Early Trends and Prospects for Modi's Prime Ministership

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Diego Maiorano

In May 2014 Narendra Modi became India's Prime Minister in the wake of a historic electoral victory. He has generated two kinds of expectations: on the one hand, his voters expect him to create millions of new jobs for a fast-growing working age population; on the other hand, Hindu extremists hope that he will pursue an aggressive policy aimed at 'hinduising' India's society. The first months of his premiership show that Modi is acting in both spheres, while pursuing a radical centralisation of power in his hands.

Keywords: India, Modi, centralisation, political economy, communalism

In May 2014, Narendra Modi led his party, the *Bharatiya Janata* Party (Indian People's Party, BJP), to what has rightly been called a historic victory, and became the fifteenth prime minister of India. For the first time since 1984, a single party obtained an absolute majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha.[1]

Narendra Modi's massive victory generated tremendous expectations in the electorate, especially among the young people. On the one hand, during the election campaign Modi presented himself as the 'development man' who could put India back on the path of high growth, create millions of jobs, and ensure '*acche din*' ('good days' in Hindi[2]) to its citizens. On the other hand, Modi's victory raised another kind of expectation, especially among the ranks of rightwing Hindu

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[1]The Lok Sabha is the Lower Chamber of India's parliament. See Michelguglielmo Torri's article in this issue for an analysis of the reasons for Modi's victory, 56.
[2]This was Modi's slogan during the electoral campaign.

nationalists, who believe that a more aggressive policy aiming at 'hinduising' the Indian state will be pursued under his prime ministership.[3]

This article explores the trajectory of the first 100 days of government of Narendra Modi, with the objective of assessing whether these expectations are likely to be met in the next few years. It will argue that the first of these expectations – reviving India's economy and creating millions of new jobs – will be very difficult to fulfil. The second expectation – Modi's "plan B"[4] – is more likely to be translated into practice, especially if the first one is not. The first two sections of this article deal with these two issues, respectively.

A second objective of this article is to analyse a third political process that has been substantially overlooked by observers of India's politics, that is the effect of Narendra Modi's victory on India's democratic framework. It will show how India's democratic institutions will be (and, to a significant extent, already are) under severe stress. During his tenure in Gujarat, Modi centralised power in his hands probably more than any other chief minister.[5] There are strong indications that Modi is setting the stage to pursue a major centralisation of powers in his hands, as will be shown in section three.

"Good days are here to stay"

India's economy has slowed down. In 2010/11, GDP grew by 10.3 percent. This rate declined to just 5.0 percent in the last fiscal year (2013/14).[6] During the election campaign, Modi presented himself as the man who could put India's economy back on track.[7] Analysing the challenges that Modi has to overcome to revive India's economy would be beyond the scope of this article. However, it will highlight the most important challenge that the new prime minister is expected to tackle, from a political point of view.

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[3]Modi is a long-time member and was for many years a full-time worker of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Organisation). The RSS is a rightwing Hindu nationalist organisation founded in 1925 by Keshaw Baliram Hedgewar. It has historically played a major role in the Hindu nationalist movement and has been banned several times by the Indian government for its role in communal violence: first in 1948 when Nathuram Godse, a former RSS member, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi; then during the 'emergency regime' (1975–77), and following the demolition of the Babri Masjid (a mosque located in Ayodhya, in North India) in 1992. The BJP was founded by the RSS back in the 1950s as its political offshoot. During Modi's first term as chief minister of Gujarat (2001-02), riots took place killing more than 2000 Muslims. Human rights organisations, opposition parties and some parts of the media accused the Gujarat government of having taken insufficient action to stop them and in some cases even condoning them. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*; Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.
[4]See Christophe Jaffrelot's interview in S. Vij, "Modi's Plan A will be Economy. If that does not Work, Hindutva", *scroll.in*, 15 May 2014.
[5]Among whom were many radical centralisers. Manor, *Politics and State-Society*, ch. 14.
[6]Data are taken from the World Development Indicators.
[7]For a critical analysis of the Gujarat development model (on which Modi's credentials as an able and business-friendly administrator are based), see Hirway *et al.*, *Growth or Development?*

One of the key reasons why Modi's appeal resonated so well with the electorate (especially the young people[8]) is that it "tapped into the frustrations of a generation of Indians who climbed out of poverty in the past decade, but who have been prevented from joining the middle classes by slowing growth and a lack of employment".[9] Creating no less than millions of new jobs for one of the fastest growing labour forces in the world is by far Modi's most important political challenge.

