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India: Problems and Prospects for the BJP Government [REDACTED]

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) administration faces many of the same problems that have brought down other coalition governments in recent years, such as ideological disputes, parliamentary paralysis, and disjointed policy initiatives. Added to these woes, the BJP faces a host of challenges that stem from the party's Hindu nationalist roots despite its effort to minimize its more extreme tendencies. In its campaign the BJP managed to strike a balance between its long-stated Hindu goals and the more popular "moderate" platform put forth in its manifesto. The responsibility of governing will soon force the party to deal with hardline elements of the BJP that lurk in the wings. The party's efforts to resolve its factionalism may make it difficult for the new government to hold on to allies and retain power - and for Western policymakers to discern the BJP's intentions on issues of mutual concern. [REDACTED]

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India: Problems and Prospects for the BJP Government [REDACTED]

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has carved out an enduring role for itself in Indian politics no matter how long it leads the newly formed coalition government in New Delhi. It is the only party in India besides Congress with enough clout to drive key decisions even when not in the government:

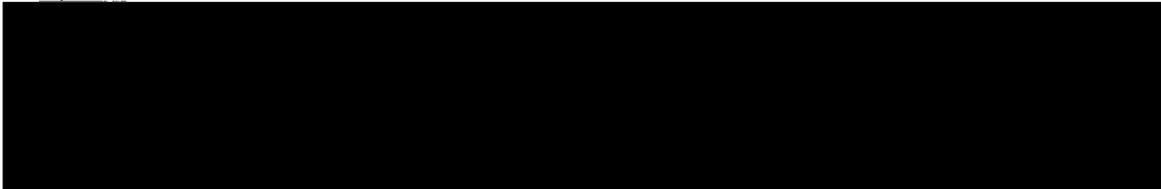
- [REDACTED]
- BJP fortunes continue to rise at a time when many longtime political parties in India are on the wane. The party has demonstrated its ability to survive the rough and tumble of governing at the state level, has overcome its Hindu extremist reputation enough to form alliances with diverse partners, and has expanded its constituency beyond its original upper-caste Hindu core of support. [REDACTED]

The party must try to bridge the gulf that remains between its moderate manifesto and its more extreme roots. How well it does so will have significant bearing on what constituencies in India will support the BJP and for how long. The party's softening of its nationalist image to build mass appeal has confused Western observers about its true intent on issues such as nuclear proliferation and relations with Pakistan. The BJP's approach to these subjects could swing from cooperative to antagonistic, depending on its resolution of disputes between hardline and moderate factions. [REDACTED]

How Hindu? [REDACTED]

A key challenge for the BJP centers on its designation of "Hindutva"--the idea of a unified Hindu state--as its guiding theme. The party's embrace of Hindutva contributed significantly to its electoral leap forward in 1991, and press [REDACTED] reporting indicates that senior BJP leaders without exception would be loath to abandon it. The party's need to ally with disparate political parties in Parliament, however, has prompted it to temper its religious rhetoric and slow its pursuit of some extreme goals:

- To please both its old and new constituencies, a BJP-led government



will have to appear to address the proposals of its hardline backers without acting on them--such as delegating decisions on Hindu extremist demands to an independent forum.

- Prime Minister Vajpayee claims that it was no longer necessary for a BJP government to enact legislation to build a Hindu temple at the site of the mosque in Ayodhya that BJP activists helped tear down in 1992. He says the issue will be resolved "democratically" through dialogue.
- BJP leaders may allow party hardliners to dominate security policy--on which there is little disagreement among Indian voters--while appeasing its allies' concerns with more moderate policy on social issues. [REDACTED]

How Nationalist? [REDACTED]

The BJP emphasizes nationalism on both economic and security issues, but several constraints will temper its ability to act on its rhetoric:

