



REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES : AN INDIAN EXPERIENCE



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ABSTARCT

In India, the regional political parties are playing a prominent role in formation of the government at the centre. In 1966 the regional political parties broke the monopoly of Congress which was a single dominant party in India since independence of our country from the British rule. It was the regional thrust, for socio-economic and cultural interests that made a fundamental change in the political scenario of India. Since, 1967 the regional political parties are emerging with greater political appeal. The regional parties in India control most of the state political affairs. They are emerging as a powerful force and are playing a vital role in the formulation of government at the centre. During last two decades, the rise of regional parties has influenced not only

state politics; but also the national parties and national politics. With sizable electoral support, the regional parties have not only managed to win elections and form state governments, they have also influenced the national politics. Together India's two national parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have roughly polled a little less than 50 percent votes. The vote share of the Congress has declined sharply during last few elections, from 39.5 percent in 1989 to 28.6 percent in 2009. This decline is much sharper when we compare the vote share of the Congress in recent elections to early elections. At the same time, the vote share of the BIP has declined from 25.6 percent in 1998 (the BIP's best performance) to 18.8 percent in 2009. On the other hand, while all regional

parties put together polled a little less than one third of total votes, they managed to win a sizeable number of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People, lower house of Parliament) in different states. Under these recent conditions, neither of the two national parties, the Congress and the BJP have managed to win a majority of seats in Lok Sabha. The net result is that, in the absence of any single party having a majority in Lok Sabha, political parties have had no choice but to form a coalition government. All of India's national governments since the 1996 Lok Sabha elections have been coalition governments with the regional parties playing a key role in formation of the government at the Centre. Indian politics has moved from an era of single-party rule with the absolute dominance of the Congress from 1952-1989 (with a brief exception 1977-80) to an era of coalition politics. The regional parties have made important inroads in the traditional support base of the Congress amongst Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis. With its declining popularity amongst traditional supporters, the Congress is heavily dependent upon the OBC and the Upper castes for electoral success.

While the Muslim, Dalits and Adivasis do vote for Congress in selective states depending upon the type of electoral contest, their support base has certainly declined compared to the past. There is now some overlap in the support base for both the Congress and the BJP. With the regional parties sure to stay in Indian politics for at least a decade or more, there are only two ways for expansion of the two national parties.

The Congress and the BJP must either enter into alliances with the regional parties or try making inroads into the support base of the regional parties because there is no third route available for these two national parties.

*The regional parties have played an important role in Indian politics at both the state and national level for a little over a decade and will continue to in the coming years. **This paper highlights the role of regional political parties in formation of government at the centre with special reference to the results of 2009 elections in India.***

RESEARCH PAPER

India has a multi-party system with a predominance of small regional parties. Political parties that wish to contest local, state or national elections are required to be registered by the Election Commission of India (EC). In order to gain recognition in a state, the party must have had political activity for at least five continuous years, and send at least 4% of the state's quota to the Lok Saba (India's Lower house), or 3.33% of members to that state's assembly. These conditions are deemed to have failed if a member of the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assembly of the State becomes a member

of that political party after his election. If a party is recognised in four or more states, it is declared as a "National party" by the EC. Otherwise, it is known as a State Party. All parties contesting elections have to choose a symbol from a list of available symbols offered by the Election Commission. All 28 states along with the union territory of Pondicherry and the National Capital Territory of Delhi usually have an elected government unless President's rule is imposed under certain conditions.

Regional Political Parties in India

A party is easily identified as a " regional party if it propagates the ideology of regionalism or thrives on invocation of regional pride. Regional parties are parties whose main holds are in one certain state and mostly they participate in the elections only within that state. Most of these regional parties have agenda fitting certain culture dominant within that state. Some of these regional parties also participate in neighboring states, which have constituencies with culture similar to the first state. Different state parties were established at different periods because of different reasons. Some even have origins prior to India's independence.

