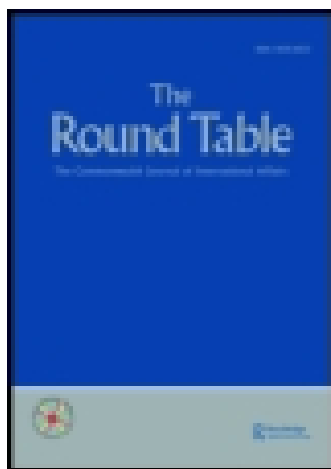


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Is the Coalition Era Over in Indian Politics?

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Is the Coalition Era Over in Indian Politics?

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ABSTRACT *This paper analyses whether 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 the BJP, reminiscent of the Congress-dominated one-party majorities that prevailed during the pre-1989 period. It argues that for a variety of mutually reinforcing reasons, including the dependence of the BJP's majority on pre-electoral coalitions, its need for such coalitions for winning state assembly elections and expanding its base for the next general election, and its need for allies in the Rajya Sabha for passing legislation, that the era of coalition politics will continue, though with some changes.*

KEY WORDS: pre-electoral coalition, allies, states, majority, stronghold, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, United Progressive Alliance, National Democratic Alliance

Introduction

India has had seven consecutive elections (1989–2009) in which no single party won a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house), resulting in minority situations (hung parliaments) whose solutions were in all cases minority governments dependent on external support. In 1991, the Congress formed a single-party minority government (which achieved a majority halfway through its term), but in all other cases minority coalitions dependent on external support were formed, these being large, multi-party coalitions with the participation of several regional parties since 1996 (see Sridharan, 2012, for details of governments formed during the coalition era elections, 1989–2009).

With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning a majority in the 2014 election, the question arises as to whether the coalition era in Indian politics is over and a new era of majority governments, led this time by the BJP, replacing the Congress, has begun. In this article, we analyse the nature of the BJP majority and the state of the opposition and conclude that coalition politics, particularly the importance of pre-electoral coalitions for victory, coalition government for effective governance, and for the BJP's future expansion, remains very much alive, and that the coalition era is not over.

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Importance of Pre-electoral Coalitions

We begin by looking at pre-electoral coalitions in the coalition era that began in 1989. In the run-up to all elections since 1989, particularly since 1998, one of the keys to victory for both the leading national parties, the Congress and the BJP, is the number of state-level pre-electoral coalitions formed, for pooling votes based on seat-sharing agreements.

Why pre-electoral coalitions? What are the incentives for national parties to form such coalitions, and under what circumstances? Given the first-past-the-post system, aggregation of votes at the constituency level is vital for winning seats. By implication, given the breakdown of the national party system into distinct state party systems, the formation of alliances with parties commanding a significant state-level vote share helps aggregate constituency-level votes shares in states where one's own party is not strong enough to go it alone. Pre-electoral coalitions have the potential to increase the number of seats won, although at the expense of conceding a certain number of seats to allies, and also including such allies in a post-election government.

The underlying principle is that a third party could:

leverage expected vote share in states where it is perceived to be a significant third party with a potentially 'bridging vote share' i.e. perceived pivotality for electoral victory helps it to form electoral coalitions with the first or second parties in the states in which it is allocated more seats to contest than in the previous elections. (Sridharan 2005, p. 197)

The BJP, since 1989, has grown partly on the basis of its own ideological appeal and mobilisation and partly by leveraging coalitions (Sridharan, 2005), while the Congress turned to coalitions with success in 2004 (Sridharan, 2004).

What were the impacts of pre-electoral coalitions—or their absence—in 2004 and 2009 on Congress victories and BJP defeats? In 2004, coalitions—or the absence of a coalition for the BJP—played a key role in the very narrow victory of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) (see Sridharan, 2004, for details). Coalitions in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Jammu and Kashmir, and the absence of a coalition for the BJP in Haryana, Assam and Jharkhand, were critical for the UPA, as were coalitions in Maharashtra and Goa (with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) compared with the absence of such in 1999) to reduce defeat margins. Similarly, in Orissa and Punjab coalitions were critical to National Democratic Alliance (NDA) victories. In 2009, the Congress was critically dependent, despite a swing in its favour and a swing against the BJP, on pre-electoral coalitions in Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, besides its long-standing United Democratic Front (UDF) coalition in Kerala.

