

Review Article

Public Policy Making in Coalition Government: Challenges and Solution

ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting scenarios of the political scenes in the current years is the emergence of the coalition government. The governance by an amalgam of various political parties is based on negotiations among them and a 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. Total 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 it, 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. First is the individual preferences of the agents or the ministers of the cabinet and second being the party ideologies and functioning. Out of which the party ideals were found more important because it meant weight regarding electoral costs. Existing research has focused more on the formation and termination of coalition arrangements rather than on the policy output by the government so formed. The difference that exists between the different configurations of the multi-party governments has a significant impact on the public policy making. The study concludes that 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. Along with it, the presence of ideological differences on important issues like liberalisation, secularism, expectations of instability leads to the rise of minority coalitions which lead to difficulties in planning and implementation of policies.

Keywords: Coalition government, delegation, agents, challenges, identified solution, and political party

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, there has been an increase in the number of coalition governments in the parliament(Hazlehurst, 2001). 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. It becomes imperative to understand the challenges and address the issue by suggesting corresponding solutions to the issue of 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 unequivocal decisions regarding policy agenda. Most of the literature and data available pertains to the formation, allocation of portfolios within the multi-party government, and the termination of such governments. 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. The study aims to allow a conceptual starting point and to bring the research on public policy making in the coalition governments. The paper intends to identify the challenges and solution underlying in the formation of public policy in the coalition government.

45 **2. METHODOLOGY**

46 The methodology of the study is based on a systematic review of Government coalitions and
47 challenges faced in policymaking. A systematic review is a highly rigorous review of existing literature
48 that addresses a formulated question. This review systematically searches, identifies, selects,
49 appraises, and synthesizes research evidence relevant to the question using a methodology that is
50 explicit, reproducible, and leads to minimize bias. It helps to present clear findings to highlight
51 problems, challenges, and offer proof about the effect of the implementation of policies and keep into
52 account the findings of similar studies.

53 **2.1 Search Strategy**

54 Challenges faced by the coalition government in policy-making were searched to do a
55 literature review for the present systematic review. The studies that were investigated the
56 involved the concept of policymaking, a coalition government and different challenges. To
57 perform a literature search, the following set of single and combined words were used:
58 *coalition government, influencer, policy making, challenges, political parties, delegation,*
59 *agency issue and modelling.*

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61 **2.1.1 Description of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

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63 **2.1.1.1 Inclusion criteria**

64 The below-mentioned set of inclusion criteria that have been adopted to select the studies
65 for review in the research:

- 66 • Discussion about challenges faced in coalition government while making policy.
- 67 • Study based on the Coalition government.
- 68 • Studies reported the possible solutions to the policy-making in the coalition
69 Government.

70 **2.1.1.2 Exclusion criteria**

71 The various exclusion criteria used to reduce inclusion of non-pertinent information sources
72 were:

- 73 • Studies that discuss soul and basic concepts of Coalition government, with no
74 Challenge and solution to the problem.
- 75 • Studies in a language other than the English
- 76 • Studies that were not accessible completely

77 **2.2 Selection of studies**

78 Before discussing, inferring the impact of the coalition government on the public policy
79 making, there is a requirement of making a selection of studies. After reviewing 50 studies
80 on this significant function of the coalition government, there was revealed relevancy of 15
81 studies that carried forward a discussion about policymaking. On further investigation of 10
82 studies, three were specifically about the modelling of the coalition government, and three
83 were concerning delegation and agency issues. Moreover, four studies were about
84 challenging ministerial discretion.