In Tamil Nadu in south India, two main state parties are All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK) and Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK). Of these two parties the DMK is the veteran party. The origins of these parties are prior to India's independence. The main ideology of this party is Tamil national pride. Before India's independence there were two Dravidian parties. One was Independent Party, which demand an independent Dravidstan in south India. Other was Justice Party, which had a Dravidian pride ideology. After India's independence, the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) was established from the merger of these two parties in the former state of Madras, in south India. This party first demanded an independent Dravidstan for all of south India. Later on the demand was changed to independent Tamil state. Finally this party compromised on a Tamil Nadu state within the Indian Union.

In the beginning this party was anti-north Indian. They opposed to any entrance of an kind of cultures of north India. They specially attacked the attempt to introduce Hindi language in Tamil Nadu. This party members also saw in the Tamil Brahmins agents of north India who immigrated to south India to enforce to north Indian Aryan culture on the south Indians. The party demanded to reserve the government jobs for Dravidians and not to "'immigrant' Brahmins. In 1972 this party split and a new party was founded by MC Ramachandaran and it was named All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK). In 1987 Ramachandaran died and lavalalita inherited him. In the last few years these Tamilian pride parties have moderated their ideologies and before the 1998 elections the AIADMK even cooperated with BJP, which is considered as a north Indian party.

In Andhra Pradesh, also in south India, Telugu Desam was founded in 1982 by Telegu film actor, NT Rao. The ideology of the party is similar to the ideology of the AIADMK, which is local cultural pride. In the Telugu Desam case, the local cultural

pride is of Telugu culture.

Another one state party is Akali Dal and its main hold is in Punjab, north India, This party is considered a state party, but actually it is a religion oriented party whose followers are the Sikhs. This party also has its origin prior to India's independence. Before independence this party demanded from the British a separate entity for the Sikhs in Punjab. During the independence period these demands were delayed for a while. After independence this party began demanding special status for the Sikh culture and the Punjabi language. They struggled for a Punjabi state with a Sikh majority within the Indian Union and recognition of Punjabi as a distinct language. They succeeded in forming the establishment of Punjab in 1966, but it had a very small majority of the Sikhs. But they also succeeded in obtaining the recognition of Punjabi as a distinct language and not as a dialect of Hindi. Later on the Akali Dal broke up into some factions. Some of the militant factions of the Akali Dal demanded an independent Sikh state to be called Khalistan. But the dominant Akali Dal faction in Punjab wants Punjab to be a part of Indian Union.

In Assam in east India and in Maharashtra in west India there are political parties which came into existence because of the discriminatory feelings of the local 'sons of soil' population.

In British India, Assam was a British province. For some period the British attached Assam to the neighboring Bengal province. During this period the Bengalis held many senior government posts. Later on Assam again became a separate province, but the government posts were still hold by the Bengalis. In the 1960s and the 1970s many Bengali oriented people immigrated to Assam, In the 1980s the Asom Gana Parishad was founded with an agenda to give back Assam to the Assamese people.

In Maharashtra, in west India, the local population is known as Maharashtrians Their language is known as Marathi. Sometimes the Maharashtrians are also known as Marathi. The capital of Maharashtra is Mumbai, formerly Bombay. During the British rule, the city of Bombay was the capital of Bombay State. The Bombay State included in it regions of present day Maharashtra and present day Gujarat. The main language of Gujarat is Gujarati, The Gujaratis are the business communities of India. The city of Bombay was the business center of India, Many business communities from Gujarat settled in Bombay and were the important business community of Bombay. But the majority of the population of Bombay was Marathi and they were the working classes of the city, Many Indians from all around India also immigrated to Bombay to find a better future. This made Bombay the largest Indian cosmopolitan.

In 1960 Bombay State was divided into Maharashtra and Gujarat. Bombay the cultural capital of the Marathis and the Gujaratis was made capital of Maharashtra. After Maharashtra was established, a general feeling among many Marathis, was that Bombay is ruled and governed by 'foreigners' Their main targets were not the Gujarati business communities, but immigrants who arrived from all over India and settled in

Bombay. So these people established the Shiv Sena party. This party which began as a protest movement of the Marathis in Bombay, slowly became popular all around Maharashtra. This party ideology was spiced with Hindu-Marathi nationalist pride. Its rivals consider this party as a fanatic and anti-Muslim party. According to the party policy, many places in Maharashtra were renamed with Marathi oriented names. For example Bombay was renamed back to its original name Mumbai.

