

Narendra Damodardas Modi (Gujarati(About this sound listen), born 17 September 1950) is an Indian politician who is the 14th and current Prime Minister of India, in office since May 2014. He was the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014, and is the Member of Parliament for Varanasi. Modi, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is a Hindu nationalist and member of the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Born to a Gujarati family in Vadnagar, Modi helped his father sell tea as a child, and later ran his own stall.

He was introduced to the RSS at the age of eight, beginning a long association with the organisation. He left home after graduating from school,

partly because of an arranged marriage which he rejected. Modi traveled around India for two years, and visited a number of religious centres. He returned to Gujarat and moved to Ahmedabad in 1969 or 1970. In 1971 he became a full-time worker for the RSS.

During the state of emergency imposed across the country in 1975, Modi was forced to go into hiding. The RSS assigned him to the BJP in 1985, and he held several positions within the party hierarchy until 2001, rising to the rank of general secretary.

Modi was appointed Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001, due to Keshubhai Patel's failing health and poor public image following the earthquake in Bhuj.

Modi was elected to the legislative assembly soon after. His administration has been considered complicit in the 2002 Gujarat riots, [a] or otherwise criticised for its handling of it, although a court found no evidence to prosecute Modi.[b] His policies as chief minister, credited with encouraging economic growth, have received praise.[8] His administration has been criticised for failing to significantly improve health, poverty, and education indices in the state.[c]

Modi led the BJP in the 2014 general election, which gave the party a majority in the Lok Sabha, the first time a single party had achieved this since 1984.

Modi himself was elected to parliament from Varanasi. Since taking office, Modi's administration has tried to raise foreign direct investment in the Indian economy, increased spending on infrastructure, and reduced spending on healthcare and social welfare programmes. Modi has attempted to improve efficiency in the bureaucracy, and centralised power through the abolition of the planning commission. He has begun a high-profile sanitation campaign, and weakened or abolished environmental and labour laws. Credited with engineering a political realignment towards right-wing politics, Modi remains a figure of controversy domestically and internationally over his Hindu nationalist beliefs and his role during the 2002 Gujarat riots, cited as evidence of an exclusionary social agenda.

Early life and education

Narendra Modi was born on 17 September 1950 to a family of grocers in Vadnagar, Mehsana district, Bombay State (present-day Gujarat). He was the third of six children born to Damodardas Mulchand Modi (c.1915 – 1989) and Hiraben Modi (born c.1920).[17]

Modi's family belonged to the Modh-Ghanchi-Teli (oil-presser) community,[18][19][20] which is categorised as an Other Backward Class by the Indian government.[21][22]

As a child, Modi helped his father sell tea at the Vadnagar railway station, and later ran a tea stall with his brother near a bus terminus. Modi completed his higher secondary education in Vadnagar in 1967, where a teacher described him as an average student and a keen debater, with an interest in theatre.[25] Modi had an early gift for rhetoric in debates, and this was noted by his teachers and students. Modi preferred playing larger-than-life characters in theatrical productions, which has influenced his political image.

When eight years old, Modi discovered the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and began attending its local shakhas (training sessions). There, Modi met Lakshmanrao Inamdar, popularly known as Vakil Saheb, who inducted him as a balswayamsevak (junior cadet) for RSS and became his political mentor.

While Modi was training with the RSS, he also met Vasant Gajendragadkar and Nathalal Jaghda, Bharatiya Jana Sangh leaders who were founding members

of the BJP's Gujarat unit in 1980.[30] Engaged while still a child to Jashodaben, a girl from a family who lived close by, Modi rejected the arranged marriage at the same time he graduated from high school.[31] The resulting familial tensions contributed to his decision to leave home in 1967.[32]

Modi spent the ensuing two years travelling across Northern and North-eastern India, though few details of where he went have emerged. In interviews, Modi has described visiting Hindu ashrams founded by Swami Vivekananda: the Belur Math near Kolkata, followed by the Advaita Ashrama in Almora and the Ramakrishna Mission in Rajkot. Modi remained only a short time at each, since he lacked the required college education. Vivekananda has been described as a large influence in Modi's life.[37]

In the early summer of 1968, Modi reached the Belur Math but was turned away, after which Modi wandered through Calcutta, West Bengal and Assam, stopping in Siliguri and Guwahati.[38] Modi then went to the Ramakrishna Ashram in Almora, where he was again rejected, before travelling back to Gujarat

via Delhi and Rajasthan in 1968–69.[39] Sometime in late 1969 or early 1970, Modi returned to Vadnagar for a brief visit before leaving again for Ahmedabad.