The general finding on pre-electoral coalitions is that the seat-sharing ratio between partners tends to get stuck in a narrow band, and not adjust smoothly upward or downward according to the demands of a partner perceiving its popularity to be on the upswing demanding more seats. For example, both the Congress–NCP and BJP–Shiv Sena coalitions in Maharashtra, the BJP–Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)) coalition in Bihar and the BJP–Akali Dal coalition in Punjab, as well as the Left Front coalitions in West Bengal and Kerala, and the Congress-led UDF coalition in Kerala, all tended to remain stable in their seat-sharing ratios over the past two or more elections, with adjustments

happening within a very narrow band (Sridharan, 2014: see the concluding chapter summarising the findings of the state chapters). It is only when old coalitions are discarded and new coalitions are formed that new ratios can be established. In this we would expect parties that are perceived to be on the upswing to be able to attract more allies and on more favourable terms.

If one compares the pre-electoral coalitions for 2009 with 2014 for both alliances, NDA and UPA, this is precisely what we can see. The BJP struck a range of new alliances, most of them on more favourable terms than in the past, while retaining its key old alliances (Shiv Sena, Akali Dal) on the same terms. Thus, in 2014 the BJP had pre-electoral alliances in 10 states (Tables 1 and 2) compared with six alliances in 2009 in which both it and its partner(s) contested seats, of which seven were new alliances—

Table 1. Indian election 2014: seats and votes of major parties

Party/coalition	Seats contested	Seats won	Seat share (%)	Vote share (%)
<i>NDA</i>				
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
<i>UPA</i>				
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
JMM	21	2	0.37	0.30
<i>Left Front</i>				
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
<i>Major regional parties</i>				
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://ecireresults.nic.in/PartyWiseResult.htm>

Table 2. National Democratic Alliance 2014

Party	State	Seat contesting	Seats won	Vote share (%)
BJP	National Party	426	282	31
BJP	<i>Tamil Nadu</i>	7	1	5.5
Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam	Tamil Nadu	15	0	5.1
Pattali Makkal Katchi	Tamil Nadu	8	1	4.4
Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	Tamil Nadu	7	0	3.5
Kongunadu Makkal Desia Katchi	Tamil Nadu	1	0	
Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi	Tamil Nadu	1	0	
New Justice Party	Tamil Nadu	0	0	
BJP	<i>Andhra Pradesh</i>	13	3	8.50
TDP	Andhra Pradesh	30	16	29.10
Jana Sena Party	Andhra Pradesh	0	—	
BJP	<i>Maharashtra</i>	24	23	27.30
Shiv Sena	Maharashtra	20	18	20.60
Swabhimani Paksha	Maharashtra	2	1	2.30
Republican Party of India (A)	Maharashtra	1	0	0.1
Rashtriya Samaj Paksha	Maharashtra	1	0	0.9
BJP	<i>Bihar</i>	30	22	29.40
Lok Janshakti Party	Bihar	7	6	6.40
Rashtriya Lok Samta Party	Bihar	4	3	3
BJP	<i>Punjab</i>	3	1	8.70
Shiromani Akali Dal	Punjab	10	4	20.30
BJP	<i>Haryana</i>	8	7	34.70
Haryana Janhit Congress	Haryana	2	0	6.1
BJP	<i>Uttar Pradesh</i>	78	71	42.30
Apna Dal	Uttar Pradesh	2	2	1
BJP	<i>Kerala</i>	18	0	10.30
Kerala Congress (Nationalist)	Kerala	1	0	0.25
Revolutionary Socialist Party (B)	Kerala	1	0	0.24
All India NR Congress	Puducherry	1	1	34.60
BJP	<i>Meghalaya</i>	1	1	8.90
National People's Party	Meghalaya	1	1	22.20
Naga People's Front	Nagaland	1	1	68.67
United Democratic Front	Mizoram	1	0	47.17
Manipur People's Party	Manipur	0	—	
North-East Regional Political Front	North-East	*	—	
BJP	<i>West Bengal</i>	42	2	16.80
Gorkha Janmukti Morcha	West Bengal	0	—	—
Kamtapur People's Party		0	—	—
BJP	<i>Goa</i>	2	2	53.40
Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party	Goa	0	—	
Goa Vikas Party	Goa	0	—	

Note: *NPP, NPF contested one seat each and another nine members supported the NDA candidates.

