Contemporary Dynamics Of Coalition Politics And Its Impact On Indian Pluralism: Analysis Of 2014 And 2019 Lok Sabha Election

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Abstract

India is a country of diverse cultures residing together as a community. Historically speaking after the end of the colonial rule, two decades in the national politics were mainly dominated by the congress as it has contributed a significant role in the India's independence but within just two decades the emotions of interdependence fall insufficient and other regional identities rise in politics which made emergence to the electoral win of the regional party, which ultimately led to the Coalitions politics. This article deals with the two consecutive Lok Sabha Elections, which ultimately led to the reemergence of the centrally strong central government and the end of coalition politics in the Indian context. This article deals with the contemporary dynamics of the Indian coalition's politics and evaluates it's impact on India's pluralism. This article deals with the theoretical framework of pluralism and coalition politics and explores how the end of coalition politics affects pluralism in India. The article concludes by highlighting the need for strong political institutions and a strong civil society, and the existence of a strong opposition voice within a majoritarian government to sustain a democratic government and Pluralism in India.

Keywords: Coalition Politics, Pluralism, Indian Politics, Democracy

Introduction

The period from 2014 to 2021 in Indian politics marked a significant shift in coalition dynamics, characterized primarily by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) achieving a strong parliamentary majority and signaling a move away from the era of frequent hung parliaments and minority governments that dominated from 1989 to 2009 (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014; Tillin, 2015). The BJP, under Narendra Modi's leadership, secured outright majorities in the 2014 and 2019 general elections—winning 282 seats in 2014 and 303 seats in 2019—prompting debate about whether the coalition era at the national level had ended (Election Commission of India, 2014, 2019; Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014). Nonetheless, despite national-level dominance, regional parties retained significant influence in state politics and continued to form electoral and governing alliances at the subnational level (Tillin, 2015). Before 2014, India's political landscape was frequently defined by coalition government,s an outcome common to many parliamentary systems where proportional or fragmented party systems prevail (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014). The genesis of coalition-style alliances in India has deep roots in the post-Independence period; early experiments in multi-party alliances and party mergers (for example, the formation of the Bharatiya Lok Dal in 1974) helped institutionalize coalition-making as a central feature of India's party system. These coalitions allowed small parties to acquire parliamentary representation and served as a means of bringing various regional and social interests into the national government. The 2014 general election marked something of a turning point because the victory of the BJP managed to convert a plurality of votes into a single-party parliamentary majority result, which, for many scholars, temporarily depressed the structural incentives for coalition bargaining at the centre.

The story of Indian democracy has been one of remarkable diversity, complexity, and adaptability. In a country marked by linguistic, religious, caste, and regional heterogeneity, coalition politics was a natural response to the fracturing of the electorate. Since the late 1980s, coalition governments have become the norm rather than the exception in India, reflecting the plural character of Indian society. However, the political transformations since 2014 — marked by the dominance of a single party at the national level — have reshaped the contours of Indian pluralism.

Conceptual Framework

This review paper mainly deals with two conceptual frameowork and thorughout the paper it has been evaluated that how in different time and space this two term are interlink.

Coalition Politics

.Coalition politics refers to the practice where various political parties come together and form a government, where multiple parties form alliances between two or more political parties sharing their own responsibility. In a democratic state where coalition government or just coalition politics are a deep-rooted framework. where coalition governance is based on negotiation, accommodation, and its compromise of various political actors. Arend Lizphart's (1977) concept of 'Consociational Democracy' is relevant for the case of India's discussion of coalition Politics, which is very much important in the discussion on the theory of coalition politics in India.

In India, coalition politics has been both a necessity and a reflection of social reality. The decline of Congress's dominance after 1989 led to a period of coalition governments — from the National Front (1989–1991), United Front (1996–1998), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) — each representing different coalitions of regional and national parties. These coalitions embodied the federal and pluralistic essence of India, ensuring representation for diverse regional, linguistic, and caste-based interests (Yadav, 1999; Chhibber and Nooruddin, 2004).

