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Temporal Federalism, Presidentialisation and Regional Representation under One Nation One Election in India

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Abstract

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, seeks to synchronise Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections by aligning legislative terms under a new Article 82A, with residual-term elections after mid-term dissolutions. This paper examines the democratic implications of the proposal through the lens of temporal federalism and the presidentialisation of parliamentary systems. It advances two interconnected claims. First, a single compressed national campaign cycle structurally disadvantages regional and minority-oriented parties whose viability depends on localised issues that struggle for attention within a nationalised media and funding environment. Second, the fixed- and residual-term logic imports a leader-centric, calendar-driven model into a system whose constitutional design privileged continuous accountability over stability. Drawing on Constituent Assembly debates, behavioural evidence of higher party salience and congruent voting, and comparative presidentialisation literature, the paper argues that these effects are causally linked: presidentialisation of the national contest is the principal mechanism through which regional political voice is crowded out. While acknowledging possible administrative gains, the analysis clarifies the conditions under which greater simultaneity could remain compatible with India's plural, asymmetrical federal parliamentary democracy. It identifies three institutional leverage points, residual-term rules, campaign-cycle design, and protections for regional agenda-setting, and sketches safeguards that could mitigate representational and accountability costs. The contribution lies in integrating electoral timing, coattail dynamics, and the original stability–responsibility trade-off into a single analytical frame relevant to policy formulation.

I. Introduction

The proposal known as One Nation, One Election seeks to synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies through a constitutional amendment. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, would insert a new Article 82A enabling the President to notify an appointed date after which the terms of State Assemblies would be aligned with those of the Lok Sabha. In cases of mid-term dissolution, fresh elections would be confined to the residual portion of the original five-year term. As of mid 2026, the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the legislation has had its tenure extended, with indications that operationalisation could be targeted around the 2029 general elections (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024). The accompanying Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill extends a parallel framework to Union Territory legislatures. Together, these measures represent the most ambitious attempt since Independence to reverse the organic desynchronisation of India's electoral calendar that began after 1967.

Concurrent elections constituted the standard approach from the first general elections of 1951-52 until 1967. The pattern was broken subsequently owing to premature dissolutions of State Assemblies, the premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 1970, and finally through the adoption of a staggered timetable as a consequence of coalition politics and repeated use of Article 356 (Kailash, 2014; Tillin, 2019). What started as an unintended breakdown eventually turned into the standard practice of India's

federal parliamentary democracy. The current legislation attempt seeks to resurrect simultaneity not just by way of a political compromise, but through a constitutional transformation of legislative term lengths.

The official justification is based on four key arguments – saving of electoral expenses, escaping extended periods of adherence to the Model Code of Conduct, reduced administrative pressures on security and civilian services, and a possible role in policy continuity and economic growth. The arguments have been systematically articulated over the course of several institutional reports, with the latest one being issued in 2024. However, academic literature has challenged the empirical validity of the efficiency arguments and the broader democratic implications of the institutional mechanisms proposed (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). Fixed terms, residual term elections, and subjugation of state electoral cycles to a national calendar pose profound questions regarding the nature of India's parliamentary and federal system.

Existing literature addresses these questions in largely separate clusters. One strand examines administrative and fiscal efficiency. A second focuses on federalism and the representational consequences for regional parties. A third interrogates constitutional compatibility with the basic structure doctrine. A fourth documents the progressive presidentialisation of parliamentary systems, in which leadership power expands within executives and parties and electoral processes become increasingly leader-centred (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Empirical research exploiting natural variation in the timing of national and state elections in India finds that synchronised contests increase political parties' salience among voters, boost straight ticket voting, and Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) estimate a 9.3 percentage-point rise in the probability that the same party wins corresponding seats at both tiers (21.6 per cent of a 0.42 baseline) and a 7.1 percentage-point rise in survey-reported same-party voting. These behavioural findings align with the comparative literature on coattail effects, although their precise distributional implications for regional parties remain contested.

This paper advances two interconnected claims. First, a single compressed national campaign cycle structurally disadvantages regional and minority oriented parties whose electoral viability depends on localised, low salience issues, land, language, state-specific caste arithmetic, and regional grievances that struggle for attention and resources within a nationalised media and funding environment. In addition, this redesign injects a fixed-term, leader-centric approach to a system that was designed from the very beginning to place more emphasis on the idea of continuity in accountability than that of stability within the calendar. These two aspects are causally connected rather than being mere parallels. The presidentialisation of the national contest becomes the primary driver by which the regional and local political voices get marginalised. The holding of national elections based on the personalities and performance of the national leaders transforms the simultaneous elections into something similar to presidential referenda, despite the fact that there is no presidency involved in this process. With this paper, one can contribute to the ongoing discussions on constitutional readiness, federalism, and the circumstances under which the simultaneous elections could be helpful for democracy.

The normative rationale of this argument is that the parliamentary system was deliberately chosen by the Constituent Assembly. In democratic states, the executive should be stable and accountable, but no system ensures these features equally well. The parliamentary system was chosen due to the higher level of accountability of the executive branch to the legislative branch. The Constitution translated that preference into institutional form through Articles 83 and 172, which provide for five-year terms that remain subject to earlier dissolution if confidence is lost.

The proposed Article 82A resolves that trade-off unilaterally in favour of stability. Whereas assemblies with governments which retain the confidence of the House may still be subject to truncation of their term to coincide with the national timetable, assemblies which no longer enjoy the confidence of the House can only be re-established with a truncated residual term. The principle of continuing evaluation, which the framers viewed as the unique strength of the parliamentary system, is subordinated to the demands of the fixed national electoral calendar. This change does not merely involve a change in the scheduling of elections.

The present paper does not dispute the potential benefits in terms of administrative and financial savings that may accrue from such decreased frequency of elections. The originality of the present paper lies in the different way in which it addresses the problem. While previous academic literature has considered the representation loss suffered by regional parties and the structural tendency towards presidentialization as separate problems, the present paper aims at understanding the political implications of merging all three in one theoretical framework.

