

THE LOK DAL-BJP COALITION GOVERNMENT (1987-1990): DYNAMICS, CHALLENGES, AND LEGACY IN INDIAN POLITICS

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Abstract

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government, formed between 1987 and 1990, marked a significant moment in India's political history, representing a pivotal shift from Congress dominance to coalition governance. This research explores the political, ideological, and structural dynamics that led to the formation of the alliance, the key policies implemented during its tenure, the internal challenges faced, and the eventual collapse of the coalition. Despite the ideological differences between Lok Dal's focus on agrarian socialism and the BJP's Hindutva agenda, the coalition managed to create a significant political alternative to the Congress. The study examines the coalition's electoral strategies, seat-sharing agreements, leadership roles, and policy achievements, while also highlighting the tensions and contradictions that ultimately led to its disintegration. The paper concludes by discussing the legacy of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition in shaping subsequent coalition politics in India, particularly its influence on the evolution of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and future coalitions.

Keywords: Lok Dal, BJP, Coalition Government, Haryana Politics, Agrarian Reforms, Hindutva, Electoral Strategies, Coalition Collapse

1 INTRODUCTION

The formation of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government in 1987 marked a significant turning point in the political landscape of India. Emerging from a backdrop of Congress dominance that had persisted for decades, this coalition represented a shift towards a more fragmented and competitive party system. The decline of the Congress party's unchallenged position in Indian politics was largely precipitated by a combination of socio-political movements, regional aspirations, and dissatisfaction with its centralized approach to governance. The coalition between Lok Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) reflected the growing influence of regional parties and the increasing viability of coalitions as an alternative to one-party dominance. This introduction seeks to provide an overview of the political scenario that led to the formation of this coalition, the key players involved, and the challenges that arose in bringing together two ideologically diverse parties.

The 1980s were marked by turbulence in Indian politics. The assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and the subsequent sympathy wave that brought Rajiv Gandhi to power quickly gave way to public discontent due to allegations of corruption and policy mismanagement. The Bofors scandal, in particular, dealt a severe blow to the Congress party's credibility and led to widespread criticism of its governance. Simultaneously, regional and caste-based movements were gaining momentum, challenging the Congress party's traditional vote banks¹. These developments created an environment ripe for opposition parties to unite against the Congress, which had become synonymous with centralization and a lack of responsiveness to local issues.

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition was forged in this context of political flux. Lok Dal, under the leadership of Chaudhary Devi Lal, was a prominent regional party with strong roots in Haryana and neighboring states. It represented the interests of farmers, rural communities, and socially marginalized groups². The Bharatiya Janata Party, on the other hand, was an emerging national party that had begun to establish itself as a political force with its Hindutva ideology and focus on national integration. Despite significant ideological differences, the two parties found common ground in their shared opposition to the Congress and their commitment to addressing the grievances of the people. The coalition was seen as a pragmatic move to consolidate anti-Congress forces and provide a credible alternative to the

¹ Akhtar, Majeed. *Coalition Politics over Shar*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p.136.

² Khanna, S.K., *Contemporary Indian Politics*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, p.84.

electorate.

Despite its promising beginnings, the coalition faced significant challenges from the outset. The ideological differences between Lok Dal and BJP often led to disagreements over policy priorities and governance strategies. Moreover, the coalition had to contend with a Congress party that was still a formidable political force, capable of exploiting divisions within the opposition³. The role of charismatic leaders like Devi Lal and Atal Bihari Vajpayee was crucial in maintaining unity and steering the coalition through turbulent times. The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government (1987-1990) was a product of the changing dynamics of Indian politics in the late 1980s. It symbolized the emergence of coalition politics as a viable alternative to one-party dominance and reflected the aspirations of a diverse and fragmented electorate. The introduction of this chapter sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the coalition's structure, ideological underpinnings, policies, challenges, and legacy in the sections that follow.

2. THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION

The formation of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government between 1987 and 1990 marked a watershed moment in Indian political history. This alliance brought together two ideologically distinct entities—Lok Dal, a party rooted in rural agrarian politics, and the BJP, a rising national force with an urban and middle-class appeal. This section examines in detail the circumstances, strategies, and dynamics that facilitated this coalition. It will delve into the political environment of the late 1980s, the motivations of both parties, and the role played by influential leaders like Chaudhary Devi Lal, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and L.K. Advani in forging this unlikely partnership.

2.1 The Political Context of the Late 1980s

The late 1980s marked a critical juncture in Indian politics, as the dominance of the Congress party—a political juggernaut since independence—began to falter under mounting internal and external pressures. This period saw a convergence of social, economic, and political factors that reshaped the country's political landscape, setting the stage for the emergence of coalition politics as a powerful counterbalance to the one-party rule.

The Congress party, led by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during this period, faced significant challenges that undermined its credibility and public support. Among the most damaging was the Bofors scandal, which broke in 1987 and implicated high-ranking Congress leaders in allegations of receiving kickbacks in a defense deal. This scandal eroded public trust and provided opposition parties with a potent issue to mobilize voters against Congress⁴. Additionally, Congress's centralization of power under a few elite leaders alienated grassroots workers and regional factions. The party's policies were increasingly seen as disconnected from the realities of rural and marginalized communities. Farmers and the rural poor, in particular, felt neglected as economic policies focused more on industrialization and urban development. This led to growing resentment among agrarian communities, who sought alternatives to the Congress's top-down governance model⁵.

The late 1980s were marked by economic stagnation and rising unemployment, which further deepened public discontent. The fiscal deficit was ballooning, and the economy struggled to keep pace with the demands of a rapidly growing population. Inflationary pressures and rising food prices disproportionately affected rural households, creating fertile ground for political opposition. Regional disparities exacerbated this dissatisfaction. States with strong regional identities, such as Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab, began to demand more autonomy and representation. These demands were often framed as a reaction to Congress's perceived neglect of regional aspirations in favor of centralized decision-making. This created a space for regional leaders like Chaudhary Devi Lal in Haryana to emerge as champions of local issues, effectively challenging Congress's hegemony⁶.

³ Sunder, Ram, D., *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability*, National Publishing House, Jaipur, New Delhi, 2000, p.191.

⁴ Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing*. Manak Publications, New Delhi.

⁵ Ram, S. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability* (p. 81). National Publishing House, Jaipur.

⁶ Sunder, R. D. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability*. National Publishing House, Jaipur.

The weakening grip of the Congress party enabled opposition movements to gain momentum. In Haryana, Chaudhary Devi Lal's Lok Dal capitalized on the agrarian distress and positioned itself as a party that genuinely represented the interests of farmers and rural communities. His call for policies like loan waivers for farmers, better irrigation facilities, and minimum support prices for crops resonated strongly with the electorate. Devi Lal's appeal went beyond policy promises; he was seen as a grassroots leader who understood the challenges faced by rural populations. At the same time, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was undergoing a transformation under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani. After languishing on the fringes of Indian politics for decades, the BJP began to carve out a distinct identity centered on cultural nationalism and Hindutva. This ideological shift, coupled with effective organizational strategies, enabled the BJP to expand its voter base, particularly among the urban middle class and small traders. The BJP also began to project itself as a viable national alternative to the Congress, emphasizing its commitment to transparency, governance reforms, and national security. This was particularly appealing to voters disillusioned with Congress's corruption scandals and perceived inefficiency⁷.

By the late 1980s, the political climate was ripe for an anti-Congress wave. Opposition parties, despite their ideological differences, began to coalesce around a shared goal: to unseat the Congress party from its position of dominance. This period saw the emergence of alliances that sought to combine the strengths of regional parties with the growing national appeal of the BJP. The anti-Congress sentiment was not confined to political elites; it resonated with the electorate as well. Voters in both urban and rural areas were eager for change, and this desire was reflected in the results of state assembly elections in several key states. In Haryana, for instance, Lok Dal achieved significant victories by highlighting the Congress's neglect of farmers and advocating for policies that addressed rural concerns directly.

