

# Changing Role of Opposition in India: Concerns and Challenges

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**Abstract:** The role of opposition in a multi-party system is very crucial, and it is essential for the successful functioning of democratic practice. Parliamentary government is essentially a government by discussion and compromise, and it implies not only a parliamentary majority but also a parliamentary minority. Parliamentary democracy needs an opposition most of it is to function effectively and successfully. Effective opposition is very necessary for the right functioning of a parliamentary democracy. It is not the business of the opposition to obstruct the government. Its purpose is not criticizing not to hinder. It is the duty of the opposition to protect democratic values and ethos. A divided and weak opposition is also more dangerous than a muscular ruling party. A large but fragmented opposition lacking unity of purpose and policy initiative may be less successful than a small opposition with the necessary leadership and policy initiative. In order to challenge the government's arbitrary actions, the opposition needs to be able to present a united front, be knowledgeable and competent, and be prepared to take the initiative. Parliamentary democracy will be weakened by the lack of an opposition leader since the opposition won't be able to present a united front against the ruling party.

**Keywords:** Democracy, Opposition, Shadow Cabinet, NDA, INDIA Front, UPA

## **Introduction**

The role of opposition in a multi-party system is very crucial, and it is essential for the successful functioning of democratic practice. Parliamentary government is essentially a government by discussion and compromise, and it implies not only a parliamentary majority but also a parliamentary minority. The legitimate existence of organized groups' political parties that oppose, criticize, and attempt to replace the ruling elite can be viewed as nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself. A strong opposition is essential for the proper working of the parliamentary system. The idea of a parliamentary opposition began to evolve mainly after the 'Glorious Revolution' of

1688 in the United Kingdom, while the opposition was emerging as a well-organized part of the British political system.

D.E. Apter noted that the opposition's duties include "providing criticism" and offering practical alternatives to government programs while considering the functions of political opposition in developing countries. When this role is carried out well, it aids the government in determining which objectives are most likely to satisfy the people. On budget, welfare, and other critical issues, criticism keeps the government attentive to the public and aware of flaws in its policy. According to Robert A. Dahl, the word "opposition" has both a personal and an operational connotation, meaning that it can refer to both being in and causing opposition. By using this standard, he defines the opposition as a collection of people who are successfully organised to oppose any activity that such persons may engage in, including their ideas and ideologies. (Dahl, 1996)

In *Political Democracy*, Edward Shils investigated the need for a unified and accountable opposition. He recognised that the efficient and continued existence of political democracy necessitates a fairly unified and responsible opposition to the ruling party functioning within the rules of the parliamentary game. This opposition should not merely be interested in obstructing and undermining the majority's initiatives based on precise and realistic facts about the country's predicament and the executive's performance. The opposition should be cohesive enough to control or isolate the constitutional system. The opposition must be able to withstand the temptations of conspiracy and subversion, and the governing party must similarly avoid the opposition, which is a step in the direction of subversion.

The views held by Indian Political Scientists and leaders on this scheme are not much different. C.P. Bhambhri summarised that effective opposition is very necessary for the right functioning of a parliamentary democracy (Bhambhri, 1957). But it is not the business of the opposition to obstruct the government. Its purpose is not criticising not to hinder. Parliamentary democracy needs an opposition most of it is to function effectively and successfully. No leader in the party can overcome the temptation of becoming dictatorial, autocratic and arrogant without the watchful eye of a strong, viable, well-informed vigilant opposition. It is the opposition that can expose the mistakes, errors, failures, corruption, lack of honesty and integrity, and the readiness to resort to the most unscrupulous methods and means to achieve the ends and objectives of the rulers.

Ram Kishore Vyas, the former Speaker of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly argued that in a democracy, the majority and minority party or parties comprise the parliament or Legislature. Though both the Government and the Opposition work as opposing forces, there is an unspoken understanding that the majority is to govern

and the minority is to condemn. According to parliamentary practise, the majority recognises the minority's legitimate freedom of expression, association, and movement, and the minority, in turn, allows the majority to carry out its programme. Vijay Rupani, former Chief Minister of Gujarat, said at a gathering that strong opposition is essential for a democracy and that the opposition parties should advance while keeping the country in mind (The Indian Express, 2021).