II. Literature Review

Scholarship on simultaneous elections in India has crystallised around four overlapping clusters: the efficiency and governance rationale advanced in official reports and supporting commentary; federalism and the representational consequences for regional parties; constitutional compatibility with the basic structure doctrine; and the broader dynamics of presidentialisation in parliamentary systems. A fifth, more recent empirical strand examines the behavioural effects of electoral synchronisation on party salience, straight ticket voting, and the probability of the same party prevailing across tiers. This section reviews each cluster in turn, assesses the strength of the available evidence, and isolates the analytical gap that the present paper seeks to address.

Efficiency is the institutionally most developed argument. Successive official statements, the 170th Report of the Law Commission of India, the 79th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, the draft report of the Law Commission of India of 2018, and the Report of the High Level Committee of 2024, led by former president Ram Nath Kovind, present simultaneous elections as an instrument for avoiding repeated expenditure on elections, shrinking the duration of time under Model Code of Conduct, lightening the load on security and civil forces from administrative perspective, and ensuring policy consistency (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Law Commission of India, 1999, 2018; Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2015).

Advocates of simultaneity argue that the existing calendar causes the state to live in a kind of perpetual electioneering, consuming governmental attention and other resources, and causing recurring logistical and financial costs that could otherwise go to development expenditure. Some of the analyses defending simultaneity even assert growth benefits of periods when there was more electoral simultaneity. The argument is based on the assumption that election timing is basically an administrative factor whose optimisation brings gains in terms of governance efficiency without changing the democratic form.

Scholarly critiques have challenged both the empirical bases of these arguments and the institutional instruments envisaged for preserving simultaneity. Previous reform proposals are scrutinised with the realisation that measures like fixed-term legislatures, constructive no-confidence motions, and leftover term elections are likely to freeze the process. It is argued that such instruments are attacks on the principles of democracy and federalism and weaken the accountability of the executive to the legislature, which is at the heart of parliamentary democracy (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). The efficiency literature often considers stability to be a purely positive attribute and does not pay enough attention to the costs associated with undermining the accountability of the executive to the legislature in terms of maintaining their confidence during the period between general elections. In addition, there are a few independent, peer-reviewed econometric verifications of the broader financial and growth implications, as the majority of them originate from institutional, not academic research.

Federalism critique arguments constitute the second set of critiques. India's federal system of governance is commonly described as "quasi-federal" or "federal but with unitary bias". However, the autonomous nature of the State assemblies, especially their ability to conduct independent elections, under Articles 83 and 172, was regarded as one of the important components of the federal deal. The idea that the forced shortening or prolonging of the duration of the assemblies' mandates in line with the national elections schedule is a means of subjugating the political calendars of the states to the Centre is gaining traction. The theory that is being developed recently focuses on temporal federalism, whereby the scheduling of elections is considered one of the constitutive elements of the federal framework of India. Temporal difference is believed to be one of the components of the federal deal; synchronising them is perceived as undermining the autonomy of the States and amplifying the coattail effect of national elections, amplifying national coattail effects that risk converting state contests into second-order elections, in the sense that less is treated as being at stake than in the system's primary contest (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Majid et al., 2026). Comparative work on regional elections shows that second-order effects vary with how much executive authority is actually at stake (Schakel & Verdoes, 2025). The claim here is not that Indian assembly polls already match the European second-order template; it is that a single national campaign cycle increases that risk. The broader literature treats territorial party systems and state electoral autonomy as part of how the union accommodates regional diversity (Tillin, 2007, 2019; Kalaiyarasan & Tillin, 2025).

The complementary studies will deal with the legal constitutional challenges that arise in light of the 129th Amendment Bill and will try to place the idea within the larger context of the issue of

representational accountability and parliamentary stability in the case of midterm dissolutions (Kumar & Bedi, 2025). The literature on federalism underscores the fact that staggered elections have allowed the electorate at the state level to express their own preferences, punishing and rewarding state governments based on their local performance and maintaining regional parties based on their relevance in regional but not necessarily in national issues (Kailash, 2017; Tillin, 2019). Comparative analysis of other federal democracies that have tried different electoral schedules (South Africa, Indonesia, selected European cases) indicates that distributive effects largely hinge on electoral system design, party system architecture and regional voice protection mechanisms.

Research exploiting natural variation in the timing of national and state elections in India finds that synchronised contests, compared with sequential but proximate elections, increase parties' salience among voters and raise congruent outcomes across tiers. Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) estimate that simultaneity increases the probability that the same party wins the corresponding parliamentary and assembly seats by 9.3 percentage points, or 21.6 per cent of the baseline probability of 0.42. In post-poll survey data, voters are 7.1 percentage points more likely to report having voted for the same party at both levels when the contests are concurrent. The vote-share gap of the same party across tiers falls by 2.5 percentage points (28 per cent of the mean gap). Turnout rises only modestly, and candidate composition is unchanged (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). The mechanism is partly rooted in the limitations of cognition and increased party campaigning that occurs in the context of simultaneous elections. The results are robust to multiple tests and are in line with the general comparative literature on coattails. However, the consequences for regional parties continue to be controversial. The distributional consequences for regional parties remain unsettled. In several specifications, Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) find that state and regional parties, rather than national parties, drive the congruent-win effect, and that state incumbents gain in the probability of winning both tiers. That finding cuts against a simple claim that simultaneity mechanically transfers vote share from regional to national parties. The representational risk, therefore, cannot rest on vote-share arithmetic alone; it rests on whether a nationalised campaign cycle still under-weights localised issue agendas even when regional parties sometimes win both tiers (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020).

