

knowledge and skills to be used in fulfilling the role of a Member of Parliament. Parliamentarians require continuous education and training programs and professional development to stay updated on emerging democratic and governance trends. In addition to their representation functions, parliamentarians may have several other responsibilities within the scope of their duties to the parliament, their parties, and their constituents. In this respect,

Therefore, this article argues that increasing technical capacity of parliamentarians in lawmaking and supervision activities—especially at committee stages—may promote their and parliament’s overall effectiveness.

candidates or newly elected parliamentarians may have access to various resources that may improve their awareness of the gridlock of parliamentary structures and processes. Political parties can provide training for candidates and newly elected parliamentarians, or the parliament itself can organize orientation programs and continuous seminars on the basic aspects of parliamentary life. In this respect, the professionalization of parliamentarians may rest on the development of the skills necessary to effectively perform their expected functions. Specialization may come through learning by experiencing the daily practices of the position(s) held (Coghill et al. 2009).

It is important to underscore the impact of international projects and programs on potential improvements in legislative capacity. Members whose major function is devoted to constituency service in practical terms can hardly reserve sufficient time for legislative processes, which require significant investments in preparation, information collection, and development of policy positions on complex subject matters. In this regard, human-resources capacity and the ways and means of supplying information and knowledge from other available sources are the major considerations that take on special importance. Reliable information and analysis are needed, especially during the committee stage. Individual advisers to legislators deal primarily with constituency problems and therefore are hindered in their attempts to address legislative-related activities. The lessons that can be drawn from similar situations in other countries are elaborated in the conclusion to this spotlight (Lewis and Coghill 2016). ■

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THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT: HOW PARTY POLARIZATION, THE RISE OF THE MEDIA, AND SINGLE-PARTY DOMINANCE LED TO THE DECLINE OF THE LOK SABHA

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India’s enviable record as a democracy is marred by a decline in the power and effectiveness of its parliament in recent years. An indication of this is that time lost in disruptions of parliament surged from 10% to 40% between 1996 and 2014 (Pandey 2015). This article argues that party polarization, the rise of the media, and single-party dominance have all led to a decline in the efficacy of the Lok Sabha (i.e., India’s lower and more powerful house).

Initially, India’s parliament enjoyed respectability due to Prime Minister Nehru, who frequently invoked the “majesty” of parliament. Despite the fact that his party, the Indian National Congress (INC), experienced a comfortable majority, he nevertheless routinely engaged with opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) (Malhotra 2014). This was visible in frequent debates on diverse issues, specifically one in which he was challenged by socialist MP Lohia, leading to a series of debates. Nehru’s tolerance and encouragement of the opposition as a vital part of parliament (Apoorvanand 2017) is notable. At that time, the Lok Sabha was marked by frank and open debate on policy matters. However, it lacked the power to hold organs of the government accountable in any way. Examples of this are the fact that treaties did not need ratification by parliament and, because the executive is part of the legislature, parliament did not make laws—it only passed (or rejected) them. Hence, its main function was as a deliberative body, in which issues were highlighted for the nation.

The tenure of Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s second successor, was marked by incremental deterioration in the parliament’s impact on policy. Crucial decisions—such as the declaration of the Emergency, during which civil liberties and rights were curtailed for 18 months—did not involve legislative debate or input. Rather, it was a fiat issued at midnight with the connivance of the president. Core supporters formed unofficial “kitchen cabinets,” and their deliberations and advice gradually replaced the parliament as the main venue of decision making. This trend continued under Rajiv Gandhi (Singh 2015, 361). Robust majorities in parliament, coupled with the fragmented nature of the opposition, allowed both premiers to ignore the Lok Sabha.

