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ESTIMATING REDUCTION IN POLLING PERSONNEL DEPLOYMENT UNDER SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

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Sanjeev Sanyal
Satvik Dev

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Sanjeev Sanyal is Member, Economic Advisory Council to the PM (EAC-PM) and Satvik Dev is Joint Director, EAC-PM. *The contents of the paper including facts and opinions expressed are sole responsibility of the authors. EAC-PM or the Government of India does not endorse the accuracy of the facts, figures or opinions expressed therein.*

Estimating reduction in polling personnel deployment under simultaneous elections

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conduct of elections in India demands substantial manpower, particularly polling personnel (PP), to carry out the poll at polling stations (PSs). This paper estimates the potential reduction in PP deployment under a simultaneous election framework. There are other potential benefits of simultaneous elections, but they are outside the scope of this paper.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has benchmarks for the deployment of PP per PS for different kinds of elections. According to these, the composition of a polling party for a PS is a Presiding Officer (PRO) plus 3 Polling Officers (POs) for a State Assembly election, a PRO plus 4 POs for a Lok Sabha election, and a PRO plus 5 POs for a simultaneous election. These benchmarks are tested against actual PP deployment numbers for certain election cycles and found to provide a good fit. Thus, using ECI benchmarks, we get a gross baseline reduction of 33 percent in PP deployment under the simultaneous election framework. This is because while 9 PP are required per PS to conduct a poll separately for State Assembly (PRO plus 3 POs) and Lok Sabha (PRO plus 4 POs), only 6 PP are required per PS to conduct a simultaneous poll (PRO plus 5 POs).

However, the gross baseline reduction number needs to be adjusted for the following factors:

a) *Premature dissolution of a State Assembly resulting in a fresh election leads to higher deployment of PP under the simultaneous framework. This is because the dissolved assembly has to be re-elected to serve a truncated 'unexpired' term till the next synchronized cycle, when it is elected again simultaneously with the Lok Sabha.*
b) *Elections of some State Assemblies are already synchronized with the Lok Sabha. There will be no reduction in PP deployment for such States.*
c) *Union Territories without legislatures do not have State Assembly elections. There will be no reduction in PP deployment for these Union Territories.*

The above adjustments are carried out using historical data of 25 years covering the last 5 completed election cycles from 1999 to 2024. The experience for this period shows that there were 10 politically driven instances of premature dissolutions of State Assemblies leading to fresh elections, averaging 2 premature dissolutions per 5-year election cycle. Also, for each of these 5 cycles, elections to 3 States (Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim) were held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha. Therefore, we assume that any 5-year election cycle will witness politically driven premature dissolutions leading to fresh elections in 2 States and synchronized elections in 3 States. The problem for our analysis is that different States have different number of PSs and therefore, the impact of a premature dissolution or a synchronized election in different States on PP deployment will vary. To account for this, we derive an average State/UT with number of PSs equal to the total PSs used in the country for the last concluded general election cycle of 2024, divided by the number of States/UTs with a legislature. Union Territories without legislatures are ignored because

they do not see State Assembly elections. This average State/UT (with 33,904 PSs) is then used to carry out the adjustments to the gross baseline estimate. It is assumed that the Lok Sabha serves its full 5-year terms. This is consistent with the experience since 1999.

Adjusting for these factors, the net estimated reduction in PP deployment under simultaneous elections is 28 percent (or 26 lakh polling personnel) for a 5-year election cycle. Multiplying this by the number of training (2) and deployment (2) days, we estimate a saving of 1.04 crore polling personnel-days over a 5-year election cycle. This is significant not just because of the large size of the reduction but also because most of the deployed polling personnel are school teachers.

