Minority Governments in India

The puzzle of elusive majorities

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4 The puzzle of minority governments in the Lok Sabha

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Introduction

From 1989 through 2004, while the Congress (I) party was displaced from its majority position, it remained at the ideological center of political competition in the sense that its policies balanced off against both the emphasis on Hindu nationalism, propagated by the Indian right led by the BJP, and the focus on redistribution and welfare advocated by the left and the center-left forces. Thus, one might have imagined that the Congress (I) could have entered into coalition with either one of the other two major ideological formations, or if coalitions were infeasible because of distaste for the long-ruling Congress on the part of other parties, one might have imagined that Congress, as the pivotal player, would form a minority government that would be hard to topple. In fact, the former never occurred, and the latter occurred only twice out of the five cases of minority parliaments. Moreover, the largest party was *not* even a member of these minority governments in two of the five cases (in 1989 and 1996).

   This chapter aims to solve these puzzles about the composition and duration of minority governments in India. With respect to the composition of minority governments, the chapter argues that:

a   When the ideologically pivotal Congress (I) Party is sufficiently marginalized on the anti-Congress dimension, it will refrain from forming a government.
b   In contrast, non-centrist parties will always want to form a government whenever asked to do so by the head of state.

With regard to cabinet stability of minority governments, the chapter argues that:

c   Non-centrist parties cannot build a minority cabinet that would be more durable than those that include the ideologically centrist Congress (I).
d   The relative durability of such non-centrist minority governments should vary with their size.

The puzzle of Indian minority governments

In the six general parliamentary elections which were held from 1989 through 2004, after the Congress Party lost its position of dominance, no other party or grouping achieved majority support in parliament with the exception of the electoral alliance of parties led by the Bhararitya Janata Party (BJP) under the National Democratic Alliance label in 1999. The composition and durability of Indian minority cabinets during this period offers an intriguing puzzle in comparative politics because of the differences between what can be found in India, on the one hand, and in Western European states, such as Denmark, Norway or Sweden, on the other hand, where there has been a long history of minority governments (Strøm 1990: 58). In Western European countries, minority governments often are formed by parties – sometimes quite small parties – that are centrally located in the space of issue competition (ibid.: 74–84, 110, 244). Supported tacitly either by the right or the left, or sometimes by both, such minority governments can be relatively long-lasting. Moreover, their durability appears to depend more on their coalitional status (coalition versus single-party) than on their support base (ibid.: 115–17). In stark contrast to these patterns, three of the five post-election minority governments in India between 1989 and 1998 were formed by non-centrist parties and the longevity of the cabinets seemed to be closely linked to the size of the minority government party or coalition.

The account of the formation of minority governments presented in the chapter builds on Strøm's (1990) neo-institutional theory. That theory gives rise to the expectation that the institutional structures of India's adversarial Westminster-style system should provide political parties with strong incentives to form minority governments rather than majority coalitions in a parliament where no single party has a majority of the seats, and that the resulting minority government should include centrist parties (Strøm 1990: 244). According to Strøm, adversarial systems encourage the formation of minority governments when a majority winner is absent because of the anticipation of future elections, which, in such systems, are both competitive and decisive of who will form the next government. Since incumbency tends to carry greater electoral costs than opposition status, parties may choose to stay outside the executive temporarily so as to be in a stronger position to form a government after the next election (ibid.: 91, 237). As for the ideological content and composition of minority governments, Strøm points out that 'parties with centrist location have much greater bargaining power than parties at the extremes, particularly in low-dimensionality spaces. It is natural to assume that this bargaining advantage makes it easier for centrist parties to form minority governments than it would be for extremist parties' (ibid.: 78). Indeed, Strøm finds that in his data pool, consisting of the established democracies of the Western world, 'in left-right space minority governments tend to be more centrist than majority coalitions' (ibid.: 244).

Although the prediction of minority governments in the absence of majority parties is consistent with what happened in India in the 1989–98 period, both the composition and duration of Indian minority governments violate expectations of most

coalition models, which predict that parties that are central will be part of the winning coalition, especially when they are large parties (Crombez 1996; van Deemen 1989, 1991; van Roozendaal 1992a, 1992b). Moreover, while there is a substantial literature on cabinet durability (see review in Grofman and van Roozendaal 1997), there is not a well-developed theory for cabinet duration of minority governments. Even Strøm goes only so far as to state that minority cabinets, in general, last for shorter periods than majority ones; that single-party minority cabinets are more stable than those formed by coalitions; and that minority cabinets perform better in those states where they are more frequent (1990: 116–17, 238). Thus, existing theory does not help us explain (a) why the party forming the minority government was not consistently the largest party; (b) why a centrist party, Congress (I), was not part of the minority government in India most of the time, even though it was always a substantially sized party even when it lacked a majority; and (c) why some post-election minority governments lasted considerably longer than others.

To explain the actual composition and durability of minority governments in India, the chapter presents a two-dimensional model of the space of the Indian party system. In addition to their place on an ideological left–right divide, political parties are also distinguished in terms of their degree of antipathy to the Congress Party, whose long-term dominance in the party system has made cooperation with it difficult to accept by some parties. As long as general elections produced a majority parliament, anti-Congressism affected government formation only if the anti-Congress parties managed to win a parliamentary majority, which happened only once, in 1977. In parliaments without a majority party, however, the position of parties on the anti-Congress dimension has considerable influence on the dynamics of government formation, as it changes the relative attractiveness of coalitions that include Congress and coalitions that exclude Congress.

The role of an ideological dimension in structuring the pattern and dynamics of party competition in a patronage democracy, such as India, has been criticized recently (Chandra 2004). Nonetheless, results from cross-national research provide evidence about the relevance of the left–right spatial distinction in making sense of the Indian political party space (Huber and Inglehart 1995). Moreover, by retaining the use of the ideological scale we make the Indian case directly comparable with European parliamentary systems that have an established tradition of coalition governance. The use of the second dimension builds on an earlier attempt in the literature (Park and Mesquita 1979) linking the formation and success of an anti-Congress coalition to the degree of ambiguity in parties' policy positions: the more ambiguous these positions, the more flexible parties can be in accepting one another as coalition partners even though the Congress may divide them by being in the center of the space. However, the approach to the idea of anti-Congressism presented here is different in two ways. First, anti-Congressism is explicitly posited as a secondary dimension of party competition rather than a kind of discount factor that reduces the ideological and policy distance among the non-Congress parties. Second, the operationalization of the valence dimension is also novel: the value of anti-Congressism is the result of the long-term historical legacy of opposition to Congress in the electoral arena.

Assessing conventional explanations of minority governments

India's minority governments in the period 1989–2004 cannot be easily explained by conventional theories of minority government formation and durability. According to a long tradition of research on party systems and patterns of government formation, minority governments are associated with high degrees of fragmentation, polarization and instability in the party system, which reduce both the parties' willingness to bargain with each other to form a majority coalition and the certainty of the information that they have about each other's strategies, preferences and goals (Dodd 1976). In general, this argument is consistent with the recent pattern of minority governments in India and helps identifying the transformation of the party system as a very important variable potentially precipitating the formation of undersized governments. However, the precise composition of the particular minority governments that have been formed after each of the elections we have considered remains unaccounted for.

A different line of explanation predicts that minority governments will be formed by a player that is located in the center of the issue space of the party system. Building on Black's (1958) well-known median voter theorem, which holds that the winset of the median player is empty in one dimension under majority rule, a number of authors have argued that a centrally located party can divide the majority opposition and form a minority government on its own (Crombez 1996; Laver and Shepsle 1996; van Roozendaal 1992a, 1992b). By forming a government on its own rather than sharing office with coalition partners, the center party can maintain control of the portfolio allocation process, which allows it to maximize its office benefits. At the same time, since the winset of the median player is empty, by forming a minority government the center party can also maximize the likelihood that government policy would reflect its own ideal point.

In this vein, Laver and Shepsle (1996) propose that a minority government will be formed by a *very strong party*, which is characterized by having 'an ideal point such that there is no alternative government preferred by a majority to one that gives the very strong party all portfolios' (1996: 263). Van Roozendaal (1992a, b) predicts that the likelihood of both the formation and the stability of a minority government increases when the central party is also numerically dominant. Crombez (1996) arrives at essentially the same conclusion and predicts that the larger and more centrist the plurality party the greater the likelihood that it would form a minority government.

These explanations would lead one to expect that the Congress Party should play the leading role in the formation of minority government in India thanks to its traditionally centrist location of the Congress Party in the Indian party system, which has been well established and recognized both in the India-specialist and the broader comparative politics literature (Huber and Inglehart 1995; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). In fact, it was precisely the centrist location of the Congress Party that led Riker (1976, 1982) to make sense of the unique development of the Indian party system and its exceptionalism under Duverger's Law.

One would have expected the Congress to take advantage of its centrist location in the parliamentary realm in exactly the same way as Riker had observed it in the electoral arena of party competition. To be more precise, given that the center party is always a Condorcet winner in a hung parliament, as long as there is one dimension, one would expect the Congress to be able to form a stable minority government thanks to its ideologically pivotal position. As long as the party controlled the median legislator, there could be no ideologically connected majority coalition of which it would not be a member. In turn, this advantage should have given the Congress the leverage to form and maintain a government of its own. However, clearly this was the case only once.

A different explanation of minority governments is offered by Grofman, Straffin and Noviello (1996) who model cabinet formation as a sequential process of proto-coalition formation. According to this model, a minority government will have a knife-edge quality to it in that it will be formed only when two proto-coalitions have reached equal size and no further expansion is impossible. In a sense, this model provides a theoretical foundation for earlier observations by Taylor and Laver (1973) and Herman and Pope (1973) according to which most minority governments, in Western Europe, are formed by near-majority size parties. However, clearly some other dynamics must be at work in India. As shown, the minority governments in this period have varied considerably in terms of the size of their parliamentary basis.

A third approach to understanding the formation of minority governments stresses the institutional incentives that encourage office- and policy-seeking political parties not to enter executive office and allow the formation of a minority cabinet instead of a majority coalition (Bergman 1993; Laver and Budge 1992; Strøm 1990; Strøm, Budge and Laver 1994). A number of different explanations have been proposed in this new-institutionalist vein. For example, Bergman (1993) links the formation of minority governments to negative parliamentary rules of cabinet formation, while Strøm *et al.* (1994) point out those restrictive legislative rules favor minority coalitions, while provisions for mandatory government size, as in the case of a constructive no-confidence vote, rule out the formation of a minority government.

