



Coalition Politics in Jammu and Kashmir: A Comparative Study of NC-INC and PDP-BJP Alliances

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Abstract: This study looks into the intricate dynamics of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on the alliances between the National Conference-Indian National Congress (NC-INC) and the People's Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party (PDP-BJP). By examining the formation, functioning, challenges, and achievements of these coalitions, the research provides a comparative analysis of their impact on regional governance, socio-economic development, and political stability. The findings highlight the significant influence of national parties on regional politics, the complexities of maintaining coalition stability amidst ideological differences, and the effects on regional identity and local issues. This analysis offers valuable insights and recommendations for future coalition governance in Jammu and Kashmir, emphasizing the need for inclusive dialogue, flexible governance models, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

Keywords: Coalition politics, Jammu and Kashmir, NC-INC, PDP-BJP, regional governance.

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Introduction

The political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir has always been marked by its intricate complexities and unique challenges, driven by a confluence of cultural, religious, and regional identities. This complexity has necessitated coalition politics to ensure stable governance, particularly involving significant alliances such as the National Conference-Indian National Congress (NC-INC) and the People's Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party (PDP-BJP). These coalitions have profoundly shaped the socio-political and economic environment of the region. The NC-INC coalition, which draws its roots from a historical alliance, aimed to stabilize the region through a balanced governance model. The INC, one of India's oldest political parties, joined forces with the NC, a dominant regional player, to maintain the special status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union and counter the rising influence of separatist movements (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003). This coalition's approach was to leverage the INC's national influence and the NC's regional stronghold, thereby creating a governance framework that catered to the diverse needs of the state's populace. Their combined efforts aimed to provide inclusive governance, ensuring that various regional and communal interests were represented within the broader national framework.

In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition represented a more recent and ideologically diverse alliance, formed in 2015 amidst the backdrop of the BJP's national electoral success. This coalition brought together the PDP, which primarily represented the interests of the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, and the BJP, which had a strong base in the Hindu-majority Jammu region. The PDP-BJP alliance was notable for its attempt to bridge the deep-seated regional and

communal divides within Jammu and Kashmir. However, the inherent ideological differences between the PDP's emphasis on regional autonomy and the BJP's focus on national integration posed significant challenges to the coalition's stability (Malik, 2015). Despite these challenges, the coalition was driven by a common minimum program that prioritized development, good governance, and regional stability. The PDP sought to address regional aspirations and retain political relevance, while the BJP aimed to expand its influence in the region. The functioning of these coalitions, their challenges, and their achievements reveal both their potential and limitations in governing such a complex and diverse region. The NC-INC coalition's tenure saw improvements in infrastructure development and social services, contributing to the region's socio-economic stability (Mir, 2017). However, internal conflicts and the challenge of aligning national and regional priorities often hindered their effectiveness. Similarly, the PDP-BJP coalition, despite introducing several welfare schemes and development initiatives, faced significant hurdles due to ideological disparities, leading to frequent policy clashes and governance issues (Khajooria, 2016). The comparative analysis of these coalitions highlights the complexities of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir and underscores the importance of cohesive and inclusive governance for ensuring regional stability and development.

Overview of Political Landscape in Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir's political landscape has been uniquely influenced by its historical, geographical, and socio-cultural context. The region has been a focal point of conflict and political maneuvering since the partition of India in 1947. It has witnessed a series of political events that have shaped its current political

structure, characterized by regional divergences and communal polarization (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003). Historically, the politics of Jammu and Kashmir have been dominated by regional parties such as the National Conference (NC) and later by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), both of which have significant influence over the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley. The Hindu-majority Jammu region has often aligned itself with national parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), creating a political dichotomy within the state.

The emergence of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir is a relatively recent phenomenon, reflecting broader trends in Indian politics where regional parties have gained prominence and coalition governments have become more common. The coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir began to take shape significantly after the 2002 state elections, which saw the end of single-party dominance and the rise of coalition governments (Webb, 2005). This period marked the beginning of more complex political arrangements aimed at balancing the diverse regional and communal interests within the state. The NC-INC coalition, for instance, was formed to stabilize the region and ensure a balanced governance approach that could cater to both national and regional interests (Chaudhary, 2015). Similarly, the PDP-BJP coalition represented a strategic partnership aimed at bridging the deep regional and communal divides within the state, though it faced significant challenges due to ideological differences between the coalition partners (Malik, 2015).

