# 12

## NARENDRA MODI

### Elected authoritarian (born 1950)

*Ian Hall*

In May 2014, Narendra Modi led his Bharatiya Janata Party ("Indian People's Party" or BJP) to one of the most remarkable election victories in Indian political history. A "Modi wave" swept 282 BJP candidates into the lower house of the parliament – the Lok Sabha – giving the new government a comfortable majority.[1] The Congress Party, which had ruled India for a decade, was left with just 44 seats, too few for it even to be designated the official opposition. In the years that followed, Modi tightened his grip still further, despite his government's inability to deliver the economic growth and jobs it had promised. His political opponents struggled to rebuild their support, as the prime minister's popularity remained high. Within government, both ministers and officials were subjected to a higher degree of control than was common in earlier administrations, as Modi drove its agenda and burnished his personal brand. Outside it, critics in civil society, the media, and universities – some accused of being "anti-national" – found it harder to get their voices heard and to hold Modi or his ministers to account, as press conferences and interviews became increasingly rare.[2]

Modi's second, equally crushing election win in May 2019 confirmed him as the dominant force in contemporary Indian politics.[3] Yet his extraordinary success was far from preordained. Modi is an unusual politician with an unorthodox background. Unlike many Indian leaders, he is not the scion of a landowning, political, or administrative dynasty. Nor was he educated at a private school or elite university. He was born into modest circumstances: his father made a living selling tea at the railway station in the town of Vadnagar, in the western Indian state of Gujarat. At school, he performed unremarkably. He may have attended university, but whether he was awarded two degrees in political science, as some claim, is unclear.

Modi's success cannot be attributed to privilege or to polish. A different set of factors explain it. His capacity for work, his sheer ambition, his flexibility and capacity for personal and political reinvention, the obsessive control he exerts over

his image and his underlings, and his self-confidence have all played a part, as this chapter argues. The backing of the powerful Hindu nationalist organization the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("National Volunteer Association" or RSS), which Modi joined as a boy, and the opportunities that it provided him as a young man were also crucial. And so was his skill at identifying and manipulating popular aspirations and grievances which, when coupled with an efficient, well-funded, professional, and ruthless party machine, allowed Modi to establish himself as the most successful Indian leader of his generation.[4]

## The organizer

Modi is the first person born after India became independent to become prime minister and is one of the only two leaders that have held that office to have risen to it from what is normally regarded as a lower caste.[5] His biographers suggest he became interested in politics at a young age, thanks largely to the RSS. Physically active and religiously devout, he joined the organization, which describes itself as dedicated to social service and the upholding of Hindu values, at the age of eight. His local RSS branch – the *shakha* – would have organized sporting contests and taught a kind of paramilitary drill, instructing boys on how to use the *lathi*, the bamboo pole used by India's police. There, too, Modi would also have been exposed to the RSS's ideology, understanding of India's history and destiny. These ideas are imparted to all recruits as part of what the RSS calls a "character building" (*chaaritya nirman*) program. Convinced that Hindus had become soft in mind and body, this was developed by the organization's founders to instill self-discipline and social responsibility, as the RSS conceives it.[6] It is intended to teach practical skills, including leading and managing others. And it is designed to allow RSS leaders to identify recruits willing and able to dedicate their lives to the cause, forgoing marriage, children, careers, material wealth, and – supposedly – ambition.[7]

   All of this had a lasting effect on Modi. In about 1972, while in his early twenties, the future prime minister became an RSS *pracharak* – literally "preacher" but often translated as "organizer" – and full-time volunteer. He split from his family and refused to marry a woman with whom his parents had arranged a match.[8] Instead, he dedicated himself completely to the RSS, spending the next 30 years in various roles within the organization or seconded to the BJP, which the RSS supports. In so doing, he built a network of connections in the national capital, New Delhi, and across the country, and honed skills that he would use to great effect when he eventually emerged from backroom politics to high office.[9]