- Some Indian business leaders back the BJP's "swadeshi" policies--which protect domestic industries by limiting foreign investment--because they fear competition, but the BJP faces pressure from other constituencies in the growing middle class who demand greater choice and flexibility. Polls show that Indians as a whole support liberalizing reforms.
- The BJP faces strong international pressure to be more pragmatic toward foreign investment and India's membership in the World Trade Organization. Despite hardline statements from some BJP leaders during the campaign, most party leaders support India's increased participation in a global, integrated economy.
- The BJP faces pressure in international forums--such as the United Nations and the Conference on Disarmament--to make Indian policy conform to international conventions on proliferation issues. At a time when India strives to be taken seriously in its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, such pressure has led BJP leaders, in private conversations with US officials, to stress "continuity" on issues of importance to the West.
- The BJP may spout strong rhetoric about bolstering India's national security posture--particularly toward Pakistan--but it cannot follow through with many of its defense-related threats in the near term. Technological and bureaucratic bottlenecks will impede any BJP effort

to escalate the country's missile programs in the near term, for example. [REDACTED]

How Much of a Team Player? [REDACTED]

To stay in power at the national level, the BJP must reconcile its self-image as a party that is "different from the rest" with its need to work cooperatively with the opposition and allies. Weak coalitions in India can never feel safe in the face of a determined opposition, but the BJP's lack of ideological allies makes it especially vulnerable to ouster. [REDACTED]

How Important Is the Pakistan Factor? [REDACTED]

Pakistani behavior will play a key role in determining whether the BJP turns hardline rhetoric into action. If Islamabad refrains from what India would view as "provocative" behavior, the BJP is likely to respond in kind. The BJP's strong nationalist and security credentials might allow it to make concessions that other Indian parties--fearing accusations of being "soft" on Pakistan--have been unwilling to consider:

- On the other hand, an upsurge in terrorism that India blames on its neighbor or evidence of increased militant infiltration into Kashmir could strengthen the hand of party hardliners who seek increased defense spending and open declaration of India's nuclear and missile status.
- India reacted to Pakistan's flight test of its Ghauri missile--the BJP's first security policy challenge in office--with public nonchalance, but the event is certain to exacerbate tensions between moderates and hardliners who differ sharply on policy toward Pakistan. [REDACTED]

A.B. Vajpayee: Lone Wolf or a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? [REDACTED]

It is unlikely that Vajpayee is simply a popular "front man" who would step aside in due time in favor of hardliners. Vajpayee has worked hard to establish a positive relationship with Western interlocutors and his public statements match views expressed [REDACTED]. Still, Vajpayee's control over the party at times appears tenuous:

- Vajpayee took pains to assure reporters in February 1998 that he, not BJP president L.K. Advani, would be prime minister in a BJP-led government. His comments struck many as a veiled threat to hardline colleagues that he had no intention of being upstaged.

- BJP hardliner K.N. Govindacharya recently referred to Vajpayee as the BJP's "mask and loudspeaker," suggesting that others behind the scenes may control the party. [REDACTED]

Vajpayee is one of the few BJP leaders with political experience at the national level; he was Foreign Minister in the Janata government from 1977 to 1979.¹ Virtually the only top-tier moderate in the BJP, he is largely responsible for guiding the party into mainstream politics and away from its hardline rhetoric of the past. He also is the party's leading vote-getter. Opinion polls before the recent election consistently rated him as the number-one choice among Indian voters for the prime ministership:

- Although his political roots lie in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)--the party's chauvinist parent organization--the statesmanlike Vajpayee has long reassured US officials that he would champion a moderate agenda.
- Vajpayee's views on issues of importance to the West often diverge markedly from his more hardline BJP colleagues, but it is Vajpayee who minimizes areas of agreement with the hardliners to preserve his broad appeal. [REDACTED]



Vajpayee and Advani: An Odd Couple? [REDACTED]

Vajpayee and Advani appear to depend on one another to keep the party functioning and nationally powerful. Their mix of talents suggests that the BJP needs both to be an effective national party. According to press reports, their divergent views and interests complement one another:

- Vajpayee is not interested in the intricacies of the party organization and even forgets the names of BJP functionaries, while Advani oversees every aspect and level of the party organization and has taken charge of grooming the second-level leadership.
- Vajpayee prefers the company of a small circle of close advisers, while Advani interacts with every level of the party organization.