There are other state parties in India. To name a few there are, National Conference in Kashmir, Haryana Vikas Party in Haryana, Manipur People's Party in Manipur, Maharashtrawadi Gomantak in Goa, Sikkim Democratic Front in Sikkim, Mizo National Front in Mizoram, and many other parties. People who broke away from larger national parties, like the Congress founded some state parties, for example the West Bengal Trinamul Congress, Tamil Nadu Congress, Kerala Congress. There are also communist state parties.

Role of Regional Political Parties in Indian National Politics

India entered into the age of Coalition Politics in the 1990s. Post 1970s emergency period saw the emergence of Janata Party and the weakening of the Indian National Congress, which once was the undefeatable Political Party in India. Also the breaking up of the National Parties saw a resurgence of Regional Parties which started dominating the state-level politics. Their entry into national level politics is however a new phenomenon. In 1977, the Akali Dal and DMK were partners in the Janata government although; the Janata Party had a clear majority (295 seats) on its own. This was the first time that regional parties shared power at the national level. There were 51 members belonging to various regional parties in 1977. In 1980, regional parties lost their newly found moment of glory when Congress returned to power. DMK managed to win 16 seats but Akalis were reduced to one seat and the total tally of regional parties including the smaller left parties of West Bengal remained only 35 in the seventh Lok Sabha. The elections to the eighth Lok Sabha were held in the backdrop of Indira Gandhi's assassination. But in 1984, regional parties increased their share in Lok Sabha. There were 76 members belonging to different regional parties in the eighth Lok Sabha. The rise of Telugu Desam in Andhra and Asom Gana Parishad in Assam were the main factors responsible for this performance of the regional parties. However, with Congress having 415 seats in Lok Sabha, the role of regional parties was bound to be insignificant in national politics.

Non-Congressism brought many regional parties together in the National Front (NF) formed in 1988, These included TDP, DMK, AGP and Congress (S) apart from the newly formed Janata Dal. But in the elections In 1989, these regional parties did not meet with success. In the ninth Lok Sabha, 48 members belonged to regional parties but the regional allies of NF had only two seats (won by TDP). In spite of their disastrous performance, these regional parties became partners in the NF led government of 1989. In 1991, the strength of regional parties in the Lok Sabha was at

57 hut this time around TDP had a fair share (13 seats). AIADMK, fanata Dal (G), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SP) and Kerala Congress supported the Congress government of Narsimha Rao. However, these parties were not part of the government. In any case, both in 1989 and 1991, regional parties were playing a crucial role at the national level in making or unmaking the central government. Thus, the 1977 elections not only sped up the demise of the Congress system but also inaugurated a new era of partnership between all-India parties and regional parties; something which never happened in the pre-1977 period.

Since 1996, regional parties have become indispensable in the formation of government at the national level. They have been important partners in the coalitions that came to power after 1996. Besides, numerical strength of the regional parties has considerably increased, with a sizable vote share being captured by regional parties. Finally, regional parties have emerged in a large number of states. The experiment of United Front (UF) government first underscored the centrality of regional parties to national politics. In the 1996 Lok Sabha 137 MPs belonged to various regional parties. At that time, it appeared that most regional parties were gravitating against the BJP. Thus, 95 of the 137 MPs belonging to regional parties were part of the UF coalition. This gave rise to the impression that regional parties were occupying the 'third' space-outside of Congress and BJP. Soon, this picture disappeared almost as quickly as a rainbow disappears. And the UF was actually described as a rainbow coalition. Rainbows are ephemeral. They make a good view but do not last long. The United Front proved to be similarly short-lived although its supporters drew satisfaction from the fact that a large number of parties agreed to block a communal party from coming to power.

