

Party System in India: from the Congress ‘System’ to Coalition Politics

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(ABSTRACT)

Party system in India has witnessed many significant changes since the inauguration of the electoral parliamentary democracy in country after Independence in 1952. The victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India’s 2014 general election in which it won a majority of seats after seven successive elections from 1989 to 2009 that resulted in hung parliaments and minority governments, mostly minority coalitions, means the end of the coalition era in Indian politics and the beginning of a new era of one-party majority dominated by BJP, reminiscent of Congress-dominated one-party majorities that prevailed during the pre-1989 period. India’s party system created a distinctive coalition formation pattern in which geography and territory played a significant part. Consequently, India’s coalitions primarily involved the coming together of two types of parties, polity-wide and single-state parties. While polity –wide parties contested and won across the country, single –state parties were basically confined to a particular state. Given the strong-centre framework, coalition become the key mechanism through which single-state parties could have say in national level decision making. At the same time for polity wide parties, coalition helped plug territorial gap and also increase support in terms of number in parliament. While on one hand, the interest of the two type of parties matched, on the other hand, there is also a tussle for the steering wheel. The federalized pattern of party system competition, the institutionalization of a coalition system and the requirement of a bicameral parliament make it difficult for polity- wide parties to wish away coalition, there is no stopping them from undermining coalition.

KEY WORDS: *Allies, Coalition, Congress, Majority, National Democratic Alliance, Political Parties United Progressive Alliance, States, System.*

Political parties are organized groups, seeking political power either by ballot or by force, within a political system. The modern parties have their origins in the 19th century Europe and the United States along with the development of electoral and parliamentary mechanisms.

The term party derives from Latin verb ‘partire’, which means ‘to divide.’ However, it does not enter in a significant way in the vocabulary of politics until the seventeenth century. It implies that it does not enter the political discourse directly from Latin, its longstanding predecessor with very much the same etymological connotation is ‘sect’, which took from the Latin word ‘secare’ that means to serve, ‘to cut’ and thereby ‘to divide’.¹

However, the political party basically conveyed the idea of ‘part’, and part is not, in and by itself derogatory term like faction. Nonetheless, the part had long lost its original connotation. The term ‘part’ enters in the French vocabulary/politics as “partager”, which means sharing, as it enters in the English vocabulary as partaking, that is, partnership and participation. When part becomes party, then term party is subjected to two opposite semantic pulls, the derivation from ‘partire’, to divide, on the one hand, and the association with taking part and thereby with sharing, on the other. While, the word ‘party’ entered into the vocabulary of politics whereas ‘sect’ was on its way out and associated with religion especially with Protestant sectarianism.² Therefore, it should be clear that political parties do not relate with

¹ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems, A Framework for Analysis*, London: Cambridge University, 1976, p.4.

² Ibid.

those sects, cliques, clubs, factions and small groups that can be identified as the antecedents of the modern party in most western countries. In England, it is possible to trace incipient parties back to the early seventeenth century, in France the development of small groups that were embryonic parties, materialized somewhat later, but clearly preceded the French Revolution in 1789.³

It is generally explained that a political party, as an association, organized in support of some principles or policies by constitutional means, it endeavor's to make the determinant of government. Without party organizations, there can be no unified statement of principles, no orderly evolution policy, and no regular resort to the constitutional devices of parliamentary elections, nor, of course, any recognized institution by means of which a party seeks to gain or to maintain power.⁴ Political scientists have viewed the concept of political party from different perspectives. Neumann⁵ calls political parties as "the life line of modern politics, Edmund Burke⁶ treats party as an ideological group, whereas Bryce⁷ and Disraeli⁸ lay emphasis on principles to be pursued by political party. Undoubtedly the principles are significant but the do not necessarily constitute the only traits or tents of political party. For Max Weber, a political party is an "associative type of social relationship, membership in which rests on formally free recruitment.... Devoted to secular power within a corporate group for its active member (which) may consist in the realization of certain objective policy for the attainment of personal advantages as both."⁹ A political party is conceived by Schumpeter as a "group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for power."¹⁰ Emphasis on electoral nature of political parties is added by Anthony Downs¹¹ and Ranney and Kendal¹²

Political parties strategy of wresting power by raising issues is emphasized by La Palombara and Myron Weiner their definition of political parties incorporates ingredients inter alia as: (I) continuity in organization, i.e., an organization whose expected life span is not dependent on the life of current leaders; (II) manifest and presumably permanent organization at local level, with regularized communication and other relationship between locals and national units, (III) self-conscious determination of leader, at both national and local levels to capture and to hold decision making power alone or in coalition with other, not simply to influence of exercise of power; and (IV) a concern on the part of the organization for seeking followers at the polls or in some manner striving for popular support.¹³

Structural and organizational traits of political party have been highlighted by Maurice Duverger who has described a political party as "a community with a particular structure" and that the contemporary political parties are characterized by their anatomy¹⁴ Duverger contemplates four basic elements of party structure: the cause, the branch, the cell and the militia. A "caucus" bearing close semblance to a committee, is dependent on small membership, attaching preface to quality rather than quantity. Being a closed group it gets spurred into action at the time of election. A "branch party" in contrast is a mass party. The "cell" typifies a part of the communist or revolutionary parties. The "militia" provides resemblance to a private army and bound in fascist parties. With membership, Duverger makes a further distinction between cadre and mass parties. Cadre is group of notables, decentralized weakly knit and it corresponds to caucus parties whereas mass parties are based on open membership. Such parties are generally centralized and strongly knit; they correspond to branch parties. However, Durverger argues that in the actual formations parties would always be having mixed structures.

In an identical but slightly different manner, Panebianco suggests a three-fold categorization of parties: elite or caucus parties, mass parties and the catch-all parties.¹⁵ Elite or caucus parties are an 'internal creation' and their formation is facilitated by cliques within an assembly joining together to articulate common concerns and thus to embark on concerted campaigns among the expanded electorate. The conservative parties in Britain and Scandinavian during the nineteenth century were of the elite type.

³ Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, "The Origin and Development of Political Parties", in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1972, pp.5-6.

⁴ R.M. Maciver, *The Modern State*, London: OUP, 1955, p.396.

⁵ Sigmund Neumann, *Modern Political Parties*, Universities of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, p.1.

⁶ Edmund Burke, "Thought on the Present Discontents (1770)" in *the work of Edmund Burke*, Vol.1, Little Brown, Boston, 1839, pp.425-426.