The most complete and influential account of minority government formation in the neo-institutional perspective is provided by Strøm (1990) who identifies two institutions that provide incentives for political parties not to enter office: the influence of the parliamentary opposition on policy and the electoral decisiveness of government formation. The stronger the role of the opposition in the policy-making process, the greater the likelihood that policy-seeking potential coalition partners may want to stay outside the formal structure of the executive in order to avoid incurring the electoral costs of incumbency. This disincentive to enter executive office is further exacerbated where electoral outcomes are decisive of coalitional bargaining power: instead of entering office now, which is costly in electoral terms, parties may strategically calculate that it is better to wait until their electoral chances will allow them to enter office on more advantageous terms in the future and let someone else incur the costs of incumbency in the meantime.

Strøm's theory predicts the formation of minority governments in India consistently. Based on the two institutional variables, India belongs to the 'adversarial' category of states that are characterized by low opposition influence over policy and high electoral decisiveness. In such systems, Strøm expects the election of a hung parliament to be followed by the formation of minority governments rather than majority coalitions, although given that most adversarial states use the plurality electoral system, he also expects hung parliaments to be rare phenomena in such cases. However, even this theory does not tell us why we see the formation of a minority government by a particular party, or coalition of parties, at any given point in time rather than another. Although Strøm's model identifies the institutional foundations of the incentives that discourage Indian parties from rushing to form majority coalitions, it does not predict which set of parties will actually form a government.

In sum, existing models of coalition formation either lack predictions as to when minority governments will form, or if they do predict minority governments they lack predictions as to which minority government will form, or if they do predict which minority government will form (e.g., the largest party or the most central party) these predictions do not always work in India.

A model of minority party governments in India

Government formation

The point of departure for the following analysis is the assumption that the government formation games in India can be modeled in a two-dimensional Euclidean space. In this model, while parties have a location on an ideological left–right dimension, political parties also distinguish themselves along a second important dimension of conflict that measures the degree of their antipathy towards the former dominant party, the Congress (I).

Figure 4.1 provides graphic descriptions of the spatial context of the Lok Sabha after each of the five elections. The location of the parties along the horizontal dimension is defined by their estimated ideological position on the left–right spectrum, while their position on the anti-Congress dimension is estimated on the basis of the length and the strength of their opposition to the Congress in the pre-1989 history of the party system.[1] Since the BJP has had the longest record of opposition to the former dominant party, it is located the farthest from the Congress (I) along the vertical axis, while the National Front, led by the Janata Dal, which was the most recent anti-Congress formation, had the shortest such record. The ordinal ranking of the players has not changed throughout the period we are looking at. Thus, on the left–right scale, the ranking of parties has been consistently the following: Left Front, National Front, (United Front), Congress (I), BJP. On the anti-Congress dimension, the ordinal ranking of players from least to most pro-Congress is: BJP, Left Front, National Front, United Front, Congress (I).

In the usual left–right dimension, it is apparent from these figures that Congress (I) is always the median party. In two dimensions, however, there may be no player that is the median on both dimensions (Kadane 1972), and it easy to see that, as we
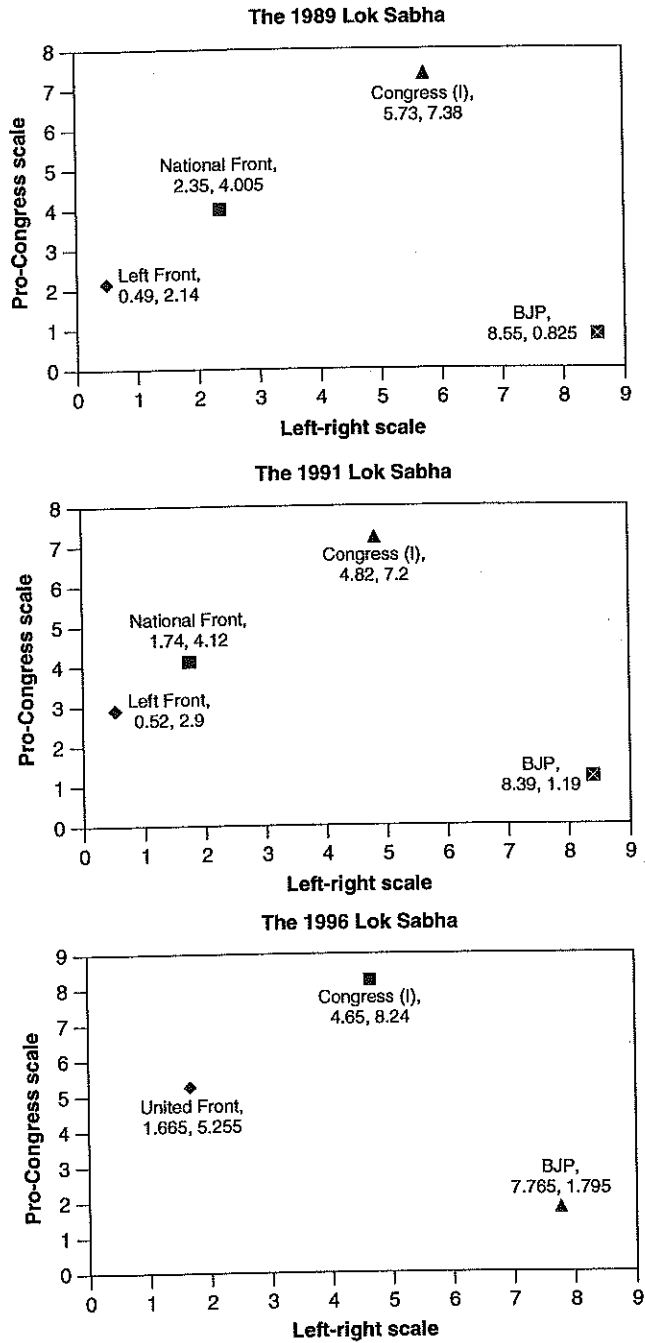
The 1989 Lok Sabha

Congress (I), 5.73, 7.38

National Front, 2.35, 4.005

Left Front, 0.49, 2.14

BJP, 8.55, 0.825

Pro-Congress scale

Left-right scale

The 1991 Lok Sabha

Congress (I), 4.82, 7.2

National Front, 1.74, 4.12

Left Front, 0.52, 2.9

BJP, 8.39, 1.19

Pro-Congress scale

Left-right scale

The 1996 Lok Sabha

Congress (I), 4.65, 8.24

United Front, 1.665, 5.255

BJP, 7.765, 1.795

Pro-Congress scale

Left-right scale

Figure 4.1 Models of five spatial voting games in the Lok Sabha, 1989–2004 (*Continued overleaf*)

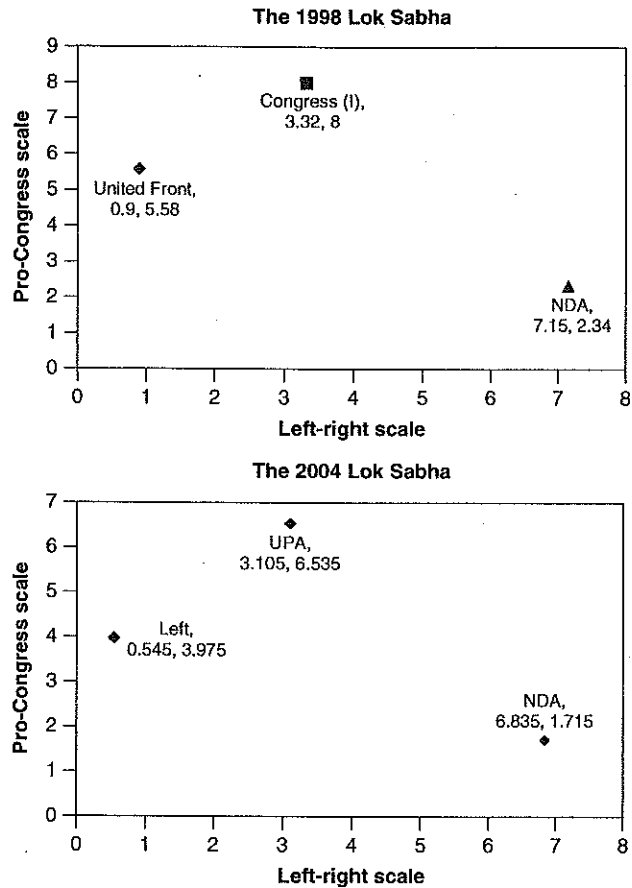**The 1998 Lok Sabha**

The 2004 Lok Sabha

Figure 4.1 Continued

have conceptualized the space of Indian political competition, the only party that could be the median on both dimensions is Congress (I), but it will be the median on both dimensions only under special circumstances. Congress (I) occupies an extreme position along the anti-Congress (I) dimension as it is, by definition, the most pro-Congress player. But Congress (I) is also the most ideologically centrist party. Thus, no other party could be a median on both dimensions. But, because of its extreme position on the anti-Congress dimension, Congress (I) can be a median on that second dimension as well *only* if it is a majority party.

The absence of a party that is central on both dimensions of political competition has important implications for the structure of coalitions in India. According to the standard view in the spatial modeling literature, party coalition choices will, in part, be determined by the ideological proximity of proposed coalition partners (see e.g., literature review in Laver and Schofield 1990). However, we add to this the notion

that party coalitional choices will be affected by the party's Shapley-Shubik power score, which, in the spatial context, can be specified by each party's Shapley-Owen value (Owen and Shapley 1989). In one dimension, the median player has a Shapley-Owen power of 1, which in fact means that this player has *all* the power in the game and thus can determine its outcome. In multiple dimensions, there is no player with a Shapley-Owen power score of 1 unless there is a majority party. Recognizing the existence of an anti-Congress dimension in Indian politics dramatically changes the government formation game from what it would be if we treated India as one-dimensional, both because it changes how we model the proximity of the actors and because it changes how we estimate their (relative) Shapley-Owen values. In particular, even though it remains central on one dimension, once Congress loses its majority status, in a two-dimensional competition it need not be the party with the highest Shapley-Owen score.

However, this loss of power only applies to the governing potential (Sartori 1976) of the Congress (I). Strictly speaking, anti-Congressism is a valence issue and *not* a policy dimension.[2] Therefore, once a government is formed, the party system resumes its one-dimensional format with respect to policy-making, so the ideologically centrist party, Congress (I) becomes the pivotal actor of the game again. In other words, although sufficient marginalization on the anti-Congress dimension can keep the Congress (I) away from entering government, it cannot affect its ability to destabilize any government that it is not a part of by refusing to support its policies. In terms of its blackmail potential, Congress (I) remains the pivotal player that can determine the stability of the standing government.

