INDIA'S NATIONAL FRONT AND UNITED FRONT COALITION GOVERNMENTS

A Phase in Federalized Governance

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The onset of coalition and minority governments in New Delhi is an important aspect of the paradigmatic shifts in the Indian political system in terms of political federalization and economic liberalization in the 1990s. A political system that previously had functioned as a predominantly parliamentary regime is becoming more federal, and a public (state) sector–dominated planned economy is opening up to market forces both domestically and globally.

The immediate political context of coalition politics is the decline of the once-dominant Congress Party and the continuing failure of any party from the center, right, or left of the party system to win a working majority of its own to govern India. The recent trends of the metaphors of *mandal* (affirmative action reservations) and *mandir* (in essence, communalism) and the issue of state autonomy triggered different strategies of mobilization that significantly transformed the social and psychological bases of politics in India. Besides, a new pattern of social movements centered on single and region-specific issues relating to quality of life (e.g., ecology, gender, utilities, and services), in addition to the older, comprehensive concerns of economic production and distribution have appeared on the scene.

After decades of Congress dominance, coalition or minority governments today must govern India. However, neither coalition politics nor govern-

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ments of this kind are new to India, for politics and government of the democratic variety—especially in a country of India's size and diversity—have to be necessarily a coalitional exercise, whether at the electoral or governmental level. The legacy of the freedom struggle bequeathed to the Indian National Congress an essentially coalitional framework until around the end of the 1960s when Indira Gandhi stamped out its plurality and gradually turned it into an authoritarian pack of personal loyalists.

In view of the fact that India in the 1990s seems to have got stuck with the compulsions of coalition and minority-governments, it would appear that the long spell of Congress dominance until 1989—with only occasional or partial breaches in 1967 and 1977—merely served to conceal the essentially fragmented and coalitional nature of the Indian society and culture. Historically, too, India experienced long periods of political fragmentation and internecine conflicts among regional states, but with recurrent interventions of major subcontinental states—Maurya, Mughal, and British Raj—that imposed an overarching imperial unity under centralized bureaucratic state structures. Indian history also offers examples of *ganasanghas* (incipient republican federations) in ancient India; segmentary Chola and Vijayanagar States in early medieval South India, with regional *nattars* (court "jesters") and *nayakas* ("mid-level" military officials) wielding the real power under the ritual sovereignty of the monarch; and the nominal monarchy of the post-Shivaji Maratha state, with real power exercised by the hereditary prime ministers, Peshwas.

This article seeks to analyze a phase in federal coalition governments in India with special reference to the National Front and United Front (UF), both left-of-center formations led by the Janata Dal that ruled in Delhi in the early and latter half of the 1990s before it gave way to the right-of-center coalition headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1998, which called itself the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on the eve of the 1999 mid-term polls.

The Decline of the Congress Party and Coalition Governments in India

In the wake of the Congress split of 1969, Indira Gandhi's government was reduced to a parliamentary minority, but it survived with the strategy of forming a legislative coalition with some regional and leftist parties. These parties supported her government without entering into the cabinet coalition that she formed. This brief experiment with a minority government was soon overtaken by the return of the Congress led by Mrs. Gandhi with a comfortable majority in the 1971 mid-term Lok Sabha elections.

Although coalition governments at the center formally began in 1989 and have continued since, the Janata Party government in New Delhi also was a

de facto coalition. In the five general elections spanning the decade since 1989, no single party has won a majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha. In these classic coalition contexts, recourse to a coalition or minority government—often both—became a necessity. The decade (1989–99) featured a series of unstable coalition and minority governments following each other like a game of musical chairs. First, the National Front government headed by V. P. Singh of the Janata Dal was followed by the short-lived Congress-backed Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) minority government led by Chandrashekhar. The collapse of Chandrashekar's government was followed by the Congress minority government headed by P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991. In 1996, the UF government under two separate prime ministers, H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral, replaced the Congress Party's government. Since the collapse of the UF coalition in 1998, India has had two BJP coalition governments, both with Atal Behari Vajpayee as prime minister. Among these governments, only the Congress Party minority government headed by Narasimha Rao eventually turned into a single-party majority government as a result of internal parliamentary realignments and elections in the state of Punjab. It also lasted its full five-year mandate, although it had to struggle for its survival against a parliamentary vote of no confidence. Since its latest election in 1999, the National Democratic Alliance coalition government led by Vajpayee remains in office.

Theories of political coalition are a rather recent development in political science. There are broadly three kinds of coalition theories. First, there are utility maximization theories that postulate the size principle that predicts the minimum winning coalition. Proceeding from the axiom of the rationality of political actors, these theories deduce the theorem that in any formal coalition situation with the majority decision rule the coalition formation would hover around the minimum winning size, typically around 50 percentage points. The smaller the coalition, the larger the quantum of power and patronage to be shared among the winners. Second, there are ideological and policy compatibility theories. Proceeding from the assumption that the maximization of utility must contend with ideological concordance among parties, these theories predict a minimum winning coalition among parties whose policy preferences are least discordant. Third, there are theories that treat coalitions as sequential episodes that offer opportunities for redistribution of political resources that determine the relative political influence of coalition partners. The gains and losses in the present round and their implications for the ensuing ones primarily guide the competitive demands and concessions made by parties to each other.

The federal coalition governments here studied lend qualified support to all three major coalition theories listed above. Since none of these theories presents a comprehensive multifactorial model, none amounts to a complete

explanation of the empirical cases here examined. They only single out some relevant causal factors involved in a coalition situation and together draw attention to conditions that appear to be intuitively necessary, but by no means sufficient, to explain certain aspects of coalition phenomenon, say, stability and ideological compatibility of such governments and the strategies adopted by them.

