



Electoral Behaviour Under Simultaneous Elections in India: A Comparative Analysis of National and Regional Voting Preferences Within the One Nation, One Election Framework

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ABSTRACT

The proposition of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) in India has generated considerable scholarly and policy debate since the Ram Nath Kovind High-Level Committee formally recommended its implementation in March 2024. This paper investigates how simultaneous conduct of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections may reshape electoral behaviour, specifically examining the phenomenon of ticket-splitting, coattail effects, and identity-based partisan alignment. Drawing on primary survey data collected from 3,240 respondents across six states Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Telangana and triangulated with secondary data from Election Commission of India records (1967–2024), Lokniti-CSDS surveys, and Vidhan Sabha results, the study finds that simultaneous elections systematically suppress regional party vote shares by approximately 7–12 percentage points, while national party premia increase correspondingly. Voters demonstrate measurable coattail dependency when both elections are held concurrently, with 64.3% of respondents indicating they would choose identical or allied parties across both ballots. However, this tendency is significantly moderated by state-specific identity variables caste, linguistic identity, and regional economic grievances particularly in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Telangana. The paper argues that ONOE, if implemented, carries profound implications for India's federal character and for the representative quality of state legislatures. It concludes with recommendations for institutional safeguards that might preserve genuine bifurcation of voter choice.

Keywords: One Nation One Election; simultaneous elections; coattail effect; ticket-splitting; Indian federalism; electoral behaviour; regional parties; Lok Sabha; Vidhan Sabha

1. Introduction

India's democratic architecture rests upon a dual electoral system wherein the national parliament (Lok Sabha) and twenty-eight state legislative assemblies (Vidhan Sabhas) are elected at separate intervals, governed by the Representation of the People Act, 1951. This disjunction was an unintended consequence of the Emergency of 1975–77 and subsequent mid-term dissolutions that broke the synchrony that originally obtained during the first three general elections (1952, 1957, 1962). Today, the country is perpetually in some state of electoral mobilisation, prompting demands for rationalisation.



The ONOE proposal, revived with force after 2014 and institutionalised through the Kovind Committee Report of 2024, seeks to hold national and all state elections simultaneously on a fixed five-year cycle. Proponents cite reduced expenditure estimated at Rs. 4,500 crore per election cycle diminished policy paralysis caused by the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), and administrative efficiency [1]. Critics, by contrast, warn that ONOE would cannibalise regional electoral identities, weaken federalism, and impose a presidential-style 'national narrative' on state-level contests [2].

What is conspicuously absent from this debate is rigorous empirical analysis of how voters actually behave when they receive two ballots simultaneously. The historical precedent of 1967 the last election in which most states voted alongside the Lok Sabha remains understudied. Equally, the international literature on concurrent elections (Germany, Sweden, United States) offers testable hypotheses about coattail effects and split-ticket voting that have not been systematically applied to the Indian case.

This paper fills that gap. It examines three central questions: (i) Does simultaneity increase the probability that a voter will support the same party or alliance across both ballots? (ii) How do state-specific identity variables moderate this tendency? (iii) What are the differential impacts on national versus regional party vote shares under concurrent electoral conditions?

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature. Section 3 presents the research methodology and data sources. Section 4 analyses historical election data from 1967–2024. Section 5 presents primary survey findings. Section 6 discusses implications for federalism and electoral integrity. Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Coattail Effects: International Evidence

The phenomenon whereby a strong presidential or prime ministerial candidate 'pulls' lower-level candidates of the same party to victory is termed the coattail effect. Campbell (1960) was among the first to document this systematically in American midterm elections, demonstrating that the absence of a presidential contest suppressed congressional support for the president's party [3]. Kernell (1977) later extended this to show that concurrent elections amplify partisan voting relative to off-cycle contests [4].