It may be noted that this estimate is for polling personnel only. The other major group which is deployed during elections is security personnel. ECI prescribes certain norms for deployment of security personnel per PS. These norms are not as strictly defined as for polling personnel, but do not differ for State Assembly, Lok Sabha, and simultaneous elections. If we restrict ourselves to security arrangements for polling stations on poll day, the deployment of security personnel under simultaneous elections will be lower, ceteris paribus, because of fewer polling instances over a 5-year election cycle. However, providing security to polling stations on poll day is only one of the functions that security personnel perform during elections. Some of their other duties involve maintenance of general law and order during election periods, securing vulnerable pockets/hamlets, providing security cover to VVIPs, and providing security to EVM and VVPAT strong rooms. For these reasons, the ECI itself estimates a 50 percent increase in the deployment of CAPF companies for a simultaneous election compared to a Lok Sabha election. But, at the same time, under simultaneous elections, separate deployment of security personnel for State Assembly elections will reduce. Therefore, it is difficult to come up with a single point estimate of the impact of simultaneous elections on deployment of security personnel.

As far as personnel involved in First Level Check (FLC) and commissioning of EVMs are concerned, while the instances of deployment of such personnel will reduce, the number of personnel required under simultaneous elections will increase, simply because the number of EVMs will double. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the change in the deployment-days of such personnel.

Note that no reduction is estimated for counting personnel since the process of counting of State Assembly and Lok Sabha votes, even in a simultaneous election, is mutually exclusive with separate personnel deployed for both.

I. BACKGROUND

The conduct of elections in India requires the deployment of a massive amount of manpower. Polling personnel (PP), responsible for managing polling stations (PSs) on the day of the poll, constitute a large chunk of this manpower. E.g. as per ECI data, approximately 70 lakh polling personnel and election staff were deployed for the conduct of 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Under the current system, frequent and separate elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies lead to the repeated mobilization of polling personnel. Majority of polling stations are located in schools. The polling officers comprise majorly of school teachers. These polling officers, along with the school buildings in which the polling stations are located, are diverted from their regular academic duties towards polling duty on the days of the poll.

The proposed simultaneous election framework aligns the terms of State Assemblies with the five-year cycle of the Lok Sabha, consolidating polling instances into fewer synchronized polling cycles. This paper analyses the impact of such synchronization on deployment of polling personnel. It starts with a gross baseline reduction estimate using ECI benchmarks and then proceeds to adjust it using historical data on premature dissolutions and synchronized State Assembly elections for the last 5 completed election cycles (1999-2024). There are other potential benefits of simultaneous elections (E.g. see Singh et al. (2024)), but they are outside the scope of this paper. Also, the paper focuses on simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, and does not cover elections held for local bodies.

II. GROSS BASELINE REDUCTION ESTIMATE USING ECI BENCHMARKS

The polling station is central to the entire election process, serving as the primary site where citizens exercise their right to vote. The polling personnel, comprising of a Presiding Officer (PRO) and Polling Officers (POs), run the show at the polling station on the day of the poll. They are responsible for the end-to-end management of the polling exercise, beginning with the preparation of the polling station, the setup of the voting compartment, and the conduct of a mock poll to verify EVM functionality. For the entire duration of the poll, they must strictly regulate the entry of voters, verify identities, and maintain the secrecy of the ballot. On conclusion of the poll, they seal the voting machines and the statutory records for counting. The ECI uses strictly defined benchmarks to determine the strength of a polling party according to the type of election being conducted. These benchmarks find mention in ECI's submissions dated 17.03.2023 to the Ministry of Law and Justice, referred to in Volume V of the Annexures to the High Level Committee Report

on Simultaneous Elections India (2024). According to these benchmarks, the composition of a polling party for each polling station is the following:

a) Presiding officer plus three polling officers for State Assembly elections;
b) Presiding officer plus four polling officers for Lok Sabha elections; and
c) Presiding officer plus five polling officers for simultaneous elections

To verify whether on-ground deployment of polling personnel follows the above benchmarks, actual polling personnel deployment data was obtained from narrative reports published by certain State Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) for election cycles conducted in their States. These were compared with the figures calculated from the ECI benchmarks. Polling station data was taken from the Statistical Reports published by the ECI. Results are shown in the Table below:

