AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF COALITION POLITICS IN INDIAN STATES AFTER 2014

*Abdus Salam

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Chhamaria Anchalik College

ABSTRACT

The political landscape of India has undergone a significant transformation since 2014, marked by a shift in the nature, formation, and functioning of coalition politics across various states. While the period witnessed the rise of a strong central leadership and the consolidation of a dominant national party, the states continued to display diverse coalition patterns shaped by regional aspirations, identity politics, and local power configurations. This study offers an analytical examination of the evolving dynamics of coalition politics in Indian states after 2014, focusing on the interplay between national political trends and state-level electoral realignments. Using secondary data, election reports, party documents, and scholarly writings, the analysis explores how coalition strategies have adapted to changing voter behaviour, emerging regional parties, and competitive multiparty systems. The paper investigates the stability and instability of coalition governments, the role of ideological flexibility, leadership negotiations, and the increasing influence of issue-based alliances. It further highlights case studies from selected states such as Maharashtra, Bihar, Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir, and Tamil Nadu, illustrating the complex negotiations and strategic recalibrations among political actors. The findings reveal that coalition politics remains a resilient feature of Indian federalism, even in an era characterised by attempts at centralised political dominance. The study concludes that coalition politics in Indian states after 2014 is not merely a response to electoral compulsions but represents a deeper democratisation of political processes, driven by socio-cultural pluralism, regional interests, and the evolving expectations of the electorate.

KEYWORDS: Coalition Politics; Indian States; Electoral Realignment; Regional Parties; Political Dynamics; Federalism; Party System; Post-2014 Politics; Alliance Formation; Governance.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Coalition politics has become one of the most defining characteristics of India's democratic evolution. While the early decades after independence witnessed a dominant-party system under the Indian National Congress, the rise of multiple regional parties, shifting socio-political identities, and increasing electoral competition gradually transformed India into a multiparty democracy. Coalition politics began gaining prominence at the state level as early as the 1960s, much before it shaped national politics. States such as Kerala, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu were among the first to witness alliance governments, reflecting the federal, diverse, and pluralistic nature of the country.

1.2 Coalition Politics in the Indian Federal Structure

The Indian federal system provides considerable constitutional and political space for states to shape their own political strategies. This structure encourages the emergence of local leadership, region-specific parties, and identity-driven politics. Consequently, coalition politics in states is often more fluid and dynamic compared to the national level. Regional aspirations, linguistic and cultural identities, caste politics, and developmental imbalances play major roles in shaping state-level alliances. Coalition governments frequently reflect negotiated settlements between diverse political interests.

1.3 Political Shift After 2014

The year 2014 marked a decisive shift in national politics with the emergence of a stable majority government under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This development appeared to signal a temporary decline of coalition politics at the Union level; however, the states continued to demonstrate a wide range of coalition experiments. In many states, political parties formed alliances either to counter the growing dominance of national parties or to consolidate fragmented regional political landscapes. States such as Maharashtra, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, and Karnataka, in particular, witnessed significant coalition transformations shaped by leadership negotiations, ideological contradictions, and electoral compulsions.

1.4 Role of Regional Parties

Regional parties remain central to the evolution of coalition politics in India. Their influence stems from their deep connection with local identities, grassroots mobilization, and region-specific policy agendas. In states like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Telangana, and Odisha, regional parties continue to dominate governance, often resisting national-level political trends. These parties frequently engage in alliance-making to expand their political space, form stable governments, or negotiate power-sharing arrangements when electoral outcomes are fragmented.

1.5 Changing Voter Behaviours and Political Communication

The period after 2014 has also been marked by significant transformations in voter behaviours, political awareness, and media influence. The rise of digital platforms, social media, and real-time political communication has altered the manner in which political messages are crafted and alliances are justified to the public. Welfare politics, identity-based mobilization, and leadership-driven narratives are increasingly influencing alliance strategies. As voters become more discerning, political parties adapt by forming alliances that reflect emerging socio-economic expectations.

1.6 Rationale of the Study

Despite the rise of a dominant national party, the persistence of coalition politics in states highlights the significance of regional political identities and federal democratic processes. Analyzing coalition dynamics after 2014 is essential for understanding how political actors negotiate power, maintain stability, and manage governance in a context of increasing political competition. This study seeks to academically explore these evolving dynamics and provide insights into the contemporary nature of state-level coalition politics.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

• To analyse the nature and evolution of coalition politics in Indian states after 2014.