With regard to the functions of the opposition, Morarji Desai, who was in opposition at the time and later became Prime Minister of India, stated that the responsibility of the opposition is to work for the good of the people, which is also the role of the ruling party. It is the responsibility of the opposition to ensure the well-being of the countries by:

- 1) Supporting democratic and in the best interests of the nation acts taken by the government.
- 2) By opposing government initiatives that, in its opinion, are detrimental to the national interest.
- 3) By exposing the government's faults and employing all constitutionally permissible and nonviolent means to bring incidents of corruption to light, to check it and to reduce it to a minimum.

### **Shadow Cabinet**

The Opposition is generally termed as the 'Shadow Cabinet' or the 'alternative Cabinet'. The opposition party forms its cabinet that would parallel that of the ruling party. They work under the Leader of the Opposition and will have expert party workers or neutral members assisting them (Neelakantan, 2018). Each cabinet minister and his team are matched with a shadow minister in the Opposition. Just as there would be unelected expert advisors in the cabinet minister's team, the shadow minister also would have his team. The shadow ministers neither have powers nor any extra payment, but they serve an important purpose. They get trained in governance while in the Opposition.

A shadow cabinet would help each party to develop capable leaders who could conduct an informed debate. They would be able to corner the government with their expertise and not allow the ruling party to get away with empty slogans. It would take away the load off the Opposition Leader and the people would know who they would be getting as their ministers and how they are compared with the incumbent. This would keep the ministers and bureaucrats on their toes. Whenever the power changes hands, these shadow ministers already have gained enough capability to run the ministry with an independent mind (Neelakantan, 2018).

## Global Perspective

Opposition to government existed in all countries having either a single party or two parties or multiple parties. In a one-party system, since the Opposition was not allowed to exist as a separate institution, it might take the form of a dissident group with minority tendencies and it might criticize the Government at party meetings with varying degrees of freedom. For instance, in Italy, the Fascists always displayed a clear division into left, right, and centre. In Germany also differences within the Nazi Party before 1934 were present (Fartyal, 1971). In the Soviet system, the members and the leaders of the Communist Party at all levels were allowed to make personal criticisms of their actions and policies. But this kind of opposition was not possible always. In the later days of Stalin's rule, for instance, internal opposition was not allowed. Likewise, when the Nazi Party came into power in 1934, the internal opposition was not permitted.

In a two-party system, the Opposition tended to be a real institution and was a potential government, as in England. The Parliamentary system of government in England had evoked admiration from all quarters, largely because of the existence of two major parties (Gupta, 1972). Those parties had functioned based on a clear understanding that it was the right of the majority party to rule the country, and the minority party had the right to discredit the rule of the majority party in the eyes of voters that the party in power was unfit to rule. Since the leader of the Opposition was paid a salary by the state, he came to acquire official status. And since there might be situations between two major parties that existed and power alternated between them, the Opposition behaved and discharged its duty with a sense of responsibility. This phenomenon provided an element of stability to the parliamentary system of government. Harold J. Laski pointed out that two parties were essential for the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy. The Opposition in England as such was described as "Opposition with capital O" because it was only a government in opposition. Robert C. Newmann observed: "The party in power and the party in Opposition understood thoroughly their respective roles. The Opposition made a spirited attack upon the Government program, and the government expected to meet it. The Government did not try to shut off debates, as that would: imply conceding the opposition's point." Thus, under the British system, the Cabinet was confronted, criticized, and checked by an anti-Cabinet which hoped to become an actual Cabinet.

