

Governing in Fragments: Coalition Politics and Power-Sharing in India

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ABSTRACT

Coalition politics has become an enduring feature of India's multi-party democratic framework, reflecting the country's deep social diversity and its evolving electoral landscape. Since the decline of single-party dominance in the late twentieth century, political alliances have emerged as the central mechanism for forming and sustaining governments at both the national and state levels. This paper examines the historical evolution, structural mechanisms, and governance implications of coalition politics in India, focusing on the interplay between stability and representation. It analyses the formation strategies of pre-poll and post-poll alliances, the negotiation of power-sharing arrangements, and the institutional tools employed to maintain coalition unity. Drawing on case studies from both national and state contexts, the study highlights the factors that contribute to coalition stability, such as leadership style, ideological compatibility, and effective conflict resolution. It also explores the challenges posed by fragmented mandates, regional demands, leadership centrality, and ethical concerns in alliance politics, while recognising the positive role of coalitions in enhancing inclusivity, strengthening federalism, and checking the concentration of power. The paper concludes by proposing institutional and electoral reforms aimed at improving coalition stability without undermining representation. By situating coalition politics within India's democratic and federal framework, the study offers insights into how alliances can evolve from arrangements of political necessity into durable platforms for inclusive and effective governance.

Keywords- Coalition Politics, Political Alliances, Multi-Party System, Indian Democracy, Federalism, Pre-Poll Alliances, Post-Poll Alliances, Power-Sharing, Governance Stability, Regional Parties.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian democracy has often been described as a paradox: a vast and heterogeneous nation, home to hundreds of political parties, yet capable of producing functioning governments that command legitimacy across deep linguistic, cultural, caste, and religious divides. The resilience of this system owes much to its **multi-party framework**, which, over time, has moved from the dominance of a single national party to a competitive and often fragmented coalition order.

The **decline of the Congress "system"**—a phrase immortalised by Rajni Kothari—after the late 1960s marked the first cracks in the post-independence political consensus. As the electorate diversified its political loyalties, the parliamentary majority that had once seemed unshakable began to fragment, leading to an era in which **political alliances became the essential currency of governance**. From the Janata Party experiment of 1977 to the present-day National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and United Progressive Alliance (UPA) formations, coalitions have evolved from exceptional arrangements to the **default operating mode** of Indian politics.

In a multi-party democracy as socially complex as India's, **alliances are not merely electoral arithmetic**—they are mechanisms of political negotiation, instruments for managing diversity, and platforms for balancing conflicting interests. Whether forged before elections to maximise vote share (pre-poll alliances) or after results to achieve legislative majority (post-poll alliances), these arrangements have shaped both the **stability of governments** and the **character of policy-making**.

Yet coalition politics is as much about **tactical compromise** as it is about **representative inclusivity**. On the one hand, alliances enable regional and smaller parties to influence national policy, ensuring that governance reflects the federal and plural character of the republic. On the other hand, the compulsions of keeping disparate partners together often lead to policy dilution, legislative deadlock, and a focus on survival over long-term reform. The very inclusivity that strengthens democratic representation can, paradoxically, weaken the decisiveness of the executive.

The contemporary Indian coalition experience also reflects a shift in the balance between **collective leadership and dominant-party hegemony**. While earlier coalitions—such as the United Front (1996–1998) or UPA-I (2004–2009)—relied heavily on consensus-building and common minimum programmes, recent arrangements under the BJP-led NDA have tended towards **centralised leadership within a coalition framework**. This signals a deeper question: is Indian coalition politics moving from genuine power-sharing to an **“alliance of subordination”**, where smaller partners exist more as symbolic endorers than as substantive policy actors?

The role of **regional parties** in this ecosystem cannot be overstated. From the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu to the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar, and from the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra to the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, regional actors have not only shaped electoral outcomes but also altered the federal balance. In many cases, **ministerial posts such as Deputy Chief Ministerships** have been strategically deployed to appease coalition partners, manage caste equations, and project inclusivity in governance—a practice increasingly visible at both state and national levels.

This research engages with these dynamics through three analytical lenses:

1. **Historical Evolution** – tracing the journey from single-party dominance to institutionalised coalition politics;
2. **Alliance Mechanisms** – examining the structures, strategies, and bargaining processes that sustain coalitions in India's multi-party setting;
3. **Governance Implications** – analysing how coalition politics shapes policy priorities, Centre–State relations, and democratic stability.

