

## Mission impossible: On simultaneous elections

The idea of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies appears to have caught the imagination of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been talking about this for some time now. It is not too much of a leap to surmise that he believes that voters are likely to back the same party in both elections, and that in the absence of a national alternative to his candidature at the Centre, such a voting pattern may help the BJP across States too. The Law Commission's move to seek the opinion of the public, political parties, academicians and other stakeholders, on the proposal appears to be aimed at giving concrete shape to this political viewpoint. The Commission has released a three-page summary of its draft working paper, setting out the amendments that may be required in the Constitution and electoral laws. It proposes to put together a report to forward to the Centre after getting the views of the public. Among its "possible recommendations" is a "constructive vote of no-confidence": while expressing lack of confidence in one government, members of the legislature will have to repose trust in an alternative. It also suggests that premature dissolution of the House could be avoided if all members sit together and elect a leader. This would entail a temporary waiver of the anti-defection law so that members could help form a stable government without the fear of disqualification. However, these are reforms that can be adopted even if simultaneous elections are not held.

### Law Commission favours simultaneous elections

In principle, simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies have the benefits of saving poll expenditure and helping ruling parties focus on governance instead of being constantly in election mode. The flip side is that it is nearly impossible to implement, as it would mean arbitrarily curtailing or extending the term of existing legislatures to bring their election dates in line with the due date for the rest of the country. This would be the most difficult change to execute, as such a measure would undermine federalism as well as representative democracy. The Commission has suggested an alternative: categorise States based on proximity to the next general election, and have one round of State Assembly polls with the next Lok Sabha election, and another round for the remaining States 30 months later. This would mean that India would have a set of elections every two and a half years. But governments have been brought down or have collapsed on their own, leading to mid-term polls in different States and even at the Centre in different years. Given the difficulties involved in shifting to simultaneous elections, we may have to live with the reality that some part of the country will go to polls every few months.

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