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Evolution Of Coalition Politics In India

A Comprehensive Study On Past elections And Future Trends (1952-Present)

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Abstract: India being a diverse country of culture, religion, languages, etc also has a diverse nature in the ideologies of its political parties. These political parties have their separate vote banks and a particular section of society always supporting them and with the help of them they came in power. But sometimes they failed to do so and here came the role of coalition government, the government which is formed as no single party can secure majority in the elections and the political parties came together to form a government by lightning their ideological differences and work on minimum programme acceptance. Since 1989, India had seen various coalition politics and different phases of coalition politics where the starting phase was full of Instability and later was slow and gradual by learning the working of coalition governments became successful and completed tenures. There was a break in coalition politics when in 2014 BJP came into Dominance and for 2019 also. But in 2024 again there is coalition government. Is this a start of a new era of coalition politics in India and what are the possibilities of coalition politics in India in 2029 general assembly elections? And how can the BJP work with it? These questions will be answered in this research paper by the comprehensive study of the past elections and the situations which influenced them.

Index Terms - Coalition politics, coalition government, UPA, NDA, electoral trends, political parties, votes share, Lok Sabha elections.

1. INTRODUCTION

India had experienced a long history of single party dominance (Indian National Congress) in the political system from 1952 to 1989 except for 1977 and 1989 general assembly elections. But soon after 1989 the Indian political system became the battlefield of different coalition politics majorly from 1989 to 1999 where India witnessed several formations and collapse of coalition governments. India as being a diverse country has different types of culture, religions, languages, heterogeneity of values all of which also impact its political sphere and the political parties were also seen by culminating different ideologies in single party or we can say by erasing the ideological importance of party they merge with each other or form alliances with each other. After a long era of coalition politics in India in 2014 India once again experienced the single party dominance but this time it was by BJP which continued in consecutive general election of 2019 but after successfully running 2 tenures the BJP needed to look towards its allies to form government for the third time. This research paper will examine the electoral trends of Lok Sabha elections from 1952 to present day and study the evolution of coalition politics in India and by analysing the data, will try to know insights of the future of coalition politics in India.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Coalition government is the type of government which is made when no single party crosses the majority number to form the government so different parties come together to give each other support and to form a government by forming an alliance. There are a number of theories given by various scholars on coalition politics explaining on which terms coalition are made, what are its effects and different types of it. These theories can also help in understanding Indian coalition politics.

William Riker's minimum winning coalition theory is one of these types. In this theory he explained that political actors seek to form coalitions that are just large enough to secure power to get a majority but no larger than necessary to avoid unnecessary compromises. Because politicians are rational actors who want to maximize their own power, rewards, and policy influence. Example: In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, BJP formed a coalition under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with 23 parties but strategically kept it to a minimum winning size (i.e., just above the 272-majority mark).

Another theory on how the coalition government divide the government positions. It is known as Gamson's Law of Proportionality proposed by William Gamson in 1961. He argued that coalition members receive government positions (such as cabinet posts) in proportion to their contribution to the coalition's total seat. Because if a party is underrepresented in cabinet positions, it may feel dissatisfied and withdraw from the coalition and if a party is overrepresented, it may lead to resentment among

other coalition members. To maintain balance it is necessary to give a fair share of power to every partner of the coalition. These theories can be better understood by the examples from India Political System

A clear example of this was seen in UPA-I (2004-2009) when Congress, after winning 145 seats, formed a coalition with parties like the DMK, RJD, and NCP. As per Gamson's Law, Congress, being the largest party, retained key ministries like Home, Finance, and Defence, while its allies were given portfolios proportional to their seat strength. The DMK (16 seats) was allocated important ministries like Telecom and Shipping, the RJD (24 seats) was given the Railways Ministry under Lalu Prasad Yadav, and the NCP (9 seats) secured Agriculture under Sharad Pawar. Importantly, the Left parties, which provided outside support but were not part of the coalition, did not receive any ministries, aligning with Gamson's theory that only coalition partners participate in power-sharing.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (PRE INDEPENDENCE- 1989)

It was clear from the beginning that after Independence the Indian National Congress(INC) will enjoy some political power because before independence it had a connection with people and the influence it held on them during the Indian National Movements and Freedom struggle was significant. As imagined, the same happened in the 1st Lok Sabha elections in 1952, The Indian National Congress secured 364 seats out of 489 and won with clear majority, forming the government with Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister of India. This started the era of Congress system in India till the era of coalition politics took the stage.