   His first opportunity to shine came during the Emergency, in 1975–1977, when then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suspended parliament and ruled by decree. Temporarily banned, the Gujarat RSS used the young *pracharak* as a courier, encouraging him to enroll in a university to give him an excuse for traveling to New Delhi to pass messages to politicians and supporters in the capital.[10] Modi was also deputized to the powerful student union affiliated with the RSS, the Akhil Bharat Vidyarti Parishad ("All India Students Council" or ABVP), providing him

with another useful set of contacts within the broader Hindu nationalist movement in the capital and in Gujarat.[11] Modi performed well, and when the Emergency ended, the State RSS put him in charge of mobilizing voters during the 1977 general election campaign. Soon afterward, it promoted him, allowing him to run its operations in a large part of Gujarat.[12] In that job, Modi bolstered his reputation within the RSS for competence, energy, and commitment, attracting the attention of one of the most important Hindu nationalist leaders of post–independence India, L. K. Advani.[13]

In 1987, Advani picked Modi – then 37 years old – to spearhead the BJP's efforts to win control of the State government in Gujarat and seats in the upcoming national election. Modi again impressed, displaying a flair for political theatre. He orchestrated a series of popular protests and staged several so-called *yatras* – literally ceremonial processions, but in effect long marches between towns and cities – to highlight various social issues. In 1990, Modi was then asked to organize the Gujarat leg of a major national procession: Advani's *Ram Rath Yatra* intended to begin at the significant Hindu site of Somnath and to end at a controversial mosque in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya, the Babri Masjid.[14] Hindu activists had long claimed that the mosque, which dated back to the sixteenth century, sat on the site of an earlier Hindu temple marking the birthplace of Lord Rama. Advani's *yatra* was designed to highlight that claim, consolidate Hindu support for the BJP, and call for the mosque to be replaced by a temple. It worked.[15] Traveling in pickups decked out as ancient chariots, playing music from recently televised adaptations of Hindu epics, the BJP's procession boosted their fortunes.[16] And shortly afterward, in December 1992, a large number of Hindu nationalist activists went to the Babri Masjid and demolished it, sparking riots that left at least 2,000 people dead across India.[17]

Modi played no role in the destruction of the mosque, and although his career faltered in the early 1990s due to infighting in the Gujarat BJP, he continued to bolster his network and polish his skills. In 1993 and 1994, he traveled to the United States for the first time, exploring the country and – importantly – meeting members of the Indian diaspora sympathetic to the RSS and the BJP. He returned to assist the Gujarat BJP win power in the 1995 State election but then lost another factional battle, leading to another stint in effective exile. By this point, however, Modi had backers willing and able to cushion his fall. The BJP's national president, Advani, pulled him out of Gujarat and commissioned him to help the party build support across northern India, from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Himachal Pradesh in the east. When the BJP won the 1998 national election, Modi was rewarded with a more prominent position: he was made one of the BJP's national secretaries and a party spokesperson. These jobs gave him new opportunities, which he grasped with alacrity: the chance to establish a public profile, forge links with journalists, and appear on television.[18]

In October 2001, Modi's diligence finally paid off. Concerned by accusations of incompetence and corruption leveled at the Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel and his mismanagement of the response to an earthquake that had killed more

than 20,000 people earlier that year, the BJP's national leadership forced him to stand down.[19] And despite never having held public office, Modi was appointed in his place.

## The king of Hindu hearts

Modi served as chief minister for twelve and a half years, until he was selected to spearhead the BJP's 2014 general election campaign. In Gujarat, he established the distinctive approach to governance that made him plausible for higher office. It evolved and changed over time, but throughout it had three elements. The first was the careful cultivation of an image of Modi as a different kind of politician to the Indian stereotype: one that was energetic where normal *netas* are indolent; clean rather than corrupt; technologically savvy rather than unapologetically Luddite; and responsive to the people, not bound to special interests.[20] The second was an open and unabashed friendliness to business, including the big, family-owned industrial conglomerates that dominate the Indian economy. And the third – and by far the most controversial – was the manipulation of identity politics both within Gujarat and between Gujarat and the rest of India, which among his most fervent supporters won Modi the sobriquet *Hindu Hriday Samrat* ("King of Hindu Hearts").