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir by focusing on the NC-INC and PDP-BJP governments. By analyzing the formation, functioning, challenges, and achievements of these coalitions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their impact on the region's socio-economic development and political stability. The significance of this study lies in its ability to shed light on the complexities of coalition politics in a region marked by deep-seated regional and communal divides. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, political analysts, and scholars interested in the governance and development of Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover, this study contributes to the broader discourse on coalition politics in India, offering insights into how diverse political alliances can navigate the challenges of governance in a highly fragmented political landscape (Chakrabarty, 2014). By drawing on various sources and empirical data, this study aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the role of coalition governments in shaping the political and socio-economic trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Formation and Functioning of Coalitions

Background and Motivations for NC-INC and PDP-BJP Alliances

The formation of coalition governments in Jammu and Kashmir was driven by a combination of political necessity and strategic motivations. The NC-INC alliance was formed primarily to ensure stable governance in a region marked by conflict and political volatility. The National Conference (NC), a dominant regional party with a stronghold in the Kashmir Valley, and the Indian National Congress (INC), one of India's oldest and most influential national parties, saw a strategic advantage in joining forces. The INC aimed to leverage the NC's regional influence to maintain its presence in the politically sensitive state, while the NC sought to

benefit from the INC's national stature and resources (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003). This coalition was also motivated by the need to counter rising separatist sentiments and to stabilize the region by aligning regional aspirations with national interests.

In contrast, the PDP-BJP alliance emerged from a more complex set of motivations. Formed in 2015, this coalition brought together two ideologically disparate parties: the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which primarily represented the interests of the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had a strong base in the Hindu-majority Jammu region. The BJP, having achieved significant national electoral success, aimed to expand its influence in Jammu and Kashmir as part of its broader national strategy. The PDP, on the other hand, sought to retain political relevance and address regional aspirations by entering into a coalition with the BJP, despite significant ideological differences. This alliance was driven by a shared goal of development and governance, albeit with divergent views on autonomy and national integration (Malik, 2015).

Key Leaders and Their Roles in Both Coalitions

The success and challenges of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir were significantly influenced by the key leaders who helmed these alliances. In the NC-INC coalition, prominent figures such as Farooq Abdullah of the NC and various INC leaders played crucial roles. Farooq Abdullah, with his deep-rooted influence in the Kashmir Valley, provided the regional legitimacy and leadership required to steer the coalition. The INC, with its rotating leadership, contributed by leveraging its national network and resources to support the coalition's governance initiatives (Chaudhary, 2015).

The PDP-BJP coalition was characterized by the leadership of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and later his daughter, Mehbooba Mufti, from the PDP, and key BJP leaders such as Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's political acumen and his vision for a "healing touch" policy aimed at reconciliation were pivotal in forming the coalition. His leadership was crucial in navigating the initial phases of the alliance. After his death, Mehbooba Mufti's leadership was marked by attempts to maintain the coalition amid rising tensions. On the BJP side, Narendra Modi's national leadership and Amit Shah's strategic political management played critical roles in driving the party's agenda within the coalition (Lone, 2016).

Governance Strategies and Policy Priorities

The governance strategies and policy priorities of the NC-INC and PDP-BJP coalitions reflected their attempts to balance regional aspirations with broader national interests. The NC-INC coalition focused on infrastructure development, social welfare, and maintaining the special status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union. Their policy priorities included improving healthcare, education, and public services, alongside efforts to counter insurgency and promote economic development. This coalition also emphasized regional autonomy while aligning its policies with national frameworks to ensure stability (Chaudhary, 2015).

The PDP-BJP coalition, on the other hand, prioritized a development agenda aimed at economic growth and governance reform. This alliance sought to implement various welfare schemes such as the Ujjwala Yojana for LPG connections, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for sanitation, and the Jan Dhan Yojana for

financial inclusion. The coalition's governance strategy involved a focus on infrastructure development, job creation, and improving law and order. However, the ideological rifts between the PDP's emphasis on regional autonomy and the BJP's focus on national integration often led to policy clashes. Despite these challenges, the coalition managed to initiate several development projects aimed at bridging regional disparities and fostering economic growth (Malik, 2015; Chaudhary, 2015).