## History of Opposition in India

### *Historical significance*

The history of opposition in India can be traced back to the year 1885 when the Indian National Congress was founded. The Indian National Congress acted as an opposition

to the government and spearheaded the national struggle which culminated in the grant of independence to the country in 1947. Later Ram Manohar Lohia came up with the original concept of uniting all opposition factions to topple the Congress in the 1960s. In that sense, he played a key role in developing the idea of a Congress-mukt Bharat. (Ketkar, 2019). The parliamentary democracy of India is currently at a difficult juncture. Without alternative voices gaining much momentum among the populace, the ruling party's continued strength in terms of electoral support and the overall narrative guiding the nation suggests a risky pattern in India's democratic past. (Bhardwaj, 2022) A divided and weak opposition is also more dangerous than a muscular ruling party to Indian democracy (Jayakumar, 2019).

The First General Elections in India for the Lok Sabha, under the new Constitution based on universal adult suffrage were held between October 25, 1951 and February 21, 1952. The total number of seats in the Lok Sabha was 489 which were required to be filled by direct elections. As a result of the elections, the Congress Party won an overwhelming majority. Out of a total of 489 elective seats in the Lok Sabha, it won 364 seats. All the parties on the Opposition benches put together secured 125 seats. The election results established the predominance of the Congress Party in the Lok Sabha. No national Opposition emerged. Whatever Opposition emerged was divided into several parties and mostly groups of independent members. The Communist Party of India (CPI) with the strength of 16 members was the largest party on the Opposition benches. It was followed by the Socialist Party and others. None of the Opposition parties could be recognized as the official Opposition.

The Second General Elections for the Lok Sabha were held in 1957. In this election, the Congress had won 371 seats, whereas the next largest party, the Communists had won 34, and the entire non-Congress membership, including independents, numbered only about 123. The Opposition comprising 123 members in the Lok Sabha continued to be small, ineffective and divided. There was again non recognised Opposition party as such in the House. The leaders of the Opposition parties who were not in a position to offer criticism of government policies and programmes, mounted attacks on its act of omission and commission by carrying on a campaign through a variety of public forums.

The Third General Elections were held in 1962. The Opposition parties realised that their chances of winning a seat depended on their ability to avoid splitting the Opposition votes. They, therefore, began to make efforts to avoid multi-cornered contests and to arrange straight contests. The Swatantra Party sought alliance with all parties other than the CPI and the Congress. The result showed that the Congress Party was again voted to power in overwhelming majority, although its strength fell marginally from 371 in 1957 to 361. The Opposition made a slight gain in increasing

its representation from 123 in 1957 to 133. However, their gains were disproportionate to the number of candidates they had put in the field. The Communists fared best, with their strategy of concentrated efforts. With 29 members they became the strongest contingent on the Opposition benches followed by the Swatantra, the Jan Sangh and the others.

The Fourth General Elections were held in 1967. Out of 520 elective seats, the Congress party won only 284 as against 361 in 1962. The Opposition made gains at the expense of the Congress party. It along with Independents owns 236 seats in Lok Sabha as compared with 133 seats in 1962. The results of the elections showed that the Swatantra and the Jan Sangh emerged as the largest and second-largest Opposition groups in the Lok Sabha. The Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) and the Communists also slightly increased their strength.

In the 1967 elections, although Congress secured fewer seats, none of the opposition parties emerged with sufficient strength to form the government. The seats won by the heterogeneous Opposition groups were divided among them. Hence, there was no national Opposition in the Parliament. While alignment and realignment of political forces were taking place Mrs. Indira Gandhi advised President V. V. Giri to dissolve the Lok Sabha and hold a midterm poll. The Lok Sabha, accordingly, was dissolved on December 27, 1970. Giving reasons for this, Mrs Gandhi said that the House had been dissolved to enable her Government “to effectively implement socialist and secular programmes and policies.”

