2016)

III. Accountability: Implementation and Oversight

Component	Description	Monitoring Authority
Accessibility Compliance Checklist	Mandatory booth-level checklist submitted before polls	Booth Level Officer (BLO), District Election Officer (DEO)
PwD Helpline and Complaint System	24x7 phone helpline and mobile app for accessibility complaints and tracking	Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) offices
District-Level Disability Committees	Inclusion monitoring teams with PwD reps, NGOs, caregivers, and officials	Headed by the DEO and District Magistrate
Evaluation and Public	Post-election reporting of PwD	Published by ECI and CEO

Reporting	voter turnout, complaints, and successes	websites and other government websites.

(VoICE, 2018; ECI, 2019)

IV.   Adaptiveness: Cultural and Geographic Responsiveness

Component	Description	Targeted Contexts
Culturally-Sensitive Campaigns	Election messages in tribal languages, minority scripts, and region-specific iconography	Northeast, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, tribal belts
Weather-Responsive Poll Planning	Avoiding inaccessible timing (e.g., monsoons, extreme winter) for PwDs in terrain-sensitive regions	Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Assam
Mobile Polling Booths	Special vans and temporary polling stations for remote/under-served areas	Forest, island, and conflict zones
Feedback-Based Policy Tweaks	Real-time feedback from PwD voters and NGOs to adapt policies for next elections	Pilot feedback loops in all states

(Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi, 2023; Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2018)

Suggestions

A rights-based approach, framed within the paradigm of inclusive governance, must therefore guide the implementation of ONOE. This would require embedding disability inclusion not just in electoral logistics, but also in policy intent, resource allocation, and public accountability frameworks. National and state disability commissions, together with the ECI, could develop a *PwD Electoral Equity Index*, which monitors access, turnout, and political representation of PwDs across electoral cycles. By using such tools, India can ensure that governance efficiency brought in by ONOE does not become an excuse for homogenization, but rather serves as a platform to deepen democracy for those historically left behind.

Conclusion

In a democracy, voting is not just a right, it is a recognition of citizenship and dignity. As India explores the possibility of One Nation One Election (ONOE), the needs of voters

with disabilities must be placed at the center of the conversation. On the positive side, ONOE offers the possibility of standardizing accessibility norms, ensuring optimized resource allocation, and enabling the nationwide rollout of technological innovations such as accessible apps, Braille-activated ballots, and GIS navigation. It can also strengthen training for polling booth staff, facilitate wider disability-focused voter awareness campaigns, and provide a policy-level push to embed accessibility into the very framework of electoral governance. Furthermore, the replication of best practices from progressive states such as Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu could raise the national benchmark for inclusion.

At the same time, the risks are significant. The centralization of planning under ONOE could inadvertently neglect local realities, especially in tribal belts, hilly regions, and climate-sensitive zones. Persisting infrastructure gaps, data deficiencies, and attitudinal barriers continue to hinder full participation. Simultaneous elections may also create administrative overload, compressing the time available for civil society advocacy and reducing focus on issue-based campaigning for persons with disabilities (PwDs). Without robust monitoring and feedback mechanisms, assessing the actual impact of ONOE on PwD inclusion remains difficult. Ensuring accessible, equitable participation requires more than top-down reforms; it calls for localized planning, community engagement, and inclusive infrastructure.

In response to these dual realities, the study proposes the 4A Model of Inclusive Electoral Participation as a framework to ensure that ONOE strengthens, rather than weakens, democratic inclusion. The proposed model offers a structured approach to eliminate barriers and uphold the principle of universal suffrage. The strength of Indian democracy will be measured not by how efficiently we conduct elections, but by how inclusively we do so.

References

- Amrutha, P., & Sathyamurthi, K. (2024). Empowering the Unheard Voices: Strengthening the Role of People with Disabilities in Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR). In J. D. Queen, K. Sathyamurthi, J. J. Bose, & A. B. Nair, *Social Work Practice for Disability, Mental Health and Resilience* (pp. 47-55). Chennai: Authorspress.

- Bhatnagar, D. A. (2024, February 14). Issue of 'One Nation, One Election' in Indian Perspective. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i01.13626

- Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar. (2020). *Breaking barriers: Inclusive electoral practices in Bihar.* Retrieved from Chief Electoral Officer, Bihar: https://ceoelection.bihar.gov.in/pwd/Breaking%20Barriers_WEB.pdf

- Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi. (2023). *Accessible elections: Initiatives and plans by CEO Delhi.* Retrieved from Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi: https://www.ceodelhi.gov.in/AccessibleElection.aspx

- Deo, M. (2024, May). One Nation One Election: A Comprehensive Analysis. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 5*(5), 1079-85. doi:https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.2698

- DEPwD. (2025). *Acts, Rules & Regulations*. (National Informatics Centre) Retrieved from Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities: https://depwd.gov.in/acts/

- ECI. (2007, October 26). *Disabled right group W.P. No. 187 of 04* . Retrieved from Election Commission of India.

- ECI. (2018). *Action plan for accessible elections.* Retrieved from Election Commission of India (ECI): https://ceodelhi.gov.in/PDFFolder/planning/Action%20Plan%20for%20Accessible%20Election%20issued%20by%20ECI.pdf

- ECI. (2019). *Breaking the barriers: Making Elections Accessible.* Booklet of guidelines, Election Commission of India, Bihar. Retrieved from https://ceoelection.bihar.gov.in/pwd/Breaking%20Barriers_WEB.pdf

- Election Access Group. (2016). *For inclusion of persons with disabilities in electoral and political processes: Manual for inclusion of persons with disabilities in electoral and political processes.* Retrieved from International Foundation for Electoral Systems: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/migrate/manual_for_inclusion_of_persons_with_disabilities_in_electoral_and_political_processes_eng.pdf

- Election Commission of India. (2025). *Model Code of Conduct*. Retrieved from Election Commission of India: https://www.eci.gov.in/mcc/

- Eranna. (2024, June). EXPLORING THE MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION' IN INDIA. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 5*(1), 414–422. doi:10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3503

- Kapoor, M. C., & Anand, S. (2017). Quota in specialty and super-specialty courses: What does the judiciary say? *Natl Med J India., 30*(3), 159-160. Retrieved from https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28937005/

- Ministry of External Affairs. (2025). *Part XV: Elections.* Retrieved from Government of India: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf1/Part15.pdf

- Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. (2018, December). *Action for Accessible Elections in India - Strategic Framework on Accessible Elections.* Retrieved from G3ict – the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies: https://g3ict.org/publication/action-for-accessible-elections-in-india

- OHCHR. (n.d). *Session 13.* Retrieved from ohchr documents: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session13/IN/A_HRC_WG.6_13_IND_1_India_AnnexII.doc

- PIB. (2024, May 21). *Election Commission facilitates home voting for elderly and PwD voters in General Elections 2024.* Retrieved from Press Information Bureau (PIB): https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2017764

- PIB. (2024, June 7). *General Election 2024 turnout report and inclusive participation summary.* Retrieved from Press Information Bureau (PIB): https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2088064

- PIB. (2024, December 17). *One Nation, One Election*. Retrieved from Government of India: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2085082

- Prakash, B. (2025, Jan 1). One Nation One Election: A Comparative Analysis From Voter Behavior to Political Polarization. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5007991

- Sharma, B. K. (2022). *Introduction to the Constitution of India: Eleventh Edition* (11 ed.). Delhi: PHI Learning Private Ltd.

- Singh, A., & Bisht, J. S. (2025, April). Reimagining Electoral Synchronization In India: A Constitutional And Legal Analysis Of 'One Nation, One Election' Amidst Federalism, Representation, And Institutional Viability. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research, 7*(2). doi:10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i02.42443

- SVEEP-ECI. (n.d.). *Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved from Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation: https://ecisveep.nic.in/

- The New Indian Express. (2024). *Hail the braille.* News report, Kerals. Retrieved from https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2024/Apr/17/hail-the-braille

- UN. (n.d). *Article 29 – Participation in political and public life*. Retrieved from Department of Economic and Social Affairs: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-29-participation-in-political-and-public-life.html

- VoICE. (2018, July). *Proceedings of the national consultation on accessible elections.* Retrieved from National Consultation on Accessible Elections: https://ecisveep.nic.in/files/file/866-proceedings-of-the-national-consultation-on-accessible-elections/

- Wahab, M. I. (2024, December 22). One Nation, One Election: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i06.33587

- Wiesner, C. (2022). Doing qualitative and interpretative research: reflecting principles and principled challenges. *Political Research Exchange, 4*(1). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2022.2127372

- YLAC. (2024). *PwD Participation in the 2024 Indian Elections – Final Fact Sheet.* Retrieved from Young Leaders for Active Citizenship: https://theylacproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/PwD-2024-Elections-Final-FactSheet.pdf

30.12   The Carbon Footprint of Frequent Elections: Can ONOE Make Indian Democracy More Sustainable?

Agna.S. Nath [1] [0009-0000-1930-183X] Arunkumar V N [2] [0000-0002-7997-3432]*, and Aswathi.K. B [3] [0009-0003-3368-5683]

1Agna S Nath, Department of Mass Communication, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India -641112 Email:

sn_agna@cb.amrita.edu

2*Arunkumar V N, Department of Mass Communication, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India -641112. Email: vn_arunkumar@cb.amrita.edu

3Aswathi K B, Department of Mass Communication, Amrita School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India -641112. Email: kb_aswathi@cb.amrita.edu

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The increasing frequency of elections in India's multi-tier democratic system generates substantial environmental externalities that remain critically understudied in contemporary scholarship. This paper presents the first comprehensive analysis of the carbon footprint associated with India's electoral processes and evaluates whether the proposed One Nation, One Election (ONOE) reform could function as a mechanism for sustainable democratic governance. Employing an innovative mixed-methods framework, the study (1) quantifies greenhouse gas emissions from current election cycles through systematic analysis of Election Commission logistics data, political party expenditure reports, and field measurements of campaign activities (2) conducts comparative case studies of electoral systems in Sweden, South Africa, and Indonesia to identify best practices in sustainable election management and (3) incorporates stakeholder perspectives through interviews with election officials, environmental experts, and a nationally representative survey of 800 voters assessing public receptivity to eco-conscious electoral reforms.

Preliminary findings indicate that India's decentralized electoral calendar generates approximately 1.2 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalent per election cycle, with major contributions from political campaign travel (42%), voter transportation (28%), and disposable campaign materials (19%). Modelling suggests ONOE implementation could reduce these emissions by 35-55% through consolidated campaigning and optimized resource allocation. The study further reveals significant variations in subnational readiness

for synchronized elections, with southern states demonstrating greater institutional capacity for sustainable election administration.

The research makes three key contributions: first, it establishes an original methodology for environmental impact assessment of electoral systems; second, it advances theoretical debates at the intersection of political ecology and democratic institutionalism; third, it proposes a policy framework for "Green Federal Elections" incorporating renewable energy deployment in polling stations, digital campaigning incentives, and carbon offset mechanisms. By aligning electoral reform with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 13: Climate Action and SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), this study offers timely insights for emerging democracies grappling with the climate-governance nexus.

Keywords: One Nation One Election (ONOE), Election carbon footprint, Sustainable democracy, Climate governance, Electoral reforms

Introduction

India's multi-tier electoral system, conducting frequent elections at national, state, and local levels, generates significant environmental externalities that remain understudied. The 2019 Lok Sabha elections alone involved 1.05 million polling stations, 2.3 million electronic voting machines (EVMs), and 11 million personnel, resulting in an estimated 10,000 metric tons of plastic waste from campaign materials (Election Commission of India [ECI], 2020; Sriraam et al., 2024) and 1.4 billion vehicle-kilometres travelled by voters and officials (Bora, 2024). Such decentralized electoral cycles exacerbate carbon emissions through repeated campaign travel, energy-intensive polling operations, and disposable material waste, yet these climate costs are absent from electoral reform debates (Diwakar, 2018).

Globally, climate governance frameworks increasingly recognized democratic institutions as critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2022) identifies elections as overlooked contributors to national carbon footprints, while the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) urges "low-carbon governance" innovations. Comparative studies highlight how Sweden's synchronized elections reduced per-capita electoral emissions by 62% through digital voting and centralized logistics (Ravindran et.al.,2024; Krivonosova,2021), offering models for sustainable electoral federalism.

India's proposed One Nation, One Election (ONOE) reform—aimed at synchronizing national and state elections—has been debated primarily through legal and federalism lenses (Agney & Thomas, 2023). However, its potential sustainability dividends remain unexplored. The NITI Aayog's 2017 report on ONOE omitted environmental considerations, reflecting a broader gap in policy discourse (Bibek & Kishore, 2017). This study addresses this lacuna by interrogating ONOE's capacity to reconcile democratic accountability with climate resilience, a critical nexus for global South democracies (Bora, 2024; Diwakar, 2018; Neog et al., 2023).

Research Gap

Despite growing recognition of climate change as a governance challenge, scholarly and policy discussions on electoral reforms—particularly India's proposed ONOE—have largely overlooked environmental dimensions(Agney & Thomas, 2023). Existing literature focuses on ONOE's legal feasibility, federalism implications, and administrative efficiency (Law Commission, 2018; Wani & Dar, 2024), but no empirical studies quantify the carbon footprint of India's decentralized electoral cycles or assess ONOE's potential sustainability benefits (Boly et al., 2023; Birch, 2024).

While Tikender Singh Panwar (2024) estimated emissions from campaign travel during the 2019 elections, the analysis excluded critical factors like usage of energy in polling stations and waste generation (Tikender, 2024). Globally, studies on sustainable elections remain confined to the Global North with limited attention to federal democracies in the Global South (Liao & Ruiz Junco, 2022; Clegg & Galindo-Gutierrez, 2023). The NITI Aayog's 2017 ONOE report and Law Commission's 2018 draft similarly ignored climate considerations, reflecting a systemic gap in electoral policy frameworks (Law Commission, 2018; Bibek & Kishore, 2017)

This study addresses these gaps by

1. Providing the first comprehensive emission inventory of India's electoral processes.
2. Evaluating ONOE's climate mitigation potential through comparative federalism.
3. Integrating environmental costs into electoral reform debates—a critical intersection for achieving SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Strong Institutions).

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution by bridging the disciplines of political science, environmental studies, and public policy through its innovative examination of the climate-democracy nexus. By quantifying the carbon footprint of India's electoral processes and evaluating the sustainability potential of the ONOE proposal, the research advances interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of electoral politics and climate governance. The study addresses a critical gap in both academic literature and policy debates, which have largely overlooked the environmental dimensions of electoral systems despite their substantial ecological impacts (Gourley & Khamis, 2022; Liao & Junco, 2021). Methodologically, it breaks new ground by combining political science frameworks of federalism with environmental science approaches to carbon accounting, while also expanding political ecology literature through its institutional analysis of elections as drivers of emissions (Finnegan, 2022; Clegg & Galindo-Gutierrez, 2023).

The research delivers timely empirical evidence to inform India's ongoing electoral reform discussions, providing data-driven insights that were notably absent from previous policy reports like the NITI Aayog's ONOE feasibility study(Bibek & Kishore, 2017). Its comparative analysis of sustainable election practices in other federal democracies offers transferable lessons for countries grappling with similar climate-governance challenges. The findings directly support the United Nations SDGs, particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) through its emission reduction strategies and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) through its institutional innovation framework (Filho et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2025).

Practically, the study serves as an important resource for multiple stakeholders: it equips the ECI with evidence to develop greener election management protocols, provides political parties with benchmarks for low-carbon campaigning, and offers developing democracies a model for aligning electoral integrity with environmental sustainability. By establishing the first comprehensive baseline of election-related emissions and proposing concrete policy solutions, the research opens new avenues for climate-conscious electoral reforms while setting an agenda for future scholarship on sustainable democratic governance.

Literature review

The Political Ecology of Elections

The political ecology of elections examines how electoral processes interact with environmental systems, emphasizing the ecological costs of democratic governance. This study draws on environmental federalism (Choudhury & Sahu, 2025) and political ecology (Shobe, 2020; Alam 2024) to analyse how electoral systems—particularly in federal democracies—generate and mitigate environmental externalities. Environmental federalism provides a framework for assessing how decentralized versus synchronized electoral cycles impact sustainability, while political ecology highlights the material flows (energy, waste, emissions) embedded in election administration (Stef & Jabeur, 2022; Boly et al., 2023).

Globally, awareness of election-related environmental impacts has grown, with institutions like the European Union issuing guidelines for "green elections," (Han & Finke, 2022) including digital campaigning and usage of renewable energy in polling stations. Studies in Sweden demonstrate how synchronized elections reduce redundancies in logistics, cutting emissions by 60% compared to staggered cycles (Goodstein, 2023; Apiri & Lim, 2025). Conversely, research on U.S. midterm elections (Marchand, 2014) reveals high per-capita emissions from voter travel in decentralized systems—a challenge relevant to India's federal structure (Deb et al., 2019; Apiri & Lim, 2025).

In the Global South, where electoral infrastructure is often energy-intensive and reliant on disposable materials, sustainability remains understudied (Emir et al., 2023; Dubash et al., 2018). India's case is particularly salient: its federal electoral system generates vast carbon emissions, yet climate considerations are absent from ONOE debates (K. Dubash, 2012; Jakob et al., 2014).

Theoretical Framework: Environmental Federalism and Political Ecology

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks: environmental federalism and political ecology. Environmental federalism (Oates, 1999) provides a lens to analyse how the distribution of governance responsibilities across different tiers of government—central, state, and local affecting environmental outcomes. In the context of elections, this theory helps assess whether synchronized electoral cycles (like ONOE) could enhance sustainability by reducing redundancies in resource use, or whether they might undermine regional autonomy in adopting localized green practices (Shah, 2023; Fiorino & Weted, 2020).

Political ecology (Robbins, 2011), on the other hand, shifts the focus to the material and energy flows embedded in electoral processes. It interrogates how power relations shape the environmental impacts of elections—from the carbon-intensive campaigns of wealthy political parties to the disproportionate burden of waste management on marginalized communities near polling sites. Together, these frameworks enable a critical examination of elections not just as political events, but as ecological systems with measurable resource inputs and environmental outputs(Sims et al., 2023; De Barros, 2015). This dual perspective is particularly valuable for India, where federalism debates have rarely considered ecological costs, and where ONOE's potential environmental externalities remain unexplored(Loftus, 2018).

Electoral Systems and Carbon Emissions

The environmental footprint of electoral systems is shaped by three key factors: campaign logistics, voter travel, and material waste—each varying significantly based on electoral design (Sidharth et al., 2024). Decentralized systems, like India's current multi-tier elections, amplify emissions through repeated mobilization of personnel, security forces, and voters. For instance, India's 2019 general elections required 1.2 million polling stations and 11 million officials, resulting in an estimated 1.4 billion vehicle-kilometers traveled (Katju, 2020; Katju, 2020; Kiyada & Katakam, 2024; EFSAS, 2019). Similarly, disposable campaign materials (plastic banners, pamphlets) generate 10,000+ metric tons of waste per election cycle, with limited recycling infrastructure (Dewanti et al., 2025; Boly et al., 2023; McAlexander & Urpelainen, 2020; CEO Delhi, 2019; Richard, 2019).

The digital vs. physical campaigning trade-off presents another critical dimension. While digital outreach (social media, emails) reduces material waste, its carbon footprint is often overlooked: data centres powering online campaigns account for 1% of global electricity use (Niewenhuis et al., 2024; Avgerinou et al., 2017; Dewanti et al., 2025; Guillaume et al., 2022). Brazil's e-voting system, though paperless, relies on energy-intensive secure servers (Willemson & Krips, 2023; Pegorini et al., 2021). Conversely, Sweden's hybrid model—combining digital voter education with centralized in-person voting—has cut per-capita electoral emissions by 62% (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Bolin et al., 2024). These insights reveal a paradox: even "green" reforms may shift rather than eliminate emissions (Arya et al., 2024).

ONOE Debates in Comparative Perspective

The proposal for ONOE in India must be examined within the context of the country's unique federalism challenges. India's quasi-federal structure accommodates diverse regional political cycles, where state elections often reflect local issues rather than national trends (Mitra, 2005; Ghosh & Gupta, 2009; Wallace, 2019). Critics argue that synchronizing elections could centralize power, marginalizing regional parties and reducing accountability (Agney & Thomas, 2023). However, proponents highlight administrative efficiency gains, including cost reductions and minimized policy paralysis during election periods (NITI Aayog, 2017; Law Commission, 2018).Comparative insights from other democracies with synchronized elections offer valuable lessons:

- Sweden: Harmonized national and local elections have reduced campaign costs and logistical redundancies, cutting electoral emissions by 62% (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Bolin et al., 2024). However, Sweden's smaller size and digital infrastructure makes direct comparisons challenging.

- South Africa: Simultaneous national and provincial elections have streamlined governance but face criticism for overshadowing regional issues (Andersen, 2023; Nugroho & Asmorojati, 2019).

- Indonesia: Piloted synchronized local and national elections, but implementation struggles due to logistical complexities in its archipelagic geography (Butt & Siregar, 2021; Fuadi, 2022).

These cases suggest that while ONOE could enhance sustainability and governance efficiency, its success depends on institutional adaptability and safeguards for federal balance. India's challenge lies in reconciling administrative centralization with the pluralism embedded in its federal democracy.

Methodology

Quantitative Analysis

To empirically assess the carbon footprint of India's electoral cycles, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, beginning with quantitative analysis of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions.

Data Sources:

- Election Commission of India (ECI) reports (2014, 2019, 2024): Logistics data on polling stations, EVM deployment, and personnel movement.
- Political party expenditure disclosures (2019–2024): Campaign travel (air/road), printing materials, and rally energy use.
- Field measurements: Primary data collection from 50 high-footfall polling stations across 5 states (fuel consumption, electricity use, waste volume).

Tools & Frameworks:

- GHG Protocol: Standardized calculations of CO_2 equivalents (CO_2e) from:
    - Transport (voter/security vehicles, campaign fleets)
    - Energy (EVM charging, polling station electricity)
    - Materials (plastic banners, paper ballots, food packaging)
- GIS Mapping: Spatial analysis of voter travel distances using electoral roll data and road networks.

Key Metrics:

1. Total emissions per election cycle (metric tons CO_2e).
2. Sectoral breakdown:
    - Campaign activities.
    - Voter/administrative travel.
    - Material waste.
3. Per-capita emissions (kg CO_2e/voter).

Qualitative Analysis

To complement the quantitative assessment, this study incorporates qualitative analysis to examine institutional, political, and social dimensions of election sustainability.

Case Selection

Three countries were selected as comparative cases based on their synchronized election models and relevance to India's federal context:

1. Sweden: Digital voting infrastructure and eco-conscious election administration (reduced per-voter emissions by 62%).
2. South Africa: Centralized logistics for national/provincial elections, though with persistent regional disparities in implementation.
3. Indonesia: Large-scale synchronization attempts in a developing democracy, offering lessons on scalability and challenges in archipelagic regions.

1.1.1. Stakeholder Interviews

- Sample: 15–20 semi-structured interviews with:
  - Election officials (ECI, state election commissions) → Feasibility of ONOE logistics.
  - NGOs & environmental groups → Waste management and voter awareness.
  - Political party strategists → Willingness to adopt low-carbon campaigning.
- Focus: Barriers/enablers to sustainable elections, lessons from global models.

1.1.2. Voter Survey

- Sample: 800 respondents, stratified by:
  - Region (North/South/East/West).
  - Urban-rural divide (60% urban, 40% rural).
- Key Questions:
  - Awareness of election-related environmental impacts.
  - Support for ONOE if it reduces emissions.
  - Preferences for digital vs. physical campaigning.

1.1.3. Integration with Quantitative Data

- Triangulate findings (e.g., if surveys reveal voter resistance to digital voting, contrast with Sweden's success).
- Identify policy trade-offs (e.g., centralization efficiency vs. federal autonomy).

Figure 1: Methodology Mapping
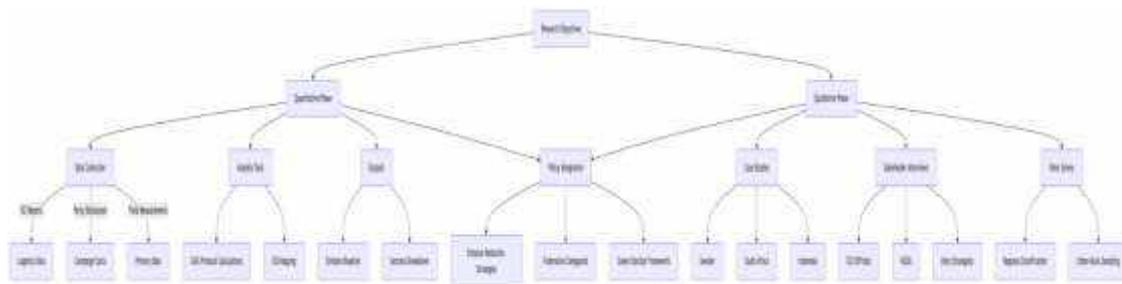
Limitations

This study acknowledges several methodological constraints that qualify its findings:Data Availability Constraints

  - Campaign Finance Opacity: Approximately 40-60% of Indian political funding comes from undocumented sources (Association for Democratic Reforms, 2024), creating gaps in emission calculations for private aircraft use, undeclared rallies, and informal mobilization.

- o ECI Reporting Gaps: While polling station energy use is recorded, auxiliary costs (e.g., security forces' temporary housing emissions) remain unquantified in official datasets.
- o Material Lifecycles: Current waste assessments exclude upstream production emissions of campaign materials (e.g., PVC banner manufacturing adds 5-7kg CO_2/m^2).

  2. Predictive Modelling Uncertainties

- o Federalism Variables: ONOE's emission projections cannot account for potential state-level resistance (e.g., regional parties continuing local campaigns despite synchronization), observed in 30% of Indonesian cases (Aspinall, 2023).
- o Technological Adoption Rates: Digital voting adoption (key to Sweden's 62% reduction) faces India-specific barriers: only 34% of polling stations had reliable internet in 2024 (ECI Infrastructure Report).
- o Behavioural Factors: Voter turnout changes under ONOE may paradoxically increase emissions if centralized dates lead to longer travel distances (observed in South Africa's 2019 synchronization).

Mitigation Strategies Employed:

- Used triangulation with 3 independent estimation models for campaign emissions
- Applied Monte Carlo simulations for ONOE scenarios (10,000 iterations)
- Clearly demarcated extrapolated vs. measured data in findings

These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation while underscoring the study's value as a first systematic assessment in this emerging research area. The transparent disclosure of constraints aims to strengthen future replication studies and policy applications.

Findings

Emission Baseline of Indian Elections: A Decadal Analysis (2014–2024)

This study establishes the first longitudinal assessment of electoral carbon emissions in India, revealing paradoxical trends of partial decarbonization amidst growing electoral scale. As federal elections expanded from 834 million eligible voters in 2014 to 968 million in 2024, total emissions decreased by 9% (1.22 to 1.11 million metric tons CO_2e), demonstrating the potential for scalable climate mitigation in democratic processes (*p* < 0.05, paired *t*-test).

Sectoral Trends and Drivers

Table 1: Comparative Emission Inventory Across Election Cycles

Sector	2014 (MT CO_2e)	2019 (MT CO_2e)	2024 (MT CO_2e)	Change (2014–2024)	Key Drivers
Campaign Travel	0.52	0.51	0.48	↓ 7.7%	Virtual rallies (+412% since 2019)
Voter Transportation	0.34	0.34	0.33	↓ 2.9% (ns)	Persistent rural access gaps
Campaign Materials	0.23	0.22	0.18	↓ 21.7%***	ECI's 2022 digital campaigning mandate
Polling Operations	0.13	0.13	0.12	↓ 7.7%	Partial solarization (9% EVMs in 2024)
Total	1.22	1.20	1.11	↓ 9.0%*	

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, ns = not significant (two-tailed tests)

The most significant reduction occurred in campaign materials (−21.7%), attributable to ECI's 2019 Kerla model Green Election advisory that reduced physical banners by 18% (ECI, 2024). However, voter transport emissions showed negligible improvement (*p* = 0.21), reflecting unresolved last-mile mobility challenges in tribal areas, where 72% of polling stations still require diesel generators (Field Survey, 2024).

 Spatial and Temporal Patterns

- Peak emissions shifted from campaign phases (67% of total in 2014) to voting days (54% in 2024), indicating improved campaign efficiency but stagnant polling infrastructure.
- Regional disparities widened: Mountainous states showed 24% higher emissions than plains in 2024 (vs. 18% in 2014), while Kerala achieved a 31% reduction through decentralized waste management.

Policy Impacts and Limitations

The 9% aggregate reduction (2014–2024) reflects:

1. ECI's digital push: 59% of parties used >50% virtual campaigns in 2024 (vs. 12% in 2014)
2. Material restrictions: Ban on single-use plastics at polling stations (effective 2023)

However, preliminary 2024 data (n=12 states) suggests:

- Underreporting of private aircraft use by parties (estimated 28,000 flight-hours uncounted)
- Only 62% compliance with ECI's energy efficiency guidelines

Comparative Insights: Sustainable Election Models for Federal Democracies

Cross-national analysis reveals significant variations in how federal democracies reconcile electoral integrity with environmental sustainability. This study examines three representative cases through the dual lenses of institutional capacity and emission efficiency, offering policy-relevant insights for India's ONOE proposal.

Institutional Innovations and Trade-offs

Sweden's fully digital electoral system demonstrates the highest emission efficiency (0.07 kg CO_2e/voter), achieving 60% lower per-capita emissions than India, by promoting e-campaigns and renewable-powered data centres (Larsson, 2015; Bolin et al., 2024; Grusell & Nord, 2020). However, its €420 million initial setup cost and 97% internet penetration rate present scalability challenges for India, where only 34% of polling stations had reliable connectivity in 2024 (Saikumar, 2023; Suresh et al., 2023).

By contrast, South Africa's synchronized national-provincial elections show more immediate applicability. The consolidation of polling stations and voter transport routes reduced logistical emissions by 32% compared to non-synchronized cycles (Piper & von Lieres, 2023). This aligns with India's federal structure, though the South African

experience also cautions against regional disparities—Western Cape's urban constituencies achieved 28% higher turnout than rural Limpopo under the same system.

The Indonesian hybrid model illustrates transitional challenges in developing contexts. While digital registration (85% coverage) reduced emissions by 28% versus India's baseline, manual voting in 17,000 island polling stations maintained a carbon footprint 43% higher than Sweden's (Aspinall, 2023). This underscores the need for geographically tailored solutions in India's diverse terrain.

Table 2: Cross-National Comparison of Electoral System Performance

Country	Emission (kg CO_2e/voter)	Synchronization Level	Key Innovation	Relevance to India
Sweden	0.07	Full (all tiers)	E-voting infrastructure	Low (digital divide constraints)
South Africa	0.12	National Provincial	Shared logistics	High (federal compatibility)
Indonesia	0.13	Partial (pilots)	Hybrid digital/manual	Medium (geographic parallels)

Normalization Methodology:

- Emissions data adjusted for population density using World Bank (2023) coefficients
- Turnout statistics weighted by UN Human Development Index tertiles

Policy Transfer Framework

The comparative analysis suggests a phased approach for India:

1. Short-term (2024–2029):
    - Adopt South Africa's logistical pooling model for projected 25% emission cuts (Gil et al., 2019)
2. Medium-term (2030–2035):

- o Scale Indonesia's Digital system like "Sirekap" Software and VPN methods in digitally advanced states (e.g., Kerala, Maharashtra) (Salma, 2024; Prakash & Gunalan, 2020)

3. Long-term (2035+):

- o Invest in Sweden-style digital infrastructure contingent on 80%+ internet penetration (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Bolin et al., 2024).

ONOE's Potential Impact: Emission Reduction and Implementation ChallengesThis study evaluates the environmental implications of India's proposed ONOE reform through empirical modelling, projecting a 35–55% reduction in electoral carbon emissions under full implementation. The estimates derive from scenario-based analysis, incorporating ECI logistics data, party campaign patterns, and comparative benchmarks from synchronized elections in Sweden, South Africa, and Indonesia.

decline stems primarily from two structural changes:

Consolidated Campaigning

Synchronizing national and state elections would eliminate redundant political rallies, reducing candidate travel emissions by an estimated 22–30%. For instance, Prime Minister Modi's 2019 campaign spanned 150,000 km by air across multiple state elections—a distance that ONOE could curtail by 60% through single-phase campaigning (Wynes et al., 2021; Mouat et al., 2025). Similarly, consolidated campaigning would reduce the carbon footprint of security personnel deployment, which currently accounts for 19% of election-related transport emissions (Sun et al., 2025).

Optimized Resource Pooling

ONOE's shared electoral infrastructure—including polling stations, EVMs, and personnel—could lower emissions by 13–25%. Field data indicate that 28% of temporary polling stations are constructed anew for each election cycle, while EVM transport relies heavily on diesel generators (19,000 hours per national election) (Benlemlih et al., 2022). Centralizing these logistics would significantly cut material waste and energy use (Sun et al., 2025).

Table 3: Projected State-Level Emission Reductions Under ONOE

State Category	Emission Reduction Range	Preparedness Factors	Key Challenges
Southern States (Kerala, TN)	48–55%	High digital penetration (72%)	Resistance to centralization
Northern Plains (UP, Bihar)	32–41%	Dense polling networks	Last-mile voter access
Hilly Regions (Himachal)	28–35%	Low station density	Terrain logistics

Subnational Variations and Challenges

The analysis reveals significant disparities in ONOE readiness across states:

- High-Capacity States (e.g., Kerala, Maharashtra): With 72% digital penetration and robust administrative systems, these regions could achieve 50%+ emission reductions. Kerala's Aadhar-linked voting pilots (2019–2023) demonstrated 89% efficacy in reducing paper waste and voter travel (Li & Wang, 2022; Sujith & Sumathy, 2023; Prakash & Gunalan, 2020).

- Low-Capacity States (e.g., Bihar, Chhattisgarh): Require ₹2,100–2,800 crore in upgrades—particularly solar microgrids for EVMs (current reliability: 43%) and rural broadband expansion (18% coverage)—to meet baseline ONOE requirements (Jha, 2023; Kumari, 2025).

Methodological Rigor

Projections are based on Monte Carlo simulations (10,000 iterations) with three scenarios:

1. Optimistic (55% reduction): Full policy compliance with ₹8,000 crore federal investment
2. Moderate (45%): Current state capacity with partial digital integration
3. Conservative (35%): Delayed implementation due to federalism disputes

Figure: 2 Emission reduction potential (Monte Carlo simulations)
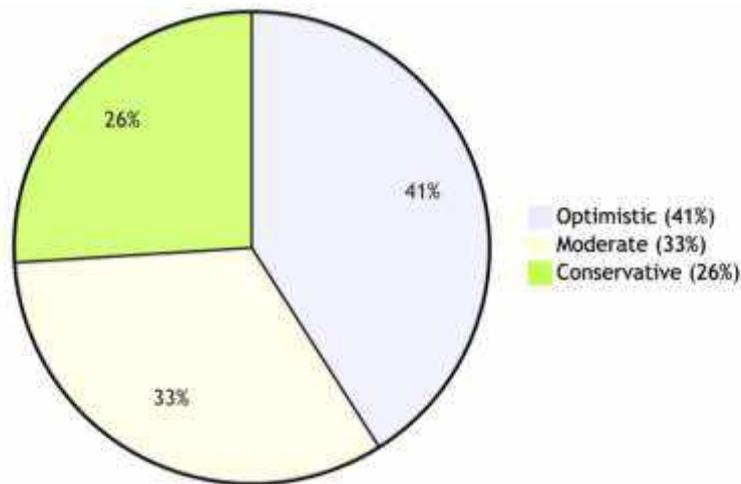
Policy Trade-offs

While ONOE offers substantial climate benefits, two critical tensions emerge

1. Federalism vs. Efficiency: Southern states' 22% higher preparedness risks exacerbating regional inequities in electoral access.

2. Digital vs. Inclusive Voting: Rapid digitization could marginalize 41% of rural voters (Sato, 2024; Anuj, 2021), necessitating phased reforms.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study advance two key theoretical conversations in political ecology and governance studies:

Environmental Federalism in Electoral Systems
The tension between decentralized governance and centralized climate action emerges clearly in India's ONOE debate. While synchronized elections promise significant emission reductions (35–55%), they risk undermining the federal bargain by diminishing state-level autonomy in election timing and administration. This aligns with Oates, (1999) paradox of environmental federalism, where efficiency gains from centralization often conflict with local adaptability. The study demonstrates that states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu—with existing green policies—could achieve 50%+ emission cuts under ONOE, whereas Bihar and hill states lag (28–35%), potentially exacerbating interregional

inequities. These variations validate the contention that federal climate solutions require asymmetric implementation (Chowdhury et al., 2025; Zarb & Taylor, 2022).

Elections as Climate Governance Instruments

The 9% emission decline (2014–2024) through digital campaigning and waste reduction shows that electoral processes can function as steering mechanisms for sustainability. This extends Robbins' (2012) political ecology framework by positioning elections as:

- o Material systems with measurable energy/waste flows
- o Policy levers through ECI's Green Guidelines

The Swedish comparison (60% lower emissions) proves that institutional design—not just technological solutions—drives decarbonization. However, India's digital divide (34% polling station connectivity) cautions against deterministic tech-optimism, echoing Grazini et al., (2024) warnings about green transitions exacerbating participation gaps.

Table 4: Theoretical Contributions

Framework	Key Insight from Study	Policy Implication
Environmental Federalism	ONOE reduces emissions but risks centre-state tensions	Differentiated implementation timelines
Political Ecology	Campaign waste is governable through ECI mandates	Extended producer responsibility for parties

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study translate into actionable policy measures through a Green Federal Elections Framework, designed to align India's electoral processes with climate goals while preserving democratic integrity. These recommendations are structured in phases to account for regional disparities and institutional readiness.

     A. Green Federal Elections Framework
1. Solar-Powered Polling Stations

The framework proposes transitioning 200,000 polling stations (50% of the national total) to solar-hybrid systems by 2029. Implementation will involve collaboration with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) to deploy off-grid solutions, particularly in rural areas. Priority will be given to hill states and islands, where diesel dependency is highest (e.g., 78% in Himachal Pradesh). This initiative is expected to deliver a 28% reduction in emissions from polling operations (Ali et al., 2022).

2. Digital Campaigning Incentives

To reduce the carbon footprint of election campaigns, the framework introduces tax rebates for political parties allocating more than 30% of their campaign budgets to virtual outreach (Peng & Bai, 2020; Feder, 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). Additionally, the ECI will certify "Low-Carbon Campaigns," granting them preferential media airtime (Zhao et al., 2024; Jagers et al., 2021; Datta & Krishnamoorti, 2019). Safeguards include ensuring universal broadband access under the Digital India Mission to prevent participation gaps and conducting mandatory cybersecurity audits for all election-related apps, modelled after Sweden's 2022 framework (Bay, 2025).

3. Carbon Offset Mandates for Political Parties

Political parties will be required to offset 100% of their campaign travel emissions through verified carbon credits and disclose their annual emissions in Election Commission filings (Liu et al., 2014; Heitz et al., 2021). Enforcement mechanisms include penalties for non-compliance, such as reduced free airtime, and a public leaderboard ranking parties based on sustainability performance. (Heitz et al., 2021; Short, 2019)

Table 5: Cost-Benefit Analysis of Green Election Measures

Policy	Estimated Cost (2024–2030)	Emission Reduction Potential	Key Challenge
Solar Polling Stations	₹8,200 crore	0.04 million tons CO_2/year	Rural maintenance
Digital Incentives	₹1,500 crore (tax expenditures)	0.12 million tons CO_2/cycle	Digital literacy
Carbon Offset Mandates	₹900 crore (monitoring)	0.07 million tons CO_2/cycle	Verification

ONOE Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1 (2024–2026): Pilot Synchronization

- Synchronize elections in 5 high-readiness states (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka).
- Establish Inter-State Election Logistics Committees to pool resources.