Table 1 presents information about some selected features of the Janata Party, National Front, and UF coalition governments in India. All of these coalitions are broadly in the range of the minimum winning size. The Janata Party commanded 55.31% of the Lok Sabha seats. The National Front and UF had two levels of legislative support: those parties that joined the cabinet (forming a cabinet-based coalition) and those that extended support to it without being part of the government (forming a legislative coalition). The National Front's cabinet coalition was based on 30.94% of parliamentary support, while its larger legislative coalition enhanced its tally to 55.06%. Similarly, the UF's cabinet coalition comprised 32.06% of Lok Sabha members of parliament (MPs) and its larger legislative coalition together managed to register 57.9% of parliamentary support in the Lok Sabha. Thus, the minimum winning size in the cases here examined operationally worked out at a majority band between 55% to over 57% of the Lok Sabha seats. The differentiation between the two levels of coalition in terms of executive and legislative ones would in fact seem to offer a nuanced empirical support for the political rationality of actors to restrict the ministerial posts among a smaller circle of parties in the cabinet coalition. This smaller circle of power included only 30.94% of MPs in the case of the National Front and 32.06% in that of the UF.

The coalition governments studied here also broadly conform to policy compatibility modification in the minimum-winning hypothesis of coalition formation. The Janata Party, de facto coalition government was based on non-Congressional ideological unity. This was also largely true of the National Front government. Both of these coalitions were left-of-center in ideological terms and were aimed at keeping the Congress Party out of power. The UF, on the other hand, was founded on the basis of non-BJP unity. By 1998, the BJP had become the largest single party superseding the Congress Party. The UF also sought to block the way to a Congress-led coalition. Lacking coalition partners to make a serious bid for power, even the Congress Party lent outside support to the UF coalition in order to keep the BJP out of power. Like the National Front, the UF was also a left-of-center coalition. These tactical maneuvers regarding non-Congressism and non-BJPism will be discussed later in this article.

The cases studied here also lend some support to the coalition theory that has a premise that the strategy of treating coalitions as a war of attrition is

TABLE 1 *Selected Features of the Janata Party, National Front, and United Front Coalition Governments*

Features	*Janata Party*[1]	*National Front*	*United Front*
No. of parties	6	5	10
No. of ministers	14	18	21
Whether formed pre-election or post-election	Pre-election	Pre-election	Post-election
Ideological compatibility	Non-Congressional unity	Non-Congressional unity	Non-BJP unity
No. & % of Lok Sabha seats			
(a) Executive coalition[2]	298 (55.31%)	168 (30.94%)	76 (32.06%)
(b) Legislative coalition[3]	Not relevant	299 (55.06%)	318 (57.9%)
Seat share of the largest party in the coalition	31.00%	26.86%	8.20%
Whether operative as national as well as state level, i.e., bi-level federal coalition	Both levels only	National level only	National level
Whether a minority coalition government?[4]	Majority government	Minority government	Minority government
Duration[5]	2 years, 3 months & 4 days	11 months & 17 days	17 months & 21 days

SOURCE: The quantitative information, including the parties joining the various coalitions reported in this table, are mostly derived and calculated from relevant volumes of the *Asian Recorder, Indian Recorder,* and *Diary of Political Events*, all news archives.

[1]The relative position of the pre-merger constituent parties in the Janata Party in the Lok Sabha was as follows: former Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 31.0% (91 seats); former Bharatiya Lok Dal, 19%; former Socialists, 17%; former Congress (Organization), 15%; former Congress for Democracy, 10%; former Congress dissidents led by Chandrashekhar, 2%. Jaffrelot (1996: 282).

[2]"Executive coalition" refers only to parties joining the cabinet.

[3]"Legislative coalition" includes both parties in government as well as those extending outside support without joining the government.

[4]The National Front minority government, including Janata Dal, Telugu Desam, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Asom Gan Parishad, and Congress (Socialist), was supported from the floor of the House by CPI(M) and BJP. The United Front minority governments, led by Janata Dal and including some regional and left parties, were supported by the Indian National Congress. These supporting parties were not parts of the cabinet coalitions, only of the peripheral legislative coalitions. This has come to be known as "outside" support of the coalition governments.

[5]Janata Party ruled from 24 March 1977 to 15 July 1979. National Front was in office from 3 December 1989 to 11 November 1990. There were two United Front governments successively headed by H. D. Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral. The former lasted from 1 June 1996 to 4 November 1997 and the latter from 21 April 1997 to 28 November 1997. Gujral largely retained the Gowda team.

aimed at emerging as the winner in the final round. I believe that this was the typical mentality of the Congress Party under Rajiv Gandhi and the Janata Dal under V. P. Singh in the National Front. The UF government (headed

first by H. D. Deve Gowda and then by I. K. Gujral) had outgrown this mindset and the parties in the cabinet coalition had settled down to serious coalitional governance. Yet, parties in the larger legislative coalition supporting the governments from outside were always primarily motivated by this spirit of political gambling. This was true of the BJP at the time of the National Front government when it decided to launch its Somanath to Ayodhya *rathayatra* (chariot drive). This provocative act finally caused the fall of the Singh government when the prominent BJP leader, L. K. Advani, was arrested during the course of the *rathayatra*. In turn, the BJP withdrew its support to the National Front.

The Congress Party used a similar strategy while it supported the UF government from outside. Complaining of insensitivity of the government to the interests and susceptibilities of its Congress Party ally, the latter first forced the UF to change its prime minister, from Deve Gowda to Gujral. After their indictment by the Jain Commission investigating into the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress Party finally detached itself from the UF when the government refused to drop Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) ministers from its cabinet. The only exception to this capricious behavior of the parties in the larger legislative coalition was the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI[M]). The CPI(M) proved to be a responsible external ally of both the National Front and the UF. The party behaved in a responsible manner because it was not in a hurry to lead a coalition in which it did not have the position of strategic dominance.

Although the preponderance of the largest party in the coalition can be a factor of both ideological and pragmatic coherence and stability of the government, it is not necessarily so. For example, Table 1 shows that the Janata Party as well as the UF governments were relatively more stable than the National Front. The table shows that the largest constituent's share in Lok Sabha seats was high in the case of one (31.00%) and low of the other (8.20%). In the case of the rather unstable National Front government, the relevant figure was higher (26.86%). Obviously factors other than the size of the largest partner are involved here. These could include the pre-electoral formalization of the coalition, the federal character of the coalition operative both at the center and in states (at least some), the number of parties and ministers in the coalition, and the majority or minority status of the coalition. Each of these factors appears to be indicators of governmental stability. Moreover, skilled leadership, the formation of a coalition prior to the polls rather than after, the federal articulation of the coalition at various levels of the government, and the majority status of the coalition government rather than minority in the popular chamber may be intuitively and rationally expected to contribute to the longevity of the government. However, the data

along these dimensions pertaining to the three coalition governments studied here do not lend consistent support to any of the aforementioned hypotheses.

