Public Policy Making in Coalition Government: Challenges and Solutions

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Review Article

ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting scenarios of the political scenes in several countries in the contemporary period is the emergence of the coalition government. The governance by an amalgam of various political parties is based primarily on negotiations among them and striking balance between conflicting interests and ideas. The paper aims to study, explore and skim through the literature available about the processes of public policy-making in a coalition government. The methodology of the study is based on a systematic review of Government coalitions and challenges faced in policymaking. A total of 50 studies have been searched considering the literature on a coalition government, Solutions to identified issue, delegation and agent issues and challenging ministerial discretion. Out of them, ten studies have been extensively reviewed, three on modelling of the coalition government, four Challenging ministerial discretion and three on delegation and agent issue. The study arrives at two factors which guide decision making in public policy formulation in coalition government. The study concludes that the country with divergent and coalition government is recommended to formulate an agreement at the very

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beganing to reduce the future impact of divergent preference of political parties in policy formulation. Along with it, the presence of ideological differences on important aspects like liberalisation, secularism, expectations of instability lead to the rise of minority coalitions which lead to difficulties in planning and implementation of policies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most commonly, a coalition government is a form of government which includes several political parties who cooperate to arrive at unanimous decision primarily to form a government or to conceptualise different public policies, in the recent years, there has been an increase in the number of coalition governments in the parliament. Owing to this, in parliamentary democracies, the coalition's transform the public policy making on the party platforms into uncertainty because of inter-party differences in ideologies and functioning aspect. Hence, it becomes imperative to understand the challenges and address the issues by suggesting corresponding solutions to public policy making by these coalition governments. In the face of clear and potential divergent interests and preferences of participating parties in the coalition governments, it raises questions about the manner in which the multi-party governments arrive at unambiguous decisions regarding policy agenda. This form of government is generally considered weak because there is no majority party. This results in following problems like Red-tapism in policy formulation and underhanded deals as more political parties engage in deals in order to get things accomplished. On the other hand, without caveat, coalitions help in formulating more comprehensive and multidimensional policies owing to the presence of deferent views during policy formulation. Hence, coalitions possess both negative and positive role to play in public policy making [1].

When there is the absence of clean majority during general elections, parties either form coalition cabinets under parliament majority or end up with minority cabinets which has one or more parties. Cabinets supported by parliament are more stable and efficient whereas minority cabinets are prone to internal struggles. Therefore, whether government with clear majority or minority government both is has to burn through the process of policy making for public welfare [1].

Thus, the present study has been conducted to draw inferences from theories on coalition and concerned parties as to how public policy making impacts them and they impact policies process. The study aims to allow a conceptual starting point and to bring the research on public policy making in the coalition governments. Hence, this paper intends to identify the challenges and solution underlying in the formation of public policy in the coalition government.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, researcher has adopted systematic review of literature as a methodology to study the challenges and solutions of public policy making in Coalition Government. This review systematically searches, identifies, selects, appraises, and synthesises research evidence relevant to the question using a methodology that is explicit, reproducible, and leads to minimal bias. It helps to present clear findings to highlight problems, challenges, and offer proof about the effect of the implementation of policies and keep into account the findings of similar studies.

3. SELECTION OF STUDIES- PROCESS OF SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Before discussing further, it become pertinent to mention that how studies were selected to reach the final conclusion.

Initially, Researcher reviewed 50 studies to understand the complexities of policy formulations in coalition governments, out of 50, 15 studies were selected that carried forward a discussion about policymaking. And finally, 10 studies, were further investigation on the basis of their impact factor in relations to policy making and coalition governments. And finally, primarily, only these 10 studies were investigated comprehensively. Out of these ten, three were specifically argued about the modelling of the coalition government. Modelling of coalition government has helped in representing the exact structure and composition of the coalition

government in the present study. And other three were concerned about delegation and agency issues. Delegation and agency issues has addressed the delegation of the powers, authorities and the responsibilities among different parties. The issues of delegation have been prominent in coalition government. And remaining four studies were about challenging ministerial discretion. When different political parties involved in coalition do not arrive at unanimous decision, result into the failure coalition government. Thus, it is relevant to study the different challenges that coalition government faces due to ministerial discretion. Hence in a nutshell, in this study, researcher has comprehensively comprehended primarily these 10 studies and tried to observe in Indian context so far.