3.1. Congress Dominance (1952- 1989)

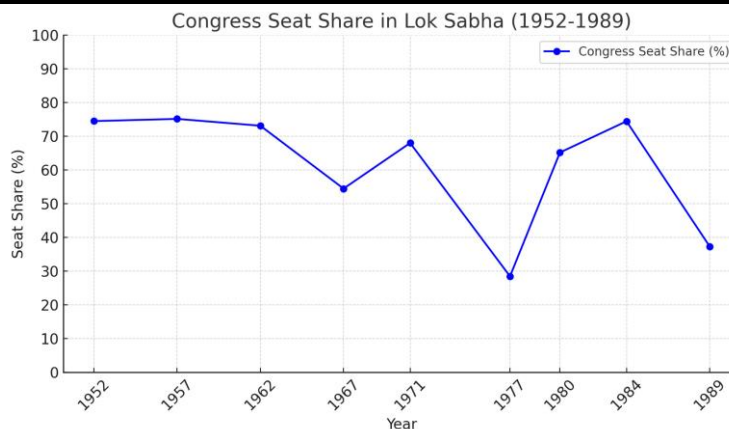
Though Nehru was in complete majority by 1952 general assembly elections, was respected by the population, he never neglected the democratic values of the newly Independent country India, was always been respectful towards opposition party, and there are several instances which shows that during Nehru government opposition check on the government was always there, by long question hours, high level parliamentary discussions. It was due to his charismatic leadership, respect for civil liberties, democratic values, scientific temperament because of which INC won in other two consecutive general elections of 1957 and 1962 with securing 371 out of 494 and 361 seats out of 494 respectively. After his death on 27 May 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri was sworn as PM of India on 2 June 1964, but the problem of successor again arose by the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri in Tashkent on 11 January 1966. The congress syndicate preferred Indira Gandhi as the New PM of India over Morarji Desai whom she defeated in parliamentary party elections where she got 355 votes and the older man got 169 seats only.

In 1967 Lok Sabha elections though INC was in majority as it secured 283 seats out of 520 but there was major decline in the vote share of the party because the party was experiencing factionalism at every stage from top to bottom. Also the opposition who was the very critic of Indira Gandhi as Ram Manohar Lohia call her 'Goongi Gudiya' (dumb doll) come together and form the United Front just to make congress lose which resulted in INC losing power in Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa and Kerala. This time can be regarded as the beginning of coalition politics in the political field of India. Indira Gandhi recommended the then President V.V Giri to dissolve the Lok Sabha on 27 Dec 1970

In 5th Lok Sabha Elections, 1971, INC bounced back again with 352 seats out of 518 against the opposition's Grand alliance(Congress(O), Jan Sangh, Swatantra, Samyukt Socialist Party, etc) who gave the slogan of 'Indira Hatao'. As she was widely popular among the poor and middle class due to her 'Garibi Hatao' campaign and the socialist outlook like her father. But soon after the Bangladesh Crisis the economy of India deteriorated, inflation got hiked, there were high rates of corruption at every level of the government offices. All these things caused the Gujarat and Bihar unrest where the student movement started, joined by the opposition as well. All these things concluded with the imposition of National emergency on 26 June 1975, which tarnished the credibility of INC among people even more

As National Emergency repealed on 21 March 1977, the new general assembly elections were held in 1977, where people gave their verdict on Indira Gandhi Government and INC faced defeat with only securing 155 seats out of 542. This is the first time India experienced the coalition government at the centre level where the coalition of Janata Party secured 330 seats out 542, but soon the decline of Morarji Desai govt started due to disintegration within the party and becoming unpopular among the people due to unfulfillment of the promises to provide better administration, development policies, social justice amid caste and communal tensions. In 1979, the Desai govt resigned from the office after which Charan Singh formed the government but soon after Indira Gandhi withdrew her support, on his recommendation the Lok Sabha got dissolved.

In the 1980 general assembly elections, INC again came to power as India had faced an unsuccessful coalition in 1977. In 8th Lok Sabha elections, congress experienced a huge victory by 414 seats out of 541, the sympathy over assassination of Indira Gandhi played a major role. But soon in 1989 Lok Sabha elections V.P. Singh used the anti corruption movement tactics against the congress as INC was dealing with several corruption cases like the Bofors scandal resulting in defeat of INC from coalition of Janta Dal by only securing 197 seats out of 529. This coalition of Janta Dal marks the end of the long dominance of INC in the India Political system. And now the full fledged dance of coalition politics begins on the Indian democratic stage.



graph-1: showing indian national congress's seat share in Lok sabha elections (1952- 1989)

4. THE RISE OF COALITION POLITICS (1989- PRESENT)

This section can be studied in three parts, first as the era of Instability (1989-1999), then the tussle of NDA and UPA from 1999 to 2014 and at last the BJP dominance era from 2014 to present times.

