

JANUARY 2026 ROUND-UP: The Structural Faultlines

Theme: *The Federal Pushback & Identity Assertion.*

January 2026 was less about "who won elections" and more about "how the system is changing." The central debates revolved around the **Basic Structure of Federalism** and the **Redefinition of Social Justice**.

1. Federalism: The 'Delimitation' Pre-Emption

- **Event:** In the Republic Day sessions (Jan 26), three Southern State Assemblies passed unanimous resolutions urging the Centre to *maintain the 1971 population freeze* for the upcoming Delimitation Commission (set to begin work in 2026).
- **PSIR Relevance:** This marks the beginning of the "**North-South Divide**" in representation. The Southern states argued that penalizing them for successful population control violates the federal principle of "**Equal Partnership**." It raises a core question: *Is Indian Federalism symmetric or demographic?*

2. Caste Politics: The 'Sub-Categorization' Standoff

- **Event:** Following the Cabinet's signal to operationalize the **Rohini Commission Report** in the Budget Session, a coalition of OBC organizations held a "Mahapanchayat" in Delhi in mid-January.
- **The Conflict:** The organizations demanded that before any "Sub-Categorization" (splitting the OBC quota), the government must release a **fresh Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC)**.
- **PSIR Relevance:** This highlights the transition from **Mandal 1.0** (Identity) to **Mandal 2.0** (Share). The debate is no longer about *getting* reservation, but about the *internal distribution* of reservation among dominant and marginalized caste groups.

3. Social Movements: The 'Legal MSP' Revival

- **Event:** The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) launched the "Farmers' Constitution March" on Jan 26, 2026. Unlike previous protests, this was decentralized, with tractor marches in 15 states simultaneously.
- **The Demand:** They rejected the government's offer of "MSP Committee Assurances" and demanded a "**Statutory Right**" (a law making purchase below MSP a crime).
- **PSIR Relevance:** This represents a maturing of "**New Agrarianism**." It is a shift from *Lobbying* (asking for higher prices) to *Rights-Based Approaches* (asking for legal guarantees), challenging the neoliberal logic of the state.

4. Electoral Reform: The 'One Nation, One Election' Friction

- **Event:** The High-Level Committee (Kovind Panel) released its implementation roadmap in Jan 2026. It proposed amending **Article 83** (Duration of Houses) and **Article 172** (Duration of State Legislatures) *without* ratification by 50% of States.
- **The Pushback:** Legal experts and regional leaders termed this a violation of the "**Federal Character**" (Basic Structure). They argued that shortening a State Assembly's tenure to align it with the Lok Sabha undermines the *autonomy* of the state electorate.

- **PSIR Relevance:** This is a classic **Unitary vs. Federal** conflict. It tests whether administrative convenience (saving money) can override constitutional design (accountability).

5. Institutional Role: The 'Governor's Discretion' Debate

- **Event:** In January 2026, the Supreme Court heard a fresh plea regarding a Governor "sitting on bills" for over two years in a non-NDA ruled state.
- **The Argument:** The State Government argued that the Governor's "**Pocket Veto**" effectively kills the mandate of an elected legislature.
- **PSIR Relevance:** This touches upon the **Role of the Governor** as an "Agent of the Centre" vs. "Constitutional Head." The friction highlights the breakdown of "**Cooperative Federalism**" into "**Combative Federalism.**"

6. Civil Liberties: The 'Surveillance' State

- **Event:** The operationalization of the *Digital Personal Data Protection Act* rules in Jan 2026 triggered protests by civil rights groups.
- **The Issue:** The rules allow the Centre to exempt its own agencies (like ED/CBI) from privacy norms on vague grounds of "sovereignty."
- **PSIR Relevance:** This relates to the "**State vs. Citizen**" debate. In the digital age, does the citizen have a "Zone of Privacy" (Right to Life, Art 21) that the state cannot breach, or does "National Security" always trump "Civil Liberty"?