Comparative Analysis

Differences and Similarities in the Formation and Functioning of Both Coalitions

The formation and functioning of the NC-INC and PDP-BJP coalitions in Jammu and Kashmir present a study in contrasts and parallels. Both coalitions were born out of political necessity and strategic alignment, yet their ideological foundations and operational dynamics differ significantly. The NC-INC coalition, rooted in a historical context, was primarily motivated by the desire to stabilize the volatile political environment of Jammu and Kashmir. This alliance between the National Conference (NC), a dominant regional party with deep roots in the Kashmir Valley, and the Indian National Congress (INC), a prominent national party, was seen as a strategic move to balance regional autonomy with national integration (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003). The NC brought regional credibility and a strong local leadership, while the INC contributed its national influence and resources. This coalition was largely driven by shared historical ties and a mutual interest in maintaining the special status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union.

In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition, formed in 2015, was a more recent and ideologically divergent alliance. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came together despite stark ideological differences, with the PDP advocating for greater autonomy and the BJP emphasizing national integration. This coalition was driven by a pragmatic approach to governance and development. The PDP sought to address the aspirations of the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, while the BJP aimed to consolidate its influence in the Hindu-majority Jammu region. Despite their differences, both parties recognized the political and electoral benefits of this alliance (Malik, 2015).

Functionally, both coalitions faced internal challenges. The NC-INC alliance struggled with aligning the national agenda of the INC with the regional priorities of the NC, often leading to policy clashes. Similarly, the PDP-BJP coalition was marked by frequent disagreements over governance strategies, particularly on issues of regional autonomy and national integration. However, both coalitions demonstrated a capacity for compromise and negotiation, essential for maintaining stability in the region.

Governance Styles and Policy Approaches

The governance styles and policy approaches of the NC-INC and PDP-BJP coalitions reflect their distinct political philosophies and objectives. The NC-INC coalition focused on inclusive governance, emphasizing social welfare, infrastructure development, and maintaining regional autonomy. Their policy initiatives were aimed at improving healthcare, education, and public services, while also promoting economic development through various state-sponsored schemes (Chaudhary, 2015). The INC's influence brought a national perspective to governance,

seeking to integrate Jammu and Kashmir's development with broader national policies.

On the other hand, the PDP-BJP coalition adopted a development-centric approach, prioritizing economic growth and governance reform. This coalition introduced several welfare schemes, such as the Ujjwala Yojana for providing LPG connections, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for sanitation, and the Jan Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion. The BJP's national development agenda significantly influenced this coalition's policies, focusing on infrastructure development, job creation, and enhancing law and order (Lone, 2016). However, the coalition's governance was often marred by ideological clashes, particularly regarding regional autonomy versus national integration.

Impact on Socio-Economic Development and Regional Autonomy

The impact of these coalitions on socio-economic development and regional autonomy in Jammu and Kashmir is a critical aspect of their comparative analysis. The NC-INC coalition, with its focus on inclusive governance, contributed to socio-economic stability in the region. Their efforts in infrastructure development, healthcare, and education improved the overall quality of life for the populace. The coalition's emphasis on maintaining the special status of Jammu and Kashmir helped in addressing the regional aspirations and preserving the unique cultural identity of the state (Mir, 2017).

The PDP-BJP coalition, despite its ideological differences, made significant strides in economic development. The introduction of various welfare schemes and development projects aimed at reducing regional disparities and fostering economic growth. The coalition's focus on governance reform and infrastructure development attracted investment and improved economic prospects for the region (Malik, 2015). However, the frequent policy clashes and ideological rifts often hindered the coalition's ability to implement its agenda effectively. The NC-INC coalition's approach to regional autonomy was more aligned with the aspirations of the local populace, aiming to preserve the special status of Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union. This approach resonated well with the majority in the Kashmir Valley, fostering a sense of political inclusion and stability. In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition's emphasis on national integration often conflicted with regional aspirations, leading to tensions and instability. The BJP's push for a uniform national policy sometimes clashed with the PDP's demand for greater autonomy, highlighting the inherent challenges of governing a region with such diverse political and cultural landscapes (Sheikh & Murlidharan, 2017).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of the NC-INC and PDP-BJP coalitions reveals both the potential and challenges of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir. While both coalitions aimed to provide stable governance and promote development, their differing ideological foundations and policy approaches significantly influenced their functioning and impact. The NC-INC coalition's emphasis on inclusive governance and regional autonomy contributed to socio-economic stability, while the PDP-BJP coalition's development-centric approach brought significant economic benefits despite frequent ideological clashes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating the complexities of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir and for developing strategies that can effectively address the region's unique challenges.