From what can be seen so far, Modi's most significant initiative for creating jobs is the "Make in India" campaign.[10] India's economy is dominated by the services sector, which accounts for as much as 58 percent of GDP, but employs only 27 percent of the workforce.[11] The objective of the Make in India campaign is to turn India into a manufacturing hub by increasing the (supposedly more labour-intensive[12]) manufacturing sector's share of India's GDP from the current 15 to 25 percent. In other words, the campaign entails a rather substantial reorientation of India's developmental path.

Modi's strategy to achieve this ambitious target is based mostly on reviving private investments. Before 2008, Gross Fixed Capital Formation[13] increased by about 15 percent annually. But in the wake of the global recession and amid widespread disappointment among India's leading industrialists and international capital with the UPA government, the rate declined to barely 1.75 percent.[14]

However, there are indications that this trend might already have been reversed. Between January – when the pre-poll surveys started suggesting that the BJP would win the elections – and July 2014, foreign direct investment (FDI) increased by an impressive 61 percent over the previous year.[15] Modi's trips to Japan, China and the United States had the main objective of courting foreign investors. Many analysts believe that the growth of capital inflows might continue in the months ahead, as they think that Modi has the ability "to implement reforms necessary to restore some of India's lost growth potential".[16]

Modi can count on the support of domestic capital too. India's big industrialists – most of whom were present at the launch of the Make in India campaign and generously funded Modi's election campaign – never miss a chance to applaud the new government, assuring it of their full backing and their willingness to invest if

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[8]Sridharan, "Class Voting".

[9]Mandhana, "Narendra Modi's Election Win Heralds New Era in India", *The Wall Street Journal,* 17 May 2014.

[10]"Industry Captains Pledge Support to PM Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' Campaign", *The Economic Times,* 25 September 2014.

[11]Institute for Human Development, *India Labour and Employment Report.*

[12]Alessandrini, "Jobless Growth".

[13]This is a widely used indicator for measuring investment rates.

[14]Anand and Tulin, *Disentangling India's Investment Slowdown.*

[15]R. Kumar, "Will Modi's Make in India Campaign Fuel Rally in Indian Markets, bring more FDI?", *The Economic Times,* 1 October 2014.

[16]Quoted in A. V. Kala, "S&P Upgrades India Rating Outlook", *The Wall Street Journal,* 26 September 2014.

the investment climate improves.[17] This is a key issue: improving the business environment means much more than rolling out a 'red carpet' to investors.[18] It entails investing massively in infrastructure, (and from a longer-term perspective) in education[19] and skill development,[20] while enormously increasing the state's (including the state governments') administrative capacity and declaring war on corruption.

It should be noted, however, that those who had hoped that Modi would use his honeymoon period to promote sweeping economic reforms were rather disappointed.[21] In June 2014, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley unveiled his first Budget, which presented substantial continuities with the previous government's economic policies.

Furthermore, there is some evidence that Modi might not be the market-friendly prime minister he was thought to be. Not only did Modi make it clear during the election campaign that his party would not allow FDI in multi-brand retail – an issue on which the US administration and retail giants like Walmart spent a significant amount of lobbying energy[22] – but the Enforcement Directorate (at the behest of the Reserve Bank of India) has started an investigation against Amazon and Flipkart for violation of FDI rules on online retail, not exactly a welcoming note for foreign investors.[23] It seems that Modi's pro-market credentials are not strong enough to go against the interests of his generous funders[24] and those of one of the BJP's core constituencies (small shopkeepers).[25] Indeed, during his terms as chief minister, there was "very little in Gujarat's political economy that [could] be rightly characterised as 'liberal' or 'free-market'".[26]

It seems that Modi has chosen a more gradual approach to reforming India's economy. Steps have been taken to deregulate the price of diesel, the price of gas

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[17]"Industry Captains Pledge Support to PM Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' Campaign", *The Economic Times,* 25 September 2014.

[18]"PM Modi to Extend Red Carpet for Investors, Launch Make in India Campaign Tomorrow", *The Economic Times,* 24 September 2014.

[19]India's educational system is notoriously unable to form employable graduates. See G. Anand, "India Graduates Millions, but Too Few are Fit to Hire", *The Wall Street Journal,* 5 April 2011. At lower levels, the situation is even worse, as Indian students' performance in international educational outcome tests clearly shows. See OECD, PISA Report.

