THE CAUSES OF POLITICAL PARTY ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON NATIONAL COHESION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Electoral politics in India has long been considered a challenge for comparative politics; from the distinctiveness of the transition and consolidation of democracy and through the understanding of the way in which the socio-economic complexities of such a heterogeneous society have adapted to and interacted with the institutions of parliamentary politics. Since the 1990s India has experienced the conjunction of a period of complex electoral fractionalisation with considerable and sustained economic growth. This has confounded expectations that the political context that is most conducive to economic development is one of strong and stable government. Rather, the contemporary experience of Indian development has occurred against the backdrop of a dynamic and regionalised party system, with coherence provided by a weakened central executive which has had to limit direct control over economic and social policy. To some extent this has been achieved because of an institutional structure of governance which has responded to the evolution of popular politics, providing a framework of governance which has reflected some of the national diversity and filled some of the power vacuums left unfilled by the fiercely competitive but often corrupt and inefficient party political system. However, a major factor has been the way in which electoral alliances and government coalitions have become an accepted feature of Indian democratic politics, forcing acceptance that compromise, power-sharing, and recognition of diversity are essential elements of successful government.

INDIA IN A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

'India,' Arend Lijphart (1996, p 258) notes, 'has long been a puzzle for students of comparative democratic politics.' He points out that the successful maintenance

of democracy has confounded expectations that such a system would be unsustainable in the light of widespread poverty and illiteracy and such pronounced ethnic and linguistic diversity. Seventy years on from independence, Indian democracy is robust and vibrant, and satisfies the conditions for democratic consolidation: 'the most surprising and important case of democratic endurance in the developing world' (Diamond 1989, p 1).

There have been a number of attempts to explain the pattern of democratic consolidation in India in terms of the institutional development of the state and the way in which the Indian state has reacted to challenges to its legitimacy and authority. Lijphart (1996) argues that the success of Indian democratic consolidation lies in the way ostensibly majoritarian democratic institutions have tended to accommodate, rather than override, challenges from regional, religious and linguistic protest movements.

While the Congress Party achieved electoral dominance in the post-independence elections, the party and the prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, did not use this dominance to override opposition. Instead, 'the Congress system has served as the foundation for a consociational grand coalition' (Lijphart 1996, p 260). This willingness to share power rather than impose majoritarian policies is put down to factors such as 'prudent and constructive leadership', the socio-economic diversity of India, successful linguistic federalism and traditions of compromise and accommodation which foster consociationalism (Lijphart 1996, pp 262-3). Lijphart recognises that his interpretation of Indian consociationalism is not fully entrenched and notes the destabilising threat of the more autocratic leadership under the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi, a federal framework which has been vulnerable to central interference, and political challenges to minority accommodation. Yet he argues that consociational politics has endured in practice and has ensured the stability of democratic government.

The lack of formally consociational institutions in India – with no provision for proportional representation, no minority vetoes, and weak entrenchment of federalism – have led to criticism of Lijphart's argument. Steven Wilkinson (2000) disputes Lijphart's reading of Indian political history, suggesting that the constitutional framework was a lot closer to the consociational model prior to independence, under British rule. Rather than consociational, Wilkinson argues that the post-independence Indian state managed ethnic and separatist in a repressive way, refusing to concede claims for minority rights that challenged the authority of the centre unless forced to do so.

He suggests that the Congress system of the post-independence period is better characterised as a *control* state (see Lustick 1979), 'in which lower castes, religious minorities, and linguistic minorities within states were denied cultural rights and largely excluded from government jobs and political power' (Wilkinson 2000, p 270).

The characterisation of the Indian state as a consociational system of government does not live up to empirical scrutiny. In pre-independence India the extent of representative government was so limited that any notion of power-sharing institutions in any democratic sense is inappropriate. The British rulers held the power and the provincial legislatures and inclusion of Indians in executive bodies was largely a pragmatic response to the limited legitimacy of the colonial state and the need to operate a functioning administration. After independence the Indian National Congress dominated the Constitutional Assembly, and the Constitution which emerged was based essentially on the majoritarian Westminster model.

The INC's dominance of electoral politics from the 1950s provided little opportunity for effective parliamentary opposition. While an essential element of the 'Congress system' of government was accommodation of a wide range of groups and opinions and a willingness to recognise issues on which there seemed to be widespread discontent, this was only partial and on the Congress leadership's terms.

In his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore Jr (1966, chapter 6) searched India in vain for the social upheaval he associated with the struggle for democratic freedoms. His account is suffused with indolent Hindus, hidebound by caste and village conventions, whose only effort is to prevent any agricultural surplus being diverted into industrial production. Atul Kohli (1990, p 3) notes:

> For nearly four decades now democracy in India has appeared somewhat of an anomaly. India is a multinational, agrarian society with a rigid and hierarchical social structure. The existence in such a setting of periodic elections, constitutional government, and freedom of expression and association has posed an intellectual puzzle.

Although the distribution of patronage was initially dominated by the Congress machine, new parties emerged to challenge for the right to distribute the spoils of government. For Kanchan Chandra (2004), the power of Indian officials to channel government resources to particular individuals or groups of voters on a partisan basis characterises it as a 'patronage democracy'. She argues that the size and partiality of the administration in democratic India provide a context in which politicians and political 'fixers' focus on mobilising along ethnic lines, and voters respond to these cues in order to try to tap into the stream of government resources.

Chandra argues that such a conceptualisation of Indian politics is not necessarily detrimental to democratic consolidation. Rather, in a competitive

electoral arena, identities are mutable and manipulable. Moreover, 'where electoral outcomes can be transformed by political manipulation, we are less likely to see the permanent exclusion of minority groups and the destabilising violence associated with permanent exclusion' (Chandra 2004, p 287). This conception of Indian identity as fluid and subject to complex patterns of politicisation and mobilisation fits in with James Manor's analysis of the nature of ethnicity in politics in India. He suggests (1996, p 463) that:

> Because Indian society is so heterogeneous, and because the country and its population are so large, people there have a wide array of identities available to them. These include at least three different kinds of caste identities (*varna*, *jati*-cluster and *jati*), religious identities (including loyalties to sects within larger religious groups) and identifications with clans and lineages – as well as linguistic, class, party, urban/rural, national, regional, subregional and local identities, and sometimes varying types of 'tribal' identities too … As a result, tensions do not become concentrated along a single fault-line in society, and do not produce prolonged and intractable conflict – 'ethnic' or otherwise – that might tear democratic institutions apart.