In an adversarial system, the government formation process both follows the principle of electoral responsiveness and is limited by the electoral identifiability of government alternatives. The former means that the head of state invites parties to form a government in a descending order of the number of their parliamentary seats; the latter suggests that the coalitions are formed before rather than after the electoral stage. Therefore, when the election produces a hung parliament, the government formation process will only decide which of the competing pre-electoral alternatives forms the executive. We expect that the above considerations will have a direct bearing on the choice of players' strategies in the government formation game under the institutional incentives of the adversarial system.

Specifically, it is expected that the centrist Congress (I) will be able to form a minority government only if it is both large enough to be asked by the President to do so *and* if the degree of anti-Congressism is such that the Congress (I) still remains the most powerful player in the government formation game in Shapley-Owen terms. However, when the Congress (I) is not both the plurality party and the party that is the most powerful one in Shapley-Owen terms, then it will not be able to form a government. Instead, it will choose to stay in opposition temporarily, and wait for the next election to provide it with stronger bargaining power. Congress (I), as the ideologically pivotal party, is particularly well positioned to use this delaying tactic, because by playing off the extreme parties against each other, it can drive a wedge between them. This strategy may reduce its marginalization on the anti-Congress dimension and improve its electoral chances at the next polls. In other

Table 4.1 The estimated Shapley-Owen power scores of the three pivotal party alliances, 1989–2004

Year	National Front (United Front)*	Congress (I)	BJP (NDA)
1989	0.40	0.38	0.22
1991	0.38	0.42	0.20
1996	0.41	0.39	0.19
1998	0.40	0.44	0.16
1999	0	0	1
2004	0.36	0.46	0.18

* Left Front in 2004.

words, as an ideologically pivotal party, Congress (I) is particularly well positioned to increase the electoral costs of incumbency for its adversaries.

The appendix at the end of this chapter shows exactly how the Shapley-Owen values were calculated for the major Indian parties for each of the four post-election legislatures examined; Table 4.1 presents the results of our calculations. It is apparent that, in only three elections (1991, 1998 and 2004) is Congress (I) the most powerful player in Shapley-Owen terms, and from our earlier data we see that in only two of these cases (1991 and 2004) is Congress (I) both the most powerful player in Shapley-Owen terms and the plurality party in parliament.

While Congress (I), because of its policy centrality, has the option of destabilizing any coalition, we argue that non-Congress (I) players will seize the opportunity and try to form a government whenever asked to do so by the Head of State – regardless of the party's relative power score. We expect them to do so due to a strategic calculation that aims at denying governmental status for their opponents on the other ideological pole. Given its ideologically pivotal position, a Congress (I) government should be preferred by both the left and the right to a government formed by the party located at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Therefore, whenever the Congress (I) declines an invitation to form a government, the party that is next in line should accept the role, for doing otherwise would allow the other extreme off-center formation to be given this invitation. Clearly, the left would want to prevent the right from forming a lasting government, just as the right would not want to see the left in office even though it may share with the left a strong anti-Congress (I) sentiment.

Government stability

We also expect that the duration of cabinets headed by non-centrist parties will in no case exceed the longevity of a Congress (I) minority government, but will vary with the size of their parliamentary support. The larger the governing party or coalition, the closer it is to the majority threshold, which will allow them to acquire the support of *ad hoc* allies on critical bills more easily than smaller parties or coalition can. Thus, *ceteris paribus* larger parties should form more durable minority governments than smaller parties. However, we expect this to be true only of post-election cabinets. Governments that are formed later in the term of the legislature

may be affected by too many additional intervening variables that our hypothesis cannot possibly account for.

These expectations are based on the theory of dominant and central players (Einy 1985; Peleg 1981; van Roozendaal 1992a, b), which is derived from the more general theory of simple games (Shapley 1962). A simple game is an N-person cooperative game in which the set of all coalitions that players can form falls into two groups: winning and losing coalitions. A winning coalition is defined by its ability to control the game and determine its outcome. A special type of winning coalition is the so-called minimum winning coalition (Riker 1962; von Neuman and Morgenstern 1944), each subset of which is a losing coalition.

Legislative politics, and the politics of cabinet stability, can be appropriately modeled as a weighted majority voting game, which is a special kind of simple game. In a weighted majority voting game, each player has a different degree of decision-making or voting power. In the context of legislative politics, the voting power of players, i.e. the political parties in parliament, is defined by the number or percent of parliamentary seats that they have. As its name suggests, the decision-making rule, or quota, in a weighted majority voting game is some majority criterion, for example, simple majority, absolute majority or super-majority. In a weighted majority voting game, the winning coalition must have a voting power that is greater than the quota. If the voting power of a coalition is less than the quota, then, by definition, the coalition is a losing one, and if the voting power of the coalition is exactly equal to the quota, then the coalition is a blocking one since it can stop any other coalition from determining the outcome of the game.

According to Peleg (1981), among the possible sets of coalitions that players can form in a simple game, coalitions P and S are equally desirable for a player A if this player can form a winning coalition with either P or S. If A can form a winning coalition with P set of parties but not with S, then P is more desirable for A then S. Peleg derives the concept of the dominant player from this desirability relationship. If a player i is a member of a winning coalition P and i can form another winning coalition outside P such that P-i cannot do the same, then P is dominated by i. If P-i can form a winning coalition outside P, and i can also do so, then i is said to weakly dominate P. If there is at least one winning coalition in a simple game that is dominated by a player i, then the simple game is called a dominated simple game.

Van Roozendaal (1992a) identifies three necessary conditions for a dominant player to be present. First, only the largest player in the game can be dominant. In the context of the legislative arena this simply refers to the party with the largest number of seats. Second, the largest player can be dominant only if its weight is equal to at least half of the quota, i.e. the number of votes that a coalition needs to win the game (Einy 1985). In other words, if the decision-making rule is majority, which it is in most parliaments, then the largest party must control at least half of 50% + 1, that is 25% + 1 of the seats. Third, if A stands for the set of players with which the largest player can form the minimum winning coalition that has the smallest overall voting power, then there must be at least one coalition of players outside A that can form a winning coalition with the largest player but not with A. As noted above, however, this last condition is not necessary for weak domination.

The concept of the dominant player is policy-blind or ideology-blind. What makes the dominant player so powerful and effective in maintaining a stable cabinet is its size. In most legislative games, however, interactions among parties are driven not only by office but also by policy-seeking motivations. The assumption that parties are interested in forming ideologically connected coalitions, in which the conflict of their interest (Axelrod 1970) will be kept at a minimum, has led to identifying another key player, the central player, who owes its strategic importance to its policy position rather than to its voting power. The concept of the central player is built on this assumption that parties are interested in policy-seeking. It is further assumed that each player in the game has a reflexive, complete and transitive position on a single policy dimension R. Following Einy's work, van Roozendaal defines player i as the central player of a weighted majority voting game when the absolute value of the difference between the total weights, or voting power, of all players located to the left and to the right of i on R is less than the weight of i itself. Formally, player i is a central player if $\quad |w(R+(i)) - w(R-(i))| < w_i$

where

$$R + (i) = \{j \in N \mid j \neq i \text{ and } jRi\}$$
$$R - (i) = \{j \in N \mid j \neq i \text{ and } iRj\}.$$

R+(i) stands for all players located to the left of player i's position on policy order R, and R−(i) stands for all players located to the right of player i's position on policy order R.

It follows from this definition that any winning coalition that is connected along R must include the central player. Furthermore, since R is the underlying dimension of the most important values that the players are concerned with, the compatibility of the coalition members' respective positions on R will become a critical factor sooner or later in the coalition's lifespan. Thus, if there is a central player present in the game, then it must be included in the cabinet so that the cabinet can be durable. Otherwise, if a central player is present in the legislative game but is left out of the cabinet coalition then it will always be able to engineer the defeat of the standing coalition on any issue related to R. In turn, it can negotiate the formation of an R-connected coalition in which it will be included. Since by assumption parties prefer inclusion in government to exclusion from it, the central player will have an incentive to de-stabilize any cabinet of which it is not a part.

We can summarize the various hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Elections that result in hung parliaments will be followed by the formation of a minority government by one of the pre-electoral coalitions that present a government alternative.

Hypothesis 2: Non-Congress (I) players always form a government when invited by the head of state to do so. The Congress (I) forms a government, when asked, only if it is the most powerful player in the two-dimensional government formation game.

Hypothesis 3: No minority government excluding the Congress (I) will be more durable than a government including the Congress (I).

Hypothesis 4: The longevity of non-Congress (I) minority governments positively varies with the dominant status of the party that leads the government.

The following section reviews the data from the post-1989 Indian parliaments in the light of these hypotheses.

Minority governments in India, 1989–2004

The Ninth Lok Sabha (1989–1991)

After the 1989 election, the Congress (I) emerged with the plurality of the seats, however, it was not the most powerful player in the two-dimensional space. Although the party could have plausibly exploited its centrist ideological position to form a government by dividing the left and the right opposition, the anti-Congress parties coordinated among themselves well enough in the election to ensure the defeat of a significant number of Congress (I) candidates throughout the country. As a result of the strength of the anti-Congress forces in the Lok Sabha, the former dominant party found itself sufficiently marginalized on the anti-Congress dimension; the estimated Shapley-Owen power score of the Congress (I) in 1989 was second only to that of the National Front. As expected, the plurality party refrained from accepting the invitation of the President to allow the next largest party with the most voting power, the National Front, to do so.

It is important to stress that the power score of the Congress (I) was quite close to that of the National Front. Therefore, the Congress (I) could plausibly calculate that it would be able to assume an unrivalled ideologically pivotal status once the prevailing line of division in the party system moves from polarization between the anti- and the pro-Congress forces to one where parties are divided primarily by their ideological positions, the Congress (I). In other words, after the 1989 election the Congress (I) could afford to spend time in opposition and postpone its entry into government until a more opportune moment was to come. Thus, the inter-party dynamics in the Ninth Lok Sabha suggested that although a strong degree of anti-Congressism may be successful in constraining the *governing* potential of the former dominant party, its *blackmail* potential remains incredibly strong thanks to its pivotal location along the left–right spectrum. Let us examine in detail what actually happened.