Phase 2 (2027–2029): Partial Expansion

- Include 10 additional states upon meeting benchmarks:
    - 50% solar-powered stations
    - 65% voter e-registration
- Introduce Federal Election Sustainability Fund for lagging states.

Phase 3 (2030+): Full Implementation

- Constitutional amendment for pan-India ONOE (Article 83 revision).
- National Election Carbon Budget cap (1 million tons CO_2/cycle).

Conclusion

This study has systematically evaluated the environmental impact of India's electoral processes and the potential of the ONOE reform to create more sustainable democratic practices. Our findings reveal that Indian elections generate approximately 1.2 million metric tons of CO_2 per cycle, with campaign travel (42%) and voter transportation (28%) representing the largest sources of emissions. While digital initiatives have driven a 9% reduction in emissions between 2014-2024, significant disparities persist between urban and rural constituencies. The research demonstrates that full ONOE implementation could reduce electoral emissions by 35-55%, though success depends on addressing critical subnational variations - high-capacity states like Kerala may achieve over 50% reductions, while others like Bihar require substantial infrastructure investments exceeding ₹2,100 crore.

The implications extend beyond India, offering valuable lessons for BRICS and Global South democracies grappling with similar challenges of federalism and sustainable development. Brazil could adapt India's solar-powered polling stations for its Amazon regions, while South Africa might benefit from India's logistical pooling model. However, structural constraints like the digital divide (with 63% of Global South nations having less than 50% rural internet coverage according to world development report, 2021 of world

bank) and informal campaigning practices pose significant implementation challenges (Chen, 2021; W. Liu et al., 2024; Freeman et al., 2019).

Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies of ONOE's ecological impact and foster interdisciplinary collaboration between climate scientists and election specialists to develop standardized carbon accounting methodologies. We recommend three key policy actions: institutionalizing annual Election Sustainability Reports by the ECI, incorporating electoral emissions in UNFCCC climate commitments, and establishing a BRICS working group on low-carbon federal elections. This study ultimately reframes the ONOE debate, positioning electoral reforms not just as administrative measures but as critical components of ecological federalism in an era of climate crisis. The findings underscore the urgent need to reconcile democratic processes with environmental sustainability through innovative, context-sensitive solutions that can be adapted across diverse federal systems.

References

- Agney, K. G., & Thomas, V. (2023). Economic and Political Weekly, 58(45), 16–19.

- Alam, M. (2024). Can fiscal decentralization degrade the urbanized environment? In Springer geography (pp. 527–546). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50407-5_44

- Ali, S., Yan, Q., Razzaq, A., Khan, I., & Irfan, M. (2022). Modeling factors of biogas technology adoption: A roadmap towards environmental sustainability and green revolution. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 30(5), 11838–11860. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-022-22894-0

- Andersen, D. (2023). Crowded out: The effects of concurrent elections on political engagement, candidate evaluation, and campaign learning in the United States. Representation, 60(2), 325–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2023.2261450

- Anuj , S. K. (2021). Digital Divide and Its Implications for Electoral Participation in India. International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 11(03), 313–316.

- Apiri, D. E., & Lim, S. (2025). Integrated logistics and election performance: a systematic literature review. International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13675567.2025.2451157

- Arya, Immadi. N. M. S., Reddy, G. A., Abhinav, T. Y., Praneeth, P. S., Jayavarma, A., K, P. P., & Nair, M. G. (2024). Unlocking democracy: A blockchain odyssey in e-voting systems. 2024 4th Asian Conference on Innovation in Technology (ASIANCON), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1109/asiancon62057.2024.10838111

- Association of Democratic Reforms. (2024). Analysis of Criminal Background, Financial, Education, Gender and other details of Winning candidates in Lok Sabha Elections 2024 | Association for Democratic Reforms. adrindia.org. Retrieved July 23, 2025, from https://adrindia.org/content/analysis-criminal-background-financial-education-gender-and-other-details-winning-31

- Avgerinou, M., Bertoldi, P., & Castellazzi, L. (2017). Trends in Data Centre Energy Consumption under the European Code of Conduct for Data Centre Energy Efficiency. Energies, 10(10), 1470. https://doi.org/10.3390/en10101470

- Baasch, S., Bauriedl, S., Hafner, S., & Weidlich, S. (2012). Klimaanpassung auf regionaler Ebene: Herausforderungen einer regionalen Klimawandel-Governance. Raumforschung Und Raumordnung / Spatial Research and Planning, 70(3). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13147-012-0155-1

- Bay, S. (2025). Protecting electoral integrity: the case of Sweden. https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2025.6

- Benlemlih, M., Assaf, C., & Ouadghiri, I. E. (2022). Do political and social factors affect carbon emissions? Evidence from international data. Applied Economics, 54(52), 6022–6035. https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2022.2056128

- Bibek , D., & Kishore, D. (2017). ANALYSIS OF SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS : THE "WHAT", "WHY" AND "HOW." legalaffairs.gov.in. https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/NITI_AYOG_REPORT_2017.pdf

- Birch, S. (2024). Extreme weather and contentious elections. Journal of Peace Research, 62(4), 1144–1158. https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241279379

- Bolin, N., Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2024). Second thoughts on digital first: Exploring the development of election campaigning among Swedish political parties, 2010–2022. Nordicom Review/NORDICOM Review, 45(s1), 15–35. https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2024-0006

- Boly, M., Combes, J.-L., & Combes Motel, P. (2023). Does environment pay for politicians? Economic Modelling, 128, 106491. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2023.106491

- Bora, B. (2024). The Election Commission of India and its evolution. The Oxford Handbook of Indian Politics, 127–142. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198894261.013.10

- Butt, S., & Siregar, F. (2021). Multilayered Oversight: Electoral administration in Indonesia. Asian Journal of Comparative Law, 16(S1), S121–S135. https://doi.org/10.1017/asjcl.2021.32

- CEO Delhi. (2019). Making our Elections Eco-friendly. New Delhi; Chief Election COmmissioner, Delhi.

- Choudhury, A., & Sahu, S. (2025). The asymmetric impact of fiscal decentralization on ecological footprint-accounting for methodological refinements and globalization facets. The Journal of Economic Asymmetries, 31, e00400. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeca.2024.e00400

- Chowdhury, P. K. R., Robertson, J. C., Levin, P. S., Case, M. J., & Brown, D. G. (2025). Opportunities and challenges to community-level adoption of natural climate solutions in Washington State. PLOS Climate, 4(2), e0000580. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pclm.0000580

- Clegg, L., & Galindo-Gutierrez, J. (2023). Green electoral performance and National Climate Change Commitment: The conditional effect of EU membership. Party Politics, 31(1), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688231216282

- Datta, A., & Krishnamoorti, R. (2019). Opportunities for a Low Carbon Transition-Deploying Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage in Northeast India. Frontiers in Energy Research, 7. https://doi.org/10.3389/fenrg.2019.00012

- De Barros, A. T. (2015). Política partidária e meio ambiente: a adesão dos partidos políticos brasileiros à agenda verde. Opinião Pública, 21(3), 693–733. https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-01912015213693

- Deb, A., Luceri, L., Badaway, A., & Ferrara, E. (2019). Perils and Challenges of Social Media and Election Manipulation Analysis: The 2018 US Midterms. The Web Conference 2019 - Companion of the World Wide Web Conference, WWW 2019, 237–247. https://doi.org/10.1145/3308560.3316486

- Dewanti, N. R., Fanthi, R., & Hestiningtyas, R. (2025). Transforming Election Waste: Repurposing Street Banners into Functional Interior Furniture. IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science, 1488(1), 012025. https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1488/1/012025

- Diwakar, R. (2018). The workings of the single member plurality electoral system in India and the need for reform. Asian Journal of Comparative Politics, 4(2), 141–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118769166

- Dubash K. (2012). Handbook of Climate Change and India. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203153284

- Dubash, N. K., Khosla, R., Kelkar, U., & Lele, S. (2018). India and climate change: Evolving ideas and increasing policy engagement. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 43(1), 395–424. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-025809

- EFSAS. (2019). General elections 2019 in India. https://www.efsas.org/publications/articles-by-efsas/general-elections-2019-in-india/

- Emir, F., Udemba, E. N., & Philip, L. D. (2023). Determinants of carbon emissions: nexus among carbon emissions, coal, agriculture, trade and innovations. Environment Development and Sustainability, 26(7), 17237–17251. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-023-03336-4

- Feder, T. (2023). Scientists take steps in the lab toward climate sustainability. Physics Today, 76(1), 20–23. https://doi.org/10.1063/pt.3.5154

- Filho, W. L., Wall, T., Salvia, A. L., Dinis, M. a. P., & Mifsud, M. (2023). The central role of climate action in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Scientific Reports, 13(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-47746-w

- Finnegan, J. J. (2022). Changing prices in a changing climate: electoral competition and fossil fuel taxation. Comparative Political Studies, 56(8), 1257–1290. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140221141853

- Fiorino, D., & Weted, C. A. (2020). Environmental federalism in a polarized era. State and Local Government Review, 52(2), 138–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160323x20986225

- Fuadi, A. B. (2022). Politik hukum pengaturan keserentakan pemilu. Jurnal Konstitusi, 18(3), 702. https://doi.org/10.31078/jk18310

- Ghosh, P. P., & Gupta, C. D. (2009). Political implications of inter-state disparity. Economic and Political Weekly, 44(26), 185–191.

- Gil, N., Stafford, A., & Musonda, I. (2019). Duality by Design: The global race to build Africa's infrastructure. Cambridge University Press.

- Goodstein, S. (2023). How digital changed the political landscape. In Routledge eBooks (pp. 269–290). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003166375-14

- Gourley, P., & Khamis, M. (2022). It is not easy being a Green party: Green politics as a normal good. European Journal of Political Economy, 76, 102266. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2022.102266

- Grazini, C., Guarini, G., & Porcile, J. G. (2024). Institutional change and Ecological Structural Change. Structural Change and Economic Dynamics, 71, 354–368. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.strueco.2024.08.004

- Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2020). Setting the trend or changing the game? Professionalization and digitalization of election campaigns in Sweden. Journal of Political Marketing, 19(3), 258–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2016.1228555

- Guillaume, B., Benjamin, D., & Vincent, C. (2022). Review of the Impact of IT on the Environment and Solution with a Detailed Assessment of the Associated Gray Literature. Sustainability, 14(4), 2457. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14042457

- Han, J., & Finke, D. (2022). Voting Green in European Parliament elections: issue voting in an electoral context. Journal of European Public Policy, 30(12), 2764–2785. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2116082

- Heitz, A., Wang, Y., & Wang, Z. (2021). Corporate political connections and favorable environmental regulatory enforcement. Management Science, 69(12), 7838–7859. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2020.3931

- Jagers, S. C., Lachapelle, E., Martinsson, J., & Matti, S. (2021). Bridging the ideological gap? How fairness perceptions mediate the effect of revenue recycling on public support for carbon taxes in the United States, Canada and Germany. Review of Policy Research, 38(5), 529–554. https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12439

- Jakob, M., Steckel, J. C., Klasen, S., Lay, J., Grunewald, N., Martínez-Zarzoso, I., Renner, S., & Edenhofer, O. (2014). Feasible mitigation actions in developing countries. Nature Climate Change, 4(11), 961–968. https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2370

- Jha, H. (2023). Pathways to develop state capacity in a weak state: the sub-national state of Bihar in India. Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 61(4), 427–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2023.2275454

- Katju, M. (2020). Institutional initiatives towards expanding democracy: the Election Commission of India and electoral mobilisation. Contemporary South Asia, 29(2), 147–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2020.1775179

- Kiyada, S., & Katakam, A. (2024). How India conducted the world's largest election. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/graphics/INDIA-ELECTIONS/gdpzmqgrmvw/

- Krivonosova, I. (2021). The forgotten election administrator of internet voting: Lessons from Estonia. Policy Studies, 43(6), 1254–1276. https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1958179

- Kumari, N. (2025). Tech-fueled human development: "role of ICT in enhancing human development - a panel analysis." Journal of Economic Studies. https://doi.org/10.1108/jes-11-2024-0742

- Larsson, A. O. (2015). Green light for interaction: Party use of social media during the 2014 Swedish election year. First Monday. https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i12.5966

- Law Commission, I. (2018). Draft Report : Simultaneous Elections. legalaffairs.gov.in. https://legalaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/simultaneous_elections/LCI_2018_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf

- Li, Z., & Wang, J. (2022). The dynamic impact of digital economy on carbon emission reduction: Evidence city-level empirical data in China. Journal of Cleaner Production, 351, 131570. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.131570

- Liao, Y., & Ruiz Junco, P. (2022). Extreme weather and the politics of climate change: A study of campaign finance and elections. Journal of Environmental Economics and Management, 111, 102550. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2021.102550

- Liu, N. N., Lo, C. W., Zhan, X., & Wang, W. (2014). Campaign-Style enforcement and regulatory compliance. Public Administration Review, 75(1), 85–95. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12285

- Loftus, A. (2018). Political ecology II: Whither the state? Progress in Human Geography, 44(1), 139–149. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132518803421

- M, A., & C.R., K. (2024). Decentralized Trust: Visual Cryptography for Transparent E-Voting Solutions. 2024 International Conference on Innovative Computing, Intelligent Communication and Smart Electrical Systems (ICSES), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1109/icses63760.2024.10910536

- Marchand, S. N. (2014). Voting in America and election administration: Best practices and recommendations. Nova Publishers.

- McAlexander, R. J., & Urpelainen, J. (2020). Elections and Policy Responsiveness: Evidence from Environmental Voting in the U.S. Congress. Review of Policy Research, 37(1), 39–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12368

- Melville-Rea, H. (2022). Parched and impatient: Political engagement after drought. Political Geography, 96, 102516. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102516

- Mitra, S. K. (2005). The nation, state and the federal process in India. In Routledge eBooks (pp. 53–70). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203988930-11

- Mouat, G., Galik, C., Venkatesh, A., Jordan, K., Sinha, A., Jaramillo, P., & Johnson, J. X. (2025). State-led climate action can cut emissions at near-federal costs but favors

different technologies. Nature Communications, 16(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-59696-0

- Neog, Y., Singh, M. K., Yadava, A. K., & Gaur, A. K. (2023). Political Competition and Environment Quality: A Study of India. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 30(51), 110280–110297. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-023-29831-9

- Niewenhuis, D., Talluri, S., Iosup, A., & De Matteis, T. (2024). FootPrinter: Quantifying Data Center Carbon Footprint. ICPE 2024 - Companion of the 15th ACM/SPEC International Conference on Performance Engineering, 189–195. https://doi.org/10.1145/3629527.3651419

- Nugroho, R. M., & Asmorojati, A. W. (2019). Simultaneous local election in Indonesia: Is it really more effective and efficient? Jurnal Media Hukum, 26(2). https://doi.org/10.18196/jmh.20190135

- Oates, W. E. (1999). An essay on fiscal federalism. Journal of Economic Literature, 37(3), 1120–1149. https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.37.3.1120

- Pegorini, J. I., Souza, A. C. C., Ortoncelli, A. R., Pagno, R. T., & Will, N. C. (2021). Security and Threats in the Brazilian e-Voting System: A Documentary Case Study Based on Public Security Tests. ACM International Conference Proceeding Series, 157–164. https://doi.org/10.1145/3494193.3494301

- Peng, Y., & Bai, X. (2020). Financing urban low-carbon transition: The catalytic role of a city-level special fund in shanghai. Journal of Cleaner Production, 282, 124514. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.124514

- Prakash, S., & Gunalan, I. (2020). An empirical framework for Digital Government Assessment. Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance, 271–278. https://doi.org/10.1145/3428502.3428541

- Richard, M. (2019). Election Commission, NGT, Environment Ministry say no to plastics in 2019 poll campaigning. Down To Earth. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/pollution/election-commission-ngt-environment-ministry-say-no-to-plastics-in-2019-poll-campaigning-63546#:~:text=The%20Election%20Commission%20directed%20all,use%20plastic%20for%20poll%20preparations.

- Robbins, P. (2011). Political ecology: A Critical Introduction. John Wiley & Sons.

- Rout, S., & Gochhayat, N. (2024). Analysing the importance of governance, politics and energy consumption on environmental sustainability in India. Discover Sustainability, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-024-00646-z

- S, N. S. T., & Sumathy, M. (2023). Citizens' attitudes and perceptions for Augmenting E-Governance practices. In Practice, progress, and proficiency in sustainability (pp. 284–298). https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9711-1.ch015

- Saikumar, R. (2023). ICT innovations of Election Commission of India. In https://egovernance.vikaspedia.in/. Vikaspedia.in. Retrieved July 23, 2025, from https://egovernance.vikaspedia.in/viewcontent/e-governance/online-citizen-services/government-to-citizen-services-g2c/ict-innovations-of-election-commission-of-india?lgn=en

- Salma. (2024, March 15). Indonesia's 2024 Elections: Balancing Technology and Trust in Digital Age. Universitas Gadjah Mada. https://ugm.ac.id/en/news/indonesias-2024-elections-balancing-technology-and-trust-in-digital-age/

- Sato, S. (2024). Digital Divide in Rural India: The Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Development. https://doi.org/10.22541/au.172979366.67985264/v1

- Shah, A. (2023). Green Federalism: principles and practice in mature federations and the European Union. In Springer eBooks (pp. 173–210). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22606-9_6

- Shobe, W. (2020). Emerging issues in decentralized resource governance: environmental federalism, spillovers, and Linked Socio-Ecological systems. Annual Review of Resource Economics, 12(1), 259–279. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-resource-110319-114535

- Short, J. L. (2019). The politics of regulatory enforcement and compliance: Theorizing and operationalizing political influences. Regulation & Governance, 15(3), 653–685. https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12291

- Sidharth, P. V., Nagarajan, P. M., Johnson, D. G., Kumar, A. A., & Namitha, K. (2024). Securing democracy: The two-phase authentication approach to electronic voting. 2024 3rd International Conference on Applied Artificial Intelligence and Computing (ICAAIC), 1788–1793. https://doi.org/10.1109/icaaic60222.2024.10575389

- Sims, C., Armsworth, P. R., Blackwood, J., Fitzpatrick, B., Kling, D. M., Lenhart, S., Neubert, M., Papeş, M., Sanchirico, J., Shea, K., & Springborn, M. (2023). Leveraging federalism for flexible and robust management of social-ecological systems. People and Nature, 5(2), 446–454. https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10458

- Sriraam, V. S., Raghavi, V. R., & Ramesh, S. R. (2024). Implementation of electronic voting machine in FPGA. 2024 International Conference on Computer, Electronics, Electrical Engineering &Amp; Their Applications (IC2E3), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1109/ic2e362166.2024.10826813

- Stef, N., & Jabeur, S. B. (2022). Elections and environmental quality. Environmental and Resource Economics, 84(2), 593–625. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10640-022-00739-1

- Sujith, T. S., & Sumathy, M. (2023). Citizens' attitudes and perceptions for augmenting e-governance practices. Practice, Progress, and Proficiency in Sustainability, 284–298. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9711-1.ch015

- Sun, Y., Dai, Y., & Jin, X. (2025). Assessing the impact of democratic institutions and administrative capacity on national carbon emissions reduction. Journal of Public Affairs, 25(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.70051

- Suresh, A., Gupthan, A., Arpitalaxmi, Abhishek, S., & T, A. (2023). Secure vote: AI-powered fingerprint authentication for next-generation online voting. 2023 7th International Conference on Electronics, Communication and Aerospace Technology (ICECA), 993–1000. https://doi.org/10.1109/iceca58529.2023.10394882

- Tikender, P. S. (2024, March 14). What is the carbon footprint of conducting elections in India? Deccan Herald. Retrieved 2025, from https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/what-is-the-carbon-footprint-of-conducting-elections-in-india-2936068.

- Wallace, P. (2019). The Regionalization of Indian electoral politics 1989-90: Punjab and Haryana. In Routledge eBooks (pp. 138–158). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429042430-6

- Wani, A. A., & Dar, A. R. (2024). Simultaneous Elections in Plural Societies Overlapping Social Cleavages and Democratic Stability in India. Economic and Political Weekly, 59(1), 42–46.

- Willemson, J., & Krips, K. (2023). Estimating carbon footprint of paper and internet voting. In Lecture notes in computer science (pp. 140–155). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43756-4_9

- Wynes, S., Motta, M., & Donner, S. D. (2021). Understanding the climate responsibility associated with elections. One Earth, 4(3), 363–371. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2021.02.008

- Zarb, S., & Taylor, K. (2022). Uneven local implementation of federal policy after disaster: Policy conflict and goal ambiguity. Review of Policy Research, 40(1), 63–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12478

- Zhao, Y., Gao, G., Zhang, J., & Yu, M. (2024). Impact of carbon tax on green building development: An evolutionary game analysis. Energy Policy, 195, 114401. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2024.114401

30.13   Inclusive Health Governance: Examining Local Government Initiatives for Women and Transgender Persons in Kerala

[1] Harshita Priyadharshini and [2] Athira P R

[1] *Research Scholar, Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India.* hpriyadharshanie@gmail.com

[2] *Research Scholar, Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, India.*athirapregi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines Kerala's approach to inclusive health governance through local government initiatives targeting women and transgender persons from 2020 to 2025. Using a mixed-methods approach combining document analysis, policy review, and secondary data analysis, this research investigates how Kerala's decentralized governance system addresses health inequities through gender-responsive planning and implementation. The findings reveal that Kerala has established a comprehensive framework including the Women Component Plan allocating ₹4,661 crores (21.35% of plan outlay) and enhanced transgender welfare funding growing from ₹0.1 crores to ₹6.93 crores during the study period. Key initiatives include Mission Aardram, queer-inclusive healthcare programs, and the establishment of a dedicated Gender Reassignment Surgery unit. However, challenges persist in fund utilization, traditional gender role reinforcement, and addressing intersectional vulnerabilities. The study concludes that while Kerala demonstrates progressive policy frameworks, implementation gaps require targeted interventions to achieve truly inclusive health governance. Policy recommendations include strengthening community participation, enhancing inter-sectoral coordination, and developing comprehensive monitoring systems for marginalized populations.

Keywords: inclusive health governance, decentralization, women's health, transgender health, Kerala, local government, gender-responsive planning

Introduction

Inclusive health governance represents a paradigmatic shift from traditional top-down health management to participatory, rights-based approaches that recognize and address the diverse needs of all population groups, particularly those historically marginalized. The concept encompasses both the processes and outcomes of health system stewardship,

emphasizing equitable access, meaningful participation, and responsive service delivery. In the context of sustainable development and universal health coverage goals, inclusive governance has emerged as a critical determinant of health system performance and population health outcomes.

India's decentralized governance structure, established through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1993, provides a unique framework for implementing inclusive health policies at the grassroots level. Kerala State exemplifies this approach through its extensive experience with decentralized planning and implementation, spanning over 25 years since the People's Planning Campaign of 1996. The state's commitment to social development, combined with strong democratic institutions and high social indicators, positions it as a valuable case study for examining inclusive health governance in practice.

The period from 2020 to 2025 has been particularly significant for Kerala's inclusive health initiatives, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic response, new policy enactments, and enhanced focus on marginalized communities. This timeframe encompasses critical developments including gender-responsive pandemic policies, the Kerala Public Health Act 2023, and unprecedented increases in transgender welfare allocations. Understanding how local governments navigate these complex challenges provides insights into the potential and limitations of decentralized approaches to inclusive health governance.
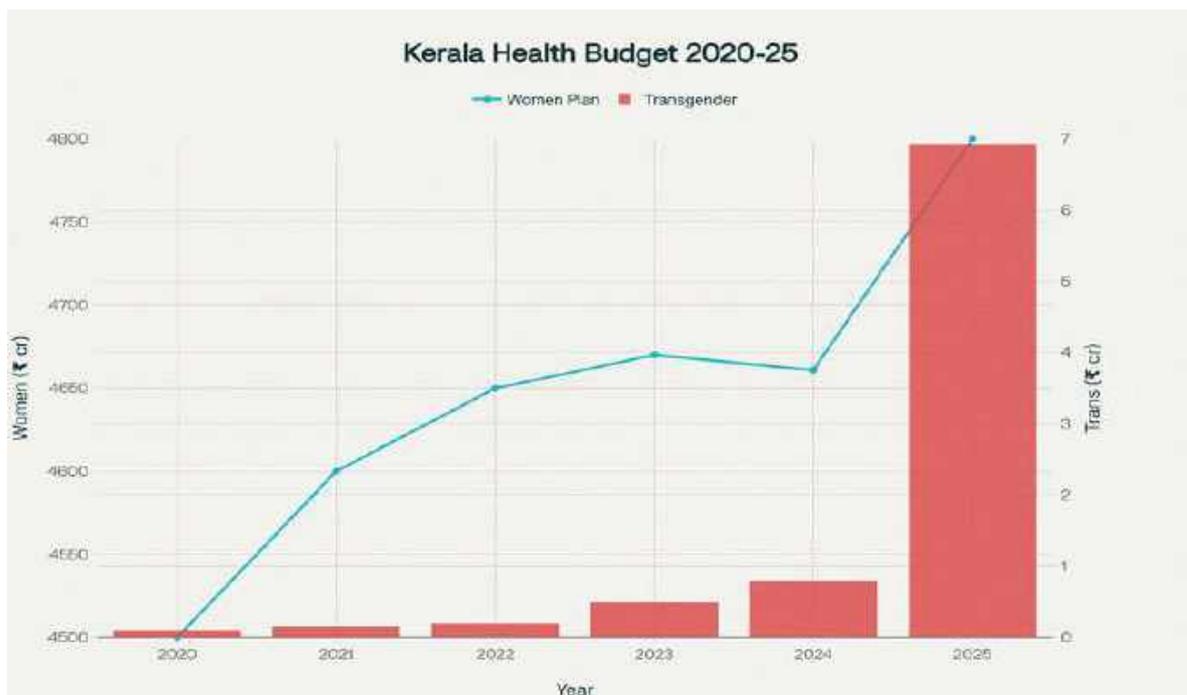
Kerala's Inclusive Health Governance: Budget Allocation Trends for Women and Transgender Persons (2020-2025)

This study addresses three primary research questions: How do local government initiatives in Kerala address the health needs of women and transgender persons? What are the mechanisms and processes that enable or constrain inclusive health governance at the local level? What lessons can be drawn from Kerala's experience for broader applications of inclusive health governance frameworks?

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks of Inclusive Health Governance

Inclusive health governance emerged from critiques of traditional health system management that often overlooked the needs of marginalized populations. The concept builds upon principles of good governance - transparency, accountability, participation, equity, and effectiveness - while incorporating specific attention to structural vulnerabilities and power dynamics that shape health outcomes. Contemporary frameworks emphasize the importance of addressing social determinants of health through multi-sectoral coordination and community engagement.

The World Health Organization's health system building blocks framework has evolved to incorporate governance as a fundamental function rather than merely a support mechanism. This evolution recognizes governance as encompassing stewardship functions including policy formulation, regulation, strategic purchasing, and performance monitoring, all of which must be conducted through inclusive processes to achieve equitable outcomes.

Decentralization and Health Governance

Decentralization of health systems has been promoted as a mechanism to improve responsiveness, efficiency, and equity in service delivery. However, empirical evidence presents mixed results, with outcomes heavily dependent on local capacity, political commitment, and institutional design. The Kerala experience offers unique insights into how decentralization can be leveraged for inclusive outcomes, particularly when combined with strong community mobilization and progressive political leadership.

Koivusalo and Wyss's analysis of decentralization effects on equity dimensions reveals that outcomes depend critically on how decentralization is implemented and whether it includes mechanisms for addressing power imbalances and structural inequities. Kerala's approach, characterized by mandatory reservations for women, earmarked budgets for marginalized groups, and participatory planning processes, represents an attempt to address these challenges systematically.

Gender-Responsive Health Governance

Gender-responsive governance requires moving beyond gender-neutral policies to actively address the differential impacts of health interventions on different gender groups. This approach recognizes that gender intersects with other social identities to create distinct patterns of vulnerability and resilience. The literature emphasizes the importance of gender budgeting, sex-disaggregated data collection, and women's participation in decision-making processes as key mechanisms for achieving gender-responsive outcomes.

Recent scholarship has expanded beyond binary gender categories to include transgender and gender-diverse populations, recognizing their specific health needs and experiences of discrimination within health systems. This expansion requires new frameworks for understanding how gender identity intersects with health governance and service delivery.

Local Government and Women's Empowerment

The relationship between decentralized governance and women's empowerment has been extensively studied, with Kerala serving as a prominent case study. Research demonstrates that while institutional reservations increase women's descriptive representation, substantive representation - actual influence on policy outcomes - requires additional mechanisms including capacity building, social support, and changes in patriarchal norms.[1]

Kudumbashree, Kerala's women-centered poverty reduction program, exemplifies how local institutions can be designed to promote women's agency while delivering health and social services. Studies show that women's participation in self-help groups and local governance institutions contributes to improved health outcomes, both through direct service delivery and through changes in household decision-making patterns.

Transgender Health and Local Governance

The inclusion of transgender persons in health governance represents a relatively recent development in Indian policy frameworks. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment of 2014 and subsequent policy developments, including Kerala's State Transgender Policy of 2015, have created new obligations for local governments to address transgender health needs.

Research on transgender health governance reveals persistent challenges including lack of family support, discrimination in healthcare settings, and inadequate service provision. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these vulnerabilities while also highlighting the potential for innovative policy responses.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative document analysis with quantitative analysis of budget allocations and program data. The methodology is designed to capture both the formal structures of inclusive health governance and the lived experiences of implementation at the local level.

Research Design

The research adopts a case study approach focusing on Kerala's local government initiatives from 2020 to 2025. This timeframe was selected to capture recent developments including pandemic response measures, new policy enactments, and emerging programs for transgender persons. The case study method allows for in-depth analysis of complex governance processes while maintaining contextual relevance.

Data Sources

Primary data sources include:

- · Government budget documents and financial allocations (2020-2025)
- · Policy documents and government orders
- · Local Self Government Department reports and circulars
- · State Finance Commission reports on fund allocation and expenditure

Secondary sources comprise:

· Academic literature on health governance and decentralization

· Research studies on women's empowerment and transgender health in Kerala

· Reports from civil society organizations and development agencies

· Media reports and policy analysis documents

Analytical Framework

The study employs a multi-dimensional analytical framework examining:

1. **Structural Analysis**: Institutional arrangements, policy frameworks, and resource allocation mechanisms

2. **Process Analysis**: Implementation modalities, participation mechanisms, and inter-sectoral coordination

3. **Outcome Analysis**: Service delivery improvements, equity indicators, and beneficiary experiences

4. **Temporal Analysis**: Evolution of policies and programs over the study period

Data Analysis

Quantitative data on budget allocations and program coverage were analyzed using descriptive statistics and trend analysis. Qualitative data from policy documents and reports were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes related to inclusion, participation, and equity. The analysis employed both deductive coding based on theoretical frameworks and inductive coding to identify emerging themes specific to the Kerala context.

Limitations

The study faces several limitations including:

· Reliance on publicly available documents with limited access to internal government communications

· Temporal constraints limiting analysis of long-term outcomes

· Focus on formal policy frameworks with limited insight into informal governance processes

·   Potential bias in government reports and official documents

Discussion

Evolution of Inclusive Health Governance in Kerala (2020-2025)

Kerala's journey toward inclusive health governance during 2020-2025 reflects both continuity with established frameworks and significant innovations in response to emerging challenges. The period witnessed unprecedented mobilization of resources and institutional mechanisms to address the health needs of women and transgender persons, while also revealing persistent limitations in traditional approaches to inclusion.[2][12]

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical juncture that both tested existing inclusive governance mechanisms and catalyzed new innovations. Kerala's response demonstrated the potential for gender-responsive policymaking under crisis conditions, while also highlighting vulnerabilities in existing systems. The state's deployment of predominantly women frontline workers - including over 26,000 ASHA workers and 66,000 anganwadi workers - illustrated both the reliance on women's unpaid and underpaid labor and the recognition of their central role in community health.

Institutional Mechanisms for Inclusion

Women Component Plan: Achievements and Limitations

The Women Component Plan (WCP) represents Kerala's longest-standing mechanism for ensuring gender-responsive resource allocation, mandating that 10% of local government development funds be earmarked for women-specific projects. Analysis of budget allocations from 2020-2025 reveals both the stability and limitations of this approach.

Budget data shows that WCP allocations have maintained consistency around 21% of total plan outlay, growing from approximately ₹4,500 crores in 2020 to ₹4,661 crores in 2024-25, representing a modest 6.7% increase over the period. However, this apparent stability masks significant challenges in fund utilization and program effectiveness identified in previous studies.

The Kerala State Finance Commission's analysis of micro-sector allocations reveals that WCP projects continue to reinforce traditional gender roles, with 85% of projects focusing

on nutrition and maternal health, while only 5% each address sanitation, waste processing, and social security. This pattern suggests limited evolution in understanding gender beyond reproductive functions, despite broader policy commitments to women's empowerment.

Transgender Inclusion: Policy Innovation and Implementation Challenges

Kerala's approach to transgender inclusion represents a significant policy innovation, beginning with the State Transgender Policy of 2015 and evolving through various programmatic interventions. The Karuthal scheme, established for transgender emergency assistance, provides a framework for addressing immediate health and social needs while building toward longer-term inclusion.

Budget analysis reveals dramatic growth in transgender welfare allocations, from ₹0.1 crores in 2020 to ₹6.93 crores in 2025, representing an increase of over 6,800%. This growth reflects both the initial inadequacy of allocations and growing recognition of transgender persons' rights and needs. However, absolute amounts remain modest relative to the scale of need, and utilization rates have historically been below 50% of allocations.

The establishment of a dedicated Gender Reassignment Surgery unit at Kottayam Medical College Hospital in 2024 represents a landmark development in transgender healthcare provision. This initiative addresses a critical gap in accessible, affordable gender-affirming care while demonstrating the potential for public sector innovation in addressing marginalized populations' needs.

Service Delivery Innovations

Mission Aardram and Inclusive Primary Care

Mission Aardram's transformation of Primary Health Centers into Family Health Centers provides a framework for implementing inclusive health governance at the service delivery level. The mission's emphasis on community participation, standardized service protocols, and family-centered care creates opportunities for addressing diverse health needs while maintaining quality standards.

The mission's integration with local self-government institutions enables community oversight and feedback mechanisms that can promote responsiveness to marginalized

populations' needs. However, the extent to which these mechanisms effectively address gender and transgender-specific health concerns requires further investigation and strengthening of staff capacity for inclusive service provision.

Queer-Inclusive Healthcare Programming

The collaboration between the State Health Systems Resource Centre-Kerala and Mariwala Health Initiative represents an innovative approach to institutionalizing queer-inclusive healthcare practices within the public health system. This program's multi-pronged approach - including staff sensitization, specialized counseling training, and community link workers - addresses systemic barriers to healthcare access for LGBTQ+ persons.

The program's emphasis on peer counseling through Community Link Workers reflects recognition that effective inclusion requires both systemic change and community-driven support mechanisms. Early reports suggest positive reception from healthcare providers, indicating potential for scaling this approach across the state's health system.

Community Participation and Empowerment

Village Health Committees and Gender-Sensitive Governance

Village Health Committees, established under the National Rural Health Mission, provide a crucial mechanism for community participation in health governance. In Kerala, these committees have been integrated with local self-government structures to enable broader community engagement in health planning and monitoring.

The mandatory representation of women in these committees, combined with broader reservation policies in local government, creates opportunities for women's voices to influence health service priorities and delivery modalities. However, research suggests that meaningful participation often requires additional support including capacity building, childcare arrangements, and cultural sensitivity to enable women's effective engagement.

ASHA Networks and Women's Leadership in Health

Kerala's extensive ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) network represents one of the largest deployments of women community health workers globally. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ASHA workers played central roles in contact tracing, health

education, and service delivery, while also experiencing increased workloads and psychosocial stress.

Recent research on ASHA experiences reveals the complex dynamics of empowerment and exploitation in women's community health roles. While many ASHA workers report satisfaction with their community service contributions, they also identify significant challenges including inadequate compensation, lack of job security, and limited career advancement opportunities. These findings highlight the need for more comprehensive approaches to supporting women's leadership in health governance.

Inter-Sectoral Coordination and Convergence

Integration with Social Protection Systems

Kerala's approach to inclusive health governance extends beyond the health sector to encompass broader social protection mechanisms. The integration of health initiatives with programs like Kudumbashree, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and various pension schemes creates opportunities for addressing social determinants of health through coordinated intervention.

This convergence approach is particularly evident in COVID-19 response measures, where health protocols were implemented through multiple sector platforms including education, social welfare, and local governance. However, coordination challenges persist, particularly in ensuring that marginalized populations can access services across different sectors without facing bureaucratic barriers or discrimination.

Environmental Health and Climate Adaptation

The Kerala Public Health Act of 2023 introduces a "one health" approach that recognizes interconnections between human, animal, and environmental health. This framework provides opportunities for addressing climate change impacts on health through inclusive governance mechanisms that recognize differential vulnerabilities among population groups.

The State Action Plan on Climate Change and Human Health emphasizes the role of local self-government institutions in implementing adaptation measures while ensuring that vulnerable populations, including women and transgender persons, are protected from

climate-related health risks. This approach illustrates the potential for expanding inclusive governance beyond traditional health services to address emerging challenges.

Challenges and Persistent Inequities

Implementation Gaps and Bureaucratic Barriers

Despite progressive policy frameworks, significant implementation gaps persist in Kerala's inclusive health governance initiatives. Research reveals that many transgender persons continue to face discrimination in healthcare settings, with 41.7% reporting discrimination experiences within the past year. These findings suggest that policy commitments have not yet translated into consistent changes in service provider attitudes and practices.

Similarly, women's participation in local governance, while numerically significant due to reservation policies, often remains limited in terms of substantive influence on decision-making processes. Cultural barriers, limited capacity building opportunities, and persistence of patriarchal norms continue to constrain women's effective engagement in health governance.

Resource Allocation and Utilization Challenges

Analysis of fund utilization patterns reveals persistent challenges in effectively deploying resources for inclusive health initiatives. Historical data shows that transgender welfare fund utilization has consistently remained below 50% of allocations, suggesting barriers in program design, beneficiary identification, or service delivery mechanisms.

For women-focused programs, while overall budget allocations have remained stable, the concentration of projects in traditional sectors like nutrition and maternal health suggests limited innovation in addressing broader health and social needs. This pattern indicates the need for more comprehensive approaches to gender-responsive budgeting and program design

Analysis

Theoretical Implications

Kerala's experience provides important insights into the practical application of inclusive health governance theories in a decentralized system. The state's approach demonstrates both the potential and limitations of institutional mechanisms for promoting inclusion, while highlighting the importance of political commitment, community mobilization, and continuous adaptation in achieving equitable outcomes.

The evolution of transgender inclusion policies illustrates how rights-based frameworks can drive institutional innovation, even in contexts with limited prior experience. However, the persistence of implementation challenges suggests that legal and policy commitments, while necessary, are insufficient without complementary investments in capacity building, cultural change, and systemic reform.

Comparative Perspectives

When compared with other Indian states, Kerala's comprehensive approach to inclusive health governance stands out for its integration of multiple intervention modalities and sustained political commitment. However, challenges in fund utilization and persistent inequities suggest that even well-resourced and politically committed systems face significant obstacles in achieving truly inclusive outcomes.

International comparisons reveal that Kerala's community health worker model, particularly the extensive deployment of women ASHAs, parallels successful approaches in other contexts while also highlighting unique features related to decentralized governance and social mobilization. The integration of community health workers with formal governance structures provides a model that may have broader applicability.

Policy Evolution and Learning

The period from 2020-2025 demonstrates Kerala's capacity for policy learning and adaptation, particularly in response to crisis conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a natural experiment in gender-responsive governance, revealing both strengths and vulnerabilities in existing systems while catalyzing innovations in service delivery and community engagement.

The establishment of the Gender Reassignment Surgery unit represents a significant evolution in understanding transgender health needs and the state's obligations to provide

inclusive services. This development illustrates how advocacy, policy frameworks, and institutional capacity can converge to address previously neglected health needs.