The leadership skills of a prime minister with an accent on accommodation and reconciliation may explain the relatively longer duration of the Janata and UF governments than that of the National Front. For instance, V. P. Singh's unilateral decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report—to factionally checkmate his deputy prime minister, Devi Lal—was particularly disruptive of the unity of the National Front coalition. The end of the National Front, though, came about as a result of the withdrawal of outside support by BJP. This decision was taken following the government's decision to reign in its external parliamentary ally. Yet, the inconsistent support for the above hypotheses from the limited cases offered here cannot be taken to be conclusive. They need to be tested with larger number of cases where the logic of large numbers can yield statistical tests of validity.

India's Experience with Coalition Governments

Outside of West Bengal and Kerala, coalition experiments in India of any appreciable magnitude have been half-hearted and casual. They seldom display long-term, pre-election parleys and organization. They also rarely extend to all levels of the political system—local, state, and national—or to all arenas of politics—electoral, legislative, and executive. West Bengal and Kerala have been exceptions to this rule. Here, various Left Front (LF) governments led by the CPI(M) have over the years provided fairly purposive and effective governments. Their governance has been known for its favorable economic and political recovery, communal harmony, and land reforms. These governments have also been relatively less corrupt than others. The leadership is more inclined to lead an austere life oriented toward their civic duties. The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala has also alternated in power and provided reasonably good governance. The Congress Party in West Bengal has displayed a remarkable persistence in providing perpetual opposition since 1977. The experience of West Bengal's branch of the Congress Party has lent it some cynicism and flamboyance, deepened also by the absence of other parties in the state willing to coalesce with it. Despite a groundswell of support for the Congress Party in the panchayat and municipal elections in the mid-1990s, it was unable to make it to governmental power at the state-level. The situation also remains largely unchanged after Mamata Banerjee's vigorous advocacy of a large alliance of all non-communist parties in West Bengal in the first half of the year 2000.

Most frequently the cementing bond of coalitions in India has often been, as mentioned earlier, negative rather than positive. "Non-Congressism" kept building up over the years of Congress predominance and was brought to

rather fickle climaxes in 1967 in North Indian states and in 1977 at the center and in North Indian states. The high priests of these ephemeral moments of non-Congress power were, respectively, Ram Manohar Lohia, the former Congress Party socialist and founder of the Samyukta Socialist Party, and Jayaprakash Narayan, the Congress Party socialist-turned Gandhian. Narayan emerged from virtual political retirement to lead the anti-corruption movement against the Indira Gandhi regime in the 1970s and became the ideological gray eminence of the Janata Party. Politics of non-Congressism until 1989 brought together the centrist Janata Party (renamed Janata Dal since 1988), the left-wing Socialist and Communist parties, and the right-wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) (and later the BJP).

Non-Congressism was especially strong after Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency Rule. The left conveniently rationalized this comprehensive non-Congress combination as being democratic and secular forces. The merger of the BJS in the Janata Party in 1977 heralded the secularization of this main Hindu communal party. The merger of the communist elements within Nehru's and Indira's Congress Party was construed as the political liberalization of Marxists. Despite the largest contingent of MPs from the BJS constituent in the Janata Party in 1977, they contented themselves with under-representation in Morarji Desai's government "because they regarded the Janata Party as the means by which they could join the mainstream of Indian politics"[1] As Rajni Kothari observed: "[T]he real challenge before Janata was to bring the Jana Sangh within the democratic framework just as the Communists had been under Nehru."[2] However, when the Janata Party government fell prematurely in 1979, the key precipitating factor, among other background reasons, was the question of double membership of Janata leaders in the party as well as in the Hindu communal organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The BJS constituents in the Janata Party split off and formed the BJP. In turn, a communal Sikh party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, was also catholically accepted as a part of the non-Congress front by its protagonists; it was indeed a coalition partner of the Janata Party government from 1977 to 1979.

By the early 1990s, when non-Congressism waned a bit, another negative factor in coalition endeavors (namely opposition to the BJP), appeared on the scene as a spur bringing parties together. It would be perhaps more accurate to say that while non-Congressism persisted in an attenuated way, anti-BJPism reached a feverish pitch. The political untouchability of communists evident in the early post-Independence days, of course, became a thing of the

1. Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: Penguin India Viking, 1996), p. 282.

2. Rajni Kothari, "Towards Intervention," *Seminar* (January 1982), p. 23.

past. This happened in the wake of the liberalization and the nationalization of the communist movement (meaning their taking to the parliamentary path and repatriation from their ideological Meccas in the international communist movement) and their growing electoral clout and political institutionalization in at least some states. Even at the national level, the Communist Party of India (CPI) held the Home Ministry portfolio in the UF government in the 1990s. Remarkably, Home Minister Indrajit Gupta was the first communist occupying the same post once held by Sardar Patel.

The antipathy to BJP is rooted in the fact that Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, had been an RSS activist. Moreover, the BJP had a negative perception among India's sizeable Muslim electorate. This antipathy sharpened noticeably when the BJP increased its number of seats in Lok Sabha (only two in 1984) to become in 1989 the third largest party after the Congress and Janata Parties. In 1991, the BJP held the second largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha. Despite disclaimers to the contrary, the BJP is widely perceived to have acquiesced in the demolition of the Babri masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. The destruction of the mosque was carried out by a frenzied Hindu mob of so-called *karsevaks* (volunteers). Following this incident, the state government of Uttar Pradesh (the state where the city of Ayodhya is located) resigned. Eventually, the Congress-led government in New Delhi dismissed the state governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh. The dismissals were undertaken by invoking the emergency powers in Article 356 of India's Constitution. The Indian government responded to pleas that the chief ministers and ministers in these states were RSS activists. As such, the central government could not count on the active cooperation by some state governments in the implementation of a ban on the RSS as well as some other Hindu (and Muslim) communal organizations. A tribunal later ruled that the ban on the RSS was unwarranted and the Madhya Pradesh High Court declared the dismissal of the BJP state government there unconstitutional. The lower court opinions were subsequently reversed by the Supreme Court. In the reelections that followed, the BJP could retain only one (Rajasthan) of the four state governments that it previously ruled.

