

# INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND CHANGE IN THE INDIAN LOK SABHA

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines legislative development in the Indian Lok Sabha employing the concept of institutionalization, a widely noted model of legislative change. Developed and applied by Nelson Polsby to the U.S. House of Representatives in an article published in 1968, this model has been extended systematically to only a couple of other legislatures. In this paper, I extend the application to the Lok Sabha. The findings, as in other applications, show mixed results regarding the establishment of boundaries, the growth of internal complexity, as well as the development of universalistic rules. As a model of legislative change, institutionalization provides some very broad strokes, but not necessarily precise mechanisms that would similarly explain the evolution of all legislative bodies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Parliament, Lok Sabha, Institutionalization*

Legislatures occupy a central position in any system of government, but particularly in one that is democratically elected. The role of legislatures is unquestioned, with such institutions designed to serve the purposes at least of representation and of policymaking, and perhaps many others. Given the centrality of legislatures in democratic societies, they are also the most studied institutions in political science. Nearly every aspect of legislatures has received some scholarly attention in an attempt to understand their evolutionary as well as the present circumstances and in a bid to forecast various aspects of them.

Despite the enormous attention by academics all over the world however, considerable gaps abound in our understanding of legislatures. One such notable area is legislative evolution. How do legislatures evolve and is there a pattern to their evolution? Is there a theoretical basis for such evolution and do the core elements of such a theory apply to all legislatures at all times and places? Or do legislatures develop given the peculiar circumstances of their own societies, or is legislative change simply a function of time? My purpose in this paper is to investigate the question of legislative development by employing one of the most frequently noted models of legislative change. The model is "legislative institutionalization," as propounded and applied by Nelson Polsby in his examination of the U.S. House of Representatives (Polsby: 1968, p144). The legislature in this case is the Lok Sabha, the lower house (or the people's house) of the Indian parliament. My specific aim in this paper is to compare the actual changes that have occurred in that legislature, especially now that it has achieved some maturity

(reaching the age of seventy), to the changes expected by the legislative institutionalization model. Doing so would provide a solid test of both the concept of institutionalization and its measures in a very different kind of legislature.

## LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Legislatures develop and change over time. The fundamental premises underlying institutionalization is that as institutions evolve, they develop certain characteristics and adopt certain features. These characteristics and features typically include the following: they become more complex as they age than before, they establish routine and standard operating procedures, they become more independent and coherent, and they develop more universalistic rather than particularistic ways of conducting business. Powered by Eisenstadt's and Huntington's theories, (Eisenstadt:1964) (Huntington: 1965) institutionalization, then, is a way by which an organization develops mechanisms to perform its work, by which it establishes its identity, by which it "institutionalizes." A mature legislature having certain features—more complexity, autonomy, coherence, and universalism rather than simplistic, subordinate, disunified or particularistic—is said to have "institutionalized." (Jewell and Patterson: 1977) (Loewanberg and Patterson: 1979)

The framework of legislative institutionalization and change, as created and applied by Polsby to the U.S. House of Representatives, forms the theoretical foundation of this paper. To test this theory, its applicability, and its attendant measurements, a number of other scholars have attempted to

replicate Polsby's approach in other bodies. Most notable in this regard are works by Hibbing, (1988) with application to the British House of Commons, and Squire (1992) with application to the California Assembly. Other studies, such as the ones by Kornberg (1970) (on the Canadian House of Commons), Pedersen (1977) (on the Danish Folketing) or Opello (1986) (on Portugal's Parliament), do not offer systematic treatments of Polsby's variables or are limited in timeframe (such as only ten years of data due to the newness of the Portuguese parliament in Opello's case).

With reference to the concept and its measures, Hibbing concludes that "many elements of the evolution of the House of Commons are consistent with those predicted by the concept of institutionalization." (Hibbing :1988, p707) "Boundaries have become more firmly established, internal complexity has increased, and a growing reliance upon universalistic rules is evident." Also, "[m]any features of the Commons, including careers, leadership positions, party and committee machinery, general complexity, and the provisions for Question Time, have become institutionalized, and this process is often taken to indicate the body itself has institutionalized." (Ibid) But, Hibbing finds the evidence to be "spotty." He notes that "some trends predicted by institutionalization are not as readily evident as others. Other trends simply do not occur at all, and still others exhibit frequent reversals of direction. In some instances the various aspects of institutionalization appear to be occurring at the same time, while in others they happen at very different times." (Ibid) Overall, then, in terms of the applicability of the concept of institutionalization to understand legislative evolution and change, Hibbing sounds skeptical.

Squire, in his application of the institutionalization theory to the California Assembly, concludes with mixed results as well. In sum, he notes that "the weight of evidence suggests that the Assembly has well-defined boundaries, and its internal complexity has increased." On the other hand, "[u]niversalistic criteria and automatic methods in the form of a seniority system ... clearly are not employed in the Assembly. Indeed, the Assembly appears to have reinforced completely opposite rules for the distribution of positions of power." (Squire :1992, p1046) With some modifications to the theory however, Squire notes that "Polsby's basic institutionalization framework can continue to produce significant advances in understanding how legislative organizations change over time." (Ibid, p1048)

Others who have specifically applied this theory and tested its measurements in the way Polsby advanced also offer mixed reviews of the theory and varying results of his measurements. In the early 1980s, Baldino undertook a test of

Polsby's markers and observed that many of the trends toward an "institutionalized" House had either paused or even reversed in his period of examination since the publication of Polsby's article. (Baldino: 1983) He specifically notes an increase in turnover rates and an erosion of respect for legislative norms. More recently, Jenkins and Stewart have embarked on a similar project. (Jenkins and Stewart: 2016) As a result of their analyses and updating of data relevant to Polsby's measures, they note that the House "is still clearly on the 'institutionalized' side of the scale of legislatures," but acknowledge "at least a little backsliding" (Ibid, p35) on most measures. They remark that "it is bracing to reveal that the institutional capacity of the House has taken a step back from most of the characteristics that described the House in the 1960s." Specifically, they point out that "[h]ouse careers no longer are getting longer and longer; instead, Democratic careers have gotten a little longer while Republican careers have plateaued. The committee system has been scaled back, both in terms of the number of committees and the resources given to them for the operation. The road to speakership is more varied; the specialization of committee functions and leadership functions has been blurred." (Ibid,36)

## THE LOK SABHA

So how do the concept of institutionalization and its measures apply to the Indian Lok Sabha? Can the evolution of the Lok Sabha be explained by this framework? The Lok Sabha, or the people's house, is the lower house of the Indian parliament, now reaching the age of seventy. This presents an opportune moment to examine the evolution of the Lok Sabha employing an established theory and addressing a gap in this regard in the existing literature, which forms the primary purpose of this paper. The age of a legislature is naturally important in a study of this kind. As Hibbing notes, "the general idea is that as institutions move through *time* they tend to adopt certain qualities and lose others." (Hibbing:1988, p682) Indeed, in some ways, age is a variable in-and-of-itself because, after all, it is a body's evolution over time that is being studied.