The regional forces-at least some of them-quickly switched over to the BIP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1998. The Lok Sabha in 1998 included 162 MPs belonging to regional parties; 92 of these were part of the NDA. TDP, which was one of the leading parties of UF, chose to join the NDA, which proved crucial for the survival of the government. Another regional party, AIADMK, played a decisive role in defeating the NDA government, The thirteenth Lok Sabha (1999) has 168 MPs who belong to regional parties. The NDA includes 109 MPs from different regional parties. In all, 32 regional parties are represented in the 13 Lok Sabha of which 15 are part of NDA, four are constituents of Left Front (6 MPs), six were Congress allies (23 MPs) and seven parties have not joined any front or alliance (38 MPs). (See Tables No. 1-3). It may be noted that the above discussion of 1999 elections does not treat JD (U) as a regional party although this party consists of four regional groups - Samata Party of Bihar, JD of Bihar, Lok Shakti of Karnataka and one JD faction from Karnataka. There is little coordination between the Karnataka unit and the Bihar unit of JD. Also, relations between the samata faction and JD faction in Bihar are only nominal The JD (U) won 17 seats in Bihar and a seals in Karnataka. It can be observed that since 1996, the BJP and Congress together get a Title over fifty per cent share of the total votes. The communist parties, BSP and ID were the three other non- regional parties, Together, they had not more than 20 per cent votes. Thus, at least one fourth of thy

electorate voted for regional or state level parties. In 1999, the share of votes polled by regional parties shows an increase. While BJP polled 23.5 per cent votes, its regional allies polled 18 per cent votes. The regional allies of congress polled 5 per cent votes. Other regional parties polled more than 15 per cent votes. Thus, If we look at the votes polled by all- India parties and state level parties, their vote share is almost 60:40. The rise in the vote share of regional and state level parties is mainly due to the broad range of alliances, forged by BJP with various parties since 1998. In 1998 the BJP had allied with 15 regional parties, while in 1999 it allied with 19 regional parties. This also indicates that since 1998 most regional parties have been gravitating towards BJP in contrast to the situation in 1996. Although Coalition Governments were in existence once or twice during the era of Late Shrimati Indira Gandhi, during 1996-1999 there were 4 Coalition Governments.

When Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee couldn't sustain the Government in 1996 due to lack of Majority (i.e. 272+ seats) in the Indian Parliament after being just 13 days old, the Third Front (a group of regional parties and Non-Congress and Non-BJP combine also referred to as the United Front) formed the Government headed by Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, who was In office from 1 June 1996 to 21 April 1997. The Congress Party and other smaller parties including the left provided outside support to him in order to provide a stable Government and prevent snap-polls. But due to rising discontent between the UF and Congress the latter withdrew support and in order to avoid elections, a compromise was reached. The Congress party agreed to support another United Front government under new leader, provided its concerns--such as not being consulted before taking important decisions and being marginalized--were addressed. The United Front elected Shri Inder Kumar Gujral as new leader and he was sworn in as Prime Minister on 21 April 1997. But unfortunately due to some internal problems in the Government, Congress again withdrew support and mid- term elections were called after Third Front governments failed twice. This time, a cohesive bloc of political parties lined up with it to form the National Democratic Alliance headed by the BJP, and Shri A.B. Vajpayee was sworn in as the Prime Minister. The NDA proved its majority in parliament. Towards the end of 1998 however, the AIADMK withdrew its support from the 13-month old government. The government lost the ensuing vote of confidence motion by a single vote. As the Opposition was unable to come up with the numbers to form the new government, the country returned to elections with Vajpayee remaining the caretaker prime minister. After 4 failed Coalition Governments and 2 mid- term elections, on October 13, 1999, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji took oath as Prime Minister of India for the third time. The BJP-led NDA had won 303 seats in the 543 scat Lok Sabha, thereby securing a comfortable, stable majority. The Coalition Government that was formed lasted its full term of 5 years - the only non-Congress government to do so.

The National Democratic Alliance was widely expected to retain power after the 2004 general election. The parliament had been dissolved before the completion of term in order to capitalize on the economic boom and improved security and cultural atmosphere; However, the coalition sidestepped controversial and ideological

questions in favour of bread-and-butter economic issues during the campaign and subsequently lost almost half its seats, with several prominent cabinet ministers being defeated.