[20]V. Mallet, "Modernising India Presents Huge Challenges for Narendra Modi", *Financial Times,* 1 October 2014.

[21]P.B. Metha, "Achhe din, like Old Times", *Indian Express,* 29 July 2014; B. Debroy, "Great Expectations", *India Today,* 31 July 2014; S. Bhalla, "In the Name of India, why?", *Indian Express,* 31 July 2014.

[22]"Walmart Continues to Lobby in US over India Retail FDI Rules", *The Hindu Business Line*, 23 April 2013.

[23]C. Srikanth, "Amazon India comes under ED Lens for Possible Violations of FDI Rules", *The Economic Times,* 5 September 2014.

[24]Modi received unprecedented financial support from India's big industrialists, many of whom have important retail ventures. (See Torri's article in this issue, 56).

[25]Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement.*

[26]Kohli, *Poverty amid Plenty,* 192. See also Sud, *Liberalization,* ch. 4.

has been allowed to rise slightly, labour regulations have been made marginally more business-friendly and caps on FDI in sectors like defence, insurance and infrastructure have been increased.[27] Modi has also started a process of consultation with the states, explicitly aimed at bettering India's position in the World Bank's ease of doing business ranking – currently in 142nd place (China is 90th) – through the replication across the country of the administrative procedures followed by the most business-friendly states. This is a key issue, since for Modi's economic agenda to be successful, the cooperation of the states will be crucial.

It should be stressed, however, that from a political point of view, Modi's objective is not so much reviving India's economy *per se* as creating jobs. After economic liberalisation in 1991, employment generation has been slow, despite the very high GDP growth.[28] Even in the five-year period between 2004/05 and 2009/10, when India's economy grew at an average annual rate of 8.42 percent,[29] only 25 million jobs were created in the non-agricultural sector,[30] against an estimated requirement of 17 million jobs *per year*.[31] While the most recent data are somewhat better – between 2009/10 and 2011/12 non-agricultural employment grew by 13.5 million jobs annually – it remains far from certain that higher rates of growth will automatically translate into sufficient employment generation.

Furthermore, Modi has to ensure that the quality of the jobs created satisfies his voters' expectations. Post-poll surveys suggest that a crucial segment of the population that supported Modi's rise (both in Gujarat and at the national level) are the young, lower middle classes.[32] These are permeated by "a general dissatisfaction with their current economic condition compared to what seem to be heightened expectations/aspirations".[33] Indeed, India's economic 'miracle' has left them behind so far. Most of them pass their time just "waiting"[34] for new opportunities to open up, often joining the ranks of Hindu extremist organisations,[35] or other violent groups, thus threatening India's social and political stability. The kind of jobs generated by India's economy in the last decade – overwhelmingly in the informal sector and highly concentrated in construction[36] – are not the kind of jobs that the educated youth are looking for.

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[27]"The Next Round of Economic Reforms", *Live Mint*, 21 October 2014.

[28]Alessandrini, "Jobless Growth"; Kannan and Raveendran, "Growth sans Employment"; Kotwal *et al.*, "Economic Liberalization"; Thomas, "India's Labour Market".

[29]Data taken from the World Development Indicators.

[30]Thomas, "India's Labour Market".

[31]Mehrotra *et al.*, "Explaining Employment Trends".

[32]Jaffrelot, "Gujarat Elections".

[33]Sridharan, "Class Voting", 75.

[34]Jeffrey, *Timepass*.

[35]Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*.

[36]As many as 93 percent of India's workforce is in the informal sector. The process of informalisation of India's labour force accelerated after economic liberalisation in the early 1990s. See Basile, *Capitalist Development*.

Given the enormity of the challenges ahead, if Modi were able to just begin tackling these problems by the end of his term in 2019, it would be a splendid achievement. From a longer-term perspective, this could also be India's last chance to avoid transforming its demographic dividend into a demographic nightmare. However, Modi's time frame is five years, by which time he will have to face the electorate again. That Modi will be able to meet the enormous expectations of the electorate (especially in terms of employment generation) seems fairly unlikely at this stage. He will most likely have to find other ways to keep his support base intact. From what could be seen during his first 100 days in office, it seems that the prime minister is preparing a 'plan B' – resorting to Hindu politics. This will be the subject of the next section.