This analysis of the politicisation of identity explains the competitiveness and volatility of modern Indian electoral politics, as well as giving an insight into the periodic outbreaks of communal violence. As Manor notes, one of the ways in which the Indian system has limited the spread of destabilising and violent uprising has been through the federal system, which has acted to 'quarantine and confine most severe conflicts within single regions' (Manor 1996, p 473).

    The strength of the Indian federal system does not lie in its constitutional entrenchment, which is weak and leaves residual and reforming power at the centre. The Nehruvian constitutional settlement provided for a strong centre, and state autonomy was constrained by limited fiscal autonomy and political interference, most ostensibly through the frequent imposition of 'president's rule'. However, from the 1950s, the centre was challenged through regional mobilisation, notably through the agitation for the reorganisation of the federation along linguistic lines. When effective electoral challenges emerged against Congress they did so in a regionally segmented manner, with different parties and coalitions gaining power at the state level. Even in the 1990s, when the Hindu-nationalist Indian Popular Party (BJP) emerged as a powerful national party, its support base was largely limited to a few major states and it expanded and gained power through alliances with a large number of state parties (Heath 1999).

Again, this can be explained in terms of the complex nature of Indian identity. Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan and Yogendra Yadav (2007) conceptualise this in terms of the 'state nation', where political institutions reflect multiple but complementary socio-cultural identities. Indian voters are more likely to relate to state parties and politicians, yet this does not necessarily weaken the attachment to national unity and identification with central institutions.

In a system of electoral federalism, the state level has emerged as the main focus for party competition in Indian national elections, and national election results are increasingly the amalgamation of regional contests. This process has seen the weakening of Congress as the dominant national party and the prevalence of national coalitions and electoral alliances. The role of prime minister has also weakened, selected as convener of a government coalition rather than a dominant personality. These changes have led Subrata Mitra (1999, pp 420-1) to describe a 'puzzle of political stability', 'explained by the existence of a relatively fair and effective electoral process, which has become an agent of the creation of a stable and legitimate political order'. The need to form effective alliances and coalitions has forced parties to 'concede, coalesce, compromise, and come to a consensus'.

The political science literature on coalition formation in parliamentary systems has tended to focus on two elements of governmental power: office-seeking and policy direction. These two elements clearly overlap – a particular government portfolio tends to bring with it responsibility for a particular policy area. Office-driven models tend to focus on the quantitative distribution of a fixed number of governmental benefits. Policy-driven models have focused on how coalition membership is determined by, and influences, ideological position.

As Terrence Cook (2002, p 4) summarises it, theory suggests that a party leader should seek a coalition which is '(1) winning, (2) minimally so, (3) able to cover median policy space, (4) ideologically connected and closed, and (5) expected to pay off partners by the proportionality rule'. These central tenets of coalition theory have provided a basis for an extensive empirical literature that has examined their applicability to European parliamentary systems.[1] This applied analysis has emphasised a number of (interconnected) conditions which are key to understanding the formation and durability of coalitions within particular states; including the institutional structure, the nature of the party system which has evolved, and the ideological context in which political parties operate.

An attempt to locate coalition analysis within the broader context of party systems is presented by Lawrence Dodd (1976). Dodd examines the durability of coalition governments, looking at the conditions which enable stable coalition

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1   Examples include de Swaan (1973), Pridham (1986), Laver & Schofield (1990), Laver & Budge (1992), Müller & Strøm (2000).

governments to exist. He accepts that minimum winning coalitions are more likely to endure than either over- or under-sized groupings, but suggests three intervening factors relating to the structure of party competition: the degree of cleavage conflict, fractionalisation and stability. The degree of cleavage conflict influences the extent to which parties are willing to bargain over coalition membership,[2] while instability and fractionalisation affect the certainty of information and hence the likelihood of a satisfactory (or stable) outcome (Dodd 1976, chapter 3). In the Indian context, Andrew Wyatt (1999, pp 10-11) uses Dodd's analysis to explain the failure of parties in Uttar Pradesh to form apparently mutually beneficial electoral alliances and government coalitions. He suggests that parties appealing to antagonistic caste constituencies (the Bahujan Samaj Party – BSP – and the Samajwadi Party – SP) have added constraints on their ability to form coalitions since these would be unpopular among their core support group.

Dodd's approach reflects a tendency to circularity in much of the party system literature, whereby the outcome of party negotiation is a reflection of the structure of the party system, which, in turn, is determined by the nature of party negotiations. This is different from the endogineity issue raised by Bueno de Mesquita (1975), whereby trade-offs between long- and short-term preferences influence the success of coalition bargaining (see Browne, Frendreis & Gleiber 1984, pp 173-4). However, Dodd's approach does highlight the issue of voter attitudes to coalition membership and the associated costs/benefits in terms of core party support. Further, if broad party system associations are exchanged for party specific variables such as the nature of party organisation and the vote base of a party, a clearer set of party systemic variables can be used to examine the relationship between parties and coalition strategy. Such an approach is developed by Gregory Luebbert (1986, p 46), who stresses the variety of conflicting goals faced by party leaders when entering negotiations over coalition formation:

> These goals include the desire to retain the leadership, to maintain party unity, to participate in a government, to participate in a majority government, to preserve policy preferences, to see the preferences enacted as public policy … From this perspective, the leaders' task is to insist on preferences that are sufficiently focused that they generate the widest possible support within the party, but sufficiently vague and opaque that they do not engage in government formation the disagreements that are a constant feature of any party.

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2   Cleavage conflict is related to the ability to maintain support from a party's voters when entering a coalition: if joining a coalition is likely to alienate a party constituency, the costs are likely to outweigh any benefits (Dodd 1976, p 59).

This allows Luebbert to model coalition preferences in relation to 'party profiles', which are defined by a party's support base, ideology, and organisational structure. Primarily concerned with maintaining this party profile, leaders will face a trade-off between the benefits of government participation and the need to protect their own position and party identity.