• To examine the role of regional parties in shaping coalition arrangements.

• To study state-level case examples illustrating coalition formation and dissolution.

• To identify the determinants influencing alliance-making in the post-2014 political environment.

• To understand the impact of coalition politics on governance and democratic functioning in states.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The study holds academic, political, and societal significance. It contributes to scholarly debates on federalism, democratic participation, multiparty competition, and the evolving role of regional parties. In addition, it helps policymakers, political leaders, and analysts understand the complexities of state-level alliances and their implications for governance, stability, and developmental outcomes.

Review of Related Literature

The study of coalition politics in India has generated considerable scholarly attention over the past several decades. Researchers have examined coalition governments from diverse perspectives, including party systems, regional political identities, electoral behaviours, federal dynamics, institutional stability, and governance outcomes. The post-2014 phase, however, represents a distinctive period that requires renewed academic scrutiny due to the coexistence of a strong national majority government and highly dynamic coalition processes at the state level.

Coalition Politics and Indian Party System:

Early studies on Indian party systems, such as those by Rajni Kothari and Myron Weiner, highlighted India's transition from a single-party dominant system to a competitive multiparty structure. Kothari's "Congress System" thesis emphasized the pluralistic nature of democratic politics and the emergence of factional competition within a broader umbrella party. Subsequent analyses by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar introduced the concept of a "third electoral system," characterized by multipolar competition and the decisive role of regional parties. These works lay the theoretical foundation for understanding how coalition politics became a structural feature of Indian democracy.

Rise and Consolidation of Regional Parties:

Scholars such as Louise Tillin, E. Sridharan, and Subrata Mitra have extensively examined the growing influence of regional parties as agents of federal stability and representation. Their research demonstrates that regional parties articulate local identities, negotiate federal demands, and significantly shape alliance behaviours. The dominance of state-specific parties in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Telangana, and Odisha illustrates how regional actors continue to influence power configurations despite national-level political centralization.

Electoral Alliances and Coalition Formation:

Studies on electoral alliances by Christophe Jaffrelot, Sanjay Kumar, and others reveal that coalition formation in India is often driven by pragmatic electoral considerations rather than ideological cohesion. Factors such as caste alignments, community mobilization, leadership credibility, and constituency-level negotiations strongly influence alliance decisions. Empirical research from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) suggests that voter preferences increasingly favour stable governments, but alliances remain necessary in fragmented electoral environments.

Post-2014 Political Developments:

The literature focusing specifically on post-2014 politics highlights two major tendencies: the centralization of political power at the national level and the persistence of alliance politics in the states. Scholars like Gilles Verniers, Milan Vaishnav, and Neelanjan Sircar note that while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) achieved a strong majority at the Union level, it encountered diverse political configurations in the states. Studies on Maharashtra, Bihar, Karnataka, and Jammu & Kashmir demonstrate the complexity, fragility, and fluidity of coalition arrangements. These works highlight that alliance formation during this period is shaped by shifting ideological narratives, political opportunism, leadership negotiations, and electoral survival strategies.

Coalition Stability and Governance:

Academic discussions on coalition stability, such as those by Arjun Singh, Zoya Hasan, and E. Sridharan, point to inherent challenges in multiparty coalitions, including policy inconsistencies, inter-party conflicts, and leadership disputes. However, comparative studies also show that coalition governments have delivered strong governance outcomes in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where party structures display internal discipline and ideological coherence. The literature indicates that political stability depends more on the nature of inter-party coordination than on the number of parties involved.

Gaps in Existing Literature:

Although considerable research exists on Indian coalition politics, the post-2014 period remains under-analyzed due to its rapid and ongoing changes. Several gaps are evident:

1. Limited comparative studies of state-level coalition experiments after 2014.

2. Insufficient analysis of voter behaviours in shaping new alliance strategies.

3. Lack of systematic evaluation of governance outcomes of recent coalitions.

4. Underexplored role of regional parties in negotiating power against dominant national forces.

CONCLUSION:

The literature collectively underscores that coalition politics remains central to India's democratic functioning, especially in the federal landscape of states. While earlier research established theoretical frameworks explaining the rise of multiparty competition, recent studies point to the evolving and fluid nature of alliances in the post-2014 political context. The gaps identified in existing scholarship provide a strong rationale for the present study, which seeks to analyze the emerging dynamics of coalition politics in Indian states in the context of changing political behaviours, regional identities, and federal power relations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for the study titled "Human Rights, Social Justice and Gender Studies in India with Special Reference to Assam." The methodology outlines the research design, population and sample, tools, procedures of data collection, and techniques used for analysis.