⁷ James Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, Macmillan, New York, 1921, p.54.

⁸ Philip Friese, *An Essay on Party, Showing its Uses, its Abuse and Natural Dissolution*, Fowler and Wells, New York, 1856, p.7.

⁹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, William Hodge Co., London, 1974, pp.373-374.

¹⁰ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, Routledge New York, 1994, p.283.

¹¹ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Harper and Row, New York, 1975, p.25.

¹² Austin Ranney and Willmore Kendal, *Democracy and the American Party System*, New York City, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956, p.85.

¹³ Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner, n.3, p.6

¹⁴ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in Modern State*, (translated by Barbara and Robert North), London: Methuen and Co, 1967, p.17.

¹⁵ Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics: An Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp.168-169.

Mass parties are 'external' creations and their formation is facilitated outside the assembly group. They endeavour to seek representation in the legislature for the fulfillment of their interests and attainment of their goals. The socialist parties articulating the interest of the working class that sprang up across Europe at the cusp of the twentieth century are cited as prime examples of mass parties. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) which came into being in 1875 is cited as a classic example. The Formation of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) formed in West Germany after the second World War is another such example. In the Indian National Congress (INC) during the national freedom struggle could be said to be mass party.

The 'catch- all' party¹⁶ is a phenomenon of recent origin. Kirchheimer is credited to have coined the phrase "catch-all" to describe the outcome of an evolutionary path followed by many parties, both elite and mass, in respect to development occurring in the aftermath of the Second World War.¹⁷ Catch-all parties strive for national interest rather than to represent a single societal segment. Catch-all parties are dominated by their leaders who interact with the electorate through electronic medium like television rather than indirectly through party members. According to Hague and Harrop, catch-all parties strive for garnering electoral support wherever they can obtain it and their objective is not to represent but to govern. The catch –all party is a "response to a mobilized political system in which governing has become more technical and in which electoral communications is through the media."¹⁸ In the post-Cold War period, many radical socialist parties in Spain and Britain have transformed themselves into leader-delimited social democratic parties, which portray an important example of a shift from mass to catch-all status. The German concept of a Volkspartei (people's party) with its wide spread support is very akin to the notion of catch-all. The major centrist national parties in India particularly the Congress fall in the category of mass party segment and of the late Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is gradually inching towards catch-all status.

In view of the fact that political parties have been defined differently various political scientists, as appraised supra, a working definition of political parties, as based on the definition provided by Hague and Harrop, with some amendment, is adopted for the purpose of this paper. Thus political parties are permanent organization which strive seek to occupy decisive position of authority in a State through legitimate constitutional means on the basis of adult suffrage.¹⁹

In democratic polity, party system breeds interaction between competing political parties. Provincial choices and option in the competitive interactions get shaped by the elections that also culminate in determining the support base of the parties. Sartori²⁰ has envisaged three important prerequisites essential for the establishment of party system: (a) responsible government; (b) the reality of elections and (c) presence of parties as a subsystem. These traits are present in the party system prevalent in India.

The Congress is a secular party that subscribes to a linguistically and culturally pluralist notion of Indian nationhood. There are four other major categories of parties (each not necessarily constituting a coalition). I classify them as Hindu nationalist (the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, and the Shiv Sena), the Communist parties (the CPI(M), the CPI), the agrarian/lower-caste populist (the Janata Party, the Janata Dal and its offshoots like the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Biju Janata Dal, Janata Dal (Secular), Janata Dal (United), etc.) and ethnic/ethno-regional parties based on particular regional linguistic groups (DMK, AIADMK, SAD, TDP, AGP) or lower-caste blocs (BSP) or tribes (JMM). Except for the Congress, BJP and CPI (M), these are regional parties with a single-state stronghold.²¹ Party system typology in India given below in Table 1.

¹⁶ Catch-all party is a response to a mobilized political system. In such parties governing becomes more technical & in which electoral communication is managed through media on the other hand a mass party is an external creation whose formation is facilitated the assembly in group; *Ibid*, p.169.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.167.

²⁰ Giovanni Sartori, n.1, p.22.

²¹ E. Sridharan, "Why are multi-party minority governments viable in India? Theory and comparison" *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* Vol. 50, No. 3, July 2012, pp.314–343.

Table-1
Party Types in India (1989-2014)

Polity wide	Cross regional	Regionally located	Regionalist
INC, BJP,	BJP (1989, 1991),	SP, BSP, JD(U),	AIADMK, DMK, PMK,
CPI (1989),	CPI(M), CPI, NCP	JD(S), RJD, RSP	VCK, DMDK, MDMK
CPI(M) (1991)	JD, RSP (1996, 1998)	CPI (2014), NCP (2004), SAP, AD, LJSP, AAP RLSP, RPI/RPI(A), RLD AIFB, SWP, INLD	TDP, TRS, MUL, KCM, KEC, JKDPDP, JKN SAD, AGP, SHS, JMM, JVM, PMK, SDF, SSP, MPP, MNF, GNLF, AINRC, WBTC/AITC, NPF/NPC, UGDP, UMFA, MIM, BJD, AUDF, YSRC, MAG, HJC(BL)

Source: K K Kailash, Regional Parties in the 16th Lok Sabha Elections: Who Survived and Why?, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. XLIX, No. 39, September 27, 2014, p. 66.

Notes: Acronyms: JP(S)=Janata Party (Secular); SAD=Shiromani Akali Dal; JD=Janata Dal; DMK=Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; TDP=Telugu Desam Party; AGP=Asom Gana Parishad; Cong(S)=Congress (Socialist); SJP=Samajwadi Janata Party; BJP=Bharatiya Janata Party; SHS=Shiv Sena; TMC=Tamil Maanila Congress; SP=Samajwadi Party; CPI=Communist Party of India; CPI(M)=Communist Party of India (Marxist); Cong (T)=Congress (Tiwari); MGP=Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party; NC=National Conference; RSP=Revolutionary Socialist Party; AIFB=All India Forward Bloc; AC=Arunachal Congress; SMT=Samata Party; BJD=Biju Janata Dal; PMK=Pattali Makkal Katchi; AIADMK=All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; MDMK=Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; JKNC=Jammu & Kashmir National Conference; MSCP=Manipur State Congress Party; TRC=Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress; HLD(R)=Haryana Lok Dal (Rashtriya); SDF=Sikkim Democratic Front; BSMC=Bodoland State Movement Committee; RJP=Rashtriya Janata Party; HVP=Haryana Vikas Party; HVC=Himachal Vikas Congress; RLD=Rashtriya Lok Dal; WBTC=West Bengal Trinamul Congress; JD(U)=Janata Dal (United); ABLTC=Akhil Bharatiya Loktantrik Congress; MADMK=MGR Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; IUML=Indian Union Muslim League; JMM=Jharkhand Mukti Morcha; TRS=Telangana Rashtra Samithi; LJP=Lok Janshakti Party; RJD=Rashtriya Janata Dal; BSP=Bahujan Samaj Party; JKDPDP=Jammu & Kashmir People's Democratic Party; AIMIM=All India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen.