Modi's plan B: *Hindutva*

At least a section of Modi's electorate (along with the virtual totality of his detractors) expects the new prime minister to make India a Hindu country or, to borrow the language of Hindu nationalists, to adopt *Hindutva*[37] as the government's guiding ideology. In particular, Hindu nationalists have for years been asking for action on three key issues. Firstly, the construction of a temple dedicated to Ram on the ruins of the sixteenth century mosque in Ayodhya that was destroyed by Hindu zealots in 1992; secondly, the suppression of Jammu and Kashmir's constitutional special status; and thirdly, the adoption of a uniform civil code.[38]

Dealing with any of these issues – what could be called the 'high road to Hindutva' – would certainly make the *Sangh Parivar*[39] very happy, but would also have major domestic and international consequences as all these issues are extremely delicate components of the social contract that bonds the 150 million-strong Muslim community to the Indian state. It is very unlikely that Modi will want to put such a contract into question, thus creating a difficult situation that would distract him from implementing his economic agenda.

However, the first 100 days of Narendra Modi as prime minister showed that the BJP is taking what can be called the 'low road to Hindutva'. This is consistent with Modi's strategy during the election campaign, in which he presented himself as the development man, leaving the 'dirty job' of polarising the electorate – especially in sensitive areas like Uttar Pradesh (UP) – to others. To put it in different terms,

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[37]That is the ideology of the RSS aimed at making India a Hindu country. This is a long-time project of the RSS, an organisation for which Modi himself served as a full-time worker for many years. The literature on this topic is abundant. See, among others, Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement.*
[38]Significantly, the BJP manifesto for the 2014 elections pays only scant attention to these issues, unlike in the past.
[39]An association of Hindu nationalist organisations.

Modi promotes two parallel discourses: development as his task, leaving the pursuit of Hindutva to his party colleagues[40] and members of the *Parivar,* especially at the local level.

A key element of Modi's strategy is the appointment of people with solid credentials as Hindu extremists to key positions within the BJP and the state institutions. The changes within the BJP have been quite remarkable during the last year. On the one hand, Modi has been able to sideline most of his internal enemies and assume control of the party (see next section). On the other hand, people with solid pro-Hindutva credentials have been appointed to very delicate roles within the BJP apparatus.

Starting from the top, Amit Shah, a highly controversial figure, was appointed party president. Shah is by far Modi's most trusted lieutenant. A long-time worker in RSS, he held several portfolios in Modi's cabinet in Gujarat.

Before the elections, Amit Shah was appointed as one of the party's general secretaries and put in charge of the elections in India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. Shah's strategy basically had a single strand: polarising the electorate along religious lines, paying attention to including the dalits,[41] – the core support base of one of UP's strongest parties, the *Bahujan Samaj* (Majority People's Party, BSP) – in the struggle against Muslims, a key sector of the ruling *Samajwadi* Party (Socialist Party, SP)'s social base.

Shah's strategy worked well. The BJP won 71 out of 80 seats in UP. At the same time, as many as 247 religion-based incidents took place in the state in the run-up to the elections in 2013 (up from 118 in 2012, an increase of 52 percent,[42] and much higher than the 18 percent increase in communal violence throughout India in 2012).[43]

That the basis of the BJP's strategy in sensitive areas like UP was religious polarisation became evident when Shah appointed Yogi Adityanath as the lead campaigner for the round of by-elections to be held in September 2014. Adityanath is a five-time MP from Gorakhpur, UP, who founded an extremist Hindu youth organisation called *Hindu Yuva Vahini* (Hindu Youth Corps) in 1998.

He is also one of the main proponents of the 'Love Jihad' theory, according to which Muslims are trying to alter the demographic equilibria between religious

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[40]There are many instances of MPs or even ministers sparking controversies with their explicitly communal speeches. See R. Guha, "Why is Amit Shah being Allowed to make MPs out of Bigots?", *Telegraph,* 10 January 2015.

[41]A. Gudavarthy, "A Rightward Shift in Dalit Politics", *The Hindu,* 13 September 2014; S. Palshikar, "Babasaheb and BJP", *Indian Express,* 27 April 2014.

[42]To be fair, the responsibility for the increasing number of communal clashes in UP is shared by RSS affiliates, rightwing Muslim organisations and the ruling SP government. A. Varshney, "Sparks, not Fires", *Indian Express,* 30 October 2014.