In India, coalition politics is an important phenomenon. Our society has diverse cultures, various religions, and ethnicities, which give it a unique identity in the global scenario. The decline of what Rajani Kothari called as 'Congress System' (Kothari,1964)led to the emergence of the influence of various regional political parties, during this period it was impossible for a single government to form a government therefore we have face the coalitions government of the National Front (1989-1991) ,United fron Front GOvernment in the year of 1996 to 1998, National Democratic Alliance(NDA) and the United Progressive Alliance(UPA) - in all of this coalitions Government a mix of various regional and National parties are present. Scholars such as Yadav(1999), Chibber &Nooruddin(2004) also advocate that the Coalition's form of government are more representative of the plural society like India, this Coalitions politics ensure participation from various regional,linguistic and caste-based interest. In spite of the fact that coalitions form of government are more realistic form of Government but the problem is Coalitions form of Government is also unstable in nature which led to the frequent fall out of the Governments.
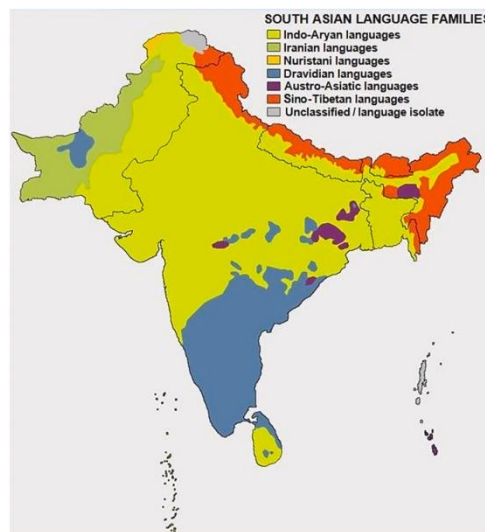
Pluralism

Pluralism is a political theory , which has emerged during the 19th and 29th century as an reactions toward the monastic principle of the state.Pluralists argued that political authority and social life are inherently multiple, not reducible to a single source such as the state. In simple term pluralism advocate for the existence of multiple groups and their interest, identities within a society. Pluralism also promote diversity , tolerance and participation of all people from all sections of society. Beside pluralism oppose the concentration of power in one center rather it advocate for the multiple center of power. Scholar such as Robert Dahl(1961) and Isaiah Berlin(1969) have viewed pluralism as pillar of the liberal Democracy.

Various Scholar has highlighted various perspective of Pluralism but it commonly agreed that pluralism is a political theory which advocate for the distributions of the power in various social structures , not only this because in pluralism various sources of power are involve in the decesion makin g process , so in a way it also prevent the tyranny and promote the commpeteion among the various group(Shakoori,2014). This political theory also used to analyse the modern political institutions and advocate for the citizen engagement through various interest group to safeguard the various sections of the society and it prohibit one single groups to dominate the political system(Shakoori,2014). Pasts century has used the concept in a way that , today it's not only important for political philosophy but it's equally important for the discussion of the social science.Political pluralism is consider the basic principles in contemporary democratic which all are mainly developing country of the south(Angelov,2019). Scholarly arguments suggests in modern democracy Pluralism work with adult suffrage,popular sovereignty and separation of power. (Goia,2021)

In India, pluralism has a more deeper history within it's cultural and historical roots. So we can say that India's pluralism is rooted in it's history of coexistence among multiple religions and languages and ethnicites. Indian Pluralism characteristic by the coexistence of the various actor religions, languages,socio-political indentities,Historically post colonial India also adopt religious diversity(Bajpai et al.,2021). Diversity of India can be seen in various ares such as language which is also name as liguistic pluralism, scholar argue India is a linguisticalyy diverse country(Ivani et al.,2020). This language diversity is presented in the figure 1.