Luebbert's conceptualisation of coalition bargaining provides a counter-vailing explanation to models which suggest that ideological coherence will be a characteristic of coalition governments. Indeed, he suggests (1986, p 64) that:

> It follows from their concern to maintain their distinctiveness that party leaders will, all other things being equal, prefer cooperation with a party whose preferences are tangential to cooperation with a party whose preferences are convergent.

In competitive party systems the tension between compromising identity and government participation will enable an open bargaining process and encourage parties with tangential or even conflicting policy preferences to join. Such coalitions are likely to be characterised by multiple veto options, with minimum member majorities following vague or segmented policy options.

Theory has suggested that successful coalitions are likely to be made up of the smallest number of parties needed to consolidate a government majority. Such a prediction is based on the assumption that this will allow each party's share of the benefits of government incumbency to be maximised. The threshold of support required for a majority in the Lok Sabha (national Parliament), required by any prospective government, is roughly 273 seats.[3] The BJP-led coalition governments in 1998 and 1999 were based largely, but not exclusively, on the successful electoral alliances the BJP constructed in the aftermath of its failure to form a government after the 1996 elections. In 1998 the BJP-led alliance failed to win a majority of seats and was forced to negotiate with a number of opposition parties in order to secure support in a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha.

The BJP secured the support of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Haryana Lok Dal, and Arunachal Congress in a parliamentary vote of confidence, which it won with 274 votes. In 1999 the BJP-led alliance did secure a majority of seats and the post-election negotiations were used to garner the support of some minor parties,[4] which consolidated the parliamentary strength of the National Democratic Alliance.

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3   Just over 50% of a membership of 545. The exact threshold is complicated by the provision of two nominated seats to represent Anglo-Indians, and the role of the Speaker. In 1998 the position in the Lok Sabha was further complicated because the results from a number of seats were delayed, due to elections being postponed because of adverse weather conditions and the Election Commission forcing re-polls.

4   The Kashmir National Conference (which won 4 Lok Sabha seats), the Manipur state Congress Party (1), Sikkim Democratic Front (1) and the Mizo National Front (1).

Events in 1998 support the theory that minimal winning coalitions will form, while, in 1999, it appears that the government formation was slightly larger than was absolutely necessary to secure power. However, the position is complicated by two factors: the coherence of the BJP-led alliance as a unitary voting bloc and the role of parties that voted for the government but refused to take government office. Examining these two factors suggests that arguments related to ideological coherence have limited applicability to the Indian case and that this, in turn, weakens the strength of any expectation of strict conformity to the concept of the minimal winning coalition.

The alliances with which the BJP fought the 1998 and 1999 elections were formed mainly as part of a strategy of pragmatic cooperation, whereby ideological distinctiveness was traded for the benefits (noted above) of co-ordination under the SMP electoral system. Whilst some alliance partnerships had some historical and ideological resonance, most were the outcome of a willingness to gang up against a common enemy. The BJP had fought in previous elections alongside the Shiv Sena, sharing a common agenda of Hindu assertiveness and, in the Punjab, the Jana Sangh (a forerunner of the BJP) and the Akali Dal had reached accommodations in previous elections. In most cases the BJP gained from alliances with ideologically distinctive partners, sharing a common electoral enemy.

In states such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, and Karnataka, the BJP forged alliances with a combination of regional parties and breakaway factions of the Congress and Janata Dal. This enabled the BJP to extend its influence, not only in terms of regional reach, but by tapping into previously hostile social bases of support (Heath 1999).

In some cases these pragmatic alliances proved extremely successful. In Tamil Nadu the 1998 alliance with the All India Anna Draavida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and assorted minor parties (Pattali Makkal Katchi – PMK, Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam – MDMK) saw the combine winning 30 of the 39 seats. In Orissa, the alliance with the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) saw the alliance win 11 of 13 seats in 1998 and, in 1999, increase this to 12. In some states alliances proved less successful. The 1998 alliance between the BJP and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP)(NTR) in Andhra Pradesh was a conspicuous failure, while in West Bengal the arrangement with the charismatic ex-Congress leader Mamata Banerjee yielded eight seats (7 Trinamul and 1 BJP) in 1998 and nine (7 Trinamul and 2 BJP) in 1999, of a possible 42.

Electoral gains did not necessarily mean that the BJP and its allies would share a common government agenda. Indeed, regional breakaways from Congress or the Janata Dal shared many ideological similarities with their former partners in Congress, United Front, and National Front governments. In a political system characterised by instability and political defection little weight could be given to

any *a priori* assumption that a successful electoral alliance would translate into a coherent government coalition.

It was only in the run-up to the 2004 Lok Sabha election that the Congress embraced a strategy of forging a broad electoral alliance. The success of this strategy was consolidated in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government and was continued through to another electoral victory in 2009. The Congress had previously resisted pre-electoral alliances, concerned that they would challenge the identity of the party as the dominant electoral force.

By 2004 the steady decline in Congress's vote share and the strength of regional parties (often formed from breakaway Congress factions) saw the leadership accept that the gains from alliance formation across a wider range of states outweighed the loss of distinctiveness. Tactical alliances were forged in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Bihar, Assam, and Andhra Pradesh.[5] As Sridharan (2004, p 5425) notes, these were opportunistic partnerships, driven by a shared response to a BJP/NDA electoral threat and the potential benefits of office.

Any attempt to characterise Indian political parties into a coherent ideological schema and to identify any median political position/space is fraught with difficulty. Whereas Western political systems have tended to be characterised along a left-right ideological spectrum this is much harder to apply to an Indian context where class, caste, and communal identities tend to cross-cut each other, and these aspects vary across a regionally segmented polity.

In its heyday the Congress could easily claim to occupy a median policy space, but in the 1990s the party's institutional centrism, devalued secularism, and association with economic liberalisation left it hard to position in any ideological spectrum,[6] The BJP's upper-caste support base and association with Hindutva, which placed it on the extreme of the communal political spectrum, was tempered by a vague commitment to a swadeshi economic policy and regional autonomy (notably a commitment to restrict the use of president's rule in state politics). Where to fit the multiplicity of regional parties into any ideological spectrum is problematic, since manifesto commitments tend to be vague or non-existent.