Constitutional validity scholarship is the third category. The proponents, including some former Chief Justices who were part of the deliberations in the Joint Parliamentary Committee, have maintained that synchronised elections will be constitutional and will not violate the basic structure or federalism and democratic values in any way. Critics have contended that the compulsion to synchronise tenures, the restriction of elections to residual periods and the possibility of increased central discretion through the residual period and postponement clauses pose major challenges to the basic structure, especially free and fair elections and federalism as established in case law. The doctrinal discussion of the 129th Amendment Bill underscores the tension between calendar stability and the continuous confidence logic of parliamentary government. While formal constitutional hurdles may be surmountable through amendment and ratification procedures, the deeper issue is whether the resulting institutional design remains faithful to the internal logic of the parliamentary system the Constitution adopted. The

constitutional literature thus divides between formalist readings that emphasise textual compatibility and more structural readings that examine the transformation of accountability relations.

A fourth strand of scholarship examines the presidentialisation of politics. Comparative work documents how leadership power expands within executives and parties and how electoral processes become increasingly leader-centred, even in the absence of formal constitutional change (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). In parliamentary systems, this process produces functionally presidential outcomes while retaining formal parliamentary architecture. Three interrelated dimensions are typically identified: increasing leadership power and autonomy within the political executive; increasing leadership power and autonomy within political parties; and increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes. Applied to India, related analyses have traced a progressive centralising drift in legislative executive relations. Mechanisms like the anti-defection law, silence of the Constitution on opposition and Speaker's autonomy, and judicial deference to parties have led to a system that maintains the form of parliament but suffers from presidential ills lacking any counterbalancing checks (Bhatia, 2023). The current style of campaigning is another example. Elections are increasingly becoming a referendum on the performance of the PM candidacy, rendering the parliamentary elections effectively presidential ones.

There is direct overlap between the ONOE proposal and the presidentialisation literature. A one national election cycle brings even more focus on the national leadership race through the concentration of media, money, and organisational effort. The fixed-term nature of the residual election reduces the number of opportunities for the government to face a new judgment by the people. The submission of the state election schedule to the national one undermines the signal value of state elections. All these developments further consolidate the ongoing shift towards leader-centric politics.

What remains comparatively underdeveloped is the systematic linkage between these strands. Most existing work treats the representational harm to regional parties and the structural drift toward presidentialisation as parallel rather than causally connected phenomena. Efficiency arguments rarely engage the presidentialisation literature. Federalism critiques seldom incorporate behavioural findings on coattail effects into a broader theory of executive personalisation. Constitutional analyses of validity do not go further than the formal assessment of the relationship with the constitution’s basic structure and ignore the issue of the inner transformation of parliamentarism into presidentialism. The empirical literature on the impact of party salience and straight-ticket voting has recorded changes in behaviour but lacks a theoretical understanding of the effect on the nature of the system. This paper will attempt to bridge this gap. The main point here is that representation and structure effects are mutually reinforcing, in that presidentialization of the national election contest is the main cause of the exclusion of regional and local political voice. The paper establishes the missing causal connection between coattail behaviour results and the phenomenon of presidentialization, as well as placing both in the context of the original constitutional trade-off between stability and accountability. The aim of the paper is to make clear the democratic significance of subjecting temporal federalism to a national electoral timetable.

Consequently, three main findings emerge from the review. First, the efficiency argument, despite institutional prominence, is built on empirically controversial grounds and tends to ignore the costs of accountability. Second, studies of federalism and of behaviour demonstrate tangible dangers of narrative capture at the national level and loss of regional voices, although the exact degree of these risks requires further exploration. Third, the theory of presidentialization provides the missing theoretical connection that shows how representational damage leads to regime transformation. The following sections explore this connection through historical reconstitution, regional party politics analysis, and forced synchronisation effects.

III. The Constitutional and Historical Baseline

The constitutional design of India's parliamentary system and the historical experience of electoral synchronisation provide the essential baseline against which the One Nation, One Election proposal must be assessed (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Election Commission of India, n.d.). Two elements are central. The first is the deliberate choice of the parliamentary form by the Constituent Assembly, articulated most clearly by B.R. Ambedkar on 4 November 1948 (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The second is the subsequent organic breakdown of the simultaneous election cycle after 1967 (Election Commission of India, n.d.). Together they reveal a constitutional preference for continuous accountability over calendar stability, and they demonstrate that the post-1967 desynchronisation was not an accidental deviation from an ideal design but the predictable working of the confidence principle that the framers institutionalised (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The proposed Article 82A reverses that preference by constitutional fiat (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

On 4 November 1948, while moving the Draft Constitution for consideration, Ambedkar framed the central institutional choice facing the Assembly (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). A democratic executive must be both stable and responsible, yet no system secures both qualities in equal measure. The American and Swiss systems offered more stability but less responsibility; the British parliamentary system offered more responsibility but less stability. Ambedkar preferred the latter. A parliamentary executive dependent upon a majority in the legislature remains continuously accountable and can be removed the moment it loses the confidence of the House. A non-parliamentary executive independent of the legislature cannot be dismissed during a fixed term. The framers judged daily assessment more essential to democratic legitimacy in India than formal security of tenure. Articles 83 and 172 translated that judgment into institutional form (Kumar & Bedi, 2025). Both the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies receive a normal term of five years from the date of the first sitting, yet that term is not rigid. Either House may be dissolved earlier if the government loses the confidence of the House. The executive remains dependent on the continuous support of the legislature.

The historical record of electoral timing further illuminates the working of that principle (Election Commission of India, n.d.). Simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies were the prevailing practice from the first general elections of 1951–52 through the

elections of 1967. Four successive cycles, 1951–52, 1957, 1962 and 1967, were conducted on a largely synchronised calendar. The practice was facilitated by the dominance of a single national party at both levels and by the relative political stability of the early post-independence decades. It was never, however, constitutionally mandated (Kumar and Bedi, 2025). The terms of the Houses remained subject to earlier dissolution under the confidence principle, and the electoral calendar remained contingent on political developments.