Election Cycle	**Polling Stations**	**Estimated deployment using ECI benchmarks**	**Actual deployment* from CEO narrative reports**	**Estimated minus Actual**	**Difference (%)**
West Bengal 2016 (State Assembly)	77,411	3,09,644	3,10,726	-1,082	-0.35%
Odisha 2019 (Simultaneous)	37,754	2,26,524	2,25,636	888	0.39%
Tamil Nadu 2019 (Lok Sabha)	67,720	3,38,600	3,40,334	-1,734	-0.51%

* Excluding reserves

Therefore, it is seen that actual deployment of polling personnel does indeed follow the benchmarks prescribed by the ECI. From these benchmarks alone, one would expect a gross baseline reduction in deployment of polling personnel of 33 percent under simultaneous elections. This is because simultaneous elections can be conducted in the same polling station that is used for State Assembly and Lok Sabha elections just by adding certain polling personnel to the polling party, in order to manage an additional EVM. In other words, while a total of nine polling personnel are required to conduct a poll separately for State Assembly (Presiding Officer plus 3) and Lok Sabha (Presiding Officer plus 4), only six polling personnel would be required to conduct a simultaneous poll (Presiding Officer plus 5) for both State Assembly and Lok Sabha.

III. ADJUSTING THE GROSS BASELINE ESTIMATE USING HISTORICAL DATA

Certain adjustments need to be carried out in the gross baseline estimate. This is because of the following reasons:

a) Premature dissolution of a State Assembly will lead to higher deployment of polling personnel under the simultaneous framework. This is because the dissolved assembly will have to be re-elected to serve a truncated 'unexpired' term till the next synchronized cycle, when it will be elected again simultaneously with the Lok Sabha.

b) Elections of some State Assemblies are already synchronized with the Lok Sabha. These are Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim. There will be no reduction in polling personnel deployment for such States.

c) Union Territories without a legislature do not have State Assembly elections. These are Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Chandigarh, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. There will be no reduction in PP deployment for these Union Territories.

Adjustments to the gross baseline estimate for the above factors are carried out using historical data of 25 years covering the last 5 completed election cycles from 1999 to 2024. The experience for this period shows that there were 10 politically driven instances of premature dissolutions of State Assemblies leading to fresh elections, averaging 2 premature dissolutions per 5-year election cycle. The details of these elections as below:

Year	State Assembly elections held due to premature dissolutions
2000	Haryana
2002	Goa
2002	Gujarat
2002	Manipur
2005	Bihar
2008	Karnataka
2009	Haryana
2009	Jharkhand
2015	Delhi
2018	Telangana

It is to be noted that the above dissolutions arose out of political developments. Certain State Assemblies were dissolved prematurely over this period, not on account of political developments, but due to logistical reasons. E.g. the Himachal Pradesh Assembly, due to expire on 9th March 2008, went to polls early in November–December 2007 because three

high-altitude constituencies — Kinnaur, Bharmour, and Lahaul & Spiti — become snowbound and inaccessible after 15th November each year, which had historically forced their polling to be deferred to May–June, long after the rest of the state had voted. To end this practice of split elections, and acting on the unanimous demand of all political parties, the Election Commission advanced the entire state's poll cycle to November-December 2007 so that all 68 constituencies could vote together before the mountain passes closed. Such dissolutions are ignored for the purpose of the analysis in this paper.

Also, for the period 1999 to 2024, elections to 3 States (Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Sikkim) were held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. Arunachal Pradesh also saw simultaneous elections in 2014, 2019, and 2024, but not in 2004 and 2009.