In the German context, where federal (Bundestag) and Länder elections frequently overlap, Dinkel (1977) and later Hough and Jeffery (2006) found that state governments belonging to the federal governing party receive approximately 3–5 percentage points more votes when their elections coincide with federal ones [5, 6]. This 'Mitregierungseffekt' (co-governance effect) is instructive for India, though the German two-vote system formally separates constituency and party votes in ways that differ from India's first-past-the-post arrangement.

Shachar and Nalebuff (1999) constructed a game-theoretic model in which simultaneous elections reduce information costs for voters, thereby increasing turnout but also reducing the independence of lower-level choices [7]. Their model predicts that national-level party cues dominate when cognitive load is high precisely the condition ONOE would create for Indian voters who receive multiple ballots covering hundreds of candidates.

2.2 Ticket-Splitting and Dual Identity in Indian Elections

The Indian voter has demonstrated a sophisticated capacity for ticket-splitting choosing one party for the Lok Sabha and another for the Vidhan Sabha that reflects the layered nature of political identity in the country. Kumar and Alam (2019) analysed 34 state elections held within six months of a Lok Sabha election between 1991 and 2019 and found that split-ticket voting was most pronounced in states with strong regional parties: Tamil Nadu (AIADMK/DMK), West Bengal (TMC), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (TDP/YSRCP/TRS), and Odisha (BJD) [8].

Yadav (1999) introduced the concept of 'second democratic upsurge' to describe the empowerment of OBC communities through regional parties in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar during the 1990s [9]. This structural shift fundamentally altered the relationship between national and sub-national electoral behaviour. Where the national Congress system once dominated both arenas, a bifurcation emerged in which national and state elections came to reflect different aggregations of social coalition.

Palshikar and Suri (2014) coined the concept of the 'regionalisation of party systems' to characterise the post-1990 trend in which state-level party systems became increasingly autonomous from national trends [10]. They demonstrate that this regionalisation was most advanced in the South (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh) and the East (West Bengal, Odisha), and least advanced in the Hindi Heartland where the BJP's rise after 2014 re-nationalised electoral contests.

2.3 Historical Precedent: Simultaneous Elections in India, 1952–1967

India conducted simultaneous Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections in 1952, 1957, and 1962, and largely in 1967 as well (with some exceptions). The Congress Party's near-monopoly during this period makes it difficult to isolate the effect of simultaneity per se. However, Singh (2011) has shown that even during the Congress era, state elections produced meaningfully different outcomes in terms of the composition of opposition when held near a general election, compared to mid-cycle [11].

The 1967 election is the most analytically rich case because it represents the first competitive multiparty cycle. Weiner (1967) observed that anti-Congress coalitions at the state level performed better in states where the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) movement had developed an independent organisational identity, rather than relying purely on anti-incumbency coattails [12]. This suggests that even under simultaneity, organisational strength can counter coattail pressures a finding with direct relevance to the ONOE debate today.

2.4 Research Gaps and the Present Study's Contribution

Despite the growing literature, four gaps remain. First, no study has used primary survey data specifically designed to elicit simultaneous-election preferences from contemporary Indian voters. Second, cross-state comparative analyses that control for identity variables are rare. Third, the Kovind Committee's own report is light on empirical electoral behaviour evidence, relying predominantly on governance and fiscal arguments. Fourth, the literature has not adequately quantified the differential impact on regional versus national party vote shares. This paper addresses all four gaps.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods design combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative electoral data. It uses a comparative cross-sectional framework that treats the six selected states as units of analysis, with electoral behaviour as the dependent variable and simultaneity as the primary treatment condition. The design follows the methodological template proposed by Lijphart (1971) for the comparative study of 'most different' political systems to control for state-level heterogeneity [13].

3.2 Primary Data: Survey Methodology

A structured survey instrument was administered to 3,240 respondents across six states between October and December 2024. The survey was designed in consultation with the Lokniti Programme, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi. States were selected to maximise variance across five axes: region (North, West, South, East), linguistic identity, dominant caste coalition, incumbency status, and party system type (nationalised vs. regionalised).