The cycle fractured after 1967 (Election Commission of India, n.d.). The general elections of that year produced significant losses for the dominant party in several states. Coalition governments of varying composition were formed in a number of Assemblies. Many of these coalitions proved unstable. Between 1968 and 1969 several State Assemblies were dissolved prematurely, often after the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356. Fresh elections in those states fell out of alignment with the national cycle. In 1970 the Fourth Lok Sabha itself was dissolved prematurely, and mid term elections were held in 1971. The combination of state-level collapses and the early dissolution of the Lok Sabha produced the staggered calendar that has characterised Indian elections ever since. Subsequent decades of coalition politics, frequent recourse to Article 356, and the rise of strong regional parties further entrenched non-simultaneous elections (Kailash, 2017; Tillin, 2019). What began as an organic breakdown became the settled institutional practice of India's federal parliamentary democracy.

The post-1967 desynchronisation was therefore not a design flaw requiring correction. It was the predictable consequence of the constitutional architecture the framers had chosen (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). Because legislative terms remain subject to the confidence of the House, electoral cycles necessarily diverge when governments fall or are dismissed at different times (Kumar & Bedi, 2025). The staggered calendar is the institutional expression of continuous accountability operating within a multi-level federal system (Majid et al., 2026). Attempts to restore simultaneity by political consensus alone repeatedly encountered this structural reality (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). The current proposal seeks to overcome that reality by altering the constitutional rules themselves (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

The proposed Article 82A would empower the President to notify an appointed date after the first sitting of a newly elected Lok Sabha (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). Thereafter, the terms of all State Assemblies constituted after that date would be adjusted so as to expire concurrently with the Lok Sabha's five-year term. In cases of mid-term dissolution of either the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly, fresh elections would be held only for the residual portion of the original five-year term. The residual term device is intended to prevent permanent desynchronisation. Its effect, however, is to subordinate the confidence principle to the requirements of a fixed national electoral calendar (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). An Assembly whose government retains the confidence of the House may nevertheless have its term curtailed in order to align with the national cycle. An Assembly that loses confidence may be reconstituted only for a truncated residual term, after which it must again align with the national clock. These design choices raise questions of constitutional and institutional preparedness that go beyond formal compatibility with the basic structure and touch

the internal logic of continuous accountability. The continuous assessment logic that Ambedkar regarded as the distinctive advantage of the parliamentary system is thereby subordinated to calendar stability (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948).

These design choices set up the two problems examined next: the crowding-out of regional issue agendas in a compressed national campaign, and the further presidentialisation of a system already drifting toward leader-centric politics (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023). Localised issues that sustain regional parties, land, language, state-specific social arithmetic, regional grievances, and struggle for visibility within that compressed cycle (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Second, by introducing fixed-term and residual-term logic, the redesign moves the system closer to the presidential model that the Constituent Assembly deliberately rejected (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023; Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The daily assessment of responsibility is attenuated; the periodic, leader-centric assessment characteristic of presidential systems is strengthened (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023). The two effects are not parallel (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023). The presidentialisation of the national contest is the mechanism through which regional and local political voice is crowded out (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023).

The constitutional and historical baseline, therefore, yields a clear conclusion (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Election Commission of India, n.d.). The framers preferred responsibility to stability and institutionalised that preference through the confidence principle (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The post-1967 staggered calendar was the organic working of that principle within a federal system (Election Commission of India, n.d.). The proposed Article 82A resolves Ambedkar's 1948 trade-off unilaterally in favour of stability, without the deliberative weighing that the Assembly gave to the question (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). It does so by altering the terms on which State Assemblies hold their mandates and by converting simultaneous elections into a vehicle for national narrative capture (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). The sections that follow examine the representational and structural consequences of that conversion in detail (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023).

IV. National Narrative Capture: The Regional Party Problem

A single compressed national campaign cycle structurally disadvantages regional and minority oriented parties by concentrating media attention, organisational resources, and funding on the national contest (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Regional parties in India typically derive their electoral strength from localised, low salience issues, land rights, linguistic identity, state-specific caste and community arithmetic, regional economic grievances, and the performance of state governments on matters of daily administration (Kailash, 2017; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020; Tillin, 2019). These issues rarely survive intact within a fully nationalised news cycle organised around the personality, performance, and programmatic agenda of the central leadership (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023). The result is a form of national narrative capture in which state-level contests are converted into

second-order contests in Reif and Schmitt's (1980) sense—elections in which national cues weigh more because the first-order frame is supplied by the national race (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Majid et al., 2026). Congruent voting under simultaneity is consistent with that risk; it is not itself a test of the European model (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Schakel & Verdoes, 2025).

The mechanism begins with the structure of the campaign itself. In situations where state and national elections take place on different schedules, parties and the media have to balance attention and resources between several elections that happen separately from each other in terms of timing (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). In such cases, regional parties can dedicate their efforts to campaigning in a particular state where they participate in the election campaign, while national parties have to adapt their strategies in order to obtain more assembly seats (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). Full synchronisation means that all actors in the political process become concentrated in one period of time in order to conduct one single national campaign (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Majid et al., 2026). National television channels, internet resources and print media pay attention to the struggle for the central office. Party machineries, advertising budgets and star candidates are mobilised primarily on the national scale (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Local issues that lack national resonance struggle for airtime and organisational priority (Majid et al., 2026).

Empirical research on voter behaviour under conditions of simultaneity provides quantitative support for part of this dynamic, not for a mechanical collapse of regional vote share. Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) compare same-day national and state elections with sequential but proximate contests and estimate a 9.3 percentage-point rise in the probability that the same party wins the corresponding seats at both tiers (21.6 per cent of a 0.42 baseline). Survey respondents are 7.1 percentage points more likely to report same-party voting when the two elections are concurrent. The same-party vote-share gap across tiers narrows by 2.5 percentage points (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). These estimates establish higher party salience and higher congruence under simultaneity. They do not establish that national parties systematically gain at the expense of regional parties. Survey evidence in the same study is consistent with greater reliance on the party label when the two contests fall on the same day, as reflected in the 7.1 percentage-point rise in reported same-party voting (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). What the authors fail to do is distinguish a clear shift from "local issues" to "national leadership" as the first consideration as an interpretative act, not something in their tables (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). These changes in behaviour are, however, in line with cognitive limitations and information overload in multiple situations at once: Voters who have to make decisions about two important elections on one day use the most prominent heuristics available to them, that is, the party label (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025).

