

3. One Nation One Election – JPC Report on Simultaneous Elections – Polity

1. Why in News

Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on 'One Nation, One Election' reported simultaneous elections can –

1. Save nearly ₹7 lakh crore
2. Improve governance efficiency
3. Increase India's GDP growth by up to 1.6%
4. Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced in Lok Sabha 2024
5. Bills referred to JPC; recommendations awaited
6. Proposes synchronizing Lok Sabha and Assembly elections

2. Background

Constitutional Amendment Bills Introduced

1. **Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024** – Synchronizing Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections
2. **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024** – Extending framework to UT Assemblies
3. Introduced in Lok Sabha in 2024
4. Referred to Joint Parliamentary Committee for examination

Mechanism Proposed

1. Bills provide for synchronizing Lok Sabha and Assembly elections
2. **Method** – Curtailing terms of state assemblies elected after particular Lok Sabha to end with that Lok Sabha's term
3. Once legislature terms align, next general election held simultaneously
4. Phased implementation ensuring gradual alignment

JPC Status

1. JPC examining bills, hearing stakeholders (political parties, constitutional experts, Election Commission, civil society)
2. Has not shared recommendations yet
3. Final report will recommend passage, amendments, or rejection

3. Key Features of the Bills

Bodies Responsible

1. **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024** – Empowers Election Commission to conduct elections for Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies together (simultaneous elections)
2. **Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024** – Extends framework to UT Assemblies (Delhi, Puducherry, J&K)
3. Election Commission central coordinating authority

Commencement of Simultaneous Elections

1. Terms of all State and UT Assemblies constituted after notification date will expire with expiry of full term of Lok Sabha
2. Elections to Lok Sabha and all State and UT Assemblies thereafter conducted together
3. One-time synchronization exercise aligning future electoral cycles

Premature Dissolution of Lok Sabha or Assemblies

1. If Lok Sabha or State/UT Assembly dissolved sooner than full five-year term –
 1. Fresh election held for term equal to remainder of five-year term (not fresh five years)
 2. Example – If Lok Sabha dissolved after 3 years, fresh election for remaining 2 years
2. **Purpose** – Synchronize elections for Lok Sabha and all Assemblies every five years
3. Prevents de-synchronization due to political instability, no-confidence motions, defections

Deferring a State Election

1. If Election Commission opines election for particular State Assembly cannot be held as part of simultaneous elections (due to natural disasters, law and order issues, administrative constraints) -
 1. May recommend to President
 2. President may issue order conducting election for that State Assembly at later date
2. **UT Laws Amendment Bill** - Does NOT have such provisions (stricter synchronization for UTs)

4. What are Simultaneous Elections?

Definition

1. Simultaneous Elections (One Nation One Election) - Holding Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections together
2. Aim - Reducing frequency of elections and associated costs
3. Single electoral cycle for central and state governments

Historical Context

1. **Simultaneous elections held** - 1951-52, 1957, 1962, 1967
2. Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies elected together in first four general elections
3. **Thereafter** - Schedule could not be maintained
4. **Reasons for de-synchronization** -
 1. Premature dissolution of some State Assemblies (President's Rule under Article 356)
 2. Premature dissolution of Lok Sabha (1971, 1977, 1980, etc. due to political instability)
 3. Defections, no-confidence motions causing government collapses
 4. New states formed at different times (reorganization, bifurcation)
5. Elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies still not realigned
6. Currently - Elections almost every year in some state or the other (electoral cycle perpetual)

5. Arguments In Favour of One Nation One Election

Reduced Expenditure

1. Will reduce huge expenditure incurred for conducting separate elections every year
2. **Election costs** - Direct costs (ECI expenditure on polling booths, EVMs, security, staff) + Indirect costs (political party spending, candidate expenses, administrative diversion)
3. JPC estimates savings - Nearly ₹7 lakh crore (over multiple electoral cycles)
4. Economies of scale - Single logistical setup, security deployment, administrative machinery

Streamlined Process

1. Managing one election cycle logistically simpler than conducting multiple elections at different times
2. More efficient use of administrative resources (civil servants, teachers, police deployed once per five years instead of multiple times)
3. Coordination among central/state machinery streamlined

Governance Without MCC Disruption

1. Problem of frequent elections - Imposition of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) over prolonged periods affecting normal governance
2. **MCC restrictions** - No new policy announcements, schemes, inaugurations, transfers, government advertisements during elections (6-8 weeks each election)
3. Currently - MCC in force almost year-round somewhere in India
4. **Simultaneous elections** - MCC once every five years; rest of time focused on governance
5. Focus on governance increases instead of being constantly in election mode

Direct Accountability

1. Voters can hold parties accountable for both central and state governance simultaneously
2. Clearer understanding how local and national policies impact lives
3. Integrated assessment of government performance at both levels
4. Potentially higher voter turnout (single trip to polling booth for both elections)

Strengthens Cooperative Federalism

1. Harmonized electoral calendar encourages coordination between Union and States
2. Ensures policy stability and continuity
3. Reduces political friction from perpetual campaign cycles (less adversarial Centre-State relations)
4. Synchronized policy implementation timelines

Economic Benefits

1. JPC claim - Can increase India's GDP growth by up to 1.6%
2. Reduced economic disruption from frequent elections
3. Business and investor confidence due to political stability
4. Continuity in economic policies
5. Less policy paralysis

Other Arguments

1. Reduced black money circulation (political funding concentrated instead of spread across multiple elections)
2. Law and order maintenance easier (security forces deployed once)
3. Media and public attention focused (currently diluted across multiple elections)
4. Administrative efficiency (officials focused on governance not election duties)