Post Independence preiod India's political system Institutinalise the concept of pluralism thought the concept of federalism,secularism and affirmative actions, ensuring representation for minorities and marginalised communities((Bhargava, 1998; Rajeev Bhargava, 2008)The Indian democratic system, through its electoral and institutional arrangements, has sought to balance unity with diversity. Regional parties, caste-based movements, and linguistic mobilizations have all been manifestations of this pluralistic ethos. Thus, pluralism in India is both a value and a necessity — a defining feature of its democracy.

Globally, pluralism and coalition politics often reinforce one another. In multi-ethnic societies, coalitions serve as instruments of power-sharing and consensus-building, preventing domination by a single group. Countries like the Netherlands, Italy, and Israel demonstrate how coalitions emerge as natural outcomes of pluralistic political systems.In India, the relationship between pluralism and coalition politics is symbiotic. Coalition governments have historically acted as mechanisms of inclusion allowing regional, linguistic, and minority groups to participate in governance. The rise of regional parties like the DMK, TDP, SP, and TMC during the coalition era (1990s–2010s) signified the empowerment of subnational identities within the national political framework. This decentralized pluralism ensured that the "idea of India" — as a federation of diverse communities remained intact (Khilnani, 1997).

However, the weakening of coalition politics after 2014 has raised concerns about the erosion of this pluralist structure. The rise of a dominant-party system led by the BJP reflects a shift toward a homogenizing majoritarian nationalism, which tends to marginalize regional and minority voices in the political discourse.

End of Coalition Politics

Coalition politics in India represents a significant evolution in its democratic framework, moving from a period of single-party dominance to one characterized by multi-party alliances at both the central and state levels. This shift reflects India's deep social diversity and evolving electoral landscape. The period immediately following India's independence in 1947 was marked by the overwhelming dominance of the Indian National Congress (INC). For decades, the Congress party largely controlled the political landscape, often forming governments unilaterally in both the states and at the center until the 1970s. However, soon forms of alliance-making began to emerge in some states, with Kerala being an early example where coalition dynamics were evident (Chiriyankandath,1997). A significant shift at the national level occurred in 1977 with the formation of the Janata Party government, which represented a pioneering attempt to consolidate opposition forces against the Congress party through mergers. An illustration of this consolidation was the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), formed by the merger of seven distinct political parties, leading to the constituent units losing their individual identities within the larger BLD entity(Singh et al.,2019)The years 1964 and 1967 are also considered crucial turning points in India's democratic development, signifying a major test for the legitimacy of its political systems at both federal and state levels (Brass,1968)

Scholars like Farooqui and Sridharan (2014) cite that the more pronounced era of coalition governments began around 1989. The electoral landscape became increasingly fragmented, and no single party could secure an absolute majority in parliamentary elections. This period saw the gradual erosion of the Congress Party's monolithic power and thus made coalition governments an "unavoidable necessity" in conducting effective governance. This transformation brought about significant political changes, and coalition politics was proving to be both a result and a cause of these changes (Shridharan,2002). During the 1990s and into the 2000s, coalition politics was deeply ingrained in the system of government in India, influencing government formation and stability. In fact, regional parties were crucial for the survival and functioning of these coalition governments, bringing local and regional issues to the national agenda. This created a dependency on regional parties that also influenced the use of Article 356 of the Indian Constitution; this Article deals with the imposition of President's Rule in the states as the central government in coalitions had to be much more circumspect to retain their allies (Shridharan,2002). That's why we have seen a selective implementation of article 356.

The period from 2014 to 2021 in Indian politics marked a significant shift in coalition dynamics, characterized primarily by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) achieving a strong parliamentary majority and signaling a move away from the era of frequent hung parliaments and minority governments that dominated from 1989 to 2009 (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014; Tillin, 2015). The BJP, under Narendra Modi's leadership, secured outright majorities in the 2014 and 2019 general elections—winning 282 seats in 2014 and 303 seats in 2019—prompting debate about whether the coalition era at the national level had ended (Election Commission of India, 2014, 2019; Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014). Nonetheless, despite national-level dominance, regional parties retained significant influence in state politics and continued to form electoral and governing alliances at the subnational level (Tillin, 2015).