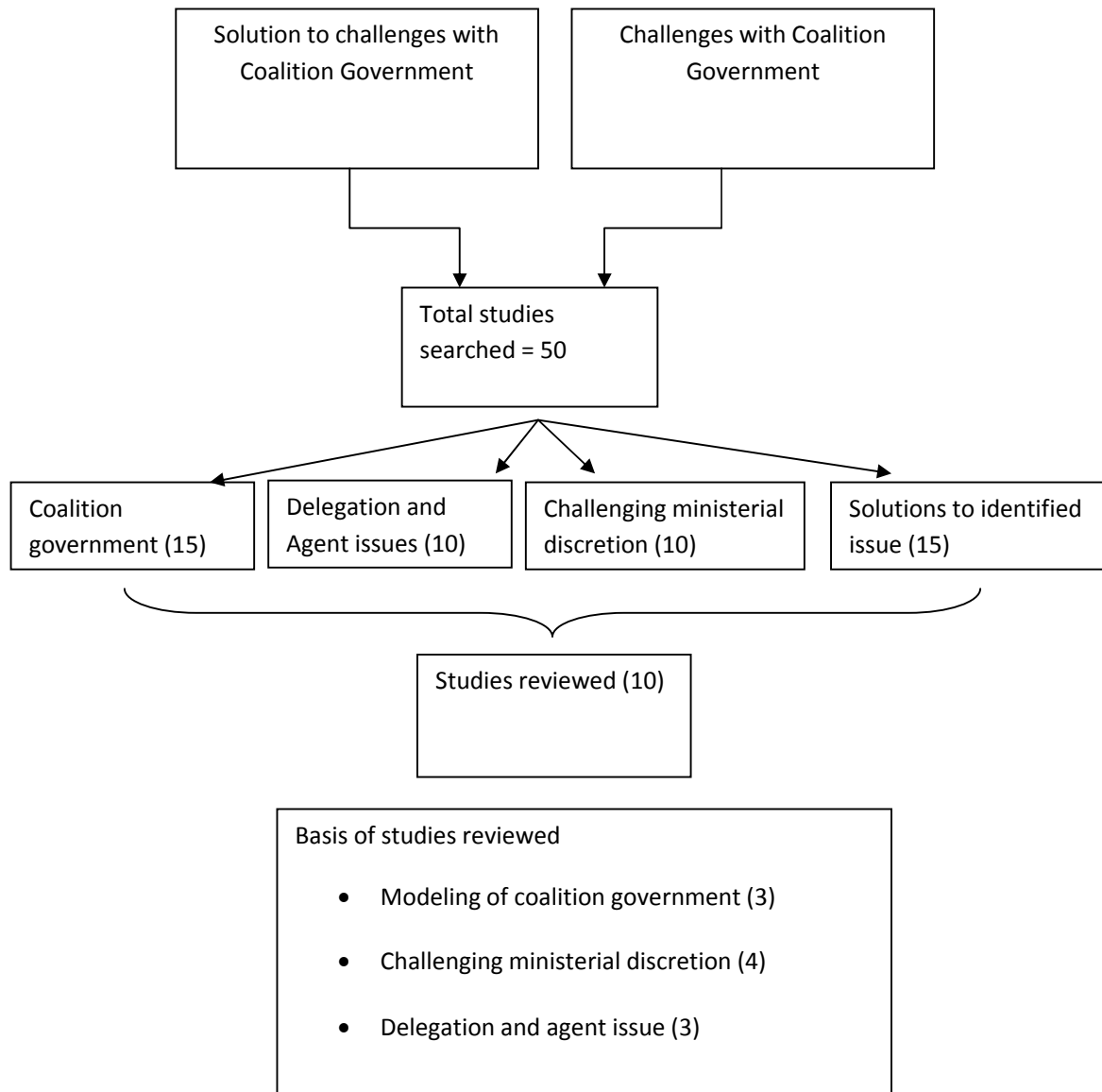
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92 **Fig. 1 Systematic review chart**

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94 **3. DISCUSSION**

95 **3.1 Coalition government basic structure and functioning regarding modelling**
 96 **coalition policymaking**

97 A study conducted by Martin found out that policymakers in coalition governments have
 98 diversity in interests and responsibilities. And this is the major challenge faced by
 99 Government in policy making.

100 Another similar study conducted by Meeting argued that two factors guide policymaking in
101 coalition governments. One is the preferences of the parties involved, and the other is the
102 institutional limitations on the policy-making by such multi-party governments. Inexperience,
103 it was found that the first factor is the cause of the problems arising in delegation and the
104 second factor aligns with solutions to the issues. From the perspective of theory, both the
105 factors play a crucial role in the successful execution of the agenda considering party as the
106 principal and ministers as agents or secondary to the process of decision making. Due to the
107 working of the above two factors policy disagreement arises among the political parties in
108 Parliament. Policy disagreements are an important consideration in politics of coalition
109 governments. The condition of policymaking in the coalition is governed by the preferences
110 of the actors or the agents involved. Also, the continuity of the governments in office is
111 considerably influenced by the internal setting of preferences of the agents. The actions that
112 are taken in the formulation of policy are highly influenced by the actions defined by each
113 political agent in the Parliament. The policy-making decisions regarding enactment and
114 passing of legislation are often hindered by disagreement by the participant's preferences
115 (Naoto, 2007). When all the partners commit themselves to agree on specific issues, it
116 makes the implementation of the legislation easier and less of an obstacle race. The
117 literature review reveals that the consensus among parties leads to better legislation.

