

UNIT III – Political Parties and Elections in India

Q1. Analyze one party Dominance system in India.

One-Party Dominance System in India

Introduction

India adopted a **parliamentary democracy** after independence in 1947. Unlike countries with a one-party system (like China or the former USSR), India had free elections and multiple parties. However, for the first three decades, the **Indian National Congress (INC)** dominated the political scene. M. Laxmikanth in *Indian Polity* calls this a “**one-party dominance system**” – not because other parties were banned, but because Congress kept winning and shaping the political agenda.

Nature of One-Party Dominance

- **Democratic but Dominant:** Opposition parties existed (CPI, CPI(M), Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party), but they were weak compared to Congress.
 - **Congress System:** The Congress acted like a broad umbrella party, absorbing diverse social groups, castes, and regional interests, hence was described as the “Congress system”.
 - **Legacy of Freedom Struggle:** Congress leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and others were seen as nation-builders, which gave the party legitimacy and trust among voters.
 - **Organizational Strength:** Congress had a strong grassroots presence, especially in rural India, which helped it win successive elections.
-

Phases of Dominance

1. **1952–1962:** Congress won overwhelming majorities in the first three general elections. Nehru’s leadership and policies like the Five-Year Plans gave stability.

2. **1967 Elections:** Congress faced setbacks in several states, showing cracks in its dominance. Regional parties began to rise.
 3. **1971 Elections:** Indira Gandhi revived Congress dominance with the slogan "*Garibi Hatao*".
 4. **1977 Elections:** After the Emergency (1975–77), Congress was defeated by the Janata Party coalition. This was the first major break in dominance.
 5. **1980s:** Congress returned under Indira Gandhi and later Rajiv Gandhi, but its dominance was weaker compared to earlier decades.
-

Decline and Rise of Coalition Politics

The decline of Congress dominance led to the **era of coalition governments:**

- **1989 Elections:** Marked the end of Congress dominance. Regional parties and coalitions became decisive.
 - **United Front Governments (1996–98):** Showed the importance of alliances.
 - **NDA (1998 onwards):** Led by BJP, brought together multiple regional parties.
 - **UPA (2004 onwards):** Congress returned to power, but only through coalition support.
This shift reflects India's diversity – regional parties like DMK, TMC, Shiv Sena, and Akali Dal became crucial players.
-

Significance of One-Party Dominance

- **Positive:**
 - Provided political stability in the formative years.
 - Helped in nation-building, economic planning, and foreign policy direction.
 - Unified diverse groups under one umbrella.

- **Negative:**

- Opposition remained weak, limiting democratic checks and balances.
 - Encouraged factionalism within Congress itself.
 - Eventually led to authoritarian tendencies, as seen during the Emergency.
-

Conclusion

India's political journey can be divided into two phases:

- **Congress dominance (1952–77):** Stability, continuity, and nation-building.
- **Coalition era (post-1989):** Reflects pluralism, regional assertion, and competitive democracy.

Thus, India never had a one-party system, but it did experience **one-party dominance**. This dominance was later replaced by coalition politics, showing the adaptability and resilience of Indian democracy.

Q2. Analyse the rise of second party Dominance in Indian Politics.

Rise of Second Party Dominance in Indian Politics

Introduction

Indian democracy initially witnessed **Congress dominance** for nearly three decades after independence. However, over time, the political landscape changed. The decline of Congress and the rise of the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** marked the emergence of a **second party dominance** in Indian politics. This shift is crucial to understand because it shows how India moved from a one-party dominant system to a competitive multi-party system, and eventually to another phase of dominance by a different party.

Background: Decline of Congress Dominance

- As explained in *Indian Polity* by M. Laxmikanth, Congress dominance weakened due to internal factionalism, corruption charges, and inability to address regional aspirations.
 - The **Emergency (1975–77)** and the defeat in 1977 elections showed that Congress was no longer invincible.
 - The rise of regional parties (DMK, Akali Dal, TDP, Shiv Sena) and caste-based parties (SP, BSP) further eroded Congress's central position.
-

Emergence of BJP as the Second Dominant Party

- **1980s:** BJP was formed from the remnants of the Janata Party. Initially weak, it gained strength through ideological clarity (Hindutva) and organizational discipline.
 - **1989 Elections:** Marked the beginning of coalition politics. BJP started gaining seats and influence.
 - **1998–2004 (NDA Governments):** BJP successfully led coalitions, showing it could dominate national politics.
 - **2014 Elections:** A turning point. BJP won a clear majority on its own, ending the coalition dependence at the Centre.
 - **2019 Elections:** Reinforced BJP's dominance, making it the central pole of Indian politics, similar to Congress in earlier decades.
 - **2024 Elections:** Once again BJP continued its dominance though with reduced numbers compared to 2019.
-

Features of Second Party Dominance

1. **Strong Leadership:** Leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and later Narendra Modi gave BJP credibility and mass appeal.
2. **Organizational Strength:** RSS support and cadre-based politics helped BJP expand across states.
3. **Coalition Building:** As Surinder Kumar and Rajdeep Kaur note in the *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, BJP

mastered coalition politics through the NDA, balancing regional allies while maintaining its core agenda.