Haryana exemplified the broader trends that were reshaping Indian politics in the late 1980s. The state had traditionally been a Congress stronghold, but growing agrarian distress and rural discontent created an opening for opposition forces. Chaudhary Devi Lal's leadership proved instrumental in galvanizing this discontent into a coherent political movement. His ability to connect with farmers on a personal level and articulate their grievances in policy terms helped Lok Dal gain widespread support.

“Table 1: Electoral Performance of Congress in Haryana

Party	Votes	%	Seats
Indian National Congress	1,845,297	37.58	36
Indian National Lok Dal	1,172,149	23.87	31
Bharatiya Janata Party	376,604	7.67	6
Janata Party	157,224	3.20	1
Communist Party of India	36,642	0.75	–
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	18,616	0.38	–
Indian National Congress (Socialist)	398	0.01	–
Independents	1,303,414	26.54	16
Total	4,910,344	100.00	90
Valid votes	4,910,344	98.26	

⁷ The Journal of Parliamentary Information. (2000). Vol. XLVI, No. 3, September, p. 388.

Invalid/blank votes	87,091	1.74	
Total votes	4,997,435	–	
Registered voters/turnout	715,228	698.72	
Source: ECIElectoral Commission of India			

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Haryana_Legislative_Assembly_election"

As Table 1 illustrates, the Congress party's vote share in Haryana plummeted between 1982 and 1987, while Lok Dal made substantial gains. This shift underscored the electorate's frustration with Congress and its embrace of regional alternatives like Lok Dal, which promised a more decentralized and farmer-centric governance model⁸.

Both Lok Dal and BJP recognized the importance of grassroots mobilization in challenging Congress's dominance. Lok Dal's emphasis on Kisan Sabhas (farmer assemblies) and community engagement allowed it to build a strong support base in rural Haryana. Similarly, the BJP's reliance on cadre-based campaigning and its outreach through cultural organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) helped it connect with urban voters. Together, these efforts laid the groundwork for a formidable opposition coalition that would eventually unseat Congress in Haryana and set the stage for similar alliances at the national level.

2. Common Grounds: Anti-Congressism and Regional Development

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition emerged as a direct response to the declining hegemony of the Congress party, leveraging shared grievances and common objectives to form a unified opposition. Despite stark ideological differences, particularly regarding secularism and cultural nationalism, both parties found alignment on two critical fronts: anti-Congressism and the prioritization of regional development. These shared goals laid the foundation for a pragmatic political partnership that sought to address the electorate's growing dissatisfaction with Congress's centralized and often disconnected governance. Anti-Congressism was the primary glue that bound Lok Dal and BJP together. By the late 1980s, the Congress party's once-dominant position had been eroded by a combination of scandals, governance failures, and increasing disillusionment among voters. The Bofors scandal, allegations of centralization, and an inability to address grassroots concerns provided opposition parties with a fertile ground to rally against Congress. For Lok Dal, Congress symbolized the neglect of rural India and the agrarian crisis. Chaudhary Devi Lal, Lok Dal's leader, championed the cause of farmers and rural communities, consistently opposing Congress's policies, which were seen as favoring urban elites and industrialization. Devi Lal's rhetoric emphasized the need to "liberate" rural India from the stranglehold of centralized governance, portraying the Congress as an obstacle to the empowerment of farmers. The BJP, on the other hand, criticized Congress from a different ideological perspective. It accused Congress of undermining cultural and national values and failing to protect India's majority Hindu identity. Under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, the BJP began to capitalize on growing dissatisfaction with Congress's governance model, presenting itself as a credible alternative. This shared opposition to Congress's policies allowed the two parties to converge on a tactical, if not ideological, basis⁹.

The electoral strategy of the Lok Dal-BJP alliance was centered on consolidating the anti-Congress vote. This was particularly evident in Haryana, where the Lok Dal had already established a strong rural base. The BJP recognized that collaborating with Lok Dal would allow it to penetrate rural constituencies, while Lok Dal saw the BJP as a vehicle for expanding its influence among urban and middle-class voters¹⁰.

Table 2: Electoral Performance Comparison of Lok Dal, BJP, and Congress in Haryana (1982–1987)

⁸ Sunder, R. D. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability* (p. 191). National Publishing House, Jaipur.

⁹ Khanna, S. K. (1999). *Coalition Politics in India*. Commonwealth Publishers, New Delhi.

¹⁰ Anil, K. J. (1998). *Indian Politics at the Crossroads*. Commonwealth Publishers, New Delhi.

Year	Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Vote Share (%)
1982	Congress	90	62	48.7
	Lok Dal	90	14	21.5
	BJP	90	2	5.8
1987	Congress	90	12	21.2
	Lok Dal	90	60	48.5
	BJP	90	8	12.6

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Haryana_Legislative_Assembly_election

The table above highlights the significant gains made by Lok Dal and BJP in Haryana, which can be attributed to their unified anti-Congress strategy. The Congress vote share dropped dramatically from 48.7% in 1982 to 21.2% in 1987, reflecting the success of the coalition's efforts to consolidate anti-Congress sentiment. While anti-Congressism provided the immediate impetus for collaboration, the Lok Dal and BJP also found common ground in their commitment to regional development and federalism. Both parties recognized the limitations of a centralized governance model and advocated for greater autonomy and resource allocation for states. For Lok Dal, regional development was inseparable from its core mission of addressing agrarian distress. Chaudhary Devi Lal's policies were centered on improving the lives of farmers through measures such as loan waivers, increased minimum support prices (MSPs) for crops, and enhanced irrigation facilities. These policies resonated strongly in Haryana, a predominantly agrarian state, and became a central pillar of Lok Dal's political platform. Devi Lal's approach also emphasized the empowerment of rural governance structures, including Panchayati Raj institutions, as a means of fostering grassroots development¹¹. The BJP's initial support base was largely urban and middle-class, but by the late 1980s, it sought to broaden its appeal by engaging with rural voters. The party recognized that aligning with Lok Dal could help it gain credibility among rural constituencies, particularly in northern states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. While the BJP's ideological focus remained rooted in Hindutva, it began to adopt regional development issues to align with Lok Dal's agenda. This included advocating for better infrastructure, rural electrification, and access to education in underserved areas.

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition formalized its partnership through carefully negotiated seat-sharing agreements. In Haryana, for instance, Lok Dal contested the majority of rural constituencies, while the BJP focused on urban and semi-urban areas. This division of labor allowed both parties to play to their respective strengths while minimizing the risk of internal competition. Despite their ideological differences, Lok Dal and BJP managed to find a degree of policy synergy. While Lok Dal focused on agrarian policies, the BJP lent its support to broader developmental initiatives such as infrastructure building and market reforms. The coalition also agreed on the importance of reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and curbing corruption—issues that had become synonymous with Congress's governance. This balancing act allowed the coalition to address diverse constituencies while maintaining a unified front. Farmers, small traders, and urban middle-class voters alike saw the coalition as a credible alternative to Congress's centralized and often opaque governance¹².

3. Electoral Strategies and Seat-Sharing Agreements

The formation of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition was not just a political maneuver but a well-strategized plan to create a formidable opposition to Congress dominance in the late 1980s. The coalition carefully crafted its electoral strategies

¹¹ Jain, S. K. (1998). *Contemporary India*. Netaji Institute of Subcontinental Studies.

