

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS ARE NEEDED TO ADDRESS DISTORTIONS IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

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Should there be economic reforms? Almost instinctively, most people would answer this question in the affirmative. But why are reforms necessary? Leaving aside the ideological and conceptual changes in direction, most of the time, reforms are simply necessary because processes usually do not perform as well in the long term as they do in the short term.

Now, if this is true for the economy, would it not be equally true for other aspects, say the process of holding elections? The renewed pitch for “One Nation One Election” if understood in terms of process improvement, or reforms, makes eminent sense. What are the distortions that have crept in due to the year-round election cycle?

First, the Rajya Sabha has simply stopped reflecting the current will of the people. No, this is not an argument to assert that Rajya Sabha should reflect the reality of the Lok Sabha mandate, although some people have made a plausible case for that as well. But is it anybody's case that the Rajya Sabha members should not reflect the current will of their respective state's mandate? Consider the situation that a fixed term (six years) for a Rajya Sabha MP has produced. Eleven Rajya Sabha members were elected from Uttar Pradesh in June 2016: Seven of them were from the SP, two from the BSP and just one each from the [BJP](#) and Congress. These results reflected the reality of the then state assembly of UP. These seats will be up for re-election in June 2022. In between, the people of the state decisively voted in favour of the BJP in March 2017. The UP assembly is due for elections in February-March 2022. This would mean that the assembly elected in 2017 would have had zero say in its entire tenure on these 11 seats.

If the BJP faces this quandary in UP, the Congress does so in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In the March 2018 Rajya Sabha elections, Rajasthan assembly returned three out of three members for the BJP. These seats would now be due for election only in March 2024. The assembly elected in December 2018, which the BJP lost, and which will again go for election in December 2023, will simply have no say over these seats. These are not just isolated examples but prevalent across the board.

Second, assembly elections two years either side of Parliamentary elections, in states ruled by a different party than that at the Centre, have led to an almost continuous confrontationist attitude, severely compromising federal cooperation and governance delivery. Take the case of West Bengal. Before the 2019 general elections, Ayushman Bharat was suspended, PM Kisan was not implemented, CBI jurisdiction was impeded. Even a natural calamity could not persuade the chief minister to cooperate with the Centre. The general elections are now over but has the situation returned to normal? No, because the state elections are less than two years away.

Third, although governments are nominally elected for five years, the frequent imposition of the Model Code suspends decision making and implementation every few months. Alternatively, every decision taken is looked through the prism of the next round of elections. This has

squeezed out space for ideas that may be vital but have no immediate electoral salience.

Fourth, the competitive nature of electoral democracy inevitably means choosing to make the easiest promise. Think of the Delhi government's promise of free rides to women in the Delhi metro. Routed in the general elections and fearing similar result six months later, who would want to invest time in arduous efforts to effect real, long-term changes?

Fifth, the ubiquitous nature of social media has meant that almost everybody is now not just an informed political animal but a participating political animal. Once you have taken a position on a political issue, then the very nature of the beast will compel you to keep on participating with your political lens, for the next election is around the corner and how can you let your side down? What this does is that it completely eliminates any chance of reconciliation post elections.

By chairing an all-party meeting on the issue so early in his second term, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) has put "One Nation, One Election" centrestage. There have been various models proposed for implementing the idea of simultaneous elections. They will surely be debated and a plausible method to reconcile the practicalities be evolved. It took us about a decade to agree to GST. It was a one-time adjustment at the national and state level and we have already started seeing the benefits of this structural change. "One Nation One Election" is also about one-time structural change. First align various cycles and then evolve a structure, by consensus, which can serve us for the decades to come. It is an idea whose time has come.

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