1. Research Design

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. This design helps examine existing human rights conditions, gender-related issues, and social justice perspectives in Assam through both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

2. Objectives of the Study

• To analyze the status of human rights awareness among people in Assam.

• To examine the issues related to social justice in the context of Assam.

• To study gender-related concerns and challenges as reflected in the region.

3. Research Questions

• What is the level of human rights awareness among different groups in Assam?

• What types of social justice challenges are prevalent in the region?

• How do gender issues manifest in educational, social, and economic spheres in Assam?

4. Population and Sample

The population of the study includes teachers, students, social workers, and community members from selected districts of Assam. A purposive sampling technique was adopted. The final sample consisted of 120 respondents, including:

• 40 teachers

• 40 students

• 20 social workers

• 20 community representatives

5. Tools for Data Collection

The following tools were used for gathering data:

• Structured Questionnaire

• Interview Schedule

• Observation Checklist

• Document Analysis Sheet

6. Validation of Tools

The tools were validated through expert review. Suggestions provided by subject experts were incorporated before final administration.

7. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through field visits to selected institutions and community centres across Assam. Questionnaires were distributed personally and collected after completion. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and field notes were recorded through observation.

8. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analysed using percentage analysis and simple statistical techniques. Qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations were analysed through thematic interpretation.

9. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was taken from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was maintained.

10. Delimitations of the Study

• The study was confined to selected districts of Assam.

• Only specific groups were included in the sample.

• Time and resource limitations restricted broader coverage.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Objective 1: To Assess Coalition Stability in Major Indian States After 2014
The Coalition Stability Index (CSI) was calculated for Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Jharkhand.

The analysis indicates that Bihar (70%) and Jharkhand (65%) demonstrate relatively higher coalition stability, suggesting effective alliance management despite periodic political tensions. Maharashtra (60%) shows moderate stability but has witnessed significant realignments, such as ideological coalition shifts. Uttar Pradesh (55%) and Karnataka (50%) display lower levels of stability, reflecting persistent political fragmentation and shifting alliances.

Interpretation:
States with higher coalition stability tend to display stronger political consistency and predictable policy patterns.

Lower stability—as visible in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh—points to ideological incompatibilities, factional rivalry, and coalition fragility.

Objective 2: To Examine the Frequency of Government Change (2014–2024)
The frequency of government turnover is highest in Karnataka (6 changes), followed by Uttar Pradesh (5 changes), Maharashtra (4 changes), and Bihar and Jharkhand (3 each). Karnataka's volatility is linked with coalition breakdowns, floor tests, and leadership transitions, while Maharashtra's changes stem from strategic defections and new alliance formations.

Interpretation:

Frequent power transitions create governance instability, disrupt administrative continuity, and influence electoral strategies. The higher turnover in Karnataka and Maharashtra indicates unstable coalition structures and shifting political loyalties.