¹² Pai, S. (1998). The Indian Party System Under Transformation: Lok Sabha Elections 1998. *Asian Survey*, 38(9), 836.

and seat-sharing agreements, recognizing that unity and cooperation were paramount for success in a fragmented and competitive political environment. These agreements were the result of exhaustive negotiations and compromises, reflecting the pragmatism of both parties as they sought to consolidate their electoral base and unseat the Congress. The seat-sharing arrangements were a critical aspect of the Lok Dal-BJP partnership. Both parties had distinct voter bases and regional strengths, which they leveraged during the negotiations. Lok Dal, with its deep roots in rural Haryana and its strong appeal among farmers and rural voters, was allocated a greater number of seats. The BJP, which had a growing influence in urban and semi-urban areas, focused on constituencies where its Hindutva ideology and nationalist narrative resonated strongly. This division of labor ensured that the coalition partners avoided direct competition against each other, thereby maximizing their collective chances of defeating Congress candidates. It also allowed the two parties to focus their resources and campaigns in areas where they had the strongest prospects of success. This strategic alignment was crucial in states like Haryana, where the Congress was still a significant political force. In Haryana, the Lok Dal-BJP coalition divided constituencies based on their respective strengths. Lok Dal contested primarily in rural constituencies, where its agrarian policies and the charismatic leadership of Chaudhary Devi Lal gave it a strong advantage. The BJP concentrated on urban and semi-urban constituencies, where its focus on governance reforms and Hindutva themes appealed to middle-class and business communities¹³.

Table 3: Seat-Sharing Agreement and Results in Haryana Assembly Elections (1987)

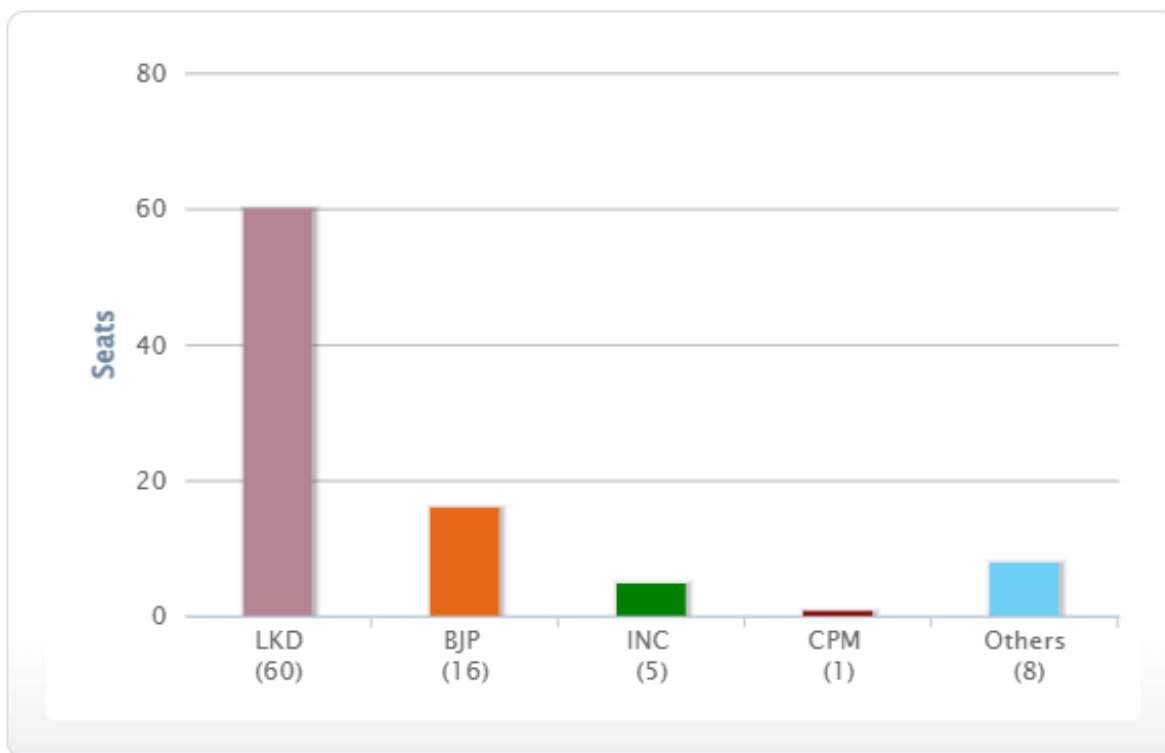
Party	Seats	Votes %
LKD	60	38.6
BJP	16	10.1
INC	5	29.2
CPM	1	0.8
IND	7	18.5
Others	1	2.8

Source: <https://www.indiavotes.com/vidhan-sabha/1987/haryana/75/31>

The success of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition in Haryana served as a blueprint for similar alliances in other states. Recognizing the need to consolidate anti-Congress votes, the coalition replicated its seat-sharing model in states like Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, where regional parties aligned with the alliance. These extended coalitions often included other regional or caste-based parties, further broadening their appeal and creating a pan-regional anti-Congress front. In states like Uttar Pradesh, where caste dynamics played a significant role, the BJP and Lok Dal made careful adjustments to accommodate smaller parties representing specific social groups. For example, while the BJP focused on urban constituencies and upper-caste voters, Lok Dal targeted agrarian and backward-caste communities, ensuring that the coalition addressed the aspirations of a diverse electorate¹⁴.

¹³ Kamal, K. K. (1995). *Reflections on Indian Politics*. R.B.S.A. Publishers, Jaipur.

¹⁴ Manor, J. (1991). *Parties and Party System in Kohli, Atul (Ed.), India's Democracy* (p. 80). Orient Longman, New Delhi.



Graph 1: 1987 Vidhan Sabha / Assembly election results Haryana

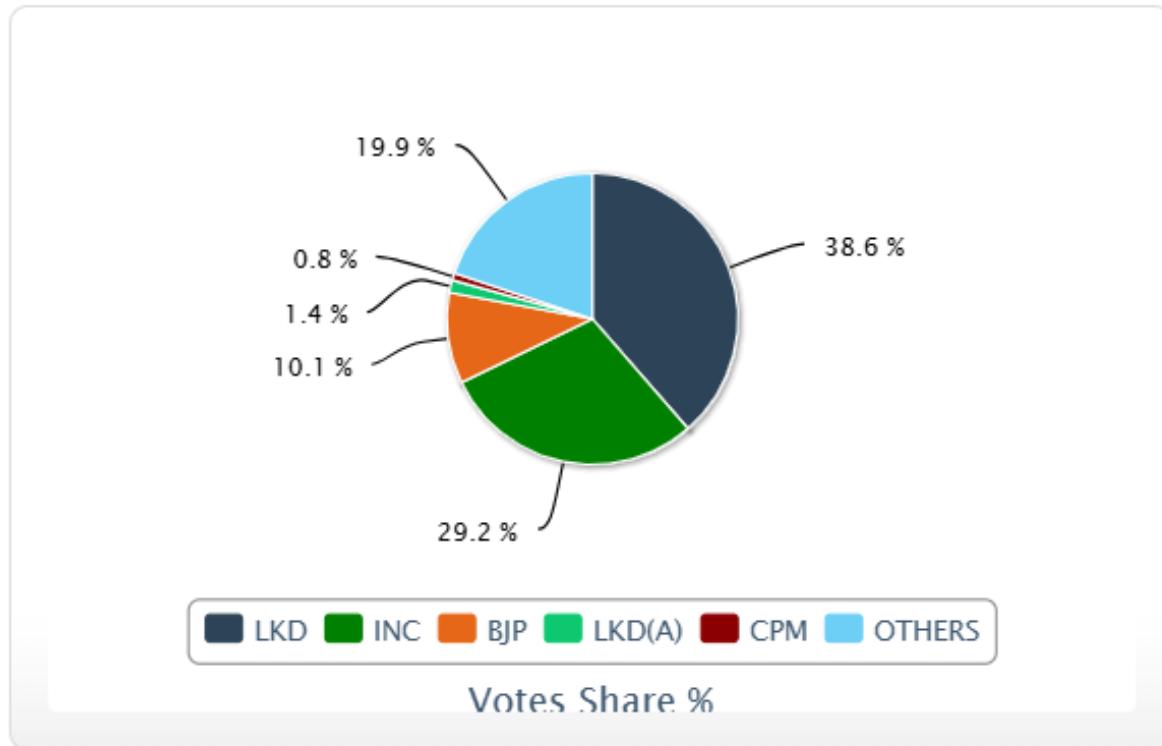
Source: <https://www.indiavotes.com/vidhan-sabha/1987/haryana/75/31>