¹ Advani also served in the Janata Cabinet and Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha served for a short time in Chandra Shekhar's minority government in 1990-91. [REDACTED]

- Vajpayee is uncomfortable with the hardline RSS involvement in politics, while Advani believes it represents the BJP's "moral authority."
- Vajpayee believes the party should stay away from overtly religious issues, while Advani views the mosque issue at Ayodhya as an important "political intervention." [REDACTED]

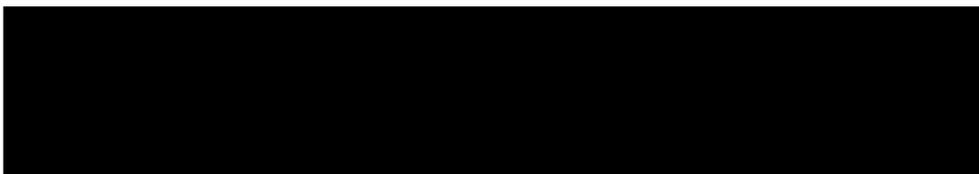
India's Hindu Nationalist Family Tree [REDACTED]

The BJP originally emerged as a political outlet for several of India's Hindu religious organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP). The first of these organizations--known collectively as the Sangh Parivar--was the RSS, formed



before independence to unite Hindus through training in ideology, cultural awareness, and physical fitness. When the RSS was banned in 1948-49--after one of its members assassinated Mahatma Gandhi--it sponsored new organizations it could control from behind the scenes. [REDACTED]

The BJP evolved from the Jana Sangh, which was established in 1951 as the political wing of the RSS. Most of the BJP's senior leadership--including Vajpayee--sprang from the RSS. The RSS depends on the BJP to keep Hindu nationalism in the public eye as a political issue, and the BJP relies on the RSS for manpower and organizing grassroots electoral support. The relationship between the organizations is stable, but tensions could emerge as the BJP tries to adopt moderate views to further satisfy its many coalition partners during the early days of the unwieldy coalition:



- The RSS probably provides financial support to the BJP, although precisely how much is unclear. [REDACTED]

Hindu Extremist Elements: How Much Influence? [REDACTED]

It is unclear how much influence the divergent factions in the BJP will have on government policies, especially given the differing agendas of the ruling coalition's many regional parties. Vajpayee is faced with the difficult task of maintaining balance between moderates and hardliners, particularly in the RSS. The BJP united behind Vajpayee during the campaign and the formation of the new government, but his power stems from his mass appeal rather than his clout within the party. The hardliners are unlikely to jettison Vajpayee, if only because they need him to keep the party in power:

- Vajpayee has been successful in sidelining party hardliners like M.M. Joshi and Kalyan Singh, but many disgruntled RSS leaders want a strong collective leadership rather than a charismatic figure at the helm, according to Indian press reports.
- Some Indian political commentators claim the RSS played a major part in preventing moderate Jaswant Singh--who the group believes is a puppet of Vajpayee--from obtaining the post of Finance Minister.
- Vajpayee needs to bridge differences over basic party doctrine. [REDACTED]

Since the BJP's rise to national prominence, its relationship with the RSS has become increasingly strained. A consensus is growing--even among some hardline Hindu nationalists--that the BJP has outgrown its parent organization, which is causing problems within the Sangh Parivar, according to the Indian press:

- [REDACTED] the BJP's rise to national power, the expansion of its membership outside RSS circles, and its policy shift toward the center has caused a rift between the organizations.
- The BJP's minimizing of "Hindutva" as a campaign slogan has angered the RSS, which clings to the concept to unify the Sangh Parivar.
- Tensions increased when the BJP blamed the RSS for supporting the destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in 1992. The episode set

off the most violent Hindu-Muslim riots since 1947 and prompted criticism of the BJP around the world. [REDACTED]

Prospects for the New Government [REDACTED]

