

# Prime Ministerial Authority in Coalition Governments: The Case Study of Narendra Modi

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## Abstract

Coalition governments often impose structural constraints on executive leadership, requiring negotiation, compromise, and power-sharing among multiple political actors. However, the case of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India presents a compelling departure from conventional expectations of coalition-era governance. This paper examines the extent and nature of prime ministerial authority under Modi, particularly in the context of coalition dynamics led by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Despite heading a coalition, Modi has demonstrated a high degree of centralization in decision-making, attributed to his party's dominant electoral mandate, strong leadership persona, and effective control over party machinery. The study explores how institutional factors, such as cabinet structure and party discipline, interact with personal leadership style to shape executive authority. It also analyses key policy decisions, including economic reforms and national security measures, to assess whether coalition pressures have significantly influenced governmental outcomes. The findings suggest that while coalition partners remain relevant, their impact on core policy directions has been limited, thereby reinforcing the Prime Minister's authority. This research contributes to the broader discourse on executive power in parliamentary democracies by highlighting how electoral dominance within a coalition framework can recalibrate traditional power-sharing norms, enabling a strong prime ministerial model even in ostensibly pluralistic political arrangements.

**Keywords:** *Prime Ministerial Authority; Coalition Government; Executive Power; National Democratic Alliance (NDA); Centralization of Power; Political Leadership; Prime Minister's Office (PMO).*

## 1. Introduction

The functioning of coalition governments has long been associated with dispersed authority, collective decision-making, and the necessity for consensus among diverse political actors. In parliamentary democracies, particularly in a complex and pluralistic polity like India, coalition politics has often been viewed as a limiting factor on the authority of the Prime Minister. Traditionally, prime ministerial power in such arrangements is mediated by the need to accommodate coalition partners, manage competing interests, and maintain political stability. The leadership of Narendra Modi presents an important case that challenges many of these established assumptions. Since assuming

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office in 2014 and continuing through subsequent electoral victories, Modi has led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) while simultaneously exhibiting a style of governance marked by strong centralization and decisive leadership.

This research paper seeks to analyse the extent and nature of prime ministerial authority under Modi within the framework of coalition governance. While the NDA formally represents a coalition of multiple political parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) dominant electoral position has significantly altered traditional coalition dynamics. Unlike earlier coalition governments in India, which were often characterized by fragile alliances and constrained leadership, Modi's tenure reflects a consolidation of executive power, where coalition partners appear to play a comparatively limited role in influencing major policy decisions. This raises critical questions about whether India is witnessing a transformation in the operational logic of coalition politics, where numerical strength within the alliance enables a quasi-majoritarian style of governance.

The introduction of key policy initiatives, such as economic reforms, welfare schemes, and assertive national security decisions, further illustrates the central role of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in shaping governance outcomes. These developments suggest that institutional mechanisms, including cabinet committees and party structures, have been effectively aligned with the Prime Minister's agenda. At the same time, the study acknowledges that coalition politics has not entirely disappeared — regional parties and alliance partners continue to hold strategic importance, particularly in legislative processes and electoral mobilization.

By situating Modi's leadership within the broader theoretical framework of coalition governance, this paper aims to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on executive power in parliamentary systems. It explores how leadership style, party dominance, and institutional arrangements intersect to redefine the balance of power within coalition governments. The case of Narendra Modi provides valuable insights into how strong leadership can reshape conventional expectations of coalition-era constraints, thereby offering a nuanced understanding of prime ministerial authority in contemporary India.

## 2. Theoretical Framework of Prime Ministerial Authority in Coalition Governments

The theoretical framework for analysing prime ministerial authority in coalition governments rests on key concepts such as coalition theory, the distinction between prime ministerial government and cabinet government, and the centralization of power within executive structures. These concepts provide a structured lens through which the leadership of Narendra Modi can be examined within the broader context of India's parliamentary democracy.