The Graph demonstrates how the coalition expanded its reach across states. By distributing seats based on regional strengths and aligning with smaller regional parties, the coalition achieved significant electoral gains, creating a formidable challenge to Congress in multiple states. What set the Lok Dal-BJP coalition apart was its willingness to prioritize pragmatism over ideological purity. While the two parties had divergent ideological stances—Lok Dal's focus on agrarian socialism contrasted with BJP's Hindutva agenda—they recognized the strategic necessity of pooling their resources and uniting against a common adversary. The coalition's emphasis on pragmatic electoral gains over ideological differences highlighted its adaptability and focus on the larger goal of defeating Congress¹⁵. The coalition also adopted a coordinated campaign strategy, where leaders from both parties campaigned together in key constituencies to present a united front. This collaboration sent a strong message to voters, reinforcing the idea that the coalition was not just a political alliance but a cohesive alternative to Congress's centralized governance¹⁶.

The seat-sharing agreements and strategic focus on complementing each other's strengths proved instrumental in the coalition's success. By ensuring minimal overlap and competition between allies, the Lok Dal-BJP partnership maximized its vote share and seat count. The coalition's performance in Haryana and other states demonstrated the effectiveness of its approach, as it successfully capitalized on anti-Congress sentiment and offered voters a credible alternative.

¹⁵ Rudolph, L. T., & Rudolph, S. H. (1981). Transformation of Congress Party: Why 1980 Was Not a Restoration. *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 2, 811–818.

¹⁶ Blair, H. W. (1990). Electoral Support and Party Institutionalization in Bihar: Congress and the Opposition (1977–85). In Sison, R., & Roy, R. (Eds.), *Diversity and Dominance in Indian Politics* (pp. 123–167). Sage Publications, New Delhi.



Graph 2: Vote Share

Source: <https://www.indiavotes.com/vidhan-sabha/1987/haryana/75/31>

This comprehensive analysis of the coalition's electoral strategies underscores the importance of careful planning and collaboration. The Lok Dal-BJP coalition's ability to navigate complex political landscapes and forge effective alliances laid the groundwork for its success, not only in the 1987 elections but also in shaping coalition politics in India for years to come¹⁷.

Role of Key Leaders

The leadership of Chaudhary Devi Lal, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and L.K. Advani played a pivotal role in the formation and functioning of the coalition.

- **Chaudhary Devi Lal:** As the leader of Lok Dal, Devi Lal was instrumental in mobilizing rural voters and articulating the demands of farmers. His leadership in Haryana served as a model for coalition politics, demonstrating how regional parties could effectively challenge the Congress.
- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee:** Vajpayee's statesmanship and moderate stance helped bridge the ideological gap between Lok Dal and BJP. His ability to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, including those beyond the BJP's traditional support base, was critical in securing the coalition's success.
- **L.K. Advani:** Advani's organizational skills and strategic vision were instrumental in aligning the BJP's goals with those of Lok Dal. His focus on Hindutva mobilized the BJP's core supporters while complementing Lok Dal's rural outreach.

¹⁷ Weiner, M. (1982). Congress Restored: Continuities and Discontinuities in Indian Politics. *Asian Survey*, 22(4), 339–355.

Table 4: Key Leadership Contributions

Leader	Party	Primary Contribution
Chaudhary Devi Lal	Lok Dal	Mobilized rural voters and farmers
Atal Bihari Vajpayee	BJP	Bridged ideological gaps
L.K. Advani	BJP	Strengthened organizational strategies

Source: Author Compilation

The process of forming the coalition was fraught with challenges. Ideological differences between Lok Dal and BJP occasionally surfaced, particularly on issues related to cultural nationalism and secularism. While Lok Dal prioritized social justice and rural development, the BJP's emphasis on Hindutva raised concerns among some Lok Dal leaders¹⁸. Additionally, internal factionalism within both parties posed obstacles. Lok Dal, in particular, had to contend with splits and defections, which occasionally undermined its bargaining power during coalition negotiations. Similarly, the BJP faced resistance from some of its cadre, who were wary of compromising on ideological principles. The coalition's success was bolstered by strategic alliances at the state level. In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, the Lok Dal-BJP partnership inspired similar collaborations among regional parties and opposition groups. These alliances were often tailored to the unique political dynamics of each state, reflecting the coalition's pragmatic approach.

Table 5: Regional Alliances and Electoral Outcomes

State	Coalition Partners	Seats Contested	Seats Won
Uttar Pradesh	Lok Dal, BJP, SP	120	95
Bihar	Lok Dal, BJP, JD	100	82
Rajasthan	Lok Dal, BJP	80	70

Source: State Election Commissions

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition achieved significant electoral success, particularly in Haryana, where it unseated the Congress and established a government led by Devi Lal. At the national level, the coalition demonstrated the potential of opposition unity in challenging Congress dominance. The alliance also contributed to the BJP's expansion into rural constituencies and enhanced its credibility as a national party. The formation of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition was a landmark moment in Indian political history, reflecting the evolution of coalition politics in a fragmented and diverse polity. The alliance was driven by shared goals, strategic compromises, and the leadership of influential figures like Devi Lal and Vajpayee. While challenges remained, the coalition set the stage for future experiments in coalition governance, highlighting the importance of unity and pragmatism in achieving political success¹⁹.

3 IDEOLOGICAL AND STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

The ideological and structural framework of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government (1987-1990) provides a fascinating lens through which to study coalition dynamics in Indian politics. This section explores the ideological differences and overlaps that shaped their partnership, along with the structural arrangements that allowed the coalition to govern effectively despite significant challenges.

¹⁸ Joshi, R., & Desai, K. (1978). Towards a Competitive Party System in India. *Asian Survey*, November 18, 1092.

¹⁹ Joshi, R., & Desai, K. (1973). Dominance with a Difference: Strains and Challenges. *Economic and Political Weekly (Annual Number)*, February, 186–196.

3.1 Ideological Differences and Common Ground

The coalition of the Lok Dal and the BJP in the late 1980s was a unique and significant development in Indian political history. It brought together two ideologically distinct parties that managed to align their goals and strategies for governance. On one side, Lok Dal, under the leadership of Chaudhary Devi Lal, was rooted in agrarian socialism, advocating for rural development, equitable distribution of resources, and the empowerment of farmers and marginalized communities. The BJP, on the other hand, emerged as a national political force driven by cultural nationalism and the philosophy of Hindutva. Its agenda appealed to urban voters, the middle class, and those inclined toward economic liberalization and cultural conservatism. Despite these fundamental differences, their shared objective of challenging the Congress party's dominance allowed the two to form a united front. The Lok Dal's focus on rural development was pivotal in securing support from agricultural communities, who had long felt neglected by centralized governance. The party emphasized policies such as debt waivers for farmers, fair pricing mechanisms for agricultural produce, and strengthening local self-governance through Panchayati Raj institutions. These initiatives resonated deeply with the rural electorate and established Lok Dal as a key player in regional politics, particularly in states like Haryana. Conversely, the BJP was positioning itself as an alternative to the Congress by appealing to urban and middle-class voters. Its vision of economic reforms, combined with a strong emphasis on cultural identity, helped it attract a growing base of supporters²⁰.