The central questions this study seeks to answer are:

- How have political alliances evolved in form, function, and power dynamics in India since the late 20th century?
- What strategies underpin successful coalition management, and how do they reconcile ideological diversity with governance coherence?
- What are the long-term implications of coalition politics for India's democratic health and federal equilibrium?

By integrating case studies, electoral data, and theoretical perspectives, the paper aims to **move beyond the cliché of coalition politics as “compromise governance”**. Instead, it positions political alliances as both a **product of India's pluralism** and a **shaper of its political trajectory**—a dual role that continues to define the tension between democratic representation and executive effectiveness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW & HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Coalition Politics in India

Coalition politics in India operates at the crossroads of federalism, pluralism, and electoral fragmentation. Both federalism and coalition governance aim to distribute political power, ensuring that governance accommodates social and cultural diversity. At independence, the multi-party system was visible but dominated by the Congress Party, which functioned as an umbrella organisation capable of containing competing ideological and regional interests within its fold.

The decline of this dominance was driven by shifts in the social and political order, including the rise of caste-based mobilisation, linguistic regionalism, and identity-driven movements. These developments led to fragmented electoral verdicts, making alliances an operational necessity. Coalition governance in this context is not simply a question of arithmetic but an ongoing process of negotiation, requiring the balancing of ideological variance with the demands of policy-making. This process often takes the form of agreed policy frameworks such as Common Minimum Programmes and structured power-sharing arrangements.

2.2 Historical Phases of the Multi-Party System

Phase I: One-Party Dominance (1952–1967)

In the early decades after independence, the Congress Party maintained electoral supremacy, allowing it to govern without formal alliances. This period represented an era of intra-party coalitions, where conflicting interests were resolved internally rather than through external partnerships.

Phase II: Emergence of Opposition and State-Level Coalitions (1967–1989)

The 1967 elections marked the first major decline in Congress dominance, with opposition coalitions forming in several states. This period saw the rise of regional parties rooted in linguistic, cultural, or caste-based movements. These early state-level coalitions provided a blueprint for managing multi-party governance.

Phase III: National Coalition Era (1989–1999)

By the late 1980s, no single party was able to secure an outright majority at the national level. Governments such as the National Front and the United Front came to power through complex arrangements between ideologically diverse partners. While these coalitions demonstrated the possibilities of power-sharing, they were often unstable due to the absence of a dominant anchor party.

Phase IV: Institutionalised Alliances – NDA and UPA (1999–2014)

From the late 1990s onwards, alliances became pre-election strategies rather than post-election arrangements. The BJP-led NDA and Congress-led UPA demonstrated contrasting models of coalition management—one with more centralised leadership and the other with a stronger emphasis on consensus-building. Both relied on regional partners for parliamentary stability.

Phase V: Dominant Party within a Coalition (2014–Present)

In recent years, the return of majority mandates for the lead party has transformed the coalition model. While alliances continue for electoral and symbolic purposes, smaller partners often have limited influence over central decision-making. The use of symbolic positions such as multiple Deputy Chief Ministers has become more common as a means to maintain inclusivity and manage internal political balances.

2.3 Key Themes in Scholarly Debate

Scholarly discussions on coalition politics in India have often centred on the tension between stability and representation. While coalitions broaden political participation by giving a voice to diverse regional, social, and ideological groups, they can also compromise decisiveness in governance, as consensus-building among multiple partners often slows decision-making and policy implementation. Another significant theme is the regionalisation of national politics, with strong regional parties exerting considerable influence on national policy agendas and reshaping Centre–State relations. These parties often use their leverage in coalition negotiations to secure benefits for their constituencies, thereby altering the federal balance. Leadership centrality has also emerged as a defining characteristic of modern coalitions, where a dominant party maintains tight control over decision-making while retaining smaller allies primarily for electoral support and symbolic inclusivity. Additionally, institutional innovations have evolved to address the unique demands of coalition governance, including arrangements such as rotational chief ministerships, symbolic appointments, and the formulation of agreed policy frameworks like the Common Minimum Programme. These mechanisms aim to reconcile diverse interests, manage internal tensions, and maintain the appearance of unity in multi-party governments.