The secondary purpose of this paper is to review how the theory of institutionalization works across types of legislatures to form some judgments about its viability as a generalizable model of legislative change. According to a popular typology of legislatures developed by Mezey, there are five different types of legislatures: active, reactive, vulnerable, marginal, and minimal. (Mezey:1979,p36) The Indian legislature, based on Mezey's scheme, is a "reactive" legislature, like the British House of Commons. "Reactive" refers to legislatures which are "more supported" in their societies and have "modest" policy-making power. Reactive

legislatures with modest policy-making powers are generally also the ones which are dominated by the prime minister and the cabinet with a disciplined majority party in the parliament. The U.S. House of Representatives is classified by Mezey as an “active” legislature, which is also “more supported” but with “strong” policy-making powers. Clearly, the separation of powers factor into such a characterization. The purpose of noting the various types of legislatures in this context is simply to provide a test of whether institutionalization and its measures work equally well across all types of legislatures to understand legislative evolution or if they are limited to legislatures of a certain kind.

**INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN THE LOK SABHA**

Polsby operationalizes institutionalization in the following fashion. It has three key characteristics:

[I]t is relatively well-bounded, that is to say, differentiated from its environment. Its members are easily identifiable, it is relatively difficult to become a member, and its leaders are recruited principally from within the organization. 2) The organization is relatively complex, that is, its functions are internally separated on some regular and explicit basis, its parts are not wholly interchangeable, and for at least some important purposes, its parts are interdependent. There is a division of labor in which roles are specified, and there are widely shared expectations about the performance of roles. There are regularized patterns of recruitment to roles, and of movement from role to role. 3) Finally, the organization tends to use universalistic rather than particularistic criteria, and automatic rather than discretionary methods for conducting its internal business. Precedents and rules are followed; merit systems replace favoritism and nepotism; and impersonal codes supplant personal preferences as prescriptions for behavior. (Polsby: 1968,p145)

In this paper, I apply each of these characteristics—the establishment of boundaries, the growth of internal complexity, and the development of universalistic rules—to the Indian Lok Sabha to judge whether its evolution has been consistent with institutionalization and its measures.

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF BOUNDARIES**

Polsby defines this characteristic as follows:

One aspect of institutionalization is the differentiation of an organization from its environment. The establishment of boundaries in a political organization refers mostly to a channeling of career opportunities. In an undifferentiated organization, entry to and exit from membership is easy and frequent. Leaders emerge rapidly, lateral entry from outside to positions of leadership is quite common, and persistence of

leadership over time is rare. As an organization institutionalizes, it stabilizes its membership, entry is more difficult, and turnover is less frequent. Its leadership professionalizes and persists. Recruitment to leadership is more likely to occur from within, and the apprenticeship period lengthens. Thus the organization establishes and ‘hardens’ its outer boundaries. ( Ibid, p145-146)

With this definition, Polsby then produces time-series data for the U.S. House, showing a decline in the percentage of first term members from 1789 to 1965 and an increase in the mean terms of service from 1789-1963. He also shows a substantial increase from 1789 to 1962 in the number of years served in Congress before being selected as Speaker and a gradual drop in time between last day of service as Speaker and death.

**Table1. Membership Turnover in the Lok Sabha, 1952-present**

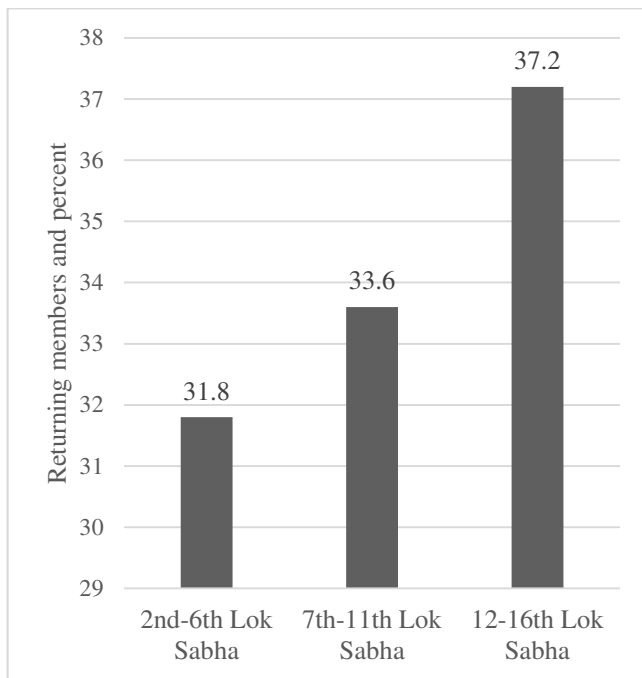
LOK SABHA	TOTAL	Returning members	%	New Members	%
1 <sup>st</sup> (May 1952-Apr. 1957)	543				
2 <sup>nd</sup> (Apr. 1957-Apr. 1962)	534	180	34%	354	66%
3 <sup>rd</sup> (Apr. 1962-Mar. 1967)	540	197	36%	343	64%
4 <sup>th</sup> (Mar. 1967-Mar. 1971)	553	161	29%	392	71%
5 <sup>th</sup> (Mar. 1971-Mar. 1977)	553	202	37%	351	63%
6 <sup>th</sup> (Mar. 1977-Jan. 1980)	557	129	23%	428	77%
7 <sup>th</sup> (Jan. 1980-Dec. 1984)	566	140	25%	426	75%
8 <sup>th</sup> (Dec. 1984-Dec. 1989)	567	225	40%	342	60%
9 <sup>th</sup> (Dec. 1989-Jun. 1991)	534	145	27%	389	73%
10 <sup>th</sup> (Jun. 1991-May 1996)	555	239	43%	316	57%
11 <sup>th</sup> (May 1996-Mar. 1998)	551	181	33%	370	67%
12 <sup>th</sup> (Mar. 1998-Oct. 1999)	546	229	42%	317	58%
13 <sup>th</sup> (Oct. 1999-May 2004)	568	267	47%	301	53%
14 <sup>th</sup> (May 2004-May 2009)	586	225	38%	361	62%
15 <sup>th</sup> (May 2009-May 2014)	560	163	29%	397	71%
16 <sup>th</sup> (May 2014-May 2019)	538	164	30%	374	70%

