

The Impact of Modi Government on Indian Politics: A Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract

Since Narendra Modi took up role as the 14th Prime Minister of India in May 2014, his government has taken the charge to usher multi-faceted significant reforms while reshaping the political, economic and social mosaic of the country. Under Modi's leadership, India has seen significant shifts in the direction of its governance with particular emphasis on centralisation of power, economic modernisation and a shift in the cultural and social identity of the nation. However, while many of the policies and reforms initiated by Modi have formalised much support, it has also caused considerable debates and criticisms, especially concerning the influence of the democratic institutions, the socialist inclusivity and India's secular framework. This article will give an extensive retrospective analysis of the effect of the current Modi government in Indian politics with a focus on key aspects of Indian politics, economic and social spheres. Through this exploration the paper aims at evaluating both the successes and challenges of Modi's governance and providing insights into its long-term implications for the political destiny of India.

Keywords: Narendra Modi, Democratic Institution, Indian Politics. Social Identity.

INTRODUCTION:

The political landscape in India has changed drastically, ever since Narendra Modi took over power and became the new prime minister in 2014 which is a turning point in the contemporary political history of the nation. Narendra Modi's tenure as India's Prime Minister has seen massive political, economic and social changes which have left a deep mark on the country. Modi's leadership has been marked by his reformist approach, nationalism and a centralising approach to governance. Indian politics has been redefined by his tenacious grip on power and the depths of his social media charisma, however, his reforms and policies have been controversial and have modernised India's political economy and integrated country within the global order. Modi, who is the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won a decisive electoral victory and his re-election in 2019 ensured his supremacy in the Indian politics. His rule that is still in existence has altered the direction of governance, the political methods, the national policies and the ideological structure that characterizes the Indian state. The emergence of Modi and the BJP promised the emergence of a strong central government, which virtually changed the balance of power to the historically pluralistic and coalition-based political system in India. The core of Modi governance is an aggressive nationalism, which is based on the advocacy of the Hindutva ideology, which has had a profound impact on the mass discourse, the political turnout, as well as the general culture of the nation. The tenure of Modi has changed the nature of politics in the country where the populist nature has been

blended with national security, economic reforms, and social welfare programmes. These factors have changed the domestic political climate as well as the global positioning of India.

The economic reforms that rewarded the first term of Modi (2014-2019) included the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the demonetization policy of 2016, and an infrastructural development initiative based on the Make in India and Digital India campaigns. These policies have received mixed reception, though being transformative in nature, their proponents have praised their long-run perspective of the Indian economy, whereas their critics have cited the short-term difficulties they presented to the Indian economy and the vulnerable groups. Such social policies as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), the Ujjwala Yojana (the provision of LPG connections to rural women) and Ayushman Bharat (a national health insurance program) have played a critical role in defining how the government reaches the marginalised parts of society. Nevertheless, the same initiatives have also generated controversies in terms of their implementation, effectiveness and the degree to which they have been politically motivated instead of just being developmental in nature as it has been historically as a central element of Indian democracy. Concentration of power to the executive has brought about the issue of the diminishing democracy checks and balances as well as the increase of control by the ruling party especially through the take-over of major institutions like, the judicial system, the media, and the electoral commission. Moreover, these institutions have become politicalised and this has resulted in a polarised political environment with voices of dissent and opposition being increasingly marginalized. The emergence of identity politics in the leadership of Modi has also changed the manner in which electoral politics is contested in India. The proper use of social media, the closeness to the masses, and ability to govern the desires and dissatisfaction of a large part of population have made Modi a very influential personality. Meanwhile, though, these trends have helped to increase social cleavages, especially on religious, caste and regional grounds. This retrospective paper tries to examine the intricate relations of the Modi government on the Indian politics, through the lens of major themes, i.e., political centralisation, economic reforms, social and cultural reforms.

MODI'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

Narendra Damodardas Modi is a prominent figure in Indian politics, having served as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for three consecutive terms. During his tenure he gained recognition for promoting a development-oriented governance model commonly refers to as the Gujarat Model. However, his ascent to national prominence has been marked by controversy particularly due to the 2002 communal violence in Godhra which continues to be a subject of significant debates. This event contributed to Modi being views both domestically and internationally as a prominent of Hindutva ideology. Opposition parties particularly those outside the Bharatiya Janata Party have persistently portrayed Modi as a figure closely aligned with the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh characterising him as a strong Hindu nationalist symbol advanced to promote the vision of India as a Hindu state. Modi's rise to prominence was significantly aided by the strong support he garnered from the Hindu majority especially after the intense political attacks against him. Over time he became the favoured leader of many Hindus securing their votes in large numbers in addition to some support from other communities. His political party along with his personal appeal was able to garnered enough support to form two consecutive governments at the national level in 2014 and 2019. Despite not winning a simple majority of votes in either of these elections, Modi benefited from the First-Past-the-Post system. The fragmented and weak opposition played a crucial role in Modi's rise alongside his personal qualities such as oratory skills and political charisma. He successfully