Eliciting ideological proximity through coalition or alliance partnerships reveals the lack of any clear barriers to electoral or government cooperation. The CPM has maintained a traditional refusal to compromise its ideological distinctiveness through a refusal to participate in coalition governments containing the BJP, which goes back to the earlier era when it stood aside from any state government formation containing the Jana Sangh or Swatantra Party (Bueno

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5   Details of 2004 alliances can be found in Sridharan 2004.
6   In their analysis of the support base of the Congress party in the late 1990s, Heath & Yadav (1999) show that the vote for Congress varied across Indian states according to the opposition it faced, marginalising its appeal as a catch-all party.

de Mesquita 1975, p 59). However, it did support the National Front government of V P Singh, which also had the outside support of the BJP, and the United Front government supported by the Congress.[7] At the limit there appears to be only one degree of separation between communists and communalists: the TDP fought the 1998 election in alliance with the CPM and, in 1999, with the BJP.

As Luebbert (1986) has described, in competitive party systems the coalition preferences of party leaders are not necessarily driven by ideological proximity but rather by the desire to retain control of their party organisation and maintain their distinctiveness with respect to their core support. For leaders of parties which had broken away from the Congress, such as the Trinamul Congress, Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar), or (in 1999) the National Congress Party, this presented a conflict in that association with the former party would weaken their attempt to create a new 'Congress' identity in a state. A similar consideration was faced by the offshoots and remnants of the Janata Dal, which had largely been forged through an anti-Congress agenda. For a party such as the TDP, which fought the 1998 elections in opposition to both the Congress (the traditional and strongest opponent), and the BJP (which had a small support base within Andhra Pradesh), the prospect of some sort of accommodation with the BJP was more attractive than that of the Congress. This was despite the concern that association with the BJP could alienate some sections of the TDP support base – most prominently Muslim voters.

While theoretical predictions of minimal winning and ideologically coherent coalitions are ideals, in practice there are countervailing pressures and constraints which require consideration. First, as Luebbert (1986) suggests, in a competitive party system the need to preserve distinctive party identities may lead to parties associating with partners who are not ideologically close. Second, in a segmented polity, where national elections can be seen as the outcome of numerous regional contests, it is often necessary to examine the component outcomes as an amalgamation of smaller interactions, rather than simply at the aggregate level. This approach chimes with Tsebelis's theory of nested games (1990). Both of these factors tend to weaken any expectations of ideological coherence in national coalition formation and emphasise the varying strategic contexts in which parties are competing.

The case of the TDP in Andhra Pradesh illustrates a further aspect of coalition formation which makes the Indian context distinctive. This is a tendency for parties to support governments but not participate in the formation of Cabinets. Most theories of coalition formation presume that the benefits of participation

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7   The CPI has tended to take a more pragmatic approach to participation in coalition governments, which has seen it tolerate cooperation with both Congress and the Jana Sangh.

will come in the form of policy influence and governmental patronage, yet the federal and diffused nature of the Indian political system and electoral behaviour mean that parties are often willing to support a government in New Delhi but not to accept ministerial posts. Minority governments, in which the government coalition has formed a sub-set of a broader parliamentary coalition – with some parties supporting the government while taking no ministerial posts – have become increasingly prevalent.[8] These governments have tended to be short lived, which fits in with the expectations of coalition theorists.

The situation of the TDP after the 1998 and 1999 elections is set out by Rob Jenkins (2003, p 611), who describes a situation in which parties are

> more interested in controlling their respective state governments than they are in having cabinet representation in New Delhi … [T]he primary reason the TDP was willing to join hands with the BJP in 1998-99 was its desire to win a majority of state assembly seats, and thereby retain control over the formidable machinery, including most law-and-order matters, of state-level government. What the TDP got for its parliamentary support of the BJP in New Delhi was the BJP's willingness to take political action within Andhra Pradesh designed to thwart the state's main opposition party, Congress, from ousting the TDP from power at the state level.

There was a similar situation in Haryana, where the Lok Dal fought against the BJP in 1998 and then supported the government, while refusing ministerial positions. In both the Andhra Pradesh and Haryana situations the BJP had allied with partners who did not deliver electoral gains (in Andhra the TDP (NTR), in Haryana the HVP). Given the proven electoral strength of the TDP and Lok Dal, the BJP was willing to ditch its previous allies and accept a subordinate role in the 1999 elections. The state parties were allowed to reap the benefits of a close association with the government in New Delhi while maintaining the right to criticise the national government from a slightly disassociated position.

As Jenkins (2003, p 611) describes, the TDP maintained '(a) a limited amount of influence on national coalition policy, derived from the TDP's credible exit option; and (b) the retention of the TDP's right to complain publicly about any aspect of national government policy out of political convenience.' In a similar way, the Lok Dal, led by Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, obtained

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8   At the national level such a situation occurred in 1979, when the Congress supported the government of Charan Singh; in 1989, when the Left Front and BJP supported the government of V P Singh; in 1990, when the Congress supported the government of Chandra Shekhar; and from 1996, when Congress supported the Deve Gowda and I K Gujaral governments.

the protection of the New Delhi administration while using its position outside the government to voice its unhappiness with rises in the price of diesel announced by the union government (Venkatesan 1999, p 24).

The institutional context has clearly influenced the outcome of coalition formation through the operation of the electoral system, the nature of the overlapping federal responsibilities of national and state governments and the role of the president in government formation and dissolution. In turn, this influences the preferences of party leaders over coalition membership.

Support from 'outside' indicates that parties feel that the gains from accepting a ministerial role from the national government are outweighed by the freedom given by some ideological or programme distance. As Laver & Schofield (1990, p 105) note, government participation can lead to 'tainting', whereby the association with unpopular policies can harm future electoral performance. In the Indian context parties primarily concerned with the control of state governments have been willing to forego the direct patronage of central government and maintain a distance from policy decisions at the national level in order to consolidate their state-wide support base.