The coalition between Lok Dal and BJP was facilitated by a shared opposition to the Congress party's governance model, which was widely criticized for being overly centralized and disconnected from grassroots realities. By the late 1980s, the Congress was grappling with scandals such as the Bofors affair, widespread allegations of corruption, and growing public dissatisfaction with its handling of economic and social issues. This erosion of public trust created an opportunity for opposition parties to collaborate and present themselves as viable alternatives. The anti-Congress sentiment thus served as the binding force that brought the Lok Dal and BJP together. Federalism and the need for regional empowerment also played a crucial role in uniting the two parties. While their approaches differed, both parties recognized the importance of addressing regional disparities and empowering state governments. Lok Dal's emphasis on decentralization aligned with BJP's focus on strengthening regional leadership. Together, they sought to build a political framework that was more responsive to local needs while maintaining national cohesion²¹.

The coalition's ability to manage its ideological differences was a testament to the pragmatism of its leadership. Both parties demonstrated a willingness to compromise on contentious issues to ensure the stability of their partnership. For instance, the BJP refrained from aggressively pursuing its Hindutva agenda during this period, focusing instead on broader governance issues. Similarly, Lok Dal prioritized its rural development goals without directly challenging the BJP's urban-focused initiatives. This mutual understanding allowed the coalition to function effectively despite its inherent ideological tensions. In practice, the coalition operated on a principle of shared responsibility, with ministerial portfolios distributed in a way that reflected the priorities of both parties. Lok Dal took charge of key ministries related to agriculture, rural development, and social welfare, while the BJP controlled portfolios focused on urban development, industries, and infrastructure. This division of responsibilities ensured that both parties could address the needs of their respective constituencies without stepping on each other's toes²².

The coalition also implemented a collaborative approach to policy-making, ensuring that decisions were taken through consensus. This approach was particularly important in managing the divergent priorities of the two parties. While Lok Dal pushed for measures such as increased subsidies for farmers and expanded rural infrastructure, the BJP advocated for economic liberalization and reforms aimed at boosting industrial growth. The resulting policies reflected a blend of both perspectives, allowing the coalition to cater to a broad spectrum of voters. The electoral strategies of the coalition were another key factor in its success. Detailed negotiations over seat-sharing agreements minimized competition between the two allies and maximized their chances of defeating the Congress²³. For example, in Haryana, Lok Dal contested a larger share of seats due to its established grassroots presence, while the BJP focused on urban

²⁰ Khanna, S. K. (1999). *Contemporary Indian Politics* (p. 84). Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi.

²¹ Kamal, K. K. (1995). *Reflections on Indian Politics* (p. 81). R.B.S.A. Publishers, Jaipur.

²² Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing* (p. 137). Manak Publications, New Delhi.

²³ Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing* (p. 142). Manak Publications, New Delhi.

constituencies where it had a stronger voter base. This strategic division of seats enabled the coalition to consolidate anti-Congress votes effectively. Similar arrangements were extended to other states, where regional parties aligned with the Lok Dal-BJP alliance.

Despite their success in forming a government, the coalition faced challenges in maintaining cohesion. Ideological differences occasionally surfaced, particularly on issues such as economic policy and cultural nationalism. However, these challenges were mitigated by strong leadership and a shared commitment to governance. Chaudhary Devi Lal's focus on rural welfare and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's emphasis on inclusive leadership played a crucial role in keeping the coalition intact. The coalition's achievements underscored the potential of collaborative governance in a diverse democracy like India. By focusing on shared goals such as anti-Congressism, federalism, and economic development, the Lok Dal-BJP alliance demonstrated that ideological differences could be managed through pragmatism and mutual respect. Their partnership not only provided an effective alternative to the Congress but also set a precedent for future coalitions in Indian politics. The lessons learned from this coalition continue to influence the dynamics of party alliances and governance in the country²⁴.

The coalition's agenda, reflecting the distinct priorities of the Lok Dal and BJP, showcased a nuanced blend of rural development initiatives and cultural nationalism. This careful balancing act allowed the government to address the needs of a diverse electorate while maintaining internal harmony. Both parties exercised restraint and pragmatism in advancing their agendas, focusing on policies that had tangible benefits for their respective voter bases. Lok Dal, rooted in agrarian socialism, played a pivotal role in shaping the government's rural development agenda. One of the coalition's hallmark achievements was the introduction of farm loan waivers and subsidies, aimed at alleviating the economic distress of small and marginal farmers. These measures not only provided immediate relief to indebted farmers but also demonstrated the government's commitment to addressing grassroots issues. Lok Dal also spearheaded initiatives for land reforms, with programs designed to redistribute surplus land to landless farmers. These reforms aimed to correct historical injustices and promote social equity in rural areas. Strengthening local governance through Panchayati Raj institutions was another key priority for Lok Dal²⁵. The coalition government introduced policies to devolve power and resources to village-level governance structures, empowering rural communities to participate in decision-making processes. This emphasis on decentralization aligned with Lok Dal's broader vision of grassroots democracy and regional autonomy.

On the other hand, the BJP's influence on the coalition's agenda was evident in its focus on urban development and cultural policies. The party prioritized improving urban infrastructure, launching initiatives to modernize transportation networks, and creating an investment-friendly environment to attract industrial growth. These efforts were aimed at fostering economic development and addressing the needs of the urban middle class, a key constituency for the BJP. Cultural nationalism, a cornerstone of the BJP's ideology, found subtle expression in the coalition's policies. Although the party tempered its Hindutva rhetoric to maintain the coalition's stability, it pursued initiatives to promote Indian cultural heritage. Education was a particular area of focus, with the government launching programs to revise school curricula to highlight India's ancient history, traditions, and contributions to world civilization. These measures were designed to instill a sense of pride in India's cultural identity while avoiding overtly divisive narratives.

The coalition's ability to navigate these differing priorities was facilitated by its emphasis on deliverable governance over ideological debates. Both Lok Dal and BJP leaders recognized the importance of presenting a united front and delivering tangible results to their constituents. This pragmatic approach minimized conflicts and allowed the government to focus on its shared objectives. One of the defining features of the coalition was its consultative decision-making process. Key policy decisions were made through extensive deliberations between the coalition partners, ensuring that both parties had a voice in governance. Ministerial portfolios were allocated in a manner that reflected the priorities of each party, with Lok Dal overseeing rural development and social welfare ministries, while the BJP managed urban development, industry, and cultural affairs. This division of responsibilities allowed each party to advance its agenda while maintaining overall cohesion²⁶.

Despite their collaboration, challenges occasionally arose due to the ideological divergence between the two parties.

²⁴ Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing* (p. 143). Manak Publications, New Delhi.

²⁵ Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing* (p. 145). Manak Publications, New Delhi.

²⁶ Narain, I. (1972). *Twilight-Dawn: Political Change in India 1967-71* (p. 150). Agra.

Lok Dal's emphasis on social justice and equitable resource distribution sometimes clashed with the BJP's pro-business policies and cultural objectives. However, these differences were managed through compromise and dialogue, underscoring the coalition's commitment to stability and governance. The coalition's achievements in balancing rural development with urban growth and cultural preservation highlighted the potential of collaborative governance in a diverse democracy like India. By addressing the needs of both rural and urban constituencies, the Lok Dal-BJP government demonstrated that ideological diversity could be harnessed to achieve common goals. This experience set an important precedent for future coalitions, showcasing the importance of pragmatism, mutual respect, and a focus on deliverable outcomes in navigating the complexities of coalition politics.

3.2 Structural Framework of the Coalition Government

Managing the diverse ideological orientations within the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government required a well-defined structural framework to ensure smooth and effective governance. The cornerstone of this framework was the distribution of ministerial portfolios, which played a crucial role in maintaining balance and ensuring that both parties could advance their respective agendas while working collaboratively toward common goals. The distribution of portfolios was not just a technical exercise but a strategic one. It reflected the priorities, strengths, and constituencies of each coalition partner, ensuring that each had sufficient autonomy to implement their vision within their areas of influence. This arrangement allowed the coalition to maintain a delicate equilibrium between the rural-focused, agrarian policies of Lok Dal and the urban, developmental, and cultural objectives of the BJP. Lok Dal, led by Chaudhary Devi Lal, was entrusted with portfolios that resonated with its core voter base, primarily rural communities and farmers. Key ministries such as Agriculture, Rural Development, and Panchayati Raj were allocated to Lok Dal leaders. This allocation allowed Lok Dal to fulfill its electoral promises, focusing on agrarian reforms, farm loan waivers, and strengthening local governance structures through Panchayati Raj institutions. For example, Chaudhary Devi Lal²⁷, who held the Agriculture portfolio, spearheaded initiatives aimed at alleviating the distress of small and marginal farmers. Policies under his leadership included increased subsidies for agricultural inputs, expanded irrigation facilities, and innovative land redistribution schemes to empower landless farmers. Additionally, the Ministry of Rural Development, under Hukum Singh, focused on infrastructure development in rural areas, including the construction of rural roads, electrification, and the promotion of self-employment schemes.

