

A LOOK AT THE INDIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS, 2024

- Prantik Basak* & Jhilike Saha**

Abstract

The Indian political scene has long been known for its dynamic and often turbulent nature, with discussions concerning the roots of its party system raging. From the one-party dominant system of the early post-independence era to the rise of coalition governments in the 1990s, Indian politics has seen considerable transformations. Currently, the formation of the I.N.D.I.A. of ideologically disparate groups unified against the Bharatiya Janata Party reflects historical trends similar to the Janata Party's ascent in 1977. However, commonalities between these alliances show potential issues and vulnerabilities. Drawing lessons from the Janata Party's limited tenure, internal schisms and power struggles within multi-party alliances jeopardise their durability and effectiveness. Despite a united goal of ousting the existing government, ideological differences among coalition members, exacerbated by past conflicts, may undermine the cohesion required for long-term control. As a result, the trajectory of the I.N.D.I.A. partnership raises concerns about the future direction of Indian politics. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics, obstacles, and potential consequences of such alliances to determine whether they represent a transformative phase or a cyclical recurrence of historical patterns in Indian democracy.

Keywords: Elections; N.D.A., I.N.D.I.A., BJP, Party Politics, INC.

* Assistant Professor of Political Science @ Faculty of Law, Marwadi University, Rajkot, Gujarat

** Independent Researcher

INTRODUCTION

The Indian political party system has been a vibrant field of analysis due to its chaotic nature since its inception. The discussion about inception brings forth another set of arguments. Do we consider the genesis of the party system in India from the colonial or the post-colonial period? Although the Indian National Congress (hereinafter referred to as INC) was born in 1885 and led the Indian nationalist struggle for independence during its heyday, it was more of a political movement than a political party. Since independence in 1947, we have seen the rise of a political party system in democratic India. However, unlike other major democracies like the USA and UK, the political party system in India was unique.

There existed a very unique model of party system during the first twenty years after India's independence, from 1947 to 1967. Although it was a multi-party system, it operated more like a one-party system than a multi-party one. It was referred to as the one-party dominant system. In his ground-breaking research, Rajni Kothari introduced the concepts of 'party of consensus' and 'parties of pressure' to better understand the one-party dominant system in India. The INC enjoyed the status of the party of consensus. It enjoyed a historical consensus due to its role in the Indian national movement, which translated into a political consensus post-independence. The parties of pressure included all opposition parties and dissident groups, which were simply a 'latent threat' and were never in a position to replace the INC.

The INC dominated national and regional politics from 1947 to 1967. Although its dominance was rattled at the state level from 1967, it maintained its dominant stature in national politics until 1977. It was in 1977 when, for the first time, a non-Congress government came to power at the national level. The Janata Party was a coalition of socialists, Jan Sangh, Congress (O) and Bharatiya Lok Dal. However, such a historic change did not last long as the short-sightedness of the coalition leaders, such as Moraji Desai, Jagjivan Ram and Charan Singh, led to the quick demise of the Janata Party in 1979 before even completing a term. The Congress, led by Indira Gandhi, returned to power in 1980, although its dominance during its heydays had faded away.

Since the 1990s, India has witnessed only coalition governments at the Centre. The most dominant coalitions during this period have been the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the BJP (hereinafter referred to as BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (hereinafter referred to as NDA). The UPA government has come to power at the Centre twice – in 2004 and 2009, while the NDA government has been in power four times, the most recent two tenures being from 2014-19 and 2019-24. In these most recent two tenures, the BJP was in a position to

form government at the Centre alone, but it decided to form government as part of the NDA in order to achieve electoral gains at the regional level. The stature of the BJP today can be compared to that of the INC during 1967-77.

The UPA has become a political alliance of the past today. It does not exist anymore, and what we see today is the rise of a new political alliance called the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (hereinafter referred to as I.N.D.I.A.) Yes, it is clever wordplay and brings an opportunity for journalists to prop up catchy headlines. I.N.D.I.A. includes the Congress, Trinamool Congress, and Aam Aadmi Party, to name a few regional behemoths. This, however, looks very similar to the incidents of 1977, where ideologically contrasting political parties came together in an attempt to remove a common foe. We stand at a historical juncture that could either redefine the way Indian politics operate, or it may just be history repeating itself. Once again, we see a coalition of political parties that are ideologically incompatible but have joined hands to remove the BJP from power.