From 2004 the overt Congress commitment to alliances and coalition politics made it easier for parties which had originated in state-level breakaways. The acceptance that Congress might not be the dominant player in a state and might try to co-opt parties with localised strength made it a more reliable alliance partner. This was reflected in successful alliances with the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra (2004 and 2009) and Trinamool Congress in West Bengal (2009). This also enabled a more coherent ideological basis to the alliance formation, with a broad commitment to a 'secular' approach to politics bolstered by co-ordination between parties drawing on similar support bases.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The single-member plurality system (SMP, or first-past-the-post), used for elections to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas (the state parliaments), has a fundamental influence through the relationship between votes received by a party and the number of seats won. Because it is a majoritarian, rather than proportional, system small fluctuations in the number of votes won can lead to large differences in terms of parliamentary seats. While the practical impact of this method of voting is often expected to promote two-party systems, this tends to be due to a misunderstanding of the properties of such a system and its operation in the United States and United Kingdom.

Duverger's Law, which associates such electoral systems with two-party systems, suggests that voters will focus on the two strongest parties, since there

is only one possible winner (Duverger 1963). However, this effect is restricted to the constituency level of voting and says little about the overall aggregation of seats. Further, even at the constituency level there are reasons why voters' ability to identify the two leading candidates in a constituency, let alone strategically co-ordinate vote choice, will be imperfect, in particular a lack of accurate information about which candidates are in a potentially winning situation.[9] For this reason, although a strong overall party performance can provide a focus for voter co-ordination on party candidates across constituencies the overall impact of Duvergian influences is weak. In particular, parties with strong constituency- or regional-based support can benefit from the disproportional returns inherent in the SMP system.

For much of the post-independence period the Congress was able to exploit the SMP system to change a minority of the vote into a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas. However, opposition to the Congress tended to be divided among a number of alternative parties, mainly with a regionally confined support base. The decline of the Congress exposed the fractured nature of the electoral arena, particularly when seen from a national perspective (Sridharan 2002). This enabled a large number of political parties to win seats in the Lok Sabha and, in situations where no one party has an overall majority of seats, has created a situation where there are a large number of potential governing coalitions.

Whilst Duverger's analysis tended to focus on tactical voting, with voters opting not to vote for their first preference in favour of a candidate who is in a position to win a seat, an alternative method for concentrating votes on potentially winning candidates is through electoral alliances. Two (or more) otherwise competing parties may agree to withdraw candidates in certain seats in order to focus support on candidates from one or other party. The success of an electoral alliance depends on satisfactory negotiations over which party will contest each constituency and the transferability of the votes of supporters of one party to an alliance partner. Such arrangements are particularly attractive in non-proportional systems such as SMP, whereby small increases in the number of votes can lead to much larger returns in terms of seats.

Electoral alliances have been widespread in Indian politics (see Sridharan 2002, pp 497-501), and a key element of the success of the BJP in transforming votes into parliamentary seats in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections. Electoral alliances do not necessarily translate into government coalition partnerships. However, they do indicate some strategic or ideological commonality which suggests a working relationship can be carried through into government and

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9   This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where constituencies tend to be very large (both terms of geographical size and number of voters), and where information from opinion polls is notoriously inaccurate and only available at state or national levels.

provide important reputational information as to which parties are likely to join in government coalitions.

The weak federal character of the Indian Constitution has been reinforced by the emergent electoral federalism, bolstered by more interventionist rulings of the Supreme Court. This has focused electoral competition at the state level. As Yogendra Yadav (1999, p 2399) suggests, 'Now people vote in the parliamentary election as if they are choosing a state government.' The interaction between state- and national-level electoral influences and coalition formation is the focus of Andrew Wyatt's (1999) analysis of politics in Uttar Pradesh in the late 1990s. Wyatt notes the dynamism of electoral alliances, varying across an electoral cycle that is broken by both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections.

Given that in most states these two elections do not coincide (following the delinking of national and state elections in the early 1970s), there tends to be a perpetual readjustment reflecting the different strategies used to approach each election. This complicates the analysis of coalition politics in two particular ways: changing the temporal range of party interests and adding an additional layer of incumbency/opposition factors.

The first effect reinforces the importance of short- and long-term influences on party strategies: as Wyatt (1999, p 13) suggests, 'we can see the BSP and the SP sacrificing immediate payoffs in the hope that eliminating other parties will enhance their future share of post-election spoils'. The second effect can change the nature of pay-offs when considered only at one level. Tsebelis (1990, p 9), in his model of nested games, describes a 'logic of apparently sub-optimal choice', noting that 'an optimal alternative in one arena (or game) will not necessarily be optimal with respect to the entire network of arenas in which the actor is involved'. However, viewing coalition negotiations at the national level as the outcome of a series of nested games provides analytical clarity as well as reinforcing the segmented nature of electoral competition across the whole country.

The central institutional aspects of the Indian political system impinging on coalition formation and durability include the electoral system, the role of the president (and state governors) in government formation and the relationship between Parliament and the government. The impact of the electoral system is examined below and related to the broader context of the party system. The institutional influence of the president (and state governors) over coalition formation centres on the role of selecting which party leaders are invited to form governments. Where a party emerges from an election with an overall majority this is a straightforward task, but in the case of a hung parliament it can be more controversial. The expectation is that the largest party will be given the opportunity to show it can form a working majority, and this should give the largest

party an advantage in attracting potential coalition partners, given that they can claim to have a greater sway over potential patronage and power.

In the aftermath of the 1996 Lok Sabha elections there was some confusion over who the president should invite to form the government. The BJP, which was the largest party, was eventually invited to form a government by President Shankar Dayal Sharma, and did so as a minority administration for 13 days before being forced to accept that it could not win majority support.[10]

In 1998 the new president, K R Narayanan, acted more circumspectly, requiring evidence that any prospective government could win a vote of no-confidence. This change of presidential behaviour meant that the largest party had less influence as a *formateur* of a working coalition.[11] A presumption that the largest party will be invited to form the government gives it an advantage in offering trade-offs to potential partners.[12]

The change in the interpretation of the president's role in coalition government formation illustrates the contingent effect of institutions. Where the constitutional position is not clearly laid down there remains room for personal interpretation. For this reason coalition formation takes place within an institutional context which is itself open to manipulation. Tsebelis (1990, chapter 4) notes that institutional design cannot always be seen as an exogenous factor, but that actors can seek to change the rules and structures which govern political interactions. In the Indian case it is clear that the choice of president or state governor can play an important part in future handling of government formation. While presidents and governors are supposed to act impartially it is clear that some are more impartial than others. Influence over appointment or election to these positions can clearly be used to affect future expectations of favourable