The Congress System²²

The Congress's pre-eminent position as a national party at the time of India's Independence in 1947 contributed significantly towards a relatively undifferentiated party system across most states of India until 1967. As a consequence, the politics and party systems in the states were commonly viewed as an extension of national politics, rather than having their own distinct characteristics.²³ Analyzing the nature of party system and the factors that shaped it in this phase is important to understand the evolution of the Indian party system

Congress's Role of pre- Independence Era

²² The account of the Congress in this section draws on several standard works including Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1970; Myron Weiner, *Party Building in a New Nation; the Indian National Congress*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967; Stanely Kochanek, *The congress party of India: The Dynamics of a One-Party Democracy*, USA, Princeton University Press, 1968; Richard Sisson and Ramashray Roy, *Diversity and dominance in Indian politics: Changing bases of congress support* (Vol. 1). Sage, New Delhi, 1990; James Manor, "Parties and the party system" In A. Kohli (Ed.), *India's democracy*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1988; W.H. Morris Jones, 'Dominance and Dissent: The Inter-relation in the Indian Party System', *Government and Opposition*, 1 (4), 1966.

²³ Rekha Diwakar, *Party System in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2017, p. 37.

The Congress was the first mass-based political organization in India, which emerged from the nationalist movement against British colonial rule. Founded in 1885, the Congress grew from being a group of founding notables to a mass movement that included peasants and workers by the 1920s under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's mass mobilization. It was an umbrella movement and party for independence and tried to include all religious and linguistic groups, castes, classes and regions and encompassed ideological strands ranging from soft Hindu nationalism to radical socialism. As an independence movement it was gradualist and used non-violent methods under Gandhi's leadership, extracting concessions in the form of increasing degrees of self-rule from the British by successive rounds of pressure, the major constitutional changes to this effect being made in 1909, 1919 and 1935. From the colonial period onwards, the Congress developed encompassing and penetrative organizational machinery, organized on a provincial basis and dependent on local notables. In its internal functioning the Congress could be said to approximate a grand coalition of social and political forces, a multi-ethnic and multi-regional coalition that was on balance ideologically centrist. The party was committed to democracy, secularism, minority rights, federalism, and a mixed economy. Congress by this time, had become an election-winning and power-using machine' and did not follow Gandhi's advice to disband itself as a political party and instead become a social service agency after Independence.²⁴

Congress's electoral and governing success in the pre-Independence decades was due to an intra-party organization which provided an effective mechanism for channeling grass-roots support into a relatively streamlined but democratic leadership. The party was also able to substantially improve its financial position after 1920 and succeeded in expanding its membership, especially in the rural regions of India. Thus, India emerged from Independence with a party that was effectively able to contain factionalism and accommodate ethnic differences.²⁵

Congress's Role of post- Independence Era

Post-Independence, the Congress became a large pan-Indian political organization, which operated at all levels of the country's political landscape. In first four elections held in 1952,1957,1962 and1967, Congress won an average of 69 percent of seats and 45 percent votes share. It also won the majority of seats in most of the state assembly elections which were held concurrently with the national elections to the Lok Sabha, Despite facing multiparty competition, Congress successfully held a place in the middle of political centre ground, as a catch-all party, and emerged as the winner in the national and most state assembly election held during this period.²⁶

Kothari²⁷ defined it as a 'system' of 'one -party dominance', and less competitive. According to this view, Congress system comprised a 'party of consensus', which was Congress, including its internal factions, and the 'parties of pressure,' the opposition parties that functioned on the margin and created the 'margin of pressure',

Both the ideas of an inbuilt corrective mechanism through faction within Congress and a latent threat from outside the margin of pressure were necessary parts of this Congress-dominated party system.

The Congress system could sustain itself because of conciliatory machinery, which mediated factional disputes and influence political decision, thus confirming its position of patronage and power. Such a position of Congress was also strengthened by its strategy of neutralizing the effects of narrow social cleavages and disaffection.²⁸ Congress's dominance during this phase was also due to the effects of the SMPS, (single member-district, simple plurality system) tends towards a two-party system because of the tendency over time for third and more parties to get eliminated due to the combination of two effects - a "mechanical effect" of over-representation or under-representation of parties, depending on whether they get more or less than a certain (varying) threshold of votes; and a "psychological effect" whereby voters tend to not "waste" their votes on parties which have no realistic chance but vote "sophisticatedly" (or strategically/tactically) for the party which they feel has the best chance of defeating their least-liked party.²⁹ These two effects taken in combination will tend to aggregate votes around the leading party and its principal rival. Duverger's law argues that the first-past-the-post system produces an imperative of consolidation of voters (and politicians) around a principal rival party to have a realistic chance of winning against a dominant party, thus leading to the elimination of third parties or at least an alliance of other parties against a leading party.

²⁴ M. Desai, *The Rediscovery of India*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2009, p.297.

²⁵ M.Tudor, *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi,2013,pp.21-23.

²⁶ Rekha Diwakar,n.22,pp.43-45.