2.4 Analytical Gap

Much has been written about the reasons coalitions form and their historical trajectory, yet less attention has been paid to how the internal structures of alliances shape governance outcomes over time. Analyses often focus on periods of instability or on the dominance of single parties, overlooking the comparative study of mechanisms that sustain effective coalitions versus those that fail. This study addresses that gap by examining alliances not only as electoral tactics but also as ongoing frameworks for governance.

III. POLITICAL ALLIANCE MECHANISMS IN INDIA

The functioning of coalition governments in India is determined not only by electoral outcomes but also by the strategies, arrangements, and management systems that shape political alliances. Unlike single-party administrations, coalitions require constant negotiation and compromise to balance competing interests. Broadly, the mechanisms that underpin alliances can be understood through the way they are formed, the manner in which power is shared, and the stability measures employed to sustain them.

Alliances in India usually take two forms: pre-poll and post-poll arrangements. Pre-poll alliances are created before elections, enabling parties to pool resources, consolidate voter bases, and present a unified electoral front. Such arrangements typically involve detailed seat-sharing agreements, joint campaigning, and coordinated messaging, often making them more stable because the terms of cooperation are agreed upon in advance. Post-poll alliances, in contrast, emerge after election results when no single party secures a majority. These are often more fragile, as they are formed under the pressure of immediate political necessity rather than long-term planning, and they tend to involve intense bargaining over ministerial portfolios and policy direction in a compressed timeframe. The decision to opt for one or the other depends on ideological compatibility, electoral arithmetic, and regional political considerations.

Once an alliance is in place, the negotiation over power-sharing becomes central to its viability. Ministerial portfolios are distributed according to the numerical strength and strategic significance of each partner. While the leading party typically retains control over key ministries such as Home, Finance, Defence, and External Affairs, allied parties are

often entrusted with portfolios that align with their regional base or political priorities. At the state level, positions such as Deputy Chief Minister or even rotational chief ministerships are used to accommodate coalition partners and to manage caste, community, or regional representation. A Common Minimum Programme often serves as the agreed framework for governance, defining policy priorities acceptable to all partners while setting aside contentious issues that could disrupt the alliance.

Coalitions also rely on specific mechanisms to ensure stability during their tenure. Coordination committees composed of representatives from all partners provide a forum to address disputes, review policies, and maintain communication. Informal agreements, such as mutual veto rights on sensitive issues, help prevent ideological clashes from escalating into government crises. Symbolic concessions, including ceremonial appointments or recognition of regional autonomy in decision-making, can also maintain goodwill among partners even when their influence over central policy is limited. The effectiveness of these mechanisms often depends on the leadership style of the dominant party. Coalitions led through consensus tend to distribute influence more evenly, whereas centralised leadership models may restrict partners' policy roles while retaining them for electoral or symbolic purposes.

The durability of alliances is shaped by several recurring factors. Numerical dependence on partners often compels the lead party to be more accommodating, whereas ideological compatibility makes it easier to maintain a coherent policy direction. Strong regional parties with concentrated voter bases can exert significant leverage, influencing both the composition of the government and its policy agenda. Additionally, the ability of leaders to manage crises through personal rapport and informal negotiation is often decisive in preventing political breakdowns.

Over time, Indian coalition politics has shown a gradual shift from genuinely collaborative power-sharing models to arrangements dominated by a single party. In these newer formations, smaller allies may have limited influence on core policy matters, yet they remain important for enhancing electoral reach, broadening regional representation, and maintaining the image of inclusive governance. This shift suggests that while coalitions will remain a defining feature of India's political system, their internal dynamics are likely to be increasingly shaped by the strategic priorities of dominant parties rather than by equal partnership among all members.

IV. CASE STUDIES OF COALITION GOVERNANCE

The history of coalition politics in India is best understood through a closer examination of landmark national and state-level alliances that illustrate the varying dynamics of stability, representation, and governance. At the national level, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under Atal Bihari Vajpayee from 1999 to 2004 is often regarded as a benchmark for coalition stability. This period was marked by a well-negotiated pre-poll alliance that brought together ideologically diverse but strategically aligned parties under a common governance agenda. Vajpayee's leadership balanced a firm ideological orientation with a pragmatic approach to partnership management, employing tools such as the National Agenda for Governance to clearly define policy priorities while allowing regional allies space to pursue their own constituencies' concerns. Ministerial portfolios were distributed in a way that reflected both numerical strength and political sensitivity, which reduced friction and strengthened the collective stake in the government's survival.

