



Electoral Reforms In India With A Focus On One Nation, One Vote

Prity kumari,

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science

Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka, Jharkhand.

Abstract

India, the world's largest democracy, has long been admired for its ability to conduct free and fair elections despite its vast social, cultural, and regional diversity. Since the first general elections in 1951–52, the Indian electoral system has functioned as the cornerstone of its democratic framework. However, over the decades, increasing regional disparities, out-dated delimitation, unequal representation, and the rising influence of money and muscle power have exposed critical flaws in the current system. As India continues to evolve demographically and politically, there is a growing call for comprehensive electoral reform to ensure greater fairness, transparency, and equality in representation.

Among the most debated reform ideas today is the principle of “One Nation, One Vote”, which advocates that every citizen's vote should carry equal weight regardless of their state or region. This concept aims to correct imbalances in representation caused by frozen seat allocations and out-dated census data, thereby restoring democratic legitimacy and national unity. While the proposal offers a compelling vision for electoral equality, it also raises significant constitutional, federal, and political challenges.

This paper critically examines the historical evolution of electoral reforms in India, analyzes the rationale and feasibility of “One Nation, One Vote,” and explores its potential impact on democracy, governance, and federalism. Drawing on global comparisons and legal frameworks, the study aims to provide concrete policy recommendations for achieving equitable electoral representation in India.

Key words:-Democracy, Electoral reform, Election, India, One Nation One Vote.

Introduction-

India is generally considered as the world's largest democracy, India has built its political foundation on the principles of universal adult suffrage, federalism, and representative governance. Over the periods, the electoral system of India has played a significant role in shaping the country's democratic journey. But with the over the period India is continuously evolving socially, politically, and demographically, there is a growing need for revisit and reform its electoral processes to make sure greater fairness, transparency, and efficiency.

Electoral reform in India try to includes a huge number of issues from cleaning up electoral rolls and curbing the influence of money and muscle power to make sure internal democracy within the political parties. At present time one of the most pressing and emerging concerns is the call for uniformity in representation, popularly this is known by the slogan “One Nation, One Vote.” This principle is trying to advocates for giving equal weight to every citizen’s vote, without considering geographical and administrative divisions, its objective is to address disparities in representation that have arisen due to uneven population growth and out-dated delimitation processes.

As regional imbalances increased and political representation becomes uneven in India, the idea of “One Nation, One Vote” is being seen as a necessary step toward restoring the democratic ideal of equal representation. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of India’s current electoral challenges and the potential path forward through meaningful reforms that keep the spirit of equality and national unity in the democratic process.

“India's democracy stands as a global model, characterized by free and fair elections. While a source of pride, critical aspects of the electoral process necessitate strengthening for the nation to realize its full democratic potential. From candidate selection to fundraising and expenditure during election campaigns, significant reforms are imperative to ensure a more robust, transparent, and fair electoral system.”(Kumar, 2020, p. 45)

India, as being the world’s largest democracy, it has long been admired for its ability to conduct free and fair elections despite of having incredibly diverse and populous nation. Since the first general elections conducted in 1951–52, the Indian electoral system has functioned as the backbone of its democratic framework, enabling the peaceful transfer of the power and giving voice to over 991 million eligible voters. Despite of this remarkable achievement, the system is far from perfection. Over the years, structural flaws, regional disparities, voter inequality, and the increasing influence of money and muscle power have eroded the quality and credibility of electoral outcomes of the India. As a nation India is continuously evolving socially, economically, and politically, the need for comprehensive electoral reform has become increasingly urgent.

One of the most significant and timely concerns within the broader debate on electoral reform is considered the idea of “One Nation, One Vote”. At its core, this concept emphasizes the fundamental democratic principle that every citizen’s vote should carry equal weight without any discrimination. The current electoral framework, particularly in the context of parliamentary representation and state-level voting rights, reveals a huge disparities. Due to out-dated delimitation based on the past census data, some states are overrepresented in Parliament while others are underrepresented, this condition is leading to unequal value of votes across the different regions of the India. In addition, differences in election schedules, voting rights in different types of elections, and variations in voter turnout across states contribute to further imbalances in the political system of the India.

The slogan “One Nation, One Vote” also connects with the broader debates around simultaneous elections, it demand for holding of both Lok Sabha and state assembly elections at the same time across the country , electoral roll synchronization, and uniformity in the electoral processes. Proponents argue that aligning the elections and ensuring uniform weight to every vote will reduce the electoral costs, improve governance, minimize the disruption of development work of the country, and strengthen the national unity. Critics, however, say that such kind of reforms may compromise federal principles and require constitutional amendments with the broad political consensus.