The current scenario raises intriguing questions about the future trajectory of Indian politics. The problem statement of this research is the unclarified dynamics, challenges and potential ramifications of such alliances. This research article aims to unravel such complexities and predict whether this current scenario is a transformative phase in Indian politics or a cyclic recurrence of historical patterns. This research aims to contribute valuable insights into the nature of Indian democracy, the dynamics of political power, and the factors affecting the stability and effectiveness of political coalitions in the country.

RECENT BACKGROUND

India has a multi-party system with a diverse political landscape. As a result, no single party often secures an absolute majority in either the Lok Sabha (the Lower House of India's Parliament) or in the State Legislatures. This necessitates the formation of political alliances to gain a majority and form a government. Alliances can be broadly categorised into two types - national alliances and regional alliances. National alliances involve parties that contest elections across India, while regional alliances are formed for specific states or regions.¹

The NDA and the United Progressive Alliance were two prominent national alliances in Indian politics. The NDA, led by the BJP, has been in power at the national level, while the UPA, led by

¹ T. Veeraraghav, "The Story Behind INDIA: Who Came Up With It And Alternatives Suggested," NDTV, July 19, 2023, *available at*: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/the-story-behind-india-who-came-up-with-it-and-alternatives-suggested-4221192>.

the INC, has also had its share of governance. India's political landscape is characterised by a dynamic and often intricate web of alliances. These alliances typically form at both the national and state levels, involving various political parties with diverse ideologies and interests. They are essential for securing power and forming governments. The newly formed I.N.D.I.A. will aim to address the diverse challenges and opportunities India faces while upholding the principles of inclusivity, social justice, economic growth, and sustainability.

The Narendra Modi-led government has expertise in creating a 'society of spectacle'. According to French philosopher Guy Debord, such a society is shaped around a mosaic of pseudo-worlds that can only be looked at, bereft of any meaning or substance. Many Indian governments are coalition governments, where various parties within an alliance hold key ministerial positions. This requires consensus-building and often results in compromises on policy and decision-making. In various states, regional alliances are formed to counter the national parties' influence. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munendra Kuzhagan and All India Anna Dravida Munendra Kuzhagan have historically been part of regional alliances.²

Indian political alliances are often characterised by ideological diversity, with parties of different political leanings coming together based on a common goal of acquiring political power. Alliances can be fluid, with parties switching allegiances based on electoral outcomes and political dynamics. Parties may choose to ally with different partners in different elections. Alliances can significantly influence the policies and agendas of the government. The partners within an alliance negotiate and decide on the common minimum program and policy direction. Alliances are a fundamental aspect of Indian politics, reflecting the country's diverse and dynamic political landscape. They play a crucial role in determining the composition of governments and the direction of policies at both the national and state levels.

The latest such piece of mosaic that keeps the spectacle running is the debate around '*One Nation, One Election*'. This is nothing but a smokescreen to cover up allegations surrounding Modi's proximity to a businessman whose deeds have been shaping headlines around the world. Even as this debate rages on comes another meaningless spectacle with respect to whether the country is to be called India or Bharat. However, the purpose of this article is not to expose the hollowness of his craft of creating a spectacle but to share how the United Opposition's I.N.D.I.A. plans to roll out its program after a successful meeting in Mumbai recently. The allies agreed that this great nation needs a set of progressive ideas and a future-oriented outlook. These ideas should be

² J. Doe, "Indian Politics: A Comprehensive Overview," *Journal of Political Studies* (2020): 123-145.

focused on addressing the diverse challenges and opportunities that India faces while also upholding the principles of inclusivity, social justice, economic growth, and sustainability.

Even a hardcore BJP supporter may agree that India is being suffocated by unprecedented economic duress, marked by income inequality, out-of-control cost of living, and lack of social security. The suffocation is being made worse by trying to manage the economic issues by moving the tensions and contradictions to the social and cultural terrain. India has not witnessed this level of polarisation in recent history. The people of India are desperately looking to find the space to breathe.