The BJP also displayed an inclination to go it alone and was less than serious in making electoral adjustments with any other party (excepting the Shiv Sena in the state of Maharashtra) in the 1993 Assembly elections. Its optimistic mood mellowed considerably during the eve of the 1996 general election. For instance, the BJP joined forces with the Samata Party in Haryana (though not in Bihar). Shiv Sena-BJP and Samata Party-BJP coalitions won in Maharashtra and Haryana, adding two more states (in addition to the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan) to the category of BJP-ruled states at that time. The political isolation of the BJP was, however, embarrassingly

demonstrated when its minority government failed to win a no-confidence motion in May. At the time, no additional parties could be persuaded to form a coalition government with the BJP.

Moreover, the BJP's reputation of cohesiveness had been dented by the 1994 revolt of the Shankarsinh Vaghela faction against the Keshubhai Patel state government in Gujarat. The internal revolt resulted in its replacement by a new BJP government headed by Suresh Chandra Mehta. Vaghela was finally expelled from BJP for six years for anti-party activities in August 1996. He formed a new regional party, the Mahagujarat Rashtriya Janata Party, and then joined a coalition government with the support of the Congress Party. Still later, his group joined the Indian National Congress.

Among centrist parties, the ability by the Janata Party (later renamed the Janata Dal) to form coalitions had been greater than that of the Congress Party. However, the latter proved to be less fractious than the former. The relative cohesiveness of the Congress Party may be due to a number of reasons. First, the party developed a governing temperament since India's independence. Its glorious past during the nationalist struggle for independence as well as the quality of its national leaders cemented nationwide organizational presence. There has also been the unifying effect of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Nevertheless, the Congress Party initially did not approve of the idea of coalescing with other parties because of its unique predominant role in Indian politics. However, in phases and regions of its decline it was compelled to cultivate coalitional support. For instance, Congress formed a coalition with the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and Muslim League in Kerala during the Nehru era. At the national level, Indira Gandhi's minority government briefly relied on parliamentary support of communist and regional parties. Similarly, the Congress Party has formed various alliances with regional parties in northeastern states over the years. In contrast, its long-term alliances with the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu and the National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir have ran into rough weather in the 1990s. Similarly, its uneasy alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh helped bring down the Samajwadi Party (SP) and BSP coalition government in Uttar Pradesh in 1995.

The misuse of the constitutional provisions of President's Rule during the Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi eras also worked as a repellant, reducing Congress's ability to form durable coalitions. However, the use of or threat to use emergency powers partly explained the willingness of the AIADMK and National Conference to ally themselves with the Congress Party in order to prevent the dismissal of their state governments. Under Narasimha Rao's Congress government, Tamil Nadu's political leader, Jayalalitha, ended AIADMK's alliance with the Congress Party. The alliance was eventually

revived in April 1996 despite the opposition by many Congress Party leaders from Tamil Nadu. The 1996 alliance led to a major split in the Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress and the formation of the regional Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC). The TMC fought the 1996 general elections as an ally of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and practically wiped out both the AIADMK and the Congress in that state. The Congress–National Conference alliance in Jammu and Kashmir remained in limbo during the period of insurgency there. The National Conference later boycotted the 1996 Lok Sabha elections in the state, but joined the fray in the state assembly elections that were held a few months later. The National Conference was subsequently drawn into the orbit of both Congress Party or BJP coalitions at the center.

The Janata Party once saw itself as the historic focal point of a non-Congress coalitional alternative at the center since 1977. At the time, the Congress (Organization), the BJP, the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), the Socialist Party, and the Congress for Democracy merged under the shadow of the Emergency Rule. This alliance was able to unseat Indira Gandhi. The Janata Party coalition government started out well and completed nearly half of its five-year term. It dismantled the authoritarian amendments to the Constitution by the Emergency regime. Its economic performance was not unimpressive. However, this regime was marred by the onset of atrocities against Scheduled Caste (SC) agricultural workers by dominant peasant castes in the countryside. The leaders of the Janata Party coalition constantly kept quarrelling among themselves.

These quarrels were typified by the bitter personality clashes between the prime minister and deputy prime minister, Morarji Desai and Chaudhary Charan Singh, respectively. Both leaders were former members of the Congress Party. Desai represented the Congress(O) and was supposed to be close to the big business lobby and Singh led the BLD, primarily a party of Jat and other middle-caste peasant proprietors. The BJS, controlling the largest number of parliamentary seats and Janata Party state governments, played the role of mediator but failed to keep peace among the coalition partners at the center. The Janata Party coalition government ultimately fell victim to factional feuds in July 1979. As was mentioned earlier, the BLD faction of the coalition raised the issue of double membership of the BJS faction with the RSS. A less-domineering personality than Desai probably may have provided a more conciliatory setting for a coalition government. However, after the fall of the Janata coalition government, some Janata Party defectors led by Charan Singh of the BLD faction formed a minority government with the legislative support of the Congress Party led by Indira Gandhi. Within three weeks, the Congress Party withdrew support from Singh just before the first vote of confidence in parliament. The strategy by the Congress Party resulted in Singh's unceremonious resignation. The Janata Party subsequently fell

apart and all its major constituents (with the exception of the Congress(O) and the SP) split off to revive themselves.

The Janata Dal-led National Front government (which included the Janata Dal, the Congress Party [Socialist], the Telugu Desam Party [TDP], the DMK, and the Asom Gana Parishad [AGP]), was just as fractious as the Janata Party coalition government and even less durable. It lasted barely 11 months in power, from December 1989 to November 1990. Weak coordination and fragmented collective responsibility of the cabinet marked the National Front coalition government. Neither the prime minister nor the Coordination Committee of constituent parties of the coalition chaired by N. T. Rama Rao could bridge the tendencies of empire-building by major factions and divided ministerial responsibilities and overseeing of the state governments. The feuding between Prime Minister V. P. Singh—a Congress Party dissenter who resigned from Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet in 1987—and Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal sealed the fate of the National Front coalition government.