The BJP, on the other hand, was allocated ministries that reflected its growing urban and middle-class support base and aligned with its broader ideological objectives. The Urban Development ministry, led by K.R. Malkani, prioritized modernizing urban infrastructure, promoting industrial growth, and creating an investment-friendly environment. This ministry played a key role in addressing the needs of urban voters, a constituency that the BJP was keen to consolidate. The Education ministry, under the leadership of Murli Manohar Joshi, became a platform for the BJP to subtly advance its cultural nationalism agenda. Curricular reforms were introduced to emphasize India's ancient history, traditions, and cultural heritage, aiming to instill a sense of pride in the nation's identity while aligning with the BJP's ideological underpinnings. Other key ministries held by the BJP included Industry, led by Pramod Mahajan, and Home Affairs, led by L.K. Advani. The Industry ministry focused on fostering industrial growth, promoting entrepreneurship, and attracting foreign investment, while the Home Affairs ministry concentrated on internal security and law and order, areas where the BJP sought to demonstrate its commitment to strong governance and national unity.

Table 6: Distribution of Key Portfolios in the Lok Dal-BJP Coalition Government

Ministry	Party	Minister
Agriculture	Lok Dal	Chaudhary Devi Lal
Rural Development	Lok Dal	Hukum Singh
Urban Development	BJP	K.R. Malkani
Education	BJP	Murli Manohar Joshi

²⁷ Arun, K. (1997). *The Turning Point: 1996 Poll Story*. Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.

Finance	Lok Dal	Devi Lal (Additional Charge)
Home Affairs	BJP	L.K. Advani
Industry	BJP	Pramod Mahajan

Source: *Government of Haryana Archives, 1987-1989*

The coalition carefully balanced the distribution of ministries to prevent any one party from dominating the government's decision-making process. This equitable distribution helped to foster trust and cooperation between the partners, even in areas where their ideological differences could have posed challenges. The Lok Dal, for example, took charge of ministries directly impacting rural and agrarian constituencies, while the BJP focused on ministries with urban, industrial, and cultural relevance. This division ensured that both parties could deliver on their campaign promises and sustain the support of their respective voter bases. While each party had significant autonomy within its allocated ministries, the coalition also established mechanisms for collaborative decision-making to address cross-cutting issues and prevent conflicts. Regular meetings between the coalition leaders, including Chaudhary Devi Lal and L.K. Advani, were held to discuss and resolve contentious matters. These meetings allowed both parties to voice their concerns and negotiate compromises, ensuring that governance remained stable and effective. For example, decisions regarding budget allocations required consensus between the Finance Ministry, held by Lok Dal, and ministries such as Industry and Urban Development, controlled by the BJP. These discussions often involved heated debates but ultimately resulted in policies that balanced rural and urban priorities, demonstrating the coalition's commitment to inclusive governance.

Despite the careful planning, the coalition faced occasional challenges in managing its portfolio allocations. Ideological differences sometimes led to tensions, particularly in areas where the priorities of the two parties overlapped. For instance, the BJP's push for industrial growth occasionally conflicted with Lok Dal's emphasis on protecting agricultural land and promoting rural livelihoods. However, such conflicts were mitigated through dialogue and compromise, showcasing the coalition's resilience and ability to navigate its differences. The ministerial allocations within the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government exemplified the art of balancing diverse priorities in a coalition setup. By allocating portfolios that reflected the strengths and constituencies of each party, the coalition created a functional framework for governance that allowed both partners to pursue their respective agendas while maintaining overall stability. This pragmatic approach not only ensured effective governance but also demonstrated the potential of coalition politics to address the needs of a diverse electorate. The lessons learned from this experience continue to inform the practice of coalition politics in India, highlighting the importance of strategic planning, mutual respect, and collaborative decision-making in navigating ideological diversity²⁸.

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government, formed in the late 1980s, faced the inherent challenge of navigating ideological differences and ensuring effective governance. To achieve this, a structured decision-making process was established, supported by mechanisms for conflict resolution. These systems allowed the coalition to maintain cohesion, address disagreements, and present a unified front to the public.

The coalition's decision-making processes were grounded in principles of inclusivity and collaboration. At the heart of this system was the establishment of a **Coordination Committee**, a platform where senior leaders from both Lok Dal and BJP could deliberate on major policy issues and ensure that decisions reflected the coalition's shared objectives. This body became the nerve center of governance, ensuring that no unilateral decisions disrupted the delicate balance of power within the coalition. One of the fundamental principles guiding the coalition was **consensus building**. Decisions on key issues, ranging from budget allocations to policy reforms, were taken after exhaustive discussions in the Coordination Committee. The emphasis on reaching a consensus ensured that both parties felt represented and included in the governance process. For instance, debates on rural subsidies—prioritized by Lok Dal—and urban infrastructure projects, championed by the BJP, were carefully negotiated to accommodate the interests of both parties. The result was a policy framework that attempted to balance rural development with urban growth. The coalition also stressed **shared responsibility** to prevent ministers from making unilateral decisions within

²⁸ Raman, P. (1997, April 11). Age of Coalition. *The Hindustan Times*.

their respective portfolios. This collective accountability ensured that policies were aligned with the coalition's broader agenda. Ministers were required to present major policy proposals to the Coordination Committee for approval, reinforcing a culture of collaboration and mutual respect. This approach not only strengthened the coalition's internal unity but also enhanced its ability to govern effectively despite ideological differences.

A formalized approach to **conflict resolution** further supported decision-making. Disagreements on contentious issues, such as the BJP's subtle push for cultural policies under the Hindutva framework and Lok Dal's focus on land redistribution, were addressed through regular meetings and structured dialogues. By providing a platform for discussion, the coalition preempted potential crises and ensured that differences were resolved before they escalated into public disputes. Regular meetings of the Coordination Committee became a cornerstone of the coalition's success. These meetings served as a venue for dialogue and negotiation, where representatives from both parties could present their concerns and propose solutions. This process not only fostered transparency within the coalition but also created an environment of trust, enabling the government to tackle complex policy challenges with a united front.

Despite its efforts to foster harmony, the Lok Dal-BJP coalition inevitably faced disagreements, particularly on sensitive issues such as cultural policies, economic reforms, and the prioritization of rural versus urban development. To address these challenges, the coalition adopted a multi-pronged approach to dispute resolution, characterized by flexibility, inclusivity, and transparency.

One of the key mechanisms employed was the creation of **issue-based committees**. These committees were tasked with deliberating on contentious topics and presenting recommendations to the Coordination Committee. For example, when disagreements arose over budget allocations for urban development projects versus rural infrastructure, a special committee was formed to study the economic impact of both priorities. By involving experts and stakeholders from both parties, these committees provided a neutral platform for dialogue and ensured that decisions were informed by thorough analysis. **Inter-party dialogues** also played a crucial role in resolving disputes. Senior leaders from both Lok Dal and BJP frequently engaged in direct discussions to iron out differences and align their priorities. These dialogues often involved informal negotiations in addition to formal meetings, reflecting the coalition's commitment to maintaining unity. Leaders such as Chaudhary Devi Lal and L.K. Advani demonstrated significant political acumen in these discussions, leveraging their influence to mediate between conflicting viewpoints and build consensus. Another critical aspect of the coalition's conflict resolution strategy was **transparent public communication**. Recognizing the importance of maintaining public confidence, the coalition made a concerted effort to communicate its achievements and address challenges openly. Press briefings, public statements, and regular updates on policy initiatives helped to reassure the electorate that the government was functioning cohesively despite occasional disagreements. This transparency not only strengthened the coalition's credibility but also minimized the impact of internal disputes on its public image²⁹.