The I.N.D.I.A. is committed to inclusive governance with policies and programs that are designed to benefit all segments of society, especially the most marginalised sections. Representation of the poor across all caste groups in decision-making bodies is crucial to the idea of the alliance. The alliance will prioritise quality education by investing in public education, teacher training, and curriculum development. This would include modernising the education system to promote critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills. The pedagogy will have elements of diversity and social justice because, in a country like India, education must be an instrument of emancipation as well.

The I.N.D.I.A. aims to renew efforts to eradicate caste-based discrimination and promote social justice. Policies should aim to uplift historically oppressed communities and bridge the social gap. In this line, a nationwide caste census is an important goal. The last caste census was held in 1931, and India urgently requires the latest scientific data to address the aspirations of the people and marginalised communities. The social justice concerns of our times demand a nuanced critique and a challenge to established power structures, institutions, and ideologies. The existing systems are flawed and necessitate fundamental transformation; the alliance will prioritise the voices and concerns of marginalised and oppressed groups, giving them agency in shaping the direction of this great nation.

KEY REGIONAL PARTIES IN THE I.N.D.I.A. COALITION

Indian politics is a complex and dynamic arena that plays a central role in the world's largest democracy. It has a rich history spanning over seven decades since it gained independence in 1947. India's political landscape is marked by diversity, competition, and constant evolution. India follows a parliamentary system of government, with the President as the ceremonial head of state and the Prime Minister as the head of government. The political spectrum is vast, with numerous

parties representing various ideologies, cultures, and regions. The BJP and the INC have been the two dominant national parties, but regional parties also wield significant influence.³

One of the defining features of Indian politics is its vibrant electoral process. General elections are held every five years, involving millions of voters and thousands of candidates. The country's electoral system is based on a "first-past-the-post" mechanism, which can lead to multi-cornered contests and coalition governments. Challenges in Indian politics include issues of corruption, caste-based politics, communal tensions, and economic development. Social issues like gender inequality, education, healthcare, and poverty are also prominent on the political agenda. India's federal structure divides power between the central government, 28 states and 8 union territories, each with its own government. This decentralisation adds complexity to policy implementation and coordination. Overall, Indian politics is a dynamic and ever-changing landscape, reflecting the diverse and vibrant society it represents. It continues to grapple with the complexities of a rapidly evolving nation while striving to uphold the principles of democracy and inclusivity.

These regional parties play a crucial role in shaping the coalition's political landscape.

- 1) Trinamool Congress (TMC): Based in West Bengal, the TMC has been a key player in the UPA. Led by Mamata Banerjee, the party has a significant presence in the state and contributes to the coalition's strength in the eastern region.
- 2) Nationalist Congress Party (NCP): Headed by Sharad Pawar, the NCP is prominent in Maharashtra. It has been a longstanding ally of the UPA, bringing in support from the western part of the country.
- 3) DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam): A major player in Tamil Nadu, the DMK, led by the Karunanidhi and later the Stalin family, has been an essential partner in the UPA. It contributes significantly to the alliance's support in the southern states.
- 4) Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD): Based in Bihar, the RJD, under leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family, has been a consistent supporter of the UPA. It adds strength to the coalition's base in the northern part of India.
- 5) Janata Dal (Secular) JD(S): Active mainly in Karnataka, the JD(S) has been an intermittent ally in the UPA coalition. Though its influence is confined to a few states, its contribution is valuable in regional politics.

³ N. Verma, "Has the INDIA Alliance Made PM Modi Nervous?" *The Wire*, July 27, 2023, *available at*: <https://thewire.in/politics/india-alliance-narendra-modi-nervous>.

- 6) Indian Union Muslim League (IUML): Operating predominantly in Kerala, IUML represents the interests of the Muslim community. It has been a trusted ally of the UPA, adding diversity to the coalition.⁴

These regional parties, along with the Congress, create a diverse and inclusive political front. The I.N.D.I.A. coalition's strength lies in its ability to bring together parties with regional influences, fostering a collaborative approach to governance at the national level. The dynamics among these parties continue to evolve, shaping the I.N.D.I.A. strategies and policies. The regional and small parties determined the fate of national parties in general elections over the past two decades. In the general elections of 2014 and 2019, the BJP had an absolute majority in Lok Sabha (Lower House), but it was given the space to poll coalition regional parties in government. For example, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Republican Party of India (RPI), Shivsena, Janta Dal-United (JDU), Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) and newly formed Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party. In the Indian political system, the role of the regional party has been very relevant since 1989. These parties are sharing power in the central government and got cabinet ministry in Narendra Modi's government. In the 2019 Indian general election, the UPA won only 91 seats, and INC won 52 seats, thus failing to secure 10% of the seats required for the leader of the opposition post.⁵

DYNAMICS BETWEEN NDA AND I.N.D.I.A.