²⁷ Rajni Kothari, The Congress 'System' in India, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No.12 (Dec., 1964), pp. 1161-1165.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See Duverger (1963) for the full argument

While Duverger’s law applies essentially at the constituency level, where strong local/state parties exist as in a federal polity, particularly one like India’s where the states are linguistic and cultural entities reflecting such social cleavages, Duvergerian dynamics can lead to two-party or bipolar systems at the state level due to the consolidation of the state-level opposition to the principal party at the state level, whether a national or regional party, in a principal rival, while at the same time leading to a multi-party system nationally because the state-level two-party systems do not consist of the same two parties.³⁰ Indeed, they can consist of a variety of parties, some national, some purely state-level. The systemic properties of the first-past-the-post electoral system working themselves out in a federal polity, reinforced by the delinking of national and state elections since 1971, and the division of powers making state-level power politically attractive, drives the bipolarization of state-level party systems. which usually favours larger parties at the cost of electorally unviable smaller parties.³¹

Table.2

Government formation and evolution of the Indian system

Election	Election year	Government Formed	Phase of Party System Evolution
1	1952	Congress	Congress domination
2	1957	Congress	
3	1962	Congress	
4	1967	Congress	
5	1971	Congress	
6	1977	Janata Party	Congress decline/opposition
7	1980	Congress	
8	1984	Congress	
9	1989	National Front Coalition	Fragmentation of the party system
10	1991	Congress(Minority Coalition)	
11	1996	United Front Coalition	
12	1998	BJP (Coalition government)	
13	1999	BJP Led NDA Coalition government	
14	2004	Congress Led UPA Coalition government	
15	2009	Congress Led UPA Coalition government	
16	2014	BJP Led NDA Coalition government	BJP domination

Decline in the Congress’s Dominance and the Bipolarization of State Party System

Over the course of the 1960s, the party machine gradually disintegrated. In 1969, the party underwent a major split— between the faction led by then prime minister Indira Gandhi, and the leaders in control of the party organization. Most of the party’s office bearers in most states stayed with the organizational faction leading to a crippling of the

³⁰ E. Sridharan, “Duverger’s Law, its Reformulations and the Evolution of the Indian Party System”, Centre for Policy Research, May 1997, and IRIS India Working Paper No. 35 (February 1997), IRIS Center, University of Maryland.

³¹ *Ibid.*

organizational capacities of the faction that emerged dominant, that of Indira Gandhi. Gandhi used her personal charisma and populist appeals to win national elections, and defeat the organizational wing of the party in the 1971 elections, winning a thumping majority, trouncing the organization wing. Her faction came to be considered the real Congress.³² The breakdown of Congress system was starkly evident after Indira Gandhi's disastrous Emergency experiment, which result in a sharp and substantial drop in the vote base. After the defeat of the Congress in the 1977 election and the formation of first non-Congress government at the centre led by Janata Party, a conglomeration of four parties (Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Congress(O),and Socialist Party), the backward castes emerged as a major force in national politics. However, once again the disenchantment with the Janata Party's uninspiring leadership and its internecine squabbling brought Congress back to power in 1980. In the 1984 election, held after Indira Gandhi's assassination, Congress polled the highest vote and seat tally ever as a sympathy vote swept the country and brought her son Rajiv Gandhi to power. But the underlying trends signified the collapse of one- party dominance and end of Congress epoch in Indian politics.³³ From 1967 onward, a consolidation of the non-Congress opposition took place, state-by-state, in tandem with such consolidation in state assembly elections. *This bipolar consolidation was the key feature and driving force of the fragmentation of the national party system.* But this bipolar consolidation has been one of *multiple bipolarities* (for example, Congress-BJP, Congress-Left, Congress-Regional Party, in different states), there by contributing to fragmentation at the national level.³⁴

The following pattern of bipolarization was discernible state-wise over 1967-89 for Lok Sabha and assembly election. In Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Delhi, the movement towards a two- party system began as early as 1967 with the consolidation of the non –Congress vote behind the BJS, the ancestor of the BJP. This system has remained stable to date. In three other states- Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura- there emerged a bipolar, Congress- versus-Left, two- alliance system in which Congress (West Bengal) or Congress- led alliance of state based minor parties (Kerala, Tripura) contested against a Left Front coalition of CPI(M), CPI (since the late 1970s in Kerala), and smaller Left parties, the two coalition alternating in power. In five other states- Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Goa- a Congress-regional party two party system came being over 1967-89, churning in the 1990s with the rise of BJP in all of these states, often in alliance with the regional party.

In one major state, Tamil Nadu, the process began in 1967, resulting in the elimination of Congress from the top two position and becoming an essentially bipolar contest between the two leading parties DMK and IADMK with one of the two being allied to Congress for parliamentary and state assembly elections. In this arrangement ,which was stable from 1977 to 1996, Congress was given the lion's share of seats in parliamentary election in exchange for the regional ally being given the lion's share of state assembly seats. Since 1996, the regional parties contest the majority of Lok Sabha seats too, given a few to their Congress or BJP allies.

In the northern- eastern rim states of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Nagaland and in Sikkim, an unstable two-party or two alliance contest prevailed between Congress and a variety of regional parties.

Finally, the congress retained preponderance until 1989 in seven major states- Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Orissa- where no alternative party or alliance consolidated itself as a successful challenger for parliamentary elections, although a broad- front anti- Congress alliance, if put to gather, could have challenged Congress, as happened in 1967-1977.

However, just after the 1989 election and the state assembly elections in early 1990, Congress remained the leading party in more states in terms of Lok Sabha seats (12 states) and in terms of vote share (17 states) than any other party, and remained one of the two leading parties in more states in terms of Lok Sabha seats (20 seats) and vote share (24states) than any other. In the state assemblies , it remained the leading party in more states (9 states) and in term of vote share (11 states) than any other party, and one of the two leading parties in terms of vote share in more states (24,or all except Tamil Nadu) than any other. However, many of these were very small states, Congress having lost Uttar Pradesh, Bihar ,Orissa, and Haryana to Janata Dal; Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh to BJP; and Rajasthan and Gujarat to a Janata Dal-BJP coalition in both Lok Sabha and state assembly elections (except Haryana, which did not have assembly elections in 1989-90.³⁵

The Evolution of the Pattern of Fragmentation of the Party System 1989–2017

³²Eswaran Sridharan "Coalition Congruence in India's Federal System", in Adrin Albala, Josep Maria Renui,(eds) *Coalition Politics and Federalism*,Springer,2018,p.14.

³³Zoya Hasan, "Political Parties", in Niraja Gopal Jayal, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *Politics in India*, OUP, 2012,p.243.

³⁴E. Sridharan, *Coalition Politics in India: Types, Duration, Theory and Comparison*, Institute of South Asian Studies, Working Paper, No.50, 2008, p.14.

³⁵E. Sridharan (ed.) *Coalition Politics Democratic Consolidation in Asia*, OUP, New Delhi,2012,pp.36-37.