Implications for regional parties remain contested but serious. In Balasubramaniam et al. (2025), state and regional parties, not national parties, bring about the congruent win effect; in addition, state government incumbents become more likely to win both tiers of elections, whereas national incumbents do not (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). This is a true restriction on any claim about regional parties' automatic downfall. The argument of the present section thus remains more limited: while simultaneity

may lead to regional parties winning both tiers, the constrained national-level campaign focuses attention and resources on the national campaign, which is the context within which locally defined issue agendas become harder to defend (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). While regional parties are able to retain or even grow their vote share in individual states, the overall context of national narrative capture reduces the scope for the issue agendas of these parties (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020).

However, real-world patterns in India illustrate that there need not be a universal trend toward decline. In some cases, regional parties historically built electoral competition in a manner that revolved around locally-based issues of language, land, or social arithmetic, and have managed to retain substantial legislative seats despite highly contested national campaigns. Such examples illustrate that a distinct regional identity and strong local leadership can still help to shape election choice. This does not negate the systemic trend established in the behaviourist literature. Synchronisation boosts party salience, induces straight-ticket voting, and raises the probability of congruent results in both tiers (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). The danger is not that each and every regional party falls apart but that localised interests are systematically undervalued in the national debate.

This is not an issue of media focus. This also affects the internal distribution of resources within the party. National parties can subsidise their state campaigns from a single central kitty, whereas regional parties cannot do so (Kailash, 2014). During simultaneous election campaigns, the difference in organisational strength is exacerbated by the fact that the time available for campaigning is less, and the race for attention is fiercer (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Candidates of regional parties, therefore, have to struggle not only against their own state competitors but also against the gravity of the national election (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023). The result is a systematic under-representation of localised concerns in the electoral conversation.

How that compressed campaign becomes leader-centric, and why that shift matters for parliamentary form, is taken up in the next section (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023).

The strategic behaviour of at least one major regional incumbent is consistent with that reading of the campaign environment. In September 2018, the Government of Telangana recommended dissolution of the Legislative Assembly under Article 174(2)(b), several months before the end of its term, so that the state election would not coincide with the 2019 Lok Sabha contest (The Hindu, 2018). Contemporary reporting treated the decision as an attempt to prevent the state campaign from being absorbed into a national, leader-centric frame. The subsequent Assembly result cannot be read as a causal estimate of delinking. The episode is used only to show that a regional party treated simultaneity as a threat to the salience of state-level issues, the same mechanism at issue here (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025).

History provides only limited comfort regarding this experience. Even though the election process was synchronised back then, the party system was dominated by one national organisation with its regional affiliates working in the framework of an agreed program and organisational strategy (High Level

Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024). Today's party system is significantly more regionally differentiated and features state-based parties that depend on the importance of local issues for their survival (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). Obliging them to participate in a purely national election process changes the rules of political competition against their favour (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020).

Some commentators object to the argument of representational deficit with an argument that voters can distinguish between national and state-level contests even in the conditions of synchronisation, or that regional identity and strong local leaders can reduce nationalisation effects (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). While it may be true in specific cases, this observation does not refute the systemic trend noted in behavioural research: synchronisation leads to an increase in party salience, an increase in straight ticket voting, and the likelihood of congruence in results (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Under a first-past-the-post regime already predisposed towards majoritarian politics, these traits enhance the inherent advantage of parties with a presence across the country (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020).

It follows that the representation issue at hand cannot be considered only in terms of the mathematics of votes. It is an issue of agenda setting and political expression. In a context where the electoral cycle is truncated and nationalised, the issues relevant to voter decisions at the state level are systematically underrepresented (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). The regional parties that focus on these very issues become irrelevant actors in the democracy’s political pluralism (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). The federal nature of the party system – and hence an essential component of the federalism of the constitutional order – gets undermined (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). And this erosion is not simply a side effect of the process of administrative reform; it is an expected result of placing temporal federalism under the subjugation of a nationwide election schedule (Majid et al., 2026; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021).

V. Structural Drift: The Presidentialisation of the National Contest

The representational harm documented in the preceding section is inseparable from a deeper structural transformation: the progressive presidentialisation of India’s parliamentary democracy. Simultaneous elections accelerate this transformation by converting the national campaign into a leader-centric contest that functionally resembles a presidential referendum, even though no such office is constitutionally at stake (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023). The resulting drift resolves the stability responsibility trade-off that B. R. Ambedkar articulated in 1948 unilaterally in favour of stability, without the deliberative weighing the Constituent Assembly gave to the question (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948).

Comparative scholarship on the presidentialisation of politics identifies three interrelated dimensions of change that can occur within formally parliamentary systems: increasing leadership power and autonomy within the political executive; increasing leadership power and autonomy within political parties; and increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). These changes do not require a formal constitutional amendment to a presidential model. They arise from

shifts in institutional practice, party organisation, media structure, and electoral incentives that concentrate authority and attention on the individual leader rather than on the collective legislature or the party as a programmatic entity (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Comparative studies of parliamentary systems that have experienced similar leader-centric shifts under concurrent electoral calendars indicate that the absence of robust checks, such as independent legislative calendars or protected regional communicative spaces, accelerates the functional conversion of parliamentary contests into leader-focused referendums. Applied to India, the framework illuminates a long-running centralising drift in legislative-executive relations. Instruments such as the anti-defection provision, silences within the constitution regarding Speaker's autonomy and opposition rights, and the court's strengthening of the powers of party leaders have led to the emergence of a system where the parliamentary form coexists with presidential maladies without any balancing mechanisms (Bhatia, 2023). Modern-day campaigning also reinforces the point that, in contemporary times, national elections are treated as referendums about the personality and competence of the candidate for the Prime Minister's position, thus making them quasi-presidential (Bhatia, 2023).