The 2014 general election stands out as a pivotal moment because the BJP's victory translated a plurality of votes into a single-party parliamentary majority—an outcome that many scholars saw as temporarily reducing the structural incentives for coalition bargaining at the centre (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014). Yet regional resilience persisted: aggregate electoral performance of regional parties did not collapse in 2014 and in some measurements even improved slightly relative to the previous cycle, indicating that the decline of coalition governance at the national level did not automatically imply marginalization of subnational actors (Tillin, 2015).

Scholars studying coalition functioning emphasize the tension coalitions face between demonstrating collective unity for governance and differentiating party identities for electoral advantage. This balance typically shifts over the electoral cycle, with parties accentuating differentiation during campaigns and negotiating compromises in mid-term governance to sustain a working majority (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014). Managing inter-party conflicts, therefore, is an intrinsic challenge to coalition durability and effectiveness (Farooqui & Sridharan, 2014).

Harm to Indian Pluralism from 2014 to 2021

The 2014 general election marked a watershed moment in Indian politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), under Narendra Modi's leadership, won an absolute majority — the first time since 1984 that a single party achieved such dominance. This marked a departure from the coalition era (1989–2014), signaling the rise of a dominant-party system (Yadav & Palshikar, 2016). The 2019 elections further consolidated this dominance, with the BJP expanding its presence even in states historically resistant to its influence. This shift had significant implications for Indian pluralism. Various scholars have seen this shift from

various perspectives and called it Hindu Nationalism, which is actually influenced by Damodar Savarkar's ideology of 'Hindutva' which excluded various communities, and their ideology often opposes the very concept of the Nation.

Jaffrelot argues that during this period, Pluralism harmed many ways. First, the decline of coalition bargaining reduced the representation of regional parties at the national level, centralizing decision-making power. Second, the ideological orientation of the ruling party, emphasizing cultural nationalism and uniformity, created tensions with India's pluralist traditions of secularism and diversity. Third, the political marginalization of minorities and dissenting groups indicated a narrowing of the democratic space (Jaffrelot, 2019).

Between 2014 and 2021, India witnessed the transformation of political pluralism into a form of electoral dominance. While formal democratic institutions remained intact, the informal norms of accommodation and coalition-building weakened. The absence of strong opposition alliances further accelerated this trend. At the same time, regional pluralism continued to survive at the state level, as seen in the resistance of non-BJP regional coalitions in states like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.Thus, the period 2014–2021 represents both the decline of coalition politics at the national level and the resilience of pluralism at the subnational level — a duality that characterizes India's current political phase.

Way Forward

India's electoral politics underwent a dramatic shift after 2014, when the BJP won an outright majority, ending the 25-year era of multi-party coalitions. From 1989 to 2014, neither Congress nor any single party had a majority; instead, a series of ideologically diverse coalition governments shared power. By contrast, the 2014 and 2019 elections saw the BJP emerge as the dominant party, re-nationalizing politics around a single party and leader. Voter turnout reached record highs in 2014 and 2019, but the winner-take-all system magnified the BJP's plurality (31–37% of votes) into large parliamentary majorities. This dominance has concentrated executive authority and made national governance more centralized and majoritarian in tone.

The shift to BJP single-party rule has placed great power in the hands of the prime minister and his party, squeezing pluralistic space. According to Sanjay Ruparelia, 2014 marked "India's first single-party majority government since 1984" and only the second such since independence. As a result, politics increasingly resembles a presidential contest centered on one party and leader. This majoritarian turn has sparked concern that India's pluralist checks – party competition, institutional balances, and federal diversity are under strain. Analysts note that in coalition-era politics, power was more dispersed across parties and regions, whereas now the BJP's centralized strategies tend to bypass the earlier requirement of consensus among many stakeholders

1. Institutional Reforms for Inclusive Governance

Even under a dominant-party dispensation, pluralism can be enriched through institutional checks and balances. The existence of various independent parliamentary committees, federal councils, and inter-state coordination mechanisms such as NITI Aayog and the Inter-State Council would ensure continuous articulation of regional concerns and minority views as part of policy making. Stronger parliamentary debate and restoring deliberative functioning of legislatures would make policy formulation more inclusive.