4.1. The Era of Instability (1989- 1999)

In 1989 as the V.P Singh formed the government alliance with BJP, left parties and some other regional parties soon it faced problem of internal differences in party due to heterogeneity of ideologies which came together with only motive to sideline the congress from acquiring power; resulting BJP to withdraw its support from the government because of discontent towards Ayodhya disputes, reservation policy and several other reasons and causing the government to fall in 1990. After this Chandra Shekar formed a government with Congress support but later on 5 March 1991 congress took his support back and the government fell.

In 1991, 10th Lok Sabha elections were held where P.V. Narsimha Rao formed a minority government at the centre which with time gained power and majority and completed its tenure. After this the 11th Lok Sabha elections held in which the Bharatiya Janata Party secured 161 seats, became the largest party but it could not attain the majority under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, seeing the opportunity united front alliance was made with the support of congress which passes the majority and formed the H.D. Deve Gowda government later on Congress took his support back and in 1997 supported the United Front and I.K. Gujral for running the government and ironically it took his support back again. This shows how the major party gave and took their support from the coalition according to their benefits and caused instability in the political system of India.

In 1998 the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government was formed with the NDA alliance but his government could not complete tenure as it fell short of only one vote from passing the majority as the Jayalalithaa (AIADMK) withdrew its support. Soon after it in 1999, 13th lok sabha election happened and BJP again came to power with its allies by securing 296 seats out of 543. By being confident over the 'India shining' campaign they called for the early elections in 2004 and this caused the beginning of a New alliance 'The United Progressive Alliance' and its tussle with National Democratic Alliance over the forthcoming elections.

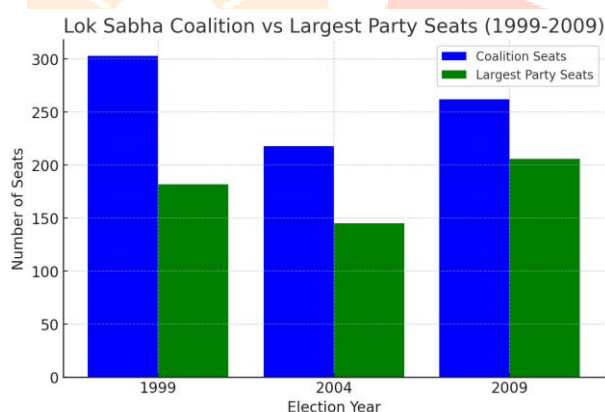
Table-1: Coalition governments (1989-1999) and their duration

Year	Prime Minister	Coalition Party	Starting Period	End period	Duration	Reason for fall
1989	V.P. Singh	Janata Dal	2 Dec 1989	10 Nov 1990	11 months 8 days	Support withdrawal by BJP
1990	Chandra Shekhar	Samajwadi party	10 Nov 1990	21 June 1991	7 months 11 days	Support withdrawal by Congress
1991	P.V. Narsimha Rao	INC (Minority government)	21 June 1991	16 May 1996	4 years 10 months 25 days	Completed tenure
1996	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	BJP (minority)	16 May 1996	1 June 1996	17 days	Failed to secure majority
1996	H.D. Deve Gowda	United Front	1 June 1996	21 April 1997	10 months 20 days	Support withdrawal by

						Congress
1997	I.k Gujral	United Front	21 April 1997	19 March 1998	10 months 28 days	Support withdrawal by Congress
1998	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	NDA	19 March 1998	13 Oct 1999	1 year 24 days	Support withdrawal by . AIADMK
1999	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	NDA	13 October 1999	22 May 2004	4 years 7 months 9 days	Early elections