captivated the Indian electorate with his catchy slogans and promises of a prosperous India focused on growth, opportunities and hope encapsulated in the phrase “Acche Din,” “Saab Ka Saath, Saab Ka Vikaas”, “Modi Hain To Munkin Hain” etc. However these promises are increasingly being viewed as illusory with mounting dissatisfaction among various groups including the youths, farmers, the poor and the middle class. Despite the growing discontentment, Modi’s larger than life persona continues to dominate Indian politics. He remains the most prominent and influential political figure both in India and internationally. If Indian politicians can be divided into the eras of Nehru and Indira Gandhi the period since 2014 can be undoubtedly be characterised as the Modi era and this characterisation would not be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, with Modi's governance, the power has been centralised in the Prime Minister's office; the decisions such as the sudden demonetisation in 2016 and revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir in 2019 were taken without consensus; the political consolidation also spread to the BJP under Modi has become a majority in India with very little room for dissent in the party the future of Indian democracy has been questioned.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX (GST)

Economic reforms have been a central focus during Modi’s time in office, with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 being a notable milestone. The GST was a transformative policy aimed at streamlining India’s complex tax system. Before GST, the previous tax structure caused inefficiencies and increased costs, as businesses had to manage multiple state-specific taxes. By replacing these various indirect taxes with a single unified tax, GST sought to simplify the framework, enhance compliance, and spur economic growth. In his speech marking the GST’s launch, Modi stated that its impact would go beyond just the financial system, highlighting its potential to “significantly boost cooperative federalism,” help in “combating corruption and black money,” and introduce a new governance model. A month later, Modi noted that the swift and smooth transition to GST had revitalized national confidence.

Although the speech by Modi may have overstated the transformative effects of GST in the short-term, he was right in suggesting that it would lead to far-reaching social benefits. GST also intended to form a single market with a population of more than that of Europe, U.S., Mexico, and Canada combined by unification of various state tax codes into one Value Added Tax (VAT). This was anticipated to help boost the annual growth rate of India by as much as two percent. The GST was also perceived to enhance the international competitiveness of Indian exports where the tax cascade had made Indian manufacturers high-cost producers. The other expected benefit was that the informal sector producers would be introduced to the tax system which would increase tax revenues. Nevertheless, even with its significant potential, GST during the Modi regime was not implemented without troubles, some of which could not have been avoided due to the scope of changes. Most of the problems were caused by the fact that the government hardly knew the complexity of the tax system and because it was implemented hastily. The GST was implemented with six tax rates, as opposed to the usual one or two, which compelled companies to increase the pressure on the government to reduce their product taxes, and the government most of the time did not refuse the plea. In addition, land and real estate transactions, which normally go hand in hand with money laundering were not subject to GST.

DEMONISATION

The demonetisation of high denomination currency notes in November 2016 was one of the most contr-

oversial decisions of Modi's government. Announced in a hurried manner the move was intended to combat and black money corruption. However, the immediate impact of demonetisation was severe economic disruption particularly in rural areas where cash transactions are predominant. the decision taken lead to long queues at banks widespread confusion and temporary slowdown in the economy while the demonetisation pushed India to increase digitalisation of payment and financial inclusion the its long-term effectiveness in curbing black money remains debatable. Demonetisation is typically a last-resort policy used in economies battling hyperinflation or large-scale counterfeiting. India had previously demonetized its currency in January 1946 (a year before Independence) and again in 1978, both times to tackle the counterfeiting of high-denomination notes. However, these efforts had minimal impact on the currency in circulation. The 2016 demonetisation, however, was much more ambitious, yet poorly planned, considering India's heavy reliance on cash and the fact that 600 million people still lacked bank accounts at the time. Additionally, the state mints were not informed about the policy change, preventing them from producing new currency notes. This resulted in a severe cash shortage, limits on cash withdrawals, delayed wages for many workers, and widespread business closures. An official declaration was made to the citizens that the \$500 and \$1000 currency notes would be invalid. People holding these old notes were allowed to exchange them at banks between November 10 and December 30, with daily and weekly limits of Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 20,000, respectively. While there was no cap on the total amount that could be exchanged, these limits applied to the daily and weekly exchanges. In his announcement, Modi explained that despite his government's actions over the first two years, India's global corruption perception ranking had only improved from near 100th to 76th, highlighting the widespread nature of corruption and black money. He stated that demonetisation would achieve two main goals: reducing the use of counterfeit currency by terrorists and aiding in the fight against corruption and black money. He concluded his speech with a passionate question, asking if citizens wouldn't endure some difficulties for the greater good of purifying the country, and expressed full confidence that everyone would join in the "mahayagna."