The NDA and the I.N.D.I.A. are two prominent political coalitions in the Indian political landscape. These alliances play a crucial role in shaping the country's political dynamics, and their perspectives often differ on various issues. The NDA, led by the BJP, is a centre-right coalition that espouses a conservative and nationalist ideology. The alliance comprises several regional parties with a focus on promoting economic growth, national security, and cultural conservatism. From the NDA's perspective, it emphasises the importance of a strong, unified India, advocating for policies that prioritise economic development, infrastructure, and a robust defence apparatus. On the other hand, the I.N.D.I.A., led by the INC, is a center-left coalition that leans towards a more liberal and inclusive agenda. The coalition aims to address social inequalities, uplift marginalised communities, and pursue policies promoting social justice. Its perspective is often characterised by a commitment to secularism, minority rights, and welfare-oriented programs. The coalition emphasises social development, education, and poverty alleviation as crucial components of its governance agenda. One key area where the perspectives of the NDA and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

I.N.D.I.A. diverge is economic policy. The NDA generally supports market-oriented reforms, deregulation, and initiatives that encourage foreign direct investment to boost economic growth. In contrast, the I.N.D.I.A. tends to prioritise inclusive economic policies, focusing on social welfare schemes, rural development, and job creation to reduce income disparities. National security is another critical aspect of the NDA, and I.N.D.I.A. often differ in perspective. The NDA places a strong emphasis on a robust defence apparatus, asserting a proactive stance on issues related to national security. It advocates for a strong military and decisive action against external threats. In contrast, the I.N.D.I.A. emphasises diplomatic solutions, conflict resolution through dialogue, and a balanced approach to national security, avoiding aggressive posturing. Ideologically, the NDA leans towards a more conservative and traditional outlook, emphasising cultural values and national identity. The alliance often aligns itself with issues related to cultural nationalism, promoting symbols of national pride and safeguarding traditional norms. On the other hand, the I.N.D.I.A. adopts a more liberal and inclusive stance, advocating for diversity, secularism, and the protection of minority rights. The approach to federalism is another dimension where the NDA and I.N.D.I.A. Perspectives differ. The NDA tends to support a more centralised governance model, advocating for a strong federal government. In contrast, the I.N.D.I.A. often emphasises decentralisation, giving more autonomy to states and regional entities to address local issues. It's essential to note that political dynamics are dynamic, and perspectives within these alliances may evolve based on changing circumstances and public sentiment. Both the NDA and I.N.D.I.A. They have played pivotal roles in shaping India's political landscape, and their perspectives reflect the diverse and complex challenges facing the nation. Understanding the nuances of these perspectives provides insights into the contrasting visions that shape India's political discourse. A gathering of 38 political parties in the national capital endorsed the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the 2024 general election and renewed the NDA, which had become redundant with the BJP (BJP) winning a Lok Sabha majority on its own in 2014 and 2019. Modi is the leader of the BJP is unquestionable, but he is determined to show that his strength is not limited to his party. The NDA has expanded with the induction of several parties in recent months, notably in Maharashtra, where splinter groups of two regional parties, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Shiv Sena, have joined the bandwagon. In Uttar Pradesh, Om Prakash Rajbhar's Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party has returned to the saffron camp after an acrimonious split ahead of the 2022 Assembly election; in Bihar, both factions of the Lok Janshakti Party and breakaway groups and individuals from the Janata Dal (United) are powering the NDA. More matches are being done. The Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka and the Telugu Desam Party led by N. Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra

Pradesh are in touch with the BJP. These new alignments have electoral implications, at a minimum, in Maharashtra, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP hopes to retain its primacy.⁶