Following parliamentary convention, the President of the Republic, R. Venkataraman, invited Rajiv Gandhi, the leader of the largest party, to form a government. However, the Congress (I) declined the invitation, arguing that the electorate had clearly spoken and wanted a change in government (Paul 1990: 54). However, there were also voices suggesting that the Congress (I) leadership expected differences among the opposition to surface any time soon, rendering any non-Congress government that might form to be potentially unstable. The Congress (I) would then be in a more advantageous position and could even form a government on its own once it faced a divided opposition again.

Following the Congress (I)'s decision to refrain from forming a government, the National Front appointed a committee to solicit and negotiate the support of the BJP and the left for a National Front government. The committee comprised N. T. Rama Rao, leader of the Telugu Desam Party, V. P. Singh, the leader of the Janata Dal, Devi Lal, Ajit Singh and Arun Nehru, each being a senior Janata Dal official (Paul 1990: 55). While the left appeared to be quite ready to provide support to the government from the outside, i.e. without formally taking up any ministerial portfolios, the BJP expressed two concerns. As L. K. Advani, the president of the BJP wrote to Rao and Singh:

i   The National Front and the BJP fought these elections on two separate manifestos, not on a common manifesto. . . . We would like the N. F. government to confine its governmental program to issues on which we agree.

ii   . . . Ever since its launching, J. D. leadership, by its utterances and actions, has been consciously trying to convey to the people an impression that it regards the BJP as a communal party, and that it would rather sit in the opposition than ever share power with it. . . . If it is acknowledged by the J. D. that though the J. D. and BJP differ on issues like Art. 307, Uniform Civil Code, Human Rights Commission, Ram Janmabhoomi, etc., the J. D. does not regard the BJP as communal, that would go a long way in removing misgivings in our rank and file.

. . . In response to your letter, the BJP wishes to convey to you its readiness to give general but critical support to the N. F. government.

(Paul 1990: 55–6)

Having thus secured the support of both the BJP and the left, the National Front proceeded to form a government. Upon swearing in the new cabinet the President indicated that the new Prime Minister, V. P. Singh, would have to prove within one month that his government enjoyed majority support in the Lok Sabha. The new government included the Janata Dal and its tiny National Front partners, each of which received one cabinet portfolio. Although the AGP had no representatives in the Lok Sabha, given that there were no elections held in Assam, one of the party's representatives in the Rayja Sabha was included in the cabinet.

The relationship between the Janata Dal and the BJP was far from amicable at either the national or the sub-national levels. In particular, the major issue that divided the two parties was the disputed construction of a Hindu temple at Ayodhya, the birth place of Lord Ram, a Hindu deity, on the site of the Babri Masjid mosque, a revered site of the Muslims. The BJP had supported the temple construction movement led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (the World Hindu Federation) that had set October 30, 1990 as the date when the demolition of the mosque and the construction of the temple should commence. The President of the BJP, Lal Krishna Advani announced in July that:

The BJP will participate in full strength in any agitational program that might be launched by the VHP for the construction of the temple. Any attempt at

settling the VHP's plans will snowball into 'the greatest mass movement this country has ever witnessed'. We will see to it that with the support of nationalist forces, the Sri Ram temple is constructed.

<div align="right">(Sunday July 15, 1990: 42)</div>

The BJP's position was especially troubling for the Janata Dal government in Uttar Pradesh, the state where the disputed site was situated, because it received substantial electoral support from the Muslim community in the previous election (Brass 1993: 134). Under pressure from Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Prime Minister V. P. Singh announced on July 28, 1990 that the VHP's unilateral deadline of October 30 would not be tolerated by the national government. The BJP finally decided to withdraw its support from the Janata Dal government in Uttar Pradesh, which, however managed to remain in office by mustering additional support from small parties and Independents (*Sunday* June 8, 1990: 12).

The second contentious issue which soured the relationship between the Janata Dal and the BJP was concerning the issue of reserving national government jobs for members of the so-called Other Backward Castes. When pledging its support to the National Front after the election, the BJP expected that the government would consult it on major policy issues. However, in August 1990 the Prime Minister announced, without prior consultation with either the left or the BJP, that his government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission by seeking to reserve 27% of all central government jobs to members of the Other Backward Castes on top of the 22.5% that was already reserved constitutionally for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is worth noting that this announcement came shortly after the Prime Minister had removed his Deputy Prime Minister, Devi Lal, from the cabinet in July over allegations of the latter's involvement in electoral misconduct in the state assembly elections of Haryana state. Devi Lal had been at odds with Prime Minister V. P. Singh ever since the latter had defeated him in the race for the National Front's leadership right after the elections. Since Lal was widely regarded as a prominent leader among the Other Backward Castes the new reservation policy was intended to cut into his political-electoral base and weaken his political position against the Prime Minister (*India Today* September 15, 1990: 31–2).

The sudden announcement of the new reservation policy upset the BJP not only because it was not consulted but, more importantly, because, of the potential impact of this policy on its own electoral prospects in the future. Since the forging of a pan-Hindu unity transcending the multifarious cleavages dividing the community was at the center of the BJP's political and electoral strategy, the National Front government's reservation policy, explicitly seeking to divide the Hindu community along caste lines by pursuing the social, economic and political empowerment of the backward castes, posed a direct challenge to it.

Apart from the temple and the reservation issues, the BJP was also apprehensive about what it perceived to be the appeasement of the Muslim community by the National Front government. The declaration of the prophet Mohammed's birthday

as a public holiday; the Prime Minister's frequent consultations with the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid of Delhi; the dismissal of Jagmohan, the governor of Jammu and Kashmir who was cracking down on Muslim fundamentalists in that state; and the failure to stand up decisively against Pakistan's interference in the affairs of Kashmir and Punjab were all issues that the BJP complained about (*Sunday* July 25, 1990: 68).

In immediate response to the announcement of the Mandal policy, the BJP executive resolved to launch a *rath yatra* ('pilgrimage by chariot'), a march through the country, to reach Ayodhya by October 30 and begin the construction of the temple there. The BJP leadership concluded that the temple issue would unite Hindus regardless of the caste and class divisions that the Mandal policy was aiming to institutionalize (*India Today* October 15, 1990: 35; Malik and Singh 1994: 87).

As October 30 was approaching the Prime Minister maintained that the High Court's order to uphold the status quo would be enforced. When Lal Krishna Advani and his entourage were about to enter the state of Uttar Pradesh in the final stage of their *yatra*, they were arrested by the police force of the state of Bihar on October 23. The BJP immediately notified the President of the Republic that the party no longer supported the National Front government in office (Malik and Singh 1994: 88). In turn, the President instructed V. P. Singh to seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha on November 7.

Two days before the vote was to be taken, on November 5, the Janata Dal split between the factions loyal to the Prime Minister and those following former Deputy Premier Devi Lal and his ally, Chandra Shekhar. The dissidents, who had the support of about 60 Janata Dal members of Parliament, formed a new party, called the Samajwadi Janata Dal, or Janata Dal Socialist, and issued a statement demanding the Prime Minister's resignation. In the meanwhile, the Congress (I) expressed its support for the new party and stated that it was willing to support 'the Janata Dal minus V. P. Singh' in office (*Frontline* November 10–23, 1990: 14). On November 7, with the BJP, the Congress (I) and the Samajwadi, as well as some other parties, voting against it, the National Front government lost the confidence vote by 346 against and only 142 in favor (*Frontline* November 10–23, 1990: 6).

Following the collapse of the National Front cabinet, the Congress (I) was again invited by the President to form a government by virtue of its still being the largest party in parliament. However, once more the party declined to do so. Instead, the Congress (I) pledged its external support to a government to be formed by the Samajwadi Janata. The Congress (I) made its offer credible by having extended support to the minority Janata Dal state governments in Gujarat, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, whose hold on office had become precarious after the BJP had severed its ties with the Janata Dal at all levels of government. In fact, the BJP had withdrawn its support from the Janata Dal governments in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh some time before it had done so at the national level (*Frontline* November 24–December 7, 1990: 14–15; *Sunday* July 29, 1990: 14).

Following the Congress (I)'s declination of the President's invitation to form a government, the President duly approached the numerically next largest parties, the BJP and then the CPI (M) to see if they were interested or able to form a government

(*Frontline* November 24–December 7, 1990: 9). However, both parties, including the blocs they led, unanimously refrained from accepting the invitation, indicating that they would prefer the dissolution of the House and the holding of new elections. At that moment, Chandra Shekhar proposed that his tiny Samajwadi Janata Party would be able to form a government with the assistance of the Congress (I) and its allies. The President accepted Chandra Shekar's proposal, swore in both him as Prime Minister as well as his cabinet ministers on November 10 and instructed him to have his cabinet prove its majority within a couple of weeks in the House. With the assistance of the Congress (I), the minority Samajwadi Janata Party government won the vote of confidence on November 16, 1990 with 280 members of the Lok Sabha voting in favor, 214 voting against the new government while 11 abstained and 17 were absent (*Frontline* November 24–December 7, 1990: 5).

The Congress (I) wasted no time trying to exploit its position by forcing Samajwadi leaders in Gujarat, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, whose governments it was supporting, to pressure their party's national leadership to fall in line with the Congress (I)'s demands and preferences in the national legislature. This, of course, led to tension between the Samajwadi Janata Party's national and sub-national leadership as the former sought to maintain its autonomy from the Congress (I) Party's dictates as much as possible. For example, the Chandra Shekar government authorized the use of Indian airports by American warplanes during the Gulf War, ignoring the protest of the Congress (I) Party that did not want to hurt the sentiments of the Muslim electorate in the country (*Frontline* March 16–29, 1991: 11). However, the cabinet could not exercise such autonomy on most decisions. Thus, for example, it had to obey the Congress (I)'s instructions to dismiss the government and impose President's Rule on the state of Tamil Nadu even though the Governor of the state had not filed a request to this end with the central government as the Constitution required. At the time, the DMK, a member of the National Front, was in office in Tamil Nadu. Thus, Congress (I) used its leverage at the national level to support its local ally, the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu which was the main opposition party to the DMK government.