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

Bihar, former Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Kerala, Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh (UP)—and on more favourable terms, contesting more seats than in earlier alliances in Bihar, former Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Haryana.

The BJP pursued a strategy whereby it could increase the geographical breadth and extent of its alliances. Accordingly, it made its electoral partnership with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra but expanded the alliance to include parties such as Swabhimani Paksha, Republican Party of India (A) (RPI(A)) and Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP). In Bihar, the BJP resumed its earlier pre-2002 partnership with the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), and continued with its alliance with Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab. In Haryana, the BJP forged an alliance with Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC), a breakaway faction of the Congress party. The party made a foray in Tamil Nadu and Kerala by proactively seeking out smaller parties. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP benefited with its alliance by winning one of the seven seats contested. Though the BJP failed to open its account in Kerala, it secured a respectable vote share of 10.3%. In UP, the BJP formed an alliance with minor party Apna Dal (AD). This alliance benefited the BJP in eastern UP. In the east, the party made its foray by seeking new allies in West Bengal (Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and Kamtapur People’s Party (KPP)) and in the states in the north-east, except Assam. The BJP’s alliance in Meghalaya with P. A. Sangma’s National People’s Party (NPP) helped it to secure one seat. In Goa the party consolidated its base by seeking an alliance with Maharashtratravadi Gomantak Party (MGP).

In 2014, the BJP clearly benefited in a major way from its alliance in states such as Maharashtra, Bihar and Haryana, and in a lesser but still important way from alliances in Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Goa. By contrast, the Congress in 2014 had alliances in eight states (Table 3), one more than its seven in 2009 on essentially the same terms as before, except that in UP and Bihar it contested in coalition, unlike in 2009, and with an improvement over the terms of 2004, the last time it allied with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar, and with two minor allies in UP. In all other states the terms remained essentially the same.

Table 3. United Progressive Alliance 2014

Party	State	Seat contesting	Seat won
Indian National Congress	National Party	462	44
Bodo People’s Front	Assam	1	—
Rashtriya Janata Dal*	Bihar	28	4
Nationalist Congress Party*	Maharashtra + Bihar	22	6
Jammu-Kashmir National Conference	Jammu and Kashmir	3	—
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	Jharkhand	4	2
Indian Union Muslim* League	Kerala	2	2
Socialist Janata (Democratic)	Kerala	1	—
Revolutionary Socialist Party	Kerala	1	—
Kerala Congress	Kerala	1	—
PPP	Punjab	1	—
RLD	Uttar Pradesh	8	—
Mahan Dal	Uttar Pradesh	3	—

Note: *Number of seats contested in alliance with the INC. Otherwise the total number of seats contested by RJD, NCP and IUML was 30, 36 and 25, respectively.

Table 4. Number of Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant before next general assembly elections

State	State assembly elections	Total number of Rajya Sabha seats	Seats vacant 2014	Seats vacant 2015	Seats vacant 2016	Seats vacant 2017	Seats vacant 2018	Seats vacant 2019
Seemadhra	May 2019	11	—	—	4(21/06)	—	3(2/04)	—
Arunachal Pradesh	December 2018	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Assam	April 2016	7	—	—	2(2/04)	—	—	2(14/06)
Bihar	October 2015	16	—	—	5(7/07)	—	6(2/04)	—
Chhattisgarh	December 2018	5	—	—	3(29/06)	—	1(2/04)	—
Goa	March 2017	1	—	—	—	1(28/07)	—	—
Gujarat	December 2017	11	—	—	—	3(18/08)	4(2/04)	—
Haryana	December 2017	5	—	—	1(1/08)	—	1(2/04)	—
Himachal Pradesh	November 2017	3	—	—	1(2/04)	—	1(2/04)	—
Jammu and Kashmir	November 2014	4	—	4(2-10/022-15/02)	—	—	—	—
Jharkhand	October 2014	6	—	—	1(7/07)	—	2(3/05)	—
Karnataka	May 2018	12	—	—	4(30/06)	—	4(20/04)	—
Kerala	April 2016	9	—	3(21/04)	3(2/04)	—	3(12/07)	—
Madhya Pradesh	December 2018	11	—	—	3(29/06)	—	4(2/04)	—
Maharashtra	October 2014	19	—	—	4(4/07)	—	6(2/04)	—
Meghalaya	February 2018	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manipur	January 2017	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mizoram	November 2018	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nagaland	February 2018	1	—	—	1(2/04)	—	—	—
NCT of Delhi		3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nominated		12	—	2(17/11)	5(21/03)	—	3(27/01)	—
Odisha	May 2019	10	—	—	3(1/07)	—	4(26/01)	—
Puducherry	April 2016	1	—	1(6/10)	—	—	2(3/04)	—