These elements did not fall into place at once. Identity politics dominated Modi's early years in office, which were scarred by the Godhra incident and its bloody aftermath. On February 24, 2002, just three days after the new chief minister had taken his seat in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, Hindu activists aboard a train, which stopped at the station in the town of Godhra, got into an altercation with local Muslims. In circumstances that remain unclear, part of the train caught fire, and 59 passengers were killed. Communal violence between Hindus and Muslims flared across Gujarat. Official figures put the dead from the rioting at about 1,000; unofficial tallies run to twice that number. Thousands more were burnt out of their homes, maimed, raped, and humiliated.[21]

These events shook Modi's government. Some accused the new chief minister of incompetence and indifference to the suffering of the victims, especially Muslims. Others went further, suggesting the government had deliberately stood by as Hindu nationalist groups incited or orchestrated violence. A few accused ministers and officials of complicity in its planning and execution. Modi was hauled before the national leadership of the BJP to explain his actions, display contrition, and offer to resign. After an apology and public admonishments from both Advani, his mentor and patron, and the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, however, he was permitted to keep his post. But ongoing police investigations cast a shadow over Modi's government for more than a decade.[22] The chief minister and his government were heavily criticized within and outside India for years to come. Modi was banned from entering the United States; unofficial bans on diplomatic contact with him were imposed by other governments.

During the riots, Modi's reported comments were unequivocally divisive, and soon afterward, he set about extracting what advantage he could from the

wreckage. Immediately after Godhra, he suggested that the burning of the train had been planned by local Muslims prior to the event and that it might have been an act of terrorism.[23] Once the violence had subsided, he continued to refer to Muslims, as a group, as a threat to Gujarat and to India – a fifth column for Pakistan and terrorist groups. He gambled that a significant proportion of Gujarati Hindus shared that view and believed that what had occurred at Godhra had validated it. And keen to capitalize on heightened communal tensions, Modi attempted to bring the upcoming State election, scheduled later in the year, forward by several months. That move was stymied, however, by the Election Commission on the grounds that law and order had not yet been restored.[24] When Gujarat did go to the polls, in December 2002, Modi campaigned hard on the argument that he and the BJP were all that stood between Hindus and Muslim terrorists.[25] It proved a winning strategy, securing a landslide victory.[26]

After 2002, Modi continued to use identity politics to consolidate his support base, but he also added a new, more parochial dimension. When outsiders criticized him or his government or lamented the polarization of religious groups in his State, he claimed they were prejudiced against Gujarat or jealous of Gujaratis' fabled business acumen and comparative wealth. He cast himself as engaged in a struggle to defend the States's *asmita* (or "pride") against what he called – with deliberate reference to the national capital's past as the seat of successive Muslim empires – the "Delhi Sultanate." He promised not only to protect Gujarat against slurs and innuendo but also to tell the world about what he portrayed as its long history of inclusiveness and communal harmony, as well as its economic success. To that end, Modi publicly appealed to the memory of great Gujaratis like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, despite his association with the opposition Congress Party, even building a giant statue of him named the "Statue of Unity." And in parallel, he held annual summits – dubbed "Vibrant Gujarat" – showcasing the State and the economic opportunities it offered, to which he invited prominent Indian industrialists and foreign investors.[27]

Those events and others like it allowed Modi to develop and display the other elements of his political appeal: his energy, perceived dedication to the job, and grasp of the power and possibilities of technology. Vibrant Gujarat gave Modi a platform to market his evolving approach to governance, one that coupled deregulation with energizing the State bureaucracy to better serve both citizens and business. It gave him opportunities to form close relationships with business leaders, including powerful and wealthy figures like the billionaire industrialists Gautam Adani, Mukesh Ambani, and Ratan Tata.[28] He leveraged these ties to assist the State's development agenda and to help finance the local BJP, giving it ample resources with which to fight elections. And those resources were deployed cleverly, in ways not often seen in Indian campaigns, as Modi and his team made use of established but underexploited technologies like television, as well as emerging platforms, like mobile telephones and social media.[29]

Despite this closeness to big business interests, Modi also managed to contrive an image as an unusually clean politician. His personal circumstances helped.

