

Wrong Notion : On simultaneous elections

The Hindu

Paper - II
(Polity)

Notwithstanding the opposition from political parties and many in civil society to the idea of simultaneous elections, the Union government has decided to accept the recommendations of a high-level committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to go ahead with the scheme. The committee envisaged simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections as the first step, followed by municipal and panchayat polls within 100 days of the general election. In order to do so, the government would need to get constitutional amendments to be passed, in Parliament and in the State Assemblies. Two key reasons have been evinced for the proposal-first, the costs of conducting these elections would be significantly reduced if held together, and, second, not having simultaneous elections has kept political parties in prolonged campaign mode, impacting governance and legislative work. There has been little to no empirical data to support the first reason. Already, general elections take an inordinately long time, with some State polls being held in phases. Simultaneous elections could prolong this process. One of the committee's recommendations is that if a State Assembly gets dissolved before five years of its term, after the "appointed date" the date for synchronising Lok Sabha and Assembly elections-fresh "midterm" elections will be held but the new Assembly's will not have a full five-year tenure. Its tenure will end five years from the "appointed date". This provision militates against the original idea of cost cutting through simultaneous elections. It is also an anti-federal idea.

In a multi-tiered governance system, people choose their representatives based on their perception of who is best suited. The power being demarcated for different levels of government allows for distinct roles for each representative and suggests varied voter choices that could be based on party affiliation, candidate strength, ideological positions or socio-economic reasons that are constituency-specific. Each tier has its exclusive importance and so does the related election. The second reason, that representatives are in perennial campaign mode and, therefore, polls to every tier should all be held during the same period, is problematic. For one, that national representatives of parties are forever in campaign mode is a consequence of the centralising tendencies of parties that are in power today and is not a reflection of the extant electoral democratic system. Second, subsuming multi-tier elections into simultaneous mode has the potential to reduce the importance of each tier, especially the Assembly and municipal/panchayat levels, and is anti-federal. Lastly, to effect this proposal, the tenures of quite a few State governments will have to be cut short. Parties and civil society actors committed to federalism must squarely reject this proposal by the Union government.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements in the context of One Nation One Election

1. The chairman of the committee formed for this was former President Ramnath Kovind.
2. This committee has recommended to hold central and state elections simultaneously but has excluded local body elections.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : A

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: "The idea of simultaneous elections is inherently anti-federal." Critically analyze this statement.

Answer's Approach:

- ❖ In the first part of the answer, discuss the idea of holding simultaneous elections in India.
- ❖ In the second part, analyze the pros and cons of holding simultaneous elections.
- ❖ Finally give a way forward.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.