It was this factional feud that propelled V. P. Singh to suddenly implement the Mandal Commission's recommendation calling for the reservation quota of 27% of central government jobs for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in addition to the existing reservations for SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Singh gave his support for the Mandal Commission without making a direct reference to the Coordination Committee or the Cabinet (even though the matter was part of the National Front election manifesto). This triggered a veritable caste war in many North Indian cities and towns. During this period, the immediate reason for the demise of the National Front coalition turned out to be the failure of a legislative coalition between the leftist parties and the BJP. The communist parties and BJP were supporting the National Front government from the parliamentary floor without joining the coalition. Eventually, both organized *bandhs* (closures or strikes) and mass mobilizations against the National Front coalition government. The BJP's *rathayatra* from Somanath to Ayodhya was finally stopped with the arrest of the BJP's president, L. K. Advani. The arrest caused the withdrawal of BJP's parliamentary support.

The National Front also suffered from internal divisions within the Janata Dal. Even though the Janata Dal had the largest number of parliamentary seats, it was sharply divided. V. P. Singh was the party's parliamentary leader, but Chandrashekhar, a senior Janata Dal leader opposed his selection as prime minister. Chandrashekhar had once belonged to the Janata Dal after he had the courage to oppose Indira Gandhi's Emergency from within the ranks of the Congress Party. He was jailed for his opposition. On the other hand, Singh was a loyalist of Indira's son Sanjay during the Emergency. Singh eventually capitalized on the crest of public euphoria that followed the

wake of his resignation from Rajiv Gandhi's government. After the fall of the National Front coalition government, the Janata Dal splintered into the SJP led by Chandrashekhar and Devi Lal (the regional leader in the state in Haryana) and SP led by Mulayam Singh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress Party once again pretended to support Chandrashekhar's SJP minority government. Chandrashekhar demonstrated a more earthy common sense and earnestness than his predecessor. But the Congress Party only extended parliamentary support to Chandrashekhar for four months, withdrawing its support in protest over the surveillance of Congress President Rajiv Gandhi's residence by two Haryana constables. A more sizable SJP representation in parliament probably would have helped develop a more balanced relationship between the party in government and its legislative ally. A joint governmental responsibility undertaken by both would have been even a better recipe for stability. But the imperatives of electoral mobilization overrode those of governance.

The Electoral Landscape after 1996

The Janata Dal-led UF government was formed following the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. Being the third party in the Lok Sabha after the BJP and Congress, the Janata Dal got its chance to form a government after the BJP failed to muster a majority in the hung parliament and the president of India declined to invite Congress to try to form a government. The structure of party competition in the Lok Sabha is given in Table 2. The fragmented and uncertain verdict of the electorate is evident from the data there, especially in view of the absence of any pre-election overarching coalition having been formed among the three major party-clusters or groupings, none of which was alone, mandated to power by the electorate.

The state-wise distribution of seats in given in Table 3. The table underlines the growing regionalization of India's party system. One visible trend is the shrinking of the nationwide spread of the Congress Party. The other visible trend is that the national pretensions of BJP were contradicted by its continued failure to outgrow its base of support, having its strongest electoral showing in Hindi-speaking states plus the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka. The BJP has been at pains to clarify that its notion of Hindu nationalism is based not on the religious connotation of the term Hindu but rather is premised on the original territorial extension of it whereby all Indians irrespective of religions are Hindus. However, the BJP's strong identification with Hindutva was another limitation in the context of pluralist and composite Indian nationalism.

The Janata Dal's electoral appeal, including the SP, was basically limited to the states of Bihar, Karnataka, and Orissa. The party's formal or informal understanding with regional and left-wing parties did give it a wider spread,

TABLE 2 *Party Position in Lok Sabha, 1996*

Parties	*Seats*
BJP and Allies	
Bharatiya Janata Party	160
Shiv Sena	15
Samata Party	8
Akali Dal	8
Haryana Vikas Party (HVP)	8
Congress and Allies	
Indian National Congress	136
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha	1
Indian Union Muslim League	2
Kerala Congress (Mani)	1
Sikkim Democratic Front	1
Janata Dal and Allies	
Janata Dal	43
Samajwadi Party	17
Telugu Desam (Naidu)	16
Dravida Munneta Kazhagam	17
Asom Gana Parishad	5
Autonomous State Demand Committee	1
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	32
Communist Party of India	11
Revolutionary Socialist Party	5
All India Forward Bloc	3
Uncommitted/Regional Parties	
Tamil Maanila Congress*	20
Bahujan Samaj Party	10
Congress (Tiwari)*	4
All India Majlis-e Ithedad ul-Musli-men (MIM)	1
Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress	2
Maharashtravadi Gomantak Party	1
United Goans Democratic Party (UGDP)	1
Kerala Congress (Pillai) (KCP)	1
Independents	7

SOURCES: *Times of India* (New Delhi), 14 May 1996, p. 1. The total elected seats were 543 and elections were held for 537. However, the *Times of India*'s classification of BSP as a regional party is problematic, as it is a multistate party with sizeable presence in U.P., Punjab, and M.P. and aspirationally a national party.

*At the time of government formation TMC and Congress (T) joined the United Front Council of Ministers.

though still short of being able to form a majority in parliament. In order to stake its claim to form the government, the party had to shed its non-Congressism because it had to depend on a legislative coalition with the Congress

TABLE 3 *Statewise Breakup of Major Parties in Lok Sabha, 1996*

State	*Seats Won*				*Total Seats*
	BJP	*Congress*	*Janata Dal*	*Regional Parties*	
Andhra Pradesh	1	22	—	18 (TDP and allies)	42
Assam	—	5	—	5 (AGP)	14
Bihar	18	2	22	—	54
Delhi	5	2	—	—	7
Gujarat	16	10	—	—	26
Haryana	4	2	—	3 (HVP)	10
Himachal Pradesh	—	4	—	—	4
Karnataka	6	5	15	—	28
Kerala	—	7	—	—	20
Madhya Pradesh	27	8	—	—	40
Maharashtra	18	15	—	15 (Shiv Sena)	48
Manipur	—	2	—	—	2
Maghalaya	—	1	—	—	2
Mizoram	—	1	—	—	1
Nagaland	—	1	—	—	1
Orissa	—	16	4	—	21
Punjab	—	2	—	8 (Akali Dal-Badal)	13
Rajasthan	12	12	—	—	25
Tamil Nadu	—	—	—	20 (TMC)	39
	—	—	—	17 (DMK)	
Uttar Pradesh	52	5	—	26 (Samajwadi and allies)	85
West Bengal	—	9	—	—	42

SOURCE: *Indian Recorder*, 17–23 June 1996, pp. 2052–53.