Table 1: Sample Distribution Across States

State	Sample Size	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	SC/ST (%)	OBC (%)
Uttar Pradesh	720	36%	64%	52%	48%	22.4	42.1
Maharashtra	540	48%	52%	51%	49%	13.2	32.4
Tamil Nadu	540	44%	56%	50%	50%	19.8	68.0
Rajasthan	480	32%	68%	53%	47%	26.3	41.5
West Bengal	480	40%	60%	51%	49%	29.1	8.3
Telangana	480	46%	54%	52%	48%	19.2	51.4
Total	3,240	41.2%	58.8%	51.5%	48.5%	21.6	40.5

Source: Primary survey by authors, 2024. Sample stratified by district-level population weight.

The survey instrument comprised 48 questions covering: (a) current voting intention under separate election conditions; (b) stated voting preference under simultaneous election conditions; (c) party identification strength; (d) issue salience rankings; (e) identity self-classification (caste, language, religion); and (f) socio-economic background. A specific experimental module asked respondents to rank order their party preferences first under the assumption of separate elections and then under simultaneous election conditions, enabling



direct measurement of preference change. The instrument was translated into seven regional languages and pre-tested with a pilot sample of 240 respondents.

3.3 Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data was drawn from four principal sources. The Election Commission of India's Statistical Reports on General Elections to the House of the People (volumes 1952–2024) and State Legislative Assemblies provided constituency-level vote share data. The Lokniti-CSDS National Election Study (NES) datasets for 1996, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, and 2024 provided attitudinal panel data on voter identity and party preference. ADR India's candidate affidavit database (2004–2024) was used for candidate background analysis. Additionally, the Report of the High Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (Kovind Committee), 2024 provided institutional and fiscal data [14].

3.4 Analytical Methods

Quantitative analysis employed: (i) descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation for survey responses; (ii) binary logistic regression to model the probability of ticket-splitting; (iii) ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to estimate party vote share differentials under concurrent versus staggered election conditions from historical data; (iv) difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation using states that held simultaneous elections in 1967 and 1972 as a natural experiment; and (v) factor analysis on identity variables to construct composite indices. All statistical analysis was conducted in STATA 17 and R 4.3. Qualitative analysis of focus group discussions conducted in three districts per state (18 total) employed thematic coding using ATLAS.ti.

4. Historical Analysis: Electoral Data 1967–2024

4.1 Divergence Trends Between Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha Outcomes

The post-1977 era reveals a systematic and widening gap between national and state electoral outcomes. To quantify this, we compute a 'National-State Divergence Index' (NSDI) for each state defined as the absolute difference in vote share between the leading national party's Lok Sabha result and its Vidhan Sabha result when the two elections occur within a 12-month window. A higher NSDI indicates that voters are making meaningfully different choices across the two arenas.

Table 2: National-State Divergence Index for Six States (Selected Election Cycles)

State	1967 (Simult.)	1984	1999	2009	2014	2019	2024
Uttar Pradesh	3.1	8.2	14.6	11.3	6.4	9.2	10.8
Maharashtra	2.8	6.4	12.1	9.8	7.2	8.1	11.3
Tamil Nadu	4.2	18.6	29.4	31.2	38.7	40.1	41.6
Rajasthan	2.6	7.1	10.2	8.9	4.1	7.4	8.8

State	1967 (Simult.)	1984	1999	2009	2014	2019	2024
West Bengal	3.4	12.2	18.3	22.1	28.6	32.4	34.2
Telangana	N/A	N/A	N/A	16.4	21.3	24.8	27.1

Source: Authors' calculation from ECI Statistical Reports, 1967–2024. 1967 figures are for undivided Andhra Pradesh for present Telangana area. Higher values indicate greater divergence.

Table 2 reveals three critical findings. First, divergence was lowest in 1967, the last genuine simultaneous election cycle suggesting that simultaneity does compress divergence. Second, Southern and Eastern states (Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Telangana) show dramatically higher divergence indices by 2024, reflecting the maturation of regional party systems. Third, the 2014 Modi wave produced a temporary reduction in NSDI in North Indian states, demonstrating how strong national-level presidential-style campaigns can partially override state-level preferences even in staggered elections.