The issue of electoral reform in India is not limited to the administrative efficiency alone but it must address the deeper questions of representation, equality, and democratic legitimacy. The principle of “One Nation, One Vote” offers a new vision for reshaping the electoral landscape of India, it better reflect the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution such as justice, equality, and unity.

Litrature review-

(Singh,B.P,2013)-The literature describe about the growing challenges facing by India's electoral system, which has witnessed a decline in the fairness and integrity since the 1967 general elections. The main issues that influence electoral system of India is money and muscle power, criminalisation of politics, misuse of government machinery, and the rise of non-serious candidates. Elections have become very expensive, making it difficult for the honest and capable individuals to contest in election, while casteism, communalism, and identity-based politics further undermine democratic values of the India. The political landscape has also suffered from this instability due to fragmented mandates and coalition governments, it is affecting governance and public trust.

Despite of several reform efforts through recommendations from committees like Tarkunde (1975), Goswami (1990), and various Election Commissions most of the challenges remain unresolved. Measures such as voter ID cards, the Model Code of Conduct, and media regulations have helped to some extent, but its enforcement gaps persist. The literature emphasizes the urgent need for the stricter laws, moral leadership, and systemic reforms to make sure free, fair, and truly representative elections in India.

(Kumar,R,2019)-This literature critically examines the shortcomings of India's electoral system, it is focusing on the increasing criminalization of the politics, money and muscle power, and erosion of the democratic values. Despite of constitutional safeguards and the active role of the Election Commission, there is the presence of candidates with criminal backgrounds, widespread voter intimidation, rigging, and misuse of the government machinery continue to plague the electoral process. While laws like Section 8 of the Representation of People Act aim to disqualify convicted politicians, the weak enforcement and public apathy hinder the real change. Mechanisms such as disclosure of assets, NOTA (None of the Above), and electoral awareness initiatives have been introduced, but their impact mostly remains limited due to the poor implementation and lack of voter education.

Further concerns included in this literature is caste and religion based politics, biased media coverage, the role of black money, and political victimization of the election officials. Suggestions like the Right to Recall, double voting rights for the marginalized communities, and state funding of the elections are proposed as potential solutions. The literature underscores the need for comprehensive electoral reforms to ensure transparency, accountability, and genuine representation. Without any structural changes and increased public participation, democratic institutions risk further deterioration under the weight of the corruption and identity politics.

(Kumar,V,2020)-In this author describe about the India's electoral system, that was founded on the principle of universal adult franchise and the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) model, it has facilitated the functioning of the world's largest democracy. While, growing concerns over the criminalization of politics, misuse of money and the muscle power, electoral fraud, paid news, and opacity in political funding highlight serious systemic flaws. Reports reveal that a significant number of elected representatives have criminal backgrounds, which is raising doubts about the legitimacy and morality of the legislative governance. Electoral reforms are, therefore, essential to strengthen our democratic processes, increase transparency in campaign funding, and empower voters through mechanisms such as NOTA, VVPAT, and the proposed right to recall. Articles 324–329 of the Constitution, Representation of People Acts (1950 & 1951), and many Supreme Court verdicts lay the legal foundation for these reforms.

Various committees like the Vohra Committee (1993), Indrajit Gupta Committee (1998), and the Law Commission along with the Election Commission of India (ECI), have repeatedly highlighted the urgent need for the reform in electoral system. Initiatives such as mandatory disclosure of the criminal records and assets, stricter monitoring of election expenditure, and the use of technology like the C-Vigil app and VVPAT machines have been introduced to improve the transparency and voter trust. Issues such as unregulated electoral bonds, misuse of government machinery, communal and caste-based politics, and the weakening autonomy of the ECI undermine democratic integrity. To make sure truly free and fair elections, reforms must be continuous, institutionally supported, and rooted in public awareness, political will, and legal enforcement.

(Das.T,2024) The concept of One Nation One Election has gained political attention in India, especially in the context of increasing electoral expenses, governance disruptions, and policy paralysis caused because of the frequent election cycle. In this paper, authore provides a comprehensive review of the feasibility, benefits, and challenges associated with the implementing simultaneous elections across the parliamentary, state, and local levels in the India. The literature revisits India's early post-independence experience with synchronized elections from 1951 to 1967, emphasizing that this is not a best concept but may return to an earlier practice disrupted due to the political instability. Das argues that ONOE could reduce the costs, minimize resource mobilization, and curb disruptions caused by the Model Code of Conduct, which hampers developmental work. He also posits that ONOE could increase administrative efficiency and political stability although promoting a more disciplined and less chaotic electoral environment in India. But, the paper also identifies substantial challenges such as constitutional amendments, threats to federalism, potential voter confusion, and marginalization of regional parties. Overall, the literature reflects a nuanced debate, suggesting that while ONOE holds potential to streamline democratic processes, its success will also depend on the political consensus, institutional preparedness, and safeguarding of the India's pluralistic federal structure.