Source: Data compiled by author; information obtained from [loksabha.nic.in](http://loksabha.nic.in), under Members.

Table 1 presents data for the Indian Lok Sabha from its beginning to the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha regarding the establishment of boundaries as defined above. As postulated, and if the hypothesis holds true, turnover in membership should have declined. In this case, “returning members,” or incumbency in other words, should have increased over the years. The data in Table 1 do not bear that out. The data generally range in percentages in the 20s, 30s, or 40s. Beginning with the Second Lok Sabha, if that is to be the starting point in the progression

of time, to the Sixteenth Lok Sabha, the percentage of returning members started from 34, then fluctuated over the years, and stood at 30 in the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. Even if one were to segment out by periods of time (for five sessions progressively) to ease comparisons over time, as shown in Figure 1, the data show only modest support for the hypothesis. The percentage of returning members from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha sessions stands at 31.8; from the 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> sessions, it moves up slightly to 33.6; and from the 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> sessions, it inches up to 37.2.

**Figure1. Returning Members by Various Sessions of Lok Sabha**

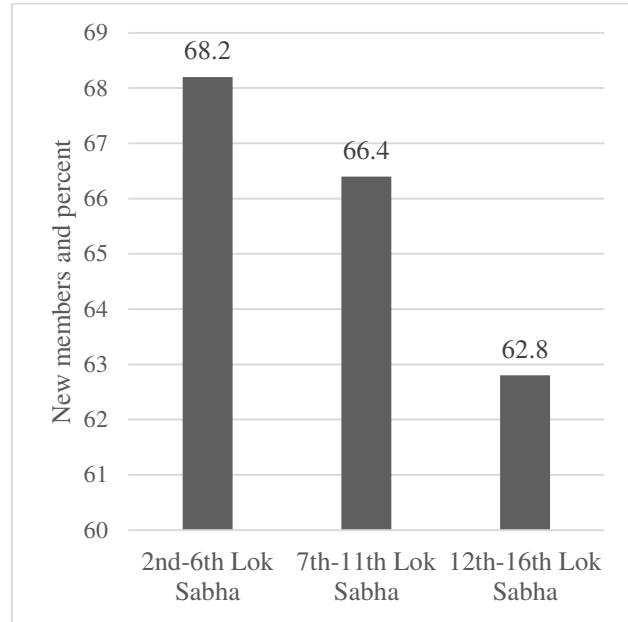


Source: Compiled by author.

The converse hypothesis should hold true if the postulation is correct. That is, the number and percentage of new members should have declined over time, consistent with the idea of the establishment of boundaries. The columns with reference to “new members” in Table 1 do not bear that trend either. The percentages are generally in the 50s, 60s, and 70s, with no progressive or marked decline over the years. Indeed, the percentage of new members in the Second Lok Sabha was 66, fluctuated over the years, and stood at 70 in the Sixteenth Lok Sabha, a higher percentage than in the Second Lok Sabha. Likewise, segmenting out again by periods of time to observe comparisons over time, as shown in Figure 2, the percentages do not reveal a significant drop in newcomers. For the 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

sessions, the percent stands at 68.2; for the 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, it is 66.4; and for the 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, it is 62.8.

**Figure 2. New Members by Various Sessions of Lok Sabha**



Source: Compiled by author.

Neither of these two measures then (of the rate of return of incumbent members or of the arrival of new members) show the patterns as hypothesized by the institutionalization theory. Since the start of the Indian Lok Sabha, there has not been an unmistakable and noticeable rise in the percentage of members returning from one session to another or a likewise fall in the percentage of newcomers entering the chamber from one session to another. This finding is more in line with Hibbing’s results of the British House of Commons than with Polsby’s data for the U.S. House of Representatives. As Hibbing observes, “turnover in the Commons since 1734 has been marked more by consistency than by rapid decline.” (Hibbing: 1968,p687) The very same could easily be said for the Indian Lok Sabha.

There are other measures, however, of the “hardening” of the organizational boundaries. In this regard, Polsby spends a great deal of time on the Speaker’s position, with the idea that as an institution creates boundaries, those in positions of leadership are more likely to come from within than from without. As Polsby formulated, as an organization institutionalizes over time, “[r]ecruitment to leadership is more likely to occur from within, and the apprenticeship period lengths,” (Polsby: 1968, p146) meaning that individuals would

be expected to serve in the body for longer periods before rising to the position of Speaker.

Table 2 displays information regarding the Speakers of the Indian Lok Sabha from the beginning (1952) to the present. After their names, the second column shows the dates of service of each Speaker, followed by the number of years as Speaker. The table does not necessarily reveal a particular pattern, one way or the other, in terms of the number of years in the Speaker’s post. However, as Hibbing notes, “what is of primary interest here is not the length of service as Speaker but the length of House [or chamber] service *before* becoming Speaker.” (Hibbing : 1988 ,p690) Following Hibbing’s and Polsby’s approach of presenting information, Figure 3 shows the mean lengths of service before becoming Speaker (based on data in the last column of Table 2), separated into groups of five Speakers “in order to even out idiosyncratic factors.” (Hibbing: 1988, p690) The expected pattern here, then, should be greater number of years in pre-speakership in later years than in earlier years.

