Concerns with simultaneous elections

Why in news?

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- Union government is clear with its stand on simultaneous elections to Parliament and all State Assemblies.
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- But the case for holding simultaneous elections in the diverse, federal Indian polity is weak.
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What are reasons cited by government for single election?

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- Massive expenditure would be reduced.
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- Diversion of security and civil staff from primary duties is avoided.
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- Impact on governance due to the model code of conduct will be less.
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- Disruption to normal public life will be addressed.
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What the concerns with the reasons for single election?

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- **The cost factor -**The Election Commission incurs a total cost of roughly Rs. 8,000 crore to conduct all State and federal elections in a span of five years, or roughly Rs. 1,500 crore every year.
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- To put this in context, all the States and the Centre combined incurred an

expenditure of nearly Rs. 30 lakh crore in FY2014.
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- Which is about 0.05% of India's total annual expenditure, and it is not a large price to pay for world's largest and most vibrant electoral democracy.
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- The notion that elections are prohibitively expensive is false and misleading.
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- **Code of conduct and polls -**The model code of conduct for elections was agreed by political parties in 1979, and prohibits the ruling party from incurring capital expenditure for certain projects after elections are announced.
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- If India is indeed embarking on a path of "cooperative federalism", then more such projects will be undertaken by each State and not by the Centre.
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- If all political parties still feel the need to reform the code, they are free to do so. The solution is to reform the code and not the electoral cycle.
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- **Governance paralysis**- Paralysis of the government due to State elections is a mere excuse.
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- The real reason is that the two national parties are excessively dependent on their national leaders' campaigns in State elections,
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- Depending on their national leaders is the problem and the prerogative of the national parties, it is not the fault of the electoral system.
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- **Diversion of civil staff and disruption of public life** – These were the two other reasons cited, but these sound more like reasons against holding elections in general.
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- These two reasons are very weak when measured against the costs of limiting electoral opportunities for citizens.
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Is single election a viable solution?

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- Studies proves that there is clear empirical evidence that most Indian voters tend to choose the same party when elections are held simultaneously to both Centre and State.
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- At the same time when elections became disparate, there was no evidence of the voter choosing the same party.
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- Simultaneous elections impinge on the political autonomy of States.
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- If elections are to be held simultaneously, States will have to give up this power and wait for a national election schedule.
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- Under a simultaneous elections regime, the State will be beholden to the Union government for elections to its State, which goes against the very grain of political autonomy under Indian federal structure.
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- Thus “oneness” is not the desired path to efficiency in a diverse polity such as India.
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Source: The Hindu

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