

Challenges of Political Development in India

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ABSTRACT

We are proud to be the largest democracy in the world. For more than sixty five years we have witnessed the conduct of successful elections, peaceful changes of government at the Centre and in the States, people exercising freedom of expression, movement and religion. India has also been developing and transforming economically and socially. At the same time we, quite often, listen complains about prevalent inequalities, injustice or non-fulfillment of expectations of certain sections of the society. These people do not feel themselves participative in the democratic process. You may ask why it is so. You have already read in earlier unit that democracy means ‘government of the people, for the people, and by the people’. It means democracy is not limited to just a process of election, but also fulfilling social and economic aspirations of the people. In India we keep on debating these various aspects of democracy and its achievements and challenges. What has been called the “largest exercise in democracy”—eight weeks of voting in which over 800 million people participated—has concluded in India with a victory for the opposition, the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi. Although it earned slightly less than one-third of the vote nation-wide, the Indian single-party district system magnified the scope of the win. The BJP, along with its allied parties, has almost doubled the number of seats it holds in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). Moreover, the BJP on its own now holds 282 out of 543 constituency seats, enough to allow it to form a government without any coalition partners. Meanwhile, the Congress Party suffered an historical defeat, now relegated to just 44 seats. Rahul Gandhi, the Congress Party’s prime ministerial candidate and scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family that has led the Congress Party since independence, barely won his own constituency in Amethi district, Uttar Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

Four states—Modi’s own Gujarat, along with Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand—are now BJP-only states, with no other party representation in the Lok Sabha. Another six “union territories,” including Delhi and Goa, are also represented entirely by the BJP. Additionally, some 109 seats flipped from Congress to the BJP—most of them rural districts where the Congress Party has traditionally shown strength. One can drive from Mysore to Delhi while crossing only BJP constituencies. The reasons for the BJP’s victory are multiple: an anti-incumbent mood among Indian voters given the state of the economy, the failure of the Congress Party to connect with younger voters, corruption scandals that saddled the current

government, Modi’s 24-hour campaign which—much like Barack Obama in 2008—made innovative use of technology and social media, attracting millions of first-time voters. While there are reasons to avoid the term “realignment,” this election may nonetheless mark a turning point in India’s political development more generally.[1,2] Modi’s victory highlights four possible changes to the political system that, if they persist, could portend welcome shifts in the character of the democratic franchise as it is traditionally practiced in India.

Historically, caste, religion, language, and ethnicity, have motivated significant blocs of voters. Although these factors—particularly the power of caste-based

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voting—are hardly irrelevant, in 2014 they took a back seat to punishing the party in power for presiding over falling growth rates, inflation, and a rupee that had lost up to 25 percent in value before recovering. Economic voting has occurred in India's past; for example, in the 1991 elections, which took place amid a currency crisis. But in this election, the BJP and Congress adopted the rhetoric of conventional center-right and center-left parties, respectively. Modi, perhaps due to allegations of his own culpability in the 2002 communal violence in Gujarat, assiduously avoided religious politics and stuck to the pro-market, anti-red tape platform that earned his home state a reputation as a business-friendly place. Indian stock markets hit a record at the prospect of a Modi-led government. The rupee also strengthened to an 11-month high. Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi focused on rural poverty and unemployment, on the widening gap between rich and poor, and on basic needs such as food, education and health.[3,4] That much of the political debate was focused on ideology rather than identity was a welcome development in the history of Indian politics. Nothing has been more certain in Indian politics than the expectation that the party in power will shower its supporters (and fence-sitters) with benefits in order to secure their vote. The Congress Party has expanded the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), a massive public works program that has provided jobs to close to 300 million households. Congress also enacted an ambitious right-to-education program, a national "rural livelihoods" program, as well as a food security bill that will ultimately deliver subsidized grains to two-thirds of the population. Supporters argue that these laws are critical to addressing India's chronic poverty and inequality; critics deride them as old-fashioned budget-busting handouts. There is evidence that the NREGA, for example, helped the Congress-led coalition win in the 2009 general election. But the failure of the Congress' welfare-based platform to cushion its collapse even in rural areas may signal the eclipse of welfare populism as a central electoral strategy. If true, this could prompt parties to modernize, to generate ideas, mobilize support, and govern on the basis of a consistent policy platform rather than entice backers through patron-client networks and seek power in order to gain control over state resources.[5,6]