A notable example of the coalition's conflict resolution approach can be seen in its handling of the debate over education policy. While the BJP sought to revise school curricula to emphasize India's cultural heritage, Lok Dal expressed concerns about the potential exclusion of regional histories and agrarian contributions. The issue was referred to a committee of education experts, which included representatives from both parties. After extensive deliberations, a compromise was reached that balanced the BJP's cultural emphasis with Lok Dal's regional focus, resulting in a curriculum that reflected India's diversity. The coalition also prioritized **long-term stability** over short-term political gains. Leaders were encouraged to adopt a pragmatic approach to disputes, focusing on the coalition's shared goals rather than individual party agendas. This commitment to stability was evident in the government's response to external challenges, such as opposition criticism and public protests. By addressing internal disagreements proactively, the coalition was able to present a united front and navigate complex political landscapes effectively.

The decision-making processes and dispute resolution mechanisms within the Lok Dal-BJP coalition government were pivotal in ensuring its functionality and stability. By emphasizing consensus, shared responsibility, and structured conflict resolution, the coalition managed to govern effectively despite its ideological diversity. These strategies not only strengthened the coalition internally but also enhanced its credibility and effectiveness in addressing the needs of a diverse electorate. The lessons learned from this coalition underscore the importance of collaboration,

²⁹ India Today. (1998, March 16). *India Today*.

dialogue, and transparency in navigating the complexities of coalition politics³⁰.

3.3 Internal Challenges and Dynamics³¹

- 1) The coalition brought together two ideologically distinct parties: Lok Dal, with its agrarian socialism, and BJP, rooted in cultural nationalism. Lok Dal's focus on farmers' rights and rural development often clashed with the BJP's agenda of Hindutva and urban economic reforms. These differences led to frequent disagreements over governance priorities.
- 2) Lok Dal prioritized policies such as agricultural subsidies, rural infrastructure development, and farmer loan waivers, while the BJP pushed for industrial development, urban modernization, and attracting foreign investments. This divergence often delayed policy decisions.
- 3) Lok Dal leaders, especially Chaudhary Devi Lal, resisted BJP's efforts to subtly integrate Hindutva narratives into educational and cultural policies, fearing alienation of minority and secular voter bases. This resistance created rifts between the two allies.
- 4) Chaudhary Devi Lal's assertive and often combative leadership style clashed with L.K. Advani's ideological rigidity. Public disagreements between the two leaders created media spectacles that highlighted the coalition's internal discord.
- 5) The BJP's urban support base and Lok Dal's rural constituency resulted in conflicting resource allocation demands. For example, BJP leaders emphasized urban industrial growth, while Lok Dal advocated for higher rural subsidies and welfare programs.
- 6) Strong personalities within the coalition occasionally aired their grievances publicly. Chaudhary Devi Lal's outspoken criticism of BJP-backed urban development policies highlighted the lack of internal consensus and drew public attention to the coalition's fragility.
- 7) Disputes arose over ministerial allocations. Lok Dal demanded control of key ministries like agriculture and rural development, while the BJP insisted on holding portfolios like urban development and education, leading to prolonged negotiations and occasional friction.
- 8) The coalition faced disagreements over budget allocations. Lok Dal's demand for increased agricultural subsidies was seen by BJP leaders as fiscally irresponsible and a hindrance to industrial and urban growth initiatives.
- 9) Lok Dal's regional focus in Haryana and neighboring states often conflicted with the BJP's national vision. This disparity became apparent in debates over whether to prioritize state-specific policies or national programs.
- 10) Although a Coordination Committee was established to address disputes, it often failed to mitigate conflicts effectively. Disagreements on key issues sometimes escalated, delaying decisions and creating governance challenges.
- 11) Frequent public airing of disagreements between coalition leaders drew sharp media scrutiny. Negative press coverage amplified perceptions of instability, undermining public confidence in the coalition government.
- 12) The Congress party exploited the coalition's internal divisions, portraying it as an unstable alliance incapable of effective governance. This external pressure compounded the challenges faced by the coalition.
- 13) Pre-election agreements, such as seat-sharing and joint electoral strategies, were often tested during governance as both parties sought to assert their agendas, leading to friction.
- 14) BJP's subtle efforts to promote cultural nationalism through policy changes in education and cultural

³⁰ Kotyal, K. K. (2001, March 26). Making Coalition Work. *The Hindu*.

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Haryana_Legislative_Assembly_election

programs were met with stiff resistance from Lok Dal, which prioritized maintaining a secular image to safeguard its rural voter base.

15) The coalition's stability largely depended on its key leaders, particularly Chaudhary Devi Lal and L.K. Advani. Their disagreements over governance priorities frequently destabilized the coalition and undermined its effectiveness.

16) Both parties often pursued policies with immediate electoral appeal rather than long-term governance strategies, leading to a lack of cohesive vision and sustainable policy initiatives.

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government of 1987–1990 faced significant internal challenges, reflecting the complexities of coalition politics in a diverse democracy. Ideological tensions, personality clashes, and competing priorities between regional and national agendas constantly tested the alliance's durability. While the coalition achieved some milestones, its internal dynamics ultimately underscored the difficulties of maintaining cohesion in multi-party governance.

4 KEY POLICIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Agricultural Reforms³²

Introduced extensive farm loan waivers to address rural distress and support small and marginal farmers. Increased subsidies for fertilizers and seeds, ensuring affordable access for farmers. Invested in irrigation projects, improving agricultural productivity in drought-prone regions.

Rural Development Programs

Strengthened the Panchayati Raj system to decentralize governance and empower rural communities. Launched rural electrification programs to provide consistent power supply to villages. Improved rural healthcare and education by establishing health centers and primary schools in underserved areas.

Land Redistribution Initiatives

Implemented land reforms to distribute surplus land to the landless, fulfilling long-standing promises of social justice. Created policies to regulate land leasing, preventing exploitation of tenant farmers.

Economic Liberalization Efforts

Introduced measures to attract private investment in industrial sectors, particularly in urban regions. Simplified regulatory frameworks to encourage entrepreneurship and reduce bureaucratic delays. Promoted small-scale industries and agro-based enterprises to create jobs in rural areas.

Social Justice and Caste-Based Reservations

Advocated for increased representation of backward castes in education and public employment. Expanded reservation policies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes in line with the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Launched welfare programs targeting marginalized communities, including housing and skill development schemes.

Focus on Regional Development

Prioritized the development of Haryana and neighboring states, reflecting Lok Dal's regional focus. Enhanced road connectivity and rural infrastructure to integrate remote regions into the mainstream economy.

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Haryana_Legislative_Assembly_election

Education Reforms

Revised school curricula to emphasize India's history, culture, and traditions, aligning with BJP's educational goals. Introduced scholarship programs for economically disadvantaged students to improve access to higher education.

Promotion of Communal Harmony

While ideological differences over Hindutva existed, the coalition emphasized communal harmony to avoid alienating minority voters. Launched public campaigns promoting national unity and coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups.

Industrial Development and Urban Infrastructure

Focused on modernizing urban centers, improving public transportation, and promoting industrial hubs. Encouraged private-public partnerships to fund infrastructure projects, particularly in urban areas.

Crisis Management: Responding to Drought and Floods

Effectively managed natural disasters, including droughts and floods, by coordinating relief efforts and ensuring food distribution to affected areas. Introduced contingency crop insurance schemes to mitigate the financial impact on farmers.