118 **3.2 The historical aspect of coalition governments**

119 Historically it has been seen that Indian National Congress has been the single largest party
120 in India since its inception in 1885. Even when India became independent in 1947, the
121 Congress party ruled over India without any opposing or competing party (K, 2016). A
122 coalition government was experienced in India as early as 1937 when Congress and the
123 Muslim League formed a coalition government in UP at the time of operation of the
124 government of India Act, 1935. However, in Free India, a coalition government was first
125 formed in 1977 where Congress and Janta government united under the leadership of
126 Morarji Desai. The formula of uniting all the opposition parties into a single party so that non-
127 Congress votes do not get divided amongst the opposing parties was proposed by Dr Ram
128 Manohar Lohia (Bisla, 2016). The four-party Janta government was in power from 1977 to
129 1979 due to the power struggle within the parties which led to the resignation of Mr Desai as
130 well as the departure of the prominent group leaders like George Fernandes, H.N.
131 Bahuguna, Biju Patnaik and Mudhu Limaye(Fadia, 1980)

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

135 time (Thakurta & Shankar, 2004). The third coalition was formed in 1989 under the
136 leadership of V.P. Singh which was supported by the BJP, which was the second largest
137 party in the country at that time. The fourth coalition government was formed in 1990 under
138 the leadership of Chandra Shekhar. The fifth coalition was formed under the leadership of
139 H.D. Deve Gowda under the banner of united front government which was unison of 13
140 parties including Congress, CPI, Samajwadi Party, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and Asom
141 Gana Parishad amongst others (F. A. Malik & Malik, 2014).

142 The sixth coalition was formed in 1997 under the leadership of I.K. Gujral, and seventh was
143 formed in 1998 led by A.B. Vajpayee which was supported by AIADMK, BJD, Akali Dal, Shiv
144 Sena and others. The eighth coalition was formed in 1999 which was led by A.B. Vajpayee
145 under National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was led by BJP and supported by 24
146 political parties including AIADMK, Telgu Dasam Party, NC, Trinamool Congress and others
147 (R. P. S. Malik, 2009). The ninth, as well as a tenth coalition, was formed in May 2004 and
148 2009 respectively under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh under the party named
149 United Progressive Alliance supported by Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal,
150 and others including left parties (Bisla, 2016). The eleventh coalition was formed in 2014 by
151 the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP with Narendra Modi as the Prime
152 Minister.

153

154 **3.3 Delegation and agency problems in coalition governments**

155 Delegation problem of responsibilities, finance, policy action and other actions in Parliament
156 give rises to Coalition among government(Naoto, 2007). The participating parties in the
157 coalition have their electorates, agenda, ideals and policy concerns for which they go
158 through the whole hog of elections competing with parties who will become their partners in
159 the times to come. Their record as a party in the government becomes more important than
160 their record as a government in general because it determines their electoral fate. It
161 becomes the cause of problems in delegating important portfolios like finance (Oppermann,
162 Brummer, & Willigen, 2003). President R. Venkataraman was of the opinion that Chandra
163 Shekhar was able to handle parliament competently but was under constant strain from the
164 Congress party which led to his resignation. This shows that it was the real government and
165 Chandra Shekhar can be merely called a proxy. This problem is referred to as the agency
166 problem in government political parties. Another challenge identified under agent issue by
167 Kostova (2004) is differences in preferences which are the major cause of agency problems
168 in the coalition governments. When parties with a divergent view of the functioning and
169 condition of the world will join hands, there is bound to be areas where there will be the

170 substantial differences in opinions on policymaking. In the case of H.D. Deve Gowda, the
171 Congress revoked its support to him due to the rising discontent regarding communication
172 over the coalition which led to the loss of a vote of confidence to the united front
173 government. There can almost never be similarity of beliefs and opinions amongst a wide
174 number of people. Therefore, it is a challenge for the leader of a coalition government to
175 make decisions and plan and execute various policies or obtain consensus on various
176 issues. However, this does not validate the withdrawing support or compelling a minister to
177 resign due to the difference in opinions (Ricker, 1962). The amount and extent to which
178 policy decisions are influenced by diverse political views of equally diverse political parties
179 will determine the probable implementation of an electoral promise. Though it becomes
180 imperative to arrive at some common ground; it becomes necessary for parties to
181 compromise. The amount of which depends on the issue under discussion and the
182 preference of the involved parties as to which policy is more important to them.