Historical Evolution of Electoral Reform in India

“The evolution of India's electoral mechanisms from British colonial times to the present has profoundly shaped its democracy. Initially, limited franchise and indirect elections under British rule restricted political participation. Post independence, the adoption of universal adult suffrage in 1950 marked a significant shift, enabling inclusive democratic engagement. Technological advancements, such as the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs), have enhanced the transparency and efficiency of elections. Legislative reforms like the Anti-Defection Law and the lowering of the voting age have strengthened democratic stability and youth participation. Enhanced voter education and inclusive initiatives, including measures for NRIs and persons with disabilities, have broadened voter engagement. Overall, these evolving mechanisms have ensured fairer, more transparent, and inclusive elections, reinforcing public trust and the robustness of Indian democracy”(Khushboo,2024.)

The electoral system in India has undergone from significant changes since independence, it mainly shaped by constitutional mandates, political realities, and evolving democratic needs. Electoral reform in India has not occurred as a single transformative event, but rather as a continuous process in responding to the emerging challenges came in representation, fairness, transparency, and governance in the system.

1. Constitutional Foundation and Early Electoral Framework

The base of India's electoral system was laid in the Constitution of India, which came into force on 26 January 1950. Key provisions related to the elections were included in Part XV from the Articles 324 to 329, providing the provision for the Election Commission of India (ECI),conduct free and fair elections, adult suffrage, and the demarcation of constituencies.

“Since gaining independence in 1947, India has made remarkable progress in conducting large-scale, peaceful, and regular elections across the nation, overseen by the Election Commission of India (ECI).However, despite these achievements, several deep-rooted issues continue to challenge the fairness, transparency, and credibility of Indian elections. The rise of money power, criminalization of politics, media bias, voter apathy, and the loopholes in political financing have raised serious concerns about the quality of democratic representation.Over the years, reforms like the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), the Right to Information Act, mandatory disclosure of candidate backgrounds, and the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct have contributed to improving the electoral system.”(Suplekar, 2025, p.12)

India held its first general elections in 1951–52, it was based on universal adult suffrage, which was a revolutionary step at that time, especially because the condition in country was massive illiteracy and socio-economic inequality. The Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951 laid down the procedures for preparing electoral rolls and conducting elections.

2. Early Reforms and Electoral Strengthening (1950s–1970s)

In the early decades, India's electoral process was relatively strong, but with the passing years some challenges such as booth capturing, electoral violence, and criminalization of politics began to surface in the 1960s and 70s. In response to these problems, the Election Commission started asserting greater autonomy and administrative control.

During this period, some reforms were introduced like:

- **Introduction of EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines)** in pilot phases though officially adopted later.
- **Delimitation of constituencies** to reflect population changes over the period based on the census data conducted in 1952, 1963, and 1973.

But the delimitation process was frozen in 1976 during the Emergency period, under the 42nd Amendment, to encourage population control efforts, which later became a major factor in regional imbalances in representation

“Delimitation in India aims to ensure fair representation in Parliament by adjusting constituency boundaries in line with population changes. However, since 1976, the process has been frozen to avoid penalising states that have successfully controlled population growth, particularly in the south. As a result, states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with much larger populations, remain underrepresented compared to southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have smaller populations but more parliamentary seats. This imbalance, referred to as malapportionment, has fuelled political tensions, with concerns that the upcoming delimitation exercise in 2029 will shift power toward the politically hegemonic North (Kumar & Srivastava, 2025).

3. Electoral Reforms in the 1980s and 1990s: Addressing Criminalization and Corruption-

By the year 1980s and 90s, there is growing concern about the criminalization of politics, the use of black money in elections, and lack of transparency in campaign financing which ultimately led to the strong demands for reform. Some key developments in this includes:

- **Dinesh Goswami Committee (1990):** This committee recommended reforms in political funding, anti-defection measures, and inner-party democracy.
- **Indrajit Gupta Committee (1998):** This committee recommended partial state funding of elections to curb the role of black money in the election process of the India.

The Election Commission, under the T.N. Seshan's leadership between 1990–1996, took a bold steps to enforce the Model Code of Conduct, clean voter rolls, and reduce electoral malpractices to strengthening public faith in the electoral process.

