

## Poll position: on electoral reforms beyond simultaneous elections

It is perhaps no surprise that [political parties are deeply divided over the idea of holding simultaneous elections](#) for the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies. During [consultations initiated by the Law Commission of India](#), nine parties opposed it, arguing that it went against the constitutional fabric and that it would be impractical. Four parties backed the concept. The BJP has sought time for a detailed response, though it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has been advocating the idea. The Congress has now spoken out against the proposal. In principle, there are obvious advantages to the 'one nation, one election' idea — election expenditure will be drastically cut and ruling dispensations will be able to focus on legislation and governance rather than having to be in campaign mode forever. However, as many of the naysayers have pointed out, the idea is fraught with practical difficulties. Also, some parties fear that a simultaneous poll, particularly in this era where news is easily and widely disseminated, will privilege national issues over regional ones even if, arguably, the reverse may happen too. The issue is that synchronisation would involve curtailment or extension of the tenure of a House — the legal propriety of which is questionable.

### Mission impossible: On simultaneous elections

The key proposal is that Assemblies be bunched into two categories based on whether their terms end close to the 2019 or the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Elections could be held for one group in 2019, and for another in 2024 so that subsequent elections could be synchronised. Or, polls could be held for one group along with the 2019 election, and for the rest 30 months later, so that there is a round of elections every two and a half years. An attempt at solving the problem of regimes falling due to lack of majority is the proposal for a 'constructive vote of no-confidence'. This means that when passing a motion expressing lack of trust in a regime, legislators must necessarily propose an alternative. If a mid-term election has to be held, the term of such a House would only be for the remainder of its tenure. These two recommendations may partially address the question raised by the DMK on whether all Assemblies would be dissolved too if the Lok Sabha has to be prematurely dissolved. However, it is unclear if it will be palatable for all parties to invest their time and resources in an election that would win them only a curtailed term. Allowing a one-time waiver of the anti-defection law to enable the House to elect a leader in the event of a hung House is another proposal. However, these reforms can be adopted even without simultaneous elections. Also, there are many pressing reforms needed in the electoral space including curbing the use of black money to fund elections and tackling the staggered manner in which elections are held in many States.

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