4. COALITION GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

Historically it has been seen that Indian National Congress has been the single largest party in India since its inception in 1885. A coalition government was experienced in India as early as 1937 when Congress and the Muslim League formed a coalition government in Uttar Pradesh at the time of operation of the government of India Act, 1935 [2].

However, in free India, a coalition government was first formed in 1977 where Congress and Janta government united under the leadership of Morarji Desai. The formula of uniting all the opposition parties into a single party so that non-Congress votes do not get divided amongst the opposing parties was proposed by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia (Bisla, 2016). The four-party Janta government was in power from 1977 to 1979 due to the power struggle within the parties which led to the resignation of Mr Desai as well as the departure of the prominent group leaders like George Fernandes, H.N. Bahuguna, Biju Patnaik and Mudhu Limaye [3].

The second coalition government in India was formed in 1979 with Mr Charan Singh being the prime minister, who had the support of CPI (Communist Party of India) and CPI (M) (Communist Party of India Marxist). However, he could not face the house due to his failure to secure the vote of confidence in the house within three weeks' time [4].

The third coalition was formed in 1989 under the leadership of V.P. Singh which was supported by the BJP, which was the second largest party in

the country at that time. The fourth coalition government was formed in 1990 under the leadership of Chandra Shekhar. The fifth coalition was formed under the leadership of H.D. Deve Gowda under the banner of united front government which was unison of 13 parties including Congress, CPI, Samajwadi Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and Asom Gana Parishad amongst others [5].

The sixth coalition was formed in 1997 under the leadership of I.K. Gujral, and seventh was formed in 1998 led by A.B. Vajpayee which was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, Shiv Sena and others. The eighth coalition was formed in 1999 which was led by A.B. Vajpayee under National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was led by BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party) and supported by 24 political parties including AIADMK (*All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)*, Telgu Dasam Party, NC, Trinamool Congress and others [6].

The ninth, as well as a tenth coalition, was formed in May 2004 and 2009 respectively under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh under the party named United Progressive Alliance supported by Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, and others including left parties. Though in 2014 election, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won the highest seat in parliamentary election. And perception was that NDA did not make any coalition with any other political parties. But in reality, NDA was in coalition as many as 40 small political parties, which was so far struggling at district and zonal level. Hence, the eleventh coalition was formed in 2014 by the (NDA) led by the BJP with Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, [7].

Hence, considering Indian coalition context in mind, where coalition is present in every general election. Even, currently, there is huge clamour in India about "Third Front" before 17th general election in 2019. Third front stand for major political parties coming together to win the election against NDA government.

5. APPLICABILITY OF STUDY IN INDIAN COALITION CONTEXT

As its quite clear now that in this paper, researcher is focused more on policy formulation aspect, which start once the coalition government come into existence. Therefore, this study become important as it help coalition governments to understand the problems and

complexities in policy formulation and provide with the required solution in specific situations. Therefore, above mentioned study focused on three major Challenges of policy making and coalition government, which are-

5.1 Modelling of Coalition Government

Political parties in coalition governments have different perspective in terms of interests and culture. And this is the major challenge faced by Government of policy making [8].

Moore & Mukherjee [9] argued that two factors guide policymaking in coalition governments. One is the preferences of the parties involved which is different from each other, and the other is the institutional limitations on the policy-making by such multi-party governments which compels the coalition government to come to unanimous decision.