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10   The role of the president and governor has been formally linked by the Supreme Court to the role of the Crown under the British parliamentary system, which, according to A G Noorani (1996), suggests that the claim of the largest party to form a government should be subservient to the rule that a proposed ministry should have the confidence of the Parliament. The role of the president in government formation and dissolution has been a frequent source of controversy, notably in 1979 when the collapse of Morarji Desai's administration saw President Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy invite Y B Chavan, then Charan Singh to form an administration. Charan Singh formed a minority government with the support of the Congress Party. When this government fell in August 1979 the president rejected Jagjivan Ram's attempt to form a government and, instead, dissolved the Lok Sabha (Venkatesan 1996). After the 1989 election V B Singh formed a minority government, with outside support from the BJP and the Left Front. This government lost a vote of no confidence in 1990, and president R Venkataraman invited Chandra Shekhar to form a minority administration, supported by the Congress. In the aftermath of the resignation of Chandra Shekhar in 1991 Venkataraman delayed the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, ostensibly so government business could be concluded (Hardgrave & Kochanek 1993, pp 71-2).

11   For a discussion of the role of the *formateur*, see Browne, Frendreis & Gleiber 1984, pp 188-9.

12   A further institutional benefit given to the party asked to form a government after a general election is influence over the nomination of two additional members of the Lok Sabha, ostensibly to represent the Anglo–Indian community under Article 331. The nomination of these members, both of whom supported the BJP-led government, helped achieve a majority in the Lok Sabha in 1998 and 1999.

outcomes. At a wider level, the endogeneity of the Constitution can be brought into the interpretation of coalition politics. The BJP has been vocal in its criticism of the operation of the Constitution and established a National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) in 2000. While the outcome of this exercise was a bureaucratic and intellectually incoherent muddle, it showed that the rules of the political game were not simply taken as given, but that the government was interested in changing the institutional structure.

Less controversially, but with much more political impact, the Constitution was amended in order to persist with the restrictions on a full delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies (see McMillan 2000, 2001a, 2001b). Starting in the mid-1970s, the practice of delimitation – adjusting the allocation of Lok Sabha seats among states and changing the boundaries of the constituencies in order to try to reduce the disparities in populations across Parliamentary seats – was postponed. This postponement was due to lapse after the 2001 Census and a full delimitation was due to take place. According to the original constitutional rules (Article 81) such a delimitation would have had a significant impact on the distribution of seats across the states and this would, in turn, have an impact on the outcome of general elections.

States which have seen higher than average population growth over the last 30 years (such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal) would have had their allocation of Lok Sabha seats increased, while states with lower population growth (such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu) would have faced a reduction in their representation. Any such redistribution of seats would clearly have implications for the regional balance of representation, with an increased representation of the Hindi-belt states. This would have a knock-on political impact. Simulations suggest that, had a full delimitation of constituencies been carried out in the 1990s, the BJP would have benefited from its strong support base in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan (McMillan 2000, p 1275).

It would clearly have been advantageous for the BJP to let a full delimitation take place, under the original constitutional guidelines. However, presumably under pressure from representatives of those states and coalition partners who would have lost out under any redistribution of seats, the government pressed through the Constitution (Eighty-Fourth) Amendment Act in 2001.[13] This re-stricted future delimitation to intra-state reallocation of seats and kept the number of seats allocated to each state at the existing level. A measure (the lapse of the

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13 Confusingly, the Eighty-Forth Amendment Act was the outcome of the Ninety-First Amendment Bill. Operational effect was given through the Delimitation Act 2002.

delimitation postponement) which would have, by default, given the BJP a large potential electoral advantage was not allowed to be sustained. The *status quo* was reimposed through further constitutional amendment. This indicates that, in the current political context, the interests of regional balance and coalition partnership are sufficient to block institutional reform which could benefit the largest party.[14]

The Indian parliamentary system of government invests executive power in a Cabinet and Council of Ministers, who have to have the support of a majority of the Lok Sabha. Legislation is mainly instigated by the government, presented to Parliament by ministers and voted on by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha (The Upper House, or Council of States).[15] As a federal system, government functions are divided between the national and state levels according to the provisions of the Constitution (Part XI). In practice, Parliament has a very limited role in scrutinising government legislation and administration, and much of government policy is implemented by presidential decree. Under the governmental system developed under Congress domination in the post-independence period, the prime minister provides a strong personal and centralised focus for the administration, and institutions such as the Planning Commission control much executive policy direction at a step removed from Cabinet control. Thus the formal mechanisms for Cabinet government are weakened and, instead, power is centralised with the prime minister and otherwise diffused through a variety of executive agencies and ministries, with limited scope for parliamentary influence.

While the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have extensive formal authority over the passage of legislation, in practice Parliament has provided only a weak institutional check on governments. According to Hardgrave & Kochanek (1993, p 81), MPs 'are indifferent to executive abuse of the system, ignore poor drafting of legislation, and provide minimal scrutiny of the budget'. In the absence of a powerful system of parliamentary committees, there are few significant legislative roles available outside the executive. One important position is that of Lok Sabha Speaker, because of the duties surrounding the timetabling of government business and, increasingly important since the passing of the Anti-defection Act, in determining the legitimacy of defections and party splits. The Speaker, who is chosen by the Lok Sabha, is expected to play a non-partisan role in looking after the conduct of the House. However, the government has an interest in the Speaker being sympathetic to the passage of government business.

In terms of the impact of the system of parliamentary government on

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14 In terms of regional redistribution, the reallocation of seats is essential. This could be disguised by increasing the total number of seats to be redistributed; a tactic that has been used in every previous delimitation (McMillan 2000, p 1273).

15 The Rajya Sabha consists of 238 members selected by indirect election from an electoral college made up of legislators from the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabhas, plus 12 members nominated by the president.

coalition formation and maintenance, the Indian system is largely centred on the office of the prime minister, who controls the formal and informal routes through which patronage is exercised and policy direction given. Ministerial positions offer competency over particular areas of government functions, although such competency has to be contested with state governments and other executive agencies. Policy is usually developed through bilateral negotiations between ministers and the prime minister rather than collectively in Cabinet, although this varies across policy issues and ministerial portfolios. The executive structure plays an important part in the allocation of portfolios amongst coalition partners and in the attitudes of parties supporting the government in the executive and legislature. This aspect of coalition government will be examined further below.