**Table 2. Speakers of the Indian Lok Sabha, 1952-present**

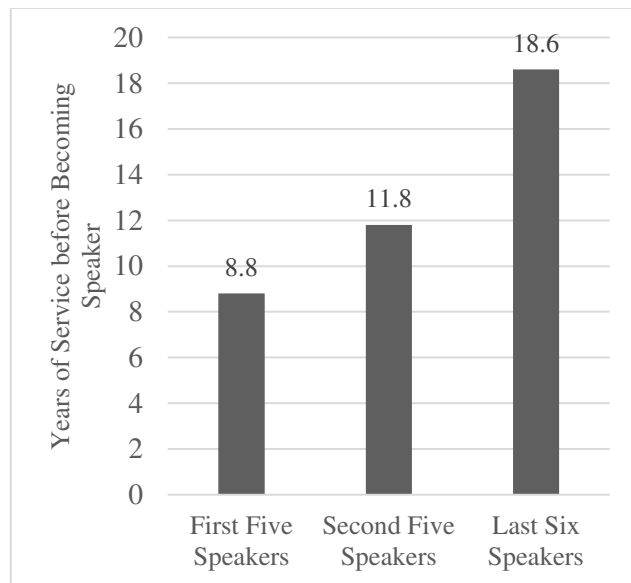
Speaker	Dates of Service as Speaker	Years as Speaker	Years in Lok Sabha or national politics before becoming Speaker
Sh. G. V. Mavalankar	1952-1956	4	6 (since 1946)
Sh. M. A. Ayyangar	1956-1962	6	22 (since 1934)
Sardar Hukam Singh	1962-1967	5	14 (since 1948)
Sh. N. Sanjiva Reddy	1967-1969;	2	0 (since 1967)
Sh. G. S. Dhillon	1969-1975	6	2 (since 1967)
Sh. Bali Ram Bhagat	1976-1977	1	26 (since 1950)
Sh. K. S. Hedge	1977-1980	3	0 (since 1977)
Sh. Bal Ram Jakhar	1980-1989	9	0 (since 1980)
Sh. Rabi Ray	1989-1991	2	22 (since 1967)
Sh. Shivraj V. Patil	1991-1996	5	11 (since 1980)
Sh. P. A. Sangma	1996-1998	2	19 (since 1977)
Sh. G. M. C. Balyogi	1998-2002	4	7 (since 1991)
Sh. Manohar Joshi	2002-2004	2	3 (since 1999)
Sh. Somnath Chatterjee	2004-2009	5	33 (since 1971)
Smt. Meira Kumar	2009-2014	5	25 (since 1984)
Smt. Sumitra Mahajan	2014-2019	5	25 (since 1989)

Source: Data compiled by author; information obtained from speakerloksabha.nic.in.

The bar graph in Figure 3 shows the anticipated trend line. The bars show a clear and consistent rise in the number of years served in the Lok Sabha (or in national politics) before moving up to the Speaker’s position.<sup>1</sup> In the most recent period, the last six Speakers served an average of 18.6 years in pre-speakership, compared to 11.8 in the previous period and 8.8 in the first period. In the first period, for example, N.

Sanjiva Reddy assumed speakership without having spent any time previously in the chamber, and G. S. Dhillon became Speaker after just two years of service in the chamber. On the other hand, M. A. Ayyangar waited 22 years and Sardar Hukam Singh 14 years before accending to the speakership. In the second period, K. S. Hedge and Bal Ram Jakhar likewise rose to speakership with no prior service in the chamber, but it took Bali Ram Bhagat 26 years and Rabi Ray 22 years, respectively, to reach the Speaker’s post. In the last period, however, four of the six Speakers served a considerable length of time in the chamber before rising to speakership. P. A. Sangma spent 19 years, Somnath Chatterjee spent a good 33 years, and Meira Kumar and Sumitra Mahajan, the current Speaker, 25 years each in pre-speakership.

**Figure 3. Years in Lok Sabha or National Politics Before Becoming Speaker**



The next part of this analysis is life after speakership. According to institutionalization theory, Speakers should remain in their positions for as long as possible; indeed, they should end not only their careers but their lives in that position. In other words, there should be no life after speakership. As Polsby conducted his analysis of the U.S. House for “The Institutionalization” article, of the five most recent Speakers, four had died in office. (Polsby:1968, p151) Hibbing’s analysis of Speakers of the House of Commons also shows a gradual and substantial decline over his four periods in the time elapsed between cessation of duties as Speaker and death. (Hibbing: 1988, p693) In the case of the Indian Lok Sabha, such appears not to be the case at all.

Table 3 presents information for life after speakership. Of the early Speakers, indeed of the first half the names on the roster of Speakers, only the first, G. V. Mavalankar, died in office. Each of the next seven Speakers lived at least a decade, and a couple around three decades, in life after speakership. What is even more striking is that five of the last seven Speakers (not counting the current Speaker) are still living, with many having relinquished the Speaker's post many years ago. Rabi Ray stepped away from the speakership in 1991, Shivraj Patil in 1996, Manohar Joshi in 2004, Somnath Chatterjee in 2009, and Meira Kumar in 2014. (It should be noted that G. M. C. Balyogi, a Speaker of more recent times, died in office; however, his death was an accident by way of a helicopter crash.) The reality that there is significant life after speakership in the Indian context does not accord with the institutionalization theory.

**Table 3. Life After Speakership**

Speaker	Elapsed years between service as Speaker and death	How Speakers finished their careers
Sh. G. V. Mavalankar	0	Died in 1956
Sh. M. A. Ayyangar	16	Resigned as Speaker in 1962; then Governor of Bihar
Sardar Hukum Singh	16	Governor of Rajasthan from 1967-1972
Sh. N. Sanjiva Reddy	21	Became president of India in 1977
Sh. G. S. Dhillon	17	Resigned as Speaker in 1975; then several ministerial posts
Sh. Bali Ram Bhagat	34	Member of Lok Sabha; Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh governor
Sh. K. S. Hedge	10	Private life
Sh. Bal Ram Jakhar	27	Member; several ministerial posts; Madhya Pradesh governor
Sh. Rabi Ray	Living	Private, political life
Sh. Shivraj V. Patil	Living	Member; minister; Punjab governor; private life
Sh. P. A. Sangma	18	Member; presidential candidate
Sh. G. M. C. Balyogi	0	Died in 2002 in helicopter crash
Sh. Manohar Joshi	Living	Member, Rajya Sabha
Sh. Somnath Chatterjee	Living	Retired from politics in 2009
Smt. Meira Kumar	Living	Lost 2014 general election

Source: Data compiled by author; information obtained from speakerloksabha.nic.in

Furthermore, as Hibbing writes, “the nature, as well as the length of the post-Speaker career, is instructive.”(Ibid,p694) The post-Speaker time of former Indian Speakers shows a varied life. A number of former Indian Speakers went on to gubernatorial (chief ministerial) or

ministerial posts; a number of others simply retired to private life. Indeed, some sort of executive position, either at the state level or in national politics, rather than a legislative position, seems to have been more the norm. Only a couple returned to membership in the Lok Sabha; one joined the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of Indian parliament).