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) from 2004 to 2014 provides an equally important but more complex example. Led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and guided politically by the Congress leadership, the UPA, especially in its first term, relied heavily on consensus-building mechanisms such as the Common Minimum Programme. This document served as a unifying framework for a coalition that included powerful regional players like the DMK, the NCP, and the Trinamool Congress. In terms of representation, the UPA was more inclusive, giving regional parties significant voice in policymaking and accommodating their demands on issues ranging from infrastructure allocations to language rights. However, this inclusivity came at the cost of slower decision-making and frequent political bargaining, which in its second term manifested in instability, policy paralysis, and vulnerability to withdrawals of support. The coalition's survival often depended on making concessions to individual partners, a reality that occasionally diluted reform initiatives and complicated governance.

The fragile United Front governments of 1996–1998 offer a sharp contrast to these more structured alliances. Emerging as post-poll coalitions without a dominant anchor party, these governments were driven largely by a shared desire to keep the Congress and the BJP out of power rather than by a cohesive policy agenda. Their short tenures reflected the inherent instability of alliances formed in haste and sustained by tactical manoeuvres rather than shared governance objectives. Political loyalty within these formations was fluid, and the absence of a strong coordinating leadership made them susceptible to collapse when even minor disagreements escalated into irreconcilable disputes.

At the state level, the 2018–2019 coalition between the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Congress in Karnataka demonstrates the risks of post-poll arrangements where parties have competing electoral bases and leadership ambitions. The alliance was born out of necessity after a fractured mandate, but the allocation of ministries and the selection of the chief minister immediately became sources of tension. Divergent policy priorities, mutual suspicion, and the constant threat of defections undermined the government's stability, leading to its eventual collapse in little over a year. This example

underscores how power-sharing alone cannot guarantee longevity without trust, policy alignment, and an effective conflict-resolution mechanism.

In contrast, longer-term alliances such as the BJP–Shiromani Akali Dal partnership in Punjab, prior to its eventual breakdown, demonstrate how enduring coalitions can be built when there is consistent ideological alignment on core issues and mutual electoral advantage. For over a decade, this partnership balanced state-specific issues, such as agricultural policy and Sikh identity concerns, with national political goals. Similarly, in Bihar, the relationship between the Janata Dal (United) and the BJP has experienced multiple cycles of cooperation and rupture, reflecting the complex interplay of caste-based politics, leadership ambitions, and strategic electoral calculations. The fact that these two parties have repeatedly realigned despite ideological and personal differences indicates that coalition politics in India is as much about pragmatic survival as it is about shared principles.

Across these cases, certain patterns emerge. Pre-poll alliances with clearly defined policy frameworks tend to produce more stable governments than post-poll arrangements cobbled together after fractured verdicts. Leadership style plays a decisive role: coalitions led by a dominant but inclusive figure can maintain discipline without alienating partners, whereas those without a clear leader or with overly centralised control risk alienating allies. Furthermore, the durability of coalitions is closely tied to the ability to reconcile national and regional priorities, manage cabinet composition with political sensitivity, and prevent ideological disagreements from escalating into existential threats. These case studies reveal that while coalition governance is often criticised for instability, its success or failure ultimately depends on strategic preparation, transparent negotiation, and the capacity to institutionalise mechanisms for conflict resolution.

V. CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS OF COALITION POLITICS

Coalition politics in India presents a complex duality: it deepens democratic inclusivity while simultaneously creating structural and operational challenges for governance. One of the foremost challenges is instability, particularly in post-poll coalitions where ideological differences and the absence of a shared electoral mandate make it difficult to sustain unity over time. Governments formed under such circumstances are often vulnerable to sudden withdrawals of support, internal factionalism, and opportunistic defections, leading to mid-term collapses or policy paralysis. Even in more stable pre-poll alliances, the constant need to accommodate divergent political agendas can slow down decision-making, dilute reform initiatives, and force compromises that weaken the coherence of policy frameworks.