With time the state units of the Samajwadi Janata became increasingly weary of the Congress (I) and its alleged attempts at de-stabilizing their governments. Fearing that the Congress (I) would instigate dissidence within its ranks, the Samajwadi government of Haryana ordered plainclothes policemen to maintain round-a-clock surveillance on the residence of Rajiv Gandhi, President of the Congress (I) Party, in order to identify Samajwadi legislators from Haryana who might be contacting the Congress (I) leader. Having discovered this, Rajiv Gandhi demanded the dismissal of Om Prakash Chauthala, the Chief Minister of Haryana and general secretary of the national Samajwadi Janata Party. To add weight to the demand, Gandhi ordered the suspension of his party's support to the Samajwadi government in the national legislature until the demand was met (*Sunday* March 17–23, 1991: 32). Since all this happened as the vote was about to be taken on the motion of thanks to the President's speech, a vote classified as a matter of confidence, the very survival of the Chandra Shekhar government was at stake (*Frontline* March 16–29, 1991: 11). The Prime Minister decided not to bow to the

Congress (I) Party, advised the President to dissolve the House and to order new elections and subsequently resigned from his post on March 6, 1991. The President accepted Chandra Shekhar's resignation and asked him to remain in office in a caretaker capacity until the new elections were over.

The Tenth Lok Sabha (1991–1996)

The spatial context of the Lok Sabha changed considerably after the 1991 election. Not only did the Congress (I) return with a significantly higher number of seats but it also became the most powerful player. As expected, the party accepted the President's invitation to form a government since there was no other player that would have rivaled it either in terms of numerical strength or voting power. In fact, this was the only instance of a Lok Sabha, other than 2004, when the largest and the most powerful players were identical. As expected, the plurality party formed a stable minority government.

Following the election, the President invited the leader of the Congress (I), Narasimha Rao, to form a government by virtue of his party's being the largest in the Lok Sabha. Since the Congress (I) was not in a majority position its decision whether to accept or decline the invitation was sensitive to the other parties' attitudes to the formation of a Congress (I) government.

The BJP pledged that it would act as an effective and responsible opposition to a Congress (I) government. The party leadership made it clear that although by being the official opposition the BJP regarded it to be its duty to vote against the Congress (I) should it attempt to form a government, it wanted no early elections and preferred the cabinet to last a full term in office (*India Today* July 15, 1991: 43). It was reported that Narasimha Rao and Lal Krishna Advani, the respective leaders of the Congress (I) and the BJP, agreed on a compromise package: while the BJP would support the Congress (I)'s economic policy initiatives in the Lok Sabha, the Rao government would in turn provide assistance to the state governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh each controlled by the BJP (Malik and Singh 1994: 91).

The non-BJP parties were ambivalent about the formation of a Congress (I) government. On the one hand, they also wanted government stability and no more elections after just having been through two rounds in as many years. On the other hand, however, the National and Left Fronts were also concerned that the Congress (I) might be able to develop a strong record in office and improve its reputation among the electorate (*India Today* July 15, 1991: 15). Furthermore, the parties were also concerned that a Congress (I)-led national government would make sub-national governance difficult in West Bengal, where the CPI (M)-led Left Front had controlled the state government for the last 20 years, and in Bihar and Orissa, both controlled by the Janata Dal (*India Today* July 31, 1991: 23). It was reported that the Congress (I) leadership did pressure the National Front to cooperate with its government by threatening to dismiss the Bihar government which was marred by severe law and order problems (*India Today* July 31, 1991: 25). Eventually, both the National Front and the Left Front decided to support the Congress (I) government on an issue-to-issue basis.

With all these developments in the background, Narasimha Rao accepted the President's invitation to form a government. His minority administration passed the vote of confidence, as instructed by the President, on July 15 with 241 legislators voting in favor, 111 against the government and 112 abstaining (Hardgrave 1993: 237). The margin by which the Congress (I) fell short of a majority in the Lok Sabha improved slightly after by-elections in November 1991 and the holding of elections in Punjab in February 1992. Of the 15 Lok Sabha seats that were contested in the by-elections the Congress (I) won 8. In Punjab, with the Shiromani Akali Dal, the main opposition party to the Congress (I) in the state, boycotting the polls, the Congress (I) won 12 of the 13 seats.

The Congress (I) managed to remain in office for the entire duration of its term by constantly seeking out new alliances with different parties on each issue that had to be voted on. For example, to have its own nominee, Shivraj V. Patil, elected as Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Congress (I) made a deal with the BJP right after the election (*India Today* July 31, 1991: 25). However, the BJP voted against the government on its investiture vote while both the National and the Left Fronts abstained (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives* 1991: 38337). On March 9, 1992, the Congress (I) secured the passing of its motion of thanks to the President's speech opening the budget session of parliament even though neither the BJP, nor the National nor the Left Front supported it. In the face of 231 votes against the motion, the government rallied 269 votes in support of its motion, while 32 legislators abstained. Among those abstaining were 9 Telugu Desam representatives who openly declared their support for the Rao government in defiance of their party's official position (Hardgrave 1993: 237).

Although the relationship between the Congress (I) and the BJP quickly moved from consensual cooperation to bitter opposition, the Rao government managed to survive the rift. In order to embarrass the government, Arjun Singh, a factional opponent of Narasimha Rao in the Congress (I) Party, issued a sharp criticism of the BJP arguing that the Congress (I)'s traditional policy of secularism was at odds with the party's cooperation with the BJP in the Lok Sabha (Malik and Singh 1994: 92). In order to preserve unity within his own party, Rao echoed the belief that communal parties have no place in a secular state, which was how the Constitution defined India, and went even further by calling for a legal ban on non-secular parties. However, by so doing he also encouraged the hard-liners within the BJP, led by Murli Manohar Joshi, who had criticized the party's moderate wing for its cooperation with the Congress (I). At its May 1992 meeting in Gandhinagar, the BJP National Council reaffirmed the party's commitment to Hindu nationalism in general and the construction of the temple at Ayodhya in particular.

On December 6, 1992 thousands of volunteers mobilized by the BJP, the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) demolished the Babri Masjid, the mosque, precipitating communal riots all over the country. In response, the Congress (I) government banned the RSS and the VSP, authorized the arrest of over 5,000 BJP party officials, and dismissed the four state governments controlled by the BJP (Malik and Singh 1994: 95). When the BJP sponsored a no-confidence motion against the government, the left voted with the Congress (I) while the

National Front helped the government by abstaining (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives* 1992: 39222).

The alienation of the BJP left the Congress (I) in a precarious position. As long as the issue of secularism versus communalism did not surface in the Lok Sabha, the government could count on the BJP's support on economic policy issues. However, the Ayodhya incident broke this arrangement leaving the government vulnerable to attacks from both the right and the left. Nonetheless, the Congress (I) managed to remain in office by taking advantage of the fragmentation of the party system and securing the *ad hoc* support of small splinter groups from time to time as political expedience required. Thus, the Congress (I) survived the no-confidence motion sponsored by the BJP as well as both the National and Left Fronts in July 1993 as the 3-member Samajwadi Party (Mulayam) and the 6-member BSP abstained while 4 members of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and 7 members of the Janata Dal (A) voted with the government against the motion (*India Today* August 15, 1993: 38–42).

The Eleventh Lok Sabha (1996–1998)

The Congress (I) managed to remain the second largest party in the Lok Sabha after the 1996 elections. However, this time the plurality party was the BJP, which we would expect to seize the opportunity and form a minority government when invited by the head of state to do so. Indeed, the BJP did precisely that: however, it commanded neither the size nor the power to provide a stable government. Realizing its inability to pass the required vote of confidence, the government resigned after only 13 days in office. Although the Congress (I) was technically the next largest single party in the Lok Sabha, it chose not to form a government once the BJP cabinet resigned – which is in line with what Hypothesis 2 would lead us to expect. Since the Congress (I) was not the most powerful player in the government formation game, it allowed the United Front to form the next cabinet while it stayed in the formal opposition. In our view, the Congress (I) did so out of strategic considerations, in order to buy time before it would bring the government down and pave the way to fresh elections.

The strategic calculation to abstain from office temporarily paid off for Congress (I) on both occasions, in 1996 and in 1989, when it could have formed a government. From both elections that followed the premature termination of these Lok Sabhas, the Congress (I) returned with a greater Shapley-Owen power score in the new legislature. In other words, the Congress (I) was able to reduce its disadvantage on the anti-Congress dimension in the next Lok Sabha by choosing to stay in opposition temporarily. As a result, it came back as the governing party in 1991 and as the largest opposition force in 1998.

As the BJP emerged from the election as the single largest party in the legislature, the President invited it to form a government on May 15. Throughout the campaign the BJP had indicated that it would not seek to form a government unless it would win at least 220 to 225 seats in the Lok Sabha (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 40). Thus, it came as quite a surprise when the BJP accepted the President's invitation

even though it won only 161 seats. On May 16 Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP's par-liamentary leader, was sworn in as Prime Minister. His cabinet ministers including one member of the Shiv Sena were also sworn in at the same time. The Shiromani Akali Dal, the Haryana Vikas Party and the Samata Party offered their support to the government without accepting any ministerial portfolios. President Shankar Dayal Sharma instructed Vajpayee to prove his cabinet's majority by May 31 (Roy 1996: 250).

Vajpayee claimed that the party decided to proceed with forming a government in order to keep the Third Front, which by then had been renamed the United Front, and the Congress (I) polarized. In particular, the BJP hoped that it would be able to secure the support of parties like the DMK, the TMC, the TDP and AGP by appeal-ing to their sub-national record of opposition to the Congress (I) as well as offering them a chance to share power at the national level by participating in the BJP-led cabinet (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 41). The BJP also sought to gain the coopera-tion of the Congress (I): in exchange for the Congress (I) abstaining from voting on the confidence motion the BJP was ready to support the re-election of Shivraj Patil of the Congress (I) as Speaker of the Lok Sabha (*India Today* May 31, 1996: 31–3; June 15, 1996: 40–1). In addition, Vajpayee also claimed that

> when the president invited me [Vajpayee] to form a government, the political situation was fluid. The regional parties were keeping their options open. We [the BJP] wanted to make an honest effort to form the government in the light of the people's mandate, with the help of regional parties on the basis of a common minimum program
>
> (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 41)

The fluidity of the political scene, however, started to thicken as the National Front, the Left Front, and four ex-Congress (I) splinter parties formed the United Front, which tabled a no-confidence motion against the BJP government on May 22. The debates on the motion took place on May 27 and 28. As not a single party seemed to change sides during the debate, it became apparent that the BJP government would not survive the vote. Before the motion could be put to a vote Vajpayee tendered the resignation of his government to the President, after only 13 days in office (Roy 1996: 253).

Following the resignation of the BJP cabinet and the expressed disinterest of the Congress (I) in forming a government, the President invited H. D. Dewe Gowda, the leader of the United Front, to form a cabinet. Gowda and his cabinet were sworn in on June 1 and with the support of the Congress (I) the new government won the vote of confidence on June 12 (Roy 1996: 253–4).