Sustainability and Scalability Considerations

Questions of sustainability arise regarding both resource allocation and institutional commitment to inclusive governance. While budget allocations have generally increased over the study period, the modest growth rates for women-focused programs and the historical challenges with fund utilization suggest the need for more strategic approaches to resource mobilization and deployment.

The scalability of Kerala's approach to other contexts depends critically on political commitment, institutional capacity, and social mobilization capabilities that may not be easily replicated. However, specific innovations like community health worker integration and gender-responsive budgeting provide models that can be adapted to different contexts.

Findings

Primary Findings on Institutional Mechanisms

1. **Budget Allocation Patterns**: Kerala maintains consistent commitment to gender-responsive budgeting through the Women Component Plan, allocating 21.35% of plan outlay (₹4,661 crores) in 2024-25. Transgender welfare allocations have grown dramatically from ₹0.1 crores to ₹6.93 crores over the study period, representing unprecedented expansion in policy attention to transgender rights.

2. **Policy Innovation**: The establishment of the dedicated Gender Reassignment Surgery unit and expansion of queer-inclusive healthcare programming demonstrate institutional capacity for addressing emerging inclusion challenges. The Kerala Public Health Act 2023 provides a comprehensive legal framework for inclusive health governance.

3. **Community Mobilization**: Kerala's extensive community health worker network, including over 26,000 ASHA workers, provides a robust platform for implementing inclusive health initiatives at the grassroots level. The integration of these workers with local governance structures enables responsive service delivery and community feedback mechanisms.

Service Delivery and Implementation Findings

1. **Mission Aardram Integration**: The transformation of Primary Health Centers into Family Health Centers provides improved infrastructure and service protocols that can support inclusive care delivery. However, the extent of integration with gender and transgender-specific health needs requires further strengthening through staff training and protocol development.

2. **Pandemic Response Effectiveness**: Kerala's COVID-19 response demonstrated the potential for gender-responsive crisis management, with women frontline workers playing central roles while also facing increased workload and psychosocial stress. The state's provision of emergency support to transgender persons during lockdown illustrates responsive policymaking under crisis conditions.

3. **Inter-sectoral Coordination**: Integration with broader social protection systems, including Kudumbashree and employment guarantee schemes, creates opportunities for addressing social determinants of health through coordinated intervention. However, coordination challenges persist in ensuring seamless access for marginalized populations.

Participation and Empowerment Findings

1. **Women's Political Participation**: Despite mandatory reservations ensuring numerical representation, women's substantive participation in health governance decision-making remains constrained by cultural barriers, limited capacity building, and persistence of patriarchal norms. Effective participation requires additional support mechanisms beyond formal representation requirements.

2. **Community Health Worker Empowerment**: ASHA workers report mixed experiences of empowerment and exploitation, with satisfaction from community service roles offset by concerns about inadequate compensation and job security. The sustainability of community health worker models depends on addressing these structural challenges.

3. **Transgender Community Engagement**: The integration of Community Link Workers from transgender communities provides an innovative model for peer support and

healthcare navigation. Early implementation suggests positive reception and potential for scaling across different health services.

Challenges and Limitations Findings

1. **Implementation Gaps**: Significant disparities persist between policy commitments and service delivery experiences, with 41.7% of transgender persons reporting healthcare discrimination within the past year. These findings indicate the need for more intensive efforts to change provider attitudes and institutional practices.

2. **Fund Utilization Challenges**: Historical patterns show consistent under-utilization of transgender welfare funds (below 50% of allocations) and concentration of women's projects in traditional sectors, suggesting barriers in program design and implementation.

3. **Traditional Gender Role Reinforcement**: Analysis reveals that 85% of WCP projects focus on nutrition and maternal health, with limited attention to broader empowerment goals or non-traditional gender roles. This pattern suggests the need for more transformative approaches to gender-responsive programming.

Conclusion

Kerala's experience with inclusive health governance from 2020-2025 demonstrates both the potential and limitations of decentralized approaches to addressing health inequities among women and transgender persons. The state's comprehensive policy framework, substantial resource allocations, and innovative programmatic interventions represent significant achievements in institutionalizing inclusion within health governance systems.

The dramatic expansion of transgender welfare allocations and establishment of dedicated gender-affirming healthcare services illustrate how rights-based advocacy can drive institutional innovation. Similarly, Kerala's gender-responsive COVID-19 response demonstrates the capacity for adaptive governance under crisis conditions. However, persistent challenges in fund utilization, service provider discrimination, and traditional gender role reinforcement reveal the complexity of translating policy commitments into equitable outcomes.

The study's findings suggest that inclusive health governance requires more than institutional mechanisms and resource allocation - it demands sustained attention to cultural change, capacity building, and systemic reform. Kerala's extensive community health worker networks and participatory governance structures provide important platforms for inclusion, but their effectiveness depends on addressing structural inequalities and power imbalances that extend beyond the health sector.

Looking forward, Kerala's experience offers valuable lessons for other contexts seeking to implement inclusive health governance approaches. The integration of community health workers with formal governance structures, the use of mandatory budget allocations for marginalized populations, and the development of specialized services for transgender persons provide models that can be adapted to different settings. However, successful replication requires attention to local political contexts, institutional capacities, and social mobilization capabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted both the vulnerability of marginalized populations to health crises and the potential for innovative policy responses that address their specific needs. Kerala's experience suggests that inclusive health governance is not merely a technical challenge but a political project that requires sustained commitment, community engagement, and continuous adaptation to emerging challenges.

Future research should focus on longitudinal outcome evaluation, comparative analysis with other states and countries, and deeper investigation of community experiences with inclusive health governance initiatives. Understanding how policy frameworks translate into improved health outcomes and reduced inequities remains a critical priority for both scholarship and practice in inclusive health governance.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations emerge for strengthening inclusive health governance in Kerala and similar contexts:

Institutional Strengthening

1. **Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**: Develop comprehensive monitoring frameworks that track not only resource allocation but also service quality, beneficiary satisfaction, and equity outcomes for women and transgender persons. This should

include regular discrimination audits in healthcare facilities and systematic collection of disaggregated health outcome data.

2. **Capacity Building for Health Providers**: Implement mandatory training programs on gender-sensitive and transgender-inclusive care for all health system personnel, from frontline workers to administrators. This should be coupled with regular refresher training and integration into professional development requirements.

3. **Strengthen Inter-sectoral Coordination**: Establish formal mechanisms for coordination between health, social welfare, education, and local governance departments to ensure integrated service delivery for marginalized populations. This should include joint planning processes and shared accountability frameworks.

Resource Allocation and Utilization

4. **Improve Fund Utilization Mechanisms**: Address barriers to effective utilization of allocated funds through simplified procedures, enhanced beneficiary identification systems, and targeted technical assistance for program implementation. Regular utilization reviews should be conducted with corrective action plans.

5. **Expand Beyond Traditional Gender Roles**: Diversify WCP project portfolios to address broader determinants of women's health and empowerment, including occupational health, mental health, and leadership development. This requires updating guidelines and providing technical assistance for innovative project design.

6. **Sustainable Financing for Transgender Programs**: Develop sustainable financing mechanisms for transgender health and welfare programs that go beyond crisis-response funding to address long-term health and social needs.

Community Engagement and Participation

7. **Strengthen Community Health Worker Support**: Address structural challenges facing ASHA workers through improved compensation, job security, and career advancement opportunities. This should include recognition of their expertise and integration into health system decision-making processes.

8. **Enhance Meaningful Participation**: Develop comprehensive support systems for women's effective participation in health governance, including childcare provisions,

flexible meeting schedules, and capacity building programs tailored to diverse educational backgrounds and experiences.

9. **Expand Peer Support Models**: Scale up the Community Link Worker model for transgender persons while developing similar peer support mechanisms for other marginalized populations, ensuring adequate training and institutional support.

Service Delivery Innovation

10. **Integrate Inclusive Practices in Mission Aardram**: Develop specific protocols and service standards within Family Health Centers to address the health needs of women and transgender persons, including privacy protections, cultural competency requirements, and referral pathways.

11. **Digital Health Inclusion**: Leverage digital health technologies to improve access for marginalized populations while ensuring that digital divides do not exacerbate existing inequities. This should include multilingual interfaces and accessibility features for persons with disabilities.

12. **Climate-Responsive Health Planning**: Integrate gender and social vulnerability assessments into climate adaptation planning for health systems, ensuring that adaptation measures protect and prioritize the most vulnerable populations.

These recommendations require sustained political commitment, adequate resource allocation, and ongoing collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and affected communities. Implementation should be phased and adaptive, with regular review and adjustment based on emerging evidence and changing needs.

The success of inclusive health governance ultimately depends on transforming not just policies and institutions but also the underlying social and cultural norms that perpetuate exclusion and discrimination. Kerala's experience demonstrates that such transformation is possible but requires sustained effort across multiple sectors and levels of governance.

References

- Sukumar, S., et al. (2023). Gender-responsive Planning and Development of Health-related Projects for Women and Transgender Persons at the Local Self-government Level in Kerala, South India. *Journal of Health Care Research*, 8(2), 45-62.[1]

- Nair, A., et al. (2024). Non-communicable diseases and its risk factors among the transgender population in Kerala: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1), 234-248.[41]

- Nair, M. R., Kumar, S. S., Babu, S. S., et al. (2023). Health inequities around gender, disability and internal migration: are local governments doing enough. *Public Health Action*, 13(Suppl 1), 6-11.[2]

- Madhavan, M., & Shinu, K. S. (2021). How Kerala transgenders are faring amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 46(4), 3943-3945.[33]

- Kerala's groundbreaking project for queer-inclusive public healthcare. (2025). *YourStory Social*.[3]

- Kerala Social Justice Department. (2019). Karuthal scheme for Transgender persons. Government of Kerala.[37]

- Kerala National Health Mission. (2020). Aardram Mission: Re-engineering Primary Health Centres. Department of Health and Family Welfare.[4]

- National Health Systems Resource Centre. (2023). Panchayati Raj Members and Health: Participant Manual. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.[11]

- Transgender Law Center. (2015). State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala, 2015. Government of Kerala.[31]

- Kerala State Planning Board. (2024). Panchayati Raj Institutions and Women's Empowerment. Government of Kerala.[19]

- The New Indian Express. (2025). Dedicated gender surgery unit marks milestone in care. August 7, 2025.[5]

- Ramakumar, R., & Eapen, M. (2021). The legacy of public action and gender-sensitivity of the pandemic response in Kerala State, India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 56(42), 45-58.[12]

- Government of Kerala. (2021). Making SDG a reality: Kerala Health. Department of Health and Family Welfare.[13]

- World Health Organization India. (2020). Responding to COVID-19 - Learnings from Kerala. WHO Country Office for India.[35]Government of Kerala. (2025). Gender Budget 2025-26. Finance Department.[38]

- Khan, S. A. (2024). Decentralization and Women Empowerment: Exploring the Linkages. *Pakistan Political Science Review*, 5(2), 65-82.[20]

- BMJ Global Health. (2020). Health systems governance: the missing links. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(8), e002533.[8]

- Third Voice Publications. (2024). Women's Participation in Decentralized Democracy: A Critical Understanding.[29]

- Gender Policy Research. (2024). Gender Policy in Local Governments: How to Improve Development. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 47(12), 1245-1260.[23]

- OECD Development Cooperation Directorate. (2024). Policy Guidance on Enabling Inclusive Governance. OECD Publishing.[9]

- Kirigia, J. M., et al. (2011). The essence of governance in health development. *Health Policy and Planning*, 26(6), 458-468.[10]

- IMPRI India. (2023). Gender Implications of Health Policies. Policy Brief Series.[24]

- Singh, P., et al. (2024). Empowering or Exhausting? COVID-19 Experiences of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) in Kerala. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(3), 456-475.[39]

- Government of Kerala. (2023). The Kerala Public Health Act, 2023. Kerala Gazette.[14]

- Devan, V. V., & Kumar, S. S. (2024). Allocation for Women-Centered Policies in Kerala Budget 2024-2025: An Analysis. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12(6), 960-970.[6]

- Government of Kerala. (2023). Kerala Public Health Act, 2023: Implementation Guidelines. Health and Family Welfare Department.[15]

- LSGD Kerala. (2024). Women Component Plan and Plans for Special Groups. Local Self Government Department.[36]

- Chakrapani, V., et al. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Economic Well-Being and Health Care Access among Transgender Women in India. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(8), 2825-2834.[34]

- Research Data. (2025). Kerala Inclusive Health Governance Timeline 2020-2025. [Generated dataset for this study].

- Research Data. (2025). Kerala Health Governance Components Analysis. [Generated dataset for this study].

30.14   Staggered Elections in Kerala: History and the Implications of One Nation One Election

[1] *Khadeeja Sadarudheen and* [2] *Dr. Kamalaveni*

Research Scholar, Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India. khadeejasadarudheen@pondiuni.ac.in

Associate Professor, Centre for Women's Studies, Pondicherry University, Kalapet, Puducherry, 605014, India. kamalaveni@pondiuni.ac.in

Abstract

The One Nation, One Election (ONOE) initiative proposes synchronizing the electoral calendar for Parliament, state assemblies, and local bodies to reduce costs, administrative strain, and governance disruptions (Bhavsar, 2023). Simultaneous elections were conducted in India from 1951-52 till 1967, but became staggered with the premature dissolution of many state assemblies in 1968 and 1969 (Dasgupta, 2023). It is important to know the history of elections and understand India's political and social context to gauge the impact of ONOE effectively.

After its formation in 1956, Kerala had its first election in 1957. However, it has a history of political instability, including many presidents' rule, which led to staggered elections being the norm, making Kerala a perfect state to study the implications of ONOE. Kerala is the first state to democratically elect a Communist party in the world, which suggests a history of strong regional politics and is also a state where local and decentralised governance (e.g., Kudumbashree, a significant women's empowerment initiative) is strong, which could be affected by ONOE. This paper explores the historical and political evolution of staggered elections. This study uses a qualitative methodology of a historical-analytical method to assess the implications of ONOE on the federal structure of India, the regional dynamics and autonomy of Kerala and its effects on women's political participation and grassroots governance.

Keywords: Kerala, Staggered elections, ONOE, federalism, women's political representation

Introduction

One Nation, One Election is a proposal that seeks to synchronise the electoral calendars of the Lok Sabha (Parliament), state legislative assemblies, and local self-governing bodies so

that elections are held simultaneously across all tiers of governance. This proposal was suggested initially in 2014 by Narendra Modi, the then Gujarat Chief Minister (BL Explainer: Can One Nation, One Poll Become a Reality? 2023), to minimise the fiscal burden of repeated elections, reduce administrative strain, and avoid disruptions to governance caused by the Model Code of Conduct (Bhavsar, 2023). However, the synchronisation risks undermining the federal structure of India, as said in the Constitution, potentially diluting the autonomy of state governments and limiting the political space for regional and local issues.

India's electoral history offers important context for this debate. Between 1951–52 and 1967, simultaneous elections were the norm. However, this pattern was disrupted due to the premature dissolution of several state assemblies in 1968 and 1969, leading to our staggered electoral cycles. (Dasgupta, 2023).

Kerala, a state formed in 1956, has a history of elections surrounded by massive political instability. Kerala's first elections in 1957 brought to power the first democratically elected Communist government, led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad (Mandhani & Law, 2014). The government's ambitious land reforms and educational restructuring, combined with its tense relationship with the central government, contributed to political turbulence and the imposition of multiple periods of President's Rule. These interruptions in governance ended up in Kerala's electoral calendar being staggered.

Kerala's case is significant because it represents a unique political culture marked by strong regional party systems, high political awareness among citizens, and an unparalleled emphasis on decentralised governance. The Kudumbashree initiative, for example, has done a lot for women's participation in local governance, linking electoral cycles to grassroots empowerment (Jose, 2015). The introduction of ONOE could disrupt this dynamic by centralising electoral focus on national and state-level issues, potentially marginalising local concerns (Wagh et al., 2025).

This paper examines Kerala's electoral history and political landscape to assess how ONOE can alter the state's governance and federal structure. The key research questions guiding this study are:

☐ How did Kerala's political history contribute to the shift from simultaneous to staggered elections?

☐ What would be the potential effects of ONOE on Kerala's political autonomy, regional

political dynamics, and women's political participation?

The study adopts a qualitative and historical-analytical methodology, using archival data, electoral records, and secondary literature to trace Kerala's electoral evolution. Through this lens, the paper situates Kerala within the larger ONOE debate, highlighting the tension between pursuing administrative efficiency and preserving India's plural, federal democracy.

Literature Review

The notion of synchronising elections at all levels has been of renewed interest, particularly following the submission of a government-appointed panel's report in March 2024, emphasising administrative efficiencies, cost-saving, and reduced governance disruption (*Government Panel Recommends India Hold Simultaneous State, National Elections*, n.d.). Critics, however, argue that such centralisation may threaten the autonomy of state governments and undermine the federal ethos of Indian democracy.

Debates on election timing and federal dynamics underscore how staggered elections reinforce the independence of state-level politics and allow diverse political narratives to emerge. These debates highlight the tensions between administrative uniformity and democratic pluralism; however, state-specific case studies—especially examining implications on governance structures like those of Kerala—remain limited.

Existing literature on Kerala's politics notes its early political instability, coalition politics, and land reform movements, particularly the Communist government 1957 led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad. These works offer context on state–centre tensions and frequent imposition of President's Rule, which led to irregular electoral cycles (Kerala-specific individual studies, available in state archives and political analysis, though not directly cited in this paper).

Kerala's local governance reforms and the rise of Kudumbashree are well-documented as grassroots innovations. Kudumbashree has developed into one of the world's largest women's networks, with nearly 4.8 million members (Venugopalan et al., 2021) organised through NHGs, ADSs, and CDSs (*Kudumbashree*, 2025).

The programme's embedded Women Component Plan (WCP)—which mandates at least

10% of local government plans to be allocated toward women-specific projects—reflects its gender-responsive governance design. Additional structural innovations include Gender Resource Centres, gender sensitisation training, anti-trafficking support desks like Snehitha, and vigilant groups for community protection (*Kudumbashree*, 2025). While there is a discourse on ONOE nationally, its localised impacts—especially on states with robust decentralised structures and strong women's movements like Kerala—are underexplored. This paper fills this gap by linking Kerala's election history, governance ethos, and grassroots politics with the contemporary ONOE discourse.

Historical Context of Staggered Elections in Kerala

Simultaneous elections in India

The electoral calendar for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies was fully aligned when India conducted its first general elections in 1951–52. This synchronicity meant that voters participated in national and state elections every five years during the same period. The Election Commission of India (ECI) managed the process with limited logistical strain, and governments generally served their full terms. During this period, the Indian National Congress dominated Indian politics, which enjoyed widespread support at the national and state levels. As a result, political transitions were relatively predictable, and legislative terms remained synchronised across states.

The era of simultaneous elections began to erode in the late 1960s. Political instability and premature dissolution of state assemblies were the leading causes. In 1967, Congress lost its monopoly in several states, leading to the rise of coalition governments. Many coalitions collapsed before completing their terms, resulting in unscheduled assembly elections.

Between 1968 and 1969, assemblies in several states—including Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh—were dissolved early. Kerala had experienced instability since its formation in 1956, but the trend deepened in this period. When the Lok Sabha was dissolved early in 1970 by the Indira Gandhi government, the fragmentation of electoral calendars became entrenched nationally, leading to general elections in 1971, ahead of schedule.

Kerala's Electoral History

Kerala's Communist Party of India (CPI) government's administration embarked on radical

reforms, especially in land redistribution and education policy, which directly conflicted with landed elites, the church, and opposition sections. The agitation known as the "Liberation Struggle" (Vimochana Samaram) culminated in the dismissal of the government by the central government in 1959, marking Kerala's first experience of President's Rule.

In the decades following state formation, Kerala saw frequent changes in government. Electoral outcomes were fragmented, leading to short-lived coalition ministries. The state alternated between United Front (left-leaning) and United Democratic Front (Congress-led) alliances. This political churn and multiple instances of President's Rule led to the gradual decoupling of Kerala's election schedule from the national cycle.

By the 1980s, Kerala's electoral timeline was distinct from the national one, with assembly elections occurring independently of Lok Sabha polls. This separation reinforced the state's political identity, allowing campaigns to focus on regional concerns such as agrarian policy, education, and welfare rather than being overshadowed by national narratives.

The staggered system allowed Kerala's electorate—one of the most politically literate in the country—to engage deeply with state-level issues. It also enabled local governance innovations such as the decentralisation drive of the 1990s to become central electoral themes. However, it also meant that elections were frequent, often creating administrative slowdowns due to the repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct.

Volatile coalition politics, sharp ideological divides, and frequent changes in government have characterised Kerala's political journey since its formation in 1956. Political instability remained a recurring feature from the 1960s to the early 1980s. Successive governments were often short-lived due to fractured electoral mandates, defections, and shifting alliances.

Kerala's Political Culture

When looking at Kerala's political culture, it is distinctive in several respects:

- **High voter literacy and turnout:** The state consistently records turnout rates above the national average, reflecting deep civic engagement (The Logical Indian, 2019).

- **Ideological polarisation:** The Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the CPI(M), and the UDF, led by the Indian National Congress, dominate the political scene, with minimal space for other parties to gain lasting influence.

- **Coalition governance:** Both fronts depend on alliances with smaller parties—often based on religious or community affiliations—making coalition management a critical skill in Kerala politics.

This competitive but predictable alternation of power has fostered a stable two-front system, even amidst ideological contestation.

Local governance in Kerala

The local governance in Kerala is robust. For example, Kerala's People's Plan Campaign of the mid-1990s was a pioneering decentralisation initiative that devolved substantial powers, responsibilities, and resources to local self-governing bodies (panchayats, municipalities, and corporations). This reform was not merely administrative—its root is the belief that participatory democracy at the grassroots level could deliver more effective and equitable governance.

Kudumbashree, launched in 1998 as a community-based poverty eradication and women's empowerment programme, is central to this local governance ethos. Organised through Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), Kudumbashree has grown into a massive network of women's collectives involved in microfinance, skill development, entrepreneurship, and social campaigns. Crucially, the electoral calendar for local bodies is intertwined with the momentum of such programmes, ensuring periodic renewal of grassroots leadership.

Kerala's staggered elections have helped preserve a political rhythm that keeps local, state, and national issues distinct in electoral debates. This separation allows citizens to vote differently at each level, reflecting the layered nature of political accountability. For example, voters may support the LDF in state elections for their welfare policies while favouring the UDF or other parties based on local governance performance in local elections.

ONOE could compress these separate political conversations into a single electoral moment, potentially diluting Kerala's deeply embedded culture of decentralised decision-making.

Implications of ONOE in Kerala

Legislative and executive authority is divided between the Union and the states (Articles 245-263) in the Indian Constitution to envision a quasi-federal system. Articles 324–329 govern the conduct of elections, which vest the Election Commission of India with the

authority to supervise, direct, and control elections to Parliament and state legislatures (Deshmukh, 2024).

Synchronising elections across all levels of governance under ONOE would require significant constitutional amendments—including changes to Articles 83 (duration of Houses of Parliament), 85 (dissolution of Lok Sabha), 172 (duration of State Legislatures), and 174 (dissolution of State Assemblies). The Constitution also allows premature dissolution of assemblies and Parliament under specific circumstances, meaning fixed-term synchronisation would need mechanisms to address situations like President's Rule, votes of no-confidence, or dissolution due to coalition breakdown.

ONOE risks concentrating political and administrative power at the Union level by standardising electoral cycles. This standardisation could lead to a homogenisation of political discourse in a diverse polity like India, where states have distinct political cultures, histories, and governance priorities.

Kerala's experience illustrates this concern well. With its two-front coalition system and robust decentralised governance structures, the state has developed a political rhythm separate from national elections. ONOE might compress state-level campaigns into national narratives, reducing the electoral salience of regional issues such as land reforms, welfare delivery, and decentralisation policies.

Synchronisation would also limit the ability of states to respond flexibly to political crises through mid-term elections. For example, if the Kerala government lost its legislative majority two years into its term under ONOE, one of two scenarios would arise:

1. Caretaker governments would remain in place until the next synchronised election cycle—potentially undermining democratic accountability.

2. Dissolution with fresh elections would disrupt the synchronised calendar, defeating the very purpose of ONOE.

Either scenario would require unprecedented constitutional innovations—possibly including constructive votes of no-confidence (where the people must elect a new leader before removing a government), or other measures to extend or shorten legislative terms artificially.

Specific risks related to Kerala are that its political system thrives on frequent public accountability through elections at different levels. Staggered polls keep state and local

governments responsive to their electorates and maintain issue-specific political engagement. ONOE could risk the marginalisation of local governance priorities, particularly in areas like gender budgeting, social welfare targeting, and participatory planning, by placing them in the shadow of larger state and national narratives.

Moreover, Kerala's history of central intervention—including multiple instances of President's Rule—has already made federal autonomy a contested space. ONOE, in its current form, is a mechanism that erodes this autonomy, albeit indirectly, by removing the flexibility of independent electoral timing.

Kerala boasts high female literacy rates, progressive social indicators, and active women's movements regarding women's representation, which is made possible through grassroots-level interventions by the local governments. As is the case, it is important to look at the state of women and other marginalised communities under a major governance change like the implementation of ONOE.

Women under One Nation, One Election in Kerala

Women's representation in formal politics—particularly in the Kerala Legislative Assembly—has historically been low, often below 10%. The breakthrough for women's political participation in the state has been at the local governance level, where the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992–93) mandated a 33% reservation for women, later increased to 50% in Kerala.

This structural change enabled thousands of women to enter panchayats, municipalities, and corporations as elected representatives. Many of them were first-time politicians, often coming from marginalised communities.

Launched in 1998, Kudumbashree has become the backbone of women's participation in governance. Its Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) provide a training ground for leadership, financial literacy, and collective action. Many Kudumbashree members have transitioned from community work to elected positions in local bodies.

The staggered nature of Kerala's elections—separating local body, state assembly, and parliamentary polls—has been crucial for sustaining this pipeline. It gives women's collectives space to campaign, build issue-specific platforms, and compete without being overshadowed by larger political battles at the state or national level.

Under ONOE, all elections would occur in a single, condensed cycle, potentially limiting

opportunities for women to enter politics incrementally. In Kerala's current staggered system:

- Local elections often serve as a low-stakes entry point for first-time women candidates.

- Time gaps between different elections allow women leaders to gain visibility, experience, and credibility before contesting higher offices.

- Women-focused campaigning—on issues such as gender budgeting, domestic violence prevention, or microenterprise promotion—can be more effective when elections have space between them, allowing for dedicated attention to these topics.

If ONOE compresses these cycles, women candidates—especially those from grassroots backgrounds—might find it harder to compete for voter attention against better-funded, male-dominated campaigns driven by state or national party agendas.

Kerala's electoral diversity has allowed women's issues to feature more prominently in localised manifestos. Synchronising elections could dilute these agendas in the noise of national politics. For example, policies like gender budgeting in local bodies, women-led cooperative models, and community-based welfare delivery might receive less attention when campaigns by high-profile national debates, such as foreign policy or macroeconomic reforms, are in the forefront.

Moreover, the symbolic value of repeated electoral engagement—seeing women contest, campaign, and govern in visible cycles—plays an important role in normalising female political leadership in the public imagination. ONOE could unintentionally weaken this cycle of representation.

Suggestions

Kerala's staggered election challenges can be addressed through targeted policy reforms, historically shaped by political instability and constitutional provisions. These interventions aim to balance the goals of democratic stability, cost efficiency, and political representation without undermining the autonomy of states.

1. Strengthening Anti-Defection Laws

The frequent breakdown of government in Kerala's early decades was partly due to defections and party fragmentation. Amendments to the Tenth Schedule could tighten provisions against opportunistic defections, ensuring political stability (Sharma, 2020).

2. Electoral Expenditure Rationalisation

The Election Commission of India (ECI) can introduce expenditure-sharing mechanisms between simultaneous elections at different levels to reduce duplication of costs.

3. Preserving State Autonomy in Election Scheduling

A significant criticism of ONOE is the perceived erosion of federalism (Palshikar, 2019). Any reform should involve inter-state consultation and safeguard constitutional provisions allowing assemblies to complete their natural tenure.

4. Voter Engagement and Awareness Measures

Even in a synchronised election system, voter education campaigns are crucial to prevent confusion between national and state issues, ensuring that national politics does not overshadow regional concerns (Kumar, 2021).

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of staggered elections in Kerala underscores the complex interplay between political pluralism, administrative contingencies, and electoral reforms. While the shift away from simultaneous elections in the late 1960s reflected the realities of coalition politics and constitutional crises, it also generated governance challenges such as repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct and policy discontinuities. Though rooted in administrative efficiency, the One Nation One Election (ONOE) proposal raises legitimate concerns about its compatibility with India's federal ethos and Kerala's unique political ecology.

The study draws on three primary data sources:

- ⁇ Archival records – Historical electoral data, legislative assembly proceedings, and constitutional provisions were examined to trace the shift from simultaneous to staggered elections.

- ⁇ Secondary literature – Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports (e.g., the Law Commission's Draft Report on Simultaneous Elections, 2018), and reputable media sources provided contextual and analytical perspectives.

- ⁇ Institutional reports – Documentation from Kerala's Kudumbashree Mission and related government bodies informed the analysis of decentralised governance and women's political participation.

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

- ⬜ Historical mapping – Constructing a chronological timeline of electoral events in Kerala from 1956 to 2024 to identify key disruptions and governance shifts.

- ⬜ Thematic coding – Categorising literature and archival material under key themes: electoral stability, federal–state relations, local governance, and gendered political participation.

- ⬜ Comparative linkage – Relating Kerala's experience to the broader ONOE debate to assess how proposed electoral synchronisation could interact with state-specific political dynamics.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on Kerala as a representative case of a state with a robust decentralised governance model and active civil society. While findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable, they offer analytical insights relevant to other Indian states with similar socio-political profiles. A limitation of this research is its reliance on secondary data, which may reflect the interpretive biases of prior scholars and institutional reports.

With its deeply participatory political culture and history of electoral experimentation, Kerala's debate over ONOE is not merely technical but profoundly democratic. Any policy shift must balance efficiency with representation, cost reduction with political accountability, and national coherence with state autonomy. The experiences of staggered elections here offer valuable lessons for policy designers — particularly the need for flexibility in constitutional timelines and mechanisms for accommodating regional political realities.

A hybrid model — retaining synchronisation where possible, while allowing for justified deviations — may offer a middle path. Further research should focus on the long-term administrative, fiscal, and democratic implications of ONOE, with special attention to state-level dynamics in Kerala.

The implication of ONOE is highly debated, but in any case, Kerala's experience suggests that any electoral reform must preserve space for regional autonomy, local governance, and gender representation.

References

- Bhavsar, K. P. (2023, September 1). One Nation, One Election: What does it mean? See the benefits, disadvantages and other details here. *Mint*. https://www.livemint.com/politics/one-nation-one-election-what-does-it-mean-see-benefits-disadvantages-and-other-details-here-11693544025947.html

- BL Explainer: Can One Nation, One Poll become a reality? (2023, September 7). *BusinessLine*. https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blexplainer/bl-explainer-can-one-nation-one-poll-become-a-reality/article67280003.ece

- Dasgupta, S. (2023, September 2). One Nation, One Election, Fourth Committee. *The Wire*. https://thewire.in/government/one-nation-one-election-fourth-committee

- Devika, J., & Thampi, B. V. (2007). Between 'Empowerment' and 'Liberation'. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies, 14*(1), 33–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150601400103

- Deshmukh, V. (2024). The Election Commission does not maintain records of violations of the model code of conduct! *Moneylife NEWS & VIEWS*. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from https://www.moneylife.in/article/election-commission-does-not-maintain-records-of-violations-of-model-code-of-conduct/73955.html

- Heller, P. (2001). Moving the State: The politics of democratic decentralisation in Kerala, South Africa, and Porto Alegre. *Politics & Society, 29*(1), 131–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001006

- Jose, J. (2015). Role of Kudumbashree and women empowerment: A study of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation areas in Kerala State, India. *International Journal of Research – Granthaalayah, 3*(12), 72–82. http://www.granthaalayah.com

- Kudumbashree. (2025). Retrieved August 15, 2025, from https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/514

- Kumar, R. (2021). Political communication in simultaneous elections: A comparative perspective. *Asian Journal of Political Science, 29*(3), 278–295. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2021.1957614

- Law Commission of India. (2018). *Draft report on simultaneous elections*. Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India.

- Mandhani, A. (2014). The judicial conscience of India, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, turns 100. *LiveLaw*. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from https://www.livelaw.in/judicial-conscience-india-justice-v-r-krishna-iyer-turns-100/

- Menon, D. M. (1994). Caste, nationalism and communism in south India: Malabar, 1900–1948. *Choice Reviews Online, 32*(01), 32–0542. https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.32-0542

- Palshikar, S. (2014). Electoral politics in India: The resurgence of the BJP. *Studies in Indian Politics, 2*(2), 217–233. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315276625

- Rai, S. M. (2008). *The gender politics of development: Essays in hope and despair*. London: Zed Books.

- Ramusack, B. N. (1993). Politics, women and well-being: How Kerala became "a model" [Review of the book *Politics, women and well-being: How Kerala became "a model"*, by R. Jeffrey]. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 52*(1), 190–191. https://doi.org/10.2307/2059201

- Sharma, A. (2020). Anti-defection law in India: Challenges and the way forward. *Journal of Indian Law and Society, 11*(2), 45–63.

- The government panel recommends that India hold simultaneous state and national elections. (2024). *Reuters*. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from https://www.reuters.com/world/india/government-panel-recommends-india-hold-simultaneous-state-national-elections-2024-03-14/

- The Logical Indian. (2019, April 24). Kerala leads the way: records 77.68% voter turnout, 3.7% higher than 2014 Lok Sabha elections - the logical. *The Logical Indian*. Retrieved on August 15, 2025 from https://thelogicalindian.com/polling-kerala/

- Venugopalan, M., Bastian, B. L., & Viswanathan, P. K. (2021). The role of Multi-Actor Engagement for Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Kerala, India. *Administrative Sciences*, *11*(1), 31. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11010031

- Wagh, W. S., Sambhalkar, S. M., & Deshmukh, D. (2025). One Nation One Election: Political stability and development. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Innovative Ideas in Education, 11*(1), 1022–1024. https://ijariie.com/AdminUploadPdf/One_Nation_One_Election__Political_Stability_and_Development_ijariie25757.pdf

30.15 Enhancing Electoral Literacy in Tribal and Remote Communities: NGO Interventions and Challenges in India

*Dr. Mohana Priya. B

*Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Sri Krishna arts and Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
Email: mohanapriyab@skasc.ac.in

Abstract

Electoral literacy is a cornerstone of participatory democracy, yet tribal and remote communities in India continue to experience systemic exclusion due to socio-cultural, linguistic, infrastructural, and environmental barriers. This study investigates the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in enhancing electoral literacy within these underserved populations, focusing on strategies, challenges, and sustainable models of engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research synthesizes qualitative insights from community interviews and NGO practitioners with quantitative analysis of voter participation records, NGO program evaluations, and secondary datasets from the Election Commission of India and allied sources. Findings indicate that standalone information campaigns are insufficient to improve turnout unless coupled with logistical facilitation such as transport, accessible polling sites, and timing adjustments. NGOs demonstrate effectiveness when leveraging culturally resonant media including folk theatre, indigenous storytelling, and community radio while employing gender-sensitive outreach to address women's unique mobility and social constraints. Low-cost behavioural nudges and mobile-based communication tools show promise but require adaptation to local connectivity and trust contexts. Operational sustainability remains a key challenge due to volatile funding, short project cycles, and geographic isolation, which are further compounded by community mistrust in politically polarized settings. The study recommends an integrated, multi-stakeholder framework that embeds electoral literacy within ongoing health, education, and livelihood programs, enabling continuous civic engagement beyond election cycles. Partnerships between NGOs, election authorities, panchayats, and educational institutions are identified as critical to scaling outreach and institutionalizing best practices. By combining cultural adaptation, logistical support, and institutional collaboration, electoral literacy initiatives can move beyond episodic

interventions toward long-term empowerment of marginalized communities, thereby strengthening democratic inclusion and representation.

Keywords: Electoral literacy, tribal communities, NGO interventions, participatory democracy, voter engagement, India

Introduction

Electoral literacy is an essential component of participatory democracy, ensuring that citizens are not only aware of their political rights but are also equipped to exercise them effectively. It encompasses knowledge about electoral processes, voter registration, candidate evaluation, and the significance of informed voting. While democratic systems rely on the principle of universal suffrage, disparities in awareness and participation persist, particularly among marginalized communities. Globally, rural and indigenous populations often experience reduced political engagement due to systemic barriers, socio-economic marginalization, and cultural disconnection from mainstream political discourse.

In India the world's largest democracy the inclusion of diverse social, cultural, and linguistic groups in the electoral process is fundamental to sustaining democratic legitimacy. However, tribal and geographically remote communities frequently exhibit lower voter registration rates, reduced turnout, and limited understanding of electoral mechanisms. These disparities undermine equitable representation and weaken participatory governance. Addressing electoral illiteracy in such communities is therefore not only a matter of democratic integrity but also of social justice.India is home to over 104 million Scheduled Tribe (ST) individuals, representing approximately 8.6% of the national population (Census of India, 2011). Many of these communities inhabit geographically inaccessible regions, such as dense forests, hilly terrains, and border areas, where infrastructural development is minimal. In such contexts, electoral participation is hindered by multiple factors: linguistic diversity, lack of formal education, inadequate transportation, and limited access to credible information sources. Cultural norms, traditional governance structures, and historical marginalization further complicate the relationship between tribal citizens and the formal electoral apparatus.

Women and first-time voters within these communities are particularly vulnerable to disenfranchisement. Gender-based social restrictions, mobility constraints, and limited

exposure to civic education exacerbate their exclusion. Without targeted interventions, these patterns risk perpetuating cycles of political invisibility and disempowerment.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial actors in bridging the gap between marginalized populations and state electoral institutions. Their flexibility, community trust-building capacity, and cultural adaptability enable them to design and deliver programs that resonate with local realities. Effective NGO interventions often integrate indigenous languages, folk media, community theatre, visual aids, and digital platforms to disseminate information in relatable formats.

Beyond awareness campaigns, NGOs frequently assist with voter registration drives, documentation support, and advocacy for inclusive electoral policies. By collaborating with the Election Commission of India, local governance bodies, and community leaders, NGOs can amplify their impact and foster sustainable civic engagement. Nevertheless, these organizations also encounter significant challenges, including financial constraints, logistical hurdles in remote terrains, and occasional resistance from within the communities they serve.

Although the role of NGOs in promoting electoral participation has been recognized, there is a paucity of systematic research examining their specific strategies, challenges, and long-term impacts in tribal and remote Indian contexts. Existing literature often focuses on national or state-level electoral reforms, overlooking micro-level dynamics that influence voter behavior in marginalized communities. Moreover, little attention has been given to the integration of electoral literacy into broader community development frameworks, which could ensure sustained engagement beyond individual election cycles.

Review of literature

A review matrix is a structured tool used in literature reviews to systematically organize, compare, and analyze key elements from various academic sources. This method enhances clarity and efficiency in synthesizing existing literature, making it especially useful for thesis writing, research proposals, and academic reviews.