The 1989 election results were not just another repeat of broad-front anti-Congressism of Janata Party kind, but signified a more far-reaching and seismic shift in the party system rooted in shifts in party organizational strength and support bases at the state level in increasing number of states, and in India's political economy and changing patterns of social mobilization. The major trends of 1989–2016 are (1) the relative decline of Congress and (2) the rise of BJP and (3) regional or single state-based parties.³⁶ Prior to 1989, the BJP and its predecessor BJS, the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), had never exceeded 10% of the vote or 35 seats nationally, except in 1977 when as a component of Janata Party it won 99 of 295 seats won by Janata Party (more than the 86 seats it won in 1989). Its rise since then has been steady in terms of both vote and seat shares. It experienced a meteoric rise in seats from a derisory 2 in 1984 (despite 7.4% votes) to 86 (out of 226 contested, mostly in de facto alliance with Janata Dal) in 1989 owing to the combination of three effects—seat adjustments with Janata Dal resulting in one-to-one contests against the Congress in most of the seats it contested, an increase in contested seats and a sizeable and regionally concentrated swing in its favour. In 1989–1991, the BJP contested alone with a religiously polarizing platform against the backdrop of the upper caste backlash against the National Front government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations for reservation of government jobs for backward classes defined in caste terms. Its vote share zoomed to 20.1%, and it won 120 seats (of an unprecedented 468 contested), becoming the second largest party in terms of seats and votes. The BJP came to form state governments on its own for the first time ever in 1990. It formed the government on its own in M. P. and H. P., and formed coalition governments with Janata Dal in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The only time that it had dominated state governments earlier was when it was part of Janata Party in 1977–1979, during which period Jana Sangh component of Janata party dominated the government and occupied the chief minister's post in M.P., H.P. and Rajasthan. Thus the BJP arrived as a state-level political force, whereas earlier it had essentially been sub-state, thereby contributing to national party system fragmentation. In 1991, with the external support of the 11-member AIADMK and some smaller allies the Congress was able to form a minority government dependent on abstention in confidence votes by a section of the opposition. It began adding to its numbers by splitting small parties such as TDP in fractions of one-third or more (legal under the Anti-Defection law), and attained a majority on its own exactly half-way through its term (end-1993). In 1996, its vote share declined still further to a then-historic low of 28.7%, having been hit badly by the breaking away of the bulk of its Tamil Nadu unit and marginally by the breaking away of factions called Congress (Tiwari) and Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress. For the first time, Congress was overtaken as the single largest party, by the BJP, winning only 141 seats compared to the BJP's 161, although it remained the single largest party by vote share with 28.8% compared to BJP's 20.3%. In 1996, BJP ran into the limits of contesting alone with a religiously polarizing agenda. Despite being catapulted to its higher-ever seat tally of 161 seats, due to its more regionally concentrated vote, making it the largest party in the Lok Sabha and able to form the government for 12 days, its vote share remained stagnant at 20.3% and it failed to win parliamentary support from enough other parties to form a minority or coalition government. Six states—U.P., M.P., Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar and Maharashtra—accounted for 143 of its 161 seats, with U.P. and M.P. alone accounting for almost half. These results can be seen as a delayed reflection of the realignment of political forces that was represented by the results of the elections to the assemblies of fifteen states between November 1993 and March 1995, which, by and large, represented major gains for BJP, some regional parties like TDP and Shiv Sena, and statebased parties such as Samajwadi Party, Samata Party and BSP, while at best a holding operation for the Congress in some stronghold states such as H.P. and M.P.³⁷ A United Front government consisting of 11 parties participating in government, including two parties represented only by Rajya Sabha (upper house) members, and three parties formally part of United Front coalition but not participating in government, and supported from outside by the Congress, was formed in June 1996. Congress withdrew support to Prime Minister Deve Gowda in April 1997, but continued to support UF government after his replacement as prime minister by I. K. Gujral, eventually withdrawing support to UF in November 1997, precipitating fresh elections in February–March 1998. In 1998, the BJP shelved its overt Hindu nationalist agenda to strike explicit or tacit alliances with a range of state-based parties, both regional parties and others, many of them earlier with UF, a strategy that it consolidated after its victory.³⁸ BJP strategy was certainly helped by the fact that Congress had toppled UF government and was the principal opponent of the constituents of the UF in several major states. This catapulted BJP to power as it emerged once again as the single largest party (Congress got only 141 seats) and led the single largest pre-election alliance.³⁹ A BJP-led 12-member minority coalition

³⁶ Regional party is something of a misnomer as it implies a party strong in two or more states in a region. All the regional parties, however, are single state-based parties except the Janata Dal (United), strong in Bihar and Karnataka, and the CPI(M), strong in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, if one considers them regional parties. These sets of states do not constitute recognizable regions. The JD(U) and the CPI(M) are really national parties with a limited geographical spread, the former being a rump of the once much larger Janata Dal.

³⁷ Eswaran Sridharan, n.31, p.87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