Although the Congress (I) and the two largest constituents of the United Front, the Janata Dal and the CPI (M), ran a campaign heavily attacking each other, their policy programs also contained some overlaps. Thus, on the one hand the Janata Dal accused the Congress (I) of being 'fossilized by family rule and the profligacy of power', of being involved in a number of scams connected to the disinvestment of public sector enterprises, of having bribed minor parties to sustain the previous minority

Congress (I) government in office by voting for it or abstaining on crucial votes of confidence, and of creating communal tension between the Muslim and Hindu communities by first allowing the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu militants and then not meting out the appropriate penalties to them (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 28). Similarly, the CPI (M) also dismissed the record of the outgoing administration by calling it a 'bonanza for big business and misery for the masses' and 'unabashed succumbing to the pressures of US imperialism' (ibid.) The Congress (I) accused the Janata Dal of triggering caste conflicts, particularly in the state of Bihar, and the entire opposition of propagating the idea of an inward-looking pre-modern India, and failing to provide stable national governments in the past (ibid.).

On the other hand, both sides agreed that economic growth had to be slowed down for the time being in order to put into effect programs and policies that would redistribute a share of the wealth to the poor masses. In addition, both the United Front and the Congress (I) agreed that the distribution of resources available to the central and the state governments should be improved and be made more equitable, and that minorities' rights should be accorded greater attention and priority. Finally, the United Front wholeheartedly subscribed to the idea put forward by Manmohan Singh, the Finance Minister in the outgoing Congress (I) government, that the small-scale sector of the economy must be strengthened and relied on for economic growth, employment creation and import-substitution (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 25).

The United Front parties established a Steering Committee that was in charge of coordinating the legislative strategies of the Front members. Parties that declined to enter the government formally, most conspicuously the CPI (M), were also given representation and say in the Committee's decision-making (*India Today* June 15, 1996: 25; Roy 1996: 254). In addition, the Front and the Congress (I) also created a coordination committee in order to develop and pursue a common agenda; however, it was agreed by both parties that their respective leaders, Dewe Gowda on the one hand and outgoing Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on the other, should have a great deal of flexibility in shaping the relationship.

The cabinet that was sworn in on June 1 included ministers from only eight parties: the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Party, the DMK, the TDP, the AGP, the INC (T), the MPVC and the KCP. Similarly to the Congress (I), the four parties of the Left Front as well as the IUML, the JMM, the MIM, the MGP, the UGDP, the ASDC, the SDF, the KEC and three Independents provided external support to the coalition. On June 28 the cabinet was expanded and the other members of the United Front, with the exception of the CPI (M), also took up ministerial portfolios (Aggarwal and Chowdhry 1996: 287–8).

Soon after the United Front took office in May 1996 the Congress (I) underwent a change in its top leadership. The President of the party, Narasimha Rao, resigned from his post under increasing pressure from the Congress (I) Working Committee which blamed Rao for alienating important Congress (I) politicians that in turn had contributed to the Congress (I)'s debacle in the 1996 parliamentary elections. His successor was the long-time treasurer of the party, Sitaram Kesri.

Amongst the first measures that Kesri took was to lure back the party's rebels that now belonged to the United Front. The first to return was the Karnataka

Congress Party, followed by the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress and the Indian National Congress (Tiwari). Although the Tamil Maanila Congress was also intensely lobbied it did stay with the United Front. In defense against the Congress (I)'s maneuvers, Prime Minister Deve Gowda sought to maintain his government's autonomy and refused to yield to the various demands posed by the Congress (I), which expected to be consulted on government policy in reciprocation for the legislative support it was extending to the cabinet.

There were two particularly important cases in point that severed the relationship between the United Front and the Congress (I). The first one was the Vidhan Sabha election in the state of Punjab (*India Today* February 28, 1997: 56–61). This election was particularly important for Kesri as it offered him the opportunity to demonstrate his ability to lead the party to electoral success. The Congress (I) demanded that the United Front help it by forming an electoral alliance against the Shiromani Akali Dal, which had boycotted the last state election in 1992, which entered into an alliance with the BJP. However, the United Front refused to do so and the election resulted in a humiliating defeat for the Congress (I) as its seat share dropped from 74.4% to 11.9% in the new Assembly.

Although Punjab was not an important state for the United Front, it was for the Congress (I), which was in power in only two major states: Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. The non-compliance of the United Front with the Congress (I)'s request also added to the growing tension within the Congress (I) Party. The local Congress (I) units in those states where a United Front constituent was in power, namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, felt increasingly uneasy about their party's national wing maintaining their opponents in power at the national level (*Frontline* April 18, 1997: 5).

The second clash between the Front and the Congress (I) took place in Uttar Pradesh, where the state election held in September 1996 had resulted in a hung assembly. The Congress (I) had contested the election as the junior partner in alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party, the party whose withdrawal had caused the collapse of the coalition government dominated by Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party the year before. The Congress (I) demanded that the United Front support the formation of a Bahujan Samaj-Congress (I) coalition government with the former providing the Chief Minister. This proposal, however, was unacceptable to the United Front because of the antagonism between the Samajwadi Party, its principal constituent in Uttar Pradesh, and the Bahujan Samaj Party, as mentioned earlier. As no combination of parties managed to put together a working majority, the central government imposed President's Rule on Uttar Pradesh.

On March 19, after six months of incessant negotiations, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the BJP agreed to form a coalition cabinet with the Chief Ministership rotating between the two partners (*Frontline* May 2, 1997: 15). No sooner did the news break, the Congress (I) started courting the Tamil Maanila Congress in an effort to topple the United Front government. Acting as Kesri's personal envoy, senior Congress (I) leader K. Karunakaran, a former Chief Minister of Kerala state, was reported to have offered G. K. Moopanar, the leader of the Tamil Maanila Congress, the Prime Ministership should it form a coalition with the Congress (I).

On March 29, Karunakaran told a press conference that Moopanar's response to the offer was positive (*Frontline* May 2, 1997: 12–13; April 18, 1997: 11). The next day, Sitaram Kesri notified President Sharma that the Congress (I) had decided to withdraw its support from the United Front cabinet in the Lok Sabha. In turn, President Sharma instructed Deve Gowda to hold a vote of confidence by April 7 (*Frontline* April 18, 1997: 5). The confidence motion, which was put to a vote on April 11, was defeated by 190 in favor and 338 against as the Congress (I) joined the BJP in voting against it. Consequently, Prime Minister Gowda submitted his and his cabinet's resignation to the President.

As soon as the Gowda cabinet was instructed by the President to seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha, the BJP floated the idea of extending its alliance and forming a National Democratic Front including more regional parties in an effort to make another attempt at forming a government (*Frontline* May 2, 1997: 18–19). At the meeting of the party's national executive, a few days before the confidence vote, Lal Krishna Advani openly identified the Congress, the Communist parties, the Samajwadi Party and the Janata Dal as the BJP's adversaries with whom the party could not form an alliance of any sort. In an effort to court the support of the regional and other minor parties, Advani called on his party to 'debunk the propaganda that the BJP was an anti-Dalit and anti-minority party' (ibid.). He further called on his party to identify more strongly with regional sentiments and concerns without consenting to regional chauvinism and to strengthen the party's ties with its present regional allies.

The BJP's claim to be more sensitive to the interests of minority and regional parties was made credible by the party's successful cooperation with the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Bahujan Samaj Party to form coalition governments in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh respectively. In any event, there was no significant response from the other regional parties in the United Front to the BJP's proposal to form a broader front and thus the BJP leadership decided not to stake an official claim to form a government.

The Congress (I) was also interested in exploring the option of forming a government. At first, the party demanded that the United Front assist it to form a government with the party's president Sitaram Kesri becoming Prime Minister. As the United Front did not agree, the Congress (I) proposed the formation of a Congress (I)–United Front coalition in which the two partners would have an equal standing; however, the United Front could provide the Prime Minister. Finally, upon the leaking of two letters sent by the United Front to the President indicating the Front's determination to prevent both the BJP and the Congress (I) from entering office, the Congress (I) Working Committee decided on April 14, 1997 to renew its support to the Front rather than risk new elections. The only conditions that the Congress (I) posed was that Gowda had to be replaced as Prime Minister first (*Frontline* May 2, 1997: 4–9).

The Congress (I)'s preferred candidate for the United Front leadership was G. K. Moopanar, leader of the TMC. The Congress (I) would have liked to see Moopanar leading the United Front not only because of his strong links with his old party but also because Moopanar had made hints in the past at allowing the Congress (I) to

share power with the United Front at the right time (ibid.: 12). However, exactly for this reason, Moopanar was not acceptable to the other members of the United Front who shared a strong anti-Congress position in common. Furthermore, M. Karunanidhi, the leader of the DMK and Chief Minister of the state of Tamil Nadu was also concerned that if Moopanar were Prime Minister, the balance of powers between TMC and the DMK, who formed coalition government in Tamil Nadu, might be upset.

In the end, I. K. Gujral, a senior member of the Janata Dal and Minister of External Affairs in the Gowda cabinet, was chosen to follow Gowda as the leader of the United Front. The Congress (I) accepted him and a new United Front cabinet was sworn in and won a vote of confidence on April 21. The reformed United Front cabinet with I. K. Gujral at its helm did not last long in office. The first major crisis to challenge the government was the defection of Laloo Prasad Yadav from the Janata Dal after he had lost to Saharad Yadav in the party's national leadership contest on July 3 by a wide margin of 58 to 691 votes. Protesting that the elections was rigged Laloo Yadav rejected the result, broke ranks with the Janata Dal and floated a new party called the Rashtriya Janata Dal. The formation of this new party did not pose an immediate threat to the United Front coalition cabinet because Laloo could only muster the support of 16 Janata Dal legislators in the Lok Sabha, all from his home state of Bihar, and 8 members of the Rajya Sabha. Later on at the end of the month, Laloo was arrested on charges of his involvement in an animal fodder scam in Bihar. Upon his arrest, Laloo appointed his wife, Rabri Devi as Chief Minister of Bihar, who was later confirmed in her post by a vote of confidence passed by the Bihar Vidhan Sabha.