However, the issues arising from demonetisation were not a result of insufficient public support, but rather due to the flawed assumptions underpinning the policy. It presumed that the majority of illicit wealth was in cash, despite data from Modi's own Income Tax Department indicating that less than 10% of black money was held in cash. Those who held black money in cash managed to bypass the demonetisation by using intermediaries to convert large-denomination notes into smaller ones. Moreover, demonetisation was a one-time measure that failed to tackle the root causes of black income. The effort to eliminate black income from the economy was largely unsuccessful, while imposing significant costs on individuals and the economy. The expected removal of Rs 3 trillion (lakh crore) of untaxed cash from the economy proved unrealistic, as 99% of the demonetised notes were returned to the banks. Within a year, the currency in circulation had returned to pre-demonetisation levels. As it became clear that the policy had not achieved its intended goals, the Modi government shifted its narrative, stating that the policy had also aimed to digitize the economy and bring black income into the tax system.

MAKE IN INDIA AND DIGITAL INDIA

In his first Independence Day on August 15,2014, Prime Minister Modi urges the world to join the “Make in India” initiative, with the goal of strengthening Indian manufacturing. The official launch of the “Make in India’s” initiative on September 25,2014,set an ambitious goal of raising the manufacturing sector’s contribution to GDP from 16% to 25% by 2025, with the promise of creating 100 million new jobs in manufacturing by 2022.The initiative sought to implement new strategies to expand manufacturing

including attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), strengthening intellectual property rights and focusing on 25 key sectors such as automobiles, defence, and energy. Key measures included deregulation prices for diesel, gas and kerosene, removing minimum price supports for agricultural products allowing upto 49% foreign investment in insurance, defence and railways, easing FDI restrictions in retail promoting infrastructure development, enhancing waste management and offering long-term federal subsidies to manufacturing these reforms and successfully attracted investment from companies like Apple, Xiaomi, Kia Motors and Samsung. Alongside, the Modi government launched multiple initiatives to stimulate economic growth including the Digital India program in 2015, aimed at improving digital infrastructure, expanding online services and promoting digital literacy. Projects like the Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA) to boost digital literacy and the Digital Payment ecosystem to encourage cashless transactions were central to this effort. Additionally, steps were taken to extend broadband connectivity to rural areas to bridge the digital gap. Although the Aadhaar biometric identification system had been introduced before Modi's tenure its expansion was further advanced under his government, playing a vital role in delivering welfare services and improving transparency by reducing leaks in the system.

Despite the initial positive outcomes such as improved ranking in ease of doing business and modest FDI growth, the 'Make in India' initiative didn't significantly increase manufacturing in the country. By 2018, the share of manufacturing in India's GDP had dropped to 14.8% down from 15.1% in 2014 and unemployment had reached its highest point in 45 years. While FDI inflows had risen in the early years they began to decline after capital outflows that represented 30-47% of total FDI inflows. By the 2017-2018 period, FDI had decreased from \$9.6 billion in 2014-2015 to \$7 billion. Notable, while FDI in service sectors grew, investment in manufacturing saw a marked decline, highlighting the shortcomings of the 'Make in India' initiative.

AGRICULTURAL REFORMS AND FARMER PROTESTS

In September 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and with minimal parliamentary debate, the Modi administration introduced and passed three controversial farm bills. The government stated that the objectives of the bills were to free farmers from restrictions on when and where and how they could sell their products, to establish a framework for private contracts between farmers and traders along with a dispute resolution mechanism starting at the sub-divisional magistrate level and to lift restrictions on food stockpiling by private companies and required the government to compensate farmers for any production limitations imposed by the state through price mechanisms. These bills sparked one of the largest strikes in history with farmers protesting at the outskirts of Delhi. The protesting farmers wanted to retain their right to sell their produce in government-regulated markets at a minimum fixed price. They expressed deep distrust toward the government, fearing that large corporations would exploit them and hoard commodities to drive up prices and profits. Many people concerned that the new laws would lead to food insecurity sympathised with farmers.