A second challenge arises from the inherent tension between national and regional priorities. Strong regional parties, while ensuring that local concerns are represented at the national level, can sometimes hold the central government hostage to state-specific demands. This dynamic can lead to skewed allocation of resources, delays in implementing national reforms, and Centre–State friction over issues such as language policy, federal grants, and legislative jurisdiction. In extreme cases, such tensions have escalated into public confrontations between coalition partners, eroding public confidence in governance. Leadership centrality is another critical issue. Modern coalitions increasingly feature a dominant party that controls the government's overall direction while retaining smaller allies for electoral legitimacy and regional outreach. This concentration of authority can improve decision-making efficiency but risks alienating partners if their policy influence is perceived as marginal. In such scenarios, coalition partners may adopt obstructionist tactics within the legislature or use public dissent as a bargaining tool, further complicating governance. The balancing act between centralised control and genuine power-sharing remains one of the most delicate aspects of coalition management.

Coalition politics also invites challenges related to political ethics and transparency. The bargaining that accompanies alliance formation and sustenance often involves opaque negotiations over ministerial portfolios, policy concessions, and financial allocations. This can lead to perceptions of political opportunism and undermine public trust in the democratic process. Moreover, in highly fragmented political environments, coalition negotiations have at times encouraged practices such as horse-trading and inducements to legislators, raising concerns about the erosion of political integrity.

Despite these challenges, coalition politics has produced notable positive impacts. It has enhanced political representation by ensuring that diverse social, cultural, and regional groups have a voice in governance. This inclusivity has strengthened the federal character of the Indian political system, making governance more responsive to grassroots concerns. Coalitions have also acted as a check on excessive centralisation of power, forcing dominant parties to seek consensus before implementing major policy changes. In some cases, coalition partners have used their influence to introduce progressive reforms, protect minority rights, and promote regional development agendas that might otherwise have been sidelined in a purely centralised system.

The policy outcomes of coalition governance have been mixed. On one hand, inclusive policymaking has improved representation and responsiveness; on the other, the need for constant negotiation can result in incrementalism, with ambitious reforms delayed or watered down to maintain political stability. Coalition politics has also shaped the tenor of India's foreign policy and economic strategies, as governments must consider the positions of influential partners on sensitive issues ranging from trade agreements to relations with neighbouring countries. In certain periods, such as the first UPA term,

coalition constraints encouraged the pursuit of consensus-driven policies that were broad-based and consultative. In other instances, such as in fragmented state assemblies, they have led to chronic instability and repeated elections.

In essence, coalition politics in India embodies the trade-off between broad-based representation and decisive governance. It reflects the country's democratic maturity in accommodating multiple voices within the governing framework but also exposes the vulnerabilities of a system where political survival can overshadow long-term national interest. The challenge lies in institutionalising mechanisms that preserve inclusivity while minimising the inefficiencies and ethical compromises that currently characterise much of coalition practice. The balance between these competing imperatives will determine whether coalition governance evolves into a stable and credible political model or remains prone to instability and short-termism.

VI. REFORM AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The future of coalition politics in India depends largely on how effectively the system can be reformed to balance inclusivity with efficiency. One important area of reform lies in the institutionalisation of coalition agreements. At present, many alliances rely on informal understandings and personal rapport between leaders, which makes them vulnerable to breakdowns when trust erodes. A more formalised framework—detailing governance priorities, conflict resolution mechanisms, and power-sharing arrangements—could enhance predictability and reduce opportunistic shifts in allegiance. Codifying the principles of the Common Minimum Programme and making such agreements publicly accessible would not only strengthen internal cohesion but also improve transparency and public trust.

Electoral reforms also hold significant potential for improving coalition stability. The first-past-the-post system often produces fragmented mandates in a diverse polity, necessitating alliances that are sometimes more tactical than programmatic. While this fragmentation reflects the plural character of Indian society, it can also hinder decisive governance. Adopting elements of proportional representation, particularly for the Rajya Sabha or state legislative councils, could ensure that the composition of legislatures more accurately reflects voter preferences, reducing the reliance on post-poll deal-making. Strengthening anti-defection laws to limit opportunistic party switching during coalition tenures would further safeguard stability.

Another area for reform is the enhancement of internal democracy within political parties. Many coalition challenges stem from the concentration of decision-making in a few hands, which leaves smaller allies feeling marginalised. Encouraging more democratic decision-making within parties—through regular internal elections, greater consultation with party units, and transparent candidate selection processes—can make coalition negotiations more balanced and less dependent on the personalities of top leaders. This would not only improve the legitimacy of coalition agreements but also create space for policy discussions that go beyond electoral expediency.

