

LEGISLATIVE DECLINE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS AND A DISREGARD FOR DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

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Both the security breach in Parliament last week featuring a theatrical attempt by individuals to highlight an issue of public importance — unemployment — and the Union government's response have been deeply problematic. The government's stymieing of any debate over this issue in Parliament and the Chair's recourse to an [unprecedented high number of suspensions of Opposition legislators following their demand for a statement in the Houses and a debate](#), have been in line with its disregard for deliberative democracy. As many as 78 Opposition Members of Parliament were suspended on Monday. Fourteen more were suspended earlier — 92 in total, and nearly matching the 94 suspensions overall since 2014 prior to this session. Unlike in the two Lok Sabhas (2004-14), when even ruling party legislators, including rebels, were suspended for unruliness, only Opposition members have been subject to suspension, which includes those for far less severe offences since 2014.

The hallmark of a functioning democracy is deliberation, wherein elected legislators debate and discuss issues of public import and seek solutions to issues that affect citizens. A thorough deliberation involves not just televised speeches from Parliament but also debates, the utilisation of parliamentary and standing committees to delve into the issue and for Bills and legislation to be discussed threadbare before consideration. Instead, over the course of recent parliamentary sessions during the National Democratic Alliance's tenure, there have been multiple attempts at browbeating the Opposition, getting Bills passed without adequate discussion, disallowing amendments on merit, and under-utilising standing and parliamentary committees while trying hard to play to the gallery. Legislative business and parliamentary work have been given short shrift, while theatrics by legislators in both the Treasury and Opposition benches, and one-upmanship through the use of suspensions, have dominated proceedings. It is no wonder that such actions have compelled global democracy reports by research institutions such as V-Dem Institute to characterise India's democracy as an "electoral autocracy". Worse, the [use of the draconian Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act to indiscriminately target dissenters, such as the protesters who threw canisters and raised slogans in Parliament](#) last week, has also fallen into the recent pattern of a deliberate equation of dissent with terror. Again, this has led the U.S.-based Freedom House, that measures civil and political liberties, to declare India as "partially free". The recent actions by the government only contribute further to the backsliding of democracy in India, making these developments a matter of serious concern.

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