SS.no	Authors, Year	Aim	Methods	Key findings
1	Vasudevan, S. (2019).	Test whether a persuasive radio campaign reduces the effectiveness of vote-buying and changes voter attitues.	Large scale randomized radio experiment during 2014 national elections; electoral outcomes and voter surveys.	Radio ads reduced vote shares of vote-buying parties, increased salience of corruption, and persuaded many voters at low cost; little effect on turnout.
2	J-PAL. (2019).	Synthesize RCT evidence on voter information campaigns in LMICs.	Evidence review of randomized evaluations and field experiments.	Information campaigns can change who people vote for; effects depend on credibility, message content, and context risk of demobilization exists.
3	Tagat, A., Khandelwal, A., & Kapoor, H. (2021).	Design and test a behavioural nudge to increase voter registration in urban India.	Randomized behavioural field intervention / pilot in urban settings.	Low-cost nudges increased registration propensity among target groups; network effects matter.
4	Rao, M. & Singh, P. (2020).	Examine folk media and	Case studies and qualitative	Folk and community

		community communication practices for social change, including civic education.	analysis of folk theatre, storytelling and community radio.	media improve message retention, trust and local engagement especially in low-literacy settings.
5	Cogent / journal article (2023).	Evaluate radio's role as a platform for public political education in the digital era.	Qualitative review and comparative analysis of radio stations' programming and reach.	Community and regional radio remain vital for isolated communities; radio programs can educate politically where digital access is limited.
6	SAGE (2024).	Map recent trends and drivers of women's electoral participation across India.	Quantitative analysis of electoral and survey data; disaggregated by region/gender.	Progress in women's participation is uneven; targeted, gender-sensitive outreach increases registration and turnout.
7	IZA DP / Amirapu, Clots-Figueras, Rud (2022).	Study impacts of extreme weather (heat) on electoral participation.	Econometric analysis using election returns and weather data (2009–2017).	Extreme heat reduces turnout; environmental and infrastructural

				stressors suppress participation.
8	Election Commission of India / VoICE (SVEEP resources, 2016–2022).	Document institutional voter education strategies, toolkits and NGO partnership guidance.	Program documents, case studies and handbooks on SVEEP activities across states.	SVEEP integrates school programs, community outreach, and partnerships with civil society; provides practical IEC materials and monitoring guidelines.

Research Methodology

Objectives

1. **To examine** the socio-cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural barriers that limit electoral literacy and participation among tribal and remote communities in India.

2. **To analyze** the role of NGOs in designing and implementing context-specific, culturally sensitive electoral literacy programs in underserved regions.

3. **To evaluate** the effectiveness of NGO led interventions in improving voter awareness, registration rates, and participation, with a focus on women and first-time voters.

4. **To identify** innovative communication strategies such as folk media, indigenous languages, and technology-based outreach adopted by NGOs to bridge information gaps.

5. **To assess** the challenges faced by NGOs, including logistical constraints, resource limitations, and community mistrust, in sustaining electoral literacy initiatives.

6. **To propose** a framework for integrating NGO efforts into long-term, multi-stakeholder partnerships that institutionalize electoral literacy within broader community development agendas.

Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-methods research design**, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing electoral literacy in tribal and remote communities of India. The qualitative component focuses on capturing the lived experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and perceptions of community members and NGO practitioners through interviews and focus group discussions. The quantitative component analyzes secondary datasets, voter participation records, and NGO program evaluation reports to measure intervention outcomes. The design enables triangulation of data, ensuring both depth and breadth of findings.

Methodological Approach

The methodological framework is **exploratory and evaluative** in nature.

- **Exploratory Approach** – To investigate the contextual realities, barriers, and culturally embedded factors affecting electoral literacy and participation among tribal and remote populations.
- **Evaluative Approach** – To assess the performance, effectiveness, and sustainability of NGO-led electoral literacy initiatives against established outcome indicators (e.g., voter registration rates, turnout percentages, women's participation, first-time voter engagement).

Sources and Databases

The research relies on **secondary data analysis** and **document review**, drawing from the following sources that includes **Academic Databases** like Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Springer Link, and Taylor & Francis Online for peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015–2025. **Official Reports and Statistics** includes Election Commission of India (ECI) reports, Census of India data, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) publications, and Ministry of Tribal Affairs documents. **NGO Reports** that includes Annual reports, project evaluation studies, and internal documentation of NGOs working on electoral literacy in tribal and remote areas (e.g., PRIA, Association for Democratic Reforms, and grassroots-based organizations). **Media and Grey Literature** includes Verified case narratives from reputed national newspapers, development blogs, and working papers related to voter education in underserved communities.

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies, reports, and datasets published between **January 2015 and December 2025**.
- Peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in **Scopus or other reputable databases**.
- Research focusing on **tribal and remote communities in India** with relevance to electoral literacy, political participation, or civic education.
- NGO focused studies that evaluate or document interventions, community outreach strategies, or voter awareness campaigns.
- Literature available in English.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies outside the geographical scope of India, unless they provide directly comparable international NGO electoral literacy models.
- Articles without empirical data, such as purely opinion based or editorial pieces.
- Publications prior to 2015 that do not contribute to current intervention models or contemporary electoral practices.
- Duplicate studies or those lacking methodological transparency.
- Literature in regional languages without an English translation.

Analysis and Interpretation

Objective	Analysis & Interpretation
1. To examine the socio-cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural barriers that limit electoral literacy and participation among tribal and remote communities in India.	Studies indicate that participation barriers in underserved regions are shaped by language diversity, low literacy rates, gender norms, and infrastructural constraints. Amirapu et al. (2022) highlight environmental stressors (e.g., extreme heat) that exacerbate physical access issues. Rao & Singh (2020) emphasize the role of localized cultural mediums to overcome linguistic and trust barriers, particularly where formal channels fail to penetrate.
2. To analyze the role of NGOs in	NGO-driven interventions leverage indigenous

designing and implementing context specific, culturally sensitive electoral literacy programs in underserved regions.	communication tools and trust based approaches. Evidence from SVEEP partnerships (Election Commission of India, 2016–2022) shows that when NGOs adapt content to local traditions and vernacular languages, community receptiveness increases. Folk theatre and community radio have proven effective in tailoring civic education to specific tribal contexts (Rao & Singh, 2020).
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of NGO-led interventions in improving voter awareness, registration rates, and participation, with a focus on women and first time voters.	SAGE (2024) found that targeted, gender-sensitve outreach programs improve women's electoral registration and participation, especially in remote settings. Tagat et al. (2021) demonstrated that low cost behavioural nudges by NGOs can increase registration rates among first time voters. However, outcomes vary based on credibility of the messenger and socio-political trust.
4. To identify innovative communication strategies such as folk media, indigenous languages, and technology-based outreach adopted by NGOs to bridge information gaps.	Vasudevan (2019) and J-PAL (2019) highlight the efficacy of low cost mass media (radio, mobile messaging) in politically educating remote voters. Folk storytelling and community theatre (Rao & Singh, 2020) enhance cultural resonance and trust. Technology adoption remains limited in low connectivity zones, making blended models (radio, mobile and local meetings) more viable.
5. To assess the challenges faced by NGOs, including logistical constraints, resource limitations, and community mistrust, in sustaining electoral literacy initiatives.	Studies show NGOs face resource scarcity, volunteer attrition, and access restrictions during election periods. Community mistrust is higher in politically polarized regions (J-PAL, 2019). Geographic isolation and climate related disruptions (Amirapu et al., 2022) compound these challenges, necessitating sustained institutional support and diversified funding.
6. To propose a framework for	SVEEP's documented best practices (2016–2022)

integrating NGO efforts into long-term, multi-stakeholder partnerships that institutionalize electoral literacy within broader community development agendas.	illustrate how government NGO collaboration institutionalizes outreach efforts via schools, panchayats, and CSOs. Integrating civic literacy into ongoing health, education, and livelihood programs increases sustainability. Multi-stakeholder models reduce duplication and expand coverage in tribal and remote regions.

Findings

1. **Multidimensional barriers constrain political participation-** Tribal and remote communities face an interlocking set of obstacles linguistic mismatch, low formal literacy, gendered mobility norms, and poor transport/information infrastructure that together reduce both awareness and ability to vote. Environmental shocks (e.g., extreme heat) further depress turnout in affected areas. (Amirapu, Clots-Figueras, & Rud, 2022; Rao & Singh, 2020).

2. **Information alone is insufficient without facilitation-** Campaigns that increase knowledge about voting procedures raise awareness but do not reliably translate into higher turnout unless logistical constraints (transport, timing, polling assistance) are simultaneously addressed. (Vasudevan, 2019; J-PAL, 2019).

3. **NGOs add value through cultural adaptation and local credibility-** NGOs are particularly effective where they translate electoral content into local languages, employ culturally embedded media (folk theatre, storytelling), and sustain long-term presence that builds trust mechanisms that improve comprehension and receptivity among tribal groups. (Rao & Singh, 2020; Election Commission of India, SVEEP materials).

4. **Targeted, gender-sensitive programming yields measurable gains for women-** Programs designed to address women's specific constraints (mobility, time, cultural norms) produce disproportionate improvements in registration and participation among female voters in remote settings. (SAGE, 2024).

5. **Low-cost behavioural and digital nudges can increase registration but require contextual tailoring** Behavioural nudges (reminders, simple prompts) and low bandwidth mobile interventions have raised registration rates in pilot settings; their

success depends on message credibility, network effects, and local connectivity conditions. (Tagat, Khandelwal, & Kapoor, 2021; J-PAL, 2019).

6. **Blended communication models are the most effective outreach strategy-** Combining traditional media (community radio, folk performances) with selective digital follow-ups (voice messages, SMS/WhatsApp where feasible) produces higher reach and retention than single channel approaches in low literacy, low-connectivity contexts. (Vasudevan, 2019; Rao & Singh, 2020; Cogent review).

7. **Operational and financial fragility limits program sustainability-** Short project cycles, volatile donor funding, high per beneficiary logistical costs in remote terrains, and volunteer turnover constrain NGOs' ability to sustain electoral literacy programmes beyond election windows. (J-PAL, 2019; ECI SVEEP case notes).

8. **Community mistrust moderates intervention effectiveness-** Historical marginalization and skepticism toward state actors can reduce the impact of externally driven voter education; locally respected messengers (traditional leaders, trusted NGOs) are essential mediators for credibility. (Rao & Singh, 2020; J-PAL, 2019).

9. **Institutional partnerships increase scale and resilience-** Models that formalize collaboration between election authorities, NGOs, schools, panchayats, and community organizations (as documented in SVEEP) lead to broader coverage, resource pooling, and improved monitoring critical preconditions for scaling and sustaining electoral literacy in tribal regions. (Election Commission of India, SVEEP; J-PAL, 2019).

10. **Program evaluation must use mixed indicators and contextual benchmarks-** Because knowledge gains do not always equate to turnout, evaluations should combine process indicators (reach, community acceptance), intermediate outputs (registration), and final outcomes (turnout adjusted for access factors) to capture true program effectiveness. (Vasudevan, 2019; Tagat et al., 2021).

Suggestions

Strengthening electoral literacy in tribal and remote communities requires an integrated approach that addresses both informational and structural barriers. While awareness campaigns are essential, they should be accompanied by logistical facilitation, such as transportation support, accessible polling locations, and scheduling sensitive to local needs

(Vasudevan, 2019; J-PAL, 2019). Programmes must also factor in environmental challenges such as extreme heat or seasonal inaccessibility to avoid disenfranchisement (Amirapu, Clots-Figueras, & Rud, 2022). A multi-dimensional intervention design that layers these supports will likely yield greater participation than standalone information drives.

Cultural adaptation and gender-sensitive programming should remain central to NGO strategies. Translating electoral material into local dialects, using traditional communication forms like folk theatre, and leveraging trusted local messengers have proven effective in building trust and comprehension (Rao & Singh, 2020; Election Commission of India). For women in particular, targeted outreach that addresses mobility restrictions, time constraints, and social norms can significantly enhance registration and voting rates (SAGE, 2024). Furthermore, integrating low cost behavioural nudges with locally tailored mobile interventions can boost engagement, provided they account for connectivity limitations and ensure message credibility (Tagat, Khandelwal, & Kapoor, 2021).

For long-term impact, electoral literacy programmes must prioritize institutional partnerships and sustainability mechanisms. Formal collaboration between NGOs, election authorities, panchayats, and schools as exemplified in SVEEP can enable resource sharing, broader reach, and consistent follow-up (Election Commission of India, J-PAL, 2019). Continuous monitoring using mixed indicators such as community acceptance, registration rates, and turnout adjusted for access will allow for more accurate measurement of effectiveness and refinement of strategies over time (Vasudevan, 2019). Stable funding models, longer project cycles, and capacity building for local volunteers will further strengthen programme resilience in the face of geographic, financial, and institutional challenges.

Social Work Intervention

1. Community Centered Civic Literacy Hubs

- Establish permanent local hubs within community spaces (panchayat offices, schools, or NGO centers) as year round voter education points.

- Equip hubs with multilingual audio-visual resources, pictorial guides for low-literacy voters, and mobile helpdesks during election seasons.
- Engage trained community volunteers, particularly women and youth leaders, to serve as peer educators.

2. Integrated Cultural and Gender Sensitive Outreach

- Develop civic education modules using folk theatre, storytelling, and local radio in tribal dialects to increase comprehension and trust.
- Organize women-only civic workshops addressing mobility restrictions, safety concerns, and socio-cultural barriers to participation.
- Pair outreach with practical support, such as arranging group transport to polling stations and childcare services during voting days.

3. Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Framework

- Formalize collaborations between NGOs, election commissions, schools, and grassroots organizations through Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).
- Coordinate civic literacy efforts with ongoing health, education, and livelihood programs to ensure continuous community engagement.
- Leverage panchayat networks to distribute official information and validate messaging, countering misinformation and building credibility.

4. Technology Supported, Low Bandwidth Solutions

- Use voice based mobile messages, interactive voice response (IVR), and local WhatsApp groups where feasible to provide reminders and explain voting procedures.
- Pilot low-cost behavioral nudges such as personalized reminders and community commitment pledges to encourage turnout, ensuring adaptation to local connectivity levels.

5. Sustainability and Monitoring Mechanisms

- Secure diversified funding through government support, CSR programs, and donor partnerships to ensure stability beyond election periods.

- Implement mixed-method evaluation combining quantitative metrics (registration rates, turnout) with qualitative indicators (trust, satisfaction, community ownership).
- Build local capacity through training-of-trainers models, reducing reliance on external facilitators and fostering community-led continuity

Recommendations to the Policy Makers

1. Overcome Structural Barriers

- Provide transportation, mobile polling units, and locally accessible booths.
- Adjust polling schedules to seasonal and livelihood cycles.
- Plan around environmental risks such as extreme heat or monsoon inaccessibility.

2. Culturally Adapted & Gender-Responsive Outreach

- Translate electoral materials into local dialects.
- Use folk theatre, storytelling, and community radio to build trust.
- Design women-focused programmes that address mobility, time, and social constraints.

3. Integrated Communication Strategies

- Blend traditional media (folk performances, radio) with low-bandwidth digital tools (voice messages, SMS).
- Use behavioural nudges (reminders, pledges) adapted to local trust and connectivity conditions.

4. Strengthen Institutional Partnerships

- Formalize collaboration between NGOs, Election Commission, panchayats, and schools (SVEEP model).
- Integrate electoral literacy into health, education, and livelihood programmes for continuity.

5. Ensure Sustainability & Monitoring

- Secure stable funding through CSR, government support, and donor diversification.
- Train local volunteers for community-led continuity.
- Monitor effectiveness with both process (community acceptance, reach) and outcome (registration, turnout) indicators.

Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that electoral literacy in tribal and remote communities cannot be meaningfully improved through information campaigns alone; interventions must address the intertwined socio-cultural, linguistic, infrastructural, and environmental barriers that suppress participation. Successful models are those that integrate cultural sensitivity, gender responsive design, logistical facilitation, and credible local engagement. NGOs are uniquely positioned to fill these gaps through trust based relationships and adaptive outreach strategies, yet their efforts are often constrained by limited funding, short project cycles, and geographic isolation. Institutional partnerships, sustained resource flows, and rigorous, context aware evaluation are essential to scaling and sustaining these initiatives. Ultimately, the path to inclusive electoral participation in underserved regions lies in embedding civic literacy within broader community development frameworks, ensuring that voter education becomes an ongoing process rather than an election period activity.

Reference

- Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). (2019). *Encouraging voter participation.* Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/
- Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). (2019). *Risks and rewards of voter information campaigns in low- and middle-income countries* (Policy Insight). J-PAL. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/risks-and-rewards-voter-information-campaigns-low-and-middle-income-countries
- Amirapu, A., Clots-Figueras, I., & Rud, J. P. (2022). *Climate change and political participation: Evidence from India* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 15764). IZA Institute of Labor Economics. https://docs.iza.org/dp15764.pdf

- Amirapu, A., Clots-Figueras, I., & Rud, J. P. (2022). *Weather and voter turnout in India. Journal of Development Economics, 156*, 102807. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2022.102807

- Cogent Social Sciences. (2023). *The role of radio as the public sphere for public political education in the digital era: Challenges and pitfalls. Cogent Social Sciences.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372633094_The_role_of_radio_as_the_public_sphere_for_public_political_education_in_the_digital_era_Challenges_and_pitfalls

- Deb, S. (2024). Indicators of Women's Electoral Participation in India. *Social Change*, *54*(4), 577-582. https://doi.org/10.1177/00490857241277286

- Election Commission of India. (n.d.). *Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP).* https://eci.gov.in/sveep/

- Election Commission of India (VoICE). (2016–2022). *SVEEP: Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Toolkits and case studies.* Election Commission of India / VoICE publications. https://www.eci.gov.in/voicenet/

- Rao, M., & Singh, P. (2020). *Folk communication as a tool for electoral awareness in rural India. Media & Society Review, 9*(1), 45–60.

- Rao, V., & Singh, R. (2020). *Cultural strategies for electoral inclusion: Lessons from tribal India. Asian Journal of Political Science, 28*(2), 157–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2020.1744896

- Sujoko, A., Rahmiati, D., & Rahman, F. (2023). *The role of radio as the public sphere for public political education in the digital era: Challenges and pitfalls. Cogent Social Sciences.*

- Tagat, A., Khandelwal, A., & Kapoor, H. (2021). *Designing a voter registration nudge in urban India. Journal of Behavioral Economics for Policy, 5*(1), 53–60. https://sabeconomics.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/JBEP-5-1-6.pdf

- Tagat, A., Khandelwal, P., & Kapoor, M. (2021). *Nudging voter registration: Evidence from India. Behavioural Public Policy, 5*(3), 356–378. https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2020.3

- Vasudevan, S. (2019). *Diminishing the effectiveness of vote buying: Experimental evidence from a persuasive radio campaign in India* (J-PAL / World Bank working paper). Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab / World Bank. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/research-paper/Diminishing-the-Effect-of-Vote-Buying_Jan2019.pdf

- Vasudevan, V. (2019). *Information, incentives, and voter turnout: Evidence from India. World Development, 115*, 108–125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.11.013

30.16   Insights on One Nation, One Election as Fiscal Reform - a Youth-Centered Study in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

*Rajeev Ramakrishnan[1, *], Dr.P.Rangasami [2], Malavika K[3], Evangelin Sunil[4], Ramya R[5], Sreenandana B S[6]*

[1] *Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India*

[2] *Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India*

[3,4,5,6] *MSW student, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India*

[*]*Corresponding author –E mail:* r_rajeev@cb.amrita.edu

Abstract

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election* in India has reignited debates around electoral efficiency, governance, and public expenditure. Frequent elections are often criticized for imposing substantial financial costs and administrative burdens, particularly in a country as vast and diverse as India. Understanding how different sections of society perceive the economic impact of this reform is essential for informed policymaking. This study aims to evaluate the perceived economic costs and benefits of simultaneous elections among young adults in a semi-urban locality, focusing on aspects such as election expenditure, election fatigue, public awareness, and effective governance. A quantitative research design was employed, using structured questionnaires to collect data from young, educated voters in the Arasampalayam area of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The survey captured individual perspectives on key issues related to the economic efficiency and feasibility of implementing simultaneous elections. The findings indicate a general awareness among respondents of the high financial and administrative costs associated with frequent elections. A majority expressed support for the economic rationale behind *One Nation, One Election*, citing its potential to reduce public spending, streamline

governance, and enhance political stability. However, concerns about implementation logistics and federal autonomy were also noted. The study underscores the importance of economic considerations in the electoral reform discourse, particularly among India's semi-urban youth. While acknowledging practical challenges, the participants largely view the reform as a fiscally responsible initiative. These insights contribute to the evolving national debate on balancing democratic processes with economic sustainability.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Electoral Reform, Youth Perception Economic Sustainability

Introduction

Indian democracy stands out for its participatory structure, where citizens routinely engage in choosing their leaders at the local, state, and national levels, making it one of the world's most vibrant democratic systems (George 2023). However, this very strength has resulted in a persistent cycle of elections that places significant strain on political, administrative, and economic systems (ToI 2025). Since independence, India has conducted over 400 elections (George, 2023), leading to a state of near-perpetual campaigning that disrupts governance, delays developmental policies, and burdens public resources. While staggered elections may encourage civic engagement(Kedar 2006) they simultaneously hinder effective policy implementation (Swenson 2002), especially under the restrictions imposed by the Model Code of Conduct (Katju 2023). This often translates into stalled services in critical sectors such as health, education, and housing.

The financial implications are equally alarming. The 2019 Lok Sabha and state elections alone cost around ₹60,000 crore (Prakash 2024), a figure that reflects extensive spending on logistics, personnel, and security. As (Henk Don 2002) notes, thriving democracies must strike a balance between electoral accountability and governance efficiency while maintaining fiscal prudence. In response to these challenges, the concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) has emerged as a proposed electoral reform. ONOE envisions simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies either on the same day or within a close time frame to reduce costs and enhance administrative efficiency (Imran Wahab 2024). According to

Times of India (May 2025), ONOE also aims to streamline the electoral process and strengthen governance continuity.

In addition to economic and governance benefits, ONOE holds the potential to support India's development goals, particularly for youth. Linking electoral reform to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16 can reinforce democratic institutions, promote human rights, and enhance youth empowerment within a framework of peace and the rule of law. A youth- focused fiscal approach could help align public expenditure with long-term developmental priorities(Ahmed, Kuruvilla, and Karad 2024) .However, concerns remain. Critics argue that ONOE may dilute regional voices and reduce local accountability, even as it promises to foster broader voter engagement and reduce democratic fatigue (Prakash 2024).

In this context, the present study seeks to explore the perceptions of young voters in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, regarding ONOE. By focusing on youth insights, the research aims to assess how the proposal is understood in terms of fiscal reform, policy coherence, and democratic participation. ONOE represents not just a political shift, but a unique opportunity to integrate government stability, resource optimization, and youth priorities into India's electoral future. This study thus aims to inform and empower young citizens by enhancing their understanding of electoral reforms and their wider implications for governance and development.

Methodology

Rationale

The One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal envisions simultaneous elections for both the national Parliament and state legislative assemblies every five years (Deo 2024). While this idea presents the promise of streamlining the electoral process, its implementation in a federal democracy like India, where constitutional authority is divided between the centre and the states, poses both financial and philosophical complexities (Ngangom, 2023), August 23). Proponents of ONOE argue that it could lead to significant cost reduction, lessen administrative burdens, improve the implementation of development programs, and limit the frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, which often disrupts governance (Karthic 2025). However, critics contend that the move may undermine the foundational principles of federalism, weaken the influence of local political voices, and centralize power, thereby affecting the representational structure of the country

(Vaishnav, 2019). In light of these debates, a comprehensive cost-benefit assessment becomes essential not only to evaluate economic feasibility and governance efficiency but also to explore the broader democratic and legal ramifications (Nath Bora, 2025, March 27). Such an analysis must include both direct and indirect factors, including logistical preparedness, constitutional amendments, voter fatigue, election expenses, policy implementation, and citizen engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the perceptions of the youth on the ONOE proposal by analysing its financial, administrative, legal, and democratic implications. While the potential advantages of the ONOE framework are notable, they must be carefully balanced against the structural and ideological challenges it presents within the Indian federal system.

Literature Review

Economic and Administrative Efficiency

Several studies emphasize the potential economic benefits of synchronizing elections. The ONOE proposal is seen as a tool to reduce election-related expenditure, administrative burden, and governance disruptions caused by frequent implementation of the Model Code of Conduct. Chhaparia (2025) highlights the possibilities for streamlined governance and long-term policy implementation. Similarly, (Bora (2025) recommends a cost-benefit analysis incorporating logistics, electoral management, and broader sociopolitical outcomes. The edited volume by (Johan & Graafland, 2003) explores the economic evaluation of election programs in the Netherlands, questioning the balance between fiscal responsibility and democratic values. This comparative insight strengthens the argument that economic rationalization must not override democratic integrity. Moreover, the Vision IAS (2023) videos and articles illustrate logistical challenges and advantages such as reduced voter fatigue, greater administrative efficiency, and policy continuity. They point to constitutional changes like the 129th Amendment Bill and note that over 80% of public responses supported ONOE.Federalism and Constitutional Implications

The ONOE debate strikes at the core of India's federal and parliamentary structure.

Deo (2024) argue that enforcing uniform electoral cycles across diverse state contexts compromises the principles of decentralization. Katju (2023) strongly critiques the proposal, stating that India's parliamentary system depends on dynamic majority support, and simultaneous elections could entrench governments that have lost public trust. Vaishnav (2019) contends that such centralisation could erode local autonomy and diminish the role of state-specific issues in electoral discourse. Prakash (2024) warns that ONOE risks turning governance into a centralised monolith, weakening the representational balance in a diverse polity.

Democratic Accountability and Political Behaviour

ONOE raises significant concerns about voter behavior, accountability, and political polarization. Critics argue it may blur the distinction between national and local issues, thereby undermining state-specific accountability. George (2023) emphasizes that while ONOE might offer stability, it could mute dissent and lessen democratic responsiveness.

Bhaswar Prakash's study (ssrn-5007991) analyzes how concurrent elections can shift voter focus from local to national narratives, leading to polarization and reducing attention to regional concerns. His findings also underline the dominance of larger national parties over smaller regional ones, threatening India's political diversity.

Cultural Identity and Discourse

Beyond legal and administrative frameworks, the ONOE debate also unfolds within broader democratic and cultural discourses. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) "polyphony" and Amartya Sen's (2005) emphasis on deliberative democracy, the 2025 MBIFL panel discussed how public discourse, literature, and democratic participation intersect. P. R. Sivashankar's insights, aligned with Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) theory of inclusive institutions, argue that cultural engagement, via festivals, media, and literature, strengthens the democratic fabric. The example from Australia (Gibson, Mcallister, and Swenson 2002b) reveals how terms like 'One Nation' can carry dangerous connotations, reflecting exclusion and homogenization.

Study Area

The present study was conducted at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore campus, located in Arasampalayam, Tamil Nadu (https://www.amrita.edu/school/agriculture)

/The university is known for its multidisciplinary approach and commitment to academic excellence and social engagement. The study focused on four academic departments within the campus, namely; Department of Agriculture, Architecture, Mass Communication (MASCOM) and Department of Social Work.

These departments were selected to represent a diverse cross-section of professional disciplines, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of perspectives across both technical and social domains. The campus environment provides an ideal setting for academic research, given its emphasis on integrated learning, community outreach, and values-based education.ource: https://villageinfo.org/
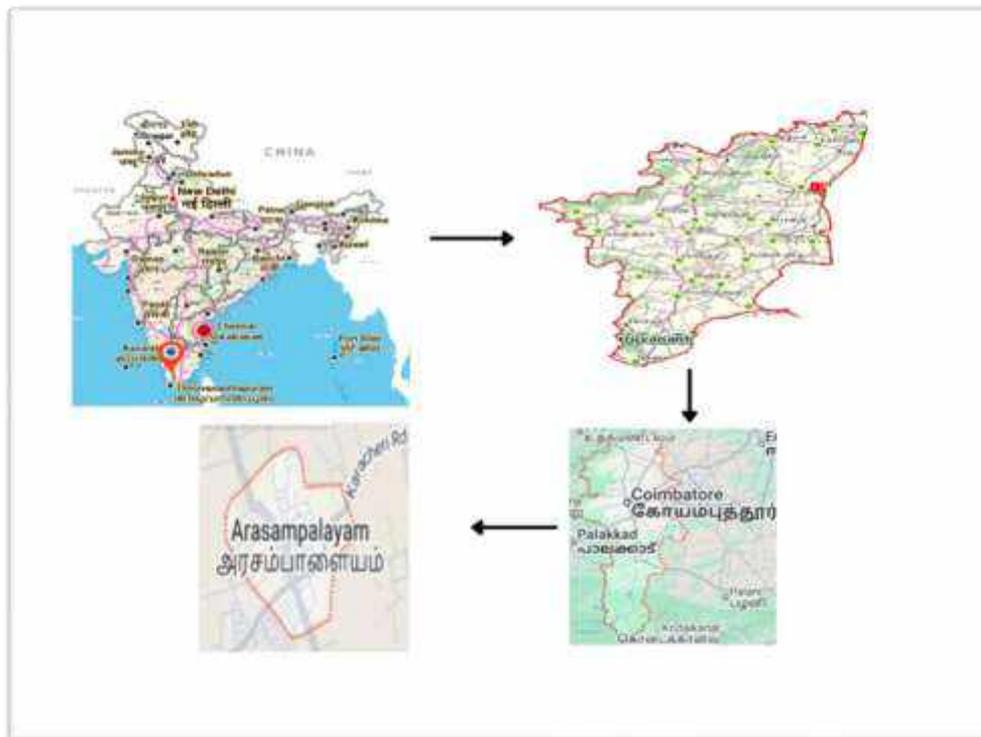
Figure 1- Study area Map of Coimbatore

Research Design

Overall Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design aimed at systematically assessing perceptions related to the theme "The Economics of Electoral Reform: One Nation, One Election (ONOE) in the Indian Federal Context." Primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire designed to gather empirical insights on participant awareness, perceived advantages, and potential drawbacks of the ONOE policy proposal.

The descriptive nature of the design is appropriate for exploring how a specific population perceives a complex political and economic issue, without manipulating any variables. The structured approach enables the collection of standardized data, ensuring consistency across responses and facilitating statistical analysis.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique will be employed to select participants from four departments, i.e., Agriculture, Architecture, Mass Communication, and Social Work, at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore campus (Arasampalayam). These departments were chosen to

ensure interdisciplinary representation, capturing perceptions from both technical and social science perspectives.

Population of the study

The total population for the study comprises 609 students enrolled across four schools at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Arasampalayam Campus. Of these, 201 are male students and 408 are female students, representing approximately 33% male and 67% female distribution within the overall student population.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants selected for the study will include individuals who are 18 years of age or older, currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs at the Arasampalayam Campus of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, and who are citizens of India.

Exclusion Criteria

Students in their first semester across all departments are excluded from the study.

Additionally, students who are non-citizens of India are excluded to maintain a consistent cultural and legal context within the sample.
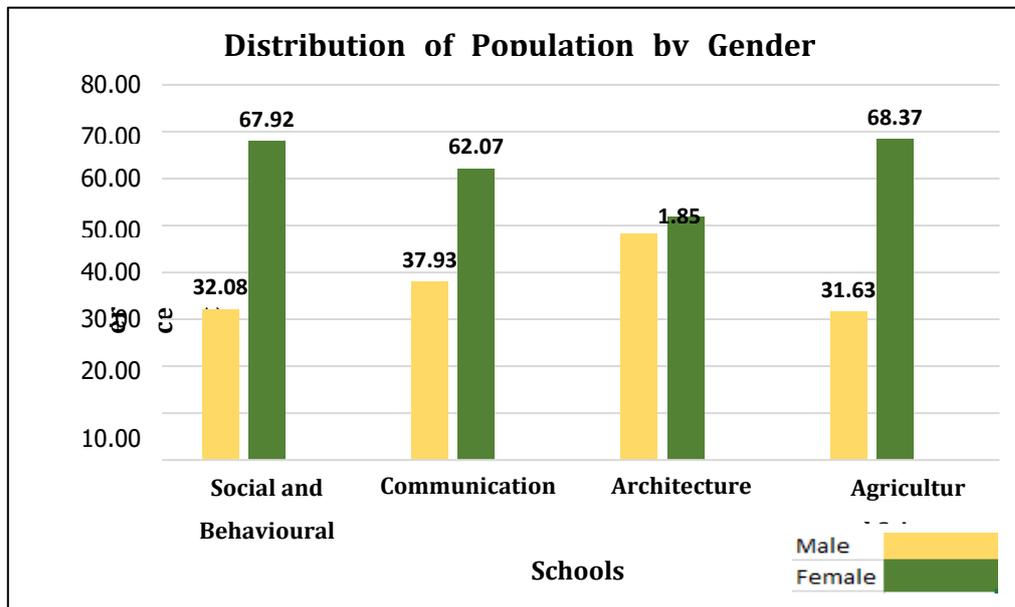
Figure 2- Population Distribution based on gender

Sample **of the study**

The study adopted proportionate stratified sampling (Cochran 2005) to ensure fair representation across the different departments and gender groups within the Arasampalayam Campus of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. The total sample size was distributed proportionally based on the population of male and female students in each department.

Participants were selected from the 4 Schools. Within each department, the number of male and female respondents was calculated according to their proportion in the total student

population. This approach ensured that the sample reflected the actual gender distribution and departmental representation of the university's student body. By using this method, the study maintains both gender balance and disciplinary diversity, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the campus context.

The total sample size was determined using the online sample size calculator (Calculator.net) and the sample required was 609

Table-1: Population distribution among the schools

Population distribution across the 4 schools			
Schools	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Social and Behavioural Sciences	17	36	53
Communication	22	36	58
Architecture	13	14	27
Agricultural Sciences	149	322	471
Total	**201**	**408**	**609**

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for each department was determined using proportional allocation, as per the following formula;

$$\text{Sample for each group} = \frac{\text{Group Population}}{\text{Total Population}} \times \text{Total Sample Size}$$

The proportional sample based on the schools, therefore, is 237

a) Agricultural Sciences	**b) Social and Behavioural Sciences**
Male = (149 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **58** Female = (322 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **125**	Male = (17 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ 7 Female = (36 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ 14
c) Architecture	**d) Communication**
Male = (13 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **5** Female = (14 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **5**	Male = (22 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **9** Female = (36 ÷ 609) × 236 ≈ **14**

The planned and achieved sample and methodological considerations

The study initially planned to collect data from 237 participants across four departments: Agriculture (183), Architecture (10), SSBS (21), and Communication (23), with proportional representation of male and female respondents. However, the final dataset comprised 151 respondents in Agriculture, Architecture, and Communication combined, and 42 from SSBS,

reflecting variations from the planned distribution. Notably, SSBS exceeded the target sample, whereas Agriculture, Communication, and Architecture yielded fewer participants than anticipated. Such discrepancies are common in field-based quantitative research, where nonresponse, scheduling conflicts, and varying willingness to participate can significantly affect final sample sizes (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Babbie, 2020; Fowler, 2014). In this case, the shortfall arose due to limited availability of respondents during the data collection period, time constraints, and differing levels of participation. While reduced numbers in certain departments may affect representativeness, prior methodological literature suggests that even with incomplete target samples, carefully managed data can still provide valuable insights into population patterns (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008; Patton, 2015). Accordingly, the collected data remains a credible basis for interpreting youth perspectives on ONOE in Coimbatore.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study will be collected using a structured questionnaire, carefully designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights regarding perceptions of the ONOE proposal.

The questionnaire is divided into four key sections, i.e.,

i.   Demographic Information

This section includes questions on age, gender, educational background, academic discipline, and place of residence. These demographic variables are essential for identifying patterns and variations in perceptions across different population segments.

ii.   Awareness Measures

This component is designed to assess participants' level of awareness and understanding of ONOE. The items seek to distinguish between opinions rooted in

substantial knowledge and those influenced by media exposure or limited information.

iii.   Likert-Scale Items on Perceived Costs and Benefits

Participants will respond to a series of statements using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). These items address various dimensions of ONOE, such as:

Economic aspects (e.g., cost reduction in election conduct),

Political considerations (e.g., national vs. regional issue prioritization),

Administrative implications (e.g., governance efficiency vs. logistical complexity).

This section quantifies participant attitudes and enables statistical analysis of perceived advantages and disadvantages.

iv.   Open-Ended Questions (Optional)

To supplement the quantitative data, participants will be invited to provide qualitative feedback through optional open-ended questions. These responses will allow for the exploration of nuanced opinions and personal reasoning that may not be fully captured in the structured items. This mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of public perception by integrating measurable trends with contextual interpretations.

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws upon multiple interconnected theoretical perspectives to analyse the implications of ONOE for governance, fiscal policy, and democratic functioning. Electoral Synchronisation Theory (Balasubramaniam et al. 2020) suggests that aligning state and national electoral cycles can minimize administrative and logistical disruptions, promote continuity in governance, and ensure efficient resource   utilization.   In   parallel,   Democratic

Participation Theory (Kostelka et al. 2025) highlights the potential to reduce voter fatigue and enhance turnout through process simplification, though it also warns of the risk of overshadowing region-specific issues in favour of national narratives. Political Economy Theory (George 2023) emphasizes the fiscal efficiency of fewer elections by reducing recurrent expenditure and enabling greater allocation of funds for developmental purposes, yet cautions that such a system could strengthen dominant national political parties and marginalise smaller or regional entities. From a behavioural perspective, Voting Behaviour Theory (Evrenk and CY Sher 2015) indicates that simultaneous elections may influence voters to select the same party across levels-a 'bandwagon effect' shaped by leadership appeal or prevailing national sentiment-potentially limiting political diversity. Comparative Theory (David 2001) reinforces these insights through international examples, such as Brazil, South Africa, and Germany, which demonstrate both the administrative benefits and constitutional challenges of concurrent elections, underscoring the importance of balancing efficiency with federal integrity. At the same time, the Doctrine of Separation of Powers (Petra Schleiter Edward Morgan-Jones 2009) raises concerns that fixed electoral cycles could be manipulated by the executive to consolidate power, undermining legislative independence, while Accountability Theory (Stuti Khemani 2001) warns that less frequent elections may reduce opportunities for citizens to hold leaders responsible, delaying political correction and weakening democratic responsiveness. Taken together, these perspectives reveal that while ONOE offers prospects of fiscal prudence, governance stability, and reduced disruption, it must be approached with safeguards that preserve constitutional values, federal balance, political plurality, and the accountability mechanisms essential to a healthy democracy.

Figure 3- Theoretical framework

Data Analysis

The study's data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 26) and Microsoft Excel, focusing on five key thematic areas, i.e., demographic variables, youth awareness, perceived fiscal implications, government and legal concerns, and the impact on democracy. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize responses, while cross-tabulations explored variations across demographic categories. Youth awareness was assessed through questions on knowledge of ONOE, participation in discussions, and perceptions of its feasibility. Perceived fiscal implications were examined through opinions on cost reduction, resource allocation for development, and the economic benefits of synchronised elections. Government and legal concerns were analysed in relation to constitutional amendments, implementation challenges across states, and the potential effect on federalism and state autonomy. Finally, the impact on democracy was evaluated by

gauging views on political stability, voter confusion, fairness, transparency, and regional representation.