Challenges and Achievements

The coalition governments in Jammu and Kashmir have had varying degrees of success in terms of policy implementations and achieving their governance objectives. The NC-INC coalition and the PDP-BJP coalition each had distinct agendas and faced unique challenges. The NC-INC coalition focused heavily on infrastructural development, social welfare programs, and maintaining the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. One of their significant achievements was the development of healthcare infrastructure, including the establishment of new hospitals and the upgrading of existing ones. They also worked on improving educational facilities by setting up new schools and colleges and introducing schemes for free education up to a certain level (Mir, 2017). The coalition also emphasized rural development, implementing programs aimed at improving agricultural productivity and providing better facilities in rural areas.

The PDP-BJP coalition, formed with the aim of integrating the development goals of the BJP with the regional aspirations of the PDP, introduced several welfare schemes that had a significant impact on the local population. Initiatives such as the Ujjwala Yojana, which provided free LPG connections to households, and the Jan Dhan Yojana, aimed at financial inclusion, were key achievements (Lone, 2016). The coalition also focused on improving sanitation through the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and worked on enhancing connectivity and infrastructure development, particularly in the Jammu region, which was a key BJP constituency.

Challenges Faced, Including Internal Conflicts and Public Perception

Despite these achievements, both coalitions faced considerable challenges, particularly related to internal conflicts and public perception. The NC-INC coalition struggled with internal party dynamics and occasional disagreements over policy priorities. The INC's national agenda sometimes clashed with the NC's regional focus, leading to policy inconsistencies and administrative bottlenecks (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003). Public perception was another challenge, with some segments of the population feeling that the coalition was not adequately addressing their specific needs, particularly in the context of insurgency and security issues.

The PDP-BJP coalition faced even more pronounced challenges due to the stark ideological differences between the two parties. The PDP's emphasis on regional autonomy and the BJP's focus on national integration often led to significant policy disagreements. Issues such as the handling of Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, were particularly contentious (Sheikh & Murlidharan, 2017). These ideological clashes not only caused internal strife but also affected the coalition's public perception. The coalition was often seen as unstable and conflicted, which undermined its credibility and effectiveness.

Public protests and opposition from local political groups also posed significant challenges to both coalitions. The NC-INC coalition had to deal with the separatist movements and frequent calls for greater autonomy, which often disrupted governance and led to law and order issues. The PDP-BJP coalition, on the other hand, faced resistance from both its core constituencies, with the PDP supporters feeling betrayed by the alliance with the BJP and BJP supporters demanding more stringent policies on national integration and security (Malik, 2015).

Stability and Durability of Coalition Governments

The stability and durability of coalition governments in Jammu and Kashmir have been a topic of significant debate. The NC-INC coalition, despite its internal challenges, managed to maintain a relatively stable governance structure. This stability was largely due to the historical ties between the two parties and their shared interest in maintaining the special status of the region (Chaudhary, 2015). However, the coalition's inability to address certain critical issues effectively did lead to periodic political instability and governance challenges.

In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition was marked by a lack of stability from the outset. The ideological differences between the two parties created a volatile political environment, making it difficult to maintain a consistent policy direction. The coalition's tenure was characterized by frequent public disagreements and policy reversals, which undermined its overall effectiveness and led to its eventual collapse (Majid, 2016). The coalition fell apart in 2018, bringing the state under direct central rule and highlighting the inherent instability in such ideologically diverse alliances (Web, 2005).

Despite these challenges, both coalitions contributed to significant policy advancements and infrastructural developments in the region. However, their inability to sustain long-term stability points to the complexities of coalition politics in a region as diverse and politically sensitive as Jammu and Kashmir. The experiences of the NC-INC and PDP-BJP coalitions underscore the need for more cohesive and strategically aligned political partnerships to ensure sustainable governance and development.

Influence of National Parties on Regional Governance

The influence of national parties on regional governance in Jammu and Kashmir has been profound and multifaceted. National parties such as the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have leveraged their resources, political clout, and strategic interests to shape the governance landscape of the region. The INC, with its long history and extensive network, brought a sense of stability and continuity when it partnered with regional entities like the National Conference (NC). This partnership aimed to blend regional aspirations with national priorities, creating a governance model that sought to balance local autonomy with integration into the broader Indian polity (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003).

