

# Coalition Governments 2.0:NDA's Third-Term Alliance Management After the 2024 Verdict

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**Abstract**—The 2024 Lok Sabha election produced the most significant setback to the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral position since 2014, reducing it from an outright majority of 303 seats to 240, and returning Narendra Modi to office for a third consecutive term only as the head of a coalition genuinely dependent on its allies for a parliamentary majority. This represented a structural departure from the preceding decade, during which the National Democratic Alliance, though nominally a coalition, had functioned in practice as a single-party-dominant arrangement, with the Bharatiya Janata Party requiring no partner's support to govern. This paper examines how the National Democratic Alliance has managed coalition politics in this changed arithmetic, focusing on the bargaining position and demands of its two pivotal regional partners, the Janata Dal (United) and the Telugu Desam Party, the government's use of state assembly election victories in Delhi and Bihar to reassert political momentum, and the organisational adjustments undertaken within the Bharatiya Janata Party itself. It situates this experience within the longer history of coalition management in India traced in earlier scholarship, and evaluates the extent to which the strategies that sustained full-term coalitions after 1999 remain applicable to a coalition of this altered character.

**Index Terms**—Coalition politics, NDA, 2024 Lok Sabha election, Alliance management, JDU, TDP, Regional parties, Modi 3.0, Bihar election, Delhi election

## I. Introduction

Coalition government has been a recurring feature of Indian politics since the fractured verdicts of the late 1980s, and earlier scholarship has examined at length the strategies by which Indian political parties, and the Bharatiya Janata Party in particular, learned to build and sustain full-term coalitions after 1999. That scholarship, however, was substantially concerned with a form of coalition politics in which no single party commanded a majority on its own, so that every partner's support was, at least in principle, indispensable. Between 2014 and 2024, by contrast, the National Democratic Alliance operated under materially different conditions: the Bharatiya Janata Party held an outright majority in the Lok Sabha in its own right, so that coalition partners, while formally part of the government, possessed little genuine leverage.

The 2024 general election altered this arithmetic decisively. The Bharatiya Janata Party's tally fell to 240 seats, well short of the 272 required for a majority, while the National Democratic Alliance as a whole secured 293 seats, sufficient to form a government only with the active and continuing cooperation of its allies. This paper examines the resulting return to what may be termed coalition governance in a substantive sense, and the strategies the National Democratic Alliance has employed to manage it through 2024, 2025, and into 2026.

## II. Objectives

This paper studies the changed bargaining dynamics within the National Democratic Alliance following the 2024 Lok Sabha election, examines the specific demands and leverage of its principal regional partners, evaluates the role of subsequent state assembly elections in Delhi and Bihar in the coalition's political strategy, and assesses the organisational responses undertaken by the Bharatiya Janata Party in response to its reduced parliamentary position.

## III. Scope of the study

The scope of this study is limited to coalition management within the National Democratic Alliance at the national level between the 2024 Lok Sabha election and early 2026. It does not extend to a comprehensive account of opposition coalition politics under the INDIA alliance, except where directly relevant to understanding the National Democratic Alliance's own strategic choices.

## IV. Methodology

The study relies on secondary sources, including election results and analyses, parliamentary proceedings, and journalistic and scholarly commentary on coalition management, alliance bargaining, and party organisation during the period under study.

## V. The 2024 verdict and the return of genuine coalition arithmetic

The Bharatiya Janata Party entered the 2024 election campaigning on the slogan of securing more than 400 seats for the National Democratic Alliance as a whole. The result fell well short of this ambition: the Bharatiya Janata Party won 240 seats and the National Democratic Alliance 293, while the opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, led by the Indian National Congress, won 234 seats, with the Congress itself improving substantially to 99 seats. Voter turnout stood at approximately 66 per cent. Contributing factors included unexpected losses for the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh, concerns over unemployment and inflation, and opposition mobilisation around the protection of reservations and constitutional safeguards for minorities.

The consequence was that, for the first time since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party required the sustained cooperation of coalition partners to remain in office. Two regional parties in particular acquired disproportionate bargaining weight relative to their seat totals: the Janata Dal (United), led by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, and the Telugu Desam Party, led by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. Because the combined seats of these two parties exceeded the National Democratic Alliance's margin over a simple majority, either party's withdrawal of support could, in principle, have brought down the government, a structural position neither party had occupied during the Bharatiya Janata Party's single-party-majority decade.