Discussion

Much has been written about the rise of regional parties in India. Milan Vaishnav of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace notes that, rather than erode the stature of national parties, regional parties have more or less stabilized in terms of their

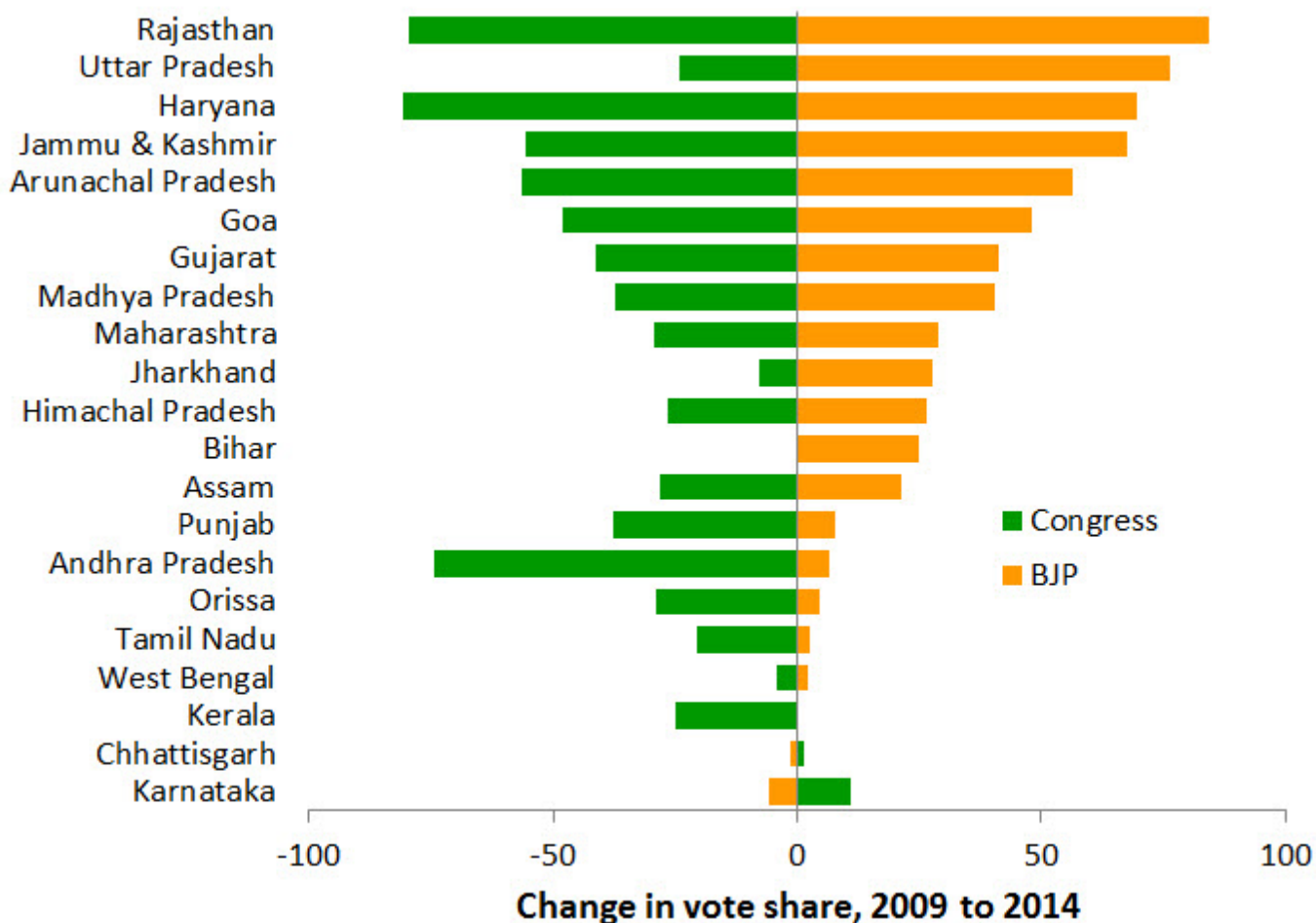
relative power. The figure below compares the changes in vote shares for the BJP and Congress, by state, between the 2009 and 2014 elections. With the possible exceptions of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, most of the BJP's victories came at the expense of the Congress Party. Unsurprisingly, Andhra Pradesh—which has been in the process of splitting into two states—is one of the few states where Congress' losses were taken up by a regional party (Telugu Desam). Although the number of states where regional parties gained greater shares of votes than either of the two main national parties remained roughly the same, in some of the larger states—UP and Bihar—BJP popularity eroded the strength of regional parties.