Considering the above historical experience, we assume that any 5-year election cycle will witness politically driven premature dissolution leadings to fresh elections in 2 States and synchronized elections in 3 States. The problem for our analysis is that different States have different number of PSs and therefore, the impact of a premature dissolution or a synchronized election in different states on PP deployment will vary. E.g. a prematurely dissolved State Assembly having a larger number of polling stations (and therefore, electors) going for fresh elections will affect the gross baseline estimate more than a State Assembly having a smaller number of polling Stations. To account for this, we derive an average State/UT with its number of polling stations equal to the total polling stations used in the country for the last concluded general election cycle of 2024, i.e. 10,51,016, divided by the number of States/UTs with a legislature, i.e. 31. Union Territories without legislatures are ignored because they will continue to witness only Lok Sabha elections under the simultaneous framework as well. This average State/UT (with **33,904 Polling Stations**) is then used to carry out the adjustments to the gross baseline estimate. These adjustments are shown in the **Annexure**. It is assumed that the Lok Sabha serves its full 5-year term. This is consistent with the experience since 1999.

Adjusting for these factors, the net estimated reduction in PP deployment under simultaneous elections is 28 percent (or 26 lakh polling personnel approximately) for a 5-year election cycle. A polling party is typically deployed at a polling station one day before the poll. Additionally, the polling personnel are required to undertake at least two trainings before the poll day. Therefore, if we take the number of days of training and deployment as four, the **net estimated reduction in personnel-days of polling personnel under simultaneous elections is 1.04 crore for a 5-year election cycle**. This is significant not just because of the size of the reduction but also because most of the deployed polling personnel are school teachers.

It may be noted that the above estimate is for polling personnel only. Further, the estimate is for the steady state, i.e. outside the transition period. Under the simultaneous election

scenario, during the transition period, elections to State Assemblies whose terms expire within the first five years of the announcement of simultaneous elections would be held twice - first, on the expiry of their term, to elect a new State Assembly for the remaining term and second, at the time of conduct of simultaneous elections at the end of the five-year period. This would lead to an increase in deployment of polling personnel during the transition period. However, we have not attempted to estimate this as it would entail making too many assumptions about how the transition is phased in.

IV. SECURITY, COUNTING, AND FLC PERSONNEL

After polling personnel, the other major group which is deployed during elections is that of security personnel. As per ECI data, 3146 CAPF companies (around 100 men in each company) were deployed for the 2019 general elections. In addition to CAPF, State Police personnel are also deployed. This scale of deployment of security personnel is required to ensure that electors are able to cast their votes fearlessly and that the elections are conducted in a peaceful and secure environment.

ECI prescribes certain norms for deployment of security personnel per PS. These norms are not as strictly defined as for polling personnel, and do not differ for State Assembly, Lok Sabha, and simultaneous elections. Instead, security deployment is primarily determined by the criticality and vulnerability of the specific location, rather than just the type of election. E.g. as per the Manual on force deployment in elections (2023), for a Polling Station Location with 1 PS, the ECI prescribes 2 State Police Personnel plus half a section (4-5 men) of a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), if the PS is identified as critical.

If we restrict ourselves to security arrangements for polling stations, the deployment of security personnel under simultaneous elections will be lower, ceteris paribus, because of fewer polling instances over a 5-year election cycle. However, providing security to polling stations is only one of the functions that security personnel perform during elections. Some of their other duties involve maintenance of general law and order during election periods, securing vulnerable pockets/hamlets, providing security cover to VVIPs, and providing security to EVM and VVPAT strong rooms. For these reasons, the ECI in its submissions dated 17.03.2023 to the Ministry of Law and Justice (referred to in Volume V of the Annexures to the High Level Committee Report on Simultaneous Elections India (2024)) estimates a 50 percent increase in the deployment of CAPF companies for a simultaneous election compared to a Lok Sabha election. But, at the same time, under simultaneous elections, separate deployment of security personnel for State Assembly elections will reduce. Therefore, it is difficult to come up with a single point estimate of the impact of simultaneous elections on deployment of security personnel.