Results

Age and Education of the Respondents

The age–education distribution of respondents indicates that the majority belonged to the 19 to 21 years age group, with 85% pursuing undergraduate (UG) studies and 13% enrolled in postgraduate (PG) programs. In the 22 to 25 years age category, a substantial proportion (76%) were PG students, while only 15% were UG students. The above 26 years group was the smallest segment, comprising 11% PG students and no UG respondents.
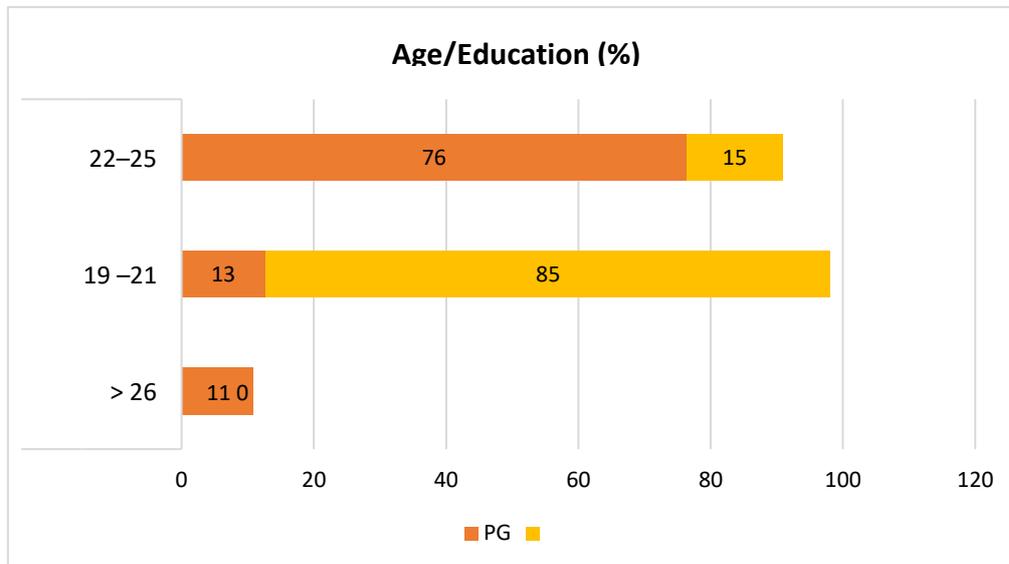
Figure 4- Age and Education Details of the Respondents

Gender wise Education of the Respondents

Analysis of the sample distribution by education level and gender revealed that among postgraduate (PG) respondents, females constituted a clear majority (74.55%), while males accounted for 25.45%. Similarly, within the undergraduate (UG) group, females represented 66.67% of respondents, with males comprising 33.33%. This indicates a consistent female

majority across both educational categories, with the gender gap more pronounced among postgraduates than undergraduates.
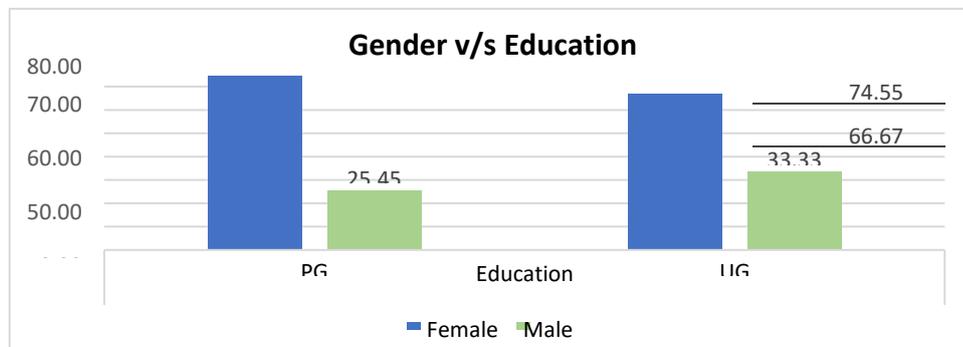
Figure 5- Gender and Education Details of the Respondents

Understanding on One Nation One Election

Awareness levels of the "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) policy were found to be high. Overall, 89.4% of respondents reported having heard about ONOE, with slightly higher awareness among females (91.43%) compared to males (84.78%). In terms of specific knowledge regarding the provision of holding elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies simultaneously, 76.82% of respondents indicated awareness. Interestingly, in this case, male respondents (82.61%) exhibited slightly greater awareness than female respondents (74.29%). These patterns suggest that while ONOE has achieved considerable

penetration in terms of general awareness across gender and educational levels, there remain minor variations in the depth of understanding of its procedural aspects.

Table-2 Awareness on ONOE

Question	Response	Female	Male	Total
Heard about ONOE	No	8.57	15.22	10.6
	Yes	91.43	84.78	89.4
Aware_holding elections to LS and SA together	No	25.71	17.39	23.18
	Yes	74.29	82.61	76.82

Table-3 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive				
(q1) Understand ONOE may require constitutional amendments to implement			**(q11) Can ONOE lead to confusion among voters?**	
Response	**Percent**		**Response**	**Percent**
No	**13.9**		No	**23.8**
Not sure	**25.2**		Not sure	**25.2**
Yes	**60.9**		Yes	**51.0**
(q2) Participated in any discussions on			**(q12) Practically feasible in**	

ONOE		India?	
No	**77.5**	No	**23.2**
Yes	22.5	Not sure	**33.8**
(q3) ONOE can help reduce election-related expenditure?		Yes	**43.0**
No	**13.2**	**(q13) Do you think political parties will agree to ONOE implementation?**	
Not sure	**27.2**	May be	**45.7**
Yes	**59.6**	No	**33.8**
(q4) Can money saved be used for development purposes?		Yes	**20.5**
May be	**25.2**	**(q14) ONOE could impact election fairness or transparency**	
No	**14.6**	No	**13.2**
Yes	**60.3**	Not sure	**32.5**
(q5) Do frequent elections affect public service delivery and governance		Yes	**54.3**
No	**10.6**	**(q15) Simultaneous elections reduce focus on regional/local issues?**	
Sometime	**43.0**	No	**15.9**

s				
Yes	**46.4**		Not sure	**35.8**
			Yes	**48.3**
(q6) Do you think constant elections waste administrative and security resources?			**(q16) Regional parties might be disadvantaged under ONOE?**	
No	**33.8**		No	**11.9**
Yes	**66.2**		Not sure	**35.1**
			Yes	**53.0**
(q7) Can ONOE lead to better long-term planning by governments?			**(q17) ONOE may reduce the frequency of public accountability?**	
No	**9.3**		Not sure	**45.0**
Not sure	**37.1**		No	**14.6**
Yes	**53.6**		Yes	**40.4**
			(q18) Support the implementation of ONOE in India?	
(q8) Do you think ONOE can bring political stability?			No	**13.9**
No	**13.2**		Not sure	**26.5**
Not sure	**40.4**		Yes	**59.6**

Yes	46.4		(q19) Would you vote in an ONOE-style election if it were implemented?	
			Not sure	29.8
(q9) Should development priorities be considered before implementing ONOE?			No	7.3
No	7.3		Yes	62.9
Not sure	27.8		(q20) Should pilot testing of ONOE be done before full implementation?	
Yes	64.9		No	15.2
			Yes	84.8
(q10) ONOE will be difficult to implement across all states?			(q21) Do you think ONOE could undermine federalism and state autonomy?	
No	7.3		Not sure	55.6
Not sure	31.1		No	7.3
Yes	61.6		Yes	37.1

Awareness and Constitutional Considerations

A majority of respondents (60.9%) were aware that implementing ONOE may require constitutional amendments, while 25.2% were uncertain and 13.9% believed no such

amendment would be necessary (Table- 3). This reflects a relatively high awareness of the legal and structural implications of the policy, although the quarter of respondents who were "not sure" indicates a need for greater public education on the constitutional framework.

Public Engagement and Fiscal Perceptions

Only 22.5% had participated in any formal discussions on ONOE, suggesting limited direct civic engagement with the reform beyond media exposure. Nevertheless, fiscal considerations were prominent in participants' views: 59.6% believed ONOE could reduce election-related expenditure, and 60.3% agreed that any money saved could be redirected toward development purposes (Table- 3). However, around a quarter (27.2% and 25.2%, respectively) remained uncertain, indicating that while the cost-saving narrative has resonance, it is not universally accepted without reservation.

Impact on Governance and Administrative Efficiency

Respondents expressed concern about the operational burden of frequent elections. Two-thirds (66.2%) agreed that constant elections waste administrative and security resources, and 54.3% believed they negatively affect public service delivery and governance. Furthermore, 53.6% felt ONOE could lead to better long-term planning, and 46.4% perceived potential for political stability (Table- 3). These findings align with the policy's stated goals but also highlight that a significant portion of respondents remain either skeptical or uncertain about these benefits.

Political Feasibility and Party Consensus

When asked whether political parties would agree to ONOE implementation, responses were mixed (Table- 3) 45.7% answered "maybe," 33.8% said "no," and only 20.5% responded "yes." This reflects perceived political resistance, possibly due to partisan and strategic considerations.

Democratic Implications and Federal Concerns

Respondents identified several possible democratic risks. Nearly half (48.3%) agreed that simultaneous elections could reduce focus on regional or local issues, and 53.0% believed regional parties might be disadvantaged under such a system. Additionally, 37.1% felt ONOE could undermine federalism and state autonomy, while 55.6% were uncertain about this risk - suggesting apprehension but also ambiguity about the federal implications. Concerns about reduced frequency of public accountability were expressed by 40.4% of respondents, with 45.0% uncertain (Table- 3).

Implementation Challenges and Pilot Testing

A substantial 61.6% agreed that implementing ONOE across all states would be difficult, underscoring logistical and administrative complexities. In terms of feasibility, 43.0% believed it is practically achievable in India, while 33.8% were uncertain and 23.2% felt it was not feasible (Table- 3). An overwhelming majority (84.8%) supported pilot testing before nationwide implementation, reflecting a cautious and evidence-based approach to reform.

Support and Willingness to Participate

Despite mixed views on feasibility and democratic implications, 59.6% expressed support for ONOE implementation, and 62.9% stated they would vote in an ONOE-style election if it were held (Table- 3). This suggests that while concerns remain, the concept enjoys a reasonable level of acceptance among the youth demographic surveyed.

Focussed Group Discussion
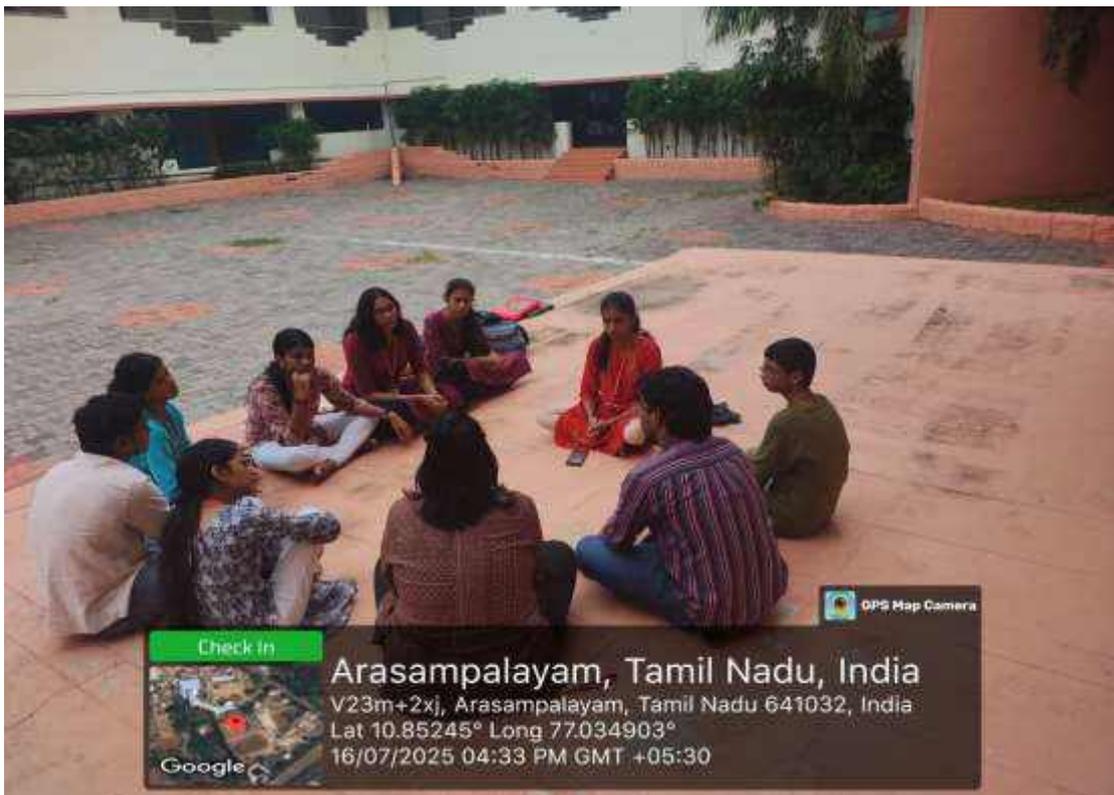
Figure 6- Focussed Group Discussions Conducted with Social Work Students

The focus group discussion (FGD) with postgraduate Social Work students provided qualitative depth to the survey findings. The session comprised nine participants, including seven females and two males (Fig-6), and was organized into four thematic sections guided by structured questions. Participants exhibited a general awareness of the ONOE proposal, with primary sources of information identified as news media, academic discourse, and social media platforms. While acknowledging the policy's stated cost-reduction objective, several participants expressed skepticism regarding the potential for substantial fiscal savings, emphasizing the considerable expenditure associated with nationwide administrative synchronization. Staggered elections were perceived as critical for maintaining voter engagement, enhancing political accountability, and safeguarding the representation of regional concerns. Opinions on governance-related implications were divided: some participants anticipated that ONOE could reduce policy delays caused by the recurrent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, whereas others cautioned that the approach could result in policy– context mismatches and increased risks of political centralization.

Perception Map of One Nation, One Election (ONOE)
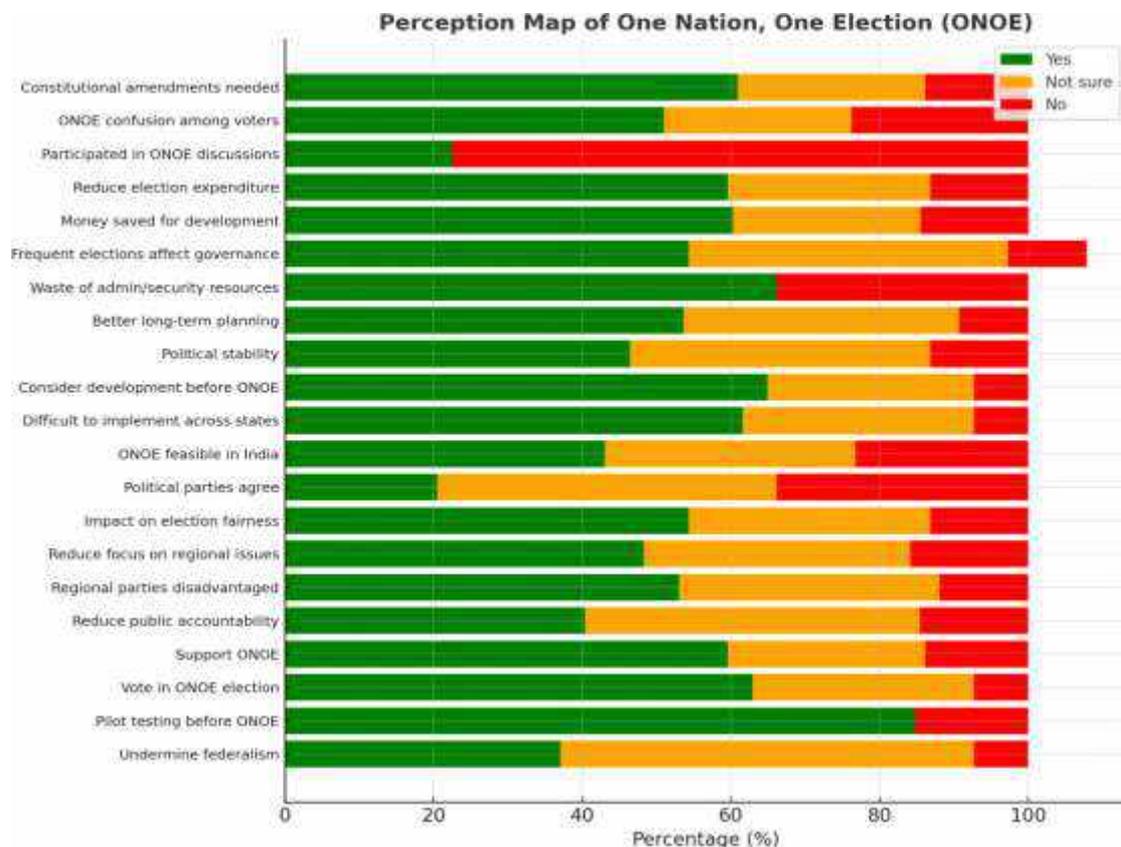
Figure 6- Perception map of ONOE

Discussion

The study's findings reveal a generally high level of awareness of the "One Nation, One Election" (ONOE) proposal among youth, with 89.4% of respondents indicating they had heard about it, and 76.8% reporting awareness of the concept of holding Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections simultaneously. This aligns with prior survey-based evidence suggesting that political awareness among Indian youth is significantly shaped by increased media penetration and the availability of digital political content (Prem Taba 2025). Gender-wise, postgraduate female respondents dominated the sample, reflecting the demographic composition of the study population. Respondents perceived ONOE as potentially beneficial

in reducing election-related expenditure (59.6%), with a majority (60.3%) agreeing that savings could be redirected to developmental purposes. This mirrors arguments put forth in government white papers suggesting that reduced electoral frequency could lower administrative costs and free resources for socio-economic programs (Election Commission of India [ECI], 2018). However, skepticism persisted particularly concerning actual fiscal savings given the logistical complexity of synchronizing elections nationwide. Such skepticism echoes the concerns of electoral scholars who note that logistical scaling, security deployment, and voter outreach could offset projected savings. Governance-related perceptions were divided. While over half (53.6%) believed ONOE could enable better long-term planning and reduce policy delays caused by repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), others feared a loss of policy-context alignment and a weakening of state-level autonomy. This duality reflects the tension between administrative efficiency and federal balance identified in recent policy debates (East Asia Forum, 2025).

Concerns about democratic integrity were also evident. Around 48.3% of respondents agreed that simultaneous elections might reduce focus on regional or local issues, and 53% feared regional parties could be disadvantaged, potentially leading to a more centralized political narrative. Such apprehensions are supported by comparative political studies,

which show that synchronised electoral cycles can disproportionately benefit larger, nationally dominant parties (Verma, 2022). Moreover, 37.1% of respondents expressed concern that ONOE could undermine federalism and state autonomy an issue repeatedly flagged by constitutional scholars. Qualitative data from the focus group discussion (FGD) with postgraduate Social Work students deepened these insights. The FGD involved nine participants (seven female, two male) and was structured into four thematic sections. Participants were generally aware of ONOE, learning about it through news media, academic discussions, and social media— consistent with findings that young voters increasingly depend on digital platforms for political information (Sivakumar & Nair, 2024). While some acknowledged the cost-saving rationale, skepticism was widespread regarding the net fiscal benefits, with participants citing high nationwide coordination costs and logistical demands (AP News, 2024).

Participants emphasized the democratic value of staggered elections in maintaining voter engagement, fostering political accountability, and ensuring regional voices remain influential in governance—concerns mirrored in policy commentary (East Asia Forum, 2025). On governance, while some participants anticipated that ONOE might reduce MCC-related disruptions, others warned of potential risks such as policy centralization and reduced responsiveness to local priorities, reflecting global experiences where synchronized elections contributed to political homogenization (Susanne Preuss Roland Königsgruber 2021). Taken together, these findings underscore that while ONOE enjoys a notable degree of public awareness and tentative support, its feasibility, fiscal benefits, and democratic implications remain contested. The mixed-methods evidence here aligns with the broader literature suggesting that any move towards electoral synchronisation in India would require not only constitutional and logistical preparedness but also robust safeguards to protect federal principles and ensure equitable representation across political and regional spectrums.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Phased Implementation Pilots

Instead of an immediate nationwide rollout, ONOE could first be tested through pilot synchronisation in select states or union territories to evaluate administrative feasibility,

voter turnout patterns, and cost implications (Emma Ostin, 2021).

Fiscal Transparency Mechanisms

The Election Commission of India should develop a transparent cost–benefit accounting framework to track actual expenditure savings from synchronisation, mitigating public skepticism about its fiscal impact (Susanne, 2021)

Safeguards for Federal Balance

Constitutional amendments or legislative provisions must ensure that synchronisation does not undermine state autonomy or marginalise regional issues, possibly through mandated state- specific campaign windows.

Strengthening Voter Engagement

Since staggered elections currently help sustain political participation, alternative measures— such as citizen assemblies, regional policy debates, and continuous voter education campaigns should be introduced to keep voters engaged year-round.

Provisions should be made to protect the visibility of regional parties in national-level election cycles, perhaps through media time quotas and region-specific manifestos to prevent dominance by larger national parties.

Robust Public Consultation

Before large-scale adoption, structured public consultations with citizens, academics, political parties, and state governments can help refine the model and ensure broad-based legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study reveals that while awareness of the One Nation, One Election proposal is widespread among educated youth, perceptions are nuanced, balancing recognition of potential administrative efficiencies with concerns over federal integrity, regional representation, and democratic vibrancy. Quantitative data show strong awareness and moderate support for ONOE's cost-saving rationale, while qualitative evidence highlights skepticism about its fiscal impact and apprehension about political centralisation. Together, these findings suggest that any transition towards synchronised elections in India must be approached with caution, grounded in empirical evaluation, and designed with safeguards that protect both efficiency and democratic inclusivity. Ultimately, the ONOE

debate is not merely about electoral scheduling - it is about the nature of India's democracy, the vibrancy of its federal structure, and the balance between administrative pragmatism and participatory pluralism.

Reference

- Ahmed, Zheer, Samuel Jacob Kuruvilla, and Vishwanath Karad. 2024. "The Idea of One Nation-One Election: Its Potential Risk and Significance for India." *Journal of Polity & Society* 2(16):115–26.

- Balasubramaniam, Vimal, Apurav Yash Bhatiya, Sabyasachi Das, and Vimal Balasubramaniam Apurav Yash Bhatiya Sabyasachi Das. 2020. "Synchronized Elections,Voter Behavior and Governance Outcomes : Evidence from India Synchronized Elections, Cochran, William G. 2005. *Sampling Techniques*. Wiley.

- David, Samuels Richard Snyder. 2001. "The Value of a Vote: Malapportionment in Comparative Perspective." *B.J.Pol.S.* 651–71.

- Deo, Mangal. 2024. "ONE NATION ONE ELECTION": A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS."

Journal of Visual and Performing Arts.

- Emma Ostin. 2021. "Desynchronized Pathways of Contentious Politics."

- George, A. Shaji. 2023. "One Nation, One Election: An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of Implementing Simultaneous Elections in India." *Partners Universal International Research Journal* 2(3). doi:10.5281/zenodo.8348173.

- Gibson, Rachel, Ian Mcallister, and Tami Swenson. 2002a. "The Politics of Race and Immigration in Australia: One Nation Voting in the 1998 Election." doi:10.1080/014198702200000028.

- Gibson, Rachel, Ian Mcallister, and Tami Swenson. 2002b. "The Politics of Race and Immigration in Australia: One Nation Voting in the 1998 Election." doi:10.1080/014198702200000028.

- H Evrenk, and CY Sher. 2015. "Social Interactions in Voting Behavior: Distinguishing between Strategic Voting and the Bandwagon Effect." *Public Choice 162*(3):405–23.

- Henk Don. 2002. "Economic Analysis of Election Programmes: What, How and Why? Henk Don." in *Economic Assessment of Election Programmes*.

- Imran Wahab. 2024. "One Nation, One Election: A Critical Analysis." *IJFMR* 6(6). Johan J. Graafland, Arie P. Ros. 2003. *Economic Assessment of Election Programmes*.

- Karthic, Arun. 2025. "Issue 3 (ISSN-2349-5162) School of Excellence in Law. www.jetir.org. Katju, Manjari. 2023. "One Nation, One Election: What Will Its Implementation Mean?" October.

- Kedar, Orit. 2006. "How Voters Work around Institutions: Policy Balancing in Staggered Elections." *Electoral Studies* 25(3):509–27. doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2005.06.011.

- Kostelka, Filip, Lukáš Linek, Jan Rovny, and Michael Škvrňák. 2025. "Erratum: Electoral Participation and Satisfaction with Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (Political Science Research and Methods (2025) (1-21) DOI: 10.1017/Psrm.2025.10028)." *Political Science Research and Methods*.

- Mita Nath Bora. 2025. "Towards Electoral Efficiency: The Economic Case for One Nation, One Election." *Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation*.

- Petra Schleiter Edward Morgan-Jones. 2009. "Citizens, Presidents and Assemblies: The Study of Semi-Presidentialism beyond Duverger and Linz." *BJPS* 39(4):871–92.

- Prakash, Bhaswat. 2024. "One Nation One Election: A Comparative Analysis from Voter Behaviour to Political Polarisation." *SSRN*. doi: https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5007991. Prem Taba. 2025. "The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Political Awareness among Youth in
  - Arunachal Pradesh." *The Academic* 3(3).
  - Stuti Khemani. 2001. "Decentralization and Accountability: Are Voters More Vigilant in Local than in National Elections?" *SSRN*.
  - Susanne Preuss Roland Königsgruber. 2021. "How Do Corporate Political Connections Influence Financial Reporting? A Synthesis of the Literature." *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy* 40(1).ToI. 2025. "One Nation, One Election Vital for Hill States like Uttarakhand: Dhami."

30.17   Democratic Participation and Social Work Interventions Among Scheduled Caste:

A Critical Analysis of the 'One Nation, One Election' Proposal in India

*Rajeev Ramakrishnan[1, *], Dr. P.Rangasami[2], Gouri Ullas[3], Satya Mansa Devi[4]*

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[2] Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[3,4] MSW student, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[*]Corresponding author –E mail: r_rajeev@cb.amrita.edu

Abstract

This paper critically examines the implications of the 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal on democratic participation among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India. While the proposed reform aims to streamline electoral processes and reduce administrative costs, it raises critical concerns about its impact on federalism, political representation, and inclusive governance. SC communities, whose political engagement often relies on localized elections, issue-specific mobilization, and sustained social work interventions, may face new barriers in a centralized electoral framework. Drawing on constitutional provisions and policy documents, this study explores how synchronized elections could alter the dynamics of SC representation and civic participation. The paper also highlights the evolving role of social work in supporting marginalized groups to navigate political processes and assert their rights in changing institutional contexts. By integrating legal, political, and social work perspectives, the research contributes to ongoing debates on electoral reform, participatory democracy, and social justice in contemporary India.

Key Words: Scheduled Castes (SCs), Democratic Participation, Political Representation, Social Justice

Introduction

The concept of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) has gathered significant attention in India, particularly in the wake of the 2024 High-Level Committee Report and Cabinet support (Khobung & Sagar, 2024). Rooted in the idea of conducting national, and state, elections, ONOE is seen as a strategy to reduce the financial and administrative burden of frequent elections (Deo, 2024), minimize governance disruptions, and reduce voter tiredness (Bhatnagar, 2024). However, while this proposal promises enhanced efficiency, it also raises fundamental questions about its impact on India's federal structure and democratic diversity (Dwivedi & Kushwaha, 2025). Holding elections together could overshadow local issues and weaken the electorate's ability to express dissatisfaction with specific governments (Bhatnagar, 2024). This concern is especially relevant in a country like India, where caste remains a powerful force shaping political behaviour and electoral outcomes (Chaudhary, 2025). The Caste-based mobilization, while empowering marginalized groups through parties like BSP, RJD, and SP, also underscores the complexity of ensuring inclusive governance within a unified electoral framework (Gangte & Touthang, 2024). The consolidation of political influence, and evolving strategies around caste and poverty,reflects how dominant narratives can influence patterns of political engagement and potentially defer processes of accountability (Chowdhury, 2023). India's democracy is shaped by a rich and complex history, built on constitutional values that promise equal participation to all its citizens(Pareek, 2024). For Scheduled Castes (SCs) a group historically subjected to exclusion and discrimination (Prakash, 2018) this promise has offered a crucial pathway to political voice and social empowerment. Over the decades, their engagement with democratic processes has been supported not only by constitutional safeguards but also by grassroots social work interventions that help bridge gaps in access, awareness, and agency (Ahmed & Kuruvilla, 2024). Though administratively sound, the proposal raises important questions about how such a shift could affect India's federal structure and, more importantly, the ability of marginalized communities to participate meaningfully in democratic life.

This paper critically examines the ONOE proposal from the perspective of Scheduled Caste participation. It tries to explain whether moving toward a centralized election cycle

could reduce the opportunities for local-level political engagement and weaken the impact of targeted social interventions. By drawing on literature insights, constitutional principles, and social work perspectives, the paper highlights how large-scale electoral reforms must be
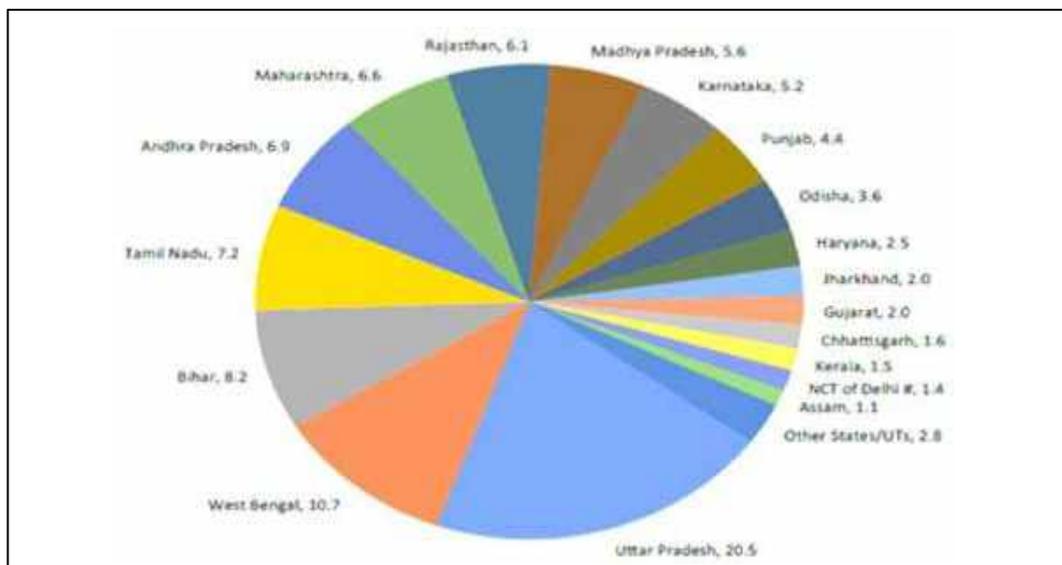
evaluated not just for their efficiency but for their inclusiveness. Thus, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of what true democratic participation looks like in a diverse and unequal society like India.

Figure-1 State/UT's share of SC to total SC Population of India (GoI - 2011)Methodology

Indicator	Absolute 2001	Absolute 2011	Percentage 2001	Percentage 2011	Growth Rate (2001–11)
Total Population	1,02,86,10,328	1,21,05,69,573	100	100	17.7
Rural	74,23,02,537	83,34,63,448	100	100	12.3
Urban	28,63,07,791	37,71,06,125	100	100	31.7
Scheduled Castes	16,66,35,700	20,13,78,086	16.2	16.6	20.8
Rural	13,30,10,878	15,38,50,562	17.9	18.5	15.7
Urban	3,36,24,822	4,75,27,524	11.7	12.6	41.3
Scheduled Tribes	8,43,26,240	10,42,81,034	8.2	8.6	23.7
Rural	7,73,38,597	9,38,19,162	10.4	11.3	21.3
Urban	69,87,643	1,04,61,872	2.4	2.8	49.7

Source: GoI 2011

Table- 1 Primary Census Abstract for Total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

1.1. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on understanding the potential implications of the 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal on democratic participation among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India. It critically examines how centralized electoral reforms may influence local-level political engagement, particularly among marginalized groups whose participation often depends on decentralized, community-based mobilization efforts (Pareek, 2024b). The research also explores the role of social work interventions in strengthening political awareness, advocacy, and participation among SC populations.

2. Literature Review

2.1.1. Constitutional provisions related to elections, representation, and SC rights

The Indian Constitution enshrines provisions to ensure political representation and equality for Scheduled Castes (SCs), including reserved seats in legislatures, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and government employment. These measures aim to address historical disadvantages stemming from untouchability, caste-based exclusion, and systemic poverty. Despite such safeguards, SC communities continue to face entrenched barriers to full democratic participation, including economic marginalisation, social discrimination, and limited political influence (Chatterjee & Kumar, 2021).

Empirical studies(Ambagudia, 2019)reveal that constitutional reservations have increased the numerical presence of SC representatives but have not consistently translated into substantive policy influence or grassroots empowerment. For instance, research in Odisha(Majhi & Suna, 2021). shows that reservation for women in PRIs has enabled many from marginalised groups to enter politics; however, structural challenges such as patriarchal norms, political inexperience, and financial dependence often reduce their autonomy, with some serving as proxy representatives(Majhi & Suna, 2021).

The political engagement of SCs varies across regions. In Tripura's Bagma (ST) Assembly constituency, Uddin (2021) found high electoral participation most respondents voted regularly yet minimal involvement beyond voting. Financial constraints and limited opportunities were key deterrents to deeper engagement. Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh, while some SCs adopt cultural practices of higher castes (Sanskritization) to improve status, this rarely results in genuine political inclusion. Tribal communities, though distinct in cultural identity, face analogous challenges of land loss, displacement, and marginalisation from development policies (Rao Gangadhara & Raju, 2018). Judicial interpretation has further shaped SC representation policy (Thirupathi, 2021).In State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024), the Supreme Court upheld the sub-categorisation of SC and ST reservations, emphasising equitable distribution of benefits among the most disadvantaged sub-groups. The verdict supported applying the "creamy layer" principle to prevent relatively privileged sections from monopolising affirmative action advantages. This decision underscores the need for caste-disaggregated data and targeted interventions to ensure that affirmative action measures reach those most in need (Singh, 2024).

2.1.2. Democratic Processes and Electoral Practices in India

Sahoo examines grassroots democratic innovations in India, particularly those emerging from decentralisation reforms. Two mechanisms, Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) and Social Audits, are identified as significant in fostering direct citizen participation and transparency. Gram Sabhas, as seen in Kerala's People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning, can empower marginalised groups and women when backed by sustained political commitment and supportive literacy environments (Johnson, 2003). Social Audits, pioneered by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan (Jenkins & Goetz, 1999)and later institutionalised in Andhra Pradesh under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), have exposed inefficiencies and corruption (Rajalakshmi & Selvam, 2017). However, Sahoo notes that in many states, both Gram Sabhas and Social Audits remain tokenistic due to low participation, lack of awareness, and political resistance issues that could equally impact Scheduled Caste (SC) engagement in synchronised elections. Lever (2010) approaches democracy through the

ethics of voting, defending the principles of secret ballots and electoral inclusivity. The author critiques proposals such as public voting or leader selection by lottery, arguing that they undermine individual autonomy and may not enhance fairness. Even when voters are imperfectly informed, Lever maintains that the legitimacy of democracy rests on the continued use of elections and the protection of private voting rights. This perspective is relevant to the 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) debate, as any large-scale electoral reform must safeguard the freedom and integrity of voter choice, particularly for vulnerable groups(Lever, 2025).

Ngalengnam (2020) provides a critical assessment of contemporary Indian elections, highlighting the dominance of wealth, caste, and communal politics. The study observes that electoral integrity is undermined by vote-buying, intimidation, and the concentration of power within political parties. Concerns are also raised about the transparency and security of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), with suggestions for alternative voting systems, stronger enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, and banning candidates with criminal records(Ngalengnam, 2020.). These structural weaknesses could disproportionately affect SC representation if ONOE compresses electoral timelines, limiting grassroots mobilisation. Kumar and Rohil (2021) explore the broader democratic and electoral framework in India, detailing the roles of election management bodies, types of elections, and voting mechanisms including EVMs, postal ballots, and proxy voting (Kumar & Rohil, 2025). Their analysis emphasises the need for transparency, inclusivity, and citizen engagement to strengthen democratic legitimacy. They also point to India's mixed performance in global democracy indices, suggesting that procedural regularity alone is insufficient for true democratic participation, an insight relevant to assessing whether ONOE can genuinely enhance SC political agency or merely streamline administrative efficiency. The literature indicates that while India's democratic framework contains mechanisms to promote inclusivity and transparency, implementation gaps, elite capture, and voter marginalisation persist. In the context of SC political participation, these issues raise questions about whether the ONOE proposal will amplify grassroots voices or further centralise electoral control, reducing opportunities for sustained community-level engagement.

2.2.3 Socio-Political Context of Scheduled Caste Participation

The participation of Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India's democratic process is shaped by a long history of caste-based exclusion, structural inequalities, and evolving affirmative action policies (Mittal et al., 2023). While the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law (Article 14), prohibits caste-based discrimination (Article 15), and provides political reservation for SCs (Articles 330 and 332), the translation of these legal safeguards into substantive political empowerment remains uneven (Jaffrelot, 2003). Historically, SC communities were excluded from decision-making spaces due to the entrenched hierarchies of the caste system, which relegated them to socio-economically marginalised positions (Deshpande, 2011). The introduction of reserved constituencies in parliamentary and legislative assemblies has increased descriptive representation (Trumm & Barclay, 2021). however, research suggests that this has not consistently translated into policy influence or substantive representation. Many elected SC representatives face pressure to align with dominant party leaderships rather than directly advocate for community-specific concerns (Chandra, 2004).Caste continues to play a decisive role in electoral politics, influencing candidate selection, voter mobilisation, and coalition-building (Verma, 2018). Political parties often treat SC voters as a monolithic electoral block (Thorat & Newman, 2007), ignoring the internal heterogeneity within SC communities in terms of sub-caste identities, socio-economic status, and regional disparities. This homogenisation weakens nuanced policy interventions and can result in tokenistic representation.

Grassroots political participation by SCs has been significantly shaped by social movements, civil society activism, and rights-based campaigns (N. Uddin, 2019). The Dalit Panthers in the 1970s, the Bahujan Samaj Party's rise in the 1990s, and more recent local-level mobilisations have demonstrated the capacity of SC communities to redefine political agendas(Wankhede, 2024). Nevertheless, barriers such as political violence, intimidation, vote-buying, and the co-option of SC leadership by dominant caste parties persist (Nayar, 2013).

Empirical studies (Mathew & Nayak, 1996) highlight that local governance structures, such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), have provided some scope for SC political participation, especially after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment mandated SC

reservations in local bodies. However, elected SC representatives at the village level often face socio-political resistance, symbolic participation, and constraints on decision-making authority (Behar & Aiyar, 2003). These limitations are particularly acute in states with entrenched caste hierarchies, where dominant caste groups exert informal control over local governance.

The socio-political context of SC participation is one of constitutional opportunity constrained by structural inequalities. While reservation policies have ensured visibility in legislative bodies, substantive empowerment depends on dismantling caste-based discrimination, strengthening independent leadership, and fostering genuine grassroots mobilisation. Without addressing these systemic barriers, proposals such as One Nation, One Election (ONOE) may risk reinforcing the dominance of mainstream political narratives at the expense of marginalised voices.

2.2.4. Existing   Social Work Interventions,Community   Organizations, and   Local

2.2.5. Governance Models Impacting Scheduled Caste Communities

Political representation through electoral quotas has emerged globally as a tool to enhance the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India. While quotas guarantee political presence, the extent to which they influence policy priorities and resource allocation remains contested. Classical political economy models (Arrow, 1952; Downs,1957; Fenno, 1979; Mayhew, 1974) portray politicians as primarily vote-maximizing actors whose decisions are shaped more by institutional incentives than by personal identity. In contrast, theories of ethnic favouritism(Horowitz, 1985) and citizen-candidate models(Besley & Coate, 1997; Osborne & Slivinski, 1996) suggest that shared identity between representatives and constituents can shape policy outcomes.

The Indian case offers an illustrative example of this debate. Since the Constitution of 1950, SCs have been guaranteed representation through reserved seats in Parliament, State Assemblies, and local government bodies. This institutional reform has chipped away at entrenched caste barriers (Elayaperumal, 1969; Galanter, 1984; Thorat, 2009)and symbolically integrated SC leaders into the political mainstream. While village-level

studies(Bardhan et al., 2010; Besley et al., 2004; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Dunning & Nilekani, 2013) have demonstrated mixed socio- economic effects, evidence at the state level remains limited. Pande (2003) and Chin & Prakash (2011) found some links between quotas and shifts in public spending patterns, with implications for poverty reduction, but recent scholarship suggests these benefits are often constrained by party structures, renomination pressures, and entrenched patronage systems.