183 Hazlehurst (2001) on the same grounds found out that participant parties not only have
184 different views on specific issues, they also have a different take on the importance level of
185 various policies. In the case of UPA 2 government, TMC Chief Mamta Bannerjee withdrew
186 her support to the UPA because their demands of rolling back of reforms were not met. Their
187 rollback of reforms included issues like FDI in retail, the rise in the price of diesel and limiting
188 the number of subsidized gas cylinders for households. Similarly, the DMK also withdrew
189 their support following an issue of a draft resolution at the United Nations Human Rights
190 Council regarding violation of human rights to Sri Lankan Tamils. It shows that the difference
191 of opinions amongst the different parties leads to withdrawal of support from the coalition.
192 Care needs to be taken to ensure that important policies are handled properly despite the
193 difference in opinions amongst the parties (Vaddiraju, 2017). A logical inference garnered
194 from the study is that a specific policy proposal is to be implemented more likely to get
195 support if it is more important to individual specific parties as well as in the case of UPA 2
196 government. Stressing on certain policies will drive up the perceived competency or
197 credibility of certain parties while the position of other parties remains unaffected. It drives
198 the moves of various parties in the coalition.

199 Further, with the formation of the coalition government, the agreements and the distribution
200 of key areas and policy decisions are all settled through negotiation and mutual agreements.
201 There have been various instances in the Indian politics where the regional parties like TDP
202 and INLD have had to collaborate with BJP to avoid bifurcation of their votes against their
203 common enemy, i.e. the Congress party. Therefore, they were forced to support BJP to
204 protect their electoral prospects (Hoeber & Rudolph, 2002). Another similar study conducted
205 by(Herd, 2010) found out a consensus to be the factor responsible for the agreements

206 among the Coalition Government. But each government has to start with existing policies
207 and regulations or the status quo. If the government desire to alter these, they again will
208 need consensus. In the absence of the agreement, the status quo remains. In coalition
209 governments, each party tries to block policy changes which either may be current of status
210 quo. Thus it can be stated that the power equation is more in favour of the party seeking
211 changes to current policy rather than changing the status quo.

212 **3.4 Challenging ministerial discretion**

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

236 *“It is my impression that if V.P. Singh had headed a government with a clear majority*
237 *instead of depending on a conglomeration of parties mutually destructive to each*
238 *other, he would have given a good administration to the country. Being dependent on*
239 *parties with different objectives and ideologies, he could not withstand pressures*
240 *from discordant groups” (Venkataraman, 1994).*

241 This shows that there are other reasons, besides political, which leads to withdrawal of
242 support by political parties from a coalition government.

243 Apart from arriving at a policy bargain consensus, the parties involved in the coalition
244 government have to strike a balance on the allocation of ministerial portfolios. Because
245 jurisdiction over a certain portfolio allocates power over agenda setting, it can be regarded
246 as a dominant instrument capable of influencing the enactment or prevention of a specific
247 policy decision (Strøm & McClean, 2015). In 1997, I. K. Gujral was selected as a consensus
248 candidate amongst others including Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, INC, left
249 parties and others. When I K Gujral refused to dismiss any DMK leaders from his
250 government, INC withdrew support from the government which led to the resignation of Mr
251 Gujral (Gupta, 1998). Despite this, there is not much freedom to appoint whomsoever to the
252 cabinet as the party considers because it depends on the influence of the participating
253 parties and the candidate's popularity with the public. Cabinet ministers tend to choose and
254 implement their own party's policy ideals rather than the collective ideals in the areas under
255 their jurisdictions. It can be started after doing the literature review that there lies an
256 enormous potential for agency loss in the policy delegation from the coalition government as
257 a whole to the ministers as individuals. It happens because the preferences of individuals
258 and collectives are divergent (Xwkru, Hhwhu, & Zrun, 1999).

259 **Table 1: Table of factors responsible for Challenges**

S No.	Study details	Challenge	Factors responsible	Relationship
1	(Martin & Vanberg, 2014)	Policymaking in the coalition government	Preference of party involved	The institutional limitation is the solution to this challenge
2	(Meeting, 2001)	Policy disagreement in Coalition government	Preference of actor	The condition of policymaking in the coalition government is governed by this factor
3	(Naoto, 2007)	Delegation issue	Personal agendas	Cause of issue in delegating important portfolios
4	(Opperman et al.,	Policy disagreement	Institutional limitation	Institutional limitation is solution to this challenge

	2003)	t in Coalition government		
5	(Strøm & McClean, 2015)	Delegation issue	Personal ideals	Cause of issue in delegating important portfolios
6	(Wang et al., 2016)	Policy disagreement in Coalition government	Agents involved	Governance of policy making
7	(Xwkrut et al., 1999)	Delegation issue	Personal Policy concerns	Cause of issue in delegating important portfolios
8	(Kostova, 2004)	Agency problem	Difference in preference	Divergent preference leads to disagreement
9	(Gelder, 2017)	Policy decision	Negotiation	Negotiation helps in policy making
10	(Seyd, 2002)	Agency problem	Difference in preference	Divergent preference leads to disagree

260

261 3.5 Possible existing and potential solutions to the identified challenges

262 Given such delegation problems, Hazlehurst found out that the parties of the coalition may
 263 resort to controlling mechanism that will seek to help keep the differences at bay and prevent
 264 the ministers of different parties holding different portfolios from drifting away from the
 265 popular mandate.