[43]Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report*, 93.

communities by seducing and marrying Hindu women. To put it in Adityanath's own words,

> Love Jihad [is] a system where a girl surrounded with fragrance is enticed into a stinking world; where the girl leaves her civilised parents for parents who might have been siblings in the past; where purity is replaced with ugliness; where relationships have no meaning; where a woman is supposed to give birth every nine months; where the girl is not free to practise her religion; and if the girl realises her mistakes and wants to be freed, she is sold off.[44]

In August 2014, a video was released in which Adityanath urged Hindus to marry 100 Muslim women for every Hindu woman who marries a Muslim man.[45] The theme of 'Love Jihad' dominated the campaign for the UP (and other state) by-elections.[46]

The RSS and other Hindu nationalist organisations like the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council) have launched several other initiatives. A particularly destabilising one is the *ghar wapsi* (homecoming) campaign, which aims at converting Muslims and Christians to Hinduism, often by offering material benefits or by physically threatening them.[47] The *ghar wapsi* campaign is actively promoted throughout the country, including in places (like Aligarh and Agra, both in UP) that are traditionally associated with the Muslim culture.[48]

The objective of further polarising UP's society has worked well. In the ten weeks that followed Modi's appointment, 605 communal incidents took place in UP alone,[49] a number that is almost equal to the total number of communal riots which occurred in *the entire country* during *the whole* of 2012 (668). However, the strategy did not pay off electorally, as the BJP suffered a serious defeat in the by-elections.[50]

Many other (less extreme) examples of the growing influence of Hindu nationalists over the BJP can be found. More than a dozen RSS leaders have been appointed to key posts in the party, and many others were given important responsibilities for the state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.[51] Both newly appointed BJP chief ministers of Haryana and Maharashtra were RSS workers in the past.

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[44]A. Chaurasia, "The Yogi and his Tricks", *Tehelka,* 27 September 2014.
[45]http://www.firstpost.com/india/watch-bjps-yogi-adityanath-tells-hindus-to-marry-a-100-muslim-women-1684103.html accessed on 07/10/2014.
[46]V. Ramakrishnan, "In Communal Overdrive", *Frontline,* 3 October 2014.
[47]S. Yechuri, "Be Warned, BJP-RSS Combine's Agenda is to Divide and Rule", *Hindustan Times,* 11 August 2014.
[48]"Forced to 'Homecoming'", *The Hindu,* 21 December 2014.
[49]S. Yechuri, "Be Warned, BJP-RSS Combine's Agenda is to Divide and Rule", *Hindustan Times,* 11 August 2014.
[50]See "Worst Setback in UP, Leaders Sulk: Wish we had Rajnath, Kalyan Singh", *Indian Express,* 16 September 2014; Y. Yadav, "No more Advantage BJP?", *Indian Express,* 17 September 2014.
[51]"RSS Paints its Colour across new BJP Team under Amit Shah", *India Today,* 17 August 2014.

It seems that two diverging processes are at work. On the one hand, Modi and Shah are filling the party with people who strongly believe in the RSS agenda. On the other hand, a great majority of the BJP's MPs and office holders share a common feature: they are devotionally loyal to the Prime Minister. The fact is that the RSS (rightly) fears that Modi's centralising tendencies may end up transforming the BJP not into the RSS' parliamentary wing, but into Modi's personal political tool (as happened in Gujarat).[52] In other words, it is certainly true that Modi's BJP is one of the ideologically closest to the RSS; however, it may also be one of the most difficult to control.

The 'saffronisation' of the state's institutions has been equally apparent, in particular in two areas: educational institutions and the bureaucracy.

Controlling educational institutions has always been a priority for rightwing Hindu organisations. More specifically, the RSS has always been keen on reducing the influence of Marxist (and supposedly pro-Congress) historians on the formulation of educational curricula. This was attempted by Morarji Desai in the late 1970s[53] and by Atal Bihari Vajpayee's governments (1998-2004).[54]

It seems that Narendra Modi is following in the footsteps of his predecessors. His home state has recently adopted several books by Dinanath Batra (former general secretary of the RSS's network of schools, the Vidhya Bharati) – defined as "not history, but fantasy" and "hilarious but scary" by two prominent Indian historians[55] – as textbooks for all primary and secondary schools.[56]

The BJP has been active at the national level too. In July 2014, the government appointed an unknown historian, Y. Sudershan Rao, as the chairperson of the Indian Council for Historical Research. Professor Rao has written many popular articles on the historicity of Indian epics, but has never published in any peer-reviewed journal.[57] He has also vowed to prove the authenticity of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* during his term.[58]