government consisting of 11 pre-election (including two independents and one from a one-Rajya Sabha MP party) and one post-election ally, and dependent on the support or abstention in confidence votes of at eight post-election allies and pre-election allies who opted out of the ministry, assumed power in March 1998. In 1999, essentially the same BJP-led pre-election coalition fought Congress-led coalition, the latter being a more tentative coalition with state-by-state agreements but no common national platform. The 21-party BJP-led alliance was formally christened National Democratic Alliance (NDA); Congress alliance was much smaller, the main difference being that the BJP was now allied to DMK in Tamil Nadu while Congress was allied to AIADMK. NDA won a more decisive victory getting 299 seats, with the BJP alone getting 182 as in 1998. With post-election adherents the number went up to 303 seats. Congress got a lowest-ever 111 seats, and only 134 with allies. However, in terms of vote share, BJP alone declined to 23.8% while Congress rose to 28.4%, remaining the single largest party. NDA formed the government with the 29-member TDP and five other smaller pre-election allies opting to support it from outside. In 2004, the incumbent BJP-led NDA coalition contested against the newly-formed Congress-led coalition, called United Progressive Alliance (UPA) after the election, and lost. The major change was that Congress party became “coalitionable” in a significant way for the first time following a conscious decision to adopt a coalition strategy. Congress-led alliance consisted of nineteen parties. This meant the addition of eight new allies—including DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu—since the 1999 elections, and the dropping of two old allies. Congress-led alliance won 222 seats and 36.53% votes (or only a whisker ahead of the NDA in vote share) but 33 seats ahead. With the external support of the Left parties (61 seats) it gained a majority in the Lok Sabha and formed a government. UPA also enjoyed the unilateral external support of two other significant parties (with whose support it could potentially retain a majority even if Left withdrew), i.e., Samajwadi Party (36 seats) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) (19 seats). The major difference between 2004 and earlier elections was the success of the Congress’ coalition ability, which was critical to its universally unexpected victory.⁴⁰ In 2009, the UPA coalition defeated the depleted NDA by a much greater margin with Congress winning 206 seats on its own and 263 with its pre-electoral allies, of which, compared to 2004, it had lost Left as a partial seat adjustment partner in Jharkhand, A.P. and Tamil Nadu, and lost RJD, LJP, TRS, PMK, MDMK and PDP, but added Trinamul Congress and the NC (Table 7). The NDA suffered major-ally depletion with the loss of TDP, BJD and the split in Shiv Sena but added the AGP, TRS, and RLD. Congress-led UPA formed a 6-party government of Congress, Trinamul Congress, DMK, NCP, NC and Muslim League but excluded some pre-electoral [JMM, Bodoland People’s Front, Kerala Congress (Mani)] and all post-electoral supporters who consisted of 9 parties and 3 independents totaling 59 MPs. This coalition resembled NDA in that the legislative coalition including post-electoral allies constituted a considerable surplus majority and hence provided insurance against defection by any ally, rendering no ally pivotal, and also from the fact that BJP numbers, down to 116, made it like Congress during NDA, in being too small to form a viable alternative coalition given that several parties like Left, SP, RJD, TDP and BSP would not be prepared to ally with it due to differences on secularism and their need for religious minority votes. In 2014, NDA consisting of the same parties except for the additional of DMK in Tamil Nadu and a host of minor parties, defeated UPA and formed a majority government which was an oversized coalition in which the BJP alone had a narrow majority of seats (52% of the seats based on 31% vote share, 38% for the NDA). Most states remained or became bipolar in the 1989–2016 period, except notably UP. However, in a number of apparently bipolar or two-party states, if we look at vote shares we find the presence of a significant, often growing, third party which has a vote share in double digits but not yet large enough to win a significant number of seats. It is obviously cutting into the potential vote share of one or both of the two main parties or alliances in a way that makes it both a threat to either/both of the former as well as attractive as an ally of one to defeat the other. This is the case in states like Assam, Orissa, Goa, West Bengal, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh. This rising third party was BJP in all of these states, and BSP in Punjab, U.P. and in a small way, M.P. By emerging as a significant third party in vote share at the state level and hence, both threatening to cut into the votes and seat prospects of either or both of the dominant parties, and hence creating incentives for the weaker of the two leading parties to ally with it, typically the regional party, since both BJP, nationally, and the regional party in the state, face Congress as their principal opponent. Thus, a process of bipolar consolidation has been taking place in many states, but of multiple bipolarities (e.g., Congress-BJP, Congress-Left, Congress-Regional Party), contributing to fragmentation at the national level, contributing and directly or indirectly to potential bipolar consolidation of a Congress-led alliance versus BJP-led alliance, although both alliances are as yet unstable, marked by the exit and entry of smaller parties. Furthermore, both alliances are not perfect one-on-one seat adjustments but partial ones, in which the total seats contested by each alliance may exceed the total number of seats. For example, in 2009, Congress alliances with its partners were explicitly limited to the partner’s main state only, so that the latter were free to contest seats against Congress in other states and did so, contributing to a larger effective number of parties by votes in 2009 despite the effective number of parties by seats shrinking. What this reflects is the drive by several smaller parties

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.88.

like Samajwadi Party and Nationalist Congress Party to expand their base horizontally across states, which brings into conflict with Congress which needs to have as broadly multi-state a base as possible to be able to defend its status as the leading national party.⁴¹

The Evolution of Coalition Governments in India⁴²

The SMSP or first-past-the-post system strongly incentivizes pre-electoral coalitions due to the imperative to win a plurality of votes at the district level⁴³ and in federal systems, at the state level. Faced with an encompassing umbrella party this incentivized the fragmented and regionalized opposition parties from the late 1960s onwards to form both pre-electoral and post-electoral coalitions against Congress party, a trend that continued into the 1970s and 1980s, including opposition party mergers, of which we give a brief historical account below. The evolution of alliances in the Indian party system can be summarized as follows. The first phase of broad-front anti-Congressism in the 1960s and 1970s, was characterized by intra-state alliances. The component parties of the alliance, e.g., Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Kranti Dal/Bharatiya Lok Dal, Socialists, Swatantra, Congress (O), had their state units, strongholds and interests in those states while having no ideological glue. The second phase, again of broad-front anti-Congressism, was that of Janata Party, which unified ideologically disparate non-Congress parties so as to have one-on-one contests aggregating votes at the constituency level so as to win. It reflected the imperative of aggregation, regardless of ideology, for victory. This also consisted of intra-state alliances of disparate parties within the overall umbrella of unification of those parties at the national level. The National Front coalition, 1989–1990, was a new departure in three senses. First, that learning from Janata Party experience, it did not try to unify very different parties but put together a coalition of distinct parties based on a common manifesto. Second, it brought in the explicitly regional parties like DMK, TDP and AGP, and the Left parties unlike the late 1960s/1970s experiments. Third, it also marked the beginning of inter-state alliances of parties or territorially compatible alliances where parties do not compete on each other's turf. In 1996, a nine-party United Front (UF) minority coalition government, with another three (Left) parties formally part of the UF coalition but opting to support from outside, and also supported by the Congress, was formed. The UF was a territorial coalition but had a certain secular ideological mooring, ranged as it was against a hard-line, perceivably "anti-system" BJP. The Congress withdrew support in April 1997, forcing a change of prime minister, and then once again withdrew support in November 1997, precipitating early elections in February 1998. All the coalitions since 1996 have been inter-state territorial, that is, federal coalitions. The period since 1991 has also seen the growth and sustenance of intra-state alliances based on ideology (like BJP-Shiv Sena) and based on territorial compatibility of two kinds. This consists of intra-state alliances which are a reverse of the historical Congress-AIADMK (a regional party) kind in which the regional party allies with the state unit of the national party with the regional party getting the majority share of both Lok Sabha and assembly seats. The examples were BJP-AIADMK-smaller parties in 1998 and 2004, BJP-DMK-smaller parties in 1999, Congress-DMK-smaller parties in 2004, BJP-TDP in 1999 and 2004, BJP-Trinamul Congress in 1999 and 2004, BJP-BJD in Orissa in 1998, 1999 and 2004, BJP-Haryana Vikas Party in 1996 and 1998 and BJP-INLD (Chautala) in 1999, and also RJD-Congress in 2004, and JD(U)-BJP in 2004. Second, the reverse of this pattern, viz., an alliance between a minor state party and a national party in which the latter gets the lion's share of both Lok Sabha and assembly seats, the key being territorial compatibility in which the national party does not contest in the smaller regional party's intra-state strongholds. Examples were BJP-Lok Shakti in Karnataka in 1998 and 1999, BJP-Samata in Bihar over 1996–1999, BJP-HVC in H.P., and Congress-JMM-smaller parties in 2004.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.89.