There, Modi lived with his uncle, working in the latter's canteen at the Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation.[41][42]

In Ahmedabad, Modi renewed his acquaintance with Inamdar, who was based at the Hedgewar Bhavan (RSS headquarters) in the city.[43][44][45]

After the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, he stopped working for his uncle and became a full-time pracharak (campaigner) for the RSS,[42] working under Inamdar.

Shortly before the war, Modi took part in a non-violent protest against the Indian government in New Delhi, for which he was arrested; this has been cited

as a reason for Inamdar electing to mentor him.[46] Many years later Modi would co-author a biography of Inamdar, published in 2001.[47]

In 1978 Modi received a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from School of Open Learning[48] at University of Delhi,

graduating with a third class.[51] Five years later, in 1982, he received a Master of Arts degree in political science from Gujarat University, as an external distance learning student.[54]

Early political career

In June 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in India which lasted until 1977. During this period, known as "The Emergency", many of her political opponents were jailed and opposition groups were banned.[55][56] Modi was appointed general secretary of the "Gujarat Lok Sangharsh Samiti", an RSS committee coordinating opposition to the Emergency in Gujarat. Shortly afterwards, the RSS was banned.[57] Modi was forced to go underground in Gujarat and frequently travelled in disguise to avoid arrest. He became involved in printing pamphlets opposing the government, sending them to Delhi and organising demonstrations.[58][59] Modi was also involved with creating a network of safe houses for individuals wanted by the government, and in raising funds for political refugees and activists.[60] During this period, Modi wrote a book in Gujarati, Sangharsh Ma Gujarat (In The Struggles of Gujarat), describing events during the Emergency.[61][62] Among the people he met in this role was trade unionist and socialist activist George Fernandes, as well as several other national political figures.[63] In his travels during the Emergency, Modi was often forced to move in disguise, once dressing as a monk, and once as a Sikh.[60]

Modi became an RSS sambhag pracharak (regional organiser) in 1978, overseeing RSS activities in the areas of Surat and Vadodara, and in 1979 he went to work for the RSS in Delhi, where he was put to work researching and writing the RSS's version of the history of the Emergency. [64] He returned to Gujarat a short while later, and was assigned by the RSS to the BJP in 1985.[30] In 1987 Modi helped organise the BJP's campaign in the Ahmedabad municipal election, which the BJP won comfortably; Modi's planning has been described as the reason for that result by biographers.[65] After L. K. Advani became president of the BJP in 1986, the RSS decided to place its members in important positions within the BJP; Modi's work during the Ahmedabad election led to his selection for this role, and Modi was elected organising secretary of the BJP's Gujarat unit later in 1987.[66]

Modi rose within the party and was named a member of the BJP's National Election Committee in 1990, helping organise L. K. Advani's 1990 Ram Rath Yatra in 1990 and Murli Manohar Joshi's 1991-92 Ekta Yatra (Journey for Unity).[25][67][68] However, he took a brief break from politics in 1992, instead establishing a school in Ahmedabad; friction with Shankersingh Vaghela, a BJP MP from Gujarat at the time, also played a part in this decision.[68] Modi returned to electoral politics in 1994, partly at the insistence of Advani, and as party secretary, Modi's electoral strategy was considered central to the BJP victory in the 1995

state assembly elections.[68][30][69][70] In November of that year Modi was elected BJP national secretary and transferred to New Delhi, where he assumed responsibility for party activities in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.[69][71] The following year, Shankersinh Vaghela, a prominent BJP leader from Gujarat, defected to the Indian National Congress (Congress, INC) after losing his parliamentary seat in the Lok Sabha elections.[25] Modi, on the selection committee for the 1998 Assembly elections in Gujarat, favoured supporters of BJP leader Keshubhai Patel over those supporting Vaghela to end factional division in the party. His strategy was credited as key to the BJP winning an overall majority in the 1998 elections,[69][72] and Modi was promoted to BJP general secretary (organisation) in May of that year.[73]