The Indian National Congress, led by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi became the single largest Party and, along with many minor parties, formed the United Progressive Alliance. With the conditional support of the leftist parties from the outside, the UPA formed a government under Dr. Manmohan Singh. The alliance completed a full term and remained in power after the 15th General Elections in May 2009. Although the left now no longer supports the UPA but with new allies it has been 'able to extend its lead in the Lok Sabha. The 2009 general election saw three main national pre-poll alliances. Given the volatile nature of coalition politics in India, many parties changed alliances before, during and after the elections. The two larger coalitions, UPA and NDA, had clearly indicated their prime ministerial candidates during campaigning for the election. The Third Front announced repeatedly through the campaigning period that their prime ministerial candidate would only be decided after the election results came out. In Indian parliamentary system, the announcement of Prime Ministerial candidates prior to elections is not required.

United Progressive Alliance

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was formed after the 2004 general election to bring together parties that either allied with the Congress in various states, or were willing to support a Congress-led national government. Though the UPA never enjoyed a clear majority on its own in the 14th Lok Sabha, it managed to complete its five-year term from 2004 to 2009 by securing outside support from the Left Front, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party at different times during this tenure. Following the August 2008 confidence vote victory for the current government, a statement by Congress President Sonia Gandhi caused speculation that the UPA would project Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the Prime Ministerial candidate in the next elections. While Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader M. Karunanidhi supported Manmohan Singh as the PM candidate, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar tried to project himself as a possible Prime Ministerial candidate as well. On 24 January 2009, Manmohan Singh underwent a cardiac bypass surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Following the surgery, speculation of alternate PM candidates arose both within the Congress and amongst coalition partners. In an attempt to quell such speculations, Sonia Gandhi on 6 February 2009, confirmed that Manmohan Singh would be the UPA's PM candidate by writing so in the Congress party magazine Sandesh. This was the first time in the history of Indian elections that the Congress party had declared its Prime Ministerial candidate prior to the elections.

National Democratic Alliance

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was the first large national coalition formed by a national party supported by various regional parties. It was formed after

the 1998 general election and the NDA formed the Government led by BIP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The government collapsed a few months later, but the NDA returned to power after the 1999 general election and this time the Vajpayee-led Government completed its full term from 1999 to 2004. Due to the volatile nature of coalitions, NDA won 181 seats after the 2004 election, but due to parties changing alliances, before the 2009 election they had 142 seats. The main opposition party, BJP, and its NDA coalition partners announced on 11 December 2007 (more than a year before the election) that their candidate for prime minister would be BJP party leader Shri Advani who was the Leader of the Opposition at the time. On 23 January 2008, leaders from BIP and other NDA parties convened in the capital to officially elect him as their candidate for the election.

Third Front

The newly formed alliance carried with them 109 seats before the 2009 election. The Left Front led the formation of the Third Front for the 2009 election. This front was basically a collection of regional political parties who were neither in UPA nor in the NDA. Most of the constituents of this Third Front were those who were part of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

Fourth Front

The newly formed alliance carried with them 64 seats before the 2009 election. The Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Lok Janshakti Party failed to reach seat sharing agreements with the Congress and decided to form a new front, hoping to be kingmakers after the election. Despite announcing this front, the constituent parties continued to declare their support for the UPA.

Results of 2009 elections

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) took early lead and maintained it to emerge victorious. Bharatiya (anata Party (BJP) leader Rajnath Singh said that the BIP's performance in the election was very unexpected and the success of the NDA that had been hoped for had not materialised. The CPI (M) led third front later said that it was ready to sit in the opposition. Some opposition parties voiced concerns on the integrity of the electronic voting machines used during the election.