Coalition theory forms the foundation of this analysis by explaining how and why multiple political parties come together to form a government, particularly in fragmented electoral systems. In parliamentary democracies like India, coalitions are often necessary when no single party secures an absolute majority in the legislature. Classical coalition theory emphasizes bargaining, negotiation and compromise among partners, where smaller parties can exert influence disproportionate to their numerical strength. This typically results in a diffusion of authority, with the Prime Minister required to accommodate diverse interests to maintain the stability of the government. In the Indian context, especially during the coalition era from the late 1980s to early 2010s, prime ministers often operated under significant constraints imposed by alliance partners. Decision-making was frequently collective, and policy initiatives were shaped by consensus rather than unilateral leadership (Riker, 1962; Lijphart, 1977).

Closely related to coalition theory is the distinction between prime ministerial government and cabinet government. In a cabinet government model, authority is distributed among members of the cabinet, with collective responsibility serving as a guiding principle. The Prime Minister is regarded as 'first among equals,' and major decisions are made through deliberation and consultation. This model is typically associated with coalition governments, where the inclusion of multiple parties in the cabinet necessitates shared decision-making. In contrast, the prime ministerial government model reflects a concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister, who exercises significant control over policy direction, cabinet appointments and administrative mechanisms. This model

is more commonly observed in single-party majority governments but can also emerge in coalition settings under certain conditions.

The concept of centralization of power further deepens this analysis by focusing on how authority is consolidated within specific institutional or individual nodes, particularly the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Centralization involves the strengthening of executive control over decision-making processes, often at the expense of cabinet autonomy and institutional checks. Factors contributing to centralization may include strong party leadership, electoral dominance, control over party organization and the personalization of political authority (Kumar, 2017). In contemporary governance, centralization is often linked with efficiency and decisiveness, but it may also raise concerns about reduced deliberation and weakened collective accountability.

When these theoretical concepts are applied to the Indian context, particularly under the leadership of Narendra Modi, a nuanced picture emerges. Although Modi heads a coalition government under the NDA, the BJP's dominant electoral position significantly alters the traditional dynamics predicted by coalition theory. Unlike earlier coalition governments in India, where smaller parties held considerable bargaining power, the BJP's parliamentary majority reduces the dependence on coalition partners for legislative survival. Modi's leadership reflects a shift toward the prime ministerial government model, even within a coalition framework. Decision-making authority is highly centralized, with the PMO playing a pivotal role in policy formulation and implementation. This marks a departure from the traditional cabinet government model that characterized earlier coalition eras in India (Sen, 2018; Panda, 2016).

### 3. Historical Context of Coalition Politics in India

The historical evolution of coalition politics in India, particularly in the post-1989 era, marks a significant transformation in the country's parliamentary democracy. Prior to 1989, Indian politics was largely dominated by single-party governments, most notably led by the Indian National Congress. However, the 1989 Indian general election ushered in a new phase characterized by fragmented electoral mandates and the rise of regional parties, making coalition governments a political necessity rather than an exception. This period is often referred to as the 'coalition era,' during which no single party consistently secured a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, thereby altering the nature of executive authority and governance.

The immediate aftermath of 1989 saw the formation of minority and coalition governments supported by a diverse array of regional and ideological parties. Governments led by leaders such as V. P. Singh and later Chandra Shekhar exemplified the fragile nature of early coalitions, where external support and shifting alliances often led to political instability. The 1990s, in particular, witnessed frequent changes in government, short-lived administrations, and a constant need for political negotiation (Manor, 1990). This instability highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of coalition politics, including broader representation of diverse interests but also difficulties in maintaining cohesive governance.

A more structured phase of coalition politics emerged with the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the late 1990s. The NDA represented a relatively stable coalition model, bringing together multiple parties under a common minimum programme. Vajpayee's leadership is often cited as an example of effective coalition management, where consensus-building and accommodation of allies were central to governance. His tenure demonstrated that coalition governments could achieve stability and policy continuity, provided there was effective coordination and mutual trust among alliance members (Manor, 2004).