In terms of governance, coalitions could benefit from institutional innovations aimed at long-term stability. Establishing permanent coalition coordination bodies with representation from all partners can facilitate continuous dialogue and prevent conflicts from escalating. These bodies could also oversee the implementation of agreed policies and serve as platforms for negotiating adjustments when political or economic circumstances change. At the state level, where coalition instability is often more acute, constitutional provisions could be explored to set minimum terms or introduce fixed legislative calendars, reducing the frequency of mid-term elections triggered by alliance breakdowns.

Looking ahead, the nature of coalition politics may also be influenced by the changing balance between national and regional forces. The current trend towards dominant-party-led coalitions suggests that while alliances will remain electorally important, their internal dynamics may increasingly be shaped by the strategic priorities of a single leading party. This could lead to more centralised decision-making within coalition structures, making stability less about equal power-sharing and more about the willingness of smaller partners to align with the dominant partner's agenda in exchange for regional benefits. Whether this trend consolidates or reverses will depend on electoral verdicts in the coming years, as well as on how regional parties adapt to the challenge of retaining influence within such arrangements.

Ultimately, the outlook for coalition politics in India is neither uniformly bleak nor unreservedly optimistic. The system's adaptability has allowed it to accommodate extraordinary diversity, but its effectiveness will hinge on reforms that institutionalise transparency, strengthen internal democracy, and protect the balance between representation and decisiveness. If such reforms are implemented, coalitions could evolve from fragile arrangements of convenience into durable platforms for inclusive and effective governance. If neglected, they risk becoming symbols of political opportunism, marked by short-lived administrations and a constant cycle of instability. The path chosen will determine whether coalition politics continues as a pragmatic necessity or matures into a respected and dependable model of democratic governance.

VII. CONCLUSION

Coalition politics in India has evolved from a rare occurrence in the early decades after independence to a defining feature of the country's multi-party democracy. This transformation reflects the deepening pluralism of Indian society, the

rise of regional political forces, and the increasing fragmentation of electoral mandates. While single-party dominance once provided stability and policy continuity, coalitions have brought greater inclusivity and representation, ensuring that diverse social, cultural, and regional perspectives are integrated into the governance process. However, these gains have been accompanied by structural vulnerabilities, most notably in the form of instability, policy dilution, and prolonged decision-making processes.

The historical trajectory of coalitions reveals important patterns. Pre-poll alliances with clearly negotiated power-sharing arrangements and agreed policy agendas tend to yield more stable governments than ad hoc post-poll formations driven by immediate electoral arithmetic. Leadership style has been a critical determinant of coalition success, with inclusive yet decisive leadership fostering unity, while overly centralised or fragmented leadership often leads to internal friction and breakdown. The ability to reconcile national priorities with regional demands has emerged as a recurring test for coalition managers, and those who fail to strike this balance risk eroding both governance effectiveness and political credibility.

Case studies at both the national and state levels demonstrate that coalition politics is not inherently unstable; rather, instability is often the product of inadequate institutionalisation, poor conflict resolution mechanisms, and opportunistic political behaviour. Where there is mutual respect, a shared vision, and mechanisms for continuous dialogue, coalitions have delivered sustained governance and meaningful policy outcomes. Conversely, when alliances are built purely on short-term convenience without a coherent framework, they have collapsed under the weight of their own contradictions.

The challenges facing coalition politics—ranging from ideological divergence to leadership centrality and ethical compromises—are not insurmountable. Institutional reforms such as formalised coalition agreements, stronger anti-defection measures, internal party democratisation, and permanent coordination mechanisms could address many of these weaknesses. At the same time, the positive impacts of coalitions—greater representation, strengthened federalism, and checks on concentrated power—should be preserved and enhanced. The future of coalition politics will depend on whether these reforms are embraced and whether political actors recognise that stability and inclusivity are not mutually exclusive but can, in fact, reinforce each other when supported by transparent and well-structured governance arrangements.

In the final analysis, coalition governance in India is both a mirror and a test of its democracy. It mirrors the country's diversity, its competitive politics, and its dynamic federalism. It tests the capacity of its leaders and institutions to manage differences constructively, to negotiate without surrendering principles, and to govern effectively in the face of competing demands. Whether it emerges as a mature and reliable model or remains a fragile arrangement of necessity will be determined by the willingness of political actors to move beyond expedient alliances toward durable partnerships grounded in trust, accountability, and a shared commitment to the public good.

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