It was also found that the preferences of the parties are the cause of the problems arising in delegation and the institutional limitations on the policy-making aligns with solutions to the issues. Both the factors play a crucial role in the successful execution of the agenda considering the party as the principal and ministers as agents or secondary to the process of decision making. Due to the working of the above two factors policy disagreement arises among the political parties in Parliament, policy disagreements are an important consideration in politics of coalition governments. The condition of policymaking in the coalition is governed by the preferences of the actors or the agents involved. Also, the continuity of the governments in office is considerably influenced by the internal setting of preferences of the agents. The actions that are taken in the formulation of policy are highly influenced by the actions defined by each political agent in the Parliament. The policy-making decisions regarding enactment and passing of legislation are often hindered by disagreement flowing from the participant's preferences [10].

When all the partners commit themselves to agree on specific issues, it makes the implementation of the legislation easier and less of an obstacle race. The literature review reveals that the consensus among parties leads to better legislation.

5.2 Delegation and Agency Problems

Delegation problem of responsibilities, finance, policy action and other actions in Parliament give rises to Coalition among government [10].

The participating parties in the coalition have their electorates, agenda, ideals and policy concerns for which they go through the whole hog of elections competing with parties who might become their partners in the times to come. Their record as a party in the government becomes more important than their record as a government in general because it determines their electoral fate in the future. It becomes the cause of problems in delegating important portfolios like finance [11]. It stand true in Indian context when President R. Venkataraman was of the opinion that Chandra Shekhar was able to handle parliament competently but was under constant strain from the Congress party which led to his resignation. This shows that it was the real government and Chandra Shekhar can be merely called a proxy. This problem is referred to as the agency problem in government political parties.

Another challenge identified under agent issue by Kostova (2004) is differences in preferences which are the major cause of agency problems in the coalition governments. When parties with a divergent view of the functioning and condition of the world will join hands, there is bound to be areas where there will be the substantial differences in opinions on policymaking. In the case of H.D. Deve Gowda, the Congress revoked its support to him due to the rising discontent regarding communication over the coalition which led to the loss of a vote of confidence to the united front government. There can almost never be similarity of beliefs and opinions amongst a wide number of people and parties [12].

Therefore, it is a challenge for the leader of a coalition government to make decisions and plan and execute various policies or obtain consensus from all sides. However, this does not validate the withdrawing of support or compelling a minister to resign due to the difference in opinions [13].

The amount and extent to which policy decisions are influenced by diverse political views of equally diverse political parties will determine the probable implementation of an electoral promise. Though it becomes imperative to arrive at some common ground; it becomes necessary for parties to compromise. Such compromise would depend on the issue under discussion and the

preference of the involved parties as to which policy is more important to them.

Hazlehurst [1] on the same grounds found out that the participant parties not only have different views on specific issues, they also have a different take on the level of importance of various policies. In case of United Progressive Alliance (UPA 2) government, Trinamool Congress (TMC) Chief Mamta Bannerjee withdrew her support from the UPA because their demands of rolling back of reforms were not met. Their rollback of reforms included issues like FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in retail, the rise in the price of diesel and limiting the number of subsidised gas cylinders for households. Similarly, the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)* also withdrew its support due to an issue of a draft resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council regarding violation of human rights to Sri Lankan Tamils. It shows that the difference of opinions amongst the different parties leads to withdrawal of support from the coalition. Care needs to be taken to ensure that important policies are handled properly despite the difference in opinions amongst the parties [14]. A logical inference garnered from the study is that a specific policy proposal to be implemented is more likely to get support if it is relevant to individual specific parties as well as in the case of UPA 2 government. Stressing certain policies will drive up the perceived competency or credibility of certain parties while the position of other parties remains unaffected. It drives the moves of various parties in the coalition.

Further, with the formation of the coalition government, the agreements and the distribution of key areas and policy decisions are all settled through negotiation and mutual agreements. There have been various instances in the Indian politics where the regional parties like Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) have had to collaborate with BJP to avoid bifurcation of their votes against their common enemy, i.e. Congress party. Therefore, they were forced to support BJP to protect their electoral prospects [15].