One Nation, One Election increases the weight of each of these elements. Firstly, the logic of the residual term and fixed timing under Article 82A proposed reduces the principle of frequent assessment that Ambedkar held as the greatest strength of the parliamentary system (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). Even a government that maintains the confidence of the House will have to undergo a shorter residual term if so required by the national schedule; a government that lacks the confidence will have to be reconstituted only for the remainder of a pre-fixed cycle. The residual term provisions thus decrease the number of occasions when the government undergoes full popular assessment. This is not just an administrative concern. This is an institutional arrangement that impacts constitutional and institutional preparedness since it affects how continuous accountability functions in situations where the government happens to be sandwiched between the national election dates (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). The daily accountability championed by Ambedkar in the context of presidential systems is overridden by considerations of calendar consistency.

Secondly, the unified national election cycle allows for focus of media coverage, organisational efforts, and money on the national election race (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). This makes the process leader-oriented because it is the national contest that forms the main framework of interpretation, in contrast to multiple state-level races. The voters who are faced with voting for multiple elections will use the most prominent heuristic tool, which is national political party labels and their leaders, resulting in straight-ticket voting and congruent results (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). The coattails effect established in behavioural literature does not just remain as a statistical fact but as an actual consequence of presidentialisation. The national election serves as the most important indicator, whereas the state-level elections turn into secondary devices for communicating what has already been decided at the national level (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Majid et al., 2026).

Thirdly, a lack of temporal autonomy in state-level electoral cycles due to their total synchronisation with the national schedule limits the autonomous role of state elections as indicators of the state electorates' moods. With the staggered system, state-level elections have the capacity to register specific preferences of state electorates, punish or reward state governments according to their performance at the state level, and support regional parties who draw strength from issues of limited national importance (Majid et al., 2026). However, under total synchronisation, such autonomous signals will lose their value. Thus, the temporal dimension of India's federal structure will be replaced by a single rhythm dictated at the national level (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

This structural drift does not occur in isolation from the representational harm analysed earlier. The two phenomena are causally linked. A presidentialised national contest is precisely the mechanism through which regional and local political voice is crowded out (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). When the campaign is organised as a referendum on the central leadership, localised issues, land, language, state-specific social arithmetic, regional grievances, struggle for visibility and organisational priority (Majid et al., 2026). Regional parties whose electoral viability depends on those issues are structurally disadvantaged. The concentration of media, funding, and party machinery on the national contest simultaneously personalises the campaign around the leader and nationalises the agenda at the expense of regional differentiation (Bhatia, 2023; Majid et al., 2026). Representational harm and structural drift are therefore not parallel pathologies; the latter is the institutional vehicle of the former.

Ambedkar’s 1948 framing supplies the normative baseline against which this transformation must be judged. He insisted that a democratic executive must be both stable and responsible, acknowledged that no system secures both qualities in equal degree, and deliberately preferred the greater responsibility of the parliamentary model to the greater stability of the presidential alternative (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The daily assessment of responsibility available through questions, resolutions, no-confidence motions, and the continuous dependence of the executive on the confidence of the House was, in his view, far more effective and far more necessary in the Indian context than periodic assessment by the electorate alone (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The proposed synchronisation resolves that trade-off unilaterally in favour of stability. It does so by constitutional design rather than by the organic working of the confidence principle, and without the deliberative weighing the Assembly gave to the question (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

The efficiency arguments advanced in support of simultaneous elections, reduced expenditure, shorter periods under the Model Code of Conduct, and greater policy continuity rest on the premise that electoral timing is primarily an administrative variable whose optimisation yields net governance gains (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024). Those arguments underweight the accountability costs of insulating governments from mid-term loss of confidence and of converting the electoral process into a leader-centric national referendum (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Bhatia, 2023). Stability is viewed as an unequivocal positive, while the deliberative principle of responsibility that the founding fathers enshrined in the system is viewed as a contingent problem that must be engineered around.

Experience from other countries supports this wariness. Countries that have both synchronous elections and a proportional system, along with strong institutions protecting minority and regional interests, yield distributional outcomes that differ from the ones expected in the case of India's first-past-the-post system (Majid et al., 2026). In the Indian case, the lack of such institutions only makes the effects of the synchronisation even more pronounced. The formal preservation of the parliamentary setup does not preclude its functional evolution towards leader-centred, national politics (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023).

VI. Reading the Two Threads Together

The representational harm analysed in Section IV and the structural drift examined in Section V are not parallel phenomena. They are causally linked. A presidentialised national contest is the principal mechanism through which regional and local political voice is crowded out (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023). This causal connection constitutes the paper's central analytical contribution: it integrates two strands of critique that the existing literature has largely treated as separate, and it situates both within the original Constituent Assembly trade-off between stability and responsibility (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Poguntke & Webb, 2005).

The mechanism operates through the reorganisation of electoral attention and interpretive frames. Under full synchronisation, the national leadership contest becomes the dominant organising principle of the campaign (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Media coverage, organisational resources, and funding concentrate on the personality and performance of the central leadership (Bhatia, 2023; Majid et al., 2026). Under simultaneity, congruent outcomes rise: Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) estimate a 9.3 percentage-point increase in the probability that the same party wins corresponding seats at both tiers and a 7.1 percentage-point increase in reported same-party voting. That is the empirical anchor. The claim that this congruence is produced by a presidentialised national frame is the paper's causal interpretation, joining those estimates to the campaign-structure and executive-personalisation literature (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). That pattern is consistent with greater reliance on the party label as a heuristic. The further claim that the heuristic is specifically the national leadership figure is an interpretive link to the presidentialisation literature, not a coefficient estimated in that study (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023). Localised issues that sustain regional parties, land rights, linguistic identity, state-specific social arithmetic, regional economic grievances, and struggle for visibility within this compressed, nationalised cycle (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). Higher congruence under simultaneity is a statistical regularity in Balasubramaniam et al. (2025). Whether that regularity is a classic coattail from a national leader onto state candidates is less settled: the same study notes that leading coattail tests do not fully account for their result, and that regional and state parties drive part of the effect. The presidentialisation argument, therefore, uses the congruence finding as compatible evidence, not as proof that Indian simultaneous elections are already presidential referendums (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023). The national contest supplies the dominant frame; state-level contests become secondary vehicles for expressing a judgment already formed at the national level (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Poguntke & Webb, 2005).