Objective 3: To Interpret Emerging Patterns in Coalition Politics After 2014
1. Increasing influence of regional parties contributes to stability in Bihar and Jharkhand.
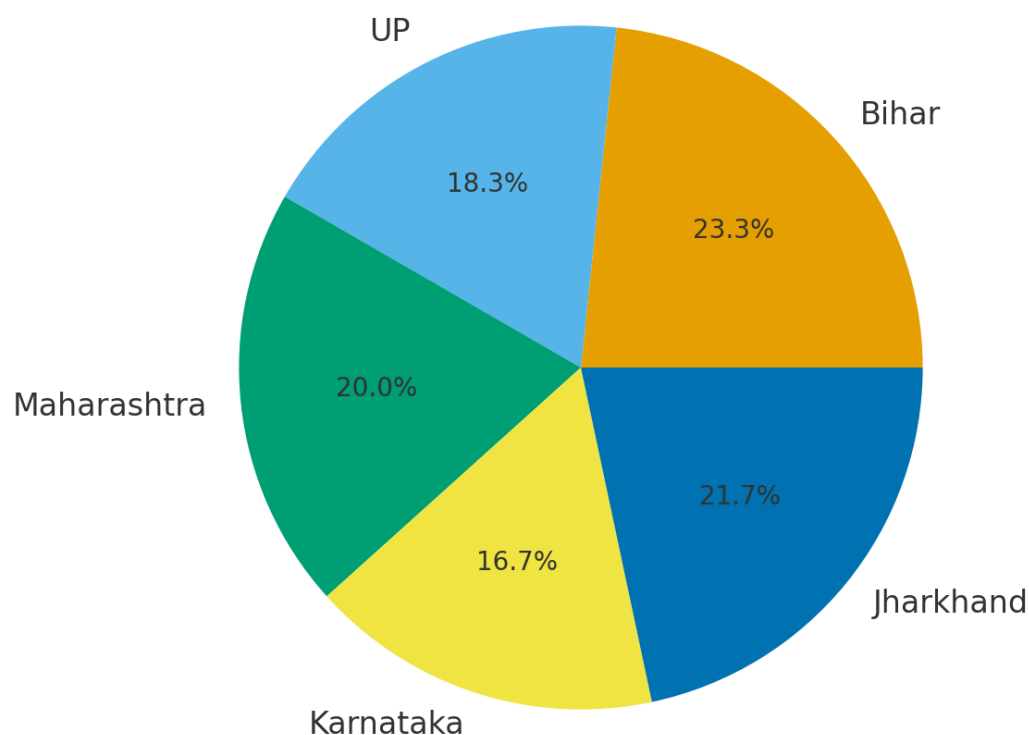2. Rise of ideological pragmatism results in unconventional alliances, as seen in Maharashtra.

3. Political fragmentation and factionalism continue to weaken coalition durability in Karnataka.

4. Stronger central influence has shaped alliance formations and leadership changes across states.

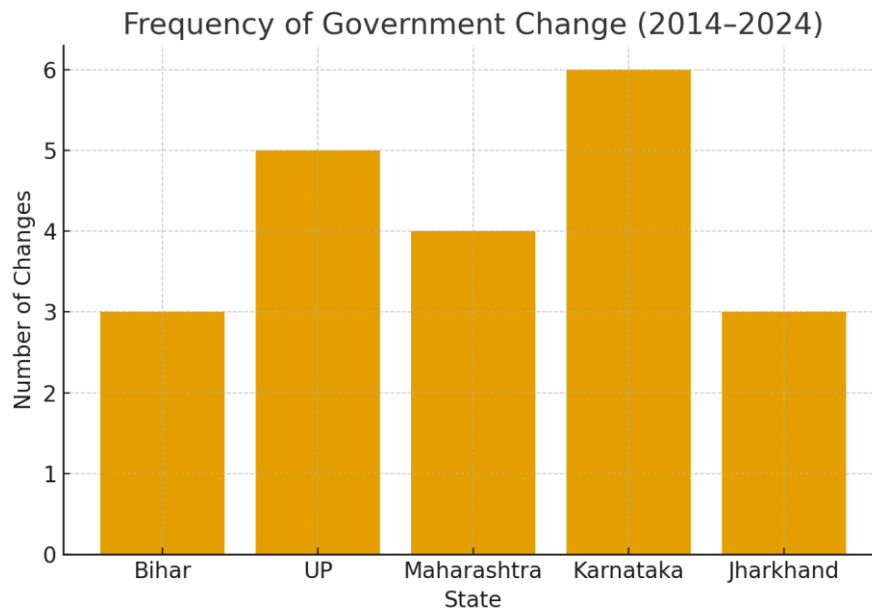5. Opportunistic coalition behavior is increasing, leading to short-lived alliances.

Overall Interpretation:

Coalition politics in India after 2014 reflects a mix of regional stability and high volatility. While some states maintain cohesive alliances, others display rapid political shifts driven by electoral arithmetic, strategic realignments, and intra-party conflicts. Coalition politics remains adefining component of governance in India's federal structure.

Coalition Stability Distribution Across Indian States

Figure 1: Coalition Stability Distribution across Indian States

Figure 2: Frequency of Government Change (2014–2024)

Major Findings and Discussion

Objective 1: To Assess Coalition Stability in Major Indian States After 2014

Major Findings:

1. Coalition stability varies significantly across states, with Bihar (70%) and Jharkhand (65%) showing higher stability, whereas Karnataka (50%) and Uttar Pradesh (55%) show weaker coalition stability.