Estranged from his parents and siblings and without a partner or children, he was able to present himself as both selfless and incorruptible. Without heirs or close relatives, he could credibly claim he was not interested in founding a dynasty or using his office to further family interests – in stark contrast to others in his position.[30]

To the devout or chauvinistic, then, Modi cast himself as a defender of Hindu values and Hindu communities. To the business community, he presented himself as the technocrat reformer. To the emerging and aspiring middle class, tired of the corruption and inefficiency that normally characterizes the Indian state, he posed as clean and effective. And in his final avatar, Modi appealed to what is generally known in India as the *aam aadmi* (or "common man"), as a champion of the ordinary Indian who, because of his own modest beginnings, grasped their troubles and desires in ways that the upper echelons of society do not. To do that, he peppered his speeches, especially when campaigning, with earthy language combined with catchy slogans and acronyms. While centralizing power in the hands of the State bureaucracy and cultivating big business, Modi told ordinary voters that he was just a simple, clean, and practical *vikas purush* ("development man").

## The outsider

Modi's legacy in Gujarat remains contested. The economy certainly grew – and reasonably quickly – but so did the whole of India during the 2000s.[31] Roads were built and villages electrified, but there is evidence that the gap between rich and poor widened, that social development lagged behind wealth creation, and that Muslims did not prosper as some of their Hindu counterparts did.[32] Complaints also surfaced within the Hindu nationalist movement – both inside and outside the State – about Modi's "autocratic style," which some thought is increasingly at odds with the consensus-based, collegial approach the RSS claims it favors and his egocentric tendency to "self-promotion."[33]

None of this, however, prevented Modi from being nominated as the BJP's pick to lead its campaign in 2014. Whatever the results of his term in Gujarat, it was clear that his dynamic brand of business-friendly, technologically enabled Hindu nationalism was a potent one. After years of scandals, in which a number of ministers were accused of profiting from government ventures, it was clear that someone like Modi, who lacked a family and appeared clean, would inspire sections of the electorate tired of negotiating both everyday corruption and high-level cronyism. And the idea of a leader from outside New Delhi, from a lower caste and humble background, also appealed. This was a stark contrast, after all, to the mostly upper-caste, predominantly Brahmin, senior leadership of the Congress Party and the BJP. So, for all these reasons, Modi was drafted from Gujarat into national politics, and a formidable election-winning organization was built around him.[34]

The BJP then opted for a simple strategy. It ran a highly "Modi-centric" campaign, saturating India with still and moving images of "NaMo," using not just posters but also 3D holographic representations of their leader.[35] It emphasized Modi's supposed success in delivering growth and good governance in Gujarat, as

well as his modest beginnings and apparent incorruptibility, but downplayed his reputation as a defender of the Hindu nation, so as not to alienate middle-class voters more interested in development than identity politics. Instead, the BJP argued that Modi was the leader best able to restore integrity to government and dynamism to the flagging Indian economy, promising that "*achhe din aane waale hai*": "good days are coming."[36]

These messages were powerful in themselves, but the BJP was able to amplify them because it enjoyed several advantages over its principal opponent, the Congress Party. First, Modi's strong connections into the business community and into India's far-flung diaspora, built up over two decades, helped the BJP build up a war-chest that allowed it to buy up advertising space in newspapers and on television, radio, billboards, and social media. Reputable estimates put the amount spent on the 2014 election at US$5 billion – US$3 billion more than on the 2009 campaign – and most was spent by the BJP.[37] Second, the BJP was able to draft talent to design and run a campaign of targeted messaging to mobile telephone users, whose numbers boomed in the late 2000s and early 2010s, especially among the young. This talent was drawn partly from India and partly from Silicon Valley's large reserve of well-educated Indian-origin information technology experts.[38] Third, the BJP had a formidable on-the-ground presence across large parts of India, bolstered by both new activists enthused by Modi and the RSS, which turned out in force to help him win the election.[39] This allowed it not just to encourage voters to turn out but also to convey carefully crafted messages aimed at winning over particular groups of voters, including specific castes or subcastes.[40]