One of the truisms of Indian democracy has long been the apathy of urban and middle-class voters. As mentioned above, Indian political parties make numerous direct appeals to poor and rural voters through a targeted transfers, but also through vote-buying schemes. Meanwhile, the middle classes have generally remained on the sidelines. It is not likely that these patterns have, all of a sudden, reversed themselves in this election. But we do know that urban areas experienced unprecedented voter turnout. There is also anecdotal evidence that the middle classes may have increased their turnout, prompted by pocketbook issues, anti-corruption sentiments, crumbling infrastructure, shoddy public service, and other concerns. If so, it would be the continuation of a trend in middle-class mobilization that has coincided with, among other things, a broad anti-corruption movement, street protests against a high-profile gang rape, the emergence of the Aam Aadmi (Common Man) party on an explicit "clean government" platform. All of these events were characterized by middle-class, primarily urban, support.[7,8]

All of these developments are, in their own ways, precarious. Religion, for example, remains a strong factor in Indian political life. According to exit polls, only 9 percent of Muslims voted for the BJP which, although up from 4 percent in 2004, suggests that the largest minority religion remains excluded from the largest center-right party. The problems of vote buying are as rampant as ever, with party officials having been caught distributing cash, alcohol, and even drugs, in an effort to win votes. National parties have yet to make inroads in states such as Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, or Tamil Nadu, where regional parties remain dominant. And, the mobilization of middle-class or urban voters may prove temporary. But all of these changes, should they continue, would be unequivocally beneficial for the Indian political system, making it more institutionalized, stable, coherent, and transparent.

India's economic development was given a huge boost by the growth acceleration that began roughly in the 1980s. Coming at precisely the time when India's planning institutions were coming apart, the coincidence was seen by many economists as a vindication of the benefits of liberalization. Greater market access and access to foreign technologies and capital markets did indeed have a role to play in sustaining three decades of high growth in India, but the drivers of the growth acceleration are more complex than a simple liberalization model suggests with significant implications for the policy challenges facing India today. This analysis uses the analytical framework of 'political settlements' (in Khan 2010a) to look at the interface between politics, economics and the enforcement of the institutional framework to look at the technology acquisition processes that have been driving growth. It shows that the institutional framework for technology acquisition in the period before 1980 did achieve significant successes in building up Indian technological capability in a few sectors and these capabilities played a significant role in driving the growth acceleration after 1980. However, the Indian political settlement at that time did not allow an effective enforcement of the

institutions that would have allowed licensing and planning to achieve global competitiveness for India's emerging modern sectors. A significant amount of 'learning' took place but high levels of effort could not be enforced and as a result global competitiveness was by and large not achieved even in the high-capability sectors. The shift to a more open economy was driven primarily by an evolution in India's political settlement that predates the formal liberalization that happened in the 1990s. India's political settlement changed in the mid- to late-1970s as the number and organizational strength of political organizations increased over the 1960s.[9,10] This eventually led to a transition from a 'dominant party' system to one that can be described as 'competitive clientelism'. The new political settlement allowed direct and ad hoc links between economic sectors close to the frontier and the political leadership. Direct and indirect financial support was provided through a number of different instruments to sectors near the global competitiveness frontier to engage in a second phase of learning that moved them to the frontier. An analytical model of catching up is used to show the importance of incentivizing 'effort' during any



process of learning-by-doing financed by external financing. The important change in the new political settlement was that in a number of sectors the design of the financing instruments in this second phase of

learning ensured high levels of effort in the context of the new political settlement. Case studies of the automobile and pharmaceutical industries are used to explore the processes through which the movement to