A major shift in Indian politics took place in 1989, when the INC lost its historical majority and the government rotated among INC coalitions, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalitions, and third-party coalitions until 2014. Ideally, this should have

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raised the Lok Sabha’s effectiveness, in that bargaining and negotiation among different parties becomes necessary in a multiparty coalition. However, one problem that arose was the “house management” of MPs, wherein the MPs of many parties articulated differing and often contradictory viewpoints. Unlike the stability of a two-party system, these internal party fractures led to chaos (Sanyal 2015). Two recent political trends also likely hampered parliamentary efficacy: (1) the extreme polarization of party politics between the outright exclusivist Hindu nationalist BJP and the numerically declining secular parties led by the INC; and (2) the rise of the role of the media in politics—particularly the televised broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings.

The rise of the BJP brought to the forefront an alternate ideology of “Hindutva” or “Hinduness,” which clashes with the secular framework of the Indian polity. This leads to polarization around this viewpoint and tends to reduce the bargaining and consensual decision making that characterizes multiparty legislatures. The fundamental tenet underlying India’s democracy—it is a secular state—is being openly contested. This questioning of the underpinnings of the state has led to less deliberation in parliament because polarization removes flexibility and openness.

Conversely, the rise of the role of the media has produced the “politics of spectacle,” wherein politicians use their increased visibility to stake out positions of inflexibility and utter pronouncements, all guaranteed to get media attention rather than engage with other MPs. The Lok Sabha therefore has become more theater than legislature (Pandey 2015).

Finally, the reversal of multiparty politics in 2014, in which the BJP gained a majority on its own, means that it is in a position to ignore not only the fragmented opposition but also its own coalition allies. The irrelevance of the Lok Sabha is highlighted by the decreased number of sittings taking place in recent years. In the 2017 winter session, it sat for 22 days, whereas it sat for 31 days in the previous year (*Governance Now* 2017). Major governmental decisions such as the demonetization of 2016 have not involved consultation and deliberation within parliament, reducing it to a venue for protest—much of it theatrical and symbolic. A final contributor to this decline is the lackluster performance of the INC in the most recent national election. In a house of 543 members, the INC received only 44 seats. This allowed the the government to neglect the appointment of a leader of the opposition, thereby further weakening the oppositional and deliberative structure of the Lok Sabha.

Ultimately, arresting the decline of India’s parliament will require the fulfillment of a number of conditions. First, there must be agreement on a mutually acceptable (across parties) fundamental tenet of India’s identity (either secular or, regrettably, Hindu-dominant). Second, a more balanced power structure within parliament must be created. A resurgent opposition with greater

numbers can demand deliberation with more authority than the current fragmented and miniscule opposition parties. Third, the media must decline to publicize theatrical behavior by parliamentary members and instead responsibly focus on matters

of substance. Fourth, all of India’s political parties must agree to give the Lok Sabha the powers that are needed and essential to the proper functioning of any legislature. ■

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LEGISLATURE AS A TOOL OF THE HYBRID REGIME: BANGLADESH EXPERIENCE

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In the past decade, the number of democratic states has declined significantly and regimes that seemingly combine features of both democracy and authoritarianism have proliferated (Freedom House 2018). This development betrayed the predictions that countries will transition to liberal democracy in the post-authoritarian period (Huntington 1991). These emerging regimes have been labeled variously depending on the nature of the institutional arrangements, but they are broadly described as hybrid regimes (Diamond 2002). Their resiliency has drawn attention to the causes of and conditions for such ability of these regimes (Gagné 2012). Four arenas are identified as crucial to the endurance of the hybrid regimes, including legislative and judicial realms (Ekman 2009; Levitsky and Way 2002). In a hybrid regime, the legislative body is stripped of its independence; consequently, it is relegated to a “rubber stamp” for the wishes of the executive. The legislative body then is used to manipulate the constitution to establish control over the electoral arena and judiciary.

Bangladesh embraced parliamentary democracy in 1991, after a short-lived one-party authoritarian system in 1975 and 15 years of military and pseudo-civilian rule. However, by 2018, it is an example of how an enfeebled legislative body can become a tool of the executive in its authoritarian agenda. Between 1991 and 2006,