Overall, then, with reference to the establishment of boundaries and the expectations produced by the institutionalization theory, some aspects of the particular measurements work in the Indian context, whereas others do not. Clearly, the turnover rates among members are not as expected, with an increase in incumbency advantage and a decrease in new entrants. What has clearly held up, as hypothesized, is a substantial increase in the years of service before assuming speakership. And contrary to the theory, former Indian Speakers have life after speakership.

**THE GROWTH OF INTERNAL COMPLEXITY**

The growth of internal complexity is considerably harder to measure compared to the establishment of boundaries. Following Polsby and Hibbing, I employ two factors in this paper: an increase over time in the independence and importance of committees in the workings of the Lok Sabha and a growth in the significance and indeed an embedding of political parties in the life of the legislature and the body politic.

**COMMITTEES**

Rather than simply counting the number of committees, something both Polsby and Hibbing warn as meaningless, (Ibid p697) I provide an impressionistic account (just as Polsby did for the U.S. House of Representatives and Hibbing did for the British House of Commons) of the development of the committee structure, as one measure, to demonstrate an increased level of complexity over time in the Lok Sabha. While there are many comprehensive accounts of committees in the Lok Sabha, (Jena:1966, Kashyap : 1992) my purpose here is generally to trace, very minimally, their development over time to evaluate the point about their internal differentiation.

Committees have had their place in the Lok Sabha since its founding. Indeed, to manage the increasingly complicated affairs of the new nation, parliamentary committees were created at the beginning in the post-independence legislature since “the review of administrative action and the examination of numerous and complicated legislative proposals and subordinate legislation require an expertise and close scrutiny that are not possible in Lok Sabha consisting as it does of 545 members.”(Kashyap: 1992,p137)

Chakrabarty and Pandey further define the purposes of the committees as follows:

In addition to acting as the eyes and ears of the Parliament, the committees are also useful in offsetting the bulk of load of the Parliament, securing an in-depth and expert analysis of legislative proposals, ensuring a harmonious working between the two Houses of the Parliament, and affording a platform to the common people to participate in the decision-making of the Parliament by giving written memoranda or oral depositions, as may be required, to the committees as and when asked for. (Chakrabarty and Pandey:2008, p96-97)

Initially, the Lok Sabha had established standing and ad hoc (select and joint) committees. The standing committees were categorized as follows: (1) "committees to inquire," (2) "committees to scrutinize," (3) "committees of an administrative character relating to the business of the House," (4) "committees dealing with the provisions of facilities to members," and (5) the "financial committees," such as the Estimates Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, and the Committee on Public Undertakings. (Ibid, p97) During the early period of the Lok Sabha, this last group seems to have been the most prominent.

In 1989, the standing committees were expanded and restructured to establish "subject-based or departmentally-related" standing committees to match executive departments. At first, this group constituted only three committees for "highly specialized and technical subjects" to include agriculture, environment and forests, and science and technology. In 1993, this structure was expanded immensely to seventeen such panels "to encompass the whole gamut of executive functioning." The committees' operating principles now included "the screening of legislation, assessment of the policy statements, and verification of the claims made by the departments in their annual reports, apart from the most crucial function of scrutinizing the demand for grants presented by the various ministries and departments." (Ibid 102) At present, there is a wide array of committees in the Lok Sabha, with sixteen such departmentally-related standing committees, three original financial committees, seventeen "Other Parliamentary Standing Committees," ten ad hoc committees, and eight "Other Committees," (mostly joint panels).<sup>2</sup>

Such a vast machinery of committee setup in the Lok Sabha would seem to suggest considerable internal differentiation, satisfying one of the fundamental measures of growth in internal complexity and hence increased institutionalization over time. The fact that so many committees exist, for some very specific purposes, and the fact

that the committee system went through significant reorganization in 1989 and in 1993 to cover all ministries and departments and policy arenas, represents a heightened measurement of internal differentiation. This aspect suggests a direction in favor of institutionalization theory, although as Hibbing notes, changes in the committee system could be interpreted to "represent only weak support for the belief that internal complexity ... has increased through time." (Hibbing:1988, p699)

## **PARTIES**

Immediately after independence, and even before, Indian politics and society were dominated by one political party, the Congress Party. Chakrabarty and Pandey describe the state of the Indian party system around then as follows:

Ideologically, even before India gained independence, the party system of the country was marked by the presence of the Congress as the umbrella organization representing, though predominantly the upper and middle classes yet having wide-spread support of the masses as well, somewhat monopolistically the mainstream of the Indian populace by accommodating as varied interests as that of capitalists like G.D. Birla alongside the interests of the other marginalized and underprivileged sections of the society, primarily in the name of waging the national struggle to win freedom for the country. (Chakrabarty and Pandey: 2008, p213-214)

In the 1960s however, the Congress Party began to lose its grip on society, particularly after India's defeat in the Indo-China war of 1962 and Jawaharlal Nehru's demise in 1964, such that "the party was able to barely scrap through to form the government under Indira Gandhi" (Ibid, p215) after the fourth general elections. In 1969, the party split into two factions: the Congress (O) and the Congress (I). (Singh, 1981) The Congress (I) party, led by Indira Gandhi, secured an astounding victory in the 1971 general elections, decimating the opposition parties "to some sort of nonentity in the Parliament." (Chakrabarty and Pandey:2008,p215) This was not to last however. With virtually no opposition, the Congress Party under Indira Gandhi became despotic, leading to mass protests in the early 1970s, resulting in Gandhi's declaration of a state of emergency in 1975 shutting down politics and suspending political activities in the country, which then led to "the total recall of the public goodwill in the Congress party making sure the realignment of political forces in the country as and when the political activities are allowed to take place." (Ibid,p217)