⁴² For detailed accounts of coalition dynamics see E. Sridharan, "The party system". In N. J. Gopal & P. Mehta (eds.), *The Oxford companion to politics in India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2010; E. Sridharan, Coalition strategies and the BJP's expansion, 1989-2004. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 43(2), 2005, pp.194–221; E. Sridharan, Electoral coalitions in the 2004 general elections: Theory and evidence. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(51), 2004, pp. 5418–5425; E. Sridharan, Coalitions and party strategies in India's Parliamentary Federation. *Publius*, 33(4), 2003, pp.135–152; E. Sridharan, The fragmentation of the Indian Party System, 1952-1999: Seven competing explanations. In Z. Hasan (Ed.), *Parties and party politics in India* (pp. 475–503). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002; E. Sridharan, Principles, power and coalition politics in India: Lessons from theory, comparison and recent history. In D. Khanna & G. Kueck (Eds.), *Principles, power and politics*, Macmillan: New Delhi, 1999, pp.270.290; E. Sridharan, Coalition Politics in India: Types, Duration, Theory and Comparison, Institute of South Asian Studies, Working Paper, No.50, 2008, pp.1-25; E. Sridharan, Why are multi-party minority governments viable in India? Theory and comparison, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 50(3), 2012, pp. 314–343; E. Sridharan, (ed.) *Coalition Politics in India: Selected Issues at the Centre and the States*, Academic Foundation, 2014, New Delhi; Sanjay Ruparelia, *Divided we govern: Coalition politics in Modern India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2015; Rekha Diwakar (2017). *Party system in India*. OUP, New Delhi, 2017; Balveer Arora, Negotiating differences: Federal coalitions and national cohesion. In F. Frankel, Z. Hasan, R. Bhargava, & B. Arora (Eds.), *Transforming India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2010.

⁴³ S.N. Golder, "Pre-electoral coalition formation in parliamentary democracies". *British Journal of Political Science*, 36(2), 2006, pp. 193–212.

⁴⁴ E. Sridharan, n.31, p.90.

The clear emphasis of alliances since the nineties has been on territorial compatibility at the expense of ideological compatibility, particularly BJP’s alliances of 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2014, and Congress alliances of 2004, 2009 and 2014, but even UF coalition. However, the most important point to be noted is that in the whole history of alliances since the 1960s, with the exception of Left Front limited to three states, alliances had been driven by the imperative to aggregate votes to win and not by ideology, programme or social cleavages except for overarching differences between Congress and BJP on secularism⁴⁵

Table 3

Indian election 2014: seats and votes of major parties

Party/coalition	Seats contested	Seats won (%)	Seat share (%)	Vote share
National Democratic Alliance				
BJP	426	282	51.93	31
SHS	58	18	3.31	1.85
TDP	30	16	2.55	2.95
SAD	10	3	0.74	0.30
LJP	7	6	1.10	0.04
AD	2	1	0.18	0.15
NPP	7	1	0.18	0.1
NPF	1	1	0.18	0.18
PMK	8	1	0.18	0.33
AINRC	1	1	0.18	0.05
SWP	2	1	0.18	0.2
Rashtriya Lok Samta Party	4	3	0.55	0.9
United Progressive Alliance				
INC	464	44	8.10	19.31
NCP	36	6	1.10	1.56
RJD	30	4	0.74	0.66
IUML 25 2 0.37 0.20		2	0.37	0.20
JMM 21 2 0.37 0.30		2	0.37	0.30
Left Front				
CPI(M)	93	9	1.66	3.25
CPI	67	1	0.18	0.78
RSP	6	1	0.18	0.30
AIFB	39	0	0.00	0.22
Major regional parties				
AIADMK	40	37	6.81	3.27
AITC	131	34	6.26	3.81
BJD	21	20	3.68	1.71
Others	57		12.39	24.97

Notes: BJP, Bharatiya Janata Party; SHS, Shiv Sena; TDP, Telugu Desam Party; SAD, Shiromani Akali Dal; LJP, Lok Janshakti Party; INC, Indian National Congress; NCP, Nationalist Congress Party; RJD, Rashtriya Janata Dal; IUML, Indian Union Muslim League; CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist); CPI, Communist Party of India; RSP, Revolutionary Socialist Party; AIFB, All Indian Forward Bloc; AIADMK, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam; AITC, All India Trinamool Congress; BJD, Biju Janata Dal; other acronyms are of the minor parties.