Under the Congress system, relations between the national and state governments were largely controlled through the internal structures of a centralised Congress Party. The formal mechanisms for allocating revenues and responsibilities between the two main tiers of government were set out in the Constitution but, under a dominant party system, the partisan interests of the Congress were served through a centralised system of spending, largely controlled by the Finance and Planning commissions, and an aggressive policy of intervention in state politics, often leading to the imposition of direct rule from New Delhi.

As Congress hegemony has waned, the formal federal structure has become more firmly entrenched. This has led to a greater degree of autonomy for state governments, although the system is still heavily centralised (see Austin 1999, chapter 30). This has meant that state governments still benefit from friendly relations with the central government, but there is less direct interference, and formal structures and Supreme Court intervention have enabled state govern-ments run by opponents of the central government to cohabit with more comfort.

A core assumption of coalition theory is that parties benefit from being in government:

> If a party participates in government, not only do the psychological rewards of wielding power accrue to the party elite and its backbenchers, but also the party is in a position to use the power of the state to reward its friends and punish its enemies.
>
> Browne & Franklin 1973, p 453

The way in which government power and patronage is shared between the members of a government coalition has important consequences both for the cohesiveness of the government and the policy direction it adopts. Two competing models of portfolio allocation have been developed: one which suggests that

government offices will be distributed proportionately between coalition partners and one which predicts that the distribution will reflect the bargaining power of each of the partners (Laver & Schofield 1990, chapter 7).[16] Additional consideration can be given to the nature of particular portfolios and their relative importance and relation to particular policy areas. Laver & Shepsle (1996) have developed this approach into a detailed model of the nature of coalition formation and how it relates to policy compromises amongst political actors.

Whereas some descriptions of coalition government (see, eg, Dodd 1976) view Cabinet and coalition membership as coterminous, the Indian situation is complicated by the willingness of some parties to support the government yet refuse to accept government office. In 1998 and 1999 the most conspicuous case of this was the attitude taken by the TDP. Other parties, such as the Lok Dal, shared this caution about too close an association with the national government, while leaders such as Mamata Banerjee swung between accepting office and remaining apart over the course of the parliaments. For the TDP, rejection of government office was partly offset by the selection of one of their party members (G M C Balayogi) as Speaker of the Lok Sabha.[17]

The fact that much of the argument put forward in this article has tended to downplay the role of ideology in the coalition politics of recent governments of India is partly the result of a deliberate neutralisation of ideological issues. While much of the practical policy direction of government is established through portfolio allocation and ministerial application, the wider ideological framework for government is set out in the process of electoral campaigns and manifesto commitments. Coalition partners will seek to establish certain foundations on which to co-operate as part of a functioning government, both through inter-party negotiations conducted in private and through publicly endorsed coalition policy documents. As Paul Mitchell (1999) has argued, public commitments are designed to establish basic aspirations and the ideological context in which a coalition government will operate. In this way, common ground is established between coalition partners, as well as an openly agreed set of constraints on the future ideological direction of government policy.

It can be seen that much of the Hindutva programme, which provided much of the ideological focus for the BJP up to 1996, was explicitly neutralised through coalition policy documents. Part of the negotiating process following the inconclusive 1998 Lok Sabha election involved the drafting of the National

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16   However, Bueno de Mesquita (1975, p 26) argues that there is no association between the size of parties and their payoffs from participation in government.

17   When Balayogi was killed in a helicopter crash in March 2002 the TDP did not press its claims over the selection of a new Speaker, and Manohar Joshi of the Shiv Sena was elected as Speaker in May 2002. This was seen as part of the TDP's wish to distance itself from the BJP government, in the aftermath of the Gujarat massacres.

Agenda for Governance, while the 1999 election was fought under a common National Democratic Alliance manifesto.

To an extent, these documents simply reflected the strategic shift that had taken place after the 1996 election. In 1996 the BJP election manifesto had stated that 'Hindutva, or cultural nationalism, shall be the rainbow which will bridge our present to our glorious past and pave the way for an equally glorious future' (cited in Hansen & Jaffrelot 1998b, p 2). The failure of the BJP to win a working parliamentary majority, or attract new coalition partners to support it in government, exposed the limitations of a militant electoral strategy and saw the party's appeal restricted to a sub-set of states and a limited social catchment. These limitations were acknowledged and were evident in the move to an electoral strategy which reached out to new alliance partners and presented a more moderate ideological approach.

The presentation of the moderate Atal Behari Vajpayee as prospective prime minister contributed to the softening of the BJP agenda. However, the 1998 BJP manifesto still included Hindutva as one of the five elements which constituted the 'core content and ideological pillars of the BJP', as well as the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution providing for the special treatment for the state of Jammu and Kashmir (chapter 3) and a commitment to 'facilitate the construction of a magnificent Shri Ram Mandir at Ram Janmasthan in Ayodhya' (chapter 2). None of these core elements of BJP ideology appeared in the National Agenda for Governance, which, instead, stated that:

> Governance must become unifying, not divisive, in its practice. It is this mindless manner of the domination of the majority that has led to bitterness, hostility and confrontation …We will, therefore, strive to develop national consensus on all major issues confronting the nation by involving the opposition parties and all section[s] of society in dialogue. We will also try for a consensual mode of governance as far as practicable.

By the time of the 1998 NDA manifesto the distance from any divisive agenda was further reiterated:

> We reach out to the minorities and even at the cost of repetition proclaim that we will safeguard the rights as enshrined in our Constitution. NDA is the political arm of none other than the Indian people as a whole: No one will be cast aside; fairness and justice will be rendered to one and all and we assure you that there will not be any discrimination.

As well as emphasising the non-divisive agenda of the coalition government, The National Agenda for Governance asserted the collective nature of the co-alition formed in 1998: 'This is our joint commitment, an assurance that we give together to the entire country.' In the 1999 NDA manifesto the cohesive nature of the coalition project was acknowledged, stating that 'with a consensus on a common cause and a common set of principles we have sunk our differences to weld ourselves into a solid phalanx of a single dominant political formation'. In this way the documents recognise the fact that they are the outcomes of a process of compromise, delineating common ground on which the government can operate.