This linkage clarifies why the efficiency case advanced in official reports is incomplete. Arguments for simultaneous elections emphasise reduced expenditure, shorter periods under the Model Code of Conduct, and greater policy continuity (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024). These claims treat electoral timing as an administrative variable whose optimisation yields net governance gains. They underweight the accountability costs of subordinating the continuous assessment principle to a fixed national calendar and the representational costs of converting state contests into second-order elections (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Majid et al., 2026). Even if measurable reductions in expenditure or shorter Model Code of Conduct periods materialise, these administrative gains must be weighed against potential long-term costs to regional autonomy, coalition flexibility, and the capacity of state-level electorates to register distinct preferences, dimensions central to the viability of any synchronised system in a diverse federation. When the campaign is organised as a functional presidential referendum, the issues that structure electoral choice at the state level are systematically underweighted. Regional parties that specialise in those issues find their distinctive contribution to democratic pluralism diminished (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020; Majid et al., 2026). The federal character of the party system, itself an important support for the federal character of the constitutional order, is thereby weakened (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

The historical record supplies a limited but instructive before-and-after comparison. Simultaneous elections prevailed from 1951–52 to 1967 under conditions of single-party dominance at both national and state levels (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024). The party system of that period featured state units operating within a broadly shared programmatic and organisational framework; regional differentiation was far less pronounced than in the contemporary multiparty system (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). The post-1967 desynchronisation arose from the organic working of the confidence principle: premature dissolutions of State Assemblies, often under Article 356, and the early dissolution of the Lok Sabha produced staggered calendars (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). In the subsequent decades, strong state-based parties emerged whose electoral viability depends on the continued salience of local issues (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). Forcing those parties into a fully nationalised campaign cycle alters the terms of political competition in ways that the earlier period of synchronisation did not fully anticipate (Majid et al., 2026). Systematic microdata on issue-voting divergence between the pre-1967 synchronised period and the post-1967 staggered period are not used in this paper. The 1951–67 calendar is treated as institutional history (High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024), not as a causal before–after design. The usable behavioural estimates are those of Balasubramaniam et al. (2025) for the later period in which both simultaneous and sequential-but-proximate contests are observed. The available behavioural evidence from the contemporary period indicates that synchronisation raises party salience and increases congruent voting across tiers (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Those tendencies do not, on the authors' own results, imply that national parties are the unique beneficiaries. They do imply a thicker party cue and a thinner space for split-ticket, tier-specific choice. Whether that space is filled by national or regional labels is context-dependent; whether local issues survive as the organising frame is the separate question this paper poses (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). The 2018 Telangana

dissolution is consistent with that interpretation at the level of political practice, not as an additional causal estimate. The incumbent regional party chose to forgo residual tenure rather than contest on the same day as the Lok Sabha election, a choice contemporaneous reporting linked to fear of a nationalised, leader-centric campaign.

The causal linkage also illuminates the normative stakes of the original constitutional choice. Ambedkar framed the central institutional decision as a trade-off between stability and responsibility, and the Assembly preferred the greater responsibility of the parliamentary model (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). Daily assessment through the continuous dependence of the executive on the confidence of the House was judged more effective and more necessary in the Indian context than the periodic assessment characteristic of presidential systems (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). One Nation, One Election resolves that trade-off unilaterally in favour of stability by constitutional design rather than by the organic working of the confidence principle (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). The residual term device and the subordination of state electoral cycles to a national calendar attenuate continuous assessment; the concentration of campaign attention on the national leadership intensifies leader-centric politics (Bhatia, 2023; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). The two effects reinforce each other. Presidentialisation of the national contest is the institutional vehicle through which regional and local political voice is crowded out; the crowding out of regional voice further concentrates political attention and organisational power around the national executive (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023).

Existing literature has tended to treat these consequences as parallel rather than causally connected. Efficiency arguments rarely engage the presidentialisation literature (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Federalism critiques seldom incorporate behavioural findings on coattail effects into a broader theory of executive personalisation (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Constitutional validity analyses often stop at formal compatibility with the basic structure rather than examining the internal transformation of parliamentary accountability (Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). The empirical literature on party salience and straight ticket voting documents behavioural shifts but does not fully theorise their implications for the character of the regime (Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). By placing electoral timing, coattail dynamics, and the original Constituent Assembly trade-off within a single analytical frame, the present paper seeks to close this gap. The representational and structural critiques compound rather than run parallel; the presidentialisation of the national contest is the mechanism that converts synchronisation into a vehicle for national narrative capture (Majid et al., 2026; Bhatia, 2023; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025).

This integrated reading has direct implications for the policy formulation aim stated in the call for papers. A purely oppositional conclusion is less useful than an analysis that identifies the specific institutional features through which harm is produced and, correspondingly, the safeguards that might mitigate it. The residual term device, the compression of the campaign cycle, and the absence of robust protections for regional agenda setting are the critical points of leverage (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Majid et al., 2026). Any design that seeks to realise the administrative benefits of

synchronisation while preserving regional and local political voice would need to address these features explicitly. Identifying the causal mechanism, presidentialisation producing narrative capture, clarifies the precise institutional features that any implementation strategy would need to address. The concluding section returns to this question after restating the compound character of the critique and the continuing relevance of Ambedkar's unresolved trade-off.

VII. Conclusion

This paper has advanced two interconnected claims. First, a single national campaign cycle structurally disadvantages regional and localised political voice by concentrating media attention, organisational resources, and interpretive frames on the national leadership contest (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). Second, the same institutional redesign accelerates the presidentialisation of India's parliamentary system, converting the electoral process into something functionally closer to a leader-centric referendum, even though no such office is constitutionally at stake (Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Bhatia, 2023). These are not parallel pathologies. They are causally linked. A presidentialised national contest is the principal mechanism through which regional and local issues are crowded out (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023). This causal connection is the paper's central analytical contribution.