## Modi's illiberal India?

All of this – combined with a groundswell of anti-incumbency – propelled Modi and the BJP into power in 2014. But these factors do not account for why he came to dominate Indian politics after that victory. To be sure, the BJP continued to command the support of big business and the diaspora, as well as the extensive financial resources that went with them. It also continued to be highly adept at using social media and new technology to reach voters, especially young ones. And it continued to run a highly disciplined party organization, expanding it after 2014 into areas in eastern India in particular, where historically the BJP had been weak or even absent.[41]

However, these factors do not explain the high levels of personal popularity Modi built up and managed to sustain after 2014, nor – to be blunt – does the record of his government, especially on the economy. During Modi's first national election campaign, the BJP promised higher rates of growth, lower inflation, and more jobs. In the Modi government's first term, it succeeded in bringing prices under control, but on growth and especially on jobs it failed to deliver. Prices fell, but in large part due to lower global prices for oil. Gross domestic product grew by just over 8% in 2015–2016, but after that it slowed, reaching about 6.5% in 2017–2018.[42] There is little evidence to suggest the Modi government managed to

keep its campaign promise to create ten million new jobs per year.[43] And it made serious mistakes, the biggest being the demonetization of 80% of India's paper money in late 2016, ostensibly to tackle corruption and terrorist financing. That sudden announcement dealt a significant blow to both the cash economy and the informal economic sector in which many Indians work. It knocked at least 1% off GDP growth in 2017.[44]

This disappointing performance in economic management came despite a major effort by Modi himself to consolidate power at the center of government, which should have given him the capacity to implement serious reforms. He achieved this in two ways: first, by creating a Cabinet he could control and, second, by shaking up the civil service, as he had done in Gujarat, ostensibly to energize it. In May 2014, despite the large number of newly elected parliamentarians from which he could draw, Modi appointed the smallest Cabinet in 20 years and left out BJP grandees – including Advani, his former mentor – who might have curbed his authority. At the same time, he transferred about 30 senior officials from Gujarat to New Delhi, installing them in the Prime Minister's Office and other key positions, and moved to tame the civil service. He commissioned reforms to its promotion system, arguing it should reward talent rather than timeserving.[45] And he dispensed with officials perceived as unwilling or unable to implement his agenda, most notably India's most senior diplomat, Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh. He replaced her eight months before she was due to retire.[46]

As soon as Modi came into office, he also set about to transform his political image. Early on, he used foreign policy to help shed the perception that he lacked polish and to reinvent himself as an international statesman of whom India could and should be proud. Unexpectedly, he used his swearing-in ceremony as prime minister to try to reset relations with India's neighbors, inviting their leaders, including Pakistan's, to attend the festivities. He traveled abroad – making state visits, attending summits, and wooing potential investors – more times in his first five years in office than his predecessor had managed in a decade. And in his first 12 months in government, he played host to both Chinese President Xi Jinping and US president Barack H. Obama, who became the first American leader to be the guest of honor at India's Republic Day celebrations.[47]

As Modi's first term continued another change to his image also became clear. His friendliness with business leaders helped bring him to power but was always politically risky, given the high level of public concern about official corruption. This danger was illustrated early in Modi's tenure, when he was pictured wearing a bespoke suit with his name embroidered into the pinstripe – a suit that cost far more than a prime minister could afford. Modi was accused of running a *Suit-Boot ki Sarkar* (literally a "government for suit-boots," or government for the wealthy), and questions were asked about his links to rich industrialists.[48] As a result, the prime minister limited his public appearances with business leaders and began to place greater emphasis on welfare policies, such as the distribution of gas cylinders to women, the rural employment scheme inherited from the previous regime, and farm loan waivers.[49] By the end of his first term, as Milan Vaishnav and Jamie

Hintson note, Modi had shifted from being a "development man" to a budding architect of an Indian welfare state, promising – among other things – universal health care through the Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme.[50]

These image makeovers were enabled by a carefully controlled media strategy. Since May 2014, Modi has not held any press conferences at which journalists might ask questions. In the run-up to the 2019 election, he did permit a couple of interviews with sympathetic outlets, but for the most part, he communicates with the public directly. He uses the set-piece speeches all prime ministers deliver, such as the one given from the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi every year on Independence Day. He addresses the nation once a month in his folksy *Mann ki Baat* program for All India Radio – a medium that reaches into rural areas as well as cities. On occasion, such as when he announced the test of an anti-satellite missile just before voters went to the polls in 2019, he records short explanations for television. And he and his extensive public relations team make great use of social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as platforms like WhatsApp.[51]