4.2 Regional Party Performance: Concurrent vs. Staggered Elections

A key empirical claim of ONOE proponents is that simultaneous elections reduce governance disruption without necessarily distorting electoral outcomes. This claim is examined through a DiD analysis exploiting the natural experiment of the 1967 (simultaneous) and 1972 (staggered) elections, using constituency-level data from 11 states for which complete records are available.

Table 3: DiD Estimates—Regional Party Vote Share Differential (1967 vs. 1972)

State/Party	1967 (Simult.) LS%	1967 (Simult.) VS%	1972 (Staggered) LS%	1972 (Staggered) VS%	DiD Estimate
TN – DMK	27.8	40.6	25.1	48.3	+10.4*
WB – Bangla Congress	12.4	18.2	8.9	19.1	+2.6
UP – SSP	18.6	22.1	14.3	19.8	+1.2
Maharashtra – PWP	7.2	11.4	5.4	12.9	+3.3*
Rajasthan – Swatantra	14.1	17.3	9.8	14.2	-0.8

Source: ECI Statistical Reports. DiD = $(VS_{072} - LS_{072}) - (VS_{067} - LS_{067})$. * $p < 0.05$.

The DiD estimates indicate that in the staggered 1972 elections, regional parties gained significantly more from the separation between Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha polls, particularly where they had a strong organisational base (DMK in Tamil Nadu, PWP in Maharashtra). This provides historical validation for the hypothesis that simultaneity suppresses regional party performance.

4.3 Voter Turnout Patterns and Simultaneity

A secondary analysis of turnout data across election cycles reveals that simultaneously held elections produce higher aggregate turnout. The mean Vidhan Sabha turnout during years coinciding with general elections (1952–1967) was 63.4%, compared to 58.1% for standalone state elections between 1968 and 2004. However, post-2004, this gap narrows to approximately 2 percentage points as ECI's voter awareness campaigns and NOTA introduction increased participation in standalone elections. The turnout premium for simultaneous elections therefore cannot alone justify ONOE from a democratic participation standpoint, particularly given the distributional complexity of simultaneous ballots.

5. Primary Survey Findings

5.1 Baseline Voting Preferences: Separate vs. Simultaneous Conditions

The core experimental finding of the survey is that simultaneous election framing significantly increases the probability that respondents choose the same party or alliance for both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. Under the 'separate election' scenario, 42.7% of respondents indicated identical party preference for both levels. Under the 'simultaneous election' framing, this proportion rose to 64.3% an increase of 21.6 percentage points. This finding holds across all six states, though the magnitude varies considerably.

Table 4: Proportion of Respondents Choosing Same Party for Both Arenas

State	Separate Elections (%)	Simultaneous Elections (%)	Percentage Point Change	Significance (p-value)
Uttar Pradesh	51.4	72.8	+21.4	< 0.001
Maharashtra	44.6	65.1	+20.5	< 0.001
Tamil Nadu	29.3	44.7	+15.4	< 0.001
Rajasthan	52.1	73.4	+21.3	< 0.001
West Bengal	33.2	51.6	+18.4	< 0.001
Telangana	36.8	55.2	+18.4	< 0.001
All States (Pooled)	42.7	64.3	+21.6	< 0.001

Source: Primary survey, 2024. Chi-square tests with Bonferroni correction applied for multiple comparisons.

Importantly, Tamil Nadu shows the lowest same-party alignment even under simultaneous conditions (44.7%), reflecting the deep entrenchment of regional party identity in that state. West Bengal and Telangana similarly show below-average alignment. By contrast, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan states where national party systems have largely displaced regional alternatives following the 2014–2019 BJP consolidation show the highest alignment rates (72.8% and 73.4% respectively).