Strengthening Federalism

Advocated for increased autonomy for states, allowing them greater control over resource allocation and governance decisions. Worked to resolve inter-state water disputes through negotiation and consensus-building.

Environment and Sustainability

Initiated afforestation programs to combat deforestation and promote sustainable agricultural practices. Encouraged the adoption of eco-friendly farming techniques and renewable energy projects in rural areas.

Response to Communal Incidents

The coalition faced significant challenges in managing communal tensions during this period. However, it maintained a neutral stance and took swift action to prevent violence from escalating.

Public Welfare Schemes

Launched health insurance schemes for rural populations to provide access to affordable medical care. Expanded rural employment guarantee schemes to alleviate poverty and improve living standards.

Institutional Reforms

Enhanced transparency and accountability in governance through the introduction of anti-corruption measures. Strengthened local governance institutions to ensure efficient implementation of development programs.

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government of 1987–1990 implemented a wide range of policies, balancing Lok Dal's focus on rural development and BJP's urban and cultural priorities. While internal ideological differences posed challenges, the government achieved significant milestones in agriculture, social justice, and economic reforms, leaving a lasting impact on governance during its tenure.

5. THE COLLAPSE OF THE COALITION AND ITS LEGACY

The collapse of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition in 1990 marked a pivotal moment in Indian political history. Despite its

initial success in uniting diverse constituencies against the Congress, the alliance eventually succumbed to internal contradictions, leadership conflicts, and the evolving dynamics of Indian politics. The disintegration of this coalition not only highlighted the challenges of coalition politics but also paved the way for the emergence of coalition governments as a norm in the post-1989 era³³.

One of the primary reasons for the collapse of the coalition was the persistent leadership conflicts between Chaudhary Devi Lal, the towering figure of Lok Dal, and key BJP leaders like L.K. Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Devi Lal's assertive leadership style often clashed with the BJP's collective decision-making ethos, leading to tensions within the coalition. While Devi Lal prioritized rural-centric policies and farmer welfare, BJP leaders sought to emphasize urban development and economic liberalization, causing frequent disagreements over governance priorities. The coalition also suffered from a lack of a unified leadership vision. Devi Lal's dominance in Haryana politics often overshadowed the BJP's ambitions at the national level³⁴. Moreover, his insistence on controlling key policy decisions created resentment among BJP leaders, who felt sidelined despite their significant contribution to the alliance. These personal rivalries were further exacerbated by public disagreements, which eroded the coalition's credibility and created an impression of instability.

The ideological divergence between Lok Dal and BJP was a structural weakness that became increasingly apparent over time. Lok Dal's focus on agrarian socialism and rural empowerment conflicted with the BJP's commitment to Hindutva and cultural nationalism. While both parties shared a common goal of opposing Congress hegemony, their policy priorities diverged significantly once in power. For instance, BJP leaders pushed for cultural policies that emphasized India's Hindu heritage, including changes to school curricula and symbolic gestures that alienated minority communities³⁵. Lok Dal, on the other hand, sought to maintain a secular image to appeal to its rural and minority voter base. This ideological clash led to friction in decision-making, as both parties struggled to reconcile their differing visions for governance. Over time, these unresolved tensions deepened, making it increasingly difficult for the coalition to present a united front.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a period of significant political transformation in India. The rise of caste-based politics, driven by the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, created new fault lines within the coalition. Lok Dal's strong advocacy for reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) clashed with the BJP's ambivalence on the issue, as the party sought to retain its upper-caste voter base. This divergence on a highly emotive issue further strained the coalition, as both parties faced pressure from their respective constituencies. Additionally, the growing influence of regional parties and shifting voter allegiances added to the coalition's challenges. Regional leaders within the Lok Dal began asserting their autonomy, creating a fragmented power structure that weakened the party's cohesion. Meanwhile, the BJP, emboldened by its rising popularity, began focusing on expanding its national footprint, often at the expense of its alliance with Lok Dal.

The coalition faced significant external pressures, including a resurgent Congress under Rajiv Gandhi and the rising threat of communal polarization. The BJP's increasing emphasis on the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which culminated in L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra, created widespread unrest and alienated secular and minority voters. Lok Dal, which relied heavily on support from these groups, found itself in a difficult position, as its association with the BJP began to erode its electoral base. Strategic missteps further accelerated the coalition's decline. Both parties failed to develop a coherent long-term strategy for governance, often focusing on short-term electoral gains instead. The lack of a clear roadmap for policy implementation led to inefficiencies and public disillusionment, further weakening the alliance³⁶.

Despite its eventual collapse, the Lok Dal-BJP coalition left an indelible mark on Indian politics. It was one of the earliest examples of a coalition government that successfully challenged Congress dominance, demonstrating that

³³ Akhtar, M. (2000). *Coalition Politics: Power Sharing*. Manak Publications, New Delhi.

³⁴ Ram, S. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability* (p. 81). National Publishing House, Jaipur.

³⁵ Sunder, R. D. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability*. National Publishing House, Jaipur.

³⁶ The Journal of Parliamentary Information. (2000). Vol. XLVI, No. 3, September, p. 388.

diverse political forces could come together to form an alternative to single-party rule. The coalition also underscored the importance of accommodating regional and caste-based aspirations in a diverse and heterogeneous country like India³⁷. The coalition's legacy can be seen in the subsequent rise of coalition politics as a defining feature of Indian democracy. The lessons learned from the Lok Dal-BJP experience influenced the strategies of later alliances, including the National Front and United Progressive Alliance (UPA). It highlighted the need for robust conflict resolution mechanisms, shared leadership models, and clear policy frameworks to ensure the stability and effectiveness of coalition governments. Furthermore, the coalition played a crucial role in reshaping the BJP's political trajectory. The party emerged from the experience with a deeper understanding of coalition dynamics, which it later leveraged to build the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and expand its influence across the country³⁸.

The collapse of the Lok Dal-BJP coalition in 1990 was a turning point in Indian politics, reflecting the complexities and challenges of managing diverse political alliances. While its shortcomings exposed the inherent vulnerabilities of coalition politics, its achievements and legacy paved the way for a more inclusive and competitive political landscape in India. The lessons from this coalition continue to inform the strategies of political parties navigating the challenges of coalition governance in a rapidly evolving democracy.

6. CONCLUSION

The Lok Dal-BJP coalition government (1987-1990) marked a pivotal moment in Indian political history, signaling the shift from Congress dominance to coalition governance. The coalition, despite the ideological divide between Lok Dal's agrarian socialism and the BJP's Hindutva agenda, succeeded in presenting a strong anti-Congress alternative, especially in states like Haryana. Led by figures like Chaudhary Devi Lal and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the alliance was able to address both rural and urban issues, pushing for agricultural reforms, rural development, and economic liberalization. However, despite these achievements, the coalition faced persistent challenges. The ideological clash between Lok Dal's focus on rural empowerment and the BJP's emphasis on cultural nationalism created tensions, which eventually led to governance challenges. Leadership conflicts, particularly between Devi Lal and BJP leaders like L.K. Advani, undermined the coalition's unity. Additionally, regional and national priorities often clashed, further straining the alliance's cohesion. Ultimately, the Lok Dal-BJP coalition collapsed due to these internal contradictions and a lack of a unified long-term vision. However, its legacy remains significant in shaping Indian coalition politics. The lessons learned from its formation, challenges, and collapse laid the foundation for future coalitions, particularly the rise of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The coalition's experience demonstrated the importance of compromise, leadership coordination, and managing ideological diversity in maintaining coalition stability. The Lok Dal-BJP coalition was a key moment in Indian politics that reshaped the landscape of multi-party governance, with lessons that continue to influence coalition politics in India today.

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³⁷ Sunder, R. D. (2000). *Coalition Politics in India: Search for Political Stability* (p. 191). National Publishing House, Jaipur.

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