the frontier happened. The analysis based on political settlements and the catching up process can explain important features of the growth process since the 1980s. Growth in India's economy has been driven by a relatively small number of sectors where growth has been very high and it has also been regionally concentrated. Moreover, growth has not created the vast numbers of jobs that India requires and has been based on skill-intensive industries. These features of the growth process are entirely consistent with an analysis that focuses on capability development. The 'planning' period was only partially successful in creating pockets of almost-frontier capabilities. It could not be applied effectively to create broad-based capabilities that were sufficiently diversified across sectors and regions. The second phase of learning after 1980 upgraded some of these sectors to the frontier using sector-specific strategies of state support and these sectors subsequently drove the growth process through market competition. [11,12] There are important implications for sustainability and for policy. The spread of growth to new sectors, more labour-intensive sectors and across regions is not likely to happen fast enough simply through market processes of diffusion. An analysis of the capability constraint suggests that labour market liberalization (the preferred policy priority of many market economists) is likely to have negligible effects in solving the sustainability problem. Neither the licensing strategy of the 1950s nor the business-government links that emerged in the 1980s offer a sufficient developmental model for India, but understanding the challenges analytically and politically can help a discussion about policy options. Secondly, as the sectors that were close enough to the frontier to benefit from sector-specific support to reach the frontier have already done so, it has become more difficult to use business-government links for productive purposes. Business-politics links have therefore increasingly been used to drive unproductive rent capture strategies as politicians continue to require off-budget financing for operating the political system. This has resulted in a growing critique of political corruption and demands for more constraints on politicians and more redistribution to the poor. However, in the absence of a growth strategy these demands are unlikely to be fulfilled.[13]

Discussion

The process of evolution of Indian federalism has been influenced, by political development, including rise of regional identities, end of a one-party dominant era, and judicial interpretations of the Constitution. Two strict rules have opened followed since Independence in dealing with dissident

domestic ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural group demands. First, no secessionist movement will be entertained and that any group which takes up a secessionist stand will, while it is weak, be ignored and treated as illegitimate, but should it develop significant strength, be smashed, with the help of the armed forces if necessary. Religious minorities were free to preserve their own law and practice their religion as they see fit, but not to demand either a separate state for their community even within the Indian Union or separate electorates or any form of proportional representation in government bodies. Any such demand would not be considered legitimate. While political and economic conflicts develop centre-state conflict dimensions of their own, conflicts involving linguistic and cultural (and even communal) dimensions have tended to assume significance under certain circumstances. Demands for an equitable distribution of political power and privileged access for the weaker regions to economic resources are often couched in the language of demands for greater autonomy for the different states as well as for a more generous investment of the central plan resources in regions far away from the 'heartland.' [14,15] The relationship between India's parliamentary federalism and coalition politics somewhat becomes a mainstay. The distinction between national and state parties is not on the basis of the arena in which they compete. Most of them compete in both assembly and parliamentary elections. Since the states in India differ vastly in terms of population and size, they play for different stakes in Parliament. With their increasing importance at the national level, they have been able to minimize the manoeuvrability and discretion of the centrist parties. A new shift has occurred in the economic domain also. The path of development which India undertook in the initial years of the post-Independence period has undergone a change now with India undertaking to reform its economy through liberalization. Economic reforms and the phenomenon of globalization has necessitated an examination of India's federal system, especially when all the layers of federations now simultaneously interact with foreign governments and corporations in the global economy. [16,17] Since the late 1960s, things have become more difficult on both the sociocultural and political fronts. On the one hand, interest groups have crystallized identities along with language, culture and religion. With the growing awareness of their political concerns, these groups have pressed harder for resources, power and respect and have exhibited impatience with mere tokenism. On the other hand, political decay has acted most formal and informal political institutions mainly due

to the attempts by politicians to erode the substance and autonomy of institutions in the interest of personal rule, creating a crisis in 'management' techniques and sowing the seeds of frustration among organized interests. The result has been the production of far more strife of a destructive sort. Federalism, in the Indian context, remains a potent concept despite failing in some cases to keep its promise of providing a democratic institutional mechanism for its diverse society. Despite its shortcomings, it remains the best hope for governing a territorially diverse and pluralistic society like India. Its ability to make the centre strong as well as sustain itself in view of the growing demands for regional and group autonomy gives it unique flexibility, and hence, is its strength. The only requirement in the present time is to ensure the sharing of resources and opportunities with different ethnic and cultural groups and communities as well to reconcile democratic polity with increasing democratization of society. In short, federal India needs only to contemporize itself.