4. **Pan-Indian Presence:** Unlike earlier when BJP was seen as a "Hindi belt party," it expanded into the Northeast, West, and South.
 5. **Policy Agenda:** Focus on nationalism, economic reforms, and welfare schemes consolidated its voter base.
-

Examples of Second Party Dominance

- **1998–2004:** NDA governments under Vajpayee showed BJP's ability to lead coalitions.
 - **2014, 2019 & 2024:** BJP secured absolute majority, reducing Congress to a weak opposition.
 - **Regional Expansion:** BJP formed governments in states like Assam, Karnataka, and Tripura, breaking Congress's traditional strongholds.
-

Significance

- **Positive:**
 - Strengthened democracy by showing that dominance is not permanent; another party can rise.
 - Brought stability after years of unstable coalition governments.
 - Reflected changing aspirations of voters, especially youth and middle class.
 - **Negative:**
 - Risk of reduced opposition strength, similar to Congress era.
 - Concerns about centralization of power and weakening of coalition culture.
-

Conclusion

The rise of BJP marks the **second phase of party dominance** in India. While Congress dominated from 1952 to 1989, BJP has emerged as the

new dominant force since 2014. This shows the dynamic nature of Indian democracy – where dominance shifts but elections remain free and competitive. The transition from one-party dominance to coalition politics and then to second party dominance highlights India’s ability to adapt to social, regional, and ideological changes.

Q3. Critically examine the politics of coalition during the period of 1989 to 2014.

Politics of Coalition in India (1989–2014)

Introduction

India’s political system after independence was marked by Congress dominance. However, by the late 1980s, this dominance declined, and India entered the era of coalition politics. As explained in *Indian Polity* by M. Laxmikanth, coalition politics refers to a situation where no single party secures a majority, and multiple parties come together to form a government. The period (1989–2014) was crucial in shaping India’s federal and pluralistic democracy.

Causes of Coalition Politics

- Decline of Congress: Internal factionalism, corruption, and inability to address regional aspirations weakened Congress.
 - Rise of Regional Parties: DMK, TDP, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, BSP, and SP gained strength, representing regional and caste interests.
 - Fragmented Mandate: Voters began supporting regional parties, leading to fractured verdicts.
 - Social Change: Mandal Commission implementation (1990) and caste-based mobilization reshaped politics.
-

Phases of Coalition Politics (1989–2014)

1. 1989–1991: Janata Dal and National Front

- V.P. Singh became PM with support from BJP and Left parties.

- Collapse due to withdrawal of BJP support after the Ram Janmabhoomi issue.

2. 1991–1996: Minority Congress Government

- P.V. Narasimha Rao led a minority Congress government.
- Introduced economic liberalization (1991), showing coalitions could still deliver reforms.

3. 1996–1998: United Front Governments

- H.D. Deve Gowda and later I.K. Gujral led coalition governments supported by Congress.
- Marked instability, with frequent changes in leadership.

4. 1998–2004: NDA Government under Vajpayee

- BJP successfully led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).
- Vajpayee's leadership gave stability, despite coalition pressures.
- Examples: Pokhran nuclear tests (1998), Kargil War (1999).

5. 2004–2014: UPA Governments under Manmohan Singh

- Congress returned to power through the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).
- UPA-I (2004–09): Introduced schemes like MGNREGA and RTI Act.
- UPA-II (2009–14): Faced corruption scandals (2G, CWG), leading to decline in credibility.

Critical Examination

- Positive Aspects:
 - Strengthened federalism by giving regional parties a voice.
 - Reflected India's diversity and pluralism.
 - Major reforms (economic liberalization, RTI, MGNREGA) were introduced during coalition governments.
- Negative Aspects:
 - Political instability (frequent changes between 1989–1999).

- Policy paralysis due to dependence on allies.
- Rise of opportunistic alliances and corruption scandals.

Conclusion

Coalition politics between 1989 and 2014 was a mixed experience. While it gave representation to diverse groups and strengthened democracy, it also led to instability and corruption. As Surinder Kumar and Rajdeep Kaur note, coalition politics became the “new normal” in India until 2014, when BJP secured a majority and ended the coalition era at the Centre.

.....

Got it — let’s make the phases of coalition politics (1989–2014) easy to memorize. Instead of long paragraphs, I’ll give you a timeline + mnemonic style breakdown so you can recall quickly in exams:

Easy Timeline of Coalition Politics (1989–2014)

● **Phase 1: 1989–1991** → ***National Front Era***

- V.P. Singh (Janata Dal) with BJP + Left support.
- Fell apart after Ram Janmabhoomi issue.
👉 *Keyword: "Front but Fragile"*

● **Phase 2: 1991–1996** → ***Minority Congress Rule***

- P.V. Narasimha Rao (Congress) runs a minority government.
- Introduced Economic Liberalization (1991).
👉 *Keyword: "Reforms despite Minority"*

● **Phase 3: 1996–1998** → ***United Front Governments***

- H.D. Deve Gowda → later I.K. Gujral.
- Supported by Congress from outside.

- Frequent instability.
👉 *Keyword: "United but Unsteady"*
-

● **Phase 4: 1998–2004 → NDA Stability**

- Atal Bihari Vajpayee (BJP) leads NDA.
 - Stable coalition, Pokhran nuclear tests, Kargil War.
👉 *Keyword: "NDA = National Development Alliance"*
-

● **Phase 5: 2004–2014 → UPA Era**

- Manmohan Singh (Congress) leads UPA.
 - UPA-I: RTI Act, MGNREGA.
 - UPA-II: Corruption scandals (2G, CWG).
👉 *Keyword: "UPA = Uplift + Problems Ahead"*
-

Mnemonic for Quick Recall

"Fragile Front, Minority Reforms, United but Unsteady, NDA Stability, UPA Rise & Fall."

This one line helps you recall the five phases in order:

- 1. National Front (1989–91)**
- 2. Minority Congress (1991–96)**
- 3. United Front (1996–98)**
- 4. NDA (1998–2004)**
- 5. UPA (2004–2014)**