The second major challenge that the new government had to cope with was caused by President Narayanan's refusal to impose President's Rule on Uttar Pradesh. The Prime Minister sought the imposition of President's Rule on the state when the premature collapse of the Bahujan Samaj Party–BJP coalition government triggered violent popular riots. Although the Bahujan Samaj Party had withdrawn from the coalition on October 19, barely a month after it had transferred the rotating Chief Ministership to the BJP on September 21, in the subsequent vote of confidence on October 21, the BJP cabinet survived as the opposition parties, prominently the Bahujan Samaj and the Congress (I), boycotted the session. President Narayanan's refusal to heed the Prime Minister's advice forced the cabinet to reconsider its position and on October 22 it resolved not to pursue the imposition of President's Rule on the troubled state.

Eventually, it was the publication of leaked excerpts from the report of the Jain commission, investigating the assassination of former Congress (I) Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, that led to the Congress (I)'s withdrawal of support from the national government. According to the leaked information, the Jain commission accused the DMK for maintaining connections with and providing support to the Sri Lankan rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that had plotted the assassination. In immediate response to the publication of these excerpts the Congress (I) demanded on November 20 that it would withdraw its support from the United Front unless the DMK were expelled from the Front and excluded from

the cabinet. The Congress (I) claimed that it could not justify supporting a government a constituent party of which had been directly responsible for the assassination of the Congress (I)'s former leader. After Gujral refused to bow to the Congress (I)'s demand on November 24, Sitaram Kesri notified the President that his party was terminating its support of the United Front cabinet as of November 28 (*Keesing's Contemporary Archives* 1997: 41914).

The decision of the Congress (I) leadership infuriated the party's MPs, many of whom were novices in the Lok Sabha and who were concerned that new elections might be called in resolution of the crisis. The MPs resented that after having incurred huge electoral expenses only 20 months ago now they were risking the loss of their seats by having to go through the costly electoral exercise once again. A number of Congress MPs demanded that the party automatically renominate them if elections were called and that the official list of candidates be published early so that there would be sufficient time to campaign (*The Hindustan Times* December 4, 1997).

Sensing the resentment of many Congress (I) MPs, the BJP tried hard to win over their support and experiment with the formation of a new BJP cabinet in the Lok Sabha. On December 3, Lal Krishna Advani had told a press conference that his party had had the support of 40 Congress MPs who were ready to break ranks with their party. Although, as Advani noted, it had never happened before that so many Congress (I) MPs would express their dissatisfaction with their party's leadership and their readiness to join another political party in the Lok Sabha, this number was not sufficient to avoid the penalties under the Tenth Schedule. Thus, the BJP resolved that if it could not get Congress (I) representatives to change sides, it would recommend to the President that the Lok Sabha be dissolved and new elections be held.

Congress (I) leaders who were adamant against the holding of new elections tried to work out a compromise formula with the United Front. In particular, Sharad Pawar, the leader of the Congress (I) Legislature Party met with A. B. Bardhan of the Communist Party of India suggesting that if the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham withdrew from the coalition briefly until it was cleared of the Jain Commission's indictment then a rapprochement between the Front and the Congress (I) could be possible. However, no agreement on the formula could be achieved.

In the evening of December 3, the cabinet decided to advise the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha and order fresh elections. The President concurred and asked I. K. Gujral to remain in office in a caretaker capacity until the new government was formed.

The Twelfth Lok Sabha (1998–1999)

Like the previous non-Congress (I) minority governments, the Gujral cabinet also collapsed prematurely, paving the way for early elections to the Lok Sabha in 1998. The outcome of these elections was that the BJP-led bloc, called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), ended up only 18 seats short of a majority, followed by the Congress (I)-led alliance and the United Front. So whereas in the eleventh

general election the party did not have enough electoral allies that could have supported its efforts to form a government, this was not the case in 1998, and it had to rely on securing only a small number of ad hoc allies in order to govern and legislate effectively.

As in 1996, the party, now the plurality player, chose to accept the President's invitation to form a government, but, given its extreme location on both dimensions, it was also the weakest player in terms of its pivotal power. The most powerful player in the 1998 Lok Sabha remained the Congress (I), which rendered the NDA government inherently unstable.

As before, the Congress (I) tried to prevent the formation of a BJP-led government by making an offer to the United Front. However, the recent history of the uneasy relationship between the two blocs of parties, resulting in the premature collapse of two United Front cabinets in very quick succession, did not make the proposal credible despite the fact that the Congress (I) had replaced Sitaram Kesri with Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow, as party leader. In addition, the numbers did not work in favor of a Congress (I)–United Front coalition either. Together, the two blocs of parties controlled 262 seats, only ten more than the NDA but still eight short of a majority. While in the 11th Lok Sabha the United Front and the Congress (I) alliance could not form stable governments despite their numerical strength, after the 1998 election the two alliances did not even have a legislative majority.

The critical support which allowed the BJP-led NDA to form a government came from two sources: the ranks of the non-committed parties and the United Front. Among the former, the BJP managed to attract two tiny regional parties into the fold of the NDA – the Haryana Lok Dal and the Arunachal Congress, which had four and two seats in the Lok Sabha respectively – while from among the United Front constituents, the BJP successfully secured the commitment of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the local opponent of the Congress (I) in the state of Andhra Pradesh, not to oppose the formation of an NDA government.

On March 10, 1998, President Narayanan, who had replaced Venkataraman in Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential palace, only the year before, asked BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee to provide letters of support from each of his party's alleged allies. This led to skirmishes within the NDA; in exchange for such a letter, the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK), its second largest constituent, demanded not only the two very important cabinet portfolios of Finance and Law but also the immediate dismissal of the government for the state of Tamil Nadu, which, at the time, was formed by the party's major local opponent, the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham. Eventually the AIADMK gave in and Sonia Gandhi explicitly admitted that the Congress (I) was no longer in a position to form a government. On March 19, the President swore in a 22-member NDA cabinet which won a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha 11 days later with a narrow margin of 13 votes. It is worth noting that the TDP eventually changed its position from neutrality to explicitly voting in favor of the NDA after the latter had assisted the TDP's candidate, Balayogi Ganti Mohanachandra, in winning the Speakership of the Lok Sabha four days before the vote of confidence.

The BJP-led coalition minority government lasted barely a year in office: on April 17, 1999 Prime Minister Vajpayee's government lost a confidence vote on the floor of the Lok Sabha by a narrow margin of 1 vote: 270 deputies voted against and 269 in favor of the continuation of the coalition government. The loss of this confidence vote was preceded by the defection of two partners from the governing coalition. First, the Haryana Lok Dal (HLD) decided to withdraw its support because of its objection to the BJP's increasingly more liberal economic policies. The HLD sought to provide protection for its agricultural constituents in the state of Haryana, which clashed with the BJP's decision to cut wheat, rice and sugar subsidies and to allow an 11% increase in the price of fertilizers, an important input for agricultural producers in the 1999 budget. Second, the AIADMK also left the coalition, just two days before the confidence vote, in response to the BJP's unwillingness to reinstate the party's protégé Admiral Vishnu Bhagwat, chief of the naval staff, in his position following his dismissal by Defense Minister George Fernandes of the Samata Party. Moreover, the AIADMK leadership was also frustrated by the BJP's unwillingness to undermine the state government in Tamil Nadu, which was headed by the DMK, the AIADMK's principal opponent in the party politics of the state.

The Fourteenth Lok Sabha (2004–2009)

As mentioned earlier, the 1999 Indian election did not produce a government formation game in the Lok Sabha because the BJP-led NDA won a parliamentary majority. The victorious electoral allies proceeded to form a government which successfully stayed in office for its full term. In contrast, the 2004 general elections continued the pattern of hung parliaments and minority governments. This time, however, the Congress (I) built up an impressive and effective electoral alliance with a host of regional parties that succeeded to prevent the NDA from returning to power. The Congress (I)-led electoral coalition, known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), emerged as the plurality player in the newly elected Lok Sabha, with the Congress (I) itself also being the plurality party. Our calculations show that the UPA was also the most powerful in terms of its estimated Shapley-Owen power score; therefore, it proceeded to accept the invitation to form the next government.

The formation of the UPA coalition minority government was a relatively straightforward matter in the light of the election results. As soon as the elections were over, the president of the Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow, immediately started negotiations with representatives of the Left Front in order to explore the possibilities of either forming a coalition government together or securing their support for a Congress minority administration. Although the long history of opposition to the Congress prevented the Left Front from accepting a formal coalitional deal, the Front clearly perceived a Congress minority government to be a lesser evil than another BJP-led government. Therefore, the left offered its external support to a minority government to be led by the Congress Party. On May 15, 2004 the Congress Parliamentary Party duly elected Sonia Gandhi as its leader

and the following day she was elected as the joint Prime Ministerial candidate of both the UPA and the Left Front.

Although the BJP was in no position to prevent the formation of a Congress government, so long as the left backed it, the party did mount a successful campaign against the choice of Sonia Gandhi as the next Prime Minister. The core of the BJP's objections had to do with the Italian i.e. non-Indian, origins of the wife of the deceased former Prime Minister. In the end, the Congress leadership bowed to the pressure and while Sonia Gandhi retained her positions as Congress president and chief of the parliamentary party, she ceded the Prime Ministerial nomination to Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister in Narasimha Rao's minority government and the architect of India's economic liberalization program in the early 1990s. On May 22, Manmohan Singh was sworn in as Prime Minister and head of a 29-member coalition cabinet. The UPA government successfully completed its five-year term in office.

Revisiting the hypotheses

The four hypotheses are well supported by the data.

Hypothesis 1: Elections that result in hung parliaments will be followed by the formation of a minority government by one of the pre-electoral coalitions that present a government alternative.

There were five elections in our time period resulting in hung parliaments. We expected to find minority governments forming after each of these elections and this hypothesis was confirmed in all five cases. We did not state as clear expectations about what governments might be formed after the breakup of the initial government but before new elections are called. However, here, too, we find that every government formed in an inter-election period was undersized. Overall, as expected, the adversarial nature of the Indian party system has prevented the competing electoral alliances from forming executive coalitions with one another.

Hypothesis 2: Non-Congress (I) players always form a government when invited by the head of state to do so. The Congress (I) forms a government, when asked, only if it is the most powerful player in the two-dimensional government formation game.

This hypothesis is also fully confirmed. In the period immediately following the six elections in the 1989–2004 period, Congress (I) was asked three times to form post-election cabinets, in 1989, 1991 and 2004. It accepted two of these invitations, in 1991 and 2004, when it was also the player with the highest Shapley-Owen value. In contrast, both the BJP and the various left groupings (Left Front, National Front, United Front) always accepted an invitation to form a government if asked to do so

immediately after an election. We acknowledge that the differences between the estimated Shapley-Owen power scores that we report or the Congress and the various left-of-center groups (National Front and United Front) are quite small, except in the case of the 2004 election. However, this is not surprising given that these two players control the median legislator on the two respective dimensions; as such their power scores should be very similar especially as they get farther removed from the center of the *yolk*, as discussed in the Appendix.