Politics of India works within the framework of the country's Constitution. India is a parliamentary democratic secular republic in which the president of India is the head of state & first citizen of India and the prime minister of India is the head of government. It is based on the federal structure of government, although the word is not used in the Constitution itself. India follows the dual polity system, i.e. federal in nature, that consists of the central authority at the centre and states at the periphery. The Constitution defines the organizational powers and limitations of both central and state governments; it is well recognised, fluid (Preamble of the Constitution being rigid and to dictate further amendments to the Constitution) and considered supreme, i.e. the laws of the nation must conform to it.[18]

There is a provision for a bicameral legislature consisting of an upper house, the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), which represents the states of the Indian federation, and a lower house, the Lok Sabha (House of the People), which represents the people of India as a whole. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, which is headed by the Supreme Court. The court's mandate is to protect the Constitution, to settle disputes between the central government and the states, to settle inter-state disputes, to nullify any central or state laws that go against the Constitution and to protect the fundamental rights of citizens, issuing writs for their enforcement in cases of violation.

There are 543 members in the Lok Sabha, who are elected using plurality voting (first past the post) system from 543 single-member constituencies. There

are 245 members in the Rajya Sabha, out of which 233 are elected through indirect elections by single transferable vote by the members of the state legislative assemblies; 12 other members are elected/nominated by the President of India. Governments are formed through elections held every five years (unless otherwise specified), by parties that secure a majority of members in their respective lower houses (Lok Sabha in the central government and Vidhan Sabha in states). India had its first general election in 1951, which was won by the Indian National Congress, a political party that went on to dominate subsequent elections until 1977, when a non-Congress government was formed for the first time in independent India. The 1990s saw the end of single-party domination and the rise of coalition governments. The latest 17th Lok Sabha elections was conducted in seven phases from 11 April 2019 to 19 May 2019 by the Election commission of India. That elections once again brought back single-party rule in the country, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) being able to claim a majority in the Lok Sabha. In recent decades, Indian politics has become a dynastic affair. Possible reasons for this could be the party stability, absence of party organisations, independent civil society associations that mobilise support for the parties and centralised financing of elections

India has seen political corruption for decades. Democratic institutions soon became federally owned, dissent was eliminated and a majority of citizens paid the price. The political corruption in India is weakening its democracy and has led to the erosion of trust by the general public in the political system. A good amount of money is required in elections which is source of political-capitalist nexus. Pre-election alliances are common in India with parties deciding to share seats. This is seen mainly on a state by state basis rather than on the national level. Candidate selection starts after seat sharing has been agreed by alliance fellows. Indian political parties have low level of internal party democracy and therefore, in Indian elections, both at the state or national level, party candidates are typically selected by the party elites, more commonly called the party high command. The party elites use a number of criteria for selecting candidates. These include the ability of the candidates to finance their own election, their educational attainment, and the level of organization the candidates have in their respective constituencies. Quite often the last criterion is associated with candidate criminality.

On 24 April 1993, the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 came into force to provide

constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. This Act was extended to Panchayats in the tribal areas of eight states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan from 24 December 1996.[15,16]

The Act aims to provide a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having a population of over 2 million, to hold Panchayat elections regularly every five years, to provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women, to appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute District Planning Committee to prepare a draft development plan for the district.

Results

When compared to other democracies, India has had a large number of political parties during its history under democratic governance. It has been estimated that over 200 parties were formed after India became independent in 1947. Leadership of political parties in India is commonly interwoven with well-known families whose dynastic leaders actively play the dominant role in a party. Further, party leadership roles are often transferred to subsequent generations in the same families. The two main parties in India are the Bharatiya Janata Party, commonly known as the BJP, which is the leading right-wing nationalist party, and the Indian National Congress, commonly called the INC or Congress, which is the leading centre-left party. These two parties currently dominate national politics, both adhering their policies loosely to their places on the left-right political spectrum. At present, there are eight national parties and many more state parties.

Every political party in India, whether a national or regional/state party, must have a symbol and must be registered with the Election Commission of India. Symbols are used in the Indian political system to identify political parties in part so that illiterate people can vote by recognizing the party symbols.

In the current amendment to the Symbols Order, the commission has asserted the following five principles:

1. A party, national or state, must have a legislative presence.
2. A national party's legislative presence must be in the Lok Sabha. A state party's legislative presence must be in the State Assembly.
3. A party can set up a candidate only from amongst its own members.
4. A party that loses its recognition shall not lose its symbol immediately but shall be allowed to use

that symbol for some time to try and retrieve its status. However, the grant of such facility to the party will not mean the extension of other facilities to it, as are available to recognized parties, such as free time on Doordarshan or AIR, free supply of copies of electoral rolls, etc.