Moreover, several personnel are involved in First Level Check (FLC) and commissioning of EVMs. FLC is a preliminary technical verification conducted by engineers before an election to test, physically verify, and seal EVMs and VVPATs in the presence of political party representatives to ensure the machines are error-free. Commissioning is the subsequent process of preparing the machines after the final list of contesting candidates is published, which involves setting the candidate details and symbols on the EVMs and VVPATs. Under simultaneous elections, while the instances of deployment of FLC and commissioning personnel will reduce, the number of such personnel deployed will increase, simply because the number of EVMs will double. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the change in the deployment-days of such personnel.

As far as the counting exercise is concerned, ECI norms specified in its Handbook for Returning Officers stipulate that in the case of simultaneous elections, the votes for State Assembly and Lok Sabha shall be counted on separate counting tables and separate staff shall be deployed for the same. Therefore, unlike in the case of polling personnel, there is not likely to be a reduction in the deployment of counting personnel under the simultaneous election scenario.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that simultaneous elections, as proposed under the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, are estimated to reduce deployment of polling personnel by **28% (26 lakh personnel)** over a 5-year election cycle. This is lower than the gross baseline reduction of 33% because of the historical experience of premature dissolutions and synchronized election cycles in certain States. This reduction is achieved by eliminating standalone State Legislative Assembly elections and consolidating polling requirements into fewer synchronized events, reducing repeated mobilization of polling parties.

The estimated reduction of 28 percent in polling personnel under simultaneous elections, even though lower than the benchmark reduction of 33 percent, is significant for at least two reasons. First, the number of personnel-days that this reduction in deployment entails is large. As per the norms prescribed by ECI in its handbooks for returning officers and presiding officers, a polling party is typically deployed at a polling station one day before the poll. Additionally, the polling personnel are required to undertake at least two trainings before the poll day. Therefore, taking the number of days of training and deployment as 4, the estimated reduction in personnel-days of polling personnel under simultaneous elections is **1.04 crore** over a 5-year election cycle. Since most polling personnel are teachers, and most polling stations are located in schools, a reduction of this scale in teaching days lost due to elections could have a significant impact on learning outcomes.

The other major group which is deployed during elections is security personnel. As far as security arrangements for polling stations are concerned, it is seen that simultaneous elections will require lesser deployment, simply because of fewer polling instances over a 5-year election cycle. However, ECI itself estimates that security deployment will be higher for a simultaneous election compared to a Lok Sabha election on account of bigger security requirements for maintenance of general law and order during election periods, securing vulnerable pockets/hamlets, providing security cover to VVIPs, and providing security to EVM and VVPAT strong rooms. But, at the same time, under simultaneous elections, separate deployment of security personnel for State Assembly elections will reduce. Therefore, coming up with a single point estimate of the impact of simultaneous elections on deployment of security personnel is difficult. Similarly, estimating the change in deployment of personnel involved in FLC and commission of EVMs is difficult, because while simultaneous elections would reduce the number of FLC and commissioning instances over a five-year election cycle, the doubling of EVMs required would increase the personnel needed.

Note that no reduction is estimated for counting personnel since the process of counting of State Assembly and Lok Sabha votes, even in a simultaneous election, is mutually exclusive with separate personnel deployed for both.

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ANNEXURE

Adjustment factor (number of States)	Polling Stations	PP deployment per PS under non-simultaneous (non-sim)		Total PP deployment under non-sim	PP deployment per PS under simultaneous (sim)		Total PP deployment under sim	Change in PP deployment
		State Assembly Election	Lok Sabha Election		State Assembly Election	Simultaneous Election		
	*Average Polling Stations * number of States*			*No. of PS times PP*			*No. of PS times PP*	*Non-sim minus sim*
Premature dissolution (2 States)	67,807	4	5	6,10,267	4	6	6,78,075	-67,807 (-11.11%)
Synchronization (3 States)	1,01,711	0	6	6,10,267	0	6	6,10,267	-
Remaining States/UTs (26 States/UTs)	8,81,497	4	5	79,33,476	0	6	52,88,984	26,44,492 (33%)
Total	**10,51,016**			**91,54,010**			**65,77,326**	**25,76,684 (28%)**

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