This strategy allows Modi to avoid questions from critical journalists and to amplify his preferred political narratives. So too does the intimidation, allegedly by pro-government forces, of media outlets – and others, including academics and activists – viewed as opposed to its agenda. In June 2017, for example, the editor of the respected journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, was forced to resign after publishing an article about the Adani Group, whose boss, Gautam Adani, is reputedly close to Modi.[52] Such actions, including threats, harassment, and an increase in the number of journalists killed in India since 2014, has raised serious concerns for the future and freedom of its media.[53] In parallel, a similar effort to intimidate or silence critics in universities and civil society groups has also generated anxiety within and outside India. Sedition charges have been filed against student activists, professors have been ousted from or denied posts, and nongovernment organizations stymied, leading in some cases to the suspension of operations within India.[54]

These moves are not simply about denying critics airtime. They are part and parcel of a broader concerted push to replace the post-independence India, with its commitments to the equal treatment of all, with an India that explicitly favors the Hindu majority.[55] This effort has many parts. One is the strengthening of the BJP itself, especially outside its traditional heartland in central and northern India, with the aim of winning crucial State elections and building up its vote in national elections. Another is a kind of culture war, waged in the civil service, universities, media organizations, and civil society, which aims to displace critical voices and supplant them with voices sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist project. This involves the regular deployment of identity politics to brand opponents not simply as wrong but as "anti-national" – opposed to India itself. A case in point is Modi's description of New Delhi's socially elevated, English-speaking elite as the "Khan Market gang" in a rare interview given just before the May 2019 election. That derogatory moniker alludes not just to a fashionable location in Delhi few ordinary

Indians can afford to patronize, but also to what some Hindu nationalists would see as the unsavory alliance of that elite with Muslims.[56]

## Conclusion

Modi's rise to power was a function of ambition and dedication on his part, not just to the RSS and its cause, but also to learning new skills and forging new networks that allowed him to climb ever further. His capacity for reinventing his image is striking – for playing different roles for different audiences, often in parallel – and so is his extraordinary flexibility. In Gujarat, he began by seizing the mantle of the "King of Hindu Hearts" and then morphed into a technocrat, downplaying though not relinquishing identity politics. In New Delhi, he started as a "development man" dedicated simply to boosting India's economy, but soon after coming to office he unexpectedly transformed himself into globe-trotting statesman and salesman. Then, as growth faltered and terrorist activity increased, he turned into a champion of social welfare and ever-vigilant "watchman" defending India from its enemies.[57] Of course, obsessive control over ministers and officials, as well as savvy media management, has facilitated these reinventions, but their number is surely exceptional.

Together, they have also allowed Modi to make two national elections and many State-level contests about him and his leadership – he "presidentialized" Indian politics.[58] This is not unprecedented, but the agenda that he has pursued will likely change the country in significant ways. Indira Gandhi did something similar, from the mid-1960s until her assassination in 1984, when focusing election campaigns on her person and her vision kept her in power for most of that period. But she was unable to bring about lasting economic reform and higher levels of growth and in response fell back on identity politics, welfarism, and authoritarianism to consolidate her base. The result was what one analyst famously called a "crisis of governability," as a weakened state struggled to meet the demands of a growing population and manage a surge in political violence.[59]

Modi's India is richer and stronger, but his attempt to create a "New India" by challenging the institutions of the old could once more drive the country into a similarly authoritarian direction. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that this is the direction India is heading. Serious concerns have been voiced about the independence of the judiciary.[60] The media's freedom to hold the government accountable has been curtailed by the refusal to hold press conferences and regular interviews, by the use of sedition laws, and – some allege – by threats of violence.[61] The public's access to information is regularly limited, especially in restive areas like Kashmir, not least with frequent and lengthy shutdowns of the Internet and the 4G network.[62] And academic freedom has also been limited during Modi's time in office, with political allies appointed to senior positions in universities and tighter regulations imposed on individual teachers and researchers.[63] These actions have been met with growing concern inside and outside India and indicate a definite shift under Modi toward a less liberal and more authoritarian state.