4.2. The NDA vs UPA Era (1999-2014)

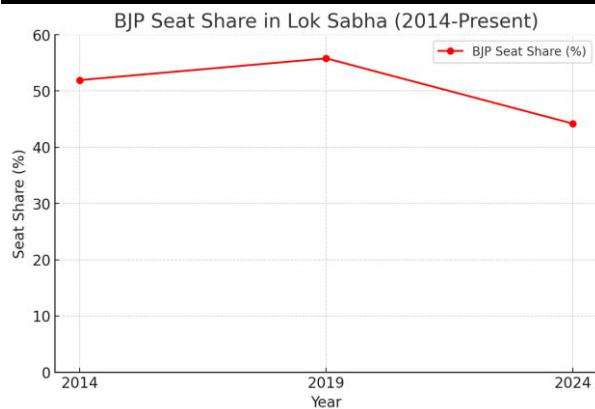
From 1999 to 2004 we saw the first stable coalition of NDA under Vajpayee leadership, during his tenure he gave the concept of 'Coalition Dharma' which means giving due respect to the coalition partners. This concept helped him to run a successful government. But In 2004, BJP didn't perform well and congress once again emerged as the largest party with its allies forming a new alliance bloc as United Progressive Alliance, though it was not able to have a clear majority on its own, it sought outside support from the left parties. Resulting Dr. Manmohan Singh to become the Prime Minister of India. During this tenure the UPA govt did a tremendous job, it tried 'detoxification' from communalism, passed several Acts like RTI 2005, NREGA 2005, Protection of women from domestic violence Act 2005 which paved its way for the forthcoming elections of 2009 general assembly. And as the result declared INC secured 206 seats, UPA in total 262 seats out of 543 but in this tenure of Dr. Manmohan Singh the congress lost its credibility among people due to several corruption cases like 2G spectrum scam, Commonwealth games scam, Coalgate Scam and also high inflation, low economic growth, unemployment forced people to look for alternatives where under Modi's leadership BJP served as a good alternative by using Gujrat Model of Development as a success story of BJP and his promise for 'Ache Din'. This started the era of BJP dominance, this was the first time in history where India was going to experience the one party dominance of a party other than INC.



graph-2 showing lok sabha coalition vs single party majority (1999- 2009)

4.3. The BJP Dominance (2014- Present)

In 2014, the BJP secured 282 seats out of 543 seats on its own and in total with NDA 336 seats out of 543 where UPA secured 59 seats along with INC, this was due to the lack of proper leadership of congress under Rahul Gandhi and the Modi's strong campaign for 'ache Din'. Modi government started several welfare schemes like Ujjwala Yojana, Ayushman Bharat, PM kisan samman nidhi which gained wide popularity and later on the Pulwama attack and Balakot Airstrikes filled the Indians heart with nationalistic sentiments causing the widespread popularity and support to BJP in the 2019, 17th Lok Sabha Election as it again secured clear majority with 303 seats on its own and in total 353 seats out of 543 along with NDA, firming it's stance a single dominant party in the contemporary Indian political system. But the situation was not same for the 2024 general assembly elections as BJP could not get the magic number of 272 seats to have a clear majority as it secured 240 seats on its own out of 543 and formed a coalition govt under NDA which in total have 292 seats out of 543, in it the TDP and JD(U) are the significant allied of the BJP under NDA by providing support of 16 and 12 seats respectively. This decline in BJP vote share was due to the loss of vote share majorly in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal and the dissatisfaction of youth towards unemployment and inflation rates. Another reason was the discontent from the farmers and due to MSP controversy.



graph-3 showing the BJP seat share in Lok Sabha from 2014 to present

5. ELECTORAL TRENDS AND DATA ANALYSIS

From 1952 to 1989 we see the dominance of INC in the Indian Political system except the 1977 and 1989 general elections. As there was weak opposition and people felt more connected to INC due to its significant role in India's freedom struggle. There was the charismatic leadership of Nehru which also strengthened the hold of votes shared by the party and it was the political tactics of Indira Gandhi and a bitter experience of coalition during 1977 which made a strong stand for the dominance of INC.

Soon after the 1989 Lok Sabha elections India experienced a series of unstable government where they make alliance with each other without any match of ideology and just to secure powerful positions and as all were playing the role of opportunists, they take their support back as soon as their interests were not entertained by the alliance or the government the list of government from 1989 to 1999 is the full of examples of such 'Aya Ram, Gya Ram' tactics.

After 1999 we came to see the two powerful alliances United Progressive Alliance which came in support with Congress and National Democratic Alliance which came in support with BJP. These alliances experienced successful coalition governments during this period of time but there were problems of corruption, high inflation rate, low economic growth rate, unemployment, etc as well.