Table: 1

Alliances	Party	Seats	Change	Popular Vote	Vote %	Swing
United Progressive Alliance Seats: 262 Seat Change: +80	Indian National Congress	206	+61	119,110,776	28.55%	+2.02%
	All India Trinamool Congress	19	+17	13,355,986	3.20%	+1.13%
	Dravida Munnetra	18	+2	7,625,397	1.83%	+0.020

Popular Vote: 153,482,356 Popular Vote %:	Kazhapan					
	Nationalist Congress Party	9	--	8,521,349	2.04%	+0.24 %
	National Conference	3	+1	498,374	0.55%	+0.42 %
37.22% Swing: +3.96%	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	2	-3	1,665,173	0.40%	-0.07 %
	Indian Union Muslim League	2	+1	877,503	0.21%	+0.01 %
	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi	1	+1	735,847	0.21%	+0.01 %
	Kerala Congress (Mani)	1	--	404,962	0.10%	+0.05 %
	All India Majlis-e- Ittehadu) Muslimeen	1	--	308,61	0.07%	-0.04 %
	Republican Party of India (Athvale)	--	-1	378,928	0.09%	-
National Democratic Alliance Seats: 159 Seat Change: -17 Popular Vote: 102,689,312 Popular Vote %: 24.63% Swing: -4.88%	Bharatiya Janata Party	162	-22	78,435,538	18.80%	-3.36 %
	Janata Dal (United)	20	+12	6,331,079	1.52%	-0.83 %
	Shiv Sena	11	-1	6,454,850	1.55%	-0.26 %
	Rashtriya Lok Dal	5	+2	1,821,054	0.44%	-0.19 %
	Shiromani Akali Dal	4	-4	4,004,789	0.96%	+0.06 %
	Telangana Rashtra Samithi	2	-3	2,582,326	0.62%	-0.01 %
	Asom Gana Parishad	1	-1	1,773,103	0.43%	-0.01 %
	Indian National Lok Dal	--	--	1,206,573	0.31%	-0.19 %
Third Front Seats: 79 Seat Change: -30 Popular Vote:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	16	-27	22,219,111	5.33%	-0.33 %
	Communist Party of India	4	-6	5,951,888	1.43%	+0.02 %
	Revolutionary	2	-1	1,573,650	0.37%	-0.06

88,174.229 Popular Vote %: 21.15% Swing: •1.06%	Socialist Party					%
	All India Forward Bloc	2	-1	1,345,803	0.32%	-0.03 %
	Bahujan Samaj Party	21	+2	25,728,889	6.17%	+0.84 %
	Biju Janata Dal	14	+3	6,612,552	1.59%	+0.29 %
	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	9	+9	6,953,591	1.67%	-0.52 %
	Telugu Desam Party	6	+1	10,481,348	2.51%	-0.53 %
	Janata Dal (Secular)	3	-1	3,434,082	0.82%	-0.65 %
	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	1	-3	1,112,908	0.27%	-0.16 %
	Haryana Janhit Congress	1	+1	816,396	0.20%	+0.20 %
	Pattali Makkal Katchi	--	-6	1,944,619	0.47%	-0.09 %
Fourth Front Seats: 27 Seat Change: •37 Popular Vote: 21,456,117 Popular Vote %: 5.14% Swing: -2.30%	Samaj wadi Party	23	-13	14,284,638	3.42%	-0.90 %
	Rashtriya Janata Dal	4	-20	5,279,059	1.27%	-1.14 %
	Lok anshakti Party	--	+4	1,892,420	0.45%	-0.26 %
Other Parties and Independen ts Seats: 16 Seat Change: +9 Popular Vote:	Assam United Democratic Front	1	+1	2,184,556	0.52%	+0.52 %
	Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajantrik)	1	+1	963,274	0.23%	+0.23 %
	Nagaland People's Front	1	--	832,224	0.20%	+0.02 %

27,146,939 Popular Vote %: 6.51% Swing: +2.04%	Bodoland People's Front	1	+1	656,430	0.16%	+0.16 %
	Swabhimani Paksha	1	+1	481,025	0.12%	+0.12 %
	Bahujan Vikas Aaghadi	1	+1	223,234	0.05%	+0.05 %
	Sikkim Democratic Front	1	--	159,351	0.04%	--
	Independents	9	+4	21,646,845	5.19%	+0.94 %
Total	364 Political Parties	543	--	417,156,494	--	