Throughout the rest of the 1970s and the 1980s, India experimented with a two-party system (the Congress and the

Janata Party), but that was not to last either. Since 1989, Indian politics have been dominated by a coalition of parties. As Chakrabarty and Pandey note, “[i]n the post-1989 scenario, the coalition governments at the Centre appear to have become the *fait accompli* of the Indian party system.” (Ibid, p220) They further explain the present condition as follows:

The current phase of the Indian party system is probably the product of the inability of the pan Indian parties like the Congress and the BJP to expand their electoral base to all nook and corner of the country in such a manner that either of the two are able to secure at least a workable majority in the Lok Sabha to form the government at the Centre. The basic reason behind their inability happens to be the irreversible social and economic churning taking place in the country since the early 1990s leading to a number of desirable and undesirable consequences for the polity of the nation. ... The cumulative effects of these transitional socio-economic processes on the polity of the country are coming in the form of people getting disaffected with the hitherto ruling formations and become prone to be drawn towards the localized and sometimes parochial political outfits who appear to them to be capable of remedying the ills plaguing their socio-economic life. The decline of the fortunes of the national parties and the emergence of the regional parties as the custodian of the interests of such distressed people come out to be the obvious consequence of the socio-economic churning in almost all states of the country. (Ibid, p229-230)

Others describe the developments in similar fashion. Indeed, some scholars have broken down the progression of Indian political parties since independence into three phases: the monopolistic phase (dominated by the Congress party), the oligopolistic phase (the Congress party and the non-Congress parties, a bipolar structure), and, lastly, the competitive phase (the fragmentation of parties). (Sarangi: 2016, p37-48) Chronologically speaking, again, as Suri, Elliott, and Hundt note:

Political parties have played a crucial role in effecting social and political transformation, but the domain of parties has also undergone tremendous change. In the decades following Independence, the plural and federal character of India’s polity quickly asserted itself. Within two decades of the first general elections, the dominance of the Congress party began to crack. A large number of new parties emerged, and many of them became ruling parties at the national or state level or both. In many states, the national parties have been marginalized or become adjuncts to their state-based rivals. This flux in the party domain and the proliferation of parties has given rise to coalition governments, which have become a regular feature of Indian politics since the 1990s. (Suri et al: 2016,p2)

To continue this trajectory, Sarangi writes, referring to the current competitive phase:

The survival of many parties from the 1990s onwards has depended heavily on their political linkages with segmented groups. Social and regional groups that have felt that they have been under-represented in the political process have established their own groups. The emergence of identity politics has been instrumental in empowering many groups that were hitherto marginalized. They have found their own space in the party system with their new-found bargaining power. An excluded group felt free to imitate the strategy of the included groups, resulting in proliferation of parties. (Sarangi: 2016,p41)

Such a fragmentation of politics has resulted in “the regionalization of politics,” an increase in “the frequency of coalition governments,” and an increase in “the level of uncertainty in decision making.” (Ibid p41-42) Indian politics, hence, have been dominated in recent decades by the presence of an ever-growing number of regional parties, with one or two semi-major national parties attempting to form governments as best they can in collaboration with smaller coalitional partners.<sup>3</sup>

What do these trends tell us about the institutionalization of political parties in the Lok Sabha and the institutionalization of the body itself? It seems that a more fractured party system, both in the polity as well as in the legislature, would constitute a less institutionalized body rather than one more so. Instead of progressing toward a system of established and stable parties, with more developed mechanisms for organization, governance, and decision-making, the parties have moved toward more ad hoc formations for purposes of influence and policy, resulting in fragmentation and thus de-institutionalization of the party system in the Lok Sabha.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSALISTIC RULES

The last aspect of institutionalization articulated by Polsby refers to the capacity of the body to establish standard operating procedures as it matures. The idea is that an established institution should promulgate rules (or even norms) that would be applied automatically to relevant situations rather than leaving matters at the discretion of individuals or circumstances. Polsby’s prime example in this regard is the development of the seniority system as a way of selecting committee chairs in the U.S. House. In this paper, following Hibbing’s measure on this component of institutionalization, I have also employed the element of Questions, a privilege in legislative bodies for legislators to question the prime minister or cabinet ministers regarding the affairs of the state. This is



one of the signature features of parliamentary forms of government, hence an analysis of its development and use over time as a measure of an institutionalized body makes sense.

Before examining the procedures that govern Questions in the Lok Sabha, I put forward some data about the frequency (the number) of questions asked over time. Table 4 carries this information. The data in Table 4, admittedly, are rather sparse and sketchy until the beginning of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, in October 1999. The data are available starting only in 1984, and the collection methods appear to be erratic until 1999. For example, the initial period of collection spanned five years (from 1984-1989), during which a total of 40,781 questions were posed. The following collection period lasted only two years (from 1990-1991), when the questions totaled 16,255. Even if one averages these out per year, the number of questions in the first timeframe comes out to 8,156, with a comparable 8,127 in the second timeframe. The first two collection periods could be said to coincide with the Eighth and the Ninth Lok Sabha sessions, respectively. For the third collection period, which stretches seven years from 1992-1999, the number of questions drop significantly to 11,704, or 1,672 per year. This period coincides with the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth sessions. There is clearly some oddity with the collection of data during this timeframe, perhaps meriting some further investigation on this small point.

**Table 4. Number of Questions Asked During Question Time in the Indian Lok Sabha, 1984-present**

Questions	Total	Starred	Unstarred
1984-1989	40,781		
1990-1991	16,255		
1992-1999	11,704		
13 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Oct. 1999-May 2004)	73,531	6,478	67,053
14 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2004-May 2009)	66,371	6,193	60,178
15 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2009-May 2014)	79,401	6,436	72,965
16 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2014-)	60,369	4,881	55,488

Source: Data compiled by author; information obtained from [loksabha.nic.in](http://loksabha.nic.in), under Questions. Data for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha represent figures as of early 2018.