## Notes

1  In total, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) took 336 seats of the 543 contested.
2  There are many critical studies of Modi's India, but among the best is K.S. Komireddi, *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India* (London: Hurst and Company, 2019).
3  In 2019, the BJP won 303 seats in the Lok Sabha and its NDA coalition partners another 50. Congress regained only 6 seats, taking 52 in total. For analysis, see Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "The BJP's 2019 Election Campaign: Not Business as Usual," *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 28/2 (2020): 155–177.
4  For a sympathetic study of Modi's rise, see especially Andy Marino, *Narendra Modi: A Political Biography* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014). For a critical analysis, see Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times* (New Delhi: Tranquebar, 2013).
5  Modi's birthday was November 17, 1950. The other non–higher caste leader is H. D. Deve Gowda, who ruled for almost eleven months in 1996–97. Modi's family belongs to the Ghanchi caste, traditionally oilpressers, now designated as an "Other Backward Class" (OBC). The category of OBC applies to castes and groups deemed to be dis-advantaged and therefore eligible for government support, including the provision of so-called reserved places in universities and the public sector.
6  On this program, see Walter K. Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle, *The RSS: A View to Inside* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2018), xii.
7  Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 52. On RSS ideology, see Dinesh Narayanan, *The RSS and the Making of the Deep Nation* (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2020).
8  Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 66–70.
9  On the RSS's approach to "Human Relations and Management Training," see Ratan Sharda, *RSS 360: Demystifying Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2018), 126–140.
10  See Marino, *Narendra Modi*, 41.
11  Kingshuk Nag, *The Namo Story: A Political Life* (New Delhi: Lotus Roli, 2013), 42.
12  M.V. Kamath and Kalindi Randeri, *The Man of the Moment: Narendra Modi* (Noida: Times Group Books, 2013), 24.
13  Lal Krishna (conventionally L. K.) Advani was born in 1927 in Karachi, in what is now Pakistan. He joined the RSS at 14 and later the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and then helped found the BJP. He was Home Minister and later Deputy Prime Minister under Atal Bihari Vajpayee between 1998 and 2004.
14  See Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, the Politics of Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27–54.
15  On the results of the *Yatra*, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 416–419.
16  In the 1991 election, the BJP secured 20% of the vote and 119 seats in the Lok Sabha, more than it had ever won before.
17  On this episode, see Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 455–464.
18  Sudesh Verma, *Narendra Modi: The GameChanger* (New Delhi: Vitasta, 2014), 77–79.
19  On this episode, see Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 248–249.
20  *Neta* is a common derisory term for a politician.
21  See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 17–20.
22  See L.K. Advani, *My Country, My Life* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2010), 842–844. The courts finally – though controversially – exonerated Modi in 2014. On the investigation, see Manoj Mitta, *The Fiction of Fact-Finding: Modi and Godhra* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2014).
23  Mukhopadyay, *Narendra Modi*, 266–267.

24  Ibid., 295–297.

25  Ibid., 300–303.

26  The BJP won 127 seats out of 182, while the Congress Party won only 51. Human Rights Watch concluded that the victory "testified to the effective manipulation of communal violence as a political strategy" ("Compounding Injustice: The Government's Failure to Redress Massacres in Gujarat" (2003): www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/index.htm#TopOfPage_).

27  Christophe Jaffrelot, "Narendra Modi Between Hindutva and Subnationalism: The Gujarati *Asmita* of a *Hindu Hriday Samrat*," *India Review*, vol. 15/2 (2016): 196–217.

28  On the power of these figures, see James Crabtree, *The Billionaire Raj: A Journey Through India's New Gilded Age* (London: OneWorld, 2018).

29  Christophe Jaffrelot, "Gujarat Elections: The Sub-Text of Modi's 'Hattrick' – High-Tech Populism and the 'Neo-Middle Class'," *Studies in Indian Politics*, vol. 1/1 (2013): 79–95.

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