The role of coalition policy documents in 1998 and 1998 was to impose constraints on the range and direction of government policy and, in particular, to restrict the BJP's implementation of policy based on the Hindutva ideology. These documents acted as a public commitment to a moderate agenda. In return, the BJP was able to elicit a positive statement of cooperation from its coalition partners. While neither document could be seen as binding in any way and commitments to religious tolerance and harmonious government looked particularly thin in the light of attacks upon Christians and massacres in Gujarat, they presented a public agenda against which the performance of the BJP and coalition partners could be judged.

For any constraint to be binding there needs to be some enforcement mechanism. The role of coalition policy documents is to tie participants to a public commitment to a basic government programme and, in doing so, increase the costs of defection – either through policy initiatives that break the consensus, or through exit from the coalition.

The analysis of coalition formation suggests that expectations of minimal-winning and ideological coherent coalitions, in which all supporting parties co-operate in the distribution of government patronage and formation of government policy, are not necessarily going to be realised. In a competitive party system party leaders may seek to maintain a distinctive identity by forming coalitions with parties appealing to a divergent, rather than coherent, ideological support base. And in a segmented party system apparently illogical coalition groupings may take place at the aggregate level because of rational strategic decisions within smaller political arenas. It is argued that the institutional context of a SMP system and a federal system of government has fostered such outcomes. These factors have created countervailing tendencies which have worked against the formation of coalitions built upon ideologically coherent policy programmes. Similar considerations have allowed regional parties to offer support to central government coalitions, while resisting the benefits that accrue from the acceptance of ministerial office.

CONSEQUENCES OF PARTY ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS FOR NATIONAL COHESION

The electoral success of alliance politics has had the somewhat paradoxical effect of reducing the disproportionality associated with the SMP electoral system. By forcing parties to negotiate over the number of seats that they contest and segmenting the electoral arena at the state level, alliances have produced outcomes in terms of seats that are more representative of the pattern of vote shares at the national level.

Alliances have also tied national parties to regional and state parties in ways which allow geographically disparate parties a say in national government, both through the co-operation entailed in alliance formation and through the sharing of power and influence in government coalitions in New Delhi. This power-sharing is effective even when state parties choose not to take office in governing coalitions. The effective distribution of veto power across a range of parties has restricted the ability of the national parties, the BJP and the Congress, to act unilaterally.

This power-sharing could be seen to restrict the ability of the central government to act decisively, but it can more clearly be seen as the mechanism behind an effective distribution of responsibility between central and state governments – a process which can be termed 'electoral federalism'. With little change in the constitutional distribution of power there has been an effective devolution of domestic policy to state level, while foreign affairs and macro-economic policy remain functions of the national government.

The consequences for social cohesion remain contested. The relationship between the alliance and coalition partners of the BJP, working together as the National Democratic Alliance, was widely seen as a moderating factor, limiting the more communally charged aspects of the Hindutva agenda. However, this interpretation was challenged by the weak response of coalition and alliance partners in the aftermath of the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002. The BJP state government in Gujarat was seen to be complicit in the targeting of Muslim areas and the BJP-led national government seen as failing to intervene effectively to prevent the atrocities. Yet, as Sanjay Ruparelia (2006, p 333) notes, the alliance partners did not act effectively: 'The failure of these parties to exercise a credible political veto against the BJP enabled Hindu nationalist cadres to severely challenge their professed secular credentials and test the limits of India's democratic regime.'

It could be argued that the events in Gujarat in 2002 tainted the BJP brand and made the party a less attractive alliance partner in 2004, but the evidence is sketchy. Concern on these lines persists today, both within and without the BJP, but was not enough to stop the party endorsing Narendra Modi, Chief Minister

of Gujarat in 2002 at the time of the massacres, as prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, in which the BJP-led NDA won a resounding victory.

While the formation of alliances and coalitions has been characterised as more opportunistic than ideological, this partly reflects the multi-dimensional ideological basis of politics in India. Parties are not simply aligned on a left-right basis, there are important secular-communal, individual/group rights, centre-periphery, and caste-based cleavages which intersect with and segment party competition. At a basic level alliance politics enhances the pluralistic aspect of electoral politics by bringing together often 'ideologically' disparate parties (for instance, in Punjab, where the Sikh-based Shiromani Akali Dal has allied with the Hindu BJP). The electoral effectiveness of catch-all parties has been shown to be vulnerable to geographically and socially concentrated challenges, and alliance politics has allowed these two types of parties to co-ordinate effectively.

It is further argued in this article that Congress's commitment to the principle of alliance and coalition politics, the party's strategy since 2004, has bolstered ideological coherence. In the past regional parties with support bases which were similar to the traditional Congress support (often state-level breakaways from the Congress) were reluctant to become partners with the national party for fear of co-option. This often drove them into alliance with the BJP, where ideological distance was countered by an appeal to very distinct support bases. However, the Congress's commitment to co-operation at the state level has given some reassurance to the state-level parties that there could be a stable working relationship bolstered with the benefits of office-holding. This has resulted in important regional breakaway parties, such as the Nationalist Congress Party and Trinamool Congress, working with the Congress both electorally and in national government.

In terms of the general pattern of democratic responsibility and accountability it is hard to see a direct effect of coalition government. This is more to do with the general weakness of parliamentary government at national and state level than with a particular facet of alliances and coalition government. The governments of the NDA and UPA have both been rocked by corruption scandals and the general delivery of policy and programmes has been poor, but this does not compare particularly badly with previous examples of single-party government.

Indian electoral politics in the period from 1998 to 2014 has been characterised by the acceptance and evolution of alliance and coalition politics. The coalition governments elected in 1999, 2004, and 2009 have each served a full five-year term and the period has coincided with high and sustained economic growth. The Indian electorate has come to accept alliances and coalitions as part of the democratic process and the political parties have adapted to the dynamics of

electoral alliances and coalition formation and the compromises and power-sharing required to sustain co-operation.

Indian elections have a powerful representative purpose and instil a crucial element of accountability and responsiveness in the political process. There are still major issues with the functioning of parliamentary democracy and the delivery of public policy programmes, but also a widespread recognition that alliances and coalition politics reflect the regional diversity and social complexity of the country. For this reason, electoral alliances and coalition politics are key to the representative role of democracy in contemporary India.

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