Once we reach the Thirteenth Lok Sabha session, however, we begin to see a more standardized method of collection and consistent data. Not only that, the data are distinguished by different types of questions, primarily “starred” (questions desiring an oral answer) and “unstarred” (questions desiring a written answer), suggesting an establishment of some standard rules to govern Questions. Looking at the data for the moment, the number of questions asked appears to be consistent across years, with some modest fluctuations. (Each of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth

sessions has a roughly equal timeframe of five years; therefore, the averages per year would be roughly the same.) Overall, however, the numbers show stability. (The data for the current Lok Sabha are necessarily incomplete as it is still in session.) Beyond the numbers, what is more interesting is that the questions have been separated into different types and some rather elaborate procedures have been created on the whole topic of Questions, which I discuss below.

Turning now to the creation of rules to govern Questions, it appears that the Lok Sabha has established rather standard procedures regarding this matter. Indeed, the procedures appear to be fairly firm, detailed, and comprehensive, suggesting some careful thinking as well as some history in their development as polished procedures now rather than merely ad hoc or something developed just recently. There are presently various types of questions (starred, unstarred, short notice questions, and questions to private members), procedures about the admissibility and selection of questions, topics that are germane and those that are not, the days of the week when questions can be posed, the discretion of the Speaker in certain matters pertaining to Questions, and a number of other well-defined details regulating this subject.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the types and selection of questions, it appears that the Lok Sabha adopted procedures similar to the ones employed in the British House of Commons. In the British House, “[q]uestions are placed in different categories: starred questions sought an oral answer, unstarred ones could be answered in writing; questions marked with the letter W required an answer on a certain day, others did not; and questions ‘of an urgent nature’ were called private notice questions (PNQs) and were handled in a special way.”(Hibbing: 1988, p706) Also, “[v]arious schemes for selecting questioners have been employed ... .”(Ibid, p706) As Hibbing further notes, “[o]ver time, a very elaborate set of ‘rules of the game’ has developed around Question Time. These rules govern which members ask questions, which ministers must answer, when Question Time takes place, how long it lasts, what kinds of questions are permitted, how much advance notice must be given by the questioner, what sorts of follow-up questions are permitted, and many other matters.” (Ibid)

It would be safe to assume that the rules governing Questions in the Lok Sabha were developed circa 1970s and 1980s, and have been revised and updated from time to time. This appears so because other, related procedures were published, or at least standardized, around the same time. For example, the first edition of the “Manual for Handling Parliamentary Work in Ministries” was published in 1973 by

the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms. The second, revised edition was published in 1989 by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs. The third edition was published in 2004.<sup>5</sup> This timeframe suggests a standardization of many rules guiding parliamentary procedures in India beginning in the 1970s. Whatever the specific time of origin and the periodic revisions to Questions, it is clear that there are now elaborate rules and procedures which govern this signature element of parliamentary practice in the Lok Sabha. Just as Hibbing (1988) wrote about the British House of Commons, it can also be written that the use of Questions has now become institutionalized in the Indian Lok Sabha.

Finally, I have added another data point that neither Polsby nor Hibbing employed to examine the story of institutionalization. This measurement refers simply to the number of bills introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha over time. Theoretically, it would be safe to suggest that a mature organization, having established standard and automatic rules and procedures rather than relying on discretionary behavior, would be more successful in passing legislation than the one that was less mature.<sup>6</sup> The data for this variable are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Legislative Productivity in the Indian Lok Sabha, 1952-present**

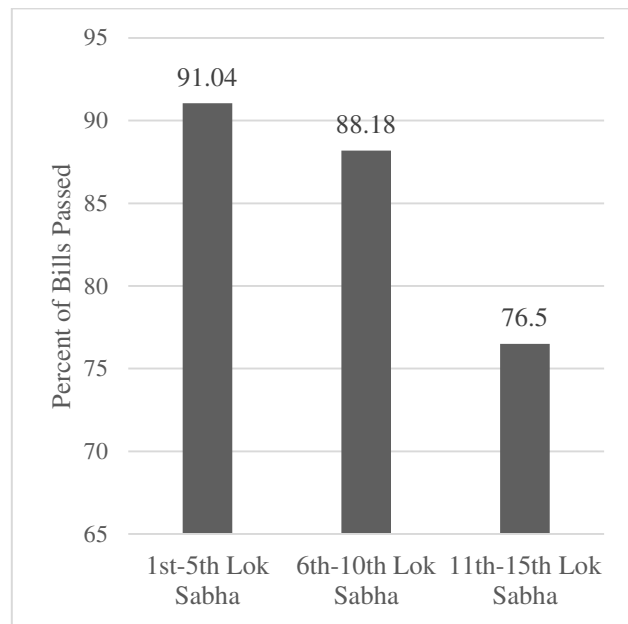
Lok Sabha	Bills Introduced	Bills Passed	% Passed
1 <sup>st</sup> Lok Sabha (May 1952-Apr. 1957)	155	151	97.4
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lok Sabha (Apr. 1957-Apr. 1962)	347	342	98.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Lok Sabha (Apr. 1962-Mar. 1967)	294	257	87.4
4 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Mar. 1967-Mar. 1971)	194	163	84.0
5 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Mar. 1971-Mar. 1977)	131	115	87.8
6 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Mar. 1977-Jan. 1980)	243	197	81.0
7 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Jan. 1980-Dec. 1984)	278	265	95.3
8 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Dec. 1984-Dec. 1989)	322	307	95.3
9 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Dec. 1989-Jun. 1991)	149	126	84.6
10 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Jun. 1991-May 1996)	308	261	84.7
11 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 1996-Mar. 1998)	134	94	70.1
12 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Mar. 1998-Oct. 1999)	96	75	78.1
13 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (Oct. 1999-May 2004)	284	233	82.0
14 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2004-May 2009)	262	211	80.5
15 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2009-May 2014)	273	196	71.8
16 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (May 2014-)	202	167	82.7

Source: Data compiled by author; information obtained from [loksabha.nic.in](http://loksabha.nic.in), under Legislation. Data for the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha represent figures as of early 2018.