The mid-term Elections for Lok Sabha was held in 1971. The most striking feature of the elections was a sweeping victory of the Congress in the elections which captured 352 seats in the House, whereas all Opposition parties and independents put together were almost routed. The Sixth General Elections was held in 1977. As many as 318 million voters were eligible to exercise their franchise. There were 2439 candidates for the 542 seats. The Congress Party had put up 493 candidates. The Janata Party and its allies contested 538 seats. The CPI had 91 and the CPI (M) had 53 candidates. Regional or State parties had 77 candidates. While unrecognized parties had 80 candidates there were also 1222 Independents. The illiteracy of the Indian masses did not affect the election. They used their franchise effectively. In the northern parts of the country where the excesses of the emergency had their bitter effect, the Janata Party and its allies swept the poll and scored an overwhelming victory. Not only were the Congress Party as a whole but also its leaders, Indira Gandhi, and most of her Cabinet colleagues decisively defeated. Of the 542 seats in the Lok Sabha, the Janata Party with its ally, the Congress for Democracy (CFD), got 298 seats. The Congress Party was reduced to a minority status by winning only 153 seats. Mrs Gandhi who stood from the Rae Bareli constituency for a seat in the Lok Sabha lost to her opponent, Raj Narain by over 55,000



votes. The Janata CFD combine secured not only the majority of the seats but also a majority of the votes and formed a government headed by Morarji Desai at the Centre on March 25-26, 1977.

Thus, an era of Congress rule ended and the country entered into another chapter. For the first time in India, a non-Congress Government was installed at the Centre. This was the first occasion since Independence when the Congress Party was not in a position to form the government. Yet, with the strength of 153 members, it was still the single largest among the Opposition parties in Lok Sabha. Consequently, the Congress parliamentary party was recognized as the Opposition party in Lok Sabha, and its leader Y. B. Chavan, was the leader of the Opposition in the House. After his election, Y. B. Chavan said that the party would play a constructive role as Opposition in parliament Chavan stated that “Constructive opposition” means working parliament in a positive manner guarding and strengthening the policies for which the Congress stands”. Following the split in the Congress in 1978, C. M. Stephen was recognized as the leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha.

The Seventh General Elections of 1980 saw the emergence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi once again as the Prime Minister. The Congress (I) party won 351 seats with 42.56 percent of the popular vote compared with 352 seats with 43.08 percent of the vote in 1971. The Lok Dal emerged as the second-largest party with 41 seats. The Janata Party won only 31 seats, although it had put forward 420 candidates more than any other party except the Congress (I). The left front together had strength of 53. A major reason for the impressive Congress (I) victory was the split in the anti-Congress (I) vote. In several northern states, Janata, Lok Dal and Congress (U) lost a division in the anti-Congress vote and triangular or quadrangular contests.

After the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, Rajiv Gandhi succeeded her as Prime Minister and the Lok Sabha was dissolved just a few days before the expiry of the normal term. In the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress (I) won a three-fourth majority in the Lower House, a majority that the party did not command even during the days of Jawaharlal Nehru. The shattering blow dealt to all other national parties by the Congress (I) in this election elevated the regional Telugu Desam of N. T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh to the stature of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha. The Opposition parties, which were completely routed also, lost many of their stalwarts.

In the 1989 Ninth Lok Sabha elections, no single political party emerged with an absolute majority to form the government. The Congress (I) Party lost its majority, but emerged as the largest single party, with 196 seats in the 543-member House. This was the second time the people by and large voted against the ruling party at the Centre. The Janata Dal won 141 seats, followed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with 90

including 4 Shiv Sena members elected with its support. The combined tally of the Left parties was 51: CPI (M)-32, CPI-12, RSP-4 and Forward Bloc-3. Besides the Janata Dal, two other constituents of the Front - Telugu Desam and Congress (S) won two seats and one seat respectively. Sensing that the electorate rejected it even though it emerged as the single largest party in the Ninth Lok Sabha, the Congress (I) laid no claim to form the government.