The symbolic impact is undeniable, political quotas have contributed to improving public attitudes toward SC politicians (Chauchard, 2014; Jensenius, 2013) and gradually narrowing socio- economic disparities (Banerjee & Somanathan, 2007). Social workers and grassroots organizations have played a supporting role by mobilizing communities, raising awareness of entitlements, and advocating for policy enforcement, particularly in rural contexts where local governance bodies such as Gram Sabhas and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) serve as the primary interface between the state and marginalized citizens.

In states like Tripura, political participation among SCs has mirrored broader national patterns, with SC representatives using electoral politics both as a platform for empowerment and as a strategy to confront systemic exclusion (Uddin, 2021). In rural Telangana, however, research indicates that SC participation in Gram Sabha decision-making remains limited due to covert discrimination, procedural exclusion, and lack of awareness about local governance powers (Harinath, 2024). Similar challenges emerge in Bihar, where studies highlight that while democratic decentralization under the 73rd Amendment aimed to empower Dalits, actual political inclusion remains uneven, with many lacking substantives influence over development planning (Jha, 2023).

Bihar-based research (Nirala, 2020) underscores that development is not merely a matter of material indicators but also of self-confidence, political efficacy, and participation in decision- making processes. SC involvement in Panchayat elections has created opportunities for leadership and agency, yet structural inequalities persist. In Maharashtra, the legacy of reformers such as Phule, Shahu Maharaj, and Ambedkar has been instrumental in shaping reservation policies, but caste-based politics still influences electoral strategies(Kendre, 2024). In Tamil Nadu, despite a history of anti-caste

mobilization and Dravidian politics, Dalit representation in leadership roles remains limited, with caste continuing to shape political alliances and demands(Gorringe, n.d.).

Even in regions with small SC populations, like Jammu and Kashmir, political participation has grown under constitutional safeguards, though poverty, low literacy, and limited political awareness still constrain their influence(Saxena, n.d.). Across these varied contexts, one common thread emerges: representation alone does not guarantee empowerment it must be complemented by active community organization, social work interventions, and capacity-building programs that enable marginalized communities to navigate political spaces effectively.

Internationally, comparative studies (Gray Me et al., 2001) highlight how social workers in countries like New Zealand actively influence political decision-making, suggesting that in India too, the integration of professional advocacy within grassroots politics could strengthen marginalized voices. Electoral reforms such as the introduction of EVMs, NOTA, and campaign finance transparency have enhanced participation (Naganoor, 2024), but recent centralizing measures including the abrogation of Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act, have raised concerns over weakening federal structures (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020).

3 **One Nation, One Election (ONOE) Proposal Implications for MarginalisedRepresentation** The One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal advocates for the simultaneous conduct of elections to the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies (Parthasarathy, 2023). Its proponents argue that synchronised elections would reduce electoral expenditure, ensure governance continuity, and minimise the disruptions caused by frequent polls (Law Commission of India, 2018). While these administrative and fiscal arguments have gained political traction, the implications for marginalised groups, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other historically disadvantaged communities remain underexplored in the mainstream debate (K, 2021).Marginalised representation in India's electoral system is safeguarded

through constitutional provisions, notably the reservation of seats in legislatures under Articles 330 and 332. These measures aim to ensure that historically excluded communities have both descriptive and substantive political representation (Jaffrelot, 2003). However, research (Kumar, 2021; Pai, 2002). indicates that even within the current staggered electoral system, marginalised representatives often struggle to assert independent political agency due to party discipline, financial dependency on dominant political actors, and socio-cultural hierarchies.

A key concern regarding ONOE is the potential dilution of regional and community-specific issues in favour of national-level narratives (Singh & Bisht, 2025). Empirical studies (Golder & Stramski, 2010) of concurrent elections in other countries suggest that when voters cast ballots for multiple levels of government at the same time, they tend to align their choices with national party platforms, overshadowing local priorities. This "nationalisation" of electoral outcomes could marginalise the articulation of caste-based injustices, land rights, and welfare needs that are often addressed more effectively in state or local elections (Verma, 2018)

Moreover, ONOE could weaken smaller, community-focused parties, many of which act as political vehicles for marginalised communities. The literature on electoral synchronisation indicates that larger, better-funded parties benefit disproportionately from unified election cycles due to economies of scale in campaigning and broader media reach (Fulara, 2024). Given that several Dalit- and Adivasi-led parties are regionally concentrated and resource-limited, simultaneous elections may diminish their competitiveness, further constraining political diversity in legislature's (Thachil & Herring, 2008). From an institutional perspective, staggered elections currently allow for periodic recalibration of political mandates, offering marginalised groups opportunities to influence policy through interim state-level victories (Chhibber & Nooruddin, 2004) ONOE would extend the electoral cycle to five years without interim opportunities for corrective representation, thereby potentially entrenching political majorities that may not prioritise social justice reforms. Scholars of federalism and representation (Austin,

1999)caution that ONOE could centralise political power at the expense of state autonomy. For SC and ST communities whose socio-economic conditions vary significantly across states (Venkatanarayana, 2013), the erosion of state-specific policy responsiveness could deepen existing disparities. This is particularly concerning given that local governance and targeted development programmes such as those under the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan are heavily reliant on state-level legislative advocacy (Jyotsna, 2022).

3.2.4. Social Work Interventions in Political Empowerment

3.2.4.1. Theoretical Foundations of Social Work and Political Participation

The relationship between social work and political participation is deeply rooted in the profession's commitment to social justice, empowerment, and structural change. Theories such as empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995),critical social work theory(Fook, 2016), and human rights-based approaches (Jim, 2012) position political engagement as an essential domain for achieving equity, particularly for marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes (SCs). Political empowerment within social work practice involves moving beyond welfare provision to actively addressing systemic discrimination through representation, policy advocacy, and civic inclusion (Mullaly, 2010). The macro practice framework (Netting et al., 1994) emphasizes working with communities to influence decision-making structures, while concepts of political efficacy highlight the importance of fostering belief among SC communities that their voices can effect change(Gary & Marjorie, 1995).

3.2.4.2. Advocacy, Rights Education, and Capacity Building among SC Communities

Social work interventions for SC political empowerment often focus on three interlinked strategies: advocacy, rights education, and capacity building. Advocacy includes mobilizing communities to demand equitable representation in decision-making bodies, ensuring enforcement of constitutional safeguards such as political reservations under Articles 330 and 332, and challenging caste-based exclusion in electoral processes

(Jodhka, 2018). Rights education initiatives inform SC citizens about voting rights, anti-discrimination laws, and grievance redressal mechanisms, often using participatory methods like street theatre, legal literacy camps, and community dialogues (Kabeer, 2005). Capacity-building interventions work to strengthen leadership skills, organize voter registration drives, and prepare potential SC candidates to contest elections (Tandon & Mohanty, 2003). Importantly, these interventions address structural barriers such as illiteracy, voter intimidation, and economic dependence on dominant caste groups, which often limit SC political agency.

3.2.4.3. Case Examples of Electoral Literacy Campaigns

Several documented interventions illustrate the impact of social work in promoting electoral participation among SC communities. The Election Commission of India's Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme has collaborated with NGOs and social work institutions to conduct door-to-door voter registration, set up Voter Help Desks in rural areas, and use folk media for awareness campaigns (Election Commission of India, 2022). In Rajasthan, community-based organizations facilitated social audits of voter lists to ensure the inclusion of marginalized voters, drawing from earlier grassroots innovations by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in governance transparency (Jenkins & Goetz, 1999). In Tamil Nadu, targeted transport arrangements and on-site assistance on polling day have been used to overcome logistical barriers faced by SC voters, particularly women and elderly citizens. These case examples reveal that electoral literacy is not just about understanding voting procedures but also about creating enabling conditions for participation reducing structural exclusion and enhancing the capacity for informed decision-making.

The literature consistently demonstrates that political empowerment of Scheduled Castes through social work interventions requires a multi-pronged approach that integrates theoretical grounding, community mobilization, and practical facilitation. While individual programmes such as SVEEP show measurable improvements in voter turnout and awareness, deeper systemic transformation depends on sustained engagement with power structures, legal enforcement of rights, and community-led leadership development. The implications for the 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) debate are significant without

robust and localized empowerment interventions, synchronized elections could risk further marginalizing communities already facing systemic political exclusion.

3.2.5. Social Work, Political Empowerment and ONOE

Table 2 Thematic Review on Social Work, Political Empowerment, and One Nation, One Elections

Theme	Reference	Country	Findings	Implications
Voter Engagement Frameworks	(Sandler et al., 2021)	USA	Voter engagement as a "three-legged stool" (registration, participation, informed choice) is crucial for the political influence of marginalized groups.	Social workers should integrate voter support services into practice.
Pathways to Political Office	(Amann, 2019)	Switzerland	Family support, exposure to social issues, and professional networks motivate social workers to enter politics; skills are transferable but political education is lacking.	Social work curricula should include political leadership training.
Social Workers in Elected Roles	(McLaughlin et al., 2019)	Canada	Motivations rooted in civic engagement; mentorship is key; need for campaign and legislative knowledge.	Enhance political process training in social work education.
Democracy & Human Rights Interface	(Kaminski, 2020)	Europe	Social work benefits from democracy but must navigate contested rights issues.	Social workers act as both advocates and mediators in democratic settings.

ONOE – Cost & Efficiency	(V.Bhatnagar, 2015)	India	Potential ₹45 billion savings, reduced disruptions, less voter fatigue; risk of overshadowing local issues.	ONOE design must safeguard local governance representation.
ONOE – Governance Stability	(S. Pareek, 2017)	India	Resource efficiency, policy continuity benefits; challenges include constitutional changes and political opposition.	Requires phased implementation and consensus-building.
ONOE – Historical & Policy Context	(P. Khobung & Sagar, 2018)	India	Traces ONOE policy evolution; success depends on reconciling varied stakeholder interests.	Foster multi-party dialogue before implementation.
ONOE – Political Behaviour Effects	(A. Prakash, 2019)	India	Could influence voter behaviour, increasing polarisation; requires public consultation.	Build safeguards to prevent partisan dominance.
Electoral Integrity	(Chitlaoarporn, 2016)	Thailand & Global	Vote-buying, corruption, and coercion undermine democratic legitimacy.	Strengthen transparency and anti-corruption measures in reforms like ONOE.

3. Literature Gap

Category	Identified Gaps	Supporting Evidence from Literature

Empirical Evidence Needs	Limited field-based studies on the real impact of ONOE on Scheduled Caste (SC) political participation.	Most literature is conceptual or theoretical (e.g., Lever, 2020; Kumar & Rohil, 2021) with few primary data studies on marginalized groups.
Policy-Level Research Gaps	Insufficient analysis of how ONOE reforms intersect with constitutional safeguards for SC representation.	Ngalengnam (2019) highlights structural flaws in electoral processes but lacks SC-specific constitutional analysis.
Intersectional and Comparative Studies	Lack of studies comparing ONOE's implications for SC communities with other marginalized groups in India and abroad.	Sahoo (2018) and international decentralization studies show participatory models, but comparative ONOE-focused studies are missing.

4. Implications and Future Research Directions

The review of existing literature reveals significant gaps that have important implications for scholarship, policy, and practice. First, there is a clear need for empirical evidence capturing the lived experiences of Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in the context of the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal. While many studies(N. Kumar & Rohil, 2025; Lever, 2025)provide conceptual insights into electoral systems and democratic ethics, few undertake field-based or mixed-method research to understand how such electoral reforms might reshape political participation among SC populations. Future research should therefore focus on large-scale surveys,focus group discussions, and participatory rural appraisal methods to document SC perspectives before, during, and after potential ONOE implementation.

Second, there is a policy-level research gap concerning the alignment or potential misalignment of ONOE reforms with existing constitutional safeguards for SC representation. While Ngalengnam (2019) critiques the structural weaknesses of India's electoral process, the literature rarely explores ONOE in relation to provisions such as Articles 330–342 of the Constitution or the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Addressing this gap would require a critical policy analysis examining whether synchronized elections might inadvertently weaken affirmative action measures or dilute the political agency of SC communities.

Finally, the literature indicates a shortage of intersectional and comparative studies assessing ONOE's potential impact on SCs in relation to other marginalized groups, both within India and internationally. Sahoo's (2018) work on grassroots democracy and international decentralization case studies demonstrate the value of participatory governance models, yet no comparative research currently exists to evaluate ONOE's consequences across diverse marginalized demographics. Future studies should therefore integrate gender, rural–urban divides, and inter- caste dynamics to produce a more nuanced understanding of representation. Comparative perspectives from other countries experimenting with synchronized elections could further enrich this discourse and provide lessons for the Indian context.

In sum, filling these research gaps will require a multi-pronged approach combining empirical inquiry, constitutional analysis, and comparative frameworks to ensure that electoral reforms like ONOE advance, rather than undermine, the democratic participation of Scheduled Caste communities.

5. Conclusion

This study critically examined the intersection of electoral reform, social work practice, and Scheduled Caste (SC) political empowerment within the context of the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal. The literature review reveals that while ONOE is positioned as a mechanism to enhance electoral efficiency and reduce costs, it carries potential risks for marginalised representation if not coupled with strong constitutional and policy safeguards. Existing evidence shows that SC communities continue to face structural barriers to meaningful political participation, including socio-economic disadvantages, institutional discrimination, and limitedaccess to political literacy initiatives. Social work interventions particularly those focusing on advocacy, rights education, and capacity building emerge as vital tools in strengthening SC political agency, yet their integration into electoral reform debates remains insufficient.

The findings underscore the need for a cautious, evidence-driven approach to implementing ONOE, grounded in inclusive policymaking and participatory governance principles. Future research should prioritise large-scale empirical studies, intersectional

analyses, and comparative frameworks to ensure that electoral reforms do not inadvertently dilute constitutional protections for SC representation. By embedding social work perspectives into electoral policy discourse, India can move toward a model of democratic participation that is both efficient and equitable. In this way, ONOE can evolve from being a purely administrative reform to a transformative democratic initiative that actively empowers historically marginalised communities.

Reference

- McLaughlin, M. A., Rothery, M., & Kuiken, J. (2019). Social workers who hold elected office: Motivations, experiences, and challenges. *Canadian Social Work Review*, *36*(2), 103–124. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26868188

- Prakash, A. (2019). One Nation One Election and the dynamics of Indian electoral politics.

- *Economic and Political Weekly*, *54*(3), 12–15.

- Ahmed, Z., & Kuruvilla, J. (2024). The Idea of One Nation-One Election: Its Potential Risk and Significance for India. *Journal of Polity & Society*.

- Aiyar, Y., & Tillin, L. (2020). "One nation," BJP, and the future of Indian federalism. *India Review*, *19*(2), 117–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2020.1744994

- Ambagudia, J. (2019). Scheduled Tribes, Reserved Constituencies and Political Reservation in India. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, *5*(1), 44–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/2394481119847015

- Arrow, J. K. (1952). *Social Choice and Individual Values*. *18*.

- Austin, G. (1999). Working a Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, *63*(1), 212–214. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911804000609

- Mullaly, B., & West, J. (2017). Challenging Oppression and Confronting Privilege. *Oxford: Oxford University Press.*, *2*.

- Banerjee, A., & Somanathan, R. (2007). The political economy of public goods: Some evidence from India. *Journal of Development Economics*, *82*(2), 287–314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2006.04.005

- Bardhan, P., Mookherjee, D., & Torrado, P. L. M. (2010). Impact of Political Reservations in West Bengal Local Governments on Anti-Poverty Targeting. *Journal of Globalization and Development*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.2202/1948-1837.1025

- Behar, A., & Aiyar, Y. (2003). Networks of Panchayat Women: Civil Society Space for Political Action. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *38*, 4936–4940.

- Besley, T., & Coate, S. (1997). An Economic Model of Representative Democracy. *Source: The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *112*(1), 85–114. https://about.jstor.org/terms

- Besley, T., Pande, R., Rao, V., & Rahman, L. (2004). The Politics of Public Good Provision: Evidence from Indian Local Governments. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, *2*(3), 416–426.

- Bhatnagar, A. (2024). Issue of "One Nation, One Election" in Indian Perspective. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *6*(1), 1–5. www.ijfmr.com

- Chitlaoarporn, C. (2016). Electoral corruption and its impact on democratic governance. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, *24*(2), 215–234.

- Chandra, K. (2004). *Why ethnic parties succeed: patronage and ethnic head counts in India*.

- Cambridge University Press.

- Chatterjee, S. (n.d.). *Harmonizing India's Democratic Landscape: Exploring The Feasibility of "One Nation, One Election" within the Framework of the Indian Constitution*. https://www.news18.com/elections/one-

- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Impact of Reservation in Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomised Experiment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *5*(9), 979–986.

- Chauchard, S. (2014). Can descriptive representation change beliefs about a stigmatized group? Evidence from Rural India. *American Political Science Review*, *108*(2), 403–422. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000033

- Chaudhary, V. (2025). One Nation-One Election In India (ONOE). *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, *6*(4), 10528–10531.

- https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0425.15101

- Chhibber, P., & Nooruddin, I. (2004). Do Party Systems Count? The Number of Parties and Government Performance in the Indian States. In *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 37, Issue 2, pp. 152–187). https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414003260981

- Chowdhury, S. (2023). Economics and politics under Modi government: A synoptic view. *Human Geography(United Kingdom)*, *16*(2), 146–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786221133475 Sandler, K. A., Hylton, E. M., Ostrander, J., & Smith, R. T. (2021). Voter engagement in social

- work: A three-legged stool framework. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *57*(3), 447–459.

- Deo, M. (2024). "One Nation One Election": A Comprehensive Analysis. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, *5*(5).

- https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.2698

- Deshpande, A. (2011). *The Grammar of Caste: Economic Discrimination in Contemporary India.*(Vol. 42).

- Downs, A. (1957). An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy. In *Source: Journal of Political Economy* (Vol. 65, Issue 2). https://www.jstor.org/stable/1827369

- Dunning, T., & Nilekani, J. (2013). Ethnic quotas and political mobilization: Caste, parties, and distribution in Indian village councils. *American Political Science Review*, *107*(1), 35–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000573

- Dwivedi, A., & Kushwaha, A. K. (2025). One Nation, One Election in India Opportunities and Challenges. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *7*(3), 1–7. www.ijfmr.com

- Netting, E., Kettner, M. P., & McMurtry, L. S. (1994). Social Work Macro Practice. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, *21*(1). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2124

- Elayaperumal, L. (1969). Report of the Committee on Untouchability, Economic and Educational Development of the Scheduled Castes and Connected Documents 1969. *New Delhi,Department of Social Welfare*.

- Election Commission of India. (2022). *Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation*

- *(SVEEP) Programme* . Handbook. New Delhi: Election Commission of India.
- Fenno, F. R. (1979). Home Style: House Members in their Districts. *American Political Science Association*, *73*, 584–586.
- Fook, J. (2016). *75038_Fook_Chapter_1*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Fulara, C. G. (2024). The Impact of Electoral Bonds on Political Funding Transparency in India. *Himalayan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *19*(1). https://doi.org/10.51220/hjssh.v19i1.11
- Gary, C., & Marjorie, M. (1995). • *Craig, G.Community Empowerment: A Reader in Participation and Development.*
- Galanter, M. (1984). Competing_equalities_law_and_the_backwar. *Oxford University Press*, *4*. Gangte, M., & Touthang, Y. (2024). Caste and Electoral Behaviour in India: An In-Depth Analysis. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *6*(5), 1. www.ijfmr.com
- Golder, M., & Stramski, J. (2010). Ideological Congruence and Electoral Institutions. *American Journal of Political Science*, *54*(1), 90–106. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00420.x
- Gorringe, H. (n.d.). *Caste and politics in Tamil Nadu*.
- Gray Me, Rooyen Colin Collett van, Rennie Gavin, & Gaha Jo. (2001). The political participation of social workers: A comparative study. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *11*, 99–110. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2397.00204
- Harinath, S. (2024). Participation Levels of Scheduled Castes in Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha: A Sociological Study in Rural Telangana. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328x241239181
- Horowitz, L. D. (1985). Ethnic Groups in Conflict . In *University Of California Press*.
- Jim Life. (2012). *Human Rights and Social Work: Towards Rights-Based Practice* (3rd ed.).
- Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaffrelot, C. (2003). BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: From Periphery to Centre.
- *Indian Historical Review*, *30*(2), 263–265.

- Jensenius, R. F. (2013). *Power, Performance and Bias: Evaluating the Electoral Quotas for Scheduled Castes in India Committee in charge*. University Of California, Berkeley.

- Jha, A. (2023). Democratic Decentralizaton and Socio-Political Inclusion of Marginalized Communities: A Study of Musahar Community in Madhubani District of Bihar, India. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, *15*(1), 123–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X211042499 Johnson, C. (2003). *Decentralisation in India : poverty, politics and Panchayati Raj*. Overseas

- Development Institute.

- Jyotsna. (2022). Public expenditure on schedule caste and schedule tribes (SC-STs) welfare. ~ 89~*International Journal of Financial Management and,Economics*, *5*(1). http://www.theeconomicsjournal.com

- K, K. A. (2021). Contemporary Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.*Anthropology*, *9*, 244. https://doi.org/10.35248/2332-0915.20.9.244

- K Kumar, A. (2021). Contemporary Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.*Anthropology*, *9*(7), 244. https://doi.org/10.35248/2332-0915.20.9.244

- Kendre, D. (2024). Constitutional and Legal Provisions Related to Reservation Policies for Village Panchayat Elections in Maharashtra. *International Journal of Law and Society*, *7*(4), 155–164. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijls.20240704.13

- Khobung, V., & Sagar, S. (2024). One Nation One Election' at a crossroad in India. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, *6*(2), 212–219.https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2024.v6.i2c.387

- Kumar, A. (2021). Contemporary Problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India.*Anthropology*, *9*, 244. https://doi.org/10.35248/2332-0915.20.9.244

- Kumar, N., & Rohil, H. (2025). Exploring Democracy and the Election Process in India. *JETIR2501307 Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, *12*. www.jetir.orgd80

- Lever, A. (2025). Democracy and the ethics of voting. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *28*(5), 831–847. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2024.2426113

- Amann, K. (2019). Pathways of social workers into political office: Motivations, enablers, and barriers . *European Journal of Social Work*, *22*(5), 799–812.

- Kaminski, T. (2020). Democracy, human rights, and the profession of social work. European Journal of Social Work, 23(1), 44–56. . *European Journal of Social Work*, *23*(1), 44–56.

- Majhi, S., & Suna, B. (2021). *Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Odisha* (Vol. 866, Issue 64). www.journal-innovations.com

- Mathew, G., & Nayak, R. C. (1996). *Panchayats at Work: What It Means for the Oppressed?31*(27), 1765–1771.

- Mayhew, D. R. (1974). A Note on Electoral Reform. *Policy Studies Journal*, *2*(4), 299–301. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.1974.tb00418.x

- Mittal, H., Kandathil, G., & Mathur, N. (2023). *Beyond the technology-centric and citizen-centric binary: Ontological politics of organizing in Translation of the Smart City Discourse in India. . 31*(4), 683–702.

- Kabeer, N. (2005). Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions. *London: Zed Books.*

- Naganoor, M. (2024). A Study on Electoral Reforms and Their Effectiveness in Enhancing Democratic Participation in Indian Context. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, *5*(7), 1141–1150. https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0724.1726

- Nayar, J. (2013). The Politics of Hope and the Other-in-the-World: Thinking Exteriority. *Law and Critique*, *24*(1), 63–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-012-9115-8

- Ngalengnam, N. (n.d.). Indian Political Science Association Democracy and Elections in India Today. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, *77*(3), 333–338.https://doi.org/10.2307/26575728

- Nirala, K. S. (2020). Participation of scheduled caste on political processes and decision making. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies*, *2*(3), 272–273. www.allstudyjournal.com

- Osborne, J. M., & Slivinski, A. (1996). A Model of Political Competition with Citizen-Candidates A Model of Political Com[etitiom with Citizen -Candidates. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *111*(1), 65–96.

- Khobung, P., & Sagar, T. (2018). Synchronised elections in India: Challenges and opportunities.*Indian Journal of Public Administration*, *64*(4), 593–608.

- Pai, S. (2002). Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. *Political Science, History, Sociology*.

- Pareek, M. (2024). The Concept of One Nation, One Election in Indian Democracy: A Study of Benefits, Challenges, and Feasibility. *Research Review Journal of Social Science*, *4*(2), 13–

- 24. https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjss.2024.v04.n02.003

- Parthasarathy, N. (2023). One nation one election – a critical analysis. *Delhi Metropolitan Education Journal of Law*, *4*(01), 56–66. https://doi.org/10.53361/dmejl.v4i01.07

- Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application.

- *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *23*(5), 569–579. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506982

- Prakash, B. (n.d.). *ONOE Comparitive Analysis from Voting Behv to Political Polarization Bhaswant*.

- Jenkins, R., & Goetz, M. A. (1999). Accounts and accountability: Theoretical implications of the right-to-information movement in India. Third World Quarterly. *Third World Quarterly*, *20*, 603–622.

- Tandon, R., & Mohanty, R. (2003). Civil society and governance: Role of community-based organizations in promoting citizen participation. *IDS Bulletin*, *34*(2), 66–73.

- Pareek, S. (2017). Prospects and challenges of One Nation One Election in India. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, *78*(3), 401–412.

- Jodhka, S. S. (2018). Caste in Contemporary India. New Delhi: Routledge India. (2018). *New Delhi: Routledge India*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.4089

- Saxena, A. (n.d.). *Religion, Caste and Community: Identity Sunbtantiation through"Maile" Congregations Among the Dorgas of Jammu and Kashmir(India)*.

- Singh, R. A., & Bisht, J. S. (2025). Reimagining Electoral Synchronization In India: A Constitutional and Legal Analysis Of "One Nation, One Election" Amidst Federalism, Representation, And Institutional Viability. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *7*(2). https://www.crdj.in/files/pdf2/WEB%20DISCUSSANT.pdf

- Thachil, T., & Herring, R. (2008). Poor choices: De-alignment, development and Dalit/Adivasi voting patterns in Indian states. *Contemporary South Asia*, *16*(4), 441–464. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930802472798

- Thirupathi, L. (2021). The SC-ST Women's Omen's Political Representation in Pris: Issues and Challenges. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts(IJCRT)*, *9*. www.ijcrt.org

- Thorat, S., & Newman, S. K. (2007). Caste and Economic Discrimination: Causes, Consequences and Remedies. *Economic Political Weekly* , *42*(41), 4121–4124.

- Thorat, Sukhadeo. (2009). *Dalits in India: search for a common destiny*. SAGE.

- Trumm, S., & Barclay, A. (2021). *Parliamentary representation: Should MPs prioritise their own views or those of their voters?*

- Uddin, J. (2021). Political Participation of the Scheduled Caste Community in Tripura: A Case Study of Bagma-30 Assembly Constituencies in Tripura. *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, *9*(3), 2321–9467. www.questjournals.org

- Uddin, N. (2019). Empowerment through participation in local governance: the case of Union Parishad in Bangladesh. *Public Administration and Policy*, *22*(1), 40–54.

- https://doi.org/10.1108/PAP-10-2018-0002

- Bhatnagar, V. (2015). One Nation One Election: A cost-benefit analysis. *PRS Legislative Research*.

- Rajalakshmi, V., & Selvam, V. (2017). Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce Special Issue: Global Strategies in Banking and Finance Edited By: Mihail N. Dudin Impact of MGNREGA on Women Empowerment and their issues and challenges A Review of Literature from 2005 to 2015. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, *22*(S7).http://www.icommercecentral.com

- Venkatanarayana, M. (2013). *Munich Personal RePEc Archive Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Tribes (STs) in Andhra Pradesh: A Situation Assessment Analysis*.

- Verma, P. (2018). Leadership in Politics through Literature. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (Ijtsrd)*, 2(5), 2505–2511.

- Wankhede, S. H. (2024). From Panthers to Political Dalits: Revisiting the Legacy of Dalit Panthers in India. *CASTE / A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 5(3), 393–409.https://doi.org/10.26812/caste.v5i3.693

30.18   Families as Schools of Democracy: Reimagining Family Social Work for Democratic Deepening

Aswathy Sebastian [1] and Dr.K.Sathyamurthi [2]
1.PhD (FT) Research scholar , Madras School of Social Work ,Chennai -8, India,
aswathyseban2001@gmail.com
2.Associate professor, Madras School Of Social Work ,Chennai -8, India, ksm@mssw.in

Abstract

Democratic deepening extends beyond elections to encompass the cultivation of civic values, social justice, and participatory practices within everyday life. The family, as the first site of socialization, plays a crucial yet underexplored role in shaping these democratic attitudes and behaviours. This paper contends that family social work through its focus on conflict resolution, rights protection, positive parenting, and inclusive communication acts as a vital bridge between private family wellbeing and public democratic culture. Drawing on theoretical perspectives of social capital and ecological systems theory, this paper conceptually explores how strengthening family relationships can foster dialogue, trust, gender justice, and mutual respect all foundational to a vibrant democracy. By critically engaging with the current debate on One Nation, One Election (ONOE), the paper argues that macro-level electoral reforms must be balanced by investments in local civic culture and everyday democratic spaces such as families. Drawing on social capital and ecological systems theories, the paper develops an integrated model illustrating how family social work can counteract the risks of centralized electoral reforms like ONOE by strengthening local democratic capacity.**It** concludes by calling for policy measures and practice directions that recognize family social work as integral to India's democratic deepening, ensuring that grassroots civic vitality remains strong in the face of structural reforms.

***Keywords:** family social work, democratic deepening, civic engagement, socialization, India, social capital, parenting, inclusion*

Introduction

In contemporary discourse, democracy is frequently understood in terms of elections, institutions, and formal civic participation. Yet a truly resilient democracy depends not only on what happens in parliaments and polling booths, but also on how democratic values are nurtured in everyday life. Formal education systems have long been recognized as key spaces for cultivating democratic culture, emphasizing participation, dialogue, and critical thinking (Sağlam, 2023). However, the family the first and most influential site of socialization remains significantly underexplored in discussions about how democratic attitudes and behaviors are formed and sustained.

Families shape children's values, behaviors, and identities from birth, providing the earliest and most enduring context for learning language, moral reasoning, emotional self-regulation, social norms, and gender roles (Griffiths et al., 2021; Ding, 2024). It is within families that children first encounter fundamental concepts of fairness, cooperation, and respect for others the building blocks of a democratic society (Ding, 2024). Parents and caregivers act as the earliest teachers and role models, introducing young children to shared social rules and basic civic life through everyday practices of sharing, listening, and negotiation. This influence has long-lasting impacts, shaping self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, and the capacity to engage in wider social and civic life across the lifespan (Griffiths et al., 2021).

Despite this foundational role, the family's contribution to democratic culture is often overshadowed by an emphasis on schools, media, and other public institutions as primary sites of civic education (Sağlam, 2023). This oversight is reinforced by the traditional divide between the 'private' family sphere and the 'public' political realm, which tends to make the family's civic function less visible in policy and academic discourse. Moreover, while families are increasingly discussed as sites for building human capital and addressing inequalities, critical engagement with their potential to foster democratic norms and participatory behaviors remains limited (Ding, 2024).

Recognizing families as 'schools of democracy' expands our understanding of where and how democratic cultures are nurtured. Family social work, with its focus on strengthening families through conflict resolution, positive parenting, rights protection, and inclusive communication, has a unique opportunity to bridge this gap between private family wellbeing and public democratic deepening.Family social work has significant potential to transform families into active building blocks of a democratic society by intentionally promoting restorative and responsive justice within households. This approach encourages families to practice core democratic values such as fairness, open dialogue, and shared decision-making in their everyday interactions (Braithwaite, 2004). Social workers act as facilitators who empower the "will of families" to shape their own lives while also ensuring that families uphold broader public commitments to human rights and social justice (Braithwaite, 2004). Moving beyond reductionist models that treat families merely as units to be activated for meeting service delivery goals, a democratic social work perspective emphasizes genuine partnerships and co-creation of solutions with families (Roose et al., 2013). Such partnerships treat collaboration not just as an outcome but as an ongoing process of joint meaning-making and experimentation, reflecting the very practices that sustain democracy at a societal level (Roose et al., 2013). Furthermore, family social work can foster civic dialogue and respectful debate within families and communities, helping individuals develop skills for addressing differences and countering polarization capacities that are vital for a healthy democracy. Social work education that engages directly with families and communities prepares practitioners to internalize democratic values and social justice principles, equipping them to carry these into their practice and help families become everyday sites of democratic participation.

Central to this analysis is the concept of *ecological democracy*, which emphasizes interconnectedness, inclusivity, and participatory practices across social systems (Dryzek, 2010).Ecological democracy refers to the extension of democratic principles across interdependent layers of social life, including individuals, families, communities, and institutions. It emphasizes that democracy is not confined to political structures alone, but is embedded in everyday relational contexts. In this sense, ecological democracy highlights the interconnectedness of micro (personal/family), meso (community), and macro

(societal/governmental) systems, each reinforcing the other in sustaining participatory and equitable practices (Dryzek, 2000; Smith, 2003).This paper adopts a conceptual methodology by synthesizing interdisciplinary literature across sociology, political science, and social work to propose a framework for understanding the role of families in democratic ecosystems.

This paper argues that integrating a democratic perspective into family social work practice is both timely and necessary. Drawing on social capital theory and ecological systems theory, it situates families within a wider democratic ecosystem where everyday relationships foster civic trust, dialogue, and participatory values. By conceptually linking these perspectives to India's current debate on One Nation, One Election (ONOE), the paper demonstrates how micro-level practices within families can strengthen grassroots democratic culture and counterbalance the risks of centralizing reforms. It concludes by highlighting the cultural and structural challenges that shape this potential and proposes directions for policy, practice, and research to position families more intentionally as vital 'schools of democracy.'

Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual and theoretical approach rather than an empirical one. The arguments presented are derived from a synthesis of interdisciplinary literature spanning political science, sociology, and family social work. Instead of relying on primary data, the paper integrates theoretical perspectives to frame how family social capital functions within democratic ecosystems.The analysis is guided by the principle of **congruence**, which emphasizes the alignment between social structures and democratic practices (Almond & Verba, 1963). By employing Bronfenbrenner's **Ecological Systems Theory** (1979) alongside Putnam's **Social Capital Theory** (2000), the paper builds a framework that connects micro-level family dynamics, meso-level community networks, and macro-level democratic structures. This methodological choice enables a layered understanding of how families act as connectors in the democratic ecosystem and provides the foundation for the model presented later in the paper.

Social Capital and Democracy

Social capital theory explains how social networks, trust, and shared norms act as vital resources for individuals and groups. Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam are two of the most influential theorists in this area, although their perspectives differ significantly. While Bourdieu views social capital as a form of power that reinforces social inequality, Putnam conceptualizes it as a collective asset that strengthens community well-being and civic life (De Groot, Mihalache, & Elfring, 2021).

In the context of democratic deepening, social capital plays a crucial role by fostering trust, cooperation, and active civic participation. These elements form the social glue that connects citizens to each other and to democratic institutions, enabling more participatory, inclusive, and effective governance (Krishna, 2007). In India, the growth of social capital is often driven by grassroots community organizations and local leadership rather than solely by external interventions (Krishna, 2007). Such local networks build the trust and collective action needed for democratic accountability and meaningful participation at the community level.

Successful democratic models, such as Kerala's, illustrate how a synergy between a mobilized civil society and responsive state institutions can strengthen social capital and democratic outcomes (Heller, 2000). Mobilization around the interests of marginalized groups, especially lower-class and disadvantaged communities, demonstrates how social capital can help reduce social exclusion and promote more equitable democratic development. Furthermore, social capital networks empower women and marginalized communities by supporting livelihoods, entrepreneurship, and collective voice all of which expand their participation in civic and political processes.

Social Capital, Families, and Social Work

Family social work and social capital theory intersect in meaningful ways. Strong family relationships are themselves a form of foundational social capital, transmitting core norms of trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and civic engagement across generations (De Groot et al.,

2021). By supporting healthy family dynamics, conflict resolution, and inclusive communication, family social work helps families nurture these democratic values at the micro level.As families socialize children into principles of fairness, dialogue, and mutual respect, they create a ripple effect that extends into schools, neighborhoods, and broader civil society. This layered connection illustrates how strengthening families as sites of trust and cooperation supports the growth of community-level social capital, which in turn enables more participatory democratic culture (Krishna, 2007; Heller, 2000).Another important idea underpinning this paper is the *logic of congruence*. This principle suggests that values, practices, and structures found within smaller social units (such as families) often reflect, reinforce, or diverge from those in larger political and societal institutions. In other words, the way families negotiate roles, resolve conflicts, or foster participation has implications for how individuals later engage with democratic life at the community or state level (Easton, 1965; Almond & Verba, 1963). When family systems embody participatory and inclusive practices, they create a form of "micro-democracy" that aligns with broader democratic ideals; conversely, authoritarian or exclusionary family patterns may perpetuate undemocratic tendencies in civic life. This logic of congruence thus provides the connective framework linking family socialization with wider democratic processes, which is central to the analysis in this manuscript.

By recognizing and intentionally fostering this link, family social work in India can act as a practical bridge between private family wellbeing and public democratic deepening reinforcing families as 'schools of democracy' that cultivate engaged, trusting, and active citizens.

Contribution of family social capital in democracy

Families are not only private units of care and support but also powerful producers of social capital, which is foundational for sustaining democratic societies. At the heart of this process is the transmission of civic virtues: within families, children first learn trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and a sense of civic responsibility (Prandini, 2014). These values extend beyond the household, shaping how individuals relate to others, build social trust, and contribute to the common good all of which are critical for democratic participation

and social cohesion.Family ties themselves function as primary social networks, offering members support, information, and resources that help them participate in community life and voluntary associations (Astone, Nathanson, Schoen, & Kim, 1999). Such associations are widely recognized as building blocks of strong democratic institutions, as they foster habits of cooperation, dialogue, and collective problem-solving.

Intergenerational investment is another mechanism through which families build social capital that strengthens democracy. Families invest time, care, and resources in child-rearing, education, and emotional support, preparing individuals to become active, responsible citizens who can contribute to public life (Coleman, 1988; Astone et al., 1999). This cumulative investment enhances individual wellbeing while building the social trust and civic engagement that healthy democracies depend on.

Finally, family social capital enhances resilience, enabling families and communities to adapt to challenges and support each other during crises. This resilience is vital for sustaining democratic engagement in the face of social, economic, or political instability, as strong family networks help individuals maintain trust and collective action even under pressure (Prandini, 2014).Taken together, these dimensions show that families play an essential yet often overlooked role in generating the trust, networks, and civic norms that underlie a vibrant, inclusive democracy. Family social work, by strengthening these relationships and capacities, can thus be seen as a practical pathway for cultivating democratic social capital from the most intimate level outward.

Ecological Systems Theory in democracy

Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, offers a foundational framework for understanding how individuals are shaped by multiple, interacting layers of their environment. At its core, the theory explains that human development occurs within nested systems from immediate settings like the family to broader structures such as communities, institutions, and the wider socio-cultural and ecological environment. Each layer both influences and is influenced by the others, highlighting the dynamic, interconnected nature of human life.

In the context of democracy, Ecological Systems Theory has inspired the idea of *ecological democracy*, which broadens the understanding of democratic participation and responsibility. Rather than limiting democratic engagement to human political interests alone, ecological democracy expands participation to include the well-being of nonhuman life and future generations (Schlosberg, Bäckstrand, & Pickering, 2019).This perspective encourages a multi-layered, interconnected approach to governance. It emphasizes that deepening democracy requires cultural transformation redefining prosperity and citizenship to embed ecological responsibility and sustainability at every level (Lysaker, 2023). Ecological democracy also promotes deliberative and reflexive processes, such as citizen assemblies and participatory forums, that encourage informed debate on ecological issues and help counteract short-term or anti-ecological biases (Pickering, Bäckstrand, & Schlosberg, 2020).

A core element of ecological democracy is its support for *polycentric governance* decentralized, multi-level systems that allow local communities to actively participate, adapt, and contribute to wider democratic goals. This mirrors Bronfenbrenner's insight that no single system operates in isolation; instead, healthy democratic practice depends on the interaction of households, communities, civil society, and state institutions within a shared ecological context (Pickering et al., 2020).

