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One Nation, One Election: The JPC Gets More Time, the Federalism Questions Remain

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One Nation, One Election: The JPC Gets More Time, the Federalism Questions Remain

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The Lok Sabha extended the tenure of the 41-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 till the first day of the last week of the Winter Session, on a resolution moved by JPC chairman P.P. Chaudhary.

WHAT THE BILL DOES

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Bill	Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024
Objective	Synchronise elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies
Companion legislation	The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 , aligning UT assembly terms
JPC strength	41 members
JPC chair	P.P. Chaudhary
Latest extension	To the first day of the last week of the Winter Session
Stated target	Phased: about 20 State Assemblies aligned with the 2029 Lok Sabha election as a first stage; full nationwide synchronisation including local bodies discussed for 2034

The Bill proposes to amend Articles dealing with the duration of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies so that all their terms can be synchronised to a common election cycle, and provides mechanisms for handling premature dissolution of an individual Assembly without disturbing the common cycle for the rest.

WHY A JPC, AND WHY IT KEEPS GETTING EXTENDED

A Joint Parliamentary Committee is constituted when a Bill's scope or contentiousness warrants scrutiny by members of both Houses together, rather than by a single-House Standing Committee. For a constitutional amendment touching the federal structure, wide-ranging consultation, with State governments, Election Commission of India, political parties and constitutional experts, is both procedurally expected and politically necessary to build the broad consensus a constitutional amendment requires.

DATE	DEVELOPMENT
December 2024	Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced in the Lok Sabha, referred to a JPC
2025-26	JPC conducts nationwide stakeholder consultations
11 July 2026	JPC states the ONOE framework "conforms to the Constitution"
29 July 2026	Tenure extended to the last week of the Winter Session

The pattern of repeated extensions is itself informative: it signals that the committee is still working through substantive objections rather than merely completing procedural formalities, since a JPC facing only administrative loose ends would not typically require successive multi-month extensions.

THE FEDERALISM QUESTIONS STILL OPEN

Three linked constitutional design questions recur in the ONOE debate, and JPC scrutiny is understood to be focused on precisely these:

QUESTION	THE DESIGN PROBLEM
Premature dissolution	If a State Assembly is dissolved mid-term (a hung Assembly, a no-confidence motion succeeding), does it get a short "unexpired term" election, or does the whole cycle wait?
Anti-defection interaction	Synchronised cycles change the political incentives around floor-crossing and government stability calculations in ways the Tenth Schedule was not designed around
Article 172 and State autonomy	Article 172 currently gives each State Assembly its own five-year term running from its first sitting; synchronising this with the Lok Sabha's cycle requires amending a provision that has historically been read as protecting State-level electoral autonomy

The Constitution's federal structure has been held to be a **basic feature**, per **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)** and reaffirmed in **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)**, meaning any amendment that is argued to substantially alter the federal balance invites heightened scrutiny, both political and, potentially, judicial.

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST

ARGUMENT FOR ONOE

Reduces the fiscal and administrative cost of near-continuous election cycles

Frees the Model Code of Conduct's governance-freezing effect from recurring too often

Reduces the security and administrative burden on the Election Commission and armed forces personnel deployed for poll duty

ARGUMENT AGAINST / CAUTION

Risks subordinating State-specific issues to national campaign narratives during a synchronised cycle

Premature-dissolution mechanisms could produce short, low-legitimacy "unexpired term" governments

A constitutional amendment of this scale, done without full State consensus, risks straining Centre-State trust

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments; Parliament and State legislatures, structure, functioning; **federalism** and Centre-State relations; appointment to various constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various constitutional bodies.

Prelims pointers:

- The Bill is the **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024**, accompanied by the **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024**.
- The examining JPC has **41 members**, chaired by **P.P. Chaudhary**.
- Article 172 currently sets a State Assembly's normal term at **five years** from its first sitting.
- **Kesavananda Bharati (1973)** established the **basic structure doctrine**; **S.R. Bommai (1994)** affirmed federalism as a basic feature.
- Stated rollout is phased: about 20 State Assemblies aligned with the **2029 Lok Sabha** poll first, full nationwide synchronisation including local bodies discussed for **2034**.

 FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA**ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION, 2026:**

Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, with the companion Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

JPC: 41 members, chaired by P.P. Chaudhary; tenure extended 29 July 2026 to the last week of the Winter Session.

JPC stated 11 July 2026 that the framework “conforms to the Constitution.”

Stated rollout: about 20 State Assemblies aligned with the 2029 Lok Sabha election first; full nationwide synchronisation including local bodies discussed for 2034.

CONSTITUTIONAL ANCHORS:

Article 172: normal 5-year term for State Legislative Assemblies.

Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973): basic structure doctrine.

S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994): federalism as a basic feature.

OPEN DESIGN QUESTIONS:

Handling of premature Assembly dissolution within a synchronised cycle.

Interaction with the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law).

State-level electoral autonomy under Article 172.

Sources: PRS Legislative Research, Lok Sabha, PIB

Source: One Nation, One Election: The JPC Gets More Time, the Federalism Questions Remain — Ujiyari.com |
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