A similar study conducted by Herd (2010) found out consensus to be the factor responsible for the agreements among the Coalition Government. But each government has to start with existing policies and regulations to the status quo. If the government desires to alter these, they again will need a consensus. In the absence of the agreement, the status quo remains. In coalition governments, each party tries to block policy changes which either may be adversely affect its quo [16]. Thus, it can be stated that the power equation is more in favour of the party seeking changes to current policy rather than changing the status quo.

5.3 Challenging Ministerial Discretion

In a study conducted by Wang, Nathwani, & Wu (2016), it was found that the functioning of multi-party governments is severely hindered as participating parties use their control over their ministries under their jurisdiction to address and advance their specific agenda rather than cooperates in the coalition [17]. In the case of Telangana movement cooperation, the announcement of the formation of a separate Telangana state led to protests across both Andhra and Rayalaseema. It included the resignation of MLAs (Member of Legislative Assembly) from those regions seeking reversal of the orders of the home minister. It took a lot of committees and consensus to take a stand on this issue which shows that the parties use their power to tilt the government policies in their favour [7]. Apart from the divisiveness of the political parties, the preferences ostensibly convert into potential and actual agency loss because of the need to delegate implementation of the policy from the combined cabinet to the individual ministers or agents whose individual policy position may differ substantially from the coalition average. In his study Hazlehurst, D. (2001) held control mechanism as one of the ways to keep coalition party confined to a specific course of action. There is a control mechanism under work that parties of coalition use which is the bargaining power to keep the coalition and the majority party on to a specific course of action. If it does not work out, support is threatened to be withdrawn. It was found that such challenges to coalition severely threaten the functioning of the government and even constrain or slower down the public policy decisions making by hindering the progress. For example, a few days before the RathYatra was about to end at Ayodhya in 1990, the then-chief minister of Bihar, Lalu Prasad Yadav made L K Advani prisoned in Samastipur. BJP had warned that it would withdraw support if Advani is arrested, so, on his arrest, BJP withdrew support which left the country unstable. R.Venketaraman observed,

"It is my impression that if V.P. Singh had headed a government with a clear majority instead of depending on a conglomeration of parties mutually destructive to each other, he would have given a good administration to the country. Being dependent on parties with different objectives and ideologies, he could not withstand pressures from discordant groups" [18].

This shows that there are other reasons, besides political, which lead to the withdrawal of support by political parties from a coalition government. Apart from arriving at a policy bargain consensus, the parties involved in the coalition government have to strike a balance on the allocation of ministerial portfolios. Because jurisdiction over a certain portfolio allocates power over agenda setting, it can be regarded as a dominant instrument capable of influencing the enactment or prevention of a specific policy decision [19].

In 1997, Inder Kumar Gujral was selected as a consensus candidate amongst others including Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Indian National Congress, left parties and others. When Inder Kumar Gujral refused to dismiss any DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) leaders from his government, INC (Indian National Congress) withdrew support from the government which led to the resignation of Mr Gujral [20]. Despite this, there is not much freedom to appoint whomsoever to the cabinet as the party considers because it depends on the influence of the participating parties and the candidate's popularity with the public. Cabinet ministers tend to choose and implement their own party's policy ideals rather than the collective ideals in the areas under their jurisdictions. It can be started after doing the literature review that there lies an enormous potential for agency loss in the policy delegation from the coalition government as a whole to the ministers as individuals. It happens because the preferences of individuals and collectives are divergent.

6. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Hazlehurst (2007) suggested that coalition government may resort to controlling mechanism that will seek to help keep the differences at bay and prevent the ministers of different parties holding different portfolios from drifting away from the popular mandate.