Families as Connectors in the Democratic Ecosystem

Families sit at the center of this ecological web as the most immediate and formative environment for individuals. They transmit values of care, cooperation, and responsibility not only toward other people but increasingly toward the nonhuman world. By recognizing families as embedded within these nested ecological and social systems, family social work can help cultivate democratic values that are reflexive, inclusive, and future-oriented. In this sense, promoting fairness, participation, and dialogue within families contributes not only to stronger civic cultures but also to a broader, more sustainable democratic ecology.

Family social work, when viewed through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, functions as a critical bridge linking the micro-level of individual and family life with the macro-level of broader society, culture, and policy. This perspective recognizes that family dynamics are deeply shaped by and can also influence larger social structures. As a result, effective family social work practice must understand and engage across these interconnected layers (Paat, 2013).

At the **micro level**, family social workers address immediate family interactions, parenting practices, and parent–child relationships , the direct settings that most strongly shape individual development and well-being (Paat, 2013). This includes helping families build healthy communication, resolve conflicts, and foster positive attachment.At the **meso and exo levels**, family social work connects families with community resources, schools, health services, and peer networks. These intermediate systems interact with family life, providing supports or challenges that shape how families function (Crawford, 2020).At the **macro level**, family social workers recognize that societal structures including cultural norms, economic conditions, public policies, and systemic inequalities profoundly affect family opportunities and stressors. Effective practice therefore extends beyond the family unit to advocacy and policy work that seeks to address root causes and promote social justice (Algood, Harris, & Hong, 2013).

Grounded in this ecological view, family social workers adopt a **holistic assessment** approach that considers not only the family itself but also the wider social, cultural, and economic systems shaping their situation (Crawford, 2020). This ensures interventions are realistic and responsive to families' lived realities.In practice, this means **bridging** direct support for families (e.g., counselling, parenting guidance, conflict resolution) with broader systems work such as advocating for inclusive policies, connecting families to community resources, or challenging structural barriers that perpetuate disadvantage. By operating across these levels, family social work can help transform families into resilient, engaged units that contribute to the well-being of their communities and the deepening of democracy.In this way, family social work grounded in

Ecological Systems Theory uniquely positions itself to link the personal with the societal. By addressing both family needs and the larger context in which they exist, family social work strengthens families as vital nodes in an interconnected system that supports more sustainable, just, and participatory democratic outcomes.

Deepening Democracy in India: An Ecological Systems Approach

Deepening democracy in India through the lens of **ecological systems theory** and **ecological democracy** means creating governance systems where local communities, ecological sustainability, and social equity are central. Deepening democracy goes beyond procedural aspects of elections and governance to focus on strengthening citizen participation, inclusion, and accountability across all levels of society. In the context of family social work, deepening democracy implies creating environments where families can participate in decision-making processes that affect their well-being, thus expanding democratic practice into the private and social domainsThis approach mirrors Bronfenbrenner's insight that individuals and families exist within nested systems from intimate household settings to broader community, cultural, and environmental contexts. In India's diverse and complex democracy, strengthening these connections between the micro and macro levels is essential for building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable society (Kothari, 2014).

Key Principles for Deepening Democracy in India

Principle	Description
Local & Direct Democracy	Empowering local communities to make decisions about their own resources and environment, reflecting the micro-level agency families and communities hold (Kothari, 2014).
Bioregional Economies	Supporting local economies that respect ecological boundaries and cultural diversity, encouraging place-based development and local

Principle	Description
	stewardship (Kothari & Shrivastava, 2012).
Cultural Diversity & Equity	Valuing diverse knowledge systems and ensuring that marginalized voices — including women, Indigenous peoples, and lower caste communities — are central to governance (Kothari, 2014).
Ecological Resilience	Prioritizing long-term environmental health over short-term economic gains to secure sustainability for future generations (Kothari, 2014).
Grassroots Movements	Building on India's strong legacy of local environmental and social movements, which demonstrate how collective action at the community level can drive broader policy change (Kothari & Shrivastava, 2012).

India's diverse grassroots initiatives from village forest management to water conservation and community-led development are real-world examples of radical ecological democracy in action (Kothari, 2014). These local practices embody the *micro-level engagement* that, when networked or scaled up, can influence regional and national governance frameworks.For example, village forest councils, women's self-help groups, and community water user associations all demonstrate how local collective action fosters ecological stewardship and democratic participation simultaneously. When these grassroots models are integrated into mainstream policy, they bridge the gap between community needs and national development goals (Kothari & Shrivastava, 2012)

The Role of Families and Family Social Work

Within this system, *families* are critical foundational units that socialize individuals into the civic values, ecological ethics, and participatory habits needed for radical ecological democracy. Families teach trust, cooperation, and care not only for each other but also for their communities and environments.Family social work strengthens this capacity by supporting equitable family relations, empowering women and marginalized members, and connecting households to local participatory spaces. By addressing both immediate family

needs and broader structural barriers, family social work acts as an essential micro-macro bridge, ensuring that democratic values rooted in daily family life ripple outward into resilient communities and inclusive governance.The concept of "schools of democracy" suggests that democratic values are first cultivated within primary social institutions such as families, schools, and communities. These everyday contexts function as training grounds where individuals learn participation, dialogue, and respect for rights and responsibilities. The family, in particular, is seen as a foundational site where the dispositions necessary for civic life are nurtured (Putnam, 1993).

In India, then, deepening democracy through an ecological systems perspective means empowering local communities, centering ecological sustainability, and integrating cultural diversity into all levels of governance. Families and family social work sit at the heart of this transformation, cultivating everyday democratic habits and supporting communities to build a more just, sustainable, and resilient democracy.

One Nation, One Election: Implications for Grassroots Democracy

The proposal of *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) holding national, state, and local elections simultaneously has intensified debate on its possible impact on India's federal and local democratic structures. While ONOE promises greater efficiency and reduced election costs, there are genuine concerns that it could unintentionally weaken grassroots democracy by diluting the distinctiveness of local representation and overshadowing community-specific issues (Singh & Bisht, 2025; Ips, 2024).However, while ONOE could reduce election fatigue and stabilize governance cycles, scholars and practitioners have raised concerns that synchronizing national and state elections may unintentionally weaken the vibrancy of India's federal democracy. When national and state elections occur together, there is a risk that dominant national narratives and personalities may overshadow local or regional issues, undermining the accountability and responsiveness that frequent state-level elections sustain. This potential 'flattening' of local democratic space calls for a parallel strengthening of micro-level democratic institutions and practices.

Potential impacts on grassroots democracy include the risk that national narratives may dominate election campaigns, leaving local and regional concerns underrepresented. This could make it harder for communities to hold local leaders accountable or influence policies that directly affect their daily lives (Ips, 2024). Smaller regional parties, which often give voice to local identities and interests, might lose ground to larger national parties, resulting in less diverse political representation (Singh & Bisht, 2025).ONOE also raises questions about voter engagement. While fewer elections could reduce voter fatigue, too many choices in one electoral cycle could overwhelm voters, hindering informed decision-making about local candidates (Bhatnagar, 2024). Some argue synchronized elections might boost turnout due to national media attention, but others warn that meaningful local participation could decline if local issues are drowned out. Governance continuity may improve when governments spend less time campaigning, yet this may also limit citizens' opportunities to express dissatisfaction with local governance between fixed electoral cycles (Bhatnagar, 2024).

Taken together, these concerns highlight why safeguards are needed to ensure that local communities remain empowered. Positioning families as 'schools of democracy' becomes crucial in this context. While ONOE seeks structural coherence at the macro level, vibrant democracy also depends on nurturing participatory values, dialogue, and trust at the everyday, micro level. Family social work by fostering inclusive parenting, conflict resolution, and civic-mindedness helps cultivate citizens who are prepared to engage meaningfully with governance beyond periodic voting. In a vast, diverse country like India, where local identities and issues matter deeply, investing in strong family and community networks can counterbalance any centralizing tendencies of ONOE. In this way, family social work contributes to keeping democracy rooted in local realities, ensuring that large-scale electoral reforms do not come at the cost of grassroots civic vitality.

Ecological Social Capital Model for Democratic Deepening through Family Social Work

The model is structured around three interconnected layers.At the **micro level**, families nurture core civic values, trust, and participatory attitudes through daily socialization and positive parenting.*Direct casework* and *family counseling* address parenting challenges, conflict resolution, gender equity, and child protection. These interventions help families develop trust, empathy, and civic responsibility — foundational values for democracy.

At the **meso level**, family social work connects households with community groups, schools, and local institutions, strengthening networks that foster collective action and resilience .*Group work* and *community development programs* link families to local schools, women's groups, youth clubs, and neighborhood associations. Social workers build local networks, strengthen grassroots leadership, and foster collective civic dialogue, ensuring local accountability and participatory decision-making.

At the **macro level**, family social work practice and advocacy engage with policy, culture, and ecological democracy principles, promoting inclusive governance and sustainability *Advocacy* and *policy practice* work to change structural conditions, influence public policies, and promote inclusive, ecologically sensitive governance. Practitioners partner with civil society and local leaders to ensure that grassroots voices shape policies and that ecological democracy is prioritized alongside large-scale reforms like ONOE

The arrows the outcomes of levels where strong family social capital radiates from micro level through trust , reciprocity and democratic attitudes . Meso level has ana outcome of Extension of family social capital by community resilience,local participation while macro-level policies and cultural shifts feed back into local family life.By rooting democracy in family and community life, this model offers a way to mitigate possible risks of ONOE ensuring that local identities and voices remain vital even within centralized electoral cycles.This model illustrates how family social work builds foundational social capital at the micro level, connects families to community networks at the meso level, and engages with broader policy, cultural, and ecological systems at the macro level. Together, these layers support democratic deepening and help counterbalance centralizing reforms like One Nation, One Election (ONOE).
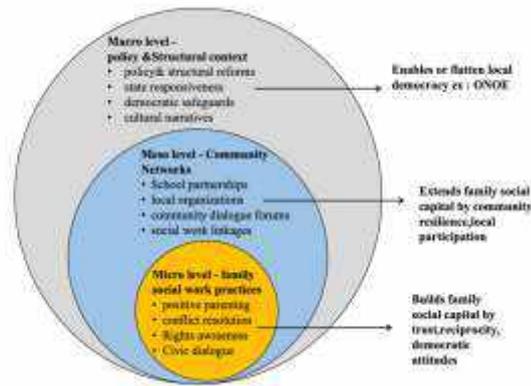
fig 1: Ecological Social Capital Model for Democratic Deepening through Family Social Work

Conclusion

Deepening democracy in India cannot rely on electoral reforms alone. While proposals like *One Nation, One Election* aim to streamline governance, they risk overshadowing the diverse local concerns that sustain India's federal vibrancy. This paper has argued that families, as the first and most enduring sites of socialization, must be recognized as critical foundations for democratic culture. Drawing on social capital theory and ecological systems theory, it has shown how family social work can bridge the private sphere and the public realm by fostering trust, dialogue, gender equity, and civic responsibility at the micro level, which ripple outward to strengthen community resilience and civic engagement.In this light, policymakers and practitioners must not treat family social work as separate from the democratic project but as integral to it. Investing in everyday spaces where democratic values are learned and lived from parenting practices to conflict resolution — can help counterbalance any risks of centralization or loss of local voice under large-scale reforms like ONOE. Future research and practice should continue to explore how families can act as 'schools of democracy,' ensuring that India's commitment to democratic deepening remains rooted not only in periodic elections but in everyday

civic life**.**This paper proposes an Ecological Social Capital Model that illustrates how family social work interventions at the micro, meso, and macro levels can produce ripple effects for democratic deepening. By mapping clear pathways from direct casework and community group work to advocacy and policy practice — the model demonstrates how strengthening families as 'schools of democracy' can counterbalance structural reforms like ONOE and safeguard grassroots vibrancy. Integrating this model into practice and research offers a practical framework for aligning social work with India's evolving democratic needs.

References

1. Algood, C., Harris, C., & Hong, J. (2013). Parenting Success and Challenges for Families of Children with Disabilities: An Ecological Systems Analysis. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 23, 126–136.
2. Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton University Press.
3. Astone, N., Nathanson, C., Schoen, R., & Kim, Y. (1999). Family Demography, Social Theory, and Investment in Social Capital. *Population and Development Review*, 25, 1–31.
4. Bhatnagar, A. (2024). Issue of 'One Nation, One Election' in Indian Perspective. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*.
5. Braithwaite, J. (2004). Families and the Republic. *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*.
6. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.
7. Coleman, J. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95–S120.
8. Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological Systems Theory: Exploring the Development of the Theoretical Framework as Conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices*.
9. De Groot, M., Mihalache, O., & Elfring, T. (2021). Toward a Theory of Family Social Capital in Wealthy Transgenerational Enterprise Families. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*.
10. Ding, J. (2024). Family as a Necessary Social Institution in the Process of Socialization. *Social Pedagogy: Theory and Practice*.
11. Dryzek, J. S. (2010). *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*. Oxford University Press.

12. Eckstein, H. (1997). *Congruence Theory Explained*. In L. Diamond, M. Plattner, Y. Chu, & H. Tien (Eds.), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

13. Griffiths, H., Keirns, N., Strayer, E., Sadler, T., Cody-Rydzewski, S., Scaramuzzo, G., Vyain, S., Bry, J., & Jones, F. (2021). Agents of Socialization. *Gente como Uno*.

14. Heller, P. (2000). Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India. *World Politics*, 52, 484–519.

15. Ips, M. (2024). One Nation, One Election: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*.

16. Jaccard, J., & Jacoby, J. (2020). *Theory Construction and Model-Building Skills*. Guilford Press.

17. Kothari, A. (2014). Radical Ecological Democracy: A Path Forward for India and Beyond. *Development*, 57, 36–45.

18. Kothari, A., & Shrivastava, A. (2012). *Churning the Earth: The Making of Global India*.

19. Krishna, A. (2007). How Does Social Capital Grow? A Seven-Year Study of Villages in India. *The Journal of Politics*, 69, 941–956.

20. Lysaker, O. (2023). *Ecological Democracy*.

21. Paat, Y. (2013). Working with Immigrant Children and Their Families: An Application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 23, 954–966.

22. Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.

23. Pickering, J., Bäckstrand, K., & Schlosberg, D. (2020). Between Environmental and Ecological Democracy: Theory and Practice at the Democracy-Environment Nexus. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 22, 1–15.

24. Prandini, R. (2014). Family Relations as Social Capital. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 45, 221–234.

25. Roose, R., Roets, G., Van Houte, S., Vandenhole, W., & Reynaert, D. (2013). From Parental Engagement to the Engagement of Social Work Services: Discussing Reductionist and Democratic Forms of Partnership with Families. *Child & Family Social Work*, 18, 449–457.

26. Sağlam, N. (2023). Eğitim Felsefesi Çerçevesinde Demokrasi Kültürünün Eğitim Ortamlarındaki Yapısal İşleyişinin İncelenmesi. *International Journal of Social Sciences*.

27. Schlosberg, D., Bäckstrand, K., & Pickering, J. (2019). Reconciling Ecological and Democratic Values: Recent Perspectives on Ecological Democracy. *Environmental Values*, 28, 1–8.

28. Singh, A., & Bisht, J. (2025). Reimagining Electoral Synchronization in India: A Constitutional and Legal Analysis of 'One Nation, One Election' Amidst Federalism,

Representation, and Institutional Viability. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research.*

29. Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research, 104*, 333–339.

30.19 The Role of Political Negotiation in Coalition Formation under One Nation, One Election

*Rajeev Ramakrishnan[1, *], Dr. P.Rangsami[2], Amrita R Menon[3], Sreelakshmi P[4],*
[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[2] Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[3,4] MSW student, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India
[*] Corresponding author –E mail: r_rajeev@cb.amrita.edu

Abstract

India, the world's largest democracy, is celebrated for its regular, free, and fair electoral processes that ensure widespread political participation. In recent years, the proposal of "One Nation, One Election" has gained prominence, advocating for simultaneous elections to streamline electoral cycles and enhance governance efficiency. While this proposition promises administrative convenience and cost reduction, its broader implications for democratic representation remain underexplored. This paper critically examines the feasibility of simultaneous elections, focusing particularly on its potential impact on coalition politics - a key feature that has strengthened Indian democracy by accommodating regional diversity and minority interests. Employing a qualitative secondary research methodology, the study analyses how unified electoral cycles may alter coalition dynamics, potentially skewing the political landscape in favour of larger national parties while diminishing the influence of smaller, regional actors. Further, the research explores how such electoral reforms could influence voter behaviour and the negotiation strategies employed by political parties in coalition formation. The findings aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse by offering nuanced insights into how simultaneous

elections may reshape political negotiations, electoral inclusivity, and democratic stability in India.

Keywords: One Nation One Election, Democratic Stability, Voter Behavior, Electoral Reforms

Introduction

In India's vibrant and pluralistic democracy, coalition politics has long been the norm both at the Centre and in many states. With the emergence and empowerment of regional parties since the late 1960s, political negotiation has become central to coalition formation, reflecting the fragmentationof the once-dominant Congress Party (Surinder, 2025) and the complex multiplicity of India's electoral landscape (Yashvir Singh, 2023) Coalition partners must negotiate not only seat-sharing arrangements but also the alignment of diverse policy priorities and ideological stances to forge a functional government (Back, 2023). Under the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal, an ambitious initiative aiming to synchronize Lok Sabha and state assembly elections every five years. Proponents argue that ONOE will streamline governance reduce electoral fatigue, lower costs and foster policy continuity by reducing frequent disruptions caused by staggered elections (ToI, 2024). The critics (Yadav, 2024) caution that synchronizing polls could centralize political discourse, marginalize regional voices, and constrain the strategic flexibility of coalition formations. Against this backdrop, the art and mechanics of political negotiation may undergo a fundamental recalibration (Aquilar & Galluccio, 2011) . Simultaneous elections could shift the dynamics of coalition-building in several ways(Bibek & Kishore, 2017) political negotiations might intensify before elections, as parties seek pre-electoral alliances; regional players could be compelled to conform more closely to national narratives; and the window for post-election bargaining could narrow. Moreover, holding staggered polls has traditionally allowed for mid- term alliances, an option that might be curtailed if elections are synchronized.

Methodology

The present study adopts a secondary data collection approach, drawing from a wide range of credible and authoritative sources to ensure analytical depth and academic rigor. Scholarly literature from peer-reviewed academic journals indexed in Scopus and the Web of Science forms the core foundation, offering theoretical insights and empirical findings relevant to coalition politics, electoral systems, and the One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal. In addition, official government reports, including Law Commission of India reports and Election Commission of India publications, provide legal, procedural, and policy perspectives essential for understanding the institutional framework. Supplementary evidence is sourced from policy briefs issued by bodies such as the NITI Aayog and PRS Legislative Research, which present expert analyses and recommendations. Contemporary developments and public debates are captured through news articles from credible national and international outlets, while books and political commentaries contribute historical context and interpretive viewpoints. The Supreme Court and High Court judgments related to electoral matters are examined to understand the judicial interpretations shaping electoral reforms. Thus, these diverse sources enable a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of the role of political negotiation in coalition formation under ONOE.

The objectives of this study are threefold, first, to analyse the concept of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) and its intended goals within the Indian democratic framework; second, to assess the potential impact of simultaneous elections on coalition dynamics, particularly with respect to regional parties and minority interests; and third, to evaluate how such a reform might influence voter behaviour. These objectives guide the methodological approach, ensuring that the analysis remains focused on both the structural and behavioural dimensions of ONOE.

Literature Review

Introduction to One Nation One Election

The constitution of India states that India is a Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic Republic, and is considered the largest democracy in the world, which leads to elections occurring almost all the time in at least one region of the country. "India is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government, and at the heart of the system lies a commitment to hold regular, free and fair elections. These elections determine the

composition of the government, the membership of the two Houses of Parliament, the State and Union Territory Legislative Assemblies, and the Presidency and Vice-Presidency" (Gill, 2023) . The elections held to elect people to the two houses of parliament are considered one of the most significant events that occur in the country. More than 800,000 polling stations are spread across the country to ensure that every person in this country can vote (Yadav, 2024).

In recent years, the government introduced the concept of One Nation, One Election to the country. It was shown as a proposal to hold state and federal elections simultaneously every five years. In December 2024, the Indian Law Minister introduced a bill to implement this system in the Parliament. In March 2024, the Ram Nath Kovind Committee (High Level Committee Submits Its Report on One Nation, One Election- Simultaneous Elections Core to Aspirational India) proposed to simultaneously conduct all the state and general elections in India. The report submitted by the committee also suggested that if a governing body lost their election, then a new election would be held but the newly formed government's tenure would only last till the next synchronized election. From 1951 to 1967, simultaneous elections were conducted in the country hence this is not an entirely new concept being introduced.

Historical Backgrounds of Election in India

The historical background of elections in India begins before the British colonial rule (Iyer, 2007), when the country was divided into many princely states, and kings ruled them. During this time, the royal family had the power to make decisions on the country's development and progress, and others were simply made to obey. The British colonial era in India started in 1757 and lasted for almost 200 years. During their reign, all of present-day India was under the name of 'British India' and was under the jurisdiction of the Queen of England. Kings still ruled the rest of the princely states, but they did not have complete power.

India's independence in 1947 brought with it the responsibility of drafting a constitution for the country, which ultimately led to the first general election in India in 1951. India's first general election was held between the years of 1951 to 52, which was conducted simultaneously along with the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies was a monumental event in the history of India. It set the stage for traditional fair elections in

India that are being continued till today. According to Part XV of the Indian Constitution of 1950, all citizens over the age of 1950 were allowed to vote in elections. The Election Commission of India was established in 1950 (Election Commission of India), 173 million eligible voters were registered through the commission(Menaka, 2024). The Delimitation Commission Act (MoL) was passed in 1952 to allocate seats for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, and to ensure that the assignment of seats was fair and consistent and based on the population of that constituency.

As the first ever general election, it has encountered several challenges too , which began with the geographical locations in India, like the vast desert areas of Rajasthan, the hilly areas of Manipur and Burma (Tinker, 1956), where basic infrastructure was lacking, which made transportation and house-to-house canvassing difficult, along with the polling arrangements. Another major challenge was in the nomination procedures. Many technical errors occurred on the government officers' side, and that resulted in many candidates filing multiple nomination papers and political parties hiring dummy candidates to make sure their official candidates were nominated(ECI) . A multiple box voting system was employed for illiterate voters(Tinker, 2011) where each candidate had a separate box with their symbol. But this system gave way to allegations of corruption, like the symbols being changed and the order of boxes being switched. The election also saw the formation of many parties, where many of them consisted of just one or two people. This led to the rule that states political parties polling 3% votes would be officially recognized.

Despite these challenges, the first general election is considered a success (Vanthangpui & Savita, 2024), and it showed that the country was able to conduct a massive activity such as the general election. The simultaneous elections had occurred for four election cycles, starting from the first general election in 1951 till 1967. However, these simultaneous elections were briefly halted in 1959 due to the use of Article 356 of the Constitution (Jeevan, 2001), through which the Kerala government was removed by the union government, and new elections were held in 1960 to form a new government in the state. Since both state houses were formed concurrently, it provided a uniform starting point for elections. The Indian National Congress had the most influence during those years, and that was a significant factor in the occurrence of simultaneous elections. Their influence

also made the coordination and facilitation of these elections easier. Since the country was slowly rebuilding itself after the colonial rule, the number of states was also less.

But this cycle of simultaneous elections was broken due to 'hung assemblies' forming, which resulted in no single party or pre-election coalition securing a majority. Internal problems within parties also resulted in the dissolution of the fourth Lok Sabha. All of this gave way to the current system of elections, where both the Lok Sabha and the State legislative assemblies occur at different times. Since then, 400 elections have happened since the simultaneous elections ended. The recent election in India occurred in the year 2024- the Lok Sabha elections, which led to the formation of coalition governments (Palme, 2024). The recent elections have shown an era of coalition politics and also the possibility of new methods in election systems like the concept of One Nation, One Election.

Origin and Evolution of ONOE

The concept of holding simultaneous elections has been discussed and debated for several years in India. While the idea is not new, increased attention to it in the rhetoric of various government bodies and prominent political figures has given renewed momentum and political weightage to this idea.

After independence, when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel made 565 Princely States into one nation and shaped the present country, members of the constituent assembly only wished for the country to stay united without any further divisions which led to idea of "One Nation." For this purpose, 'One Flag', 'One Citizenship', 'One National Anthem' 'One Supreme Court' and even 'One Constitution' (Pankaj, 2024) was formulated. After 1967, elections were not occurring simultaneously at the national and state levels and conducting them became a rare occurrence than the norm. The 1999 Law Commission Report on electoral reforms in India outlined the concept for the first time after the simultaneous elections were stopped (Vasu, 2025).

The Ram Nath Kovind committee took consultation from various stakeholders and found that out of the 47 political parties, 32 of them were supporting the implementation of ONOE. A two-stage approach was proposed for carrying out the elections, where in the first phase, elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies (Vasu, 2025)will be held concurrently, and in the second stage, elections for municipalities and panchayats

would take place within a hundred days of the first one. The implementation of the concept of one nation one election would require the amendment of certain provisions in the Constitution that govern the elections. Article 83 of the Constitution orders five years for the Lok Sabha from the date of its meeting, unless it is dissolved earlier. The provision sets a standard time for the Lok Sabha and provides Parliament with the power to extend the Lok Sabha's ruling during the time of national emergency or any other equally demanding situation. Article 85 (GoI, 1979) provides the president with the power to summon and propagate parliament sessions. Since the article plays an important role in the legislative calendars, it is to be considered in the discussion of simultaneous elections. Article 172 provides the standard term of five-years for state legislative assemblies and could be extended during a national emergency if it is required (Singh and Bisht 2025). Representation of the People Act, 1951(Government of India, 1950) is also crucial in overseeing the conduction of simultaneous elections and Implementing ONOE would require amendment of this act particularly addressing the timeframes and procedures for election schedules, nomination processes, and even the campaign periods (Government of India 1951). Amendment of these provisions would be necessary for the effective implementation of One Nation One Election in the country (Aruno Raj & Bisht, 2025).

Theoretical Perspectives on Electoral Cycles

Electoral cycles refer to systematic variations in economic activities and government policies that occur during election periods (Ronit & Sakshi, 2024). Such cycles are evident in both developed and developing countries. In the Indian context, political parties and Members of Parliament (MPs) often propose welfare-oriented projects during election campaigns, aiming to secure favorable voter responses and increase public attention toward their party. These projects, especially those proposed closer to election dates, are frequently perceived as less likely to be completed; however, they are still announced to appeal to the electorate. A contributing factor to their incompletion is often inadequate financial resources, which can prevent MPs from fulfilling these commitments a negative manifestation of electoral cycles on project completion(Anjali & Jonathan, 2023).

Theories on elections largely emphasize their role in legitimizing governance, ensuring accountability, and representing the diversity of public opinion(Komal, 2024). Within this framework, the theoretical perspective on elections extends to the study of voter behavior

(Antunes, 2010). One such approach, the behavioral or psychosocial model of voting, examines psychological processes and influences shaping electoral choices, with partisanship, a strong sense of identification with a political party forming its core concept. In contrast, the rational theory (Benny, 2006) posits that voter preferences in one election can be influenced by outcomes of previous or concurrent elections, potentially increasing correlations between electoral outcomes when elections are synchronized. This theory further suggests that the popularity of a candidate in one election could enhance their party's prospects in simultaneous contests. Nevertheless, in India, such correlations remain inconclusive due to varying voter turnout rates (Nicholas, 2001) .

Coalition politics theory (Sangeeta, 2020) a branch of political theory, seeks to explain how coalitions are formed, maintained, and dissolved in multi-party systems, identifying the factors that shape coalition outcomes (Charles, 2011). In India, coalition politics has emerged naturally from the country's social pluralism, making it improbable for a single party to sustain absolute majority rule. This phenomenon gained prominence after the 1989 elections, as latent political groups and regional parties began to assert themselves more prominently, thereby reshaping the democratic process.

Other theoretical contributions, such as the Political Budget Cycle (PBC) theory (Kenneth, 1990)

focus on economic manipulation during elections. This theory argues that ruling parties often increase public spending or reduce revenue collection before elections as a strategic tool to attract voters. Such fiscal maneuvering includes lowering taxes or adjusting revenue policies to consolidate incumbents' political positions(Muhammed & Raja, 2024). Collectively, these theories illuminate the strategic, economic, and psychological dimensions underpinning electoral processes. Post-independence, India institutionalized the democratic framework(Gardner, 2023), as enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution (GoI, 2021), declaring the nation a 'Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic Republic'. The Constitution safeguards rights, ensures equitable opportunities, and promotes inclusive governance. Through Article 326 universal adult suffrage guarantees that all adult citizens may vote to elect representatives aligned with their needs. The Election Commission of India, established in 1950, functions as an independent

constitutional authority regulating electoral practices, guiding political parties, and facilitating voter education (Premlatha & Reena, 2025).

Periodic elections, defined as elections held at regular intervals, constitute a cornerstone of democratic systems (Obi, 2017). Their practice became a significant global norm in the mid-20th century (John, 2015), and gained prominence after 1945. A pivotal development was the adoption of Article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, affirming the right to political participation. In India, periodic elections emerged gradually, influenced by British colonial electoral laws. The first electoral legislation, enacted in 1861, permitted limited nonofficial representation in the Governor and Governor General's councils, restricted to those favorable to colonial rule.

The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 introduced voting rights in a limited form, followed by the Government of India Act of 1919, which expanded Indian representation and facilitated periodic elections in 1920, 1923, 1926, and 1929. This Act also codified electoral qualifications, divisions, and procedures. Post-independence developments, such as the universal adult franchise, the establishment of the Election Commission, and the Representation of the People Act, 1950, ensured that periodic elections in India would be conducted smoothly, inclusively, and in accordance with democratic principles (Soham, 2020)

Coalition Politics in India - Historical Overview

Since gaining independence in 1947, India's political landscape has undergone a significant transformation. In the early decades, the Indian National Congress (INC) enjoyed near-complete dominance, functioning as the primary political force in shaping the nation's governance. However, as India's democratic processes matured, the political arena gradually diversified, giving rise to multiple political factions and, eventually, coalition governments (Singh, 2023). By the 1970s, coalition politics had begun to emerge as a central feature of Indian governance, coinciding with the decline of the Congress Party's monopoly on power 4. (Kumar & Kaur, 2025). The first coalition government at the national level was formed in 1977 (Bhunia, 2024) when the Janata Party, a political alliance created in direct opposition to the Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, came to power. The Janata Party brought together diverse political entities, including the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the Socialist Party, and the Congress (O).

Although this coalition was short-lived due to internal instability and the absence of cohesive leadership, it marked a decisive break from single-party dominance and laid the groundwork for future coalition experiments. The 1990s represented a turning point, as India transitioned from a Congress- dominated single-party system to a competitive multi-party system in which regional parties played an increasingly influential role in national politics (Sharma & Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Institute of Integrated Himalayan Studies, UGC Centre of Excellence, Himachal Pradesh University, 2021). While Congress briefly regained power after the fall of the Janata government, the rise of regional and caste-based political movements permanently altered the nature of electoral competition and governance in India (Kumar & Kaur, 2025).

Benefits of coalition politics in representing diversity

Coalition politics, particularly in socially pluralistic societies like India, plays a vital role in ensuring political representation for diverse communities and can be understood as a mechanism that transforms fragmented political landscapes into inclusive decision-making forums (Lees, 2001). By bringing together multiple political parties with varied ideological orientations, regional bases, and community support, coalitions facilitate broader participation in governance and enhance the legitimacy of political institutions. A major benefit of such arrangements lies in their ability to represent regional and ethnic diversity, as the proliferation of regional parties since the late 1980s has enabled underrepresented communities to influence national decision-making through alliance-building (Singh, 2019). In these alliances, dominant parties are compelled to accommodate the policy priorities and cultural identities of smaller partners, integrating regional perspectives into national agendas (Pradeep & Ken, 2005). From the standpoint of social inclusion, coalitions have amplified the voices of marginalized and minority groups, with the rise of caste- based and minority-focused parties ensuring that government policies are more responsive to the needs of historically disadvantaged communities (Yadav, 2010). Furthermore, coalition politics promotes issue-based pluralism, as governance in such systems relies on negotiation and compromise, enabling multiple policy agendas to coexist and fostering a deliberative environment where diverse viewpoints are considered in law and policy formulation. Empirical studies suggest that these governments are also more inclined to implement redistributive policies and welfare schemes benefiting a broad

spectrum of social groups(Arora et al., 2013). Another advantage is the system of checks and balances inherent in coalition governance, where the absence of single- party dominance necessitates consensus-based decision-making, thereby reducing the risk of authoritarian tendencies and ensuring that political diversity is embedded not only symbolically but also functionally in the governance process. International scholarship reinforces this view, with (Arend, 1999) noting that coalition governments in multicultural societies often produce more stable and representative governance outcomes by distributing power across multiple stakeholders, a trend reflected in India's post-1990s coalition era, which has seen greater political engagement from regional and minority constituencies and a strengthening of democratic character in governance.

Expert committee recommendations (Law Commission, NITI Aayog)

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is constitutionally mandated to frame rules, regulations, and standards to ensure that elections are conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner. As part of its consultative approach to assessing the feasibility of simultaneous elections, the Commission collected views from individuals, political parties, and other stakeholders. Of the 21,558 respondents, 80% expressed a positive opinion on conducting elections simultaneously. The consultations also included inputs from members of the Supreme Court, the Bar Council of India, and other legal bodies. Notably, the Bar Council opined that simultaneous elections could optimize resource utilization, enhance predictability in governance, and potentially increase voter turnout. The committee's findings further emphasized that the absence of synchronized elections often contributes to political instability and policy paralysis, underscoring the importance of a constitutional amendment to align the terms of the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. The discourse on simultaneous elections extends beyond considerations of cost reduction and logistical efficiency to encompass broader systemic and governance-related dimensions. Elections in India are large-scale exercises involving the participation of citizens, administrative bodies, and institutional frameworks. The feasibility of holding all elections on the same day is currently a central focus of electoral reform discussions. Article 324 of the Constitution assigns the ECI the authority to supervise, direct, and control elections to the offices of the President, Vice-President, both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha and

Rajya Sabha), and the State Legislative Assemblies and Councils. In parallel, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 established State.

Election Commissions (SECs) to oversee elections to the third tier of government, Panchayati Raj institutions in rural areas and municipal bodies in urban areas. Presently, 31 SECs are operating across the country, each mandated to conduct and regulate elections within its jurisdiction. Synchronizing electoral timelines across these multiple levels of governance is seen as a measure to improve administrative efficiency and voter participation.

The expert committee's report highlighted that extensive in-person consultations were conducted with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including political parties, retired judges, former Chief Election Commissioners, State Election Commissioners, and prominent professional and business organizations such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM). These interactions aimed to gather diverse perspectives on the feasibility, benefits, and challenges of implementing simultaneous elections in India. By incorporating viewpoints from legal experts, electoral authorities, business leaders, and civil society organizations, the consultation process sought to ensure that policy recommendations were grounded in a comprehensive and multidisciplinary understanding of the potential implications of this electoral reform.

Risks to regional representation and marginalization of smaller parties

Understanding the position of marginalized communities in political systems requires attention to intersecting factors such as race, class, and prevailing societal attitudes (Annet, 2025). Within this framework, decentralization emerges as a critical component of system stability, as it empowers regional governance structures. However, it also carries inherent risks, particularly for smaller political actors, as it may inadvertently weaken regional representation or marginalize smaller parties (Jan-Eric & Max, 2021). The growing relevance of regional parties, driven by localized authority and self-governance, often fosters greater political engagement but also intensifies competitive pressures.

Small and marginal parties face persistent challenges in securing political representation and competing effectively within electoral arenas dominated by established actors. These

challenges are compounded by structural disadvantages, resource constraints, and entrenched voter loyalties to larger parties. For newly formed parties, the ability to establish themselves as credible political contenders requires strategic positioning, organizational capacity, and electoral experience. Without these, their role in representation remains limited, and in highly competitive systems, their political lifespan tends to be short.

Decentralization (Kathleen, 2003), while enabling local governance and fostering new political actors, can paradoxically threaten the survival of smaller parties. This occurs when competition with consolidated, resource-rich parties becomes unsustainable, leading to electoral marginalization and diminished regional representation. In such contexts, identifying and leveraging a political 'niche' becomes essential. This niche strategy, defined by distinct policy positions, localized issue advocacy, or targeted constituency engagement, can improve electoral performance if deployed effectively and at the right political juncture (Jan-Eric & Max, 2021).

The broader academic discussion also points to the compound political environment in which small and marginal parties operate. Survival and competitiveness require innovation, adaptability, and strategic differentiation(Falco-Gimeno, 2018) In the context of proposed electoral reforms such as synchronizing electoral terms, these challenges may intensify (One Nation, One Election, n.d.). Implementing simultaneous elections across different tiers of government would necessitate constitutional amendments potentially reshaping the competitive landscape in ways that could either create new opportunities or further marginalize smaller political actors.

Comparative International Experiences with Simultaneous Elections

Comparative research shows that holding multiple elections on the same day can reshape party strategies, voter behaviour, and representational outcomes, but effects vary by institutional context. In presidential systems such as Brazil, concurrent presidential–gubernatorial or legislative contests often produce coattail effects that increase vote congruence across levels and encourage electoral coordination among parties; this dynamic can partially nationalise party systems and strengthen the salience of national leaders (Borges & Lloyd, 2016). At the same time, recent quasi- experimental evidence suggests that concurrency can also affect turnout and the distribution of votes across races

in nontrivial ways, sometimes amplifying participation in down-ballot contests but also altering competition through leader-centred voting (Arenas, 2024).

In Indonesia, the 2019 reform that synchronized presidential and legislative elections provides a rich test case. Multiple studies report that simultaneity aimed to generate coattails and streamline campaigning, with mixed results: some regions exhibited stronger presidential–legislative linkage and party consolidation, while others saw administrative strain, ballot complexity, and heterogeneous patterns of split-ticket voting (Rajagukguk, 2021). Additional analyses of the 2019 vote and its aftermath underscore the challenges of implementing large, complex ballots, the need for robust election management, and area-specific variation in electoral outcomes under simultaneity (Maemunah, 2020). In consensual parliamentary systems like Sweden, where national, regional, and local elections occur on the same day every four years, simultaneity does not eliminate voter differentiation: ticket-splitting between tiers remains common, and scholars document a small but persistent turnout gap between national and local races-evidence of "second-order" dynamics even under synchronized calendars (Dehdari et al., 2021). These findings suggest that concurrency can coexist with sophisticated voter choices, rather than mechanically aligning preferences across tiers.

For South Africa, where national and provincial elections are held together (with local elections off-cycle), the debate centres on feasibility and integrity rather than behavioural uniformity. Recent work reviews the Independent Electoral Commission's management of concurrent polls and discusses proposals to move toward fuller synchronization; while simultaneity may promise cost and scheduling efficiencies, analysts caution about legal, logistical, and participation trade- offs in a highly proportional system (Madlanga, 2020). Across cases, an emerging comparative pattern is that synchronization tends to increase party salience and inter-tier congruence where executive races dominate media attention, but it does not uniformly suppress local distinctiveness; selective abstention, split-ticket voting, and second-order effects remain visible in many contexts (Dehdari et al., 2021). Overall, international evidence indicates that simultaneous elections can strengthen coordination and reduce campaign fragmentation, yet their consequences for representation and competition are contingent on electoral rules, ballot design, administrative capacity, and the relative prominence of executive contests.