BJP efforts to resolve differences within the party and the coalition will preoccupy the new government for at least its first few weeks in power, distracting it from policymaking or substantive progress in talks with Pakistan. It faces the same problems as its predecessor, the United Front, which also got off to a disjointed start as a result of its disparate members' demands:

- If the BJP must reach for an issue to combat internal disintegration, it might step up hard-line rhetoric on national security issues--or Pakistan-bashing--where there is little disagreement.
- [REDACTED] press reporting indicates that the BJP will set up a National Security Council to examine New Delhi's options on important issues. The administration is likely to use the Council to "buy time" before making decisions on issues that will affect India's relations with the West, such as nuclear policy.
- [REDACTED] New Delhi may be willing to work with US officials behind the scenes on issues of mutual concern, particularly in cases where the give-and-take of coalition politics threatens progress.
- Some of the new ministers holding key portfolios lack experience, which could stall decisionmaking on some issues. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha, for example, has government experience but little formal financial training. [REDACTED]

Working in the BJP's favor, however, is its large block of seats in parliament. The BJP controls a much larger group of members of parliament than the Janata Dal did when it led the United Front coalition government--179 BJP members of parliament compared to 45 held by the Janata Dal. Although the BJP could have more trouble than the UF in reaching a consensus on key policy issues because of its internal factionalism, once decisions are made within the organization, the BJP should have an easier time pushing policies through parliament because of its large block. [REDACTED]

BJP Leadership Patterns

Emerging from the strict organization of the RSS, the BJP most likely has a tiered system:

- The top echelon of leaders consists of moderate Vajpayee, hardline Advani, and extremist Joshi. Immediately below them is a group of powerful leaders--both moderate and hardline--such as Finance Minister Sinha and senior leader Jaswant Singh.
- The second tier is composed of mid-level party members who hold significant positions in the party organization, such as general secretaries, and are the next generation of leaders. Press reporting indicates that Advani has been grooming this new batch of leaders.

The majority of upper-level BJP members hail directly from RSS ranks, which sparks Advani and RSS leaders to exert considerable resources on these members. Press reports note that Vajpayee spends little time with the party rank and file. This imbalance results in Advani's hardline camp dominating Vajpayee's small moderate camp, often alienating it within the party.

Advani's hardliners within the BJP and RSS appear to recognize the importance of hewing to a moderate political line to play a national role. Vajpayee and his moderate followers probably recognize Advani as a key intermediary between their faction and the hardliners and intramural friction is likely to increase without him. It is unclear whether the party could replace either leader with a politician of similar stature in order to maintain cohesion.

The BJP Without Vajpayee: Key Intelligence Gaps



If Vajpayee suddenly left the scene--due to death or removal--it is unclear who would take the reins. It is also uncertain whether a new moderate leader could generate comparable support to challenge the influence of the hardline factions:

- BJP senior spokesman Jaswant Singh falls into the moderate camp, having no RSS connections and serving as Finance Minister in Vajpayee's short-lived 1996 Cabinet.

[REDACTED]

It is likely that an internal power struggle would emerge between the small moderate faction, the hardliners who want to maintain national power, and the extremist faction. We are unsure whether hardliners would support another moderate leader. If Advani took control, it is not clear whether he would adopt a more moderate agenda for the sake of national power. [REDACTED]