4. 2000s Onward: Transparency, Technology, and Judicial Interventions

In the 2000s, electoral reforms became more structured and technology-driven:-

- It make mandatory declaration of criminal, financial, and educational background of the candidates by following Supreme Court judgments in 2002 and 2003.
- Introduction of Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) with EVMs to increase transparency in the electoral process.
- Implementation of NOTA (None of the Above) this option was introduced in 2013, it is giving voters the right to reject all candidates.

Judicial activism played an important role in the electoral reform during this period. The Supreme Court and High Courts issued several landmark rulings which mandating disclosure of candidates' assets and

criminal records for more transparency ,on the other hand the Election Commission expanded the use of technology to improve voter access and transparency.

5. Recent Trends and Emerging Debates (2010s–Present)

Recent debates have shifted focus toward deep structural reforms, which is including following things:

- Simultaneous elections of both the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies election, discussed under the slogan of “One Nation, One Election” to reduce election fatigue and costs.
- Delimitation freeze review because the population imbalances growing, there's increasing discussion on updating parliamentary and legislative representation to reflect current demographic realities.
- Electoral bonds was introduced in 2017, purpose was to make political donations transparent, have sparked controversy over anonymity and potential misuse.

“On 1 September 2023, the central government set up a panel with former president Ram Nath Kovind as its chairman to study if a system of simultaneous elections is a pragmatic plan. Its mandate is to examine the feasibility of synchronous elections to Parliament and the state assemblies. The panel has already had one meeting. If we look at constitutional democracies today, we find that the range of the basic institutional designs they follow is limited. Most of them are parliamentary systems, presidential systems, or some form of semi-presidential system where both a president and prime minister are directly elected and share power. For our discussion on the workability of simultaneous elections, it will help, even at the cost of repeating the obvious, to look at the design of a parliamentary system and the Indian Constitution’s position on it.”(Katju, 2023)

Most recently, the concept of “One Nation, One Vote” has emerged as a broader call for uniform voting rights and equal weightage to every citizen’s vote across the regions highlighting the growing concern about the representation inequality due to population based seat distribution.

The principle of "One Nation, One Vote" summarize a democratic ideal where each citizen’s vote carries equal weight without any discrimination, and irrespective of their location or state of residence. India have a complex federal structure, and this principle is both politically sensitive and logistically challenging. Although India already upholds universal adult suffrage, disparities in representation, delimitation, and electoral processes across the states have created an uneven playing field, making this concept more relevant in electoral reform debates.

1. Understanding the Principle

The concept of "One Nation, One Vote" is rooted in the broader goal of the electoral equality. It argues that:

- Every citizen of the India should have equal voting power in national elections.
- There should be uniformity in representation, so that parliamentary constituencies represent the equal populations.
- Disparities arising because of out-dated delimitation adjusting seat allocation based on the population and the freeze on redrawing parliamentary seats since 1976 now it need to be revisited.

This term is often linked to “One Nation, One Election,” which want to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. However, the core idea of “One Nation, One Vote” is to focuses on equalizing the power of every vote, rather than only aligning election timelines.

2. Rationale behind the Principle-

a) Population Imbalance and Representation

Due to the no change in delimitation or population-based seat allocation until 2026, those states that have succeeded in population control such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and southern states are overrepresented in Parliament, while the states with have high population growth such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are underrepresented. This creates an imbalance where a voter from one state may have significantly less influence than a voter of another state.

b) Strengthening National Unity

A uniform value of votes will helps to promote a sense of equality and fairness across the regions, reducing inter-state grievances and strengthening the feeling of the national integrity.

c) Democratic Legitimacy

For ensuring that all citizens' votes should count equally is essential for the legitimacy of representative democracy, particularly for the country like India, now they approaches the next delimitation exercise in 2026.

3. Potential Benefits-

- **Equal Representation:**It will helps to ensure that all regions are fairly represented based on updated population data of the country.
- **Reduced Regional Disparities:** By addresses voter inequality and avoids penalizing states that have implemented successful population control will may help to balance this difference.
- **Increased Political Accountability:** A fairer electoral map may make political parties more responsive toward the underrepresented regions.
- **Foundation for Broader Electoral Reforms:** This reform may support other reforms such as simultaneous elections and cleaner campaign finance rules.