5.2 Party-Level Vote Share Shifts Under Simultaneous Conditions

Respondents were asked to indicate their party choice for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha separately under each scenario. The party-level aggregation of these responses reveals the distributional consequences of simultaneity for national versus regional parties.

Table 5: Estimated Vote Share Change for National vs. Regional Parties Under Simultaneous Election Framing (All States Pooled)

Party Category	Separate Election —LS %	Simultaneous —LS %	Separate Election —VS %	Simultaneous —VS %	VS Gain/Loss
National Parties (BJP+INC)	58.4	60.1	44.2	51.6	+7.4
Regional/State Parties	28.6	26.3	42.8	35.4	-7.4
Others/Independents	13.0	13.6	13.0	13.0	0.0

Source: Primary survey, 2024. Figures reflect stated vote intention. LS = Lok Sabha; VS = Vidhan Sabha.

The data show a 7.4 percentage point loss for regional and state parties in the Vidhan Sabha vote under simultaneous election conditions, with a corresponding gain for national parties. This is a substantial effect: in the 2024 General Elections, the combined vote share of all regional and state parties in Lok Sabha was approximately 31.2% [15]. A 7.4 point compression would eliminate nearly a quarter of their collective vote, with potentially catastrophic implications for seat shares given India's first-past-the-post system.

5.3 Ticket-Splitting Behaviour and Determinants

Binary logistic regression was used to identify predictors of ticket-splitting defined as choosing different parties for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha under the simultaneous election framing. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6: Binary Logistic Regression—Predictors of Ticket-Splitting Under Simultaneous Election Conditions

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Odds Ratio	S.E.	p-value
Regional Identity (High)	0.84	2.32	0.11	< 0.001
State Party Preference (Strong)	1.12	3.06	0.14	< 0.001
Education: Tertiary (vs. Primary)	-0.31	0.73	0.09	< 0.01
Urban Residence	-0.22	0.80	0.08	< 0.01
Age (per year)	0.02	1.02	0.004	< 0.001
SC/ST Identity	0.44	1.55	0.12	< 0.001
Issue: Local Governance Salient	0.67	1.95	0.10	< 0.001
State: Tamil Nadu (ref: UP)	0.92	2.51	0.19	< 0.001
State: West Bengal	0.73	2.07	0.18	< 0.001
State: Telangana	0.61	1.84	0.17	< 0.001
Constant	-1.24	--	0.22	< 0.001

Source: Authors' regression analysis on primary survey data. $N = 3,240$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.38$; Hosmer-Lemeshow $\chi^2 = 9.12$, $p = 0.33$.

The regression findings are substantively important. Strong regional identity is the most powerful predictor of ticket-splitting ($OR = 2.32$), followed by strong state party preference ($OR = 3.06$). Local governance salience when voters prioritise issues like water supply, roads, and local employment also significantly increases ticket-splitting ($OR = 1.95$), suggesting that issue-based voting may partially counteract coattail pressures. Notably, higher education and urban residence are associated with lower ticket-splitting, which runs counter to intuition: this may reflect the dominance of national-level media consumption and national political narratives among urban educated voters, consistent with Norris and Inglehart's (2019) findings on media globalisation and political alignment [16].

5.4 Issue Salience and Its Interaction with Simultaneous Election Framing

Focus group discussions revealed a consistent qualitative pattern: when respondents were prompted to think about state-level governance issues electricity supply, education quality, public distribution system they more frequently articulated differentiated party preferences for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. When the framing shifted to national issues national security,

economic growth, Prime Ministerial leadership the frequency of same-party preferences increased markedly. This suggests that ONOE's electoral campaign environment would likely be dominated by national narratives, marginalising state-level issue salience.

Table 7: Issue Salience and Party Differentiation in Simultaneous Election Framing (Focus Group Analysis)

Issue Salience Category	% Choosing Same Party (Both Arenas)	% Choosing Different Party	Sample (FGD Groups)
National Issues Dominant	71.4	28.6	9 groups
State/Local Issues Dominant	48.2	51.8	9 groups

Source: Thematic analysis of 18 focus group discussions across six states, 2024. Each group comprised 10–12 respondents.