Gelder [21], argued that to restrict future policy actions from sliding away from common coalition ground, a potential solution can be to assign junior ministers from the majority party the job of being an overseer. As it was noted that there are differences in the preferences of individual actors and collective, the allocation of portfolios can be considered as a solution to ensure successful delegation and execution of legislative agenda in policymaking. Ministers are then more likely to implement and continue with tasks assigned to them as it aligns with their party's policies as opposed to the coalition collective. A coalition is likely to be more successful if the parties moderate their ideologies and programmes along with listening to the point of view of ministers of other political parties as well. It is not necessary that all parties shall have similar beliefs and ideologies which might lead to difficulty in achieving consensus on issues. A considerable literature review has pointed towards using this as a strategic move. Additionally, this also hinders the autonomy of the senior minister to some extent thus, effectively reducing the ministerial discretion [10].

In the real-world democracies, the coalition practice does not give complete autonomy to the individual heads or cabinet ministers. The individual heads have to work within the ambit of rules imposed by the coalition, and this helps in overcome the problem of decision making and delegation. Holding a particular portfolio gives power to the respective party to influence decision making, but on the other hand, it also gives the power to other parties to challenge the decision [22].

Another solution that can be considered is the formulation of a coalition agreement or a contract. It can have a significant effect on the performance of cabinets in public policymaking. Such drafts can reduce the negative impact of the differentiation in individual preferences. It will also assist in limiting the ministerial discretion of cabinet ministers in their respective ministries [17].

7. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In the study conducted above, which entailed a systematic literature review, it was examined that the delegation problem has a considerable impact in the real-world policy-making decisions in multi-party governments. Moreover, it was found that the Indian party system has become fragmented since 1996. Due to the decline of the

Congress party and the simultaneous rise of the BJP accompanied with the rise of a large number of other state-based parties with few seats which lead to the necessity of formation of coalition governments party ideology and functioning criteria. It was found to be a major influencer followed by preferences of individual actors in impacting policymaking agenda. Allocation of portfolios among the different political parties in Parliament can significantly help in the achievement of Parliament agendas. The absence of converging preferences of the participating parties of the coalition government, division of portfolios among cabinet ministers leading to a power struggle, and ministerial discretions all enhance the potential for agency loss in the delegation in parliamentary activity.

The possible solutions have been identified in the systematic review for example, the country with divergent and coalition government is recommended to formulate an agreement in the starting itself to reduce the future impact of divergent preference of political parties in policy formulation. The main reason behind the failure of coalition government in an economy where the parties withdraw support for the smallest reasons is that there are no friends or enemies in politics; the only thing permanent is interest. Along with it, the presence of ideological differences on important issues like liberalisation, secularism, expectations of instability lead to the rise of minority coalitions which lead to difficulties in planning and implementation of policies.

8. CONCLUSION

The coalition government is a multi-party government where several parties cooperate and govern as a single government. The aim of the present research was to study the challenges and the solutions of the policy making in coalition government. On the basis of the systematic review, the researcher identified three major challenges that are faced by coalition government. These are first, modelling of coalition government, second, delegating and agency issues and third is, challenges of ministerial discretion. It has been observed that coalition government has more or less failed to serve the purpose of governing the country.

Modelling of the coalition government has represented the complex structure of the coalition government. This complex structure involves several parties belonging to different background and culture coming into contact to form coalition government. Another identified challenge is delegation and agency issue where delegation of power, authority and responsibilities among different parties forming coalition government was an issue. Finally, ministerial discretion where the parties wanted to exercise the power of their ministries under their jurisdiction.

As per the literature review, it can be recommended to Coalition government to adhere to the control mechanism to prevent delegation problem within the working of Parliament. Bargaining power through control mechanism results in converging of views. Another identified solution is assigning junior ministries an overseer will help in effective policymaking because the juniors can then focus on their individual assigned tasks

The results of this study can be generalised on other democracies to the extent to which the political systems are similar. If the coalition governments share characteristics, the results can be applied, but a comparative research design needs to conduct to arrive at more specific conclusions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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