On the other hand, the BJP's entry into Jammu and Kashmir's coalition politics marked a significant shift. The BJP's focus on national integration and its ideological stance on issues like Article 370 influenced the region's governance structure profoundly. The BJP's alliance with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was an attempt to consolidate its influence in a traditionally volatile region by promoting development and national unity (Sheikh & Murlidharan, 2017). However, this partnership also highlighted the tensions that arise when national political agendas intersect with regional governance needs.

Dynamics between Regional Parties and their National Partners

The dynamics between regional parties and their national partners in Jammu and Kashmir have been characterized by both cooperation and conflict. The NC-INC alliance, for example, was built on a shared historical legacy and mutual interests. This

partnership allowed for a certain degree of policy coherence and stability, although it was not without its challenges. The NC had to navigate its regional agenda while accommodating the INC's broader national policies, which sometimes led to friction and compromises on both sides (Chaudhary, 2015).

In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition was a more complex and contentious arrangement. The ideological divergence between the PDP's focus on regional autonomy and the BJP's emphasis on national integration created inherent tensions. These differences were evident in policy-making processes and governance strategies, often leading to public disagreements and policy inconsistencies. The PDP had to balance its commitment to addressing local grievances and aspirations with the BJP's nationalistic agenda, a balancing act that proved difficult to sustain (Majid, 2016). These dynamics underscore the challenges of coalition politics in a region as politically and culturally diverse as Jammu and Kashmir. The need for regional parties to align with national partners brings both opportunities for enhanced resources and political influence, and challenges in maintaining regional identity and addressing local issues effectively.

Effects on Regional Identity and Local Issues

The involvement of national parties in Jammu and Kashmir's coalition politics has had significant effects on regional identity and local issues. The NC-INC coalition worked to preserve the region's special status and cultural identity, recognizing the importance of regional autonomy in maintaining political stability. This approach resonated well with the local population, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, where regional identity and autonomy are deeply cherished (Chaudhary & Rao, 2003).

In contrast, the PDP-BJP coalition faced significant challenges in reconciling regional identity with national political agendas. The BJP's stance on Article 370 and its push for greater national integration often clashed with the PDP's emphasis on regional autonomy and addressing local grievances. This ideological conflict impacted the coalition's ability to govern effectively and address the specific needs of the local population (Sheikh & Murlidharan, 2017). The perception of the BJP as an external force trying to impose a national agenda exacerbated tensions and contributed to political instability.

Moreover, the coalition governments' efforts to implement development projects and social welfare schemes often encountered resistance due to these underlying tensions. While initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Jan Dhan Yojana were beneficial, their implementation was sometimes hindered by local skepticism and political opposition (Lone, 2016). The challenge of aligning national development goals with local priorities remains a critical issue in the region's governance.

Conclusion

The study of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir underscores the delicate balance between regional autonomy and national integration. The alliances between the National Conference-Indian National Congress (NC-INC) and the People's Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party (PDP-BJP) each brought distinct approaches and faced unique challenges. The NC-INC coalition, leveraging a shared historical legacy, successfully integrated local governance with national priorities, emphasizing regional autonomy. Conversely, the PDP-BJP coalition, with its

development-centric agenda, was frequently undermined by ideological differences, affecting its stability and efficacy. Several critical lessons emerge from these coalition experiences. Firstly, successful coalition governance necessitates a deep understanding and respect for regional aspirations and identity. National parties must align their broader agendas with the specific needs and cultural contexts of the regions they govern to maintain political stability. Secondly, effective communication and compromise are indispensable in managing ideological differences and policy disagreements within coalitions. The capacity to negotiate and find common ground is crucial for the longevity and success of coalition governments (Chaudhary, 2015).

For future coalition governance in Jammu and Kashmir, parties should prioritize inclusive dialogue and collaborative policy-making. National parties need to work closely with regional partners to craft policies that address local issues while promoting broader national objectives. Building trust and transparency within coalitions, and ensuring all partners have a voice in the decision-making process, is vital. This approach can mitigate internal conflicts and enhance the effectiveness of governance. In conclusion, the intricate dynamics of coalition politics in Jammu and Kashmir offer valuable insights for future governance. The emphasis should be on creating flexible governance models, fostering effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and maintaining an inclusive and respectful dialogue. By adopting these strategies, coalition governments can better navigate the complexities of regional politics and contribute to the socio-economic development and political stability of the region.

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