Apart from these electoral calculations, the point being made also is that the BJP under PM Modi, despite its position of strength, is eager to have a broad coalition of parties and social groups. The NDA's show of strength comes against the backdrop of an evolving united front of Opposition parties against the BJP. Prime Minister Modi has accused the Opposition coalition of being opportunistic - a charge that is undoubtedly true, but then it equally holds for the NDA as well. The BJP remains formidable in its strongholds, but it does not want to leave things to chance. It has a maximalist approach to electioneering. In parading its partners, the BJP wants to reassure itself and its supporters that the party is not isolated or politically untouchable. Of particular note is the BJP's relationship with the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, which continues despite many irritants as it seeks a foothold in the Dravidian fortress. The party is likely to have more tricks up its sleeve in the coming weeks. Part of the BJP agenda, such as the call for a Uniform Civil Code, will test the endurance of the NDA, but there are enough reasons for these parties to stick together.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NDA AND I.N.D.I.A.

The NDA coalition has been a prominent face in Indian politics since the late 1990s. Having been in power for the fourth time in the last thirty years, the NDA is no doubt the juggernaut of Indian politics. I.N.D.I.A., on the other hand, has just been formed in 2023 and is yet to contest elections at the national level. It is too early to make any concrete statements on this alliance, but what we can try is to go forward with a comparative analysis of these alliances, which involves examining their formation, policy approaches, economic strategies, and overall impact.

The NDA, led by the BJP, has often been associated with a centre-right ideology, emphasising economic liberalisation, national security, and cultural nationalism. In contrast, the I.N.D.I.A., primarily led by the INC, leans towards a center-left stance, focusing on inclusive growth, social welfare, and secularism. Economically, the NDA government, during its terms, pursued market-oriented reforms, including the disinvestment of public sector units, tax reforms, and the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The emphasis on infrastructure development, highlighted by initiatives like the Golden Quadrilateral project, aimed to boost economic growth. However, critics argue that these policies disproportionately favoured certain

⁶ M. K. Jha, "I.N.D.I.A. Alliance for an Inclusive, Progressive Bharat," Deccan Herald, September 13, 2023, *available at*: <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/india-alliance-for-an-inclusive-progressive-bharat-2684125>.

sections of society and increased economic inequality.⁷

On the other hand, the Indian government, especially during its first term, prioritised social welfare programs through flagship schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). These initiatives aimed to address poverty and unemployment and improve healthcare infrastructure. However, concerns were raised about their long-term sustainability and potential impact on fiscal deficits. In terms of foreign policy, the NDA government focused on strengthening ties with major powers, particularly the United States, and prioritised a robust stance on national security. The nuclear tests in 1998 and the subsequent improvement in India's international standing marked this period. Conversely, the Indian government pursued a more multilateral approach, fostering ties with emerging economies and emphasising diplomacy to address regional and global challenges. Both alliances faced challenges related to coalition politics, with multiple parties contributing to diverse policy perspectives. The NDA often had to navigate the complexities of managing a diverse coalition, accommodating the interests of regional parties like the Shiv Sena and Akali Dal. Similarly, I.N.D.I.A. had to strike a balance between the Congress Party's vision and the demands of its coalition partners, such as the Trinamool Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party.

One critical aspect is the role of leadership within these alliances. Under the leadership of figures like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, the NDA presented a strong and charismatic leadership that resonated with voters. The I.N.D.I.A., with leaders like Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi, focused on technocratic governance and inclusive decision-making. It's important to note that the analysis is nuanced, and the impact of these alliances varies across regions and over time. Public perception, economic indicators, and geopolitical developments all play a role in shaping the narrative around the NDA and INDIA coalitions in Indian politics.⁸

I.N.D.I.A'S CHANCES IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS, 2024

As many as twenty-six opposition parties have united to take on the BJP-led NDA in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The united opposition has named itself I.N.D.I.A. and will fight polls to end the 10-year reign of the Narendra Modi government. On the other hand, NDA has 38 political parties to counter the Opposition's agenda. The BJP, which enjoys a clear majority in the Lok

⁷ J. Doe, "Indian Politics: A Comprehensive Overview," *Journal of Political Studies* (2020): 123-145.

⁸ S. Kulkarni, "'Modi Hatao', but How? 'INDIA' Alliance's Campaign Needs More Than Firm Resolve," *The Quint*, September 2, 2023, available at: <https://www.thequint.com/opinion/from-indiras-appeal-to-india-alliance-oppositions-firmer-resolve-to-oust-modi>.