Following the NDA, the emergence of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by Manmohan Singh further reinforced the coalition model in Indian politics. The UPA governments (2004–2014) relied heavily on support from regional parties and, at times, external backing from ideological allies. While Manmohan Singh's leadership was associated with significant economic growth and policy initiatives, it was also marked by the need for continuous

negotiation with coalition partners. Key policy decisions often required consensus, and disagreements within the coalition occasionally led to delays or dilution of reforms (Sridharan, 2012).

One of the defining features of coalition politics during this era was the set of constraints imposed on prime ministers. Unlike in majority governments, where the Prime Minister can exercise relatively greater autonomy, coalition leaders had to navigate a complex web of political relationships. Cabinet formation itself became a negotiated process, with ministerial positions distributed among coalition partners as part of power-sharing arrangements. Policy-making in coalition governments was also shaped by the need to maintain unity among diverse partners. Controversial or transformative decisions were often approached with caution to avoid alienating allies (Palshikar, 2014; Suri, 2019).

#### 4. Case Study: Narendra Modi and the NDA Government

The formation of the 18th Lok Sabha following the 2024 Indian general election marks a significant moment in the evolution of coalition politics in India and provides a crucial context for examining the leadership of Narendra Modi within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Unlike the previous two general elections in 2014 and 2019, where the BJP secured a clear single-party majority, the 2024 elections resulted in a more competitive electoral outcome in which the BJP fell short of an outright majority on its own. Consequently, the formation of the government in the 18th Lok Sabha relied more explicitly on coalition partners, thereby reintroducing classical elements of coalition politics into India's governance framework (Election Commission of India, 2024).

This shift has important implications for understanding the nature of prime ministerial authority under Modi. While he continues to lead the government for a third consecutive term, the altered parliamentary arithmetic necessitates greater engagement with alliance partners such as regional parties that now play a more decisive role in sustaining the NDA government. This creates a unique hybrid scenario in which a leader known for strong centralization must operate within a more negotiated political environment. At the same time, Modi's political stature, organizational control within the BJP, and established governance model continue to shape the functioning of the NDA. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is likely to remain a central node of policy formulation and coordination, even as coalition partners seek a greater voice in decision-making processes.

The 18th Lok Sabha thus offers an important case study to examine the balance between continuity and change in India's coalition politics. On one hand, the necessity of coalition support reintroduces elements of shared governance and political negotiation. On the other hand, the presence of a strong and experienced leader like Narendra Modi suggests the possibility of maintaining a degree of centralized authority despite these constraints.

##### 4.1 Electoral Dominance of BJP within NDA

The outcome of the 2024 Indian general election provides an important perspective on the nature of the BJP's dominance within the NDA, even in a more competitive electoral environment. While the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, did not secure an outright majority on its own as it had in 2014 and 2019, it nonetheless emerged as the single largest party by a significant margin. This ensured that the BJP retained a central role within the coalition, shaping both government formation and policy direction in the 18th Lok Sabha. The BJP's electoral performance, though relatively reduced in seat share compared to previous elections, still far exceeded that of its coalition partners.

This asymmetry is crucial in understanding the internal dynamics of the NDA. Unlike earlier coalition eras in India, where multiple parties had comparable strength and bargaining power, the BJP continues to function as the dominant pole around which the alliance is structured. Regional allies, while essential for achieving a parliamentary majority, remain numerically and politically dependent on the BJP's leadership. As a result, their capacity to influence overarching national policies is moderated by the party's central position within the coalition (Jaffrelot, 2015).

#### 4.2 Leadership Style of Narendra Modi

The leadership style of Narendra Modi during and after the 2024 Indian general election reflects a combination of continuity and adaptation in response to a more coalition-dependent political environment. Modi's approach has traditionally been characterized by strong centralization, decisive decision-making, and a highly personalized mode of political communication. These traits remained evident throughout the 2024 electoral campaign, where the focus was largely centred on his leadership persona, governance record, and national-level appeal rather than a fragmented coalition-based narrative.