2. Promotion of Federal Decentralization and Cooperative Federalism

The essence of pluralism in India rests in its federal character. A non-coalition central government is called upon to actively promote cooperative federalism by respecting state autonomy, sharing fiscal resources equitably, and consulting regional governments on national policies. Empowerment of local self-governments-that is, Panchayati Raj institutions and urban municipalities-is another way to sustain bottom-up pluralism: to let diverse communities have a say in governance at grassroots levels.

3. Electoral and Party System Reforms

Other reforms that have been advanced are the introduction of proportional representation or mixed-member electoral systems, which would better represent the diversity of views in Parliament, even when there is a dominant-party government. Internal democracy within political parties, free and fair candidate selection, and involvement by women and minorities in leadership positions can extend the democratic base of governance.

4. Empowering Independent Institutions

Pluralism does require an ecosystem of accountability that is independent. Strengthening the Election Commission, judiciary, media, and civil society organizations would create countervailing forces to balance the concentration of political power. The autonomous institutions guarantee pluralism by enforcing constitutional values and protecting minority rights against possible majoritarian overreach.

5. Encouraging Civil Society and Public Discourse

Pluralism flourishes not just within the formal structures of politics, but also in the public discourse. Fostering vibrant civil society organizations, think tanks, universities, and cultural associations will help maintain diversity and promote deliberation across differences. Media pluralism-both in ownership and content-needs to be safeguarded in order to ensure that a variety of voices enters the public domain.

6. Fostering Inclusive Policy Narratives

Non-coalition government can also represent plural interests by making a conscious effort to integrate diversity into its policy agenda. Programs that recognize linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity, such as inclusive education curricula, multilingual

communication, and region-specific development schemes, can reaffirm pluralism in governance. Policy consultation with marginalized groups, minority representatives, and regional leaders can embed pluralistic sensitivity in policy design.

7. Deepening Constitutional Morality and Democratic Culture
Furthermore, pluralism depends not just on institutions but also on political culture: the leadership of a dominant-party government must demonstrate constitutional morality that accommodates respect for dissent and debate and abjures homogenizing nationalism. Above all, it requires political tolerance and respect for opposition voices as a necessary condition for the legitimacy of plural democracy.

8. Building a Culture of Dialogue and Consensus
Even outside the coalition framework, dialogue and negotiation should constitute the core of decision-making. The establishment of multi-party consultative platforms on major national issues, such as economic reforms or social justice, could invoke the deliberative advantages of coalition politics. Consensus politics, rather than adversarial dominance, strengthens unity without suppressing diversity.

The absence of coalition governments need not inevitably portend the death of pluralism. If the institutions of democracy are robust, representative, and participatory, pluralism can survive and even flourish in a non-coalition political system. It should seek to combine the efficiency of a single-party government with stability, together with the inclusiveness and representational diversity that a coalition framework can offer. Pluralism, under these conditions, requires a constant commitment to constitutionalism, decentralization, and democratic dialogue: a guarantee that the unity of India will continue to be forged from the very strength of its diversity.

Conclusion
Coalition politics has been the expression of India's pluralism, but we also have to understand that the end of coalition politics certainly doesn't imply the end of pluralism. It needs some institutional reform to safeguard it by various organisational measures, coalition politics. Strengthening coalition culture, therefore, is not merely a political necessity but a reaffirmation of India's pluralist identity but it is equally true that coalitions politics is some time inefficient in making a strong decesion, for this some time majoritarian form of government is required but this Government should be responsible in making a institutional set up for protect different voice of the country which is Plural in nature, sudden emergence of Hindu Nationalism hinders our way to achieve this goal, but argue that ultimately it's the Institution which should be rational and inclusive in nature for this we have to take many step as already disscussed.

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