Punjab	March 2017	7				7(5-9/042-4/07)			
Rajasthan	December 2018	10							
Sikkim	May 2019	1							3(2/04)
Tamil Nadu	April 2016	18							1(23/02)
Telangana	May 2019	7				6(29/06)			3(2/04)
Tripura	February 2018	1				2(21/06)			
Uttar Pradesh	March 2017	31			10(25/11)	1(2/04)			
Uttarakhand	January 2017	3				11(4/07)			10(2/04)
West Bengal	May 2016	16				1(4/07)			1(2/04)
Total:		245		10	10	72		6(18/08)	67
								10	8

Note: Figures in parentheses are the day and month of retirement.

Source: <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/>

Table 5. Number of BJP Rajya Sabha MPs retiring before the next general election

State	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Seemandhra			1			
Arunachal Pradesh						
Assam						
Bihar					2	
Chhattisgarh			1		1	
Goa						
Gujarat				2	3	
Haryana						
Himachal Pradesh			1		1	
Jammu and Kashmir						
Jharkhand						
Karnataka			2		2	
Kerala						
Madhya Pradesh			2		3	
Maharashtra			1		1	
Meghalaya						
Manipur						
Mizoram						
Nagaland						
NCT of Delhi						
Nominated						
Odisha						
Puducherry						
Punjab			1			
Rajasthan			1		1	
Sikkim						
Tamil Nadu						
Telangana						
Tripura						
Uttar Pradesh	1		1		1	
Uttarakhand			1			
West Bengal						
Total:	1		17	2	15	

Table 6. Number of National Democratic allies retiring before next general election

State	Party	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Seemandhra	Telugu Desam Party			1		1	
Telangana	Telugu Desam Party			1		1	
Maharashtra	Shiv Sena			1		1	
Nagaland	Naga People's Front			1			
Punjab	Shiromani Akali Dal			3			
Total:				7		3	

Source: <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/>

Coalitionability at the state level also depends on various local factors. In bipolar state party systems (almost all major states except UP and currently Bihar), either of the two leading parties is an attractive coalition partner for significant third or fourth

parties, provided there are no basic ideological contradictions or aversion of their voters. In some cases, there is an ideological or social-base compatibility, such as the BJP–Shiv Sena and BJP–Akali alliances in Maharashtra and Punjab, respectively. Conversely, such significant third or fourth parties are attractive coalition partners, adding to the vote pool, for either of the two leading partners, subject to the same caveat. One can, therefore, expect coalitions between the BJP and third parties not dependent on Muslim/Christian minority votes when the former is a leading party in a state, or between a regional party, even if dependent on minority community votes, if the latter is the leading party and can check the BJP as a junior partner at the state level (e.g. JD (U), earlier Telugu Desam Party (TDP), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Biju Janata Dal (BJD)). Likewise, one can expect coalitions between the Congress and a regional party if the Congress is a third/fourth party and the regional party's main opponent is another party or the BJP (e.g. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)/All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in earlier years, or RJD in Bihar, AITC in West Bengal currently).

Importance of Pre-electoral Allies

The BJP won 282 seats, 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 the 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 the 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 the 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 the BJP, as many as 57 seats are accounted for by states in which the 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 the Shiv Sena, LJP, HJC, TDP and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and several minor parties (in Tamil Nadu), respectively (Table 2). 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.

The Rajya Sabha Factor

Coalition politics that goes beyond the NDA coalition to reach out to other parties formally in opposition, to be able to pass legislation in the Rajya Sabha (upper house) as

ordinary bills, not to speak of constitutional amendments (which in effect need two-third majorities in both houses) that need to be passed by simple majorities in both houses, is necessitated by the fact that the NDA has only 57 seats in the 245-member Rajya Sabha while the Congress has 68 seats. The NDA tally of 57 falls far short of the halfway mark of 123. In the NDA, besides BJP's 43 members, TDP has six members, Shiv Sena three, SAD three, RPI(A) one and Nagaland People's Front (NPF) one, or 14 in all for allies.