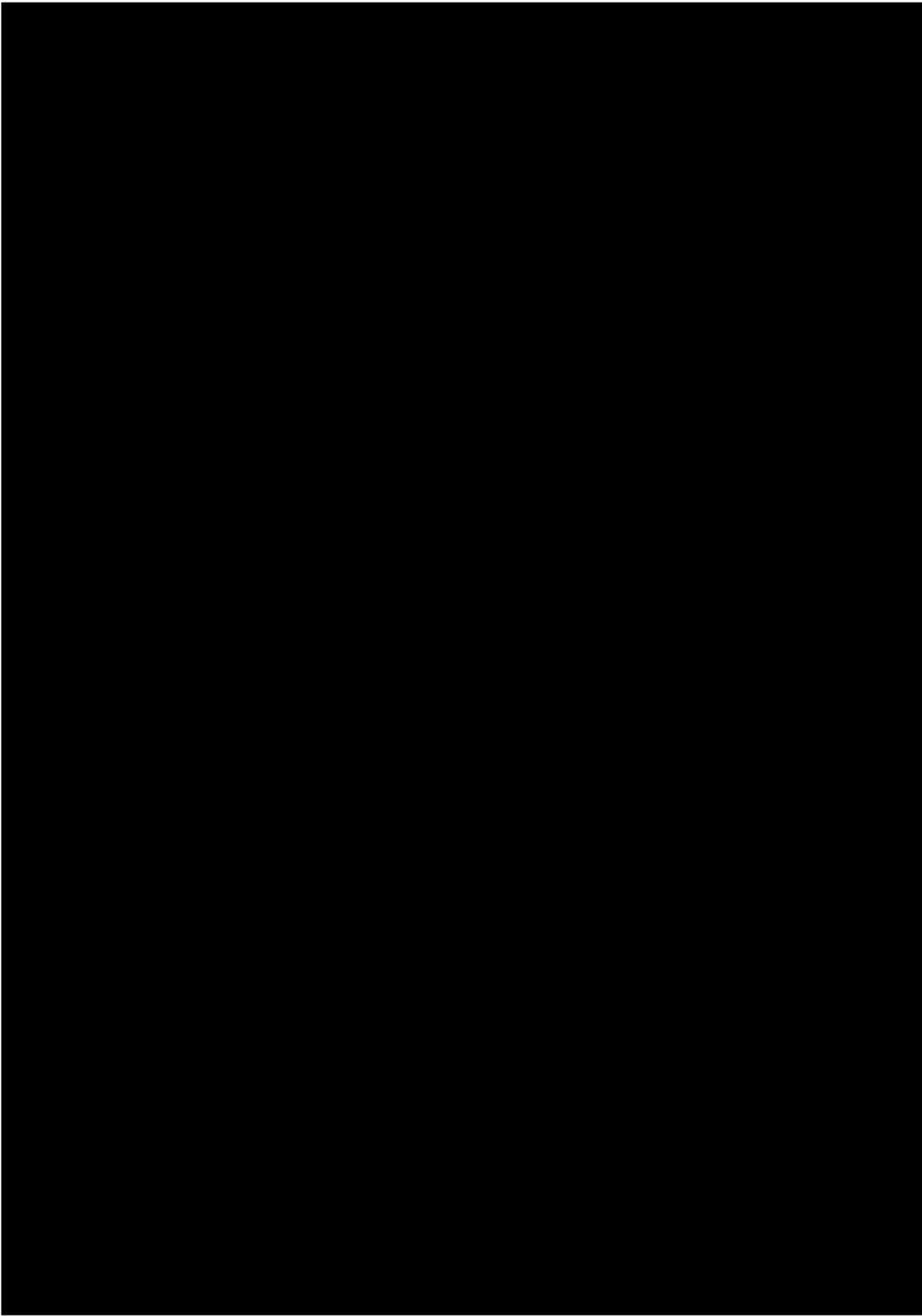
BJP's "Partners of Convenience" [REDACTED]