5. Recognition should be given to a party only on the basis of its own performance in elections and not because it is a splinter group of some other recognized party.[14,15]

A political party shall be eligible to be recognized as a national party if:

1. it secures at least six percent (6%) of the valid votes polled in any four or more states, at a general election to the Lok Sabha or, to the State Legislative Assembly; and .
2. in addition, it wins at least four seats in the House of the People from any State or States.
3. or it wins at least two percent (2%) seats in the House of the People (i.e. 11 seats in the existing House having 543 members), and these members are elected from at least three different states.

Likewise, a political party shall be entitled to be recognized as a state party, if:

1. it secures at least six percent (6%) of the valid votes polled in the state at a general election, either to the Lok Sabha or to the Legislative Assembly of the State concerned; and
2. in addition, it wins at least two seats in the Legislative Assembly of the state concerned.
3. or it wins at least three percent (3%) of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the state, or at least three seats in the Assembly, whichever is more.

Although a strict anti-defection law had been passed in 1984, there has been a continued tendency amongst politicians to float their own parties rather than join a broad based party such as the Congress or the BJP. Between the 1984 and 1989 elections, the number of parties contesting elections increased from 33 to 113. In the decades since, this fragmentation has continued.

India has a history of party alliances and breakdown of alliances. However, there are three party alliances regularly aligning on a national level in competing for Government positions. The member parties work in harmony for gratifying national interests, although parties can jump ships.

- National Democratic Alliance (NDA) - Right-wing coalition led by BJP was formed in 1998 after the elections. NDA formed a government, although the government didn't last long as AIADMK withdrew support from it resulting in 1999 general elections, in which NDA won and

resumed power. The coalition government went on to complete the full five-years term, becoming the first non-Congress government to do so. In the 2014 General Elections, NDA once again returned to powers for the second time, with a historic mandate of 336 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats. BJP itself won 282 seats, thereby electing Narendra Modi as the head of the government. In a historic win, the NDA stormed to power for the third term in 2019 with a combined strength of 353 seats, with the BJP itself winning an absolute majority with 303 seats

- United Progressive Alliance (UPA) - Centre-left coalition led by Indian National Congress (INC); this alliance was created after the 2004 general elections, with the alliance forming the Government. The alliance even after losing some of its members, was re-elected in 2009 General Elections with Manmohan Singh as head of the government. The alliance has been in the opposition since the 2014 elections, with the INC being the principal opposition party, but without the official status of the Leader of Opposition since they failed to win the minimum required seats.[13,14]

As with any other democracy, political parties represent different sections among the Indian society and regions, and their core values play a major role in the politics of India. Both the executive branch and the legislative branch of the government are run by the representatives of the political parties who have been elected through the elections. Through the electoral process, the people of India choose which representative and which political party should run the government. Through elections, any party may gain simple majority in the lower house. Coalitions are formed by the political parties in case no single party gains a simple majority in the lower house. Unless a party or a coalition have a majority in the lower house, a government cannot be formed by that party or the coalition.

Conclusions

The Union Council of Ministers, headed by the prime minister, is the body with which the real executive power resides. The prime minister is the recognized head of the government.

The Union Council of Ministers is the body of ministers with which the prime minister works with on a day-to-day basis. Work is divided between various ministers into various departments and ministries. The Union Cabinet is a smaller body of senior ministers which lies within the Union Council of Ministers, and is the most powerful set of people in

the country, playing an instrumental role in legislation and execution alike.

All members of the Union Council of Ministers must be members of either House of Parliament at the time of appointment or must get elected/nominated to either House within six months of their appointment.[18]

It is the Union Cabinet that co-ordinates all foreign and domestic policy of the Union. It exercises immense control over administration, finance, legislation, military, etc. The Head of the Union Cabinet is the prime minister. The current prime minister of India is Narendra Modi.

India has a federal form of government, and hence each state also has its own government. The executive of each state is the governor (equivalent to the president of India), whose role is ceremonial. The real power resides with the chief minister (equivalent to the prime minister) and the State Council of Ministers. States may either have a unicameral or bicameral legislature, varying from state to state. The chief minister and other state ministers are also members of the legislature.[19]

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