The Rajya Sabha is elected by the members of the legislative assembly of the state assemblies by proportional representation and the BJP controls only seven state assemblies as of September 2014, including two with its NDA partners (Punjab and Seemandhra). Tables 4–6 show the number of Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant, state-wise, including the number of BJP members retiring every year until the mid-2019 election, and the timing of state assembly elections until then.

The prospects for the BJP and NDA increasing their Rajya Sabha strength over the rest of the government's term, in effect, until the politically relevant date of late 2018 (elections will be held in April–May 2019), can be estimated as follows. Elections for the Rajya Sabha seats are due in November 2014. Elections will be held for the 10 seats from Uttar Pradesh that will fall vacant in November, and for a lone vacancy in Uttarakhand. In the recent Rajya Sabha Elections the BJP won a seat from Uttar Pradesh. In Uttarakhand the lone seat was won by the Congress.

The next round will be in November 2015, for three seats from Kerala, four seats from Jammu and Kashmir and one in Puducherry. There will be two openings in the nominated category as well with two members completing their term. While the BJP will not win a single seat in Kerala as it does not have a legislative presence in the state assembly, in the case of Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP tally will depend upon the party's performance in the forthcoming assembly elections. The BJP ally All India NR Congress (AINRC) is likely to win the Puducherry seat in 2015. In 2016, Rajya Sabha elections will be held to fill the 72 seats falling vacant as a result of retirements. Of these, 12 are with the BJP and six belong to its alliance partners. In Assam, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the BJP and its allies will find it difficult to improve upon their existing tally owing to their poor strength in the existing assemblies. Thus, the BJP in all likelihood will be able to retain its sole vacant seat in UP. In Uttarakhand, the lone vacancy is likely to be filled by the Congress. The BJP, on the basis of its strength in the current Karnataka assembly, will barely manage to retain one seat of the four vacancies arising in 2016. In Nagaland, the BJP ally NPF will be able to retain its existing seat.

It is in Seemandhra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab that the NDA and the BJP will register an increase. This will be due to the remarkable performance of the BJP and its allies, barring Punjab where elections are due in 2017, in the last assembly elections. In Seemandhra, the TDP is likely to improve its tally from one to three and the SAD in Punjab from three to four. The BJP will be able to retain its lone seat in Punjab. In its stronghold states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the BJP will improve its tally from the existing one, two and one, to two, three and four, respectively. The BJP will also be able to fill the five vacancies due to appear among the nominated members in March 2016.

In Assam, the two seats are falling vacant in February 2016 and the state assembly elections are due sometime in April. Therefore, the two seats are likely to be retained by the incumbent Congress party. The same is the case with Kerala, where the seats fall vacant in early April and the assembly elections might happen sometime in April or May. Thus, there is a likelihood of the existing assembly electing the members to fill the vacancies. The BJP and its allies will not be in a position to open their account in Kerala at least until 2016. In Tamil Nadu, elections to the state assembly are scheduled in April or May 2016. Hence, the six Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant from Tamil Nadu can be elected only by the new assembly. Unless the NDA were to perform remarkably in the assembly elections or reach some kind of understanding with the two major Dravidian parties—the AIADMK and the DMK—one could assume that at best the NDA could gain one seat in the Rajya Sabha from Tamil Nadu in 2016.

The state assembly elections are due in 2014 in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Jammu and Kashmir, and in 2015 in Bihar. Even if we were to assume that the BJP-led NDA will win an absolute majority in these five states and capture all the 15 vacant Rajya Sabha seats—five in Bihar, one in Haryana, four each in Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra, and one in Jharkhand—the NDA tally would reach 59 by August 2016, still way short of the majority mark of 123 in the Rajya Sabha.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that even if the BJP and its allies were to perform remarkably in the state assembly elections of 2014–18, they are still likely to fall short of the halfway mark in the Rajya Sabha. This underlines the imperative for the BJP-led NDA to rework its strategy and seek new allies and forge fresh coalitions at the state level, such as perhaps with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, BSP in UP and BJD in Odisha, in the next two years. The upshot is that even by late 2018 the NDA will not attain a Rajya Sabha majority even under favourable assumptions.