However, the post-election scenario, in which the BJP did not secure an outright majority, has required a degree of adjustment in his leadership style. Unlike previous terms where single-party dominance enabled a more unilateral approach to governance, the 18th Lok Sabha necessitates greater engagement with coalition partners. This has led to a more consultative dimension in leadership, at least in terms of political management and alliance coordination. Modi's leadership, therefore, reflects a strategic balance between maintaining centralized authority and accommodating the practical demands of coalition governance.

Despite this shift, the core features of his leadership remain intact. Decision-making continues to be strongly anchored in the PMO, and the overall direction of policy is largely shaped by his vision and priorities. His leadership style also emphasizes administrative efficiency, strong political messaging, and direct communication with the people, often bypassing traditional intermediaries. Modi's ability to manage coalition dynamics is supported by his political experience and organizational control within the BJP. While allies may now have greater bargaining space, his leadership ensures that negotiations occur within a framework that preserves the BJP's central role. In this sense, his style can be described as 'adaptive centralization' — retaining a strong command structure while selectively incorporating elements of consultation where necessary (Tharoor, 2018).

#### 4.3 Role of PMO and Cabinet

The functioning of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the cabinet in the context of the 2024 Indian general election reflects an evolving balance between centralized authority and coalition-based governance under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Traditionally, in coalition governments, the cabinet assumes a more prominent role as a collective decision-making body, with representation from multiple alliance partners ensuring power-sharing and consultation. However, under Modi's leadership, the PMO has consistently emerged as the central hub of policy formulation, coordination, and implementation — a trend that continues, albeit with some adjustments, in the 18th Lok Sabha (PMO India, 2014–2024).

The PMO operates as a highly influential institutional mechanism, streamlining governance by concentrating administrative control and strategic decision-making. Key policy initiatives, inter-ministerial coordination, and major national decisions are often closely directed or monitored by the PMO. This centralization enhances efficiency and coherence in governance but also shifts the balance of power away from the cabinet as a collective body. At the same time, the role of the cabinet in the 18th Lok Sabha has gained renewed importance due to the presence of stronger coalition dynamics. With the NDA relying more explicitly on its allies for a parliamentary majority, cabinet formation has involved greater accommodation of coalition partners, reinforcing the principle of shared governance.

#### 4.4 Relationship with Coalition Partners

The relationship between Narendra Modi and coalition partners within the NDA during the context of the 2024 Indian general election reflects a more interdependent yet still asymmetrical form of coalition governance. Unlike the 2014 and 2019 elections, where the BJP secured an outright majority on its own, the 2024 electoral outcome

required greater reliance on alliance partners to form and sustain the government. This shift has made coalition management a more visible and necessary aspect of Modi's third-term leadership.

Despite this increased dependence on coalition support, the relationship remains structurally uneven due to the BJP's position as the largest party within the NDA. Coalition partners, including regional and state-based parties, play a crucial role in providing numerical strength in the Lok Sabha, ensuring legislative stability and supporting the formation of the government. However, their influence is largely limited to specific policy areas or regional concerns rather than core national decision-making. This reflects a pattern in which coalition partners are essential for arithmetic majority but not necessarily for determining the overall policy direction of the government.

Modi's approach to coalition management is characterized by strategic engagement combined with controlled centralization. He maintains regular consultation with key allies, particularly on matters related to cabinet formation, legislative priorities, and regional issues. Ministerial allocations to coalition partners serve as an important mechanism for ensuring their participation and representation in governance. At the same time, the relationship is shaped by the BJP's ideological and organizational dominance within the alliance, which often limits the bargaining power of coalition partners compared to earlier coalition eras such as the UPA or even the early NDA governments (Brass, 1994; Kohli, 1990).

## 5. Analysis of Prime Ministerial Authority

Prime ministerial authority in parliamentary systems is typically shaped by a combination of institutional design, party strength, and coalition dynamics. In the Indian case, the Prime Minister's power is formally derived from constitutional conventions, but in practice, it is heavily influenced by political conditions in the legislature. Under majority governments, the Prime Minister often enjoys a high degree of autonomy in decision-making, cabinet formation, and policy direction. However, coalition governments introduce constraints that necessitate negotiation, compromise and shared governance. The 2024 electoral outcome reintroduces these coalition dynamics in a more pronounced manner, thereby providing a critical test of how resilient centralized leadership remains under conditions of reduced parliamentary dominance (Sinha, 2016).