A coalition, called the National Front, led by the Janata Dal, its other members being the Telugu Desam Party, the Asom Gana Parishad, the DMK, and the Congress (S) staked its claim to constitute the government. Lacking a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, the National Front could form the government only when it was extended support by the leftist parties comprising the CPI (M), CPI, Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party on the one hand and the BJP on the other. Immediately, after the constitution of the Ninth Lok Sabha, the Congress (I) was recognized as the Opposition party with its leader, Rajiv Gandhi, as the leader of the Opposition. The withdrawal of support by the BJP to the V. P. Singh government had thrown up constitutional issues, bringing into focus the role of the President. The National Front had a strength of 146 members and the BJP and the Left Front had a strength of 86 and 51 members respectively. Thus, the withdrawal of the BJP's support deprived the National Front government of a majority of the membership of the House of the People. However, under the parliamentary system, the Council of Ministers should have a majority of members present and voting in the House and not a majority of the total membership of the House of the People. The President, therefore, advised Prime Minister V.P Singh to prove his majority in the House of the People. Thus, for the first time in India's political history, the 11-month-old V. P. Singh government was voted out of power on November 7, 1990, in Parliament, bereft of the support of onetime ally, the BJP, and a considerable chunk of the parliamentary ranks of the Janata Dal. The fate of the government was decided in a matter of ten minutes after the motion was put to vote, and the final tally was 346 votes against the government and a bare 142 in favour. The collapse of independent India's second non-Congress government at the Centre barely 11 months after it was catapulted to power, was a body blow to the Opposition cause in the country.

In the meantime, Chandra Shekhar managed the support of one-third of the members within Janata Dal (the number required to split the party), and the Congress (I) sought to interpret it curiously. On November 10, 1990, Chandra Shekhar, the leader of Janata Dal (S) - the breakaway group of Janata Dal - claimed the support of 58 MPs in the Lok Sabha and assumed the office of the Prime Minister with the support of the Congress (I). There was a considerable debate on the next leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha with the Congress (I) and the BJP, with a strength of 196 and 86 members



respectively, in the House, vying for the position. After considering all aspects of the matter, the Speaker informed the House on December 27, 1990, of his decision to recognize L. K. Advani, leader of the BJP, as the leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha with effect from December 24, 1990, in terms of Section 2 of the salary and allowances of leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977.

Accordingly, Rajiv Gandhi, leader of the Congress (I) parliamentary party, ceased to be the leader of the Opposition from that date. Subsequently, the Chandra Shekhar government was forced to step down, because of the surveillance by two police constables of the Haryana government, at the Congress (I) party president's residence. Further, on the recommendation of the Chandra Shekhar government, the President dissolved the Ninth Lok Sabha and ordered a fresh poll. The mid-term poll of 1991 was said to be the strangest election in the history of Independent India. For the first time in India, the former Prime Minister and President of the 108 years old Congress Party, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated at an election meeting at Sriperumbdur (Tamil Nadu) on May 21, 1991, by a suspected Tamil militant from Sri Lanka during the Tenth Lok Sabha elections.

At the same time, the single most important development of the Tenth Lok Sabha election was the emergence of the BJP as a National party. There had been multiple contests this time, though the result of these contests has not always favoured the Congress as in the past. In the Tenth Lok Sabha poll, the Congress party emerged as the largest single majority party with 224 seats in Lok Sabha in the three-round elections held in May and June 1991. The BJP doubled its vote percentage in the 1991 elections to emerge as a major all-India party. The Congress and its electoral allies secured 240 seats and the National Front-Left combine comprising Janata Dal, Telugu Desam Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Congress (S), Haryana Vikas Manch, CPI, CPI (M), Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Bloc together secured 129 seats.

As the single largest party in the Tenth Lok Sabha, the Congress (I) Party formed the government headed by P. V. Narasimha Rao. Consequently, with the strength of 120 members, the BJP was recognized as the Opposition party in Lok Sabha, and its leader L. K. Advani, was the leader of the Opposition in the Lower House. In addition to this, the Speaker of Lok Sabha recognized that the Janata Dal and the CPI-M were the Opposition groups in the Lok Sabha, and its leaders V. P. Singh and Somnath Chatterjee, as the floor leaders of their respective parties. As the 1991 elections gave no political party a majority, the INC (I) formed a minority government under Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao and was able to complete its five-year term.

The eleventh Lok Sabha in 1996-1998 was a period of turmoil in the union government with several short-lived alliances holding sway. The Indian National Congress came into the election on the back of several government scandals and accusations of mishandling.