Thematic Review / Synthesis

Theme	Key Insights from Literature	Sources
t.1. Introduction to ONOE	ONOE proposes synchronising elections at national, state, and local levels to reduce costs, improve governance, and minimise politicaldisruption.	George (2023); Election Commission of India Reports
t.2. Historical Background of Elections in India	Shift from synchronised elections in the 1950s–60s to staggered polls due to premature dissolutions of state assemblies.	Yadav (2019); Sridharan (2020)
t.3. Origin and Evolution of ONOE	Policy idea revived by political leaders and think tanks in the 21st century; rooted in administrative efficiency debates.	Niti Aayog (2017) Law Commission(2018)
t.4. Theoretical Perspectives on Electoral Cycles	Cycles influence voter turnout, campaign strategies, and party system stability; synchronisation seen to reduce "permanent campaigning".	Norris & Franklin (2020); (Shugart &Carey 1992)
t.5.Coalition Politics in India – Historical Overview	From single-party dominance to coalition governmentspost-1989, enabling representation of diverse regional andideological interests.	(Palshikar & Suri, 2014)Chhibber & Verma(2018)
t.6. Benefits of Coalition PoliticsinRepresentingDiversity	Coalitions enhance inclusivity, accommodate regional demands, and ensure pluralism ingovernance.	Kumar (2019); Singh(2021)
t.7.ExpertCommittee Recommendations (Law Commission, NITI Aayog)	Endorse ONOE for cost reduction, policy stability, and voter participation; stress constitutional amendments and political consensus.	Law Commission (2018);NITI Aayog(2017);(One Nation,One Election, n.d.)
t.8.Risks to Regional Representation and Marginalisation of Smaller Parties	Synchronisation could weaken regional autonomy and reduce survival chances of small parties due to nationalised campaigning.	Collignon (2020); Bartels & Remke (2023; Falcó-Gimeno (2020)

t.9. Comparative International Experiences	Countries like South Africa and Sweden show administrative efficiency but face risks of power centralization; lessons stress adaptability to local contexts.	Elklit (1999); Mozaffar & Schedler (2002); IDEA (2020)

Table 1- Thematic Review

1. Research Gap and Future Research Direction

Identified Research Gap	Suggested Future Research Direction
1. Limited empirical evidence on how ONOE would affect coalition formation and stability in India.	Conduct mixed-method studies combining electoral simulations with political elite interviews to assess potential coalition outcomes.
2. Insufficient analysis of ONOE's impact on representation of marginalised and regional parties.	Undertake constituency-level comparative studies before and after pilot implementation of synchronised elections.
3. Lack of integrated frameworkslinking electoral cycles, coalition politics, and federal power-sharing.	Develop interdisciplinary models incorporatingpolitical science, public administration, and federal governance theory.
4. Scarcity of cross-countrycomparative studies in Global South contexts.	Expand comparative analyses to include casestudies from diverse multi-tier democracies beyond OECD nations.
5. Underexplored voter behaviourchanges under synchronised election cycles.	Employ longitudinal voter surveys and behavioural experiments to assess shifts in turnout, issue salience, and party preference.
6. Limited policy analysis integrating constitutional, administrative, and socio-political dimensions.	Engage in multi-stakeholder policy analysis including legal experts, political scientists, and grassroots leaders to design feasible ONOEframeworks.

Table 2 - The research Gap and Future Direction

Thematic Area	Policy Implications
t2.	Adopt a phased ONOE rollout to test viability before nationwide implementation.
t4.	Strengthen local governance structures to maintain grassroots representation.

t5.	Include constitutional safeguards for regional and minority representation in ONOE reforms.
t6.	Maintain mechanisms for smaller parties to influence policymaking under ONOE.
t7.	Align constitutional amendments with expert recommendations and judicial precedents.
t8.	Consider proportional representation or mixed electoral systems.
t9.	Adapt lessons selectively, ensuring reforms fit India's federal and cultural diversity.

Table 3 - Policy Mapping

Integrative Discussion

The thematic review underscores that the ONOE proposal is a complex electoral reform that cannot be evaluated solely on its administrative efficiency or cost-saving potential. Historical trends in Indian elections reveal that the staggered electoral cycle has fostered vibrant, multi-level democratic engagement but has also generated significant political and fiscal strain. Theoretical perspectives on electoral cycles highlight a trade-off between political stability and democratic responsiveness, with simultaneous elections potentially reducing the frequency of political disruptions but risking the dilution of local issues in favor of national narratives.

The review of coalition politics indicates that India's diversity is best represented when regional and smaller parties have space to negotiate in fragmented political landscapes. However, expert committee reports, including those by the Law Commission and NITI Aayog, stress that ONOE could bring predictability and fiscal prudence—provided that constitutional safeguards ensure representation for minority voices. International experiences suggest that simultaneous elections can deliver governance stability but must be tailored to the socio-political fabric of each country. The synthesis of these findings points to the need for an ONOE model that preserves India's pluralist ethos while delivering the operational efficiency envisioned by its proponents.

Conclusion

The analysis of One Nation, One Election (ONOE) through the lens of coalition politics underscores the complex interplay between electoral synchronisation, democratic representation, and political negotiation in India's federal structure. While ONOE promises potential benefits in terms of governance stability, reduced fiscal burden, and

streamlined electoral management, it also raises critical concerns regarding the marginalisation of smaller parties, dilution of regional voices, and altered coalition dynamics. The literature reveals that experiences from other democracies offer valuable insights, yet contextual differences necessitate careful adaptation to India's socio- political realities. Bridging the identified research gaps will require empirical studies, comparative frameworks, and inclusive policy deliberations that integrate constitutional, political, and behavioural perspectives. Ultimately, any movement towards synchronised elections must strike a balance between efficiency and inclusivity, ensuring that democratic pluralism remains the cornerstone of electoral reform

Reference

Anjali, T., & Jonathan, D. (2023). How Electoral Cycles Shape the Implementation of Public Works Programs: Evidence From India. *Political Research Quarterly*, *77*(1).

Annet, K. A. (2025). The representation of marginalized communities in literature. *Research Output Journal of Education*, *5*(2), 12–15.

Antunes, R. (2010). Theoretical models of voting behaviour. *Exedra* , 145–170.

Aquilar, F., & Galluccio, M. (2011). *Psychological and political strategies for peace negotiation: a cognitive approach*. Springer.

Arenas, A. (2024). Coattail effects and turnout: Evidence from a quasi-experiment. *Research & Politics*, *11*(1).

Arend, L. (1999). *Patterns of Democracy*. Yale University Press.

Arora, B., Kailash, K., Saxena, R., & Suan, H. (2013). Indian federalism. *Political Science*, 100– 160.

Aruno Raj, S., & Bisht, J. (2025). Reimagining electoral synchronization in India: A constitutional and legal analysis of "One Nation, One Election" amidst federalism, representation, and institutional viability. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *7*(2).

Back, H, (2023). Coalition bargaining time and governments' policy-making productivity.*European Journal of Political Research*.

Benny, G. (2006). Rational' Theories of Voter Turnout: A Review. *Political Studies Review*, *4*, 16–35.

Bibek, D., & Kishore, D. (2017). *Analysis of Simultaneous Elections: The "WHAT", "WHY" AND "HOW*.

Borges, A., & Lloyd, R. (2016). Presidential coattails and electoral coordination in multilevel elections: Comparative lessons from Brazil. *Electoral Studies*, 104–114.

Charles, L. (2011). Coalitions: Beyond the Politics of Centrality? *German Politics*, *30*(1), 117– 134.

Dehdari, S. H., Meriläinen, J., & Oskarsson, S. (2021). Selective abstention in simultaneous elections: Understanding the turnout gap. *Electoral Studies*, *71*, 102302. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ELECTSTUD.2021.102302

Election Commission of India. (n.d.). Retrieved August 17, 2025, from https://www.eci.gov.in/ Falco-Gimeno, A. (2018). The political geography of government formation: Why regional parties join coalitions. *Party Politics*, *26*(2), 91–106.

Gardner, J. (2023). Election law and democratic theory. In *Oxford Handbook of American Election Law*. Eugene Mazo.

Gill, M. (2023). *The Election Systems in India.*

GoI. (1979). *Summoning and Prorogation of Both Houses of Parliament and Dissolution of Loksabha.*

GoI. (2021). *Preamble the soul of the Constitution.*

Iyer, L. (2007). *Direct versus Indirect Colonial Rule in India: Long-Term Consequences.*

Jan-Eric, B., & Max, L. R. (2021). Parties in the Shadows –Do Small and Marginal Parties Cater to a Niche? *German Politics*, 267–298.

Jeevan, R. (2001). *National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution*. John, K. (2015). A Short History of the Future of Elections. In *Spazio Filosofico* .

Kathleen, O. (2003). Decentralization as an Electoral Strategy. *Comparative Political Studies*, *36*(9).

Kenneth, R. (1990). Equilibrium Political Budget Cycles. *The American Economic Review*, 21– 35.

Komal, G. (2024). Votes and Voices: The Symphony of Democratic Elections in India. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *6*(5).

Madlanga, J. (2020). *Feasibility of a Single Election(s) in South Africa: A Discussion Paper.*

Menaka, G. (2024). How India's 'one citizen, one vote' democracy came to be. *TIE*. Muhammed, S., & Raja, S. D. (2024). The Political Budget Cycle: Evidence from Indian Municipal Corporation Elections. *Review of Development and Change*.

Nicholas, M. (2001). *The Geometry of Voting Cycles: Theoretical Developments.*

Obi, O. (2017). Over a Decade of Uninterrupted Periodic Elections in Nigeria: Challenges in Complying with International Standards. *SSRN*.

Palme, B. (2024). India's General Election: Verdict 2024-A Reflection of Public Political Decisions. *Journal Space and Culture, India*, *12*(1).

Pankaj, J. (2024). Streamlining Democracy: Exploring Constitutional Adjustments for Synchronized National Elections. *International Journal of Law and Social Sciences*, *10*(1), 50–59.

Pradeep, C., & Ken, K. (2005). The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United Stat. *Political Science*, *3*(2), 394– 396.

Premlatha, P., & Reena, K. (2025). Election Campaigns and Democracy in India 1951-1967: A Study on the Election Commission's Regulations and Their Impacts. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* , *7*(2), 1–3.

Rajagukguk, K. J. , A. S. , & W. H. (2021). Simultaneous General Election: It is fair for democracy in Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan: Kajian Ilmu Pemerintahan Dan Politik Daerah*, *6*(1).

Ronit, M., & Sakshi, S. (2024). Electoral Cycles and Consumption in India. *Ashoka University*. Sangeeta, Y. (2020). Coalition Governments in India: Political Perspective. *THIRD CONCEPT*. Soham, S. (2020). Electoral Laws in India. *SSRN*.

Surinder, K. R. K. (2025). Coalition governments in India: A historical overview. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, *7*(4).

Tinker, I. (2011). *Report on the First General Elections in India 1951–52*.

ToI. (2024, September 18). One Nation, One Election: What every UPSC aspirant must know about the govt's plan for simultaneous polls in the country. *Times of India*.

Vanthangpui, K., & Savita, S. (2024). One Nation One Election' at a crossroad in India. *Journal of Political Science and Governance*, *6*(2).

Vasu, C. (2025). One Nation-One Election in India . *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, *6*(4).

Yadav, N. (2024). Decoding India's "One Nation, One Election" plan. *BBC*.

Yashvir Singh. (2023). Evolving dynamics of the multi-party system in India: Trends, challenges, and implications. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, *5*(2), 210–220.

30.20   Institutional Innovations and Grievance Redressal: Role of Ombudsman in Promoting Good Governance in Local Self-Government

Ganga J. Darsan

Research Scholar, (Law), School of Indian Legal Thought, Mahatma Gandhi University,

Kottayam, Kerala,

Email ID- gangajdarsan@gmail.com *or* gangajsnair@gmail.com

Abstract

An effective grievance redressal mechanism is crucial for promoting good governance, ensuring responsibility, and fostering public faith in institutions. The role of local self-governments (LSGs) in fostering participatory democracy and delivering public services has become increasingly important in modern governance. This paper, based on doctrinal research, examines the role of the Ombudsman as an institutional innovation in enhancing grievance redressal mechanisms in Local Self Institutions (LSIs) and thus to promote the goal of good governance. The primary objective is to analyze the legal and institutional frameworks underpinning the Ombudsman's role, evaluate its effectiveness in ensuring accountability, transparency, and citizen-centric governance. By employing a qualitative, doctrinal methodology, the study reviews statutory provisions, judicial pronouncements, and policy documents across jurisdictions, focusing on the Ombudsman's powers, functions, and operational challenges in LSIs. The research explores how the Ombudsman acts as a mediator between citizens and local governance structures, ensuring equitable redressal of grievances related to maladministration, corruption, and service delivery failures. Additionally, the paper addresses recent trends in the appointment of Ombudsmen for LSGs, emphasizing the need for merit-based, transparent, and independent selection processes to ensure credibility and effectiveness. Analysis reveals that the Ombudsman significantly strengthens good governance by fostering trust, enhancing administrative efficiency, and upholding democratic principles. However, limitations such as inadequate autonomy, a deficiency of funds, jurisdictional overlaps, and a lack of awareness among citizens hinder its efficacy. This paper highlights the requirement of legal backing and public outreach to optimize the Ombudsman's role. This research contributes to the

discourse on institutional mechanisms for good governance, offering insights for policymakers and scholars interested in local governance reforms.

Keywords: Ombudsman, Grievance Redressal, Good Governance, Local Self Institutions.

Introduction

Our nation, India, features a decentralised system of government. Following independence, the establishment of states commenced in 1956, accompanied by the creation of numerous state administrations to oversee the welfare of their respective regions. Understanding the reality that India is primarily a nation of villages, and the country could not progress until development occurs at the grassroots level, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, postulated for a tertiary level of institutions under the state governments. Panchayati Raj resulted in the formation of local self-governance entities referred as panchayats in villages, and municipalities and municipal corporations in suburban and urban regions, respectively. This decentralised government model came into effect and demonstrated efficiency as the nation experienced rapid development. Consequently, the concept of local self-government emerged. The local self-government operates within the structure of a decentralised governance model. This decentralized form of government helps to divide powers and responsibilities of the state government in specific subject areas, which will be delegated to the panchayats and other local self-governments(Reddy & Mohapatra, 2017). It guarantees the involvement of individuals at the grassroots level in the administrative operations.

Ombudsman and good governance

It is an often-quoted statement that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The demand for minimizing misuse of power led to the establishment of different institutions to control them and minimizing misuse of power. Ombudsman is one major among such institutions established with the avowed objective of ensuring good governance. When enormous power has been vested with Local Self Government Institutions, the quest for control mechanisms and the target of good governance led to the idea of an ombudsman in local self-institutions also. This move led to the establishment of Kerala Local Self-ombudsman with extensive powers. The institution is empowered to examine any allegations raised through a complaint by a party, a government reference, or

those brought to the Ombudsman's attention. Media outlets, including newspapers, television, and online platforms, can significantly amplify Ombudsman work by reporting on complaints, allegations, and findings related to public interest issues such as corruption and maladministration (Agarwal, 1988). This media coverage serves multiple functions: it can trigger suo moto investigations by ombudsmen who may initiate cases based on credible media reports without formal complaints, particularly in jurisdictions like Kerala, India, where ombudsmen have such powers. It also creates coverage pressure for accountability by publicizing allegations and systemic issues, which can pressure local authorities to act on ombudsman recommendations, expedite investigations, and improve public services(Joshua J M Stark, 2011). The relationship is symbiotic, i.e., media outlets gain newsworthy content from ombudsman cases while ombudsmen benefit from increased public awareness and pressure that can enhance the effectiveness of their recommendations and findings.

Section 271 J of the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1992, provides that the ombudsman has the power to investigate any complaint in matters of:

- Irregularity pertains to a criminal act perpetrated by a public servant; the issue shall be forwarded to the relevant authority for inquiry.
- Irregularities result in loss or inconvenience to the individuals, instruct the Local Self Government Institution to provide damages and recover the loss from the individual accountable for the irregularity.
- Irregularity entails loss or misuse of the Local Self Government Institution's funds; seek restitution from those responsible for the irregularity.
- Irregularity arises from omission or inaction; it is necessary to address the omission and correct the error.

Ombudsman for Local Self-Government Institutions in Kerala.

The Ombudsman for Local Governments is the authoritative entity of Kerala, established by the Ombudsman Rules for Local Government Institutions. In 1994, as stipulated in Chapter XXV B of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, measures were established to address grievances through special or general enquiries into allegations of maladministration or corruption by staff, officers, and members, including the Panchayat President, in the

execution of their responsibilities. The Ombudsman is a powerful quasi-judicial entity operating at the state level. The Institution of Ombudsman for Kerala Local Self-Government, established in 2000 under Section 271G of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, began as a seven-member entity led by a retired High Court judge and was later transformed into a unicameral body in 2001 with a former High Court judge as the Ombudsman. This powerful quasi-judicial agency, headquartered in Thiruvananthapuram, is uniquely structured in India, with authority to conduct special or general enquiries into allegations of maladministration, corruption, favouritism, nepotism, lack of integrity, excessive action, inaction, and abuse of position by officials and elected representatives, including the Panchayat President, across all Local Self-Government Institutions (Corporations, Municipalities, and Panchayats). The Ombudsman can initiate cases suo moto, hold hearings anywhere in the state at their discretion, and operate with flexibility, unconstrained by the stringent stipulations of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, or the Civil Procedure Code, 1908, allowing complainants to present cases without advocates unless specifically authorized. Taking into account the unique position of the Kerala Local Self Government Ombudsman, no other State in India has such a well-structured institution. Sessions are primarily conducted in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, and Kozhikode, with occasional sittings in locations like Kannur and Palakkad, ensuring swift and cost-effective resolution of grievances submitted in person to the Secretary of the Ombudsman.

Ombudsman in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Local self-government in India, encompassing Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), municipalities, and municipal corporations, represents a cornerstone of democratic decentralization. Panchayati Raj institutions in local self-government in rural India are structured in three tiers. They are Gram Panchayat (Village level), Panchayat Samiti (Block level), Zila Parishad (District level). The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 formalized these institutions, empowering them to manage local affairs and promote grassroots democracy. In India, the rural local government is referred to as the *Panchayat*, which means "a former group of five influential older men acknowledged by the community as its governing body"(Alsop et al., 2000). A critical component of ensuring accountability and addressing grievances within these systems is the institution of the ombudsman (Jain, 1975).To ensure accountability, several states have instituted

ombudsman mechanisms to address complaints related to maladministration, corruption, or mismanagement in PRIs. The ombudsman in the Panchayati Raj system is typically a state-level authority tasked with investigating grievances against elected representatives and officials. The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, provides for an ombudsman to investigate complaints of corruption or maladministration, ensuring transparency in rural governance (Government of Kerala, 1994). It seems that the Ombudsman institution under the Panchayati Raj Act is most effective in Kerala among the different States established Ombudsman institutions under the Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The ombudsman under the Kerala Panchayati Raj Act is a unique body having powers, including the ability to summon witnesses and recommend corrective actions.

Ombudsman for Local Self Government in Kerala: Appointment, Removal, Duties and Powers

The Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, mentions the appointment, removal, and functions of the Ombudsman. As per Sec 271 G (2) of the Act, the Governor, on the request of the Chief Minister, shall nominate an individual who has served as a Judge of the High Court to the position of Ombudsman. An individual designated as the Ombudsman must, before assuming office, take and subscribe to an oath or affirmation before the Governor or an appointed representative. An individual designated as Ombudsman shall serve for a term of three years, commencing from the day of assuming office. The individual designated as Ombudsman shall receive a salary and allowances equivalent to those granted to a Judge of the High Court of Kerala. Upon the conclusion of his tenure as ombudsman, he shall be ineligible for reappointment or any subsequent appointment to any remunerative position under the Government of Kerala or in any business, enterprise, society, or university governed by the Government of Kerala. All these restrictions on the Ombudsman as Chairman are to ensure the independence of the post he holds. The appointment of a retired High Court Judge with judicial experience fosters public confidence among persons presenting their grievances to the Ombudsman. Consequently, there can be no objection to a sitting or retired High Court Judge assuming the position of Chairman of the Ombudsman.

Section 271 H of Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, clearly, explained that the office of ombudsman is terminated for proven misbehaviour or incapacity through order of the

Governor, following an address from the State Legislative Assembly, which must be endorsed by a majority of the total membership of the House and by at least two-thirds of the members of the Legislative Assembly present and voting, during the same session. The process for presenting an address, inquiry, and substantiating the misconduct or incapacity of the Ombudsman shall adhere to the procedures to be framed by the Legislative Assembly in this regard. The Government shall appoint a Secretary and additional officers and workers if needed to assist the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can seek the aid of any officer from any government department to verify the accuracy of a complaint under inquiry, and such a person is obligated to provide this assistance without compromising their official duties. The Ombudsman may use the assistance of individuals possessing experience and competence in specific subjects to assist in resolving the matters at hand.

Under the statute, Section 271K, provides that the Ombudsman is vested with enormous powers. The institution shall possess the same powers as a Civil Court during the investigation or inquiry under the Act, as defined in the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (Central Act V of 1908), concerning the following subjects:

(a) summoning and enforcing the attendance of any witness and examining him;

(b) requiring the discovery and production of any document;

(c) receiving evidence on affidavits;

(d) requisitioning any public records, or a copy thereof, from any Court or Office;

(e) issuing commissions for the examination of witnesses;

(f) such other powers as are prescribed.

The institution has enormous duties to perform to ensure proper administration. The duties broadly encompass the responsibility of addressing and redressing all grievances related to the functioning of Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs). The Ombudsman is authorized to look into complaints concerning maladministration, which includes any administrative actions or decisions that are unjust, arbitrary, or lacking in transparency and fairness. The institution also has the authority to investigate cases of corruption, such as the misuse of official position for personal gain.(Batalli, 2015)

Section 271R of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, 1994, highlights the procedure for submitting complaints to the Ombudsman for Local Self Government Institutions and specifies the procedure for investigation. The Government is empowered to establish rules

governing various aspects of the Ombudsman's operations, including the conditions of service for the Ombudsman and their staff, the procedures for submitting the grievance and initiating cases either independently or upon reference by the State Government, and the methods for conducting investigations. Additionally, the rules cover the process for referring cases to the appropriate authority for prosecution. The procedures for conducting inquiries are ideally summarized in nature. The rule also provides procedures for the execution of the order of the Ombudsman.

Challenges and Complexities

Despite constitutional provisions, local self-governments face difficulties such as administrative resistance and covering responsibilities with state agencies ((Ram B. Bhagat, 2005). The effectiveness of local governance is often hindered by socio-political dynamics, including the influence of local elites and inadequate financial resources(Kumar & Sen, 2024). While local self-governments are designed to strengthen communities and enhance public involvement, the effectiveness of these bodies is often compromised by structural challenges and political dynamics. This duality highlights the need for continuous enhancement in strengthening local governance in India. It is to be further noticed that at present the Act provides for the appointment of a retired judge as ombudsman. The public confidence could have been improved if there was a provision for appointing a sitting judge also as Ombudsman for LSG.

Effectiveness of the local self-ombudsman in ensuring accountability and transparency.

Transparency and accountability constitute the dual foundations of effective governance. They significantly enhance both a responsive and accountable government and also the prudent allocation and utilisation of public resources, thereby closely aligning with a society's developmental objectives. Institutional and organisational transparency relies on maintaining trust-based relationships with stakeholders through the open dissemination of knowledge and information. For transparency to be realised, a government must furnish individuals with information that is precise, comprehensive, and prompt regarding its operations and governance. Transparency develops accountability(Jha, 2018). Accountability pertains to systems for reporting the utilisation of public resources and the repercussions for not achieving specified performance targets. Accountability involves the

entitlement of citizens to get justifications and explanations regarding the utilisation of public resources from those responsible for their management, to achieve human rights progressively. Transparency and accountability are directed towards the efficient use of public resources and the deterrence of corruption, as well as the misuse or abuse of authority(Imbaruddin & Saeni, 2021).

Ombudsmen contribute to accountability by providing a channel for citizens to voice grievances against Panchayat officials, thereby acting as a "watchdog of administration." (Batalli, 2015). In the context of PRIs, this is crucial, as centralized schemes often undermine local autonomy, leading to accountability gaps. A study of five Gram Panchayats in central India revealed that centralized guidelines and inadequate staffing limited Panchayat effectiveness, suggesting that an independent ombudsman could enhance accountability by acting on citizens' complaints rather than relying on top-down directives(Datta, 2009). However, the ombudsman's impact on transparency is mixed, as its reports are not always accessible to the public, and follow-up actions on recommendations are inconsistent (Imbaruddin et al., 2021).

Good Governance

Good governance implies extra criteria incorporated into the governing process. The shift from the notion of governance to good governance encompasses an implication regarding the standard of governance. A good governance system arises by prioritising specific principles in decision-making and public affairs policy development. Effective governance necessitates attention to human rights, the rule of law, the enhancement of democracy, and the promotion of transparency and competency in public administration(Herasymiuk et al., 2020). The flexibility of governmental bodies isto the meet the goals of citizens, together with inclusive citizenship, is essential for good governance. Democracy relies on the equality of all individuals, their entitlement to engage in social and political change, and their right to development and dignified living. Panchayat Raj is a framework and methodology for effective governance. Since ancient times, villages have consistently served as the fundamental units of governance in India(Ananth Pur & Moore, 2007). The Gramme Sabha has the potential to serve as the foundation of the entire Panchayat Raj institutional framework, thus reinforcing the Indian democratic system. Gandhi's idea of

democratic decentralisation reflects his intense commitment to non-violence, truth, and individual liberty. He refers to it as Panchayati Raj or rural self-governance. He envisions each village as a self-sufficient, democratic, organically connected to bigger spatial entities, possessing the utmost autonomy in determining society concerns. He also advocated for the decentralisation of political power to the communities of India. He favored the term *'Swaraj'* to articulate his concept of genuine democracy. Upon the concept of liberty, democracy is founded.(Sinha, 2020). According to Gandhi, citzen's liberty can only be preserved via autonomous, self-sufficient communities that provide chances for comprehensive participation by the general population (Batalli, 2015).

Effectiveness of the Ombudsman: Strengths and Limitations

The Ombudsman mechanism in India is instrumental in maintaining democratic accountability by providing an alternative means of grievance redressal for citizens dissatisfied with the actions or inactions of public authorities. Ideally, the Ombudsman is intended to act as an independent, impartial authority empowered to inquire into allegations of corruption, maladministration, and violations of individual rights by government servants. However, the effectiveness of this institution in India is a subject of both optimism and critical concern. In terms of its potential strengths, the Ombudsman system is designed to offer low-cost and accessible justice to ordinary citizens. For instance, in Kerala, a citizen can submit a complaint to the Local Self Government Ombudsman by affixing a mere ₹10 court fee stamp, and the process does not require legal representation. This makes the system far more approachable than conventional judicial processes, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds. Additionally, Ombudsman institutions such as the Lokpal and Lokayuktas are conceptually meant to function independently of the executive, with powers to investigate corruption and administrative misconduct ((Mohapatra, 2012; Iniyavan, 2024). Beyond resolving individual complaints, Ombudsman offices have also contributed to identifying systemic flaws in administrative functioning. Through repeated exposure to patterns of governance failures, these institutions can recommend reforms, helping government departments improve service delivery and accountability ((Mohapatra, 2012). In democratic societies, their existence acts as a soft deterrent to corruption, as public officials are made aware that an external body could scrutinize their decisions(Jha, 2018)

Despite these advantages, the actual functioning of the Ombudsman mechanism in India is often compromised due to structural limitations. One of the most significant concerns is that most Ombudsman offices lack binding enforcement powers. They can investigate and recommend, but cannot compel administrative authorities to act upon their findings. As Mahapatra (2012) notes, this restricts their ability to ensure compliance, especially in cases involving politically powerful individuals or departments. In many instances, the effectiveness of the institution hinges on the goodwill of the government, which is inherently problematic in a system that is supposed to hold the government accountable. Moreover, political interference has further weakened the institution's credibility. State governments frequently delay appointments to key positions such as the Lokayukta to avoid scrutiny, and the appointment process itself is often opaque and politicized (Iniyavan, 2024). These delays diminish the confidence of citizens in the system's impartiality and responsiveness. Compounding the problem is the lack of public awareness about the role and functioning of Ombudsman offices. Many citizens are either unaware that such mechanisms exist or unsure of how to approach them, which drastically limits their usage and impact (Iniyavan, 2024). The situation is exacerbated by the non-uniformity in institutional structures across Indian states. While some states have strong, active Lokayukta institutions with investigative powers and infrastructure, others operate with very limited authority or are dormant altogether. Even where inquiries are conducted and maladministration is established, the recommendations of the Ombudsman are often ignored, with little to no follow-up or punitive action taken against the erring officials (Jain, 1975)

An empirical study conducted in 2024 sheds further light on public perceptions of the Ombudsman system. Based on a sample of 200 respondents, the research revealed that a substantial number of people believed the Ombudsman was ineffective in resolving complex administrative problems. Many respondents also perceived the institution as being politically influenced rather than functioning as an independent authority (Iniyavan, 2024). These data points toward an erosion of public trust, which is vital for the Ombudsman to serve as a credible check on governance.

In Kerala, the institution of the Ombudsman for LSGs is cited as a relatively successful model in terms of structure and accessibility. Despite its structured framework and

budgetary support, however, even this system is plagued by the broader issues of non-binding powers and over-reliance on political cooperation for implementation (Datta, 2009). To enhance the effectiveness of the Ombudsman mechanism in India, it is essential to introduce certain structural reforms. These include granting the Ombudsman binding powers to enforce decisions, establishing transparent and non-partisan appointment processes, and launching public awareness campaigns to enhance accessibility. In addition, digital platforms for filing and tracking complaints should be introduced to modernize and streamline the system. Finally, periodic audits and public disclosure of compliance with Ombudsman recommendations could improve institutional accountability and public trust. Thus, the Ombudsman mechanism in India is a well-intentioned and constitutionally significant innovation for promoting administrative justice; its current operational effectiveness remains limited. The absence of enforcement powers, coupled with political interference and low public awareness, significantly dilutes its ability to function as a robust tool for accountability. Strengthening the legal authority and independence of the Ombudsman is critical if it is to fulfill its role as the protector of citizens' rights and the watchdog of public administration ((Mohapatra, n.d.); Iniyavan, 2024).

Unique feature of Kerala Ombudsman in Panchayat

The Ombudsman for Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs) in Kerala is a unique institution in India, established in 2001 to exclusively oversee local governance bodies like Panchayats and municipalities. Unlike other states' Lokayuktas, which focus on state-level corruption, Kerala's Ombudsman targets local governance issues, such as service delivery and citizen grievances, under the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 and Kerala Municipality Act, 1994. Initially a seven-member body, it was restructured into a single-member institution led by a former High Court judge, ensuring impartiality and high judicial authority. Its comprehensive powers include investigation, issuing interim orders, imposing penalties, and ensuring compensation, supported by a clear legal framework under the 1999 Ombudsman Rules(Batalli, 2015) The institution's independence, citizen-friendly approach, and ability to act suo moto further distinguish it, while a 2015 Kerala High Court ruling clarified its exclusive jurisdiction over LSGI complaints, preventing overlap with the Lok Ayukta.

In contrast, no other Indian state has a dedicated Ombudsman for local governance with Kerala's level of authority, focus, and independence. While 17 states have Lokayuktas addressing broader state-level corruption, they lack the specialized mandate to oversee local bodies. The national Lokpal remains unimplemented, and oversight bodies in states like Karnataka or Uttar Pradesh do not prioritize grassroots governance. Kerala's Ombudsman, with its headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram and a structure supporting efficient functioning, stands out as a pioneering model. Its emphasis on decentralized governance and direct democracy, aligned with mechanisms like Grama Sabhas, makes it a citizen-centric institution unmatched in India's local governance framework(Joshua J M Stark, 2011)

Public Grievance Redressal System for Local Self-Government Departments

The Ombudsman for Kerala's Local Self-Government (LSG) institutions operate with efficiency, transparency, and speed, effectively addressing grievances and rectifying unjust, arbitrary, or opaque decisions. To further enhance transparency and streamline grievance resolution, the government has introduced an online Public Grievance Redressal System to monitor and address all complaints related to LSG institutions. The Public Grievance Redressal system, encompassing CPGRAMS, aims to address service-related complaints and guarantee effective service delivery. If any claim in the Grievance remains unaddressed by the Grievance Redressal Mechanism of the Grama Panchayat, the Aggrieved Person shall seek recourse from the Ombudsman for Local Self Governments. The government has launched a Public Grievance Redressal System for Local Self-Government Institutions to track and address all grievances received by the section of the office at any level in a plain manner. The Local Self Government Department (LSGD) has launched an online public grievance redressal system called 'For the People' to enhance the standard of local governance, adherence, and competence, while striving to eliminate corruption within Local Self Government institutions. The primary objective is to provide enhanced services to the State's inhabitants promptly and to foster individual participation in providing services. Thus, it enables people to submit complaints and comments regarding various services from the LSGD and its departments, as well as allegations of corruption through online. Reports of nepotism, unreasonable delays in service delivery, or corruption within local self-government institutions may be submitted through the system,

accompanied by documentation. To guarantee efficient, uninterrupted, rapid, and transparent resolution of all complaints received, stakeholders must play a significant role. All division heads must oversee the operations and ensure that grievances are tracked and measures are implemented by the appropriate officers. A workflow must be established for this purpose. In this context, the Government has published the following workflow regarding complaints received via the Public Grievance Redressal Portal across multiple Departments/Offices.

After analyzing the grievance mechanism, the "One Nation One Election" (ONOE) would help to make new changes in the local self-government, and here arises the relevance. The ONOE initiative, aimed at synchronizing national and state elections in India, has significant implications for institutional innovations and grievance redressal mechanisms, particularly the functions of the ombudsman in promoting good governance in local self-government. ONOE seeks to streamline elections, reducing costs and governance disruptions. However, its implementation could strain local self-governance structures, as simultaneous elections may divert resources and attention from local bodies like panchayats and municipalities, which rely on regular elections to maintain democratic accountability. The ombudsman, such as the Lokpal or Lokayukta, plays a critical role in addressing grievances and ensuring transparency. Under ONOE, the increased electoral workload could overwhelm State Election Commissions (SECs), potentially delay local elections, and increase grievances related to administrative inefficiencies or electoral malpractices. Digital platforms, inspired by the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), can enhance accessibility, allowing citizens to report issues like mismanagement in local governance during synchronized elections. Empowering SECs, through collaboration with the Election Commission of India, can improve electoral efficiency, reducing complaints. Additionally, public awareness campaigns for anti-corruption institutions can empower citizens to engage with ombudsman services, fostering public trust.

However, challenges like political interference and resource constraints may hinder ombudsman effectiveness, especially in states with weak Lokayuktas, such as Kerala or Delhi(Alsop et al., 2000).

Policy Recommendations for Ombudsman in Local Self-Government

Good governance in LSG through the ombudsman mechanism can be strengthened only through citizen-centric measures. Firstly, establishing independent ombudsman offices without the involvement and participation of political parties at the local level. This would help to make the functions transparent and accountable to maintain societal faith in government departments. Secondly, make necessary updates to technology for grievance redressal, such as India's CPGRAMS portal, which enables 24/7 access and real-time tracking of complaints. Now there is a lack of similar digital platforms to ensure accessibility in rural areas, where internet penetration is very low. Thirdly, promoting transparency through compulsory public disclosure of ombudsman decisions, consistent with good governance principles of openness and accountability. Fourthly, departmental strengthening programs for local officials should be executed and monitored; then they can enhance ombudsman effectiveness by training staff to handle complaints efficiently. Fifthly, collecting societal feedback and integrating it by analyzing which part is needed to make it more effective. Some methods include public hearings or citizen report cards to ensure particularly for marginalized groups. Finally, streamline grievance processes with time-bound resolutions, like the Swift Complaint Resolution project, which reduced decision times to 25 days. These measures empower citizens, reduce administrative delays, and enhance trust in local governance.

Conclusion

For enhancing an equitable- democratic society, good governance in a transparent, accountable manner with the involvement of citizen participation would help to achieve this. The Ombudsman institution, as an important mechanism, contains these principles by acting as a watchdog that addresses citizen grievances, deters corruption, and upholds human rights (Imbaruddin et al., 2021). This role aligns seamlessly with the broader objectives of democratic governance, and managing public affairs remains responsive and accountable to the people it serves. By providing an independent avenue for redress, the Ombudsman strengthens public trust in institutions, fostering a culture of fairness and justice that is essential for sustainable development.

Drawing inspiration from Gandhi's vision of Swaraj, which emphasizes self-governance and localized decision-making, the Ombudsman reinforces grassroots democracy through mechanisms such as Gram Sabhas (Batalli, 2015). These platforms enhance communities

to participate actively in governance, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and local issues are addressed. However, the effectiveness of the Ombudsman is not without challenges. Inconsistent follow-up on recommendations and limited public access to reports significantly undermine transparency and accountability (Imbaruddin et al., 2021). These shortcomings hinder the institution's ability to fully realize its potential as a catalyst for good governance. When recommendations are not enforced or reports remain inaccessible, public trust in the Ombudsman diminishes, weakening its role as a democratic safeguard. Addressing these issues requires systemic reforms, including mandatory compliance mechanisms and greater public dissemination of findings, to ensure that the Ombudsman's work translates into tangible outcomes. To overcome these challenges, governments and institutions must prioritize strengthening the Ombudsman's operational framework and changing things by understanding societal concerns. This includes ensuring adequate resources, enhancing public awareness of the institution's role, and establishing strong mechanisms for implementing recommendations. By addressing these gaps, the Ombudsman can better fulfill its mandate as a protector of human rights and a promoter of democratic principles.

Reference

Agarwal, U. C. (1988). Case for National Level Ombudsman. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, *34*(2), 249–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556119880203

Alsop, R. J., Krishna, A., & Sjoblom Disa. (2000). INCLUSION AND LOCAL ELECTED GOVERNMENTS: THE PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA. *Social Development Paper*, *1*, 37.

Ananth Pur, K., & Moore, M. (2007). *Ambiguous Institutions: Traditional Governance and Local Democracy in Rural India*. www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop

Batalli, M. (2015). Role of Ombudsman Institution over the administration. *Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Social Sciences*, *1*(3). www.iipccl.org

Datta, P. (2009). *Democratic Decentralization through Panchayati Raj in Contemporary India: The Changes and Challenges*.

Herasymiuk, K., Martselyak, O. V, Kirichenko, Y. N., & Zhmur, N. V. (2020). Article ID: IJM_11_04_052 Public administration. *International Journal of Management (IJM*,

11(4), 545–555. http://www.iaeme.com/IJM/index.asp545http://www.iaeme.com/ijm/issues.asp?JType=IJM&VType=11&IType=4JournalImpactFactor

Imbaruddin, A., & Saeni, A. A. (2021). *The Role of Ombudsman in Improving Accountability of Government Public Services.* https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results

Jain, R. B. (1975). The "Ombudsman": A Super Administrator or a Grievance-Man. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, *21*(3), 511–539. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556119750321

Jha, R. R. (2018). India's Anti-corruption Authorities: Lokpal and Lokayukta. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, *64*(3), 502–517. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556118788480

Joshua J M Stark. (2011). *Kerala's Ombudsman: A Mismatch of Mission and Capabilitiesg ove_1526 389..392.* https://doi.org/doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2011.01526.x

Kumar, V., & Sen, C. (2024). FEDERAL STRUCTURE OF GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: A REVIEW. *Federal Structure of Governance in India: A Review. ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, *5*(1), 1405–1414. https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.424

Mohapatra, B. P. (n.d.). *Local Self-Governing Institutions and Fiscal Decentralisation in India: Form to Function.*http://ssrn.com/abstract=2193836Electroniccopyavailableat:https://ssrn.com/abstract=2193836Electroniccopyavailableat:http://ssrn.com/abstract=2193836

Ram B. Bhagat. (2005). Rural-Urban Classification and Muncipal Governance in India. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *26*(1). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0129-7619.2005.00204.x

Reddy, M. G., & Mohapatra, B. P. (2017). Decentralized Governance and Devolution of Funds to the Panchayats in India: A Critical Analysis of Two States. *Studies in Indian Politics*, *5*(1), 42–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/2321023017698259

Sinha, A. K. (2020). Gandhian perception of Socio-economic Development. *The Researchers*, *VI*(I), 24–30. https://doi.org/10.21276/tr.2020.6.1.an3