6. Arguments Against One Nation One Election

Logistical Challenges

1. All states and central government face massive logistical challenges
2. **Coordinating schedules** - 28 states + 8 UTs (3 with assemblies) + Lok Sabha = complex synchronization
3. **Resources** - EVMs, security personnel, polling staff (teachers, government employees) required simultaneously across entire country (shortage concerns)
4. Infrastructure strain (polling booths, counting centers)
5. Training and deployment of millions of personnel simultaneously

Local Priorities Overshadowed

1. May help dominant national party at cost of regional parties
2. Regional issues can be overshadowed by national issues (national narrative dominating campaign discourse)
3. **Example** - Local governance concerns (water, education, health) buried under national security, economic policy debates
4. Undermines state-specific political discourse
5. **Regional parties' concern** - National parties (BJP, Congress) with greater resources and pan-India presence will dominate; regional parties sidelined
6. Voter choice influenced by national factors instead of state performance

Complex Reforms Needed

1. Implementing simultaneous elections requires significant constitutional amendments -
 1. Articles 83, 85 (Lok Sabha term and dissolution)
 2. Articles 172, 174 (State Assembly term and dissolution)
 3. Article 356 (President's Rule implications)
 4. Representation of the People Act, 1951
2. Changes to existing electoral laws posing legal complexities
3. **Potential constitutional challenges** - Article 356 (President's Rule implications; if state assembly dissolved under President's Rule, fresh election for remainder term breaks simultaneous cycle repeatedly)
4. Ratification by states required (Article 368; amendments affecting federal structure need state consent)

Federalism & State Autonomy Concerns

1. **Synchronizing terms effectively curtails or extends tenure of State Assemblies -**

1. Assemblies elected mid-Lok Sabha term would have curtailed tenure (less than 5 years)
2. Violates democratic mandate given by voters for full term
2. Undermines constitutional autonomy of states
3. **Fixed terms problematic** - Prevents premature dissolution even if government loses majority (contradicts parliamentary democracy principle of government accountable to legislature)
4. States lose flexibility in political management (coalition governments, defections)
5. **Critics** - Reduces states to administrative units rather than autonomous federal entities

Other Arguments Against

1. **Voter confusion** - Single ballot for Lok Sabha and Assembly may confuse voters (especially illiterate, first-time voters)
2. **Campaign fatigue** - National and state parties campaigning simultaneously overwhelming voters
3. **Remainder term elections** - Governments formed for remainder term (say 2 years) lack legitimacy and stability; "lame duck" governments
4. **Practical implementation challenges** - How to handle hung assemblies, defections, disqualifications post-election
5. **No-confidence motions** - If Lok Sabha government falls mid-term, fresh Lok Sabha election for remainder term de-synchronizes future cycles again (defeating purpose)
6. **President's Rule misuse** - Potential for misuse of Article 356 to align state election timings (politically motivated dissolutions)
7. **Democratic principle** - Elections are essence of democracy; more frequent elections ensure greater accountability (current system allows mid-term corrections)

7. Way Forward

JPC Recommendations (Expected)

1. Synchronized polls for all 3 tiers of government improving governance architecture
2. Enhance transparency, inclusivity, ease, and confidence of voters
3. Law Commission likely to recommend holding simultaneous polls for all three tiers -
 1. Lok Sabha
 2. State Assemblies
 3. Local bodies (municipalities and panchayats)
4. **Phased implementation** - Starting 2029 (allowing time for constitutional amendments, logistical preparations, stakeholder consultations)

Implementation Roadmap

1. **Phase 1** - Lok Sabha + State Assemblies synchronization
2. **Phase 2** - Local bodies (panchayats, municipalities) alignment (more complex due to varying 5-year terms starting at different times)
3. Pilot projects in select states testing feasibility
4. Gradual alignment through remainder-term elections

Addressing Concerns

1. **Federalism** - Ensure state autonomy protected; amendments require state ratification
2. **Regional parties** - Level playing field through campaign finance reforms, equal media access, state-specific debates/manifestos
3. **Logistics** - Increase EVM production, security personnel training, administrative capacity
4. **Fixed terms** - Allow flexibility for no-confidence motions with remainder-term elections maintaining synchronization
5. **Voter awareness** - Extensive voter education campaigns explaining dual ballot system

Complementary Reforms

1. **Electoral reforms** – State funding of elections, caps on campaign spending, transparency in political funding, inner-party democracy
2. **Anti-defection** – Strengthen anti-defection law preventing political instability
3. **President's Rule** – Stricter guidelines preventing misuse of Article 356
4. **Local bodies** – Constitutional status and autonomy (Article 243G, 243W implementation strengthening)

Consensus Building

1. Multi-party consultations ensuring broad political consensus
2. Civil society, constitutional experts, Election Commission inputs
3. Address opposition concerns constructively
4. Avoid partisan push; build national consensus

8. Conclusion

One Nation One Election proposal through Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 aims simultaneous Lok Sabha-State Assembly elections saving ₹7 lakh crore and increasing GDP growth 1.6% per JPC. Requires synchronizing legislature terms, remainder-term elections preventing de-synchronization, and phased implementation. Arguments Favor reduced expenditure, streamlined governance without MCC disruption, direct accountability, and cooperative federalism. Concerns include logistical challenges, national issues overshadowing local priorities, complex constitutional reforms, and federalism-state autonomy undermining. Way forward requires addressing federalism concerns, ensuring regional party competitiveness, strengthening logistics, complementary electoral reforms, and building multi-party consensus for 2029 implementation across Lok Sabha, Assemblies, and local bodies balancing efficiency with democratic principles.

Source - <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/one-nation-one-election-could-save-nearly-7-lakh-crore-rupees-and-increase-indias-gdp-growth-by-1-6-per-cent-jpc/>