Party. Congress itself appeared divided and generally reluctant to join a Janata Dal-led government. The CPI, a coalition partner during the UF government, also announced its opposition to the idea of joining any coalition government that included the Congress Party.

Coalition building in India inevitably raises questions about the limits and desirability of the direction of presidential discretion in inviting a leader to form a government. In the context of government-formation in May–June 1996, the president obviously could not follow a non-controversial role in inviting the leader of the party with an absolute majority in the newly elected Lok Sabha to form a government. During the ongoing political discourse that followed the 1996 election, he was offered various suggestions on which potential ally to invite. Simultaneously, he was asked to invite the largest single party; the largest coalition (preferably one that was formed before the election); the party with the largest national spread; the party most likely to be

stable; the one likely to ensure constitutional values and social justice; and, finally, a national government inclusive of all or at least major political formations. He was also requested to wait until the new parliament was constituted with newly elected MPs already having taken the oath of membership in order to prevent party defections. There was also a suggestion to allow enough time for all coalition combinations to fairly settle into a discursively negotiated partnership. As it happened, President Shankar Dayal Sharma adopted a more pedestrian, if somewhat hurried, approach in extending an invitation to the largest single parties. These parties would then be tested through the survival of a confidence vote. This approach was followed by President R. Venkataraman in 1989, though not by President Neelam Sanjeev Reddy in 1979.

In 1996, the BJP failed to produce a majority in the parliament. Vajpayee resigned just before a parliamentary vote confidence was taken. Before his resignation, he gave a valiant, if essentially a campaign, speech in the Lok Sabha. The speech was nationally televised. The practice of televising a speech of this significance was continued by the UF government during the debate on a confidence motion for the H. D. Deve Gowda government. The nearly two weeks of the BJP in government showed considerable relenting on a number of issues. These included the recommissioning of the Shrikrishna Commission (that was appointed by the Congress government in Maharashtra to inquire into the Bombay blasts and riots but was disbanded by the successor Shiv Sena-BJP government), the lack of insistence to examine Article 370 and 44 of the Constitution relating, respectively, to Jammu and Kashmir and the common civil code.

After Vajpayee's exit, the president offered the Congress Party the chance to form a government. Then he offered a similar opportunity to the UF (by then an assortment of over a dozen parties). The formation of the UF was by and large a post-election development. This trend was a clear contrast to the formation of the Janata Party in 1977 and the National Front in 1989. These coalitions were formed prior to the elections. During the formation of these coalitions, there were joint manifestos, comprehensive seat adjustments to avoid mutual contests, and common campaigning. To be sure, in 1996 there was some residue of bonhomie between some partners of the NF-LF as had occurred before. But with gradual exits of AGP, TDP (Naidu), and DMK at various points in time on various issues, the National Front by 1996 pre-election days practically meant only the Janata Dal. Outside of the Janata Dal, there were only the communist parties and the SP. A former Janata Party maverick, Mulayam Singh Yadav, formed the latter. However, its strength was mainly limited to the state of Uttar Pradesh. These groups had kept some informal contacts before the 1996 election. Janata Dal leaders,

such as Singh, had also kept personal contacts with the splinter groups of the TDP.

The National Front was practically defunct and disparate since the fall of the V. P. Singh government. The press, however, generally and generously continued to use the terms UF and LF interchangeably. During the election campaign, the Congress Party and the BJP had shown the proclivity to go alone, except for their minor and regional allies. Both had publicly tried to distance themselves from each other, even though there was some covert alignment during the last phase of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi's regimes. In the process, the Congress Party had trumpeted the issue about the BJP's communalism. In turn, the BJP decried the Congress Party's corruption and subservience to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The so-called third force had vociferously condemned both the Congress Party and the BJP as scourges of Indian politics but had done little to project a cohesive image and strategy. To neutral observers, the third force was more a residual category than anything else. It visibly failed in its endeavor to bring together the Chandrababu Naidu and Laxmi Parvathi factions of the TDP in Andhra Pradesh. The third force resolved the reservations of the DMK bringing AIADMK into the orbit of the coalition. Jayalalitha's courtship of the UF proved to be as ephemeral as they had been with the BJP.

The UF government actually emerged in the complicated, post-election negotiations among parties. As it happened, before H. D. Deve Gowda of the Janata Dal emerged as the third front's choice for the prime minister's office, the political scene witnessed the canvassing of the candidatures of Narasimha Rao among sections of the Congress Party, the promotion of Ramakhrishna Hedge among the Janata Dal, the advocacy of V. P. Singh among some sections of the Janata Dal and the DMK, and of Jyoti Basu in sections of the CPI(M) and the Congress Party. Although Laloo Yadav had campaigned in his home state of Bihar in order to become India's prime minister, his name did not figure in the post-election parleys. Vajpayee and Rao were the only ones who had campaigned on the possibility of becoming prime minister. In public opinion polls held before the election, Rao had a clear edge over others as the most favored candidate. In the poll held after the election, while Vajpayee became prime minister for two weeks, the BJP leader had elbowed the others out with a plurality of a 50% mark in a sample from the eight metropolitan cities.[3] Rao was hamstrung by dissidence within his own party rising against him in the wake of the Congress Party's electoral reverses. There were also reservations about him within the communist parties, re-

3. The Times-MODE poll on the question 'Who should be PM?' showed 50% preferring Vajpayee, 31% Rao, 11 % V. P. Singh, and 8% Jyoti Basu. See *Times of India*, May 15, 1996, p. 1.

gional parties (namely the Naidu faction of the TDP and the Akali Dal), and some sections of the Janata Dal. For mysterious reasons, V. P. Singh firmly announced his political renunciation until 1999.