There were various factions within the Congress. The BJP grew from strength to strength and emerged as the single largest party in a hung house. The BJP won 161 seats, the Congress 140 and the Janata Dal 46. The rise of regional parties started with this election. The regional parties won 129 seats. Prominent among them were TDP, Shiv Sena & the DMK. As per the prevailing custom, the President invited the BJP to form the government. The BJP attempted to build a coalition, but could not go far and Atal Bihari Vajpayee had to resign as the PM in 13 days. His resignation address in the Lok Sabha is well known. The Congress Party declined to form the government but chose to extend outside support to Janata Dal and other smaller parties that formed into the 'United Front'. Out of nowhere, H D Devegowda became the Prime Minister and he lasted for 18 months before he had to step down and make way for I. K. Gujral. He also could not last long following differences within the Janata Dal.

In the twelfth general election of 1998, BJP emerged as the single largest party with 182 seats out of 543. Congress won 141 and the other regional parties won 101 seats. The BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with other regional parties. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sworn in as the Prime Minister for the second time. His government could not last long and he had to resign after 13 months in office after the AIADMK withdrew support. The NDA lost by just one vote when Dr Giridhar Gamang, the then Chief Minister of Odisha and also an MP, voted against the NDA. The nuclear tests at Pokhran and the Kargil war were some of the important incidents in this term.

The Thirteenth Lok Sabha election was conducted in 1999 and these elections were held in the backdrop of the Kargil war. The BJP again emerged as the single largest party with 182 seats while the Congress could win only 114. This time the regional parties won 158 seats. The BJP was able to form a more stable NDA this time around and this was the first time that a non-congress alliance lasted a full five-year term. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sworn in as the Prime Minister for the third time.

The Fourteenth Lok Sabha period was 2004 to 2009 and the BJP went in for early elections alongside launching an 'India Shining' campaign. Though it could win the middle class vote, the poorer sections voted for the Congress and other regional parties resulting in the defeat of the NDA. The BJP could win only 138 seats while the Congress improved its tally to 145. The regional parties again ruled the roost with 159 seats. The BJP conceded defeat and the Congress then formed the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with support from other parties and outside support from the left parties. Sonia Gandhi refused to become the Prime Minister amidst the controversy about her foreign origin. Manmohan Singh was chosen as the Prime Minister.

The Fifteenth Lok Sabha started in 2009; the Congress-led UPA implemented a lot of its promises including the enactment of Right to Information (RTI) & the National

Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). It also waived off farm loans in 2008. Against this background, it went into the polls in 2009. The NDA on the other hand was led by L K Advani. The Congress won 206 seats, a huge improvement from 2004. The BJP could win only 116. The regional parties won 146 seats. The UPA came to power for the second term in a row. Dr Manmohan Singh was sworn in as the Prime Minister for the second time.

The Sixteenth Lok Sabha held in 2014, the second term of the UPA proved to be a disaster with numerous allegations of corruption & scams like 2G, Coal Block, Adarsh, Commonwealth Games etc. The silence of the Prime Minister and the perception that he had no real power made matters worse. The BJP was successfully able to project Narendra Modi as the man of the hour and also as its Prime Ministerial candidate. Rahul Gandhi could not match Narendra Modi. The BJP won a majority on its own with 282 seats while the Congress recorded its worst-ever performance with just 44 seats. This was the first time since 1984 that a party won a majority on its own.

The seventeenth Lok Sabha election was riding the wave of Nationalism, popular schemes and the lack of an alternative leader who could match Narendra Modi, the BJP romped home with an increased mandate. Narendra Modi led BJP won 303 seats on its own and crossed the 350 mark with its NDA allies. Narendra Modi became only the 3rd person in India’s history to have secured a single-party majority two times in a row, after Jawaharlal Nehru & Indira Gandhi (Dubbudu, 2019). The Congress received a drubbing again winning only 52 seats.