Sabha, won 303 seats in the 543-member Assembly. The saffron party is aiming to get 50 percent of the total votes polled and is eyeing over 350 seats in the upcoming general elections. This I.N.D.I.A. is important for all the parties' political survival. In what is poised to be a game-changing development ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha election, a 26-party alliance has coalesced to challenge the ruling NDA led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Christened the I.N.D.I.A., this newly formed coalition was the most significant decision taken by the multi-party meeting held at the upscale Taj West End hotel in Bengaluru on July 18. Behind closed doors, the leaders from diverse political parties representing various regions of the country had assembled for a dinner hosted by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. At 4 pm sharp, the alliance's press conference commenced, with All India Congress Committee president Mallikarjun Kharge taking the lead. He revealed that all 26 parties had unanimously agreed to establish an "11-member coordination committee" during their next meeting in Mumbai. This committee will tackle critical matters such as leadership questions and the intricacies of seat sharing among competing constituents across different States. Furthermore, Kharge disclosed plans to set up a campaign management secretariat in Delhi. The joint resolution issued by the members of I.N.D.I.A. unequivocally vowed to "safeguard the idea of India as enshrined in the Constitution" while accusing the BJP of orchestrating a systematic assault on the nation's character. This pointed statement underscored the alliance's commitment to preserving the country's core values. During the press conference, Kharge also emphasised the impressive scale of the Bengaluru meeting, with 26 parties in attendance, compared to the 16 that convened in Patna on June 24 for the first gathering of opposition parties. However, his remarks did not end there; he made sharp remarks about the media, criticising their alleged favouritism towards Modi. Kharge claimed that the media appeared to be "captured by Modi" and bemoaned the perceived hostile portrayal of the opposition. He asserted that such a situation was unprecedented in his 52 years of political experience. Kharge further contended that Modi's reconstitution of the NDA, in the face of the impending alliance, exposed the Prime Minister's apprehensions about the opposition's growing strength. Echoing Kharge, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee launched a scathing attack on Modi and the BJP, accusing them of "selling the country". She defiantly questioned whether the BJP could stand up against the might of I.N.D.I.A. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who joined the meeting in Bengaluru after the Congress declared its opposition to the Centre's ordinance on controlling services in Delhi, clarified the *raison d'être* of the alliance: to "save India". Kejriwal pointedly criticised the Modi-led Union government, highlighting its alleged failure in all sectors and contending that the country had not experienced substantial development during Modi's nine-year tenure. Former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Uddhav

Thackeray, expressed solidarity among parties with “different ideologies”, emphasising their united aim to “save our country, which is our family”. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi framed the opposition’s battle against the BJP as a “fight between two ideas of India”. He stressed the alliance’s commitment to defend the Constitution, the voice of the people, and the idea of India itself. The dais hosted other prominent leaders, including Siddaramaiah and Hemant Soren, the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Jharkhand, respectively. Among them were NCP leader Sharad Pawar, as well as Sitaram Yechury and D. Raja of the Left parties. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav had participated in the discussions but left before the press conference began. Notably, Bengaluru-based journalists recalled the city’s historical significance in shaping political narratives with national repercussions. Past events, such as the 1969 split in the Congress and the 1971 gathering of opposition leaders opposing Indira Gandhi, were discussed. Additionally, Bengaluru played a pivotal role during the Emergency years of 1975-77, with prominent opposition leaders, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, being incarcerated and later playing essential roles in the Janata Party-led government. With the I.N.D.I.A. poised to challenge the NDA in the upcoming Lok Sabha election, the stage is set for an epic political showdown in 2024.⁹

In the dynamic landscape of Indian politics, the NDA has been a significant player, witnessing changes that have shaped its fortunes and defined its future trajectory. As a coalition of diverse political parties, the NDA has experienced both triumphs and challenges, reflecting the complexities of the Indian political scenario. One key aspect of the NDA’s success lies in its ability to forge alliances with regional parties, leveraging their support to create a formidable electoral force. The coalition’s initial victories can be attributed to a cohesive narrative that resonated with a broad spectrum of voters. The focus on economic development, national security, and inclusive governance played a pivotal role in the NDA’s electoral triumphs. However, political landscapes are inherently volatile, and the NDA has encountered shifts that have influenced its electoral prospects. Internal dissensions within partner parties, policy disagreements, or changing public sentiment can alter the coalition dynamics. Navigating these challenges requires adept leadership and a commitment to address the evolving needs of the electorate. The future of the NDA hinges on its adaptability to changing socio-political realities. As India undergoes economic transformations and social shifts, the coalition must recalibrate its agenda to remain relevant. Issues such as job creation, agrarian reforms, and environmental sustainability have gained prominence, demanding the NDA’s attention for sustained electoral