266 In another similar study conducted by Gelder (2017), it was found out that to *restrict future*
 267 *policy actions* from sliding away from common coalition ground, a potential solution can be to
 268 *assign junior ministers* from the majority party the job of being an overseer. As it was noted
 269 that there are differences in the preferences of individual actors and collective, the *allocation*
 270 *of portfolios* can be considered as a solution to ensure successful delegation and execution
 271 of legislative agenda in policymaking. Ministers are then more likely to implement and
 272 continue with tasks assigned to them as it aligns with their party's policies as opposed to the
 273 coalition collation collective. A coalition is likely to be more successful if the parties moderate
 274 their ideologies and programmes along with listening to the point of view of ministers of other

275 political parties as well. It is not necessary that all parties shall have similar beliefs and
 276 ideologies which might lead to difficulty in achieving consensus on issues. A considerable
 277 literature review has pointed towards using this as a strategic move. Additionally, this also
 278 hinders the autonomy of the senior minister to some extent thus, effectively reducing the
 279 ministerial discretion (Naoto, 2007).

280 In the real world democracies, the coalition heads do not give complete autonomy to the
 281 individual heads or cabinet ministers. The individual heads have to work within the ambit of
 282 rules imposed by the coalition, and this helps in overcoming the problem of decision making
 283 and delegation. Holding a particular portfolio gives power to the respective party to influence
 284 decision making, but on the other hand, it also gives the power to other parties to challenge
 285 the decision (Martin, 2015).

286 Another solution that can be considered is the formulation of a coalition agreement or a
 287 contract. It can have a significant effect on the performance of cabinets in public
 288 policymaking. Such drafts can reduce the negative impact of the differentiation in individual
 289 preferences. It will also assist in limiting the ministerial discretion of cabinet ministers in their
 290 respective ministries (Wang et al., 2016).

291 **Table 2: Table of identified solutions to a particular challenge**

S. No.	Studies Details	Issue	Factors resulting in the resolution of the issue
1	(Hazlehurst, 2001)	Solution to delegation problem	Control mechanism
2	(Gelder, 2017)	Prevent future policy action from drifting	Assign Junior Ministers an overseer
3	(Naoto, 2007)	Successful execution of Parliament agenda	Allocation of portfolios
4	(Martin, 2015)	Reducing negative impact of the differentiation in parties preference	Formulation of a coalition contract or agreement
5	(Wang et al. (2016)	Divergent view	Bargaining power through control mechanism results in converging of views

292 **4. Conclusion**

293 In the study conducted above, which entailed a systematic literature review, it was examined
294 that the delegation problem has a considerable impact in the real world policy-making
295 decisions in multi-party governments. Moreover, it was found that the Indian party system
296 has become fragmented since 1996. Due to the decline of the Congress party and the
297 simultaneous rise of the BJP accompanied with the rise of a large number of other state-
298 based parties with few seats which lead to the necessity of formation of coalition
299 governments party ideology and functioning criteria. It was found to be a major influencer
300 followed by preferences of individual actors in impacting policymaking agenda. Allocation of
301 portfolios among the different political parties in Parliament can significantly help in the
302 achievement of Parliament agendas. The absence of converging preferences of the
303 participating parties of the coalition government, division of portfolios among cabinet
304 ministers leading to a power struggle, and ministerial discretions all enhance the potential for
305 agency loss in the delegation in parliamentary activity.

306 As per the literature review, it can be recommended to Coalition government to adhere to the
307 Control Mechanism to prevent delegation problem within the working of Parliament.
308 Bargaining power through control mechanism results in converging of views. Another
309 identified solution is assigning junior ministries an overseer will help in effective policymaking
310 because the juniors can then focus on their individual assigned tasks. Also, the country with
311 divergent and coalition government is recommended to formulate an agreement in the
312 starting itself to reduce the future impact of divergent preference of political parties in policy
313 formulation. The main reason behind the success of coalition government in an economy
314 where the parties withdraw support for the smallest reasons is that there are no friends or
315 enemies in politics; the only thing permanent is interest. Along with it, the presence of
316 ideological differences on important issues like liberalisation, secularism, expectations of
317 instability leads to the rise of minority coalitions which lead to difficulties in planning and
318 implementation of policies.

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

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