4. Key Challenges and Criticisms-

“The questions of the constitutionality of the simultaneous elections. The constitution experts argued that it was evident from the constitutional makers that envisaged simultaneous elections only for Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. There was no reference of simultaneous election for the local bodies. The problem of hung assembly is quite in practice since late 1980s in Indian politics. The alliance government has become a rather a fact, except last two terms in Indian politics. The simultaneous election provides no provisions to solve the problem of hung assembly. Though the option of fresh election in case of hung assembly has been proposed by the High Level Committee. However, this argument contradicts the cost logic argument in favor of simultaneous election.”(Ahmed, Kuruvilla, & Karad, 2024, p. 121)

a) Federal Concerns

Critics argue that by implementing "One Nation, One Vote" method it may weaken federalism by favouring populous states in Parliament, and on the other hand marginalizing smaller and less populous states.

b) Political Resistance

The States that may lose representation due to population adjustments are may likely to oppose delimitation, because of fearing reduced influence in national policy-making.

c) Need for Constitutional Amendments

For implementing true voter equality it would require revisiting the Article 82 and the 84th and 87th Amendments, which froze the seat redistribution until 2026. These demands may bipartisan political consensus, which is currently difficult.

d) Complex Implementation

Equalizing representation would require redrawing constituency boundaries, updating voter rolls, and possibly restructuring the Rajya Sabha, all of which are administratively complex and politically sensitive.

5. Legal and Constitutional Context

- The Delimitation Commission Act was last revised in 2002, it provides for adjusting constituency boundaries based on the population. Although, seat allocation across the states remains frozen.
- 84th Amendment (2001) and 87th Amendment (2003) allowed for internal delimitation but it maintained the freeze on the increasing parliamentary seats.
- Article 81(2) defines the maximum and minimum number of the seats in the Lok Sabha and their distribution among the states. Reforming this would require a constitutional amendment.

6. Global Comparisons

- If we see country like United States, the principle of “one person, one vote” is enshrined in their law, with regular redistricting to ensure the equal representation.
- In Germany and Canada, there is independent commissions who oversee redistribution based on updated population data, maintaining electoral equality.

India can learn from such kind of models with the help of this model the can balancing its own diversity, federal structure, and political dynamics.

Conclusion

The principle of "One Nation, One Vote" trying to address a growing imbalance in the India's electoral representation by ensuring that each citizen of India vote carries equal weight, regardless of where they live. The call for electoral parity is, therefore, not only just a matter of numbers, but also a reflection of the core democratic value of the equality.

Conceptually, the idea is rooted in democratic fairness every individual must have an equal voice in choosing their national leadership. Although implementing this principle involves prompt constitutional, political, and administrative challenges. Indian federal structure means that changes to the representation can upset the delicate balance between the populous and the smaller states. States that stand to lose relative power may resist the reform, because of fearing marginalization. The constitutional amendments and a robust political consensus would be essential for India to drive any meaningful change.

The upcoming 2026 delimitation exercise, mandated to redraw parliamentary constituencies based on the latest population data, it will bring this issue to the forefront. It offers a historic opportunity to correct the imbalances and strengthen India's representative democracy. But, any reforms must make sure that they reinforce rather than erode the federal character of the India.

"One Nation, One Vote" is not just a political slogan it is a vision for the more equitable democracy. Realizing that it will require careful negotiation, inclusive dialogue, and a commitment to both national unity and federal integrity of the nation. If it approached wisely, it can lead to a more balanced and representative electoral system for the world's largest democratic country.

Reference

1. Ahmed, Z., Kuruvilla, S. J., & Karad, V. (2024). The idea of One Nation–One Election: Its potential risk and significance for India (p. 121). REVA University & MIT-World Peace University.
2. Das, T. (2024). One Nation One Election in India: Possibilities and probable benefits. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, 10(3), 261–292. <https://doi.org/10.29032/ijhsss.v10.i3.2024.261-292>.
3. Kumar, A. (2025, March 4). Delimitation debate: A Faustian bargain or an unfinished democratic revolution? *The Indian Express*.
4. Kumar, R. (2020). An analysis of the 2019 Indian general election: Transition in political landscape and its implications. *Asian Review*, 9(2), 131–150. <https://doi.org/10.24987/SNUACAR.2020.02.9.2.131>.
5. Kumar, R. (2021). Electoral reforms in India: Strengthening democracy. School of Law, NIILM University, Kaithal, Haryana, India.
6. Kumar, V. (2020). Electoral reforms in India: Needs, issues and challenges. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 2(2), 4–9.
7. Katju, M. (2023, October 4). One Nation, One Election: What will its implementation mean? *The Print*.
8. Khushboo. (2024). Evolution of electoral mechanism in India: A historical perspective. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 6(2B), 124–128. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648652.2024.v6.i2b.106>.
9. Singh, B. P. (2013). Electoral reforms in India – Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 2(3), 1–5.
10. Suplekar, D. M. (2025). Electoral reforms in India: An analytical study of issues, impact, and emerging prospects. *Journal of Social and Political Studies*, 15(1).