A new chapter in the colourful history of opposition in India was written with the formation of the INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) front as a rival to the current NDA alliance. There are 26 Opposition parties in the front, including two national and 24 regional parties. The strength of the newly formed coalition of opposition parties lies in the presence of the Chief Ministers of seven States and 142 members of the Lok Sabha.

**Table 1: Seat Position in the Lok Sabha**

<i>Election</i>	<i>year</i>	<i>Total seat</i>	<i>Ruling party</i>	<i>seat</i>	<i>Opposition party</i>	<i>seat</i>
First General Elections	1951	489	Congress Party	364	No official single Opposition	125
Second General Elections	1957	500	Congress	371 seats	No official single Opposition	123
Third General Elections	1962		Congress	361	No official single Opposition	133
Fourth General Elections	1967	520	Congress	284	Swatantra and the Jan Sangh	236 seats

<i>Election</i>	<i>year</i>	<i>Total seat</i>	<i>Ruling party</i>	<i>seat</i>	<i>Opposition party</i>	<i>seat</i>
Mid-term Elections for Lok Sabha.	1971	521	Congress	352	No official single Opposition	169
Sixth General Elections	1977	542	Janata Party	295	Congress	153
Seventh General Elections	1980		Congress	351 seats	The Lok Dal Janata Party left front	41 seats 31 seats 53
Eighth General Elections	1984	516	Congress	404	Telugu desam	30
Ninth Lok Sabha elections	1989	543	Congress	196	BJP	89
Tenth Lok Sabha election	1991	523	Congress	232	BJP	120
The eleventh Lok Sabha	1996	545	BJP	161	Congress	140
Twelfth general election	1998	545	BJP	182	Congress	141
Thirteenth Lok Sabha election	1999		BJP	180	Congress	114
Fourteenth Lok Sabha	2004		Congress	141	BJP	130
Fifteenth Lok Sabha	2009		Congress	206	BJP	116
Sixteenth Lok Sabha	2014		BJP	282	Congress	44
seventeenth Lok Sabha	2019		BJP	301	Congress	50

### Importance of Opposition Leader

The statutory definition of the Leader of Opposition, however, came with the Salary and Allowances of Leader of Opposition Act of 1977. It said the Leader of the Opposition will be from the Opposition party having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Lok Sabha Speaker or the Rajya Sabha Chairperson in the respective houses. The 1977 Act did not set the 10 per cent condition but Mavalankar's was a ruling of the Speaker and was enforceable as law. Mavalankar rule was finally incorporated in Direction 121(1) in the Parliament (Facilities) Act 1998. This rule remains unchanged. Since there is no constitutional provision, the 1977 law does not provide for the requirement of 55 members as an essential pre-requisite. As it all depends on the speaker's directions and discretion, it may be hoped that rightful action will be taken. The simple way out is to substitute 'pre-poll alliance' for 'party' or say 'party or pre-poll alliance'. In any case, pre-poll alliances are already being extended credibility and legitimacy in the matter of the President and Governors deciding on whom to call first for forming the government in cases where no party secures clear majority support in the House.

Under the existing rules, an Opposition party can claim to have a Leader of Opposition in any of the houses provided the party has won 10 per cent of the seats. This number is 55 in the Lok Sabha, which is a 543-member house (Dutta, 2019). The 10 per cent rule was spelt out by GV Mavalankar, the first Lok Sabha speaker. Mavalankar had ruled in the Lok Sabha that the strength of the main Opposition party,

to be officially recognised as such, must be equal to the quorum of the house. A quorum is equivalent to 10 per cent of the members. The absence of an opposition leader will weaken parliamentary democracy as the opposition will not be able to put up a unified front against the ruling party. LoP in the Lok Sabha is involved in appointments to key offices including that of the Lokpal, CBI director, chief vigilance commissioner, chief information commissioner and the chairperson of the NHRC.