The first column of Table 5 shows the number of bills introduced in each session of the Lok Sabha since the beginning, the second column shows the number of bills passed, and the final column shows the percentage passed. The premise, of course, is that the percentage would have increased over time if the hypothesis were to hold true. The data in Table 5 do not reveal a clear and consistent pattern. Indeed, the high points are in the first two sessions (at 97.4 and at 98.6 percent,

respectively), after which the percentages reach 95.3 in the Seventh and Eighth sessions and are generally in the 80s in the earlier sessions but drop to even the low 70s in the later sessions. Again, separating this measure into three segments of five sessions each, as shown in Figure 4 (not including the current session since it is still ongoing), the percentages show a precipitous drop over time, with the highest passage rates from the 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> sessions (at an annual average of 91.04 percent), which drops to 88.18 percent per year from the 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> sessions, and plummets to 76.5 percent per year in the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> sessions.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 4. Legislative Productivity by Various Sessions of Lok Sabha**



Source: Compiled by author

Theoretically, then, this would not be consistent with an institutionalized Lok Sabha. Legislative accomplishment, in the form of passage of bills, has declined over time, suggesting a body functioning less smoothly and effectively than before. Of course, many variables could influence this trend, including the fragmentation of political parties noted above (and the growth of new parties), but this data point suggests a less organized legislative body now than during its earlier eras. Indeed, examining some of the same variables (number of bills passed, percentage of questions admitted, growth in the number of political parties in the Lok Sabha), other scholars point to the “decline” of the Indian parliament as a result. (Verma and Tripathi: 2013,p153-177) At a minimum, however, a marked decline in legislative productivity points to a lack of institutionalization over time.

## LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE LOK SABHA

The Lok Sabha, now approaching seventy, has certainly reached a mature age such that certain aspects of its evolution can now be systematically examined. In this paper, I have sought to employ a well-articulated and widely-noted theory of institutionalization and its measurements to see how they fit with the historical development of the Lok Sabha, something that has been heretofore unexamined by scholars. Has the Lok Sabha evolved consistent with this framework, or does this framework explain the Lok Sabha's evolution?

To be specific about the various measurements first, a few produced expected results in the Indian context, but some did not. With reference to the establishment of boundaries, only the variable about an increase in years in the chamber (or national politics) before becoming Speaker fits the pattern. Others do not. Regarding the growth of internal complexity, the committee setup fits the expected evolution, but not so for the parties. Lastly, with reference to the development of universalistic rules, the variable about Questions fits the mold, but not legislative productivity. In all, then, some trend lines are as hypothesized, but others are not, with sketchy evidence.

The fundamental questions are: has the Lok Sabha institutionalized over time, and can institutionalization theory explain that development? It would be safe to say that the Lok Sabha has institutionalized in some respects, but certainly not in every aspect imagined by the theory. It has developed a complex structure of committees to manage the increasingly complicated affairs of the state. The provision for Questions is now governed by standard procedures rather than by discretionary behavior. And the number of years in pre-speakership service, before assuming the Speaker's post, has decidedly increased. Such developments indicate an institutionalized body, (Haeberle, 1978, p 1054-65) although other indicators (turnover rates or legislative productivity) suggest otherwise.

The evidence for institutionalization in the Lok Sabha is relatively weak. Perhaps that is so because of the type of legislature Lok Sabha represents. As a reactive legislature, with a multi-party system, legislative development may be hindered and seem inconsistent across measures due to its very nature. Indeed, given the similarly mixed results in the case of the British House of Commons (in Hibbing's study), the Canadian House of Commons (in Kornberg's study), and the Danish Folketing (in Pedersen's study), all reactive legislatures just like the Lok Sabha, a strong case can be made that reactive legislature will exhibit non-monotonic and heterogeneous trends across measurements which may seem inconsistent or

multi-directional at times. Much of the evidence, of course, depends on the kinds of measures of institutionalization one selects, which can vary.

Is institutionalization, then, a generalizable model of legislative change? It is indeed difficult to imagine how one model can be applied as a universal principle underlying change. Legislatures evolve in very different ways, influenced no doubt by many factors, not the least of which is the environment in which they exist and perhaps to which they adapt. The concept of institutionalization appears to provide some very broad strokes, but not necessarily ones that would explain the evolution of all the legislatures in a similar fashion. As Hibbing concludes in his study of the British House of Commons, "[t]his is another way of saying that the concept of institutionalization is gross at best; it illustrates a general tendency, but with facets that fall victim to politics at particular moments." (Hibbing:1988,p708) This would apply to the Lok Sabha as well, and to most other legislative assemblies around the world. In reality, it seems unfair perhaps to put so much on the shoulders of just one theoretical construct to explain the evolution of complicated bodies existing in a variety of complicated settings with complicated histories.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In Indian politics, the line of demarcation between prominence in national politics and holding the Speaker's position is a little hard to draw. Many Indian Speakers ascend to that position already having a large name in politics and hence do not necessarily undergo the apprenticeship period or develop expertise in politics within the chamber. Therefore, simply counting the number of years in the Lok Sabha is not necessarily a good indicator of an individual's station in Indian politics.

<sup>2</sup>Even though most committees in the Indian parliament are technically not designated as "joint committees," most tend to have members from both houses (the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, M. P. Singh, *Split in a Predominant Party: The Indian National Congress in 1969* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1981), for a careful account of the Congress Party's split.<sup>4</sup>For an extended discussion of the current state of political parties in India and its impact on the Indian parliament, see Chakrabarty and Pandey, *Indian Government; Party System in India: Emerging Trajectories*, ed. Ajay K. Mehra (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2013); B. L. Shankar

and Valerian Roderiques, *The Indian Parliament: A Democracy at Work* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); *The Indian Parliament: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2014); Sanjay Ruparelia, *Divided We Govern: Coalition Politics in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup>Details regarding these topics are presented in various documents (Type of Questions, Starred and Unstarred Questions, Procedures Relating to Questions, Allotment of Days for Questions, Admissibility of Questions, and Procedure for Short Notice Questions) and are available at [loksabha.nic.in](http://loksabha.nic.in), under Questions (Home).

<sup>5</sup>See Manual – Documentation : Ministry of Parliamentary affairs, Govt of India.

<sup>6</sup>Even though neither Polsby nor Hibbing employ such a measure to judge institutionalization, Opello does consider something similar, something he terms “decisional effectiveness.” The idea is that a mature legislature would pass legislation “which involves higher levels of aggregation and agreement among deputies is indicative of a more effective legislative institution.” See Opello, “Portugal’s Parliament,” 309.

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