## VI. Managing pivotal allies: the JDU and TDP

The government's management of these two partners has drawn heavily on strategies identifiable in earlier phases of coalition politics in India, including the allocation of ministerial portfolios and financial commitments calibrated to each partner's specific political and regional priorities, consistent with the logic of the Common Minimum Programme approach that shaped coalition governance after 1999. The Telugu

Desam Party's demands have centred substantially on financial assistance and special status-like consideration for Andhra Pradesh, reflecting the state's particular fiscal position following the 2014 bifurcation of the erstwhile combined state. The Janata Dal (United)'s demands have centred on continued political and financial support for Bihar, and on accommodating Nitish Kumar's position as Chief Minister through what was widely anticipated, prior to the November 2025 Bihar election, to be his last major electoral campaign.

Unlike the ideological bargaining that characterised some earlier coalition arrangements, the accommodation of both partners has been substantially transactional and region-specific, consistent with the observation in earlier scholarship on Indian coalition politics that the exigency of the political situation, rather than ideological alignment, has typically governed the terms on which Indian coalitions are sustained. Neither the Janata Dal (United) nor the Telugu Desam Party shares the Bharatiya Janata Party's core ideological commitments to the same degree as the party's more consistently aligned allies, yet both have remained within the coalition throughout the period under study, suggesting that the transactional management of regional demands has, to this point, proved sufficient to hold the arrangement together.

## **VII. State elections as a coalition legitimisation strategy**

Following the setback of 2024, the National Democratic Alliance sought to recover political momentum through a sequence of state assembly elections. In February 2025, the Bharatiya Janata Party secured a historic victory in the Delhi assembly election, defeating the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party and regaining control of the National Capital Territory after twenty-seven years, a result widely interpreted as a revival of the party's urban support base. In November 2025, the National Democratic Alliance secured a substantial majority in Bihar, winning 202 of 243 assembly seats, a result read as a personal endorsement of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and as reinforcing rather than displacing the Janata Dal (United)'s position within the alliance ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

These state-level victories served a coalition management function distinct from their immediate electoral significance: by demonstrating that the National Democratic Alliance retained the capacity to win decisively at the state level, the coalition leadership was able to regain control of the national political narrative after the setback of 2024, strengthening its hand in subsequent dealings with its national-level partners even as those partners' seats remained arithmetically indispensable in Parliament.

## **VIII. Organisational adjustment within the Bharatiya Janata Party**

Alongside its external coalition management, the Bharatiya Janata Party undertook internal organisational changes in response to its reduced parliamentary position, including the selection of a new, younger party president, Nitin Nabin, intended to refresh the party's organisational identity and its appeal to younger voters ahead of a demanding 2026 election calendar that includes assembly elections in five states. This organisational renewal may itself be read as a coalition management strategy in the broader sense, aimed at reducing the party's future dependence on its regional partners by rebuilding its own independent electoral strength.

## IX. Findings

The evidence examined suggests that the National Democratic Alliance's management of its third-term coalition has relied substantially on strategies consistent with those identified in earlier studies of Indian coalition politics, namely transactional accommodation of regional partners' specific demands, rather than ideological convergence, and the pursuit of state-level electoral victories to sustain the coalition leadership's national political authority. At the same time, the underlying arithmetic of this coalition differs materially from the pattern that prevailed between 2014 and 2024: the Janata Dal (United) and the Telugu Desam Party possess genuine, structurally grounded bargaining leverage that the Bharatiya Janata Party's earlier coalition partners largely lacked. The coalition has, through early 2026, proved stable, aided by the National Democratic Alliance's subsequent state election victories, but its durability remains more directly contingent on the continued cooperation of two regional parties than at any point since 2014.

## X. Conclusion

The 2024 Lok Sabha verdict returned Indian national politics to a form of coalition governance last seen in its fuller sense before 2014, compelling the Bharatiya Janata Party to manage its regional partners with a degree of accommodation unnecessary during the preceding decade of single-party-majority rule. The government's response, transactional accommodation of allies, strategic use of state election victories, and organisational renewal within the party, draws on a repertoire of coalition management techniques with a long history in Indian politics, even as it operates within a changed and more genuinely constrained parliamentary arithmetic. Whether this coalition proves as durable through a full term as the arrangements that followed 1999 will depend substantially on whether the National Democratic Alliance's continued success in state elections can offset the structural leverage its two pivotal regional partners now hold at the national level.

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