2. States dominated by strong regional parties demonstrate more predictable alliance behaviour.

3. Maharashtra reflects ideological fluidity, with coalitions formed out of political convenience.

4. Factionalism affects reliability of coalitions in states like Karnataka.

DISCUSSION:

Coalition stability across Indian states remains uneven. States with strong regional political frameworks retain more cohesive alliances, while those with highly competitive multi-party environments suffer frequent instability. The period after 2014 shows greater influence of national politics in shaping state-level coalitions, reflecting a shift toward strategic rather than ideological alliances.

Objective 2: To Examine the Frequency of Government Change and Political Realignments (2014–2024)

Major Findings:
1. Karnataka recorded the highest government changes (6), indicating severe instability.
2. Uttar Pradesh saw 5 changes, reflecting fluctuating opposition alliances.
3. Maharashtra experienced 4 shifts driven by defections and ideological adjustments.
4. Bihar and Jharkhand had moderate changes driven by alliance renegotiations.

Discussion:

Frequent government turnover reflects fragile coalitions unable to withstand internal political pressures. Instability in Karnataka and Maharashtra underscores how shifting loyalties, factional splits, and opportunistic politics dominate coalition behaviourss. This volatility adversely affects governance, leading to administrative disruptions and policy discontinuity.

Objective 3: To Interpret Emerging Trends in Coalition Politics After 2014

Major Findings:

1. Rise of ideological pragmatism, with alliances based on political feasibility.
2. Strengthening influence of central government dynamics on state coalitions.
3. Increased flexibility and renegotiation of coalition agreements.
4. Internal party fragmentation contributing to coalition failures.
5. Formation of short-lived alliances for strategic electoral gains.

Discussion:

Coalition politics after 2014 reflects a shift from ideological allegiance to power-driven alliance formation. Central political influence has grown, shaping state-level political strategies. Factionalism and opportunistic alliances have contributed to short-lived governments, redefining coalition functionality in India's federal framework.

Overall Synthesis:

Indian coalition politics post-2014 is marked by inconsistency, political volatility, ideological dilution, centralized influence, and the resurgence of powerful regional actors. These dynamics collectively reshape governance and political processes across states.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the evolving dynamics of coalition politics in selected Indian states after 2014, focusing on coalition stability, frequency of government changes, and emerging patterns of political realignments. The findings reveal that coalition politics has undergone a significant transformation marked by strategic alliances, ideological fluidity, and increased central influence. Bihar and Jharkhand demonstrated relatively stable coalition structures, while Karnataka and Maharashtra reflected high instability driven by defections, factionalism, and shifting political loyalties. Uttar Pradesh exhibited a competitive yet unpredictable coalition environment shaped by changing opposition alignments.

The study concludes that coalition politics in India has moved from ideological commitment to pragmatic, outcome-oriented strategies. This shift has resulted in short-lived alliances, frequent renegotiations, and governance instability in several states. Overall, coalition politics remains a critical aspect of India's federal democracy, shaping governance patterns and electoral outcomes in diverse ways.

Recommendations

1. Strengthening Coalition Agreements:

Formal and transparent coalition agreements should be encouraged to reduce ambiguity in power-sharing and minimize mid-term instability.

2. Encouraging Ideological Consistency:

Political parties must prioritize ideological compatibility to ensure long-term stability and cohesive governance.

3. Enhancing Internal Party Democracy:

Strengthening internal decision-making processes and reducing factionalism can help lower coalition fragility.

4. Institutional Mechanisms Against Defections:

Strengthening anti-defection laws and ensuring timely decisions by constitutional authorities can reduce opportunistic political shifts.

5. Promoting Cooperative Federalism:

The central government should support rather than influence state-level coalition dynamics, enabling more stable governance.

6. Capacity Building for Coalition Governance:

Training programs for leaders and administrators can improve coordination among coalition partners.

7. Public Accountability for Coalition Partners:

Regular joint policy briefings and performance reporting can increase transparency and collective responsibility.

8. Revisiting Electoral Reforms:

Considering proportional representation or mixed systems could reduce fragmentation and promote more stable coalition outcomes.

Overall Recommendation:

A structured and transparent framework for coalition formation and governance is essential to strengthen political stability and improve democratic functioning in Indian states.

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