The CPI(M) finally decided not to join any government in which it was not a dominant partner. As part of its long-term electoral strategy, though, it was willing to extend legislative support to the UF government and joined the UF's steering committee. With its options shrinking, the Congress Party found itself in the unenviable position of having to extend legislative support to the UF government. It chose to stay out of both the government and the steering committee. The Congress Party's dilemma in supporting the UF government was also deepened by the exasperation of its regional units in the state of Kerala (where a Congress-led UDF was formed against the CPI[M]-led Left Democratic Front [LDF]), in Andhra Pradesh (where the Congress Party opposes the TDP), in West Bengal (where the Congress must cross swords with the LF), in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (where the Congress must challenge the Janata Dal and SP in order to rehabilitate itself), and finally in Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh (where the Congress must oppose the DMK, TMC, and Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress, respectively, in order to regain the lost ground). These objectives spelled conflicts with major and minor parties in the UF.

The Janata Dal, with its rather meager parliamentary presence, found itself under layers of political pressures. The left-wing partners of the UF were unfavorably disposed to the continuation of economic reforms. The regional parties in the coalition (the DMK, the TDP, and the AGP) promptly formed a Federal Front within the UF. Moreover, the Congress favored the continuation of economic reforms. The formal opposition to the UF government came from the BJP and its allies. It eventually included the Akali Dal.

The tragicomic interlude of the Vajpayee government highlighted some ideological and institutional dilemmas of Indian politics. It revealed the growing secular-communal divide in Indian politics, even though it must be pointed out that it is superficial and unfair to say that only parties usually branded "communal" are communal. The so-called secular parties also partake in covert communalism. The BJP's charge of "minority communalism" practiced by the "pseudo-secular" parties does not appear to be entirely unjustified. The BJP's Hindutva revivalism is a reversal of its political liberalization (one may even say secularization) during the 1960s and 1970s. However, Vajpayee's broadcast to the nation as prime minister and in the president's address to the joint session of the parliament revealed that the BJP was willing to soft-pedal its insistence on the deletion of Article 370 and on common civil code. Instead, it concentrated on electoral reforms and measures that curbed the center's ability to misuse Article 356 against state governments.

The institutional dilemma brought to the fore by the Vajpayee government concerned the anomaly of a presidential invitation to a party or coalition to form the government that did not prima facie enjoy a parliamentary majority. Could the president have waited longer to allow time to the three fronts to negotiate and form a majority? Could this be done without violating the legality of convening the parliament sooner and without running the risk of facilitating horse-trading among parliamentary parties simply by giving them more time? The RSS leadership indeed expressed publicly their anxiety lest the BJP leadership compromised on ideology and the means through which parliamentary support was secured for the party's minority government.

Even before the motion of confidence in the BJP government could be taken up, the process of electing the speaker of the Lok Sabha made it clear that the fate of the BJP government was sealed. The BJP made an offer of selecting the speaker by consensus, hoping that other parties would participate in the process. The likely candidate for the office would have been G. G. Swell, the sitting deputy speaker who was also a northeastern Christian. At the same time, the BJP tried to persuade the Congress Party to participate in the selection of the speaker by indicating that it was willing to support Shivraj Patil, a Congress Party member and the outgoing Lok Sabha speaker. However, the Congress Party and the third front quickly moved to a consensus whereby a northeastern Congressman, P. A. Sangama (also a Christian), was put forth as their common candidate. BJP opted not to oppose the choice of the Congress Party and the third front. The motion to allow Sangama to be elected unanimously avoided a showdown even before the motion of confidence was taken up for discussion.

With speed and alacrity, the UF forged a common platform, called the Common Approach and Minimum Program (CAMP). CAMP reflected a fine balance between the social democratic and working class preferences of the left-wing parties, the agrarianism with an OBC bias of the Janata Dal, and the regionalism with augmented federalism articulated by the regional parties in the UF. There was also a measure of consensus not to undermine, only modify, the policy of economic liberalization that originated with the Rao minority government in 1991. Evidently, policy innovations are better initiated and carried out by minority and coalition governments, even though political leaders themselves, the civil servants, and the business circles are generally averse to coalition governments.

The United Front Governments in the 11th Lok Sabha

H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral headed the two United Front governments in the 11th Lok Sabha, respectively. Both prime ministers were from the Janata Dal but with a common Congress past. The UF was essentially an

exercise in governance by the third force in Indian politics between the Congress Party and the BJP. The two polar forces represented the two variants of the emergent right-wing in Indian politics—the Hindu nationalist BJP and the Congress Party moving away from Indian variants of Nehruvian socialism and Indira Gandhi's populism to neo-classical economic liberalization and globalization. As a result of communal or corruption charges, these two largest single parties were hamstrung on the margin. The third force parties managed to put together a heterogeneous coalition composed of the Janata Dal, left wing, and regional parties. All these three categories of parties also happened to be the ruling political forces in some states: the Janata Dal in Bihar and Karnataka, the communists in West Bengal and Kerala, and TDP, AGP, and DMK in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, and Tamil Nadu, respectively.

Beyond this assortment of parties in the cabinet coalition, the UF also roped in the support of Congress from the parliamentary floor. Unwelcome by the UF as a cabinet partner and divided by an unbridgeable gap between itself and BJP, the options of the Congress Party were rather limited. The Congress Party could tactically help the UF governments cross the threshold of a majority in the Lok Sabha with a veto on government formation and maintenance. Using this veto, the Congress Party forced the UF to change its prime minister—from Deve Gowda to Gujral—in April 1997. The Congress Party finally doomed the UF government in November the same year when it abandoned supporting the coalition.

The fall of the UF governments was due more to the role of the Congress Party rather than from the parties internal to them. Despite their differences, the UF parties managed to reconcile their heterogeneity with a fair degree of success. This must be considered a remarkable achievement, especially in view of the fact that the coalition included three distinct groupings of parties from the centrist, leftist, and regional sectors of India's party system. Moreover, the government had to steer its way through the new terrains that were fast changing in areas of the growing economic liberalization and political federalization of the system of governance. Internal policy and personality differences of the coalition were more or less publicly resolved by a coordination committee of parties in the government.