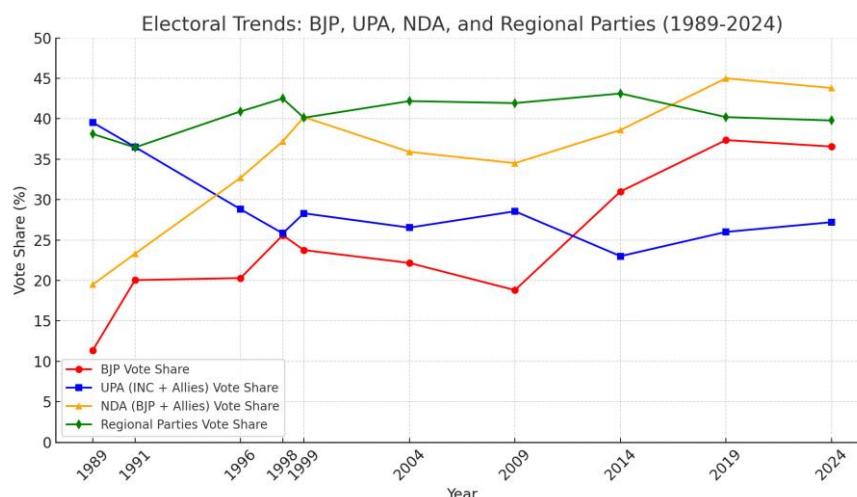
From 2014 the era of Modi's government dominance started where they really didn't need any alliance to form government but in 2024 elections the scenarios changed as BJP didn't clear the majority and came in power with NDA.

By analysing all these elections and coalition governments it can be seen that there was hunger for power in coalition governments, there were trends for corruption cases, unemployment, inflation, communalism, hike and slowed economic growth which forced people to look for alternatives whenever they feel frustrated from the government as we can see people's support to Morarji Desai government then in 1980 again it was with Indira Gandhi government.

We can also see that the ongoing situation and country's environment also affect the electoral behaviour of the people as we can see how the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi changed the people's mind and these situation causes the increase in INC vote share, same is with the BJP as the nationalistic sentiments after Pulwama attack and Balakot Airstrikes results the increase in vote share of BJP in 2019 elections.

Now in 2024 we can see the need for coalition politics again as BJP didn't get the clear majority. Though the number was not so high, but we have seen the fall of the government with the deficiency of one vote only in history so this can be the start of a new era of coalition as there was also a new alliance of Congress, I.N.D.I.A coming to the forefront.

In the future we can see the emergence of coalition politics 2.0 in India but this time maybe it will learn from its history and political parties will not be making the same mistakes as before.



graph-4: showing vote share of major political parties and alliances in lok sabha elections from 1989 to 2024

6. IMPACT OF COALITION POLITICS ON GOVERNANCE

Coalition politics played a major role in shaping governance in India which is connected with the several policy making and economic reforms as the economic reforms of 1991 majorly the LPG policy and the tax reforms of that period helped in the GDP growth of India. The NDA and UPA both have different approaches towards policy making as NDA's is more inclined towards infrastructure reforms under which it invest under developing highways, railways, smart cities, digital connectivity and boost economy with GST, IBC, Make in India, Skill India, etc whereas the UPA approach is more inclined towards the welfare schemes like National Food Security Act, NREGA, RTE, etc which try to directly help the underprivileged class of the society

However, these coalition government often causes the challenges in decision making as we can see during the period from 1989 to 1999 where various government formed and collapsed in very short time span which impacted the effective working or making of the policy as during this time period the only focus of these governments was to secure power and hold powerful positions and to solve the internal conflicts of their parties. We can take the examples from the tenure of UPA 2 in which there is policy paralysis due to its internal conflicts with its allies like DMK and TMC which hampers the government power to work on economic reforms or any other policy other than it we can see many cases of corruption as they increased during the time of coalition governments.

7. CONCLUSION:

In quest of searching for the future of coalition politics in India, several questions arise like Will the coalition government return in 2029? Or can the BJP get on track to hold a clear majority in next elections? Or How the new alliance of the opposition will affect the BJP stance in becoming a full majority party in next elections?

By concluding this and to answer this, by analysing the data and electoral trends of the past elections It can be clearly said that the coalition politics will remain a distinguished feature of indian political system as in 2014 and 2019 we see the BJP dominance but in 2024 elections the shift in the scenario from dominance to need of coalition is clearly visible. In upcoming elections coalition politics can be seen by BJP to encounter the I.N.D.I.A, the increasing role of regional parties also proves the fact. However there can be more focus on consensus building and use of the principle of 'Coalition Dharma' by the BJP to strengthen its allies and clear the stance of NDA on adaptability. But along with it there should be effective governance because as if the policy paralysis increases it can be the case that people turn to single party rule in future.

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