**Table 2: Leaders of opposition in Loksabha**

<i>loksabha</i>	<i>Leader of opposition</i>	<i>party</i>	<i>Tenure</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>
4 <sup>th</sup>	Ram Subhag Singh 1 year, 10 days	Indian National Congress (O)	17 December 1969 27 December 1970	Indira Gandhi
5 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Vacant</i> No official opposition		27 December 1970 30 June 1977	
6 <sup>th</sup>	Yashwantrao Chavan 284 days	Indian National Congress	1 July 1977 11 April 1978	Morarji Desai
	<i>C. M. Stephen</i> 1 year, 88 days		12 April 1978 9 July 1979	
	Yashwantrao Chavan 18 days		10 July 1979 28 July 1979	
	Jagjivan Ram 24 days	Janata Party	29 July 1979 22 August 1979	Charan Singh
9 <sup>th</sup>	Rajiv Gandhi 1 year, 5 days	Indian National Congress	18 December 1989 23 December 1990	VP Singh
	L. K. Advani 2 years, 214 days	BJP	24 December 1990 13 March 1991	Chandra Shekhar
10 <sup>th</sup>	L. K. Advani  Atal Bihari Vajpayee 2 years, 289 days		21 June 1991 26 July 1993 21 July 1993 10 May 1996	PV Narasimha Rao
11 <sup>th</sup>	PV Narasimha Rao 15 days	Indian National Congress	16 May 1996 31 May 1996	Atal Bihari vajpayee
	Atal Bihari Vajpayee 1 year, 186 days	BJP	1 June 1996 4 December 1997	PV Narasimha Rao Deva Gowda IK Gujral
12 <sup>th</sup>	Sharad Pawar 1 year, 38 days	Indian National Congress	19 March 1998 26 April 1999	Atal Bihari vajpayee
13 <sup>th</sup>	Sonia Gandhi 4 years, 98 days		31 October 1999 6 February 2004	
14 <sup>th</sup>	L. K. Advani 4 years, 362 days	BJP	21 May 2004 18 May 2009	Manmohan Singh
15 <sup>th</sup>	Sushma Swaraj 4 years, 149 days		21 December 2009 19 May 2014	

16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> loksabha no official opposition in india during Narendra Modi as the PM

The Congress demanded an amendment to the relevant laws to allow the single-largest party in the Opposition to send its legislative party leader to attend meetings of key appointment panels. The amendment was made about the appointment of the CVC and also the CBI director but the Lokpal Act was not modified to bring the single largest Opposition party on board if it did not secure 10 per cent seats in the Lok Sabha. After 75 years of freedom, India still lacks robust opposition, endangering the values of democracy. Due to several factors, including the growth of regional parties, the practice of coalition government, and the Congress party's declining influence at the national and regional levels, forming a constructive opposition is challenging. P.D.T.Achary, a former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, stated that when a request comes from the largest opposition party, the speaker is legally bound to recognise the leader of that party as the leader of the opposition. Way back in the 1950s, the speaker started the practice of recognising parliamentary parties as 'parties' and 'groups' for the limited purpose of allotting seats in the house, time for participating in the debates, rooms in Parliament House etc(Achary, 2019). He issued a direction under which a party is recognised as such only if it had 10% of the strength of the house. A party which had less than 10% members were categorised as a 'group'. But there was no reference to the leader of the opposition in the above direction. It would appear that the people who administered the house rules and directions acted under the erroneous belief that only a party having 10% members can claim the post of leader of the opposition. (Achary, 2019). Recognising a member of the house as the leader of the opposition is a statutory decision. No political consideration can be brought into it (Achary, 2019).

The opposition is a necessary and unavoidable component of democracy that should not only be acknowledged as a constitutional need but also nurtured and valued for its essentiality. Both the ruling government and the opposition have proclaimed values, rights, and obligations to uphold the democratic principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity as well as to uphold the unity and integrity of the country. The opposition has also vowed to act as watchdogs to preserve the balance of good governance and democratic principles. A strong opposition that is always capable of taking the reins of power is always regarded as being necessary for a robust parliamentary democracy. To maintain security, progress, and good governance within the bounds of the law, the country requires a stable government and a strong leader capable of making decisive actions.

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