Limited Regional Presence

Coalition politics will also remain important because the BJP will need to expand its base outward from its current strongholds in the northern and central Hindi-belt states and the three western states and Karnataka towards other states in the south and east. For this it will need allies in the other southern states and possibly in Odisha, West Bengal and Assam (in all of which it has had BJD, AITC and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) as allies at various times in the past). This is because its narrow majority of 52% of the seats is based on the lowest ever vote share (31% nationally, 38% with its NDA allies) to convert into a seat majority in Indian elections, a conversion ratio of 1.67 (per cent seats for per cent votes), which is more than even the Congress victories of 1952 and 1984.

Disaggregated by region, this victory is very disproportionately based on an unprecedentedly sweeping victory in the Hindi-speaking northern and central states and Union Territories (Delhi, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana) and western states and Union Territories (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu) (Table 7). Of the BJP's 282 seats, as many as 244, or 87%, came from this Hindi-belt plus western India stronghold, or in other words, it won a whopping 81% of the 304 seats in this region, or an even more whopping 92% of the seats contested (244

Table 7. 2014 Results—BJP's stronghold and rest of India

Coalition/Party	BJP's stronghold (Hindi Belt + Gujarat + Maharashtra + Goa + Dadra-Nagar Haveli + Chandigarh + Daman and Diu) (304 seats)				Rest of India (239 seats)			
	Seats contested	Seats won	Seat (%)	Vote (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Seats (%)	Vote (%)
NDA								
BJP	266	244	81	44	161	38	16	19
BJP allies	39	29	10	5	75	18	8	11
UPA								
INC	233	10	3	19.8	229	34	14	21
INC allies	65	11	5	6	6	4	2	1
AIADMK					41	37	15	8
AITC					60	34	14	9
BJD					21	20	8	4
Left Front					78	11	5	10
Others						42	20	44

Note: For party acronyms, refer to Table 1.

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

out of 266 contested) in this region based on a 44% vote share in this region. Replicating such a strike rate in this region would be extremely improbable. Expansion into the south and east will be necessary and would require either an improbable quantum jump or, more realistically, the formation of pre-electoral coalitions with regional party allies.

Opposition Space

Finally, coalitions will remain critical in the opposition space in Indian politics and can make a huge difference in some places. Most recently, for example, in the August 2014 by-elections to 10 assembly seats in Bihar, barely three months after the BJP sweep in the Lok Sabha election, the newly formed JD(U)–RJD–Congress coalition won six out of 10 seats. For the Congress in particular, a viable recovery path will of necessity involve coalition formation either before or after elections in a number of states, particularly states such as Tamil Nadu, Seemandhra, Telangana, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and, perhaps, Assam, in addition to existing coalitions in Kerala and Maharashtra.

Not Yet a One-party Hegemonic System

The party system, as indicated by the effective number of parties by votes and seats in 2014 (see Table 8), remains a multi-party system and is not like the party system that prevailed in the era of Congress hegemony from 1952 to 1984 (except 1977), not even during the low point of 1967. The party system as measured by a standard index, that of the Effective Number of Parties (N), by seats (N_s) and by votes (N_v), remains a multi-party system with N_v at 7.06, which is higher than that in all elections during the Congress hegemonic period up to 1989 (never above the high point of 5.2 in 1967), and N_s at 3.5 being higher than any N_s during the pre-1989 period (highest was 3.2 in 1967 during that period). Hence, it is too early to say that the BJP has become hegemonic in the party system, like the Congress was before 1989.

Table 8. Effective number of parties in lower house elections

S.N.	Year	Nv: Effective Number of Parties (Votes)	Ns: Effective Number of Parties (Seats)
1	1952	4.53	1.80
2	1957	3.98	1.76
3	1962	4.40	1.85
4	1967	5.19	3.16
5	1971	4.63	2.12
6	1977	3.40	2.63
7	1980	4.25	2.28
8	1984	3.99	1.69
9	1989	4.80	4.35
10	1991	5.10	3.70
11	1996	7.11	5.83
12	1998	6.91	5.28
13	1999	6.74	5.87
14	2004	7.60	6.50
15	2009	7.98	5.01
16	2014	7.06	3.50

Source: See *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy*, XV/1-2 (January-June 2003), Statistical Supplement, Tables 1.1–1.13, 293–307. For 2004, the index was calculated by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi; for 2009 and 2014 by the authors.

Conclusion

For the multiple reinforcing reasons detailed in this paper, 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 the BJP is now in place. Coalition politics, in government, at the centre and in many states, and for party strategies in coming state assembly elections and the next general election, will remain central to Indian politics.

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