The protests, as reported by the media, appeared to be a response to the imposition of market forces in a sector previously regulated by the state. India's agricultural sector is highly inefficient, with most farmers owning small plots of land, making them highly sensitive to risks like drought or disease. The government's claim that the bills were intended to empower farmers seemed disingenuous, as many small farmers would likely have to sell their assets in times of crisis. Additionally, the lack of unskilled, labour-intensive factory jobs in urban areas made transitioning out of agriculture a difficult option for many marginal farmers. When the protests were linked in the media to previous incidents of farmer suicides, the

situation seemed even more urgent. Several state governments, particularly those not governed by the BJP, sided with the farmers, viewing the legislation as a constitutional matter since agriculture falls under state jurisdiction. Ultimately, the Supreme Court suspended the laws indefinitely and set up a committee to assess whether they served the national interest. Nevertheless, while the situation for most protesting agricultural workers may not have been as dire as portrayed by the media, and despite some gradual liberalization of the sector over the past two decades, the existing agricultural system remained highly inefficient and in need of reform. However, the Modi government failed to secure support from stakeholders before introducing the legislation and struggled to manage the resulting backlash from farmers, state governments, the public, and the Supreme Court. These bills sparked protests led to significant public outcry and eventually forced the BJP government to repeal all three bills by late November 2021.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES UNDER MODI'S GOVERNMENT

The SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN (Clean India Mission) that aimed at eliminating open defecation in India and improving sanitation across India was one of the biggest welfare projects led by Modi. The program has led to development of millions of toilets, the creation of awareness of hygiene and sanitation, and the critics have observed that the program has been very inconsistent in regards to implementation and there are concerns on the sustainability of toilets that have been developed. Other welfare programs introduced by the Modi government include the Pradhan Mantri Awaz Yojana (housing to all) and Ujjwala Yojna (welfare provision of LPG connections in rural areas) have led to a considerable change in terms of access to basic services. There has however been a lot of criticism about these programs based on implementation difficulties and absence of long-term planning. The emphasis on Hindu culture and values displayed by Modi has also evoked an underlying issue of secularism in India to a considerable extent. religion (the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the decision to repeal Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir). The cultural nationalism which is emerging and provided a platform to a culture of tension marked by a series of voices of apprehension about the weakening of the pluralistic traditions in India. The social partitioning of the Indian society under the impact of increased pressure on the Hindu religious identity in the political arena and marginalization of the Muslim and Christian minorities in the country.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS OF MODI'S GOVERNANCE

Firstly, Modi's leadership has been accused of undermining India's democratic institutions by centralising power and undermining the independent institutions such as the judiciary and the media, which have led to a decline in the quality of democracy in India. The growing influence of the executive over other branches of government has also raised fears about the future of democratic governance in India.

Secondly, while India has continued to see strong economic growth under Modi's leadership, India faces significant challenges related to unemployment, income inequality and rural distress. Modi's economic policies such as demonetisation and the GST have been criticised for their negative impact on small businesses and workers in the informal sector. Additionally, the growing wealth gap between the urban elite and the rural poor remains a major concern.

Thirdly, Modi's government has been criticised for promoting communal tensions in India. the rise of Hindu nationalism has been accompanied by a rise in religious violence, especially against Muslim

minorities. Criticism has been raised that the government's policies such as the CAA and the NRC have marginalised Muslim communities and undermined the secular ethos of India.

CONCLUSION

The Modi government (2014-present) has significantly impacted the Indian politics positively and transformatively through strong changes in both governance and physical discourse. The leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been exemplified as ambitious policy reforms such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), demonetisation and emphasis on technological improvement and infrastructure development. On the one hand, these policies have transformed the outlines of Indian electoral politics by consolidating power in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and making the politics a nationalistic and a matter of cultural identity. This strategy by the government has helped to redefine Indian political position clearly with Hindu nationalism gaining momentum and a centralised power structure began to emerge. This has generated a polarised political setup with the opposition parties failing to offer a consistent and unified opposition to the BJP hegemony. Moreover, the Modi government focus on security, foreign policy, and firmness of national interests has redefined the role of India in the global geopolitics, which strengthens its status as an important player in the international affairs. Even as the success of its foreign policy including the success of the relationship with key powers in the world has been remarkable, the government has also been criticised due to internal human rights issues and the increasing decline of the democratic institutions.

In sum, the influence of the Modi government on Indian politics cannot be underestimated, as it triggered the economic modernisation as well as great political restructuring. Nevertheless, it has not done so without controversy as it has brought about some heated arguments on the future course of democracy, secularism, and social inclusivity in India. The retrospective review of the moderate rule of Modi is marked by a time of dramatic change, the results of which will continue to be predicted and discussed in the forthcoming years to come and determine the future of Indian democracy and its political agenda.

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