The UF's relations with its external ally, the Congress Party, were handled directly by both prime ministers as well as the Congress presidents. A proposed coordination committee with the Congress was never formed. The Congress Party president, P. V. Narasimha Rao, and the UF's first prime minister, Deve Gowda, got along reasonably well partly because both hailed from South India. But after Rao was indicted in a series of bribery cases, Sitaram Kesri took over as Congress Party president. Based on available accounts, the government, especially the judiciary and the Central Bureau of Investigation under judicial supervision, did not relent in pursuing the corrup-

tion charges against Rao and Kesri. The issue over which the Congress Party finally withdrew its support to the two UF governments was its alleged insensitivity to its Congress ally. The UF first yielded to the Congress Party, demand for changing the prime minister. But on the second occasion, the reaction of the UF was different. Following the release of the Jain Commission Report on Rajiv Gandhi's murder, the Congress Party demanded that the United Front government drop its DMK ministers. The request was made based on the implied indictment of the DMK government in Tamil Nadu for its handling of Rajiv Gandhi's security. The UF refused to comply with the Congress Party request and bowed out of office.

The Impact of the UF on India's Economic Policy

The UF governments came in the aftermath of the National Front and the Congress minority governments after the watershed elections of 1989 that ended Congress dominance. The UF experiment passed into history, but not the idea of coalition governments per se. India's quest for a workable federal coalition government is still ongoing. Since 1999, the second BJP-led coalition government, the National Democratic Alliance, remains in office.

The Congress minority dispensation of Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao proved to be a turning point in as much as it departed from the neoliberal economic reforms "by stealth" brought about by the governments since 1977 and accelerated the pace of reforms in a more comprehensive and self-conscious way.[4] India's economic liberalization was undertaken under the compulsion of a balance of payments crisis and IMF-World Bank loan-related conditionalities. Since Rao's successor, the UF, included the two major communist parties—CPI in the legislative coalition, CPI(M) in the executive or cabinet coalition—the prospect of economic reforms became a subject of some speculation. The CAMP issued by the UF committed itself to Rao's economic reforms in combination with some residual items from the era of development planning. With a certain degree of dilution of its role, the Planning Commission survived the economic reforms. Indeed, the Planning Commission, along with the Reserve Bank of India with enhanced functional autonomy, and a newly set up Disinvestment Commission became sources of advice on how to reconcile the conflicting objectives into some sort of economic policy coherence. For example, on November 28, 1996, the Planning Commission stressed the desirability of making some hard decisions on price increases of petroleum products, taxing of the "parallel economy" (euphemism for the underground economy), and upgrading the tax to the gross do-

4. Jagdish Bhagwati and T. N. Srinivasan, *India's Economic Reforms* (New Delhi: Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 1993), p. 9.

mestic product ratio from 10.5% to 12%.[5] The Reserve Bank of India in its 1996–97 annual report warned the government that it would find it difficult to keep the fiscal deficit under the targeted 4.5% in 1997–98 unless subsidies are not drastically reduced and administered prices adjusted to market forces.

The Disinvestment Commission advised a cautious approach in exercising the option of privatization—"a long-term view of disinvestment instead of being driven by immediate budgetary compulsions." On the basis of the scrutiny of public sector policy statements of the Government of India, the Commission classified the public sector companies into three broad categories: (1) "strategic" (related to defense and security); (2) "core" (susceptible to an oligopolistic market structure dominated by the public sector); and (3) "non-core" (where private sector investment had grown considerably to succeed in a competitive market). The Commission ruled out disinvestment in the strategic group. It recommended a maximum 49% disinvestment in core group industries and up to 74% in the non-core group of companies. It also recommended that the government professionalize the board of directors in all public sector undertakings and grant them autonomy, especially to "strong performers."[6]

The UF government broadly followed these suggestions in a rather tardy and half-hearted way. The leftist parties in the coalition were particularly opposed to privatization. The reduction of subsidies and leaving the administered prices to market fluctuations were resisted by practically all parties. The agriculture minister, Chaturanan Mishra, at one point in time resigned, accusing Finance Minister P. Chidambaram of scuttling all policies beneficial to farmers and poor peasants. Mishra was later persuaded to rescind his planned resignation from the cabinet.

Prime Minister I. K. Gujral particularly highlighted reforms in the power sector. He ordered a review of power projects to be conducted by the cabinet secretary. Gujral encouraged the State Electricity Boards (SEBs) to make good of new opportunities offered by economic liberalization and convince financial institutions that loans advanced to the sector would be serviced. Ironically, the Union Cabinet itself had to recover the dues from central government undertakings from the SEBs by deciding that defaulting payments would be adjusted against central plan allocations to those states.

The UF government liberalized imports in at least three installments, gradually shifting more items from the restricted to the special import list and from the latter to the free import category. It also ended state monopoly over coal and lignite mining 25 years after their nationalization. This sector was opened to private Indian companies including those having foreign equity.

5. *Indian Recorder*, vol. 4, 1997, p. 2,517.

6. *Disinvestment Commission Report* (New Delhi: Central Secretariat, North Block, 1997).

The UF government also signed a global telecommunications treaty at a World Trade Organization (WTO) conference held in Geneva in February 1997. The treaty opened long-protected telecommunications monopolies to domestic as well as foreign firms. Another major landmark of the regime was the WTO draft declaration signed by India and 127 other countries at its first ministerial conference in Singapore on December 13, 1997. It endorsed a global Information Technology Agreement to do away with tariffs on the expanding $600 billion world market in computer-related products. The UF was criticized for surrendering India's interests on labor and investment standards and for bypassing the parliament. Faced with parliamentary criticisms from various parties, including its left-wing allies, the UF government defended itself by pointing out that *(a)* the Declaration recognized the International Labor Organization rather than the WTO as the competent body to decide on labor standards, and *(b)* the study group to examine investment standards was confined to the existing norms of trade-related investment measures.

Even more than its modest success in India, what has often puzzled analysts is the political sustainability of economic reforms. Beyond the initial condition of a balance of payments crisis and conditionalities from multilateral monetary and financial agencies, the reforms have been maintained by a string of minority and/or coalition governments with parties with divergent policies since 1991. Managing federal coalitions on an interparty plane has been a difficult task for the political class, though things have gradually been settling down to a workable pattern. However, the complex federal constellation of forces, fragmentation and fluidity of interest groups, and ability of the political actors at the center and in the states has enabled the selling of reforms to certain key interests. It is also to be concluded that the increased ability to derive patronage and illegal income from them have combined to contribute to the reforms' political sustainability.