Source: Election Commission of India <http://eciresults.nic.in/PartyWiseResult.htm>

⁴⁵ For a detailed overview of state-level coalition politics in India see E. Sridharan, “The party system”. In N. J. Gopal & P. Mehta (eds.), *The Oxford companion to politics in India* (pp. 119–129).2010; New Delhi: Oxford University Press; E. Sridharan, Coalition strategies and the BJP’s expansion, 1989-2004. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 43(2), 2005,pp.194–221; E Sridharan, Electoral coalitions in the 2004 general elections: Theory and evidence. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(51),2004,pp. 5418–5425; E. Sridharan, Coalitions and party strategies in India’s Parliamentary Federation. *Publius*, 33(4), 2003,pp.135–152;E. Sridharan, The fragmentation of the Indian Party System, 1952-1999: Seven competing explanations. In Z. Hasan (Ed.), *Parties and party politics in India* (pp. 475–503). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.2002; E. Sridharan, Principles, power and coalition politics in India: Lessons from theory, comparison and recent history. In D. Khanna & G. Kueck (Eds.), *Principles, power and politics*,Macmillan: New Delhi,1999,pp.270.290;E. Sridharan,“Unstable Parties and Unstable Alliances: Births, Splits, Mergers and Deaths,” in Mahendra Prasad Singh and Anil Mishra (eds). *Coalition Politics in India: Problems and Prospects*, Manohar, New Dehi2004,pp. 43-74;E. Sridharan, Coalition Politics in India: Types, Duration, Theory and Comparison, Institute of South Asian Studies, Working Paper, No.50, 2008, pp.1-25

The BJP won 282 seats in 2014 parliamentary elections, a majority of the 543 elected, and 545 seats (including the two nominated Anglo-Indian members) in the Lok Sabha; it formed a surplus majority NDA government with its pre-electoral coalition partners, the principal ones being Shiv Sena, LJP, TDP and SAD, taking its majority in the Lok Sabha to 334, a seemingly unassailable position, given that the next largest party, the Congress with only 44 seats, would find it impossible to be the nucleus of any possible alternative coalition. However, the question arises as to how unassailable the BJP's majority is in future elections and with that the implications for the continuing importance of coalitions. The importance of pre-electoral allies for BJP's current majority needs to be noted because this is an NDA government with five non-BJP ministers in the 45-member council of ministers (four in the 23-member cabinet, of whom one each is from Shiv Sena, TDP, SAD and LJP, and one out of the 22 ministers of state is from a minor Bihar party). Of the 282 seats won by BJP, as many as 57 seats are accounted for by states in which BJP depended significantly on coalition partners (not counting UP, where the AD was a minor ally). These are Maharashtra (23 seats), Bihar (22 seats), Haryana (seven seats), Andhra Pradesh (two seats), Punjab (two seats) and Tamil Nadu (one seat), the figures in parentheses indicating the number of BJP seats, and principal allies in these states being Shiv Sena, LJP, HJC, TDP and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and several minor parties (in Tamil Nadu), respectively. Now, even if we assume that two-thirds of these 57 seats would have been won by the BJP contesting alone, this would still leave it 19 seats short of its present total and short of a majority. Hence, the BJP's majority in 2014 was crucially dependent on vote transfer from its pre-electoral allies, a calculation that undoubtedly had weight in the formation of a surplus majority NDA coalition government.⁴⁶

Prospects

India's party system created a distinctive coalition formation pattern in which geography and territory played a significant part. Consequently, India's coalitions primarily involved the coming together of two types of parties, polity-wide and single-state parties. While polity-wide parties contested and won across the country, single-state parties were basically confined to a particular state. Given the strong-centre framework, coalition became the key mechanism through which single-state parties could have say in national level decision making. At the same time for polity wide parties, coalition helped plug territorial gap and also increase support in terms of number in parliament. While on one hand, the interest of the two type of parties matched, on the other hand, there is also a tussle for the steering wheel. The federalized pattern of party system competition, the institutionalization of a coalition system and the requirement of a bicameral parliament make it difficult for polity-wide parties to wish away coalition, there is no stopping them from undermining coalition. At the same time, the increasing strength of single-state parties and their interest in maintaining the coalitional system is likely to act as a buffer against any rude shock. For the multiple reinforcing reasons first, it is ironic but not surprising that the BJP majority has come when a coalitional system has actually been institutionalized. In an institutionalized coalition system, alliances and coalitions are normalized as parties are conscious that they may not be able to win elections, come to power or run a government on their own. A mixture of electoral and/or post-electoral calculations was a key element in the overall strategy of almost all **political parties** in this election. As in the previous two general elections, there were three players, the two coalition fronts, United Progressive Alliance and National Democratic Alliance and a host of unaligned parties. While the fronts leveraged pre-electoral calculations, the unaligned reckoned post-electoral factors. Second, the territoriality of party strength, a key feature of post-Congress polity has not gone away. Barring Congress and BJP no other party has won from more than four states. At the same time, these two polity-wide parties are marginal players in more than 100 seats. This paradox increases the potency of key State-based parties and the importance of alliances. The BJP's success has come from its traditional mainstay States in the north and west. Even here, in the two big States of Bihar and Maharashtra its alliances with LJP and SHS are crucial. In these elections the party not only had pre-electoral alliances with more than 20 parties across the country but also spoke of post-electoral calculations continually through the campaign. In the east and the south, BJP is dependent on allies. It is important to note that BJP is actually unattractive at least as an electoral partner, to key players who matter in some States. In the past, in a competitive two-party situation, BJP was a useful ally in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Orissa. However, with CPI (M), DMK and Congress ceasing to be competitive forces, the attractiveness of BJP to AITC, AIADMK and BJD has also reduced. Third, the First Past the Post System (FPTP) of electoral laws that is used in India is advantageous to parties that have concentrated bases of strength. The BJP's muscle and the success of State-based parties, like AIADMK, TDP, AITC, SHS and SDF is primarily a result of how the FPTP translates votes into seats. Thus the Congress with 19.3 percent of the votes got only 44 seats whereas AIADMK with a substantially lower 3.3 percent of votes managed 37. This is because the Congress is thinly spread across the country and the states in which it still has a

⁴⁶ Adnan Farooqui Sridharan Is the Coalition Era Over in Indian Politics? *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 2014, p.11.

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robust presence have a low seat share in the Lok Sabha. The spatial distribution of party support plus the incentives in the FPTP system will continue to keep electoral alliances attractive. Fourth, an election is not a single shot game but part of a larger process. It would be foolhardy for anyone to assume that they do not need allies. Parties form and run governments and governments have to legislate. The incongruence between the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in terms of party-support, another feature of post-Congress polity, will persist and therefore alliances and coalitions with payoffs at different levels are not going anywhere. The success of BJP is the beginning of the end of coalition politics is only a Chimera. Congress will know that dominance and legitimacy are not only fragile but are also politically constructed. They depend a great deal on political and historical circumstances and events. The fact that Congress is no longer the dominant party and is in Opposition should not only unburden it but also afford it a greater deal of strategic flexibility. It is premature to conclude that the era of coalition politics is over in India or that a new one-party hegemonic system dominated by BJP is now in place. Coalition politics, in government, at the centre the coming general election 2019, will remain central to Indian politics.