Hypothesis 3: No minority government excluding the Congress (I) will be more durable than a government including the Congress (I).

This hypothesis is also fully supported. The only minority governments to last a full term were the 1991 single-party Congress minority government and the 2004 minority coalition headed by the Congress. All other post-election governments had a much more mayfly-like existence and, indeed, all governments which lacked Congress as a member, whenever formed, were not long-lasting.

Hypothesis 4: The longevity of non-Congress (I) minority governments positively varies with the dominant status of the party that leads the government.

This hypothesis is also strongly supported. Of the three non-Congress (I) minority governments, the largest one, formed by the BJP-led NDA lasted longer than either the National Front or the United Front cabinets, both of which spent almost exactly the same length of time in office. Again, this is exactly what we would expect given that the Janata Dal, which led both 1989 National Front and the 1996 United Front governments, did not enjoy the status of a dominant party whereas the BJP did so in the 1998 Lok Sabha. To prove the non-dominance of the Janata Dal in the former two legislatures, it is sufficient to show that the Janata Dal was *not* the largest party in either of those parliaments. Thus, the party failed to meet the first necessary condition of dominance listed in van Roozendaal's definition, which we discussed earlier. In contrast, the BJP in 1998 met all three conditions of dominance: it was the largest party in the Lok Sabha elected that year; it had at least 25% of the seats, and there was at least one majority coalition that the BJP could form, arithmetically, such that the Congress Party, the second largest in the Lok Sabha at the time, could not. One such majority combination was the following {BJP, AIADMK, BJD, HLD, HVP, JKN, JP, LS, MDMK, PMK, SAD, SAP, SHS, TDP, WBTC} = 273. The Congress would have been able to form a considerably smaller coalition with the same subset of parties: {INC, AIADMK, BJD, HLD, HVP, JKN, JP, LS, MDMK, PMK, SAD, SAP, SHS, TDP, WBTC} = 232.

Conclusion

Although puzzling and idiosyncratic at first glance, the formation of minority governments in India during the period between 1989 and 1998 can be consistently explained in terms of rational and strategic choices that players have made under

the prevailing institutional conditions of the country's adversarial Westminster-style parliamentary system. But to do so requires us to recognize that the spatial dynamics of government formation in India were strongly affected by the existence of anti-Congressism as a valence dimension, as was the likelihood that minority cabinets would be durable.

The existence of an anti-Congress dimension made it hard for Congress (I) to put together winning majority coalitions when it did not, on its own, control a majority of the seats in the parliament. On the other hand, because ideologically disconnected coalitions that did not include the centrist Congress (I) party were hard to put together, it made majority governments that excluded Congress virtually impossible to create (or if created, to sustain). Thus, when there was no majority party, India had minority governments. Moreover, except when Congress (I) was the most powerful player in Shapley-Owen terms, it chose not to form minority cabinets. Instead it operated to destabilize the politics of the governing party(ies) so as to force new elections, and sought to put a wedge between parties of the left and of the right. Furthermore, when the centrist Congress (I) party did form a minority government, that government was more stable than the minority governments formed by non-centrist parties. Finally, minority governments formed by non-centrist parties varied in their durability with the dominant status of the party forming the government.

Appendix

Methodological notes

Locating parties in Indian's two-dimensional
political space

There is no readily available information on the ideological mapping of the Indian party system that would provide party locations in the policy space at the interval level (for a partial exception, see Huber and Inglehart 1995). This presents a difficulty given that our model relies on the approximation of the ideal points of players in the two-dimensional space. However, since it is fairly easy to establish the ordinal location of major players along both the ideological and the anti-Congress dimensions, we can take advantage of the solution proposed by van Roozendaal (1998) which approximates players' ideal points at the interval level by using ordinal level data on their location.

The intuitive foundation of this method is that each player's ideal point is defined by the location of its median member. Thus, if we know the size of the players,

i.e. their weight defined in terms of the seats they hold in parliament, and their ordinal ranking on each dimension, we can calculate the location of each player's median legislator by simply dividing the number of seats that the party has by 2. It is important to note that whereas the ordinal location of players is very unlikely to change, especially during the short time span that we are focusing on; their ideal policy points will vary considerably as their legislative weight change from one election to the next (van Roozendaal 1998: 135). We use this method to calculate the ideal point of each player and then convert it to a 10-point left–right scale, both on the horizontal and the vertical dimensions. As discussed in the text the left–right ranking of parties along the ideological dimension has been as follows, from left to right: Left Front, National Front (United Front), Congress (I) and the BJP (NDA).

We estimate the ordinal ranking of the non-Congress poles (left, right, and the anti-Congress center) on the anti-Congress dimension by counting the number of times that a pole provided the major rival to the Congress Party at the state level in the national elections prior to 1989, when the period of minority governments begins. We only consider the major states of India and do not include union territories. These states are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay (1952–1957), Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Mysore/Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras/Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal. 'Major rivalry to the Congress' is defined as being the largest non-Congress party in terms of the share of the popular vote in a given state in a given national election. Independents and state-specific regional parties are not counted toward any of the three poles. The 1977 election, in which the most significant parties of the right, the anti-Congress center, and the left (save the Communists), merged into a united alternative is excluded. The right has provided the major rival to the Congress in 45 cases, the left 28 and the anti-Congress center only 15 times. In the remaining cases, the major rivals were Independents (19 times) and state-specific parties (10 times). Thus, by the beginning of the post-Congress era, the right had clearly developed the strongest record or rivalry with and antipathy to the Congress, followed by the left, and, finally, the anti-Congress center.

Calculating Shapley-Owen values in the two-dimensional Indian party space

For spatial voting games the Shapley-Owen value corresponds to the more familiar Shapley-Shubik value (see e.g. Owen 1995). In two dimensions, the pivotal power (Shapley-Owen value) of a player can be measured by summing up the fractions of the time that s/he can be the median along lines of cleavage as the axis of the cleavage is rotated through the two-dimensional space (cf. Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1986; Rapoport and Golan 1985; Shapley and Owen 1989). It follows from the basic Shapley-Owen results that the power of each player in a three-player game is given by the size of the critical angle at which subtends the two median lines that intersect its location, where a median line is a line partitioning the points of the space in such a manner that no more than one-half of all players will lie on or on either side of the line (Miller, Grofman and Feld 1989). With three players, the

median lines are the three sides of the triangle defined by the positions of the three players. We can link these median lines to an important social choice concept called the *yolk*. The yolk is the smallest such circle that intersects all median lines. The yolk may be thought of as the generalized center of the distribution of players' positions in the two-dimensional space (Ferejohn, McKelvey and Packel 1984; McKelvey 1986). Technically speaking, the yolk is the smallest such circle that intersects all median lines, where a median line is a line partitioning the points of the space in such a manner that no more than one-half of all players will lie on or on either side of the line (Miller, Grofman and Feld 1989). By definition, every median line intersects the yolk and any one player can be pivotal if and only if her ideal point lies on a median line. Therefore, by finding the two median lines through ideal point x that are tangent to the opposite sides of the yolk, we can identify the angles at which x can be pivotal. In a two-dimensional space, the likelihood that a player will be pivotal over policy choices can also be directly linked to its distance from the center of the yolk, which is the center of the circle that can be inscribed within the triangle. The formal result is stated in a theorem by Feld and Grofman (1990):

Theorem 1: In two dimensions, a player with ideal point x located at a distance d from the center of the yolk, which has a radius r, will have a Shapley-Owen power score no greater than 2 arcsin (r/d) / P.

This theorem implies that as the ideal point of a player moves farther and farther from the center of the yolk, it will subtend the two median lines, tangent to opposite sides of the yolk, that can be drawn through her ideal point at smaller and smaller angles. The calculations by Feld and Grofman (1990) show that the maximal power of a player drops with the distance of her ideal point from the center of the yolk at a declining rate: a player that is located 2 yolk radii away from c can have no more than 0.333 of the total Shapley-Owen power, while a player located at 7 and 8 yolk radii away will have a maximum Shapley-Owen power of 0.09 and 0.08 respectively. For games with multiple players, players that are located very far from the yolk will see very small marginal gains, or losses, in terms of their maximum Shapley-Owen power score as their spatial location changes. In stark contrast, even small changes in the spatial location of those players that are close to the center of the yolk will have considerably greater consequences in the division of the total Shapley-Owen power in the game.

The maps in Figure 4.1 identify government formation as essentially three-player games in each Lok Sabha from 1989 to 1998. It follows from the definitions we have offered that the yolk of both the 1989 and the 1991 games was located within the triangles defined by the positions of the National Front, the Congress (I) and the BJP. Therefore, the pivotal power of these players can be measured by the angles at which they subtend their intersecting median lines, which are also tangent to the *yolk*. However, the Left Front can be pivotal at only zero angle because there are no two median lines tangent to opposite sides of the yolk that would intersect it. As a result of its spatially defined weakness, the Left Front could do no better than consistently support the National Front, the player closest to it, which is precisely what it did throughout the period. It was thus not all that surprising that the two fronts actually merged (as the United Front) in 1996.

The graphs also show the disadvantaged position of the BJP in the party space. The BJP was not the median player on either the ideological or the anti-Congress dimension. In fact, on both of these dimensions, the BJP occupied an extreme position, which put the party at a strategic disadvantage in the games of government formation and stability. Although the Left Front did have an extreme location on the left–right scale, it was not an extreme on the anti-Congress axis.

In contrast to the Left Front and the BJP, the Congress (I) and the National Front, later United Front, were in much stronger positions. The former has been the median player on the ideological dimension, while the latter has occupied the median position on the anti-Congress line of cleavage throughout the period. We calculate the angles subtended by each player's position, as noted above, and than the player's Shapley-Owen value. We report these in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 4.2 The critical angles of the three pivotal party alliances in the Lok Sabha, 1989–2004

Year	National Front (United Front)*	Congress (I)	BJP (NDA)
1989	72.2°	68.4°	39.4°
1991	68.8°	75.7°	35.5°
1996	74.6°	70.8°	34.6°
1998	72.33°	79.34°	28.33°
2004	64.8°	82.8°	32.4°

* Left Front in 2004