5.5 Caste, Language and the Limits of Coattail Effects

The survey's identity module reveals that caste-based and linguistic identity variables significantly moderate the coattail effect. In Tamil Nadu, linguistic identity (Tamil pride) is the dominant moderator: 74.3% of respondents with high Tamil linguistic identity preference maintained differentiated party choices even under simultaneous framing, compared to 53.1% of those with low linguistic identity salience. In West Bengal, anti-incumbency toward the state government and the Bengali bhadralok cultural identity both served as strong moderating variables. In Telangana, Telangana regional identity forged through the statehood movement remains a powerful driver of ticket-splitting (OR = 1.84 in regression; see Table 6).

These findings point to a fundamental limitation of the coattail hypothesis when applied to India's extraordinary socio-political diversity: where regional identities are institutionalised in party organisations with decades of mobilisation history, the nationalising pressure of simultaneity is significantly attenuated. The national party premium under ONOE would therefore be uneven across states decisive in the Hindi Heartland, marginal in the South and East.

6. Discussion: Implications for Federalism and Electoral Quality

6.1 Federalism and the Suppression of Regional Voices

India's federalism is nominally cooperative but structurally asymmetric: Article 356, centrally controlled paramilitary forces, fiscal dependence through the Finance Commission, and the dominance of national electronic media all tilt power toward New Delhi. The only arenas in which regional political actors genuinely exercise autonomous power are state assemblies and the state-level voter choice that produces them. If ONOE systematically compresses regional party vote shares by 7–12 percentage points, as the evidence suggests, it would function as a structural constraint on federalism that does not require any amendment to Part XI of the Constitution.



Scholars of Indian federalism Sharma (2004), Tillin (2013), and Saez (2002) have documented the gradual 'refederalisation' of India since the 1990s through the empowerment of state governments, particularly under coalition arrangements at the Centre [17, 18, 19]. ONOE, by re-nationalising electoral dynamics, threatens to reverse this tendency and restore the electoral conditions more closely approximating the single-party dominance of the Nehruvian era, but without the institutional safeguards of that period.

6.2 Electoral Quality and Voter Autonomy

From an electoral quality perspective, the core concern is whether ONOE would reduce the practical autonomy of voters to make independently reasoned choices about national and state governance. The survey data strongly indicate that a significant proportion of voters (21.6 percentage points more under simultaneous framing) would exercise less differentiated choice, not because their preferences had changed but because the cognitive and information environment would shift. This is a form of structural preference manipulation that, while technically voluntary, operates through changes in choice architecture rather than deliberation. Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) concept of 'choice architecture' is relevant here: the design of the election simultaneous versus staggered effectively nudges voters toward a particular behavioural pattern [20]. In the ONOE framework, the nudge is systematically advantageous to national parties, raising questions about the neutrality that elections as a democratic institution are meant to embody.

6.3 Administrative Feasibility and the Transition Problem

Beyond electoral behaviour, the transition to ONOE poses severe administrative challenges that the Kovind Committee report does not adequately resolve. The committee recommends a two-phase transition wherein Lok Sabha and some state elections are synchronised in Phase I (2029), with remaining states added in Phase II (2031). This would require either curtailing the tenure of incumbent state governments by up to three years or extending them both constitutionally problematic or conducting multiple simultaneous elections in the transition phases, which would itself create a period of heightened coattail effects before the system stabilises.

The logistics of simultaneous elections for over 900 million registered voters across 543 Lok Sabha and approximately 4,100 Vidhan Sabha constituencies would require an unprecedented deployment of EVMs, security personnel, and election officials. The Election Commission's own internal assessments, reported in parliamentary testimony, suggest a minimum of 12–18 months of additional preparation time and capital expenditure in the range of Rs. 8,000–10,000 crore for EVM acquisition alone [21].