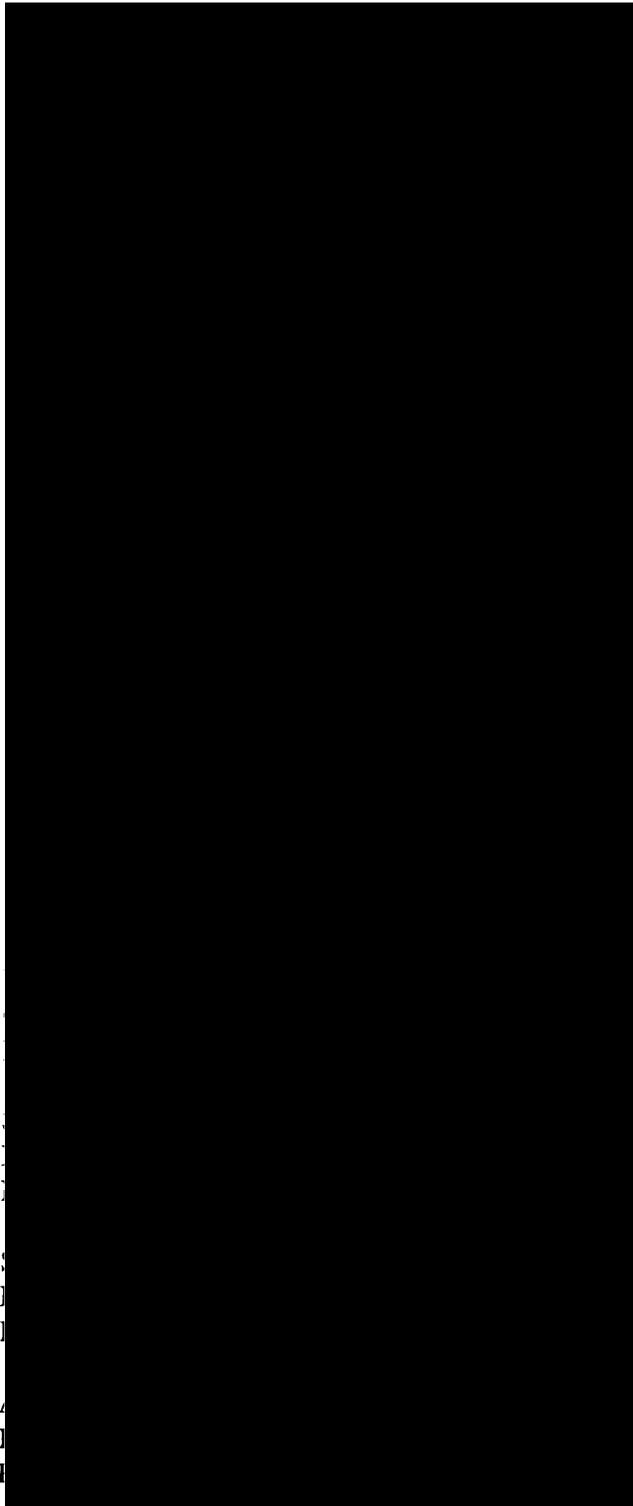
The BJP has no true ideological allies--only parties that have agreed to work with it solely for a stake in government. The BJP's heavy emphasis on "ideology" as a defining party theme makes its lack of compatriots a significant liability for its staying power. To the degree that it appeases its disparate allies, it dilutes its original message of Hindutva. The BJP's alliance with corrupt Tamil Nadu politician Jayalalitha and her AIADMK party, for example, chips away at the BJP's image as a party not tarnished by corruption. The following parties--which allied with the BJP in the runup to the elections--were equally unsettling for the BJP's ideological aspirations:²