Source: Results of the 2009 Indian general election - party-wise

Support for formation of UPA government

The President of India, Pratibha Patil dissolved the 14th Lok Sabha with immediate effect on 15 May; Prime Minister Manmohan Singh submitted the resignation of his Council of Ministers to the President, for him to be re-elected as the Prime Minister as well as for new Council of Ministers to be elected. On 16 May, Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi were re-elected as Party leader and Chairperson respectively of the Congress Parliamentary Party. This effectively makes him the prime Minister-elect of the new government. Finally, the President invited Dr. Singh to form the new government on 20 May, The new government was sworn in on 22 May 2009, Due to the fact that UPA was able to get 262 seats - just short of 10 seats for a majority all the external support came from parties who gave unconditional support to Manmohan Singh and the UPA. The Janata Dal (Secular), the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party all decided to do so to keep out any possibility of a BJP government in the next 5 years, Nagaland Peoples Front, Sikkim Democratic Front, and Bodoland Peoples Front, each with an MP, decided to join and support the UPA government. The three independent candidates to extend support for UPA were all from Maharashtra, and they were Sadashiv Mandlik, from Kolhapur constituency, Raju Shetty, from the political party Swabhimani Paksha, who won from Hatkandagle and Baliram Ladhav from Bahujan Vikas Aaghadi party who won the Palghar constituency.

On 21 May, it was announced that the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) had decided to leave and give outside support to the UPA government, due to failed talks between the Congress and the DMK on cabinet positions. After many deliberations between DMK and Congress, the DMK agreed to 3 cabinet ministers and 4 ministers of state. Kanimozhi, daughter of the DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, decided not to join the new government cabinet, instead she wanted to focus on improving the party's image. The two incumbent cabinet ministers from DMK, Dayanidhi Maran and A. Raja joined the cabinet, but due to concerns raised by Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh on T.R. Baalu, he was dropped from the cabinet, and Karunanidhi's son M.K. Azhagiri, replaced him as part of a compromise. On 25 May 2009, DMK decided to join the UPA government, reversing the decision made in prior days to extend outside support.

To conclude, till 1967, in India there was a single party rule. Even in States also there was a domination of Congress party. But, the scenario changed after 1967. Other parties started coming to power in the states. There will be different party in the centre and in the states. Regional parties started entering Indian political system. From 1980's we can see the formation of coalition government in the centre. The Congress lost its domination and regional parties started participating in the national government. Therefore, coalition government started coming up in central, Many regional parties like TDP, DMK, Akali Dal. and AIADMK started playing their influential role. They started participating in government decision making. Earlier, developmental work will go to those states which are ruled by Congress only, because congress was dominating in the Centre. Now, the regional parties made developmental works come to their states, because, they are also participating in the government planning process. Whenever, central government is making policies it has to consider, the interest of the regional parties. Government planning and finance allocation is also influenced by regional parties and the presence of regional parties in national government sometimes create instability. Sometimes legislature is dissolved and fresh elections are held before the five year terms. Both Experts and Political Parties agree that the era of Coalition Politics has just begun and its here to stay. At the time when regional political parties are assuming significance and the days of single party rule are over, there is no escape from coalition politics.- - says Mr. Sharad Pawar, Union Agriculture Minister and President of the Nationalist Congress Party.

Experts say that Coalition Politics is result of rise of Regional Parties on agendas of National Importance. One of the reasons for the growing importance of Regional Parties has been their success in articulating the interests of the assertive backward castes and Dalits or 'untouchables'. These parties remain 'regional' in terms of geographic location, but are national in terms of issues relevant to the country as a whole, Their role within the national coalition is also indicative of a more competitive and polarised party system. The continuity of coalition governments (first under the NDA and later UPA) confirms not merely the decline of one party rule and rise of regional and smaller parties, but a crisis of majoritarian political culture, based on the dominance of a single party led by a charismatic leader over a cluster of smaller parties. Both the Coalitions have faced the problem of internal disputes due to clustering of parties having differing manifestos. For the sustenance of a stable future of Coalition Politics, the parties must keep their Common Minimum Program ahead of their own ideologies. Regional parties are playing a major role in the Indian politics. Now, their influence is not only with respect to particular region but considered in national politics also. India now looks forward to a stable future of Coalition Governments as single-party majority seem to be a thing of the past now.

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