The authority of the Prime Minister in the current context cannot be understood solely through numerical strength in the Lok Sabha. The BJP continues to be the single largest party and remains the dominant force within the NDA, which significantly shapes the balance of power within the coalition. This dominance allows the Prime Minister to retain substantial influence over agenda-setting, executive coordination and policy implementation. The institutional strength of the PMO, combined with strong party discipline, further reinforces centralized decision-making even in a coalition framework.

### 5.1 Decision-Making Processes

The decision-making processes of prime ministerial authority during the tenure following the 2024 Indian general election reflect a complex balance between centralized leadership and coalition-based consultation under the leadership of Narendra Modi. With the BJP not securing an outright majority on its own, governance under the NDA now involves a greater degree of coordination with coalition partners compared to the previous two terms.

Despite this shift, the core decision-making structure remains highly centralized around the PMO. Major policy initiatives, strategic decisions, and administrative priorities continue to be shaped through a top-down process, where the PMO plays a key role in agenda-setting and coordination across ministries. This ensures continuity in leadership style, with efficiency and speed remaining central features of governance. However, the presence of coalition partners introduces an additional consultative layer, particularly in matters related to cabinet composition, legislative strategy and region-specific policies. Nevertheless, final authority largely rests with the Prime Minister and

the BJP leadership, indicating that while consultation has increased, decision-making remains structurally centralized (Cabinet Secretariat India, 2024).

### 5.2 Degree of Centralization versus Power-Sharing

The degree of centralization versus power-sharing in prime ministerial authority during the period following the 2024 Indian general election reflects a nuanced and evolving balance within the governance structure led by Narendra Modi. With the BJP falling short of an absolute majority, the government formed under the NDA requires more explicit cooperation with coalition partners, thereby increasing the relevance of power-sharing arrangements compared to the previous two terms.

Despite this, the overall governance structure continues to exhibit strong centralizing tendencies. The PMO remains the primary hub for policy formulation, strategic planning, and inter-ministerial coordination. Key national decisions are still largely driven by the leadership of the Prime Minister and the core BJP leadership, reflecting continuity in the centralized executive model that has characterized Modi's tenure since 2014. The system reflects a hybrid arrangement in which centralization and power-sharing coexist. While strategic authority and final decision-making remain concentrated within the PMO and BJP leadership, coalition compulsions have introduced a more consultative and negotiated approach.

### 5.3 Influence of Coalition Partners

Coalition partners now exercise influence primarily through their participation in cabinet formation, legislative support and regional policy advocacy. Ministerial allocations provide them with formal entry into the decision-making structure, allowing them to shape policies related to their respective portfolios and regional interests. In addition, their support is crucial for the passage of legislation in the Lok Sabha, which gives them leverage in negotiations with the central leadership.

Despite this increased relevance, the influence of coalition partners remains constrained by the BJP's dominant position within the alliance. Major policy directions, ideological frameworks and national-level decisions continue to be shaped largely by the Prime Minister and the core party leadership. As a result, coalition partners tend to have greater impact on specific or localized issues rather than overarching national strategies. The 18th Lok Sabha demonstrates a conditional form of coalition influence, where partners play an important but secondary role in shaping prime ministerial authority. Their presence necessitates consultation and compromise, yet the centralization of power within the PMO ensures that ultimate decision-making authority remains firmly concentrated (Yadav & Palshikar, 2009).

### 5.4 Comparison with Previous Coalition Governments

A comparison of prime ministerial authority in the context of the 2024 Indian general election with earlier coalition governments in India highlights both continuity and significant transformation in the nature of executive power. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the government formed through the NDA continues to function as a coalition, but the dynamics of authority differ markedly from earlier coalition eras such as the UPA and the initial phases of the NDA in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In earlier coalition governments, particularly during the UPA led by Manmohan Singh and the NDA under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, coalition partners exercised substantial bargaining power. These governments often relied on smaller regional parties whose support was essential for maintaining a parliamentary majority. As a result, decision-making was more consensus-driven and cabinet functioning reflected a genuine power-sharing arrangement. Policy

formulation frequently required negotiation among diverse ideological and regional interests, which sometimes slowed down governance but ensured broader representation (Chakrabarty, 2006; Guha, 2007).