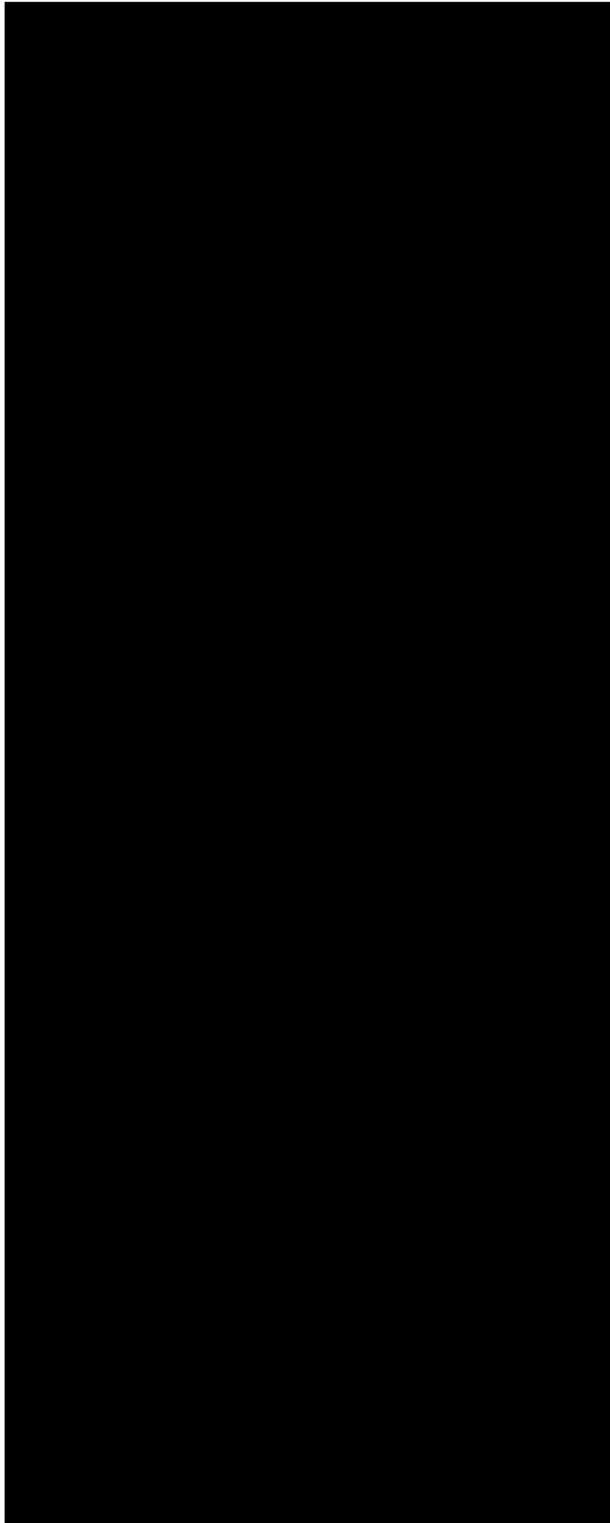
- **All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)** (in Tamil Nadu, led by Jayalalitha): The AIADMK demonstrated that it can pose problems for the BJP when Jayalalitha tested her clout by making her support for the coalition dependent on satisfaction of her state-level demands.
- **Shiv Sena** (in Maharashtra, led by Bal Thackeray): The Shiv Sena comes closest of the BJP's allies to an ideological meeting of minds, but the Shiv Sena's penchant for thuggery and violence has often undermined BJP efforts to emphasize stability and peacefulness.
- **Samata Party** (in Bihar, led by George Fernandes): Economics is the greatest strain between the BJP and Samata parties; in spite of being one of the BJP's most loyal allies, Samata leader Fernandes steadfastly remains a socialist.
- **Akali Dal** (in Punjab, led by Prakash Singh Badal): The Akali Dal's roots in Punjabi separatism makes it an odd match for the nationalist BJP, which emphasizes its refusal to accord any special interests to regions, religions, or ethnic groups.

² This list does not include post-election allies, such as the Telegu Desam Party, which had no seat-sharing arrangements with the Hindu nationalists going into the polls but whose support was a crucial factor in the BJP's ability to pass its vote of confidence. [REDACTED]

- **Haryana Vikas Party** (in Haryana, led by Bansi Lal): The HVP is essentially a party of ex-Congress Party members. The alliance has endured, despite the absence of an ideological commonality.
- **Biju Janata Dal** (in Orissa, led by Naveen Patnaik): This alliance spun out of the disintegration of the Janata Dal (JD) into splinter groups. Antipathy for the Congress Party is the sole focus.
- **Lok Shakti** (in Karnataka, led by Ramakrishna Hegde): This alliance was forged when former JD politician Hegde was rebuffed by the Sonia Gandhi-influenced Congress Party. The LK is another offshoot of the collapse of the old JD. The BJP already had small pockets of support in northern and coastal Karnataka and in urban areas but lacked key political personalities in that region. The alliance with the LS gives the BJP access to Hegde's "magnetic" personality and his well-oiled political machinery, according to the US Consulate in Chennai.
- **Trinamool Congress** (in West Bengal, led by Mamata Bannerjee): This troubled alliance produced little benefit for either party. [REDACTED]







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