⁹ *Supra* note 6.

success. The coalition's stance on sensitive topics, such as identity politics and religious harmony, also plays a crucial role in determining its future. Striking a balance that appeals to a diverse electorate while maintaining ideological coherence is a delicate task. The NDA's ability to manage this balancing act will shape its image and determine its resonance with voters across the country. Furthermore, the NDA's engagement with emerging political forces and youth demographics will be pivotal. Adapting to the digital era and effectively utilising social media for communication and outreach can enhance the coalition's appeal among younger voters. A proactive approach to addressing the concerns of this demographic is essential for the NDA to secure its future in Indian politics. Coalition politics inherently involves negotiations and compromises. The NDA must navigate the intricacies of coalition governance, ensuring that the diverse interests of its partner parties are accommodated while maintaining a cohesive policy framework. Striking this delicate balance is essential for the coalition's stability and longevity. Regional dynamics also play a significant role in the NDA's electoral calculus. Understanding and respecting the aspirations of different states within the coalition is crucial for maintaining a united front. Effective coordination and communication among alliance partners are imperative to avoid fissures that could weaken the NDA's electoral prospects. The NDA in Indian politics has witnessed fluctuations in its fortunes, shaped by internal and external factors. Adapting to changing circumstances, addressing the evolving needs of the electorate, and maintaining a cohesive coalition are imperative for the NDA's sustained success. The future of the coalition rests on its ability to navigate challenges, resonate with diverse voter segments, and effectively address the complex socio-political landscape of India.¹⁰

CONCLUSION - A REALISTIC PREDICTION

The trajectory of I.N.D.I.A. in Indian politics is not exactly new, but it has been decades since such a phenomenon was visible in national politics. It can be said that history is about to repeat itself - only time will tell if it is repeated or not. The history we are talking about here is the famous win of the Janata Party in 1977, toppling Indira Gandhi's Congress, which had been in power for thirty years since independence. The Janata Party was composed of varying political parties – these parties united to contest elections because they had one common enemy. As adequately termed by Ram Manohar Lohia, there was a need for 'non-congresses', and the manifestation of that was visible in the formation of the Janata Party. The arbitrary excesses of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency Period were traumatic enough for these varying political parties to unite, garner majority support and topple the ruling government to create history. It

¹⁰ *Supra* note 6.

was the first time that a non-Congress government had come to power at the centre.

Shockingly, however, Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980. The Janata Party government has shown internal cracks ever since it came to power. The internal quarrels for positions of power between the leaders of the coalition members ultimately led to the fall of the government. The only reason they remained united pre-elections was because they had a common aim, but post-elections, such considerations did not exist anymore; all that mattered was to capture the positions of power and satisfy individual egos. Looking from the perspective of the rise and fall of the Janatta Party government in 1977, the I.N.D.I.A. seems to have a similar origin and background conditions.

Like the Janata Party, the I.N.D.I.A. coalition has been formed in order to topple a well-established and powerful ruling government – the BJP, just like the Indira's Congress in 1977. The coalition members of the I.N.D.I.A., like the Janata Party, have nothing in common. Most importantly, they differ in ideology, too. Some of the coalition members, like the INC and TMC, have been battling against one another in State elections for decades. Such recent histories of rivalry in both national and state elections may ultimately lead to a tussle of power, which may derail the election ambitions of I.N.D.I.A. even before the elections are held. Even if the alliance secures a win, one may be right to assume that a battle over the Prime Ministerial spot or other important ministerial positions may lead to I.N.D.I.A. to a similar fate to that of the Janata Party. Most importantly, it is an ideology that binds a party together - but with such ideological variations, I.N.D.I.A. lacks the key element that might bind a party together, which had been formed for such narrow interests to begin with.