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# ROLE OF OPPOSITION IN DEMOCRACY

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## Introduction

In a democracy, the Opposition is not merely a rival to the ruling party but an indispensable pillar of parliamentary governance. It represents the voices of citizens who did not vote for the ruling party, thereby ensuring that the interests of all sections of society are articulated in the political process. The Opposition acts as a watchdog of democracy, holding the government accountable, scrutinizing legislation, and offering alternative policies. As envisaged in India's Westminster model of parliamentary democracy, the Opposition embodies the principle of checks and balances, preventing concentration of power and safeguarding constitutional values.

## Role of opposition in strengthening democracy

### **Ensures Executive Accountability**

The Opposition compels the government to justify its policies through various parliamentary devices like Question Hour, debates, motions etc.

**Example:** During the COVID-19 crisis, Opposition questioned vaccine procurement delays and migrant worker management, forcing the government to clarify.

### **Scrutinises Legislation**

Opposition examines bills clause-by-clause, flags loopholes, and sometimes sends them to Parliamentary Committees for review thereby strengthening legitimacy.

**Example:** Opposition protests over Farm Laws (2020) highlighted gaps in consultation, eventually leading to repeal.

### **Safeguards Constitutional Morality**

Opposition guards against misuse of constitutional provisions like ordinances, Article 356, or money bills.

**Example:** Opposition criticized the Ordinance on electoral bonds, highlighting transparency issues, which the Supreme Court struck down (2024).

### **Protects Rights and Civil Liberties**

Raises concerns when individual freedoms or minority rights are threatened, acting as a guardian of fundamental rights.

**Example:** Opposition strongly opposed the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), calling it discriminatory.

### **Promotes Inclusivity**

By representing marginalized communities, the Opposition ensures that diverse social groups are not left unheard.

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## **Provides Alternative Policies**

Offers constructive criticism and alternative solutions, making governance more competitive and innovative.

**Example:** During the 2020 Economic Stimulus debate, Opposition suggested direct cash transfers to poor households as an alternative.

## **Challenges faced by opposition in democracy**

### **1.Dominance of Strong Majorities-Majoritarianism**

A large ruling party majority reduces the space for Opposition voices in Parliament.

**Example:** BJP's strong majority in 2014 & 2019 Lok Sabha made it difficult for Opposition to block or amend bills.

### **2.Defections and Weak Party Cohesion-Political instability**

Frequent defections under anti-defection loopholes weaken Opposition unity.

**Example:** Maharashtra 2022 political crisis saw Opposition MLAs defect, toppling the government.

### **3.Misuse of Investigative Agencies**

Allegations of ED, CBI, and IT raids being used against Opposition leaders hampers free functioning.

**Example:** ED summons to Opposition leaders like Hemant Soren (2024) and others in corruption cases.

### **4.Financial Disadvantages**

Ruling parties have access to more funds and state machinery, limiting Opposition campaign capacity.

**Example:** Supreme Court striking down Electoral Bonds (2024) revealed disproportionate donations to ruling party.

### **5.Media Bias & Narrative Control-Information asymmetry**

Mainstream media often provides more visibility to the ruling party; Opposition voices struggle for airtime.

**Example:** Opposition alleged media underreporting of their protests during farm law debates.

### **6.Lack of Internal Democracy**

Many Opposition parties suffer from dynastic politics and weak intra-party structures, reducing credibility.

**Example:** Internal rifts within Congress and regional parties have weakened Opposition unity.

### **7.Criminalization of Politics**

Opposition leaders often face legal battles (sometimes genuine, sometimes politically motivated), diverting focus.

**Example:** Disqualification of Rahul Gandhi (2023, Surat court conviction) – later stayed by SC.

### **8.Polarization of Politics**

Deepening communal, caste, and regional divides make it harder for Opposition to build broad coalitions.

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**Example:** The INDIA bloc's struggle (2024) to reconcile regional party interests with national unity.

## **Measures Taken to Strengthen the Role of Opposition**

### **1. Institutional recognition of Leader of Opposition (LoP)**

The Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977 gives LoP Cabinet rank and privileges.

**Example:** Even though no LoP was recognized in 16th & 17th Lok Sabha (lack of 10% seats), in Rajya Sabha the LoP continues to play a vital role in appointment committees.

### **2. Parliamentary Committees as Equal Platforms**

Opposition MPs play a major role in Standing Committees, PAC, Estimates Committee.

**Example:** PAC (Public Accounts Committee) is always headed by an Opposition MP by convention.

### **3. Judicial Safeguards for Opposition Rights**

Judiciary has intervened to protect Opposition leaders against arbitrary state action.

**Example:** Supreme Court (2023) stayed Rahul Gandhi's disqualification, reinforcing Opposition's role in Parliament.

### **4. Mandated Role in Key Appointments**

LoP's presence is compulsory in high-level committees for CVC, CBI Director, Lokpal, NHRC, etc.

**Example:** In 2023, LoP Mallikarjun Kharge participated in the panel selecting the new CBI Director.

### **5. Legal Protection under Anti-Defection Law**

Tenth Schedule (1985, 2003 amendment) protects Opposition parties from losing MLAs to defections, though with loopholes.

**Example:** Recent debates on Maharashtra defection (2022–23) revived calls for stricter anti-defection norms.

### **6. Increasing Civil Society & Social Media Support**

Civil society activism and social media amplify Opposition voices beyond Parliament.

**Example:** Farmers' protests (2020–21) and Bharat Jodo Yatra (2022–23) drew massive civil participation, strengthening Opposition narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The Opposition is the lifeblood of democracy, ensuring accountability, debate, and the protection of diverse voices. While constitutional provisions, committees, and judicial safeguards have strengthened its role, persistent challenges like majoritarian dominance, defections, and credibility deficits limit its effectiveness. A vibrant Opposition is not an adversary to governance but a partner in democratic checks and balances. Strengthening its voice through internal reforms, equitable political funding, parliamentary culture, and media independence will not only empower the Opposition but also fortify India's parliamentary democracy and uphold constitutional values.