Chief Minister of Gujarat

Taking office

In 2001, Keshubhai Patel's health was failing and the BJP lost a few state assembly seats in by-elections. Allegations of abuse of power, corruption and poor administration were made, and Patel's standing had been damaged by his administration's handling of the earthquake in Bhuj in 2001.[69][74][75] The BJP national leadership sought a new candidate for the chief ministership, and Modi, who had expressed misgivings about Patel's administration, was chosen as a replacement. [25] Although BJP leader L. K. Advani did not want to ostracise Patel and was concerned about Modi's lack of experience in government, Modi declined an offer to be Patel's deputy chief minister, telling Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee that he was "going to be fully responsible for Gujarat or not at all". On 3 October 2001 he replaced Patel as Chief Minister of Gujarat, with the responsibility of preparing the BJP for the December 2002 elections.[76] On 7 October 2001, Modi was administered the oath of office.[77] On 24 February 2002 he entered the Gujarat state legislature by winning a by-election to the Rajkot - II constituency, defeating Ashwin Mehta of the INC by 14,728 votes, which enabled him to take office.[78]

2002 Gujarat riots

Main article: 2002 Gujarat riots

On 27 February 2002, a train with several hundred passengers burned near Godhra, killing approximately 60 people.[e] The train carried a large number of Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya after a religious ceremony at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid.[81][82] In making a public statement after the incident, Modi said that the attack had been terror attack planned by local Muslims.[3][81][83] The next day, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad called for a bandh across the state. [84][85] Riots began during the bandh, and anti-Muslim violence spread through Gujarat.[81][84][85] The government's decision to move the bodies of the train victims from Godhra to Ahmedabad further inflamed the violence.[81][86] The state government stated later that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed.[87]

Independent sources put the death toll at over 2000.[81][88] Approximately 150,000 people were driven to refugee camps.[89] Numerous women and children were among the victims; the violence included mass rapes and mutilations of women.[2]

The government of Gujarat itself is generally considered by scholars to have been complicit in the riots,[1][2][3] and has otherwise received heavy criticism for its handling of the situation.[90] Several scholars have described the violence as a pogrom, while others have called it an example of state terrorism.

[91][92][93] Summarising academic views on the subject, Martha Nussbaum said: "There is by now a broad consensus that the Gujarat violence was a form of ethnic cleansing, that in many ways it was premeditated, and that it was carried out with the complicity of the state government and officers of the law." [2] The Modi

government imposed a curfew in 26 major cities, issued shoot-at-sight orders and called for the army to patrol the streets, but was unable to prevent the violence

from escalating.[84][85] The president of the state unit of the BJP expressed support for the bandh, despite such actions being illegal at the time.[3] State

officials later prevented riot victims from leaving the refugee camps, and the camps were often unable to meet the needs of those living there.[94] Muslim victims

of the riots were subject to further discrimination when the state government announced that compensation for Muslim victims would be half of that offered to Hindus,

although this decision was later reversed after the issue was taken to court.[95] During the riots, police officers often did not intervene in situations where

they were able.[2][83][96] In 2012 Maya Kodnani, a minister in Modi's government from 2007 to 2009, was convicted of participation in the Naroda Patiya massacre

during the 2002 riots.[97][98] Although Modi's government had announced that it would seek the death penalty for Kodnani on appeal, it reversed its decision in 2013.

[99][100]

Modi's personal involvement in the 2002 events has continued to be debated. During the riots, Modi said that "What is happening is a chain of action and reaction.

"[2] Later in 2002, Modi said the way in which he had handled the media was his only regret regarding the episode.[101] Modi has not offered an apology for the riots.

[11] In March 2008, the Supreme Court reopened several cases related to the 2002 riots, including that of the Gulbarg Society massacre, and established a Special

Investigation Team (SIT) to look into the issue.[90][102][103] In response to a petition from Zakia Jafri (widow of Ehsan Jafri, who was killed in the Gulbarg

Society massacre), in April 2009 the court also asked the SIT to investigate the issue of Modi's complicity in the killings.[102] The SIT questioned Modi in March

2010; in May, it presented to the court a report finding no evidence against him.[102][104] In July 2011, the court-appointed amicus curiae Raju Ramachandran

submitted his final report to the court. Contrary to the SIT's position, he said that Modi could be prosecuted based on the available evidence.[105][106]

