

If Elections at all levels in India are held in 2024, it will cost Ten Lakh Crores!

Three to five lakh crores of the estimated ten lakh crores poll expenditure could be saved when "One India, One election" idea is adopted, depending on how effective ECI is and how cooperative parties are going to be.

This is my revised estimate based on trends in the previous poll expenditure in India. My earlier studies and analysis show that poll time expenditure has been doubling every election since 2014.

As a research based public policy analyst of over five decades, I have been tracking poll expenditure and elections, including by field studies and analysis but for different levels for over twenty five years elections. My books, including, ***Sustainable Good Governance, Development and Democracy*** (2019 Sage), explains “cost of parliamentary democracy”, with breakdown of expenditure at various levels.

I had estimated that Lok Sabha election expenditure had gone up to 60.000 crores in 2019 against 30.000 crores in 2014 elections. I had explained this trend in a monograph titled ***“Poll Expenditure: The 2019 Elections”*** after the Lok Sabha polls in 2019.

This ten lakh crore new estimation now includes election expenditure at Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and for Municipalities and Panchayats (three levels), on a five year tenure basis.

The expenditure trend at panchayat levels is more or less in the same lines, however the party line competition has intensified in more villages than before. However “publicity expenditure” at this level is not even ten percent of Assembly level expenditure. The number of parties and candidates contesting has been increasing and there are no efforts to moderate the number of candidates at any level.

2024 Lok Sabha poll expenditure alone will involve around one lakh twenty thousand crores, of this ECI is estimated to spend hardly twenty percent (expenditure on new EVMs is not included). I had earlier concluded that a significant percent of total expenditure was "unaccounted". This was expenses in one of the books.

Number of seats at each level of election and estimate of poll expenditure for 2024

<i>Elections for:</i>	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Estimated costs (in Crores)</i>
▪ Lok Sabha	540	1,20,000
▪ State Assembly	4500	3,00,000
▪ Municipalities	500	1,00,000
▪ Zilla Parishads	650	50,000
▪ Mandal	7000	80,000
▪ Village Panchayats	2,50,000	3,00,000

"One India, one election" initiative by itself will not reduce poll expenditure significantly or substantially. Unless, the present practices by political parties to do with candidate selection, campaigning, and incumbents indulgence are restrained; ECI becomes more effective, and its Model Code of Conduct is adopted by parties. And, poll schedule becomes more rational.

A "one week poll", on the other, is likely to bring down poll expenditure far more, instead of continuing with polls nationally stretched and spread over seven or nine phases as in 2014 (36 days) or 2019 (39 days).

By having simultaneous polls for different levels what is likely to be reduced marginally or visibly is expenditure on travel, printing, media campaign, booth level logistics, and the like. Without curbing the "note for vote" (voter inducements), poll expenditure will not reduce significantly.

My other book on ***"Good Governance"*** (Sage 2013), gives details about "note for vote" phenomena, state wise for more than one election for some states.

My more recent book, ***"Next Big Game Changer of Elections in India"*** (2022), pointed the initiatives needed in the electoral practices by political parties, particularly the incumbent and of course by the ECI to bring significant change in poll expenditure trends and governance in the country as the Government is trying now with "one election" idea.

My 2021 Monograph ***"Propositions for Our Republic at 100 in 2050"*** also elaborates further on poll practices that can deepen democracy and answer recent India critics.

Dr N Bhaskara Rao

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