

Electoral Reform – The ‘One Nation, One Election’ Friction

Syllabus Relevance: *Party System: National and Regional Political Parties; Federalism: Changing Nature of Centre-State Relations.* **Context:** In January 2026, the Law Ministry signaled its intent to operationalize the **High-Level Committee (Kovind Panel)** recommendations. The roadmap proposes synchronized Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections starting from **2029**. **Key Theme:** *Efficiency vs. Accountability.* **Keywords:** *Article 83 & 172, The 'Coattail Effect', Federal Autonomy, Presidentialization of Politics, Ratification Requirement.*

1. The Core Conflict: National vs. Regional Narrative

The central argument for 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) is **Administrative Efficiency** (saving ₹60,000 Crore per cycle). However, the political opposition in Jan 2026 centered on **Federal Autonomy**.

- **The "Coattail Effect":** PSIR studies (IDFC Institute) show that when elections are held simultaneously, there is a **77% probability** that a voter chooses the same party for both Centre and State.
- **The Implication:** If a "Wave Election" (like 2014 or 2019) happens, regional parties fear they will be wiped out. A voter thinking about "National Security" or "PM Face" might inadvertently vote for the same party for "Water Supply" or "MLA Face," drowning out specific state-level issues.

2. The Constitutional Challenge: Cutting Short the Mandate

- **Article 83 & 172:** These articles guarantee a **5-year term** for Lok Sabha and State Assemblies *unless dissolved earlier*.
- **The Jan 2026 Roadmap:** To synchronize elections in 2029, some State Assemblies (elected in late 2026 or 2027/28) would have to be dissolved *prematurely* (after just 2 or 3 years).
- **The Federal Outcry:** Regional parties termed this **"Unconstitutional."** They argued that the 5-year mandate is given by the *People*, and the Centre cannot cut it short for "administrative convenience." It effectively punishes voters in those specific states.

3. The 'Ratification' Debate

- **The Trick:** The Kovind Panel suggested that synchronizing elections does *not* require ratification by 50% of States (under **Article 368**) because it doesn't technically alter the "Union List" or "State List."
- **The Jan 2026 Pushback:** Legal experts and Opposition states argued that altering the tenure of a State Assembly *fundamentally* alters the **Federal Character** of the Constitution (Basic Structure). They threatened to challenge any such move in the Supreme Court if State Ratification is bypassed.

4. Theoretical Framework: 'Presidentialization' of Parliamentary System

- **Parliamentary Logic:** In a parliamentary system, the executive survives only as long as it has the confidence of the House. Elections can happen *anytime* the government falls.
- **Presidential Logic:** In a presidential system (US), terms are fixed (4 years).

- **The Hybrid Danger:** ONOE attempts to force a "**Fixed Term**" (Presidential feature) onto a "**Flexible House**" (Parliamentary feature).
- **The Dilemma:** What happens if a State Government falls in 2030 (1 year after the election)? Do we have a by-election for the remaining 4 years? Or do we impose President's Rule for 4 years? Both options dilute democratic accountability.

5. Conclusion: The Threat to Regional Parties

- **Existential Crisis:** For regional parties (TMC, DMK, TRS), this is an existential threat. They thrive on "**Local Incumbency**" and distinct "**Regional Identity.**"
- **Homogenization:** ONOE threatens to "**Nationalize**" the political discourse, turning India into a *de facto* Unitary State during election season. It risks reducing Chief Ministers to mere "Glorified Mayors" who must ride the coattails of the Prime Minister to win.