The throughline of the argument is the unresolved trade-off that B. R. Ambedkar placed before the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1948. A democratic executive, he insisted, must be both stable and responsible; no system secures both qualities in equal degree, and the parliamentary model was preferred precisely because it offers greater responsibility through continuous assessment than the greater stability of the presidential alternative (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). The daily dependence of the executive on the confidence of the House was judged more effective and more necessary in the Indian context than periodic assessment by the electorate alone (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948). Articles 83 and 172 institutionalised that preference by making legislative terms subject to earlier dissolution when confidence is lost (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025). The post-1967 staggered calendar was the organic working of this principle within a multi-level federal system (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). One Nation, One Election resolves the 1948 trade-off unilaterally in favour of stability by constitutional design. The residual term device and the subordination of state electoral cycles to a uniform national calendar attenuate continuous assessment; the compression of the campaign cycle intensifies leader-centric politics (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar & Bedi, 2025; Bhatia, 2023). The deliberative weighing the Assembly gave to the question is replaced by an administrative preference for calendar uniformity (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024).

The empirical and comparative evidence reviewed in the preceding sections supports this reading. Synchronised contests raise party salience and congruent voting: a 9.3 percentage-point increase in same-party wins across corresponding seats (21.6 per cent of the 0.42 baseline) and a 7.1 percentage-point increase in survey-reported same-party voting, relative to sequential but proximate elections

(Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Those figures support a behavioural shift. They do not, by themselves, measure a loss of regional vote share. The compound critique, therefore, rests on joining that behavioural shift to the constitutional and campaign-structure argument, not on an unsubstantiated claim that ONOE has already been shown to erase regional parties. National narrative capture reduces the space for the localised issues on which regional parties depend (Majid et al., 2026; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020). The centralising drift in legislative executive relations, already visible in anti-defection rules, constitutional silences, and campaign practice, is reinforced by the fixed calendar logic of the proposed reform (Bhatia, 2023; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Efficiency arguments that emphasise cost reduction and policy continuity underweight these accountability and representational costs (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021). The historical experience of 1951–67 offers limited reassurance: the party system of that period was far less regionally differentiated than the contemporary multiparty system, and the subsequent desynchronisation arose from the confidence principle rather than from administrative failure (High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, 2024; Aiyar & Sircar, 2020).

A purely oppositional conclusion is less useful to the policy formulation aim stated in the call for papers than an analysis that identifies the specific institutional features through which harm is produced and, correspondingly, the safeguards that might mitigate it. There are three leverages that arise from the above discussion. All of them could be regarded as part of an implementation strategy rather than as a rejection of simultaneity as such.

The first is the residual term approach. In fixing new elections to take place after mid-term dissolution only until the end of the pre-set five-year term, the system has made the calendar rather than the confidence a priority (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021; Kumar and Bedi, 2025). The implementation strategy that aims to ensure the continuation of continuous accountability would still allow for full-term reconvention of parliament in case of a collapse of the government, even if only temporarily. Flexible terms of the legislature, not residual terms, have been recommended as a more constitutionally sound solution (Shrotriya & Pachauri, 2021).

The second area that needs urgent intervention is that of the compression of the campaign cycle itself. National narrative capture occurs because of the concentration of media, resources, and organisational energy in one national window (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025). Some measures that can be taken to deal with this problem may include legally mandated restrictions on how long and where national spending on campaigns takes place, legal mandate for broadcasting time for state level concerns during concurrent elections, and institutional assistance for state-level electoral commissions to ensure the creation of separate communicative space even when there is one calendar (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar & Bedi, 2025).

Third, the lack of effective protection of regional agenda-setting within the context of a first-past-the-post system. The experience of other systems indicates that simultaneous election holds various distributional effects when combined with proportional representation and the presence of institutional

measures protecting the interests of minorities and regions (Majid et al., 2026). Such measures are absent in the Indian electoral process. In case an attempt is made to combine simultaneity of the elections with preserving regional political voice, it will require additional reform of the election campaign process and access to the media that guarantees the ability of state parties to put regional agendas forward (Aiyar & Sircar, 2020; Majid et al., 2026). Without it, the inherent advantages of nationally-based parties will remain intact.

They are not without costs, however, and designing such measures in practice will need empirical and institutional inquiry, which falls outside the scope of this paper. The idea here is not to provide a full alternative architecture, but to stress that the democratic costs of synchronization cannot be reduced to constitutional validity issues. They extend to the internal transformation of parliamentary accountability and to the conditions under which regional and local political voice can be sustained within a multi level system (Bhatia, 2023; Majid et al., 2026; Kumar and Bedi, 2025). A reform justified solely by administrative efficiency risks resolving Ambedkar's trade-off in a manner the Assembly itself declined to endorse (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948).

The paper therefore concludes that the representational and structural critiques of One Nation, One Election compound rather than run parallel. Presidentialisation of the national contest is the mechanism of national narrative capture; national narrative capture is the electoral expression of presidentialisation (Majid et al., 2026; Balasubramaniam et al., 2025; Bhatia, 2023). Both effects subordinate the continuous assessment principle that the framers institutionalised to a preference for calendar stability that they deliberately weighed and did not prioritise (Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948; Shrotriya and Pachauri, 2021). Any serious engagement with the proposal must therefore confront not only the fiscal and logistical arguments advanced in its favour, but the deeper question of what kind of democratic system is being produced when temporal federalism is subordinated to a uniform national electoral rhythm (Majid et al., 2026; Kumar and Bedi, 2025). The safeguards sketched above indicate directions in which that confrontation might productively proceed. They do not resolve the tension Ambedkar left unresolved. They do, however, refuse the unilateral resolution of that tension in favour of stability alone. Clarifying these conditions contributes to the knowledge base required for policy formulation that can enhance, rather than diminish, the plural and multilevel character of India's democracy.

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Author contributions

Both authors (author-1, author-2) conceived, researched, and wrote the manuscript. All work, including analysis and final approval.

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