6.4 Recommendations for Institutional Safeguards

If ONOE is to be implemented without undermining the representative quality of state legislatures, several institutional safeguards merit consideration. First, a mandatory 'State Issues Period' of four weeks preceding a simultaneous election during which national campaign spending and national leader appearances in state constituencies are restricted could help preserve state-level issue salience in campaign discourse. Second, different ballot designs (colour, size, sequence randomisation) that reduce the visual and cognitive conflation of



national and state choices could partially attenuate coattail effects. Third, a Constitutional guarantee that state assemblies dissolved under President's Rule for reasons other than natural tenure expiry would automatically hold a fresh independent state election, rather than waiting for the next synchronised cycle, would preserve the right of voters to express fresh state-level preferences.

7. Conclusion

This paper has provided the first systematic empirical examination of electoral behaviour under simultaneous election conditions in contemporary India, combining primary survey data from 3,240 respondents across six states with historical analysis of election data from 1967 to 2024. The findings point to three main conclusions.

First, simultaneity has a powerful nationalising effect on voter behaviour: the proportion of voters choosing identical parties for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha increases by approximately 21.6 percentage points under concurrent election conditions. This is not an artefact of party preference but of the choice architecture created by simultaneity itself. Second, this effect is significantly moderated by regional identity, state party organisation strength, and the salience of local governance issues factors that explain why Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Telangana show much lower alignment than Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Third, the aggregate consequence for regional parties is a loss of approximately 7–12 percentage points in Vidhan Sabha vote share, which, through first-past-the-post seat conversion, could translate into the near-elimination of regional parties from several state legislatures.

These findings have significant implications for the ONOE debate. The governance efficiencies claimed for simultaneous elections reduced Model Code of Conduct periods, lower election expenditure, administrative rationalisation are real and non-trivial. But they must be weighed against the structural electoral costs: the compression of regional voices, the reduction of voter autonomy in state-level choice, and the potential reversal of India's hard-won federal rebalancing since the 1990s. Future research should examine micro-level constituency data from the 1967 simultaneous elections with more granular social identity data, and should model the seat-share rather than just vote-share implications of the differential ONOE effect using simulation methods.

India's democracy has thrived, in considerable measure, because it has accommodated extraordinary diversity through decentralised electoral competition. Any reform that structurally advantages national parties at the expense of state-level representation deserves careful, evidence-based scrutiny precisely the kind this paper has sought to provide.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument (Abridged)

The following represent the key experimental questions from the survey instrument used in primary data collection:

Q1. [Separate condition] If Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections were held at different times, which party would you vote for in:

(a) Lok Sabha;

(b) Vidhan Sabha?

[Party list provided by state]

Q2. [Simultaneous condition] If both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections were held on the same day and you received both ballots together, which party would you choose for:

(a) Lok Sabha;

(b) Vidhan Sabha?

Q3. On a scale of 1–5, how strongly do you identify with [state/regional identity] vs. [national identity]?

Q4. Which issues matter most to you when choosing your Vidhan Sabha representative?

(Rank up to 3: local roads, electricity, water supply, law and order, education, employment, national security, inflation)

Q5. Have you ever voted for different parties in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections?

[Yes / No / First-time voter]

Appendix B: State-Wise Regression Outputs

Full regression outputs by state are available from the corresponding author on request. Key state-level variations in the predictors of ticket-splitting are summarised in Table B1 below.

Table B1: Key Predictors of Ticket-Splitting by State (Odds Ratios, Simultaneous Condition)

State	Regional Identity (OR)	State Party Pref. (OR)	Local Issue Salience (OR)	N
Uttar Pradesh	1.62*	2.14*	1.44*	720
Maharashtra	1.88*	2.61*	1.72*	540
Tamil Nadu	3.41*	4.02*	2.38*	540
Rajasthan	1.54*	2.01*	1.39*	480
West Bengal	2.76*	3.44*	2.01*	480
Telangana	2.43*	3.11*	1.94*	480

* $p < 0.05$. OR = Odds Ratio. All models control for age, education, gender, urban/rural residence.