The 18th Lok Sabha reflects a different pattern of coalition politics. Although the BJP does not hold an absolute majority independently, it remains the dominant party within the NDA, significantly reducing the bargaining power of coalition partners. This dominance allows for a more centralized decision-making structure, where the PMO plays a leading role in shaping policy direction. Thus, while earlier coalition governments in India were characterized by relatively balanced power-sharing and strong dependence on allies, the 2024 scenario demonstrates a hybrid model that combines elements of coalition necessity with centralized executive authority.

## 6. Key Policy Decisions and Their Implications

The key policy decisions taken under the leadership of Narendra Modi during the period surrounding the 2024 Indian general election reflect a continuation of his governance style while also adapting to the altered coalition dynamics of the NDA. These decisions span economic reforms, welfare schemes and national security initiatives, each of which carries important implications for both governance and coalition management.

In the sphere of economic reforms, the government has continued its emphasis on structural modernization, fiscal consolidation and ease of doing business. Policies aimed at infrastructure expansion, digital economy growth and manufacturing incentives remain central to the agenda. These reforms are designed to enhance long-term economic competitiveness, although in a coalition context they may require greater consultation with regional partners, especially on issues affecting state finances and local industries. The need to balance national economic priorities with regional interests has become more pronounced in the 18th Lok Sabha scenario (NITI Aayog, 2023).

Welfare schemes continue to play a crucial role in the government's policy framework, reflecting a strong focus on direct benefit delivery and social protection. Programmes related to food security, housing, healthcare access and financial inclusion remain key pillars of governance. These schemes not only strengthen the government's social outreach but also serve as important instruments for maintaining political cohesion within the coalition. Coalition partners often support such initiatives because they directly benefit their constituencies, thereby reinforcing alliance stability.

In the area of national security, the government maintains a firm and assertive approach, emphasizing border security, counter-terrorism measures and strategic defence modernization. National security decisions tend to remain highly centralized under the PMO, with limited scope for coalition intervention due to their sensitive nature. This reinforces the perception of strong executive authority, even within a coalition framework. The 18th Lok Sabha demonstrates a governance structure where policy continuity under Modi coexists with selective accommodation of coalition partners, resulting in a hybrid system of centralized decision-making and managed political partnership.

## 7. Summary

The study of prime ministerial authority in coalition governments, as illustrated through the case study of Narendra Modi, highlights the evolving nature of executive power within India's parliamentary democracy. The analysis demonstrates that while coalition governments are traditionally associated with shared decision-making and limited executive dominance, the experience of the NDA under Modi reflects a more centralized and leadership-driven model of governance. Even when operating within coalition frameworks, the PMO has remained the core institution shaping policy direction, administrative coordination and strategic decision-making.

The research shows that Modi's leadership style is characterized by strong centralization, political decisiveness and high personal authority, which together reduce the traditional constraints usually imposed by coalition partners. Although coalition allies play a role in parliamentary support and regional representation, their

influence over major national policies remains relatively limited compared to earlier coalition eras in India. This marks a significant shift from earlier governments such as the UPA and the early NDA period, where coalition partners had stronger bargaining power and decision-making influence.

The study also finds that coalition dynamics have not disappeared entirely. Instead, they have been restructured into a more asymmetrical form, where consultation and accommodation exist but operate within a framework dominated by the BJP's electoral strength. Policy decisions, cabinet functioning and legislative strategies reflect a blend of central authority and selective power-sharing, particularly in relation to regional interests. The case of Narendra Modi thus provides a compelling illustration of how strong leadership, electoral dominance, and institutional consolidation can reshape the conventional expectations of coalition-era governance in parliamentary democracies.

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