The Supreme Court gave the matter to the magistrate's court. The SIT examined Ramachandran's report, and in March 2012 submitted its final report, asking for the case to be closed. Zakia Jaffri filed a protest petition in response. In December 2013 the magistrate's court rejected the protest petition, accepting the SIT's finding that there was no evidence against the chief minister.[107]

2002 election

In the aftermath of the violence there were widespread calls for Modi to resign as chief minister from within and outside the state, including from leaders of the

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Telugu Desam Party (allies in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance coalition), and opposition parties stalled Parliament over

the issue.[108] Modi submitted his resignation at the April 2002 BJP national executive meeting in Goa, but it was not accepted.[109] His cabinet had an emergency

meeting on 19 July 2002, after which it offered its resignation to the Gujarat Governor S. S. Bhandari, and the state assembly was dissolved.[110][111] Despite

opposition from the election commissioner, who said that a number of voters were still displaced, Modi succeeded in advancing the election to December 2002.[112]

In the elections, the BJP won 127 seats in the 182-member assembly.[113]

Although Modi later denied it, he made significant use of anti-Muslim rhetoric during his

campaign,[114][115][116][117] and the BJP profited from religious polarisation among the voters.[112] Modi hired the public relations firm APCO Worldwide to manage

his image.[112] He won the Maninagar constituency, receiving 1,13,589 of 1,54,981 votes and defeating INC candidate Yatin Oza by 75,333 votes.[118] On 22 December

2002, Bhandari swore Modi in for a second term.[119] Modi framed the criticism of his government for human rights violations as an attack upon Gujarati pride, a

strategy which led to the BJP winning two-thirds of the seats in the state assembly.[1][114]

Second term

During Modi's second term the rhetoric of the government shifted from Hindutva to Gujarat's economic development.[74][1][114] Modi curtailed the influence of Sangh

Parivar organisations such as the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP),[120] entrenched in the state after the decline of Ahmedabad's

textile industry,[74] and dropped Gordhan Zadafia (an ally of former Sangh co-worker and VHP state chief Praveen Togadia) from his cabinet. When the BKS staged a

farmers' demonstration Modi ordered their eviction from state-provided houses, and his decision to demolish 200 illegal temples in Gandhinagar deepened the rift

with the VHP.[120][121] Sangh organisations were no longer consulted or informed in advance about Modi's administrative decisions.[120]

Nonetheless, Modi retained

connections with some Hindu nationalists. Modi wrote a forward to a textbook by Dinanath Batra released in 2014, which stated that ancient India possessed technologies including test-tube babies.[122][123]

Modi's relationship with Muslims continued to attract criticism. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (who asked Modi for tolerance in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat violence and supported his resignation as chief minister)[124][125] distanced himself, reaching out to North Indian Muslims before the 2004 Lok Sabha elections. After the elections Vajpayee called the violence in Gujarat a reason for the BJP's electoral defeat and said it had been a mistake to leave Modi in office after the riots.[126][127]

Questions about Modi's relationship with Muslims were also raised by many Western nations during his tenure as chief minister. Modi was barred from entering the United States by the State Department, in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission on International Religious Freedom formed under the aegis of the International Religious Freedom Act,[128][129] the only person denied a US visa under this law.[130] The UK and the European Union refused to admit him because of what they saw as his role in the riots. As Modi rose to prominence in India, the UK[131] and the EU[132] lifted their bans in October 2012 and March 2013, respectively, and after his election as prime minister he was invited to Washington.[133][134]

During the run-up to the 2007 assembly elections and the 2009 general election, the BJP intensified its rhetoric on terrorism.[135] In July 2006, Modi criticised Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "for his reluctance to revive anti-terror legislation" such as the 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act. He asked the national government to allow states to invoke tougher laws in the wake of the 2006 Mumbai train bombings.[136] In 2007 Modi authored Karmayog, a 101-page booklet discussing manual scavenging. In it, Modi argued that scavenging was a "spiritual experience" for Dalits.[137][138][139] However, this book was not circulated that time because of the election code of conduct.[140] After the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, Modi held a meeting to discuss the security of Gujarat's 1,600-kilometre (990 mi)-long coastline, resulting in government authorisation of 30 high-speed surveillance boats.[141] In July 2007 Modi completed 2,063 consecutive days as chief minister of Gujarat, making him the longest-serving holder of that post,[142] and the BJP won 122 of 182 state-assembly seats in that year's election