Finally, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) (a Delhi-based think tank set up by the Vivekananda Centre, an affiliate of the RSS and very close to Modi) is preparing an 11-volume history of India.[59] According to a VIF fellow, Anand Verma, the objective is to present "the correct cultural, traditional and spiritual aspects of India" and to challenge the dominant view of India's history"

[52]M. Katju, "Why the Sangh Fears Modi", *Indian Express,* 16 April 2014.
[53]Rudolph and Rudolph, "Rethinking Secularism".
[54]Sundar, "Teaching to Hate".
[55]Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib quoted in "Historians Slam Dina Nath Batra's Books", *Hindustan Times,* 28 July 2014.
[56]R. Gaikwad, "Dinanath Batra's Books are a Must-read in Gujarat Schools", *The Hindu*, 25 July 2014.
[57]R. Thapar, "History Repeats Itself", *India Today*, 21 July 2014.
[58]P. Lal, "In the Name of History", *Tehelka,* 9 August 2014.
[59]B. Singh, "The Brains behind Modi Sarkar", *Tehelka*, 2 August 2014.

whose objective is to "make us feel inferior and destroy our fundamental Indian values".[60] It remains to be seen how influential the VIF's version of the history of India will be. It is clear, however, that the VIF has a strong influence on Modi's government.

In fact the VIF has provided Modi's government with a good number of senior officials. To name just a few: Ajit Doval, founding Director of the VIF, was chosen as National Security Advisor; Nripendra Misra, a member of the VIF's executive council, became Modi's Principal Secretary; and P. K. Misra, former Senior Fellow of the VIF and Modi's Principal Secretary at the time of the Gujarat riots in 2002, has been appointed additional Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. This obviously does not mean that all VIF affiliates are Hindu extremists – far from it – but it is certainly true that the VIF has a clear ideological orientation that is not very dissimilar from the RSS' view of the world.

Finally, the state-owned media, in particular Doordarshan TV, is apparently subject to significant pressure from the government. In October 2014, the network uninterruptedly broadcast the entire 70-minute speech of the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat.[61] This was a sign, according to senior officials, of the growing influence of the RSS on state-owned television. Another official claimed that the Information and Broadcasting Minister, a former member of the RSS' student wing, meets the network's Director General every morning. The official continued that he had not seen such an attempt to control Doordarshan since the times of the emergency regime.[62]

Modi, consistent with his strategy of presenting himself as the development (rather than the communal) man, has so far remained silent on communal controversies.[63] The prime minister is very active on Twitter. However, out of about 800 tweets posted between 16 May and 8 October 2014, not a single one mentioned the words 'Muslim' or 'riots' or referred to communal incidents like those in Muzaffarnagar.[64] Not only did the prime minister not comment upon serious communal clashes or offer (even only rhetorical) comfort to the victims of the violence, he did not condemn a number of atrocities perpetrated against Muslims in the summer of 2014.[65] As noted by analyst Pratap Bhanu Mehta, he "has failed to

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[60]*Ibid.*

[61]This was the first time that the public television broadcast the annual speech of the RSS chief, who set out the roadmap for the organisation in the year to come. For the full text, see http://timesofindia.india times.com/india/Text-of-RSS-chief-Mohan-Bhagwats-Vijayadashami-speech/articleshow/44199148.cms.

[62]D. Jha, "RSS Broadcast is only one Indication of Rising Control over Doordarshan, Insiders Complain", *scroll.in*, 3 October 2014.

[63]"Prime Minister Narendra Modi under Fire for Silence over Communal Controversies", *Indian Express,* 27 July 2014.

[64]Author's calculation.

[65]Such as the killing of a student in Pune in June, or the attempt by *Shiv Sena* (an ally of the BJP at that time) MPs to force-feed a fasting Muslim in July. A. Bhakto, "Rise of the Fringes: Narendra Modi Government Faces Acid Test", *The Economic Times,* 27 July 2014.

publicly draw clear red lines on what his partymen can and cannot say".[66] This silence has spread the idea that incendiary speeches and the propagation of hatred between religious communities are and will be tolerated.

A final point is worth mentioning. The RSS cadres offered Modi critical support during the election campaign. However, it is far from certain that the organisation will again back the prime minister in 2019 if none of the three big issues on its agenda – the construction of a temple in Ayodhya, the suppression of Jammu and Kashmir's special status, and the adoption of a uniform civil code – are implemented. The downplaying of the Hindutva agenda by Advani and Vajpayee in the 1990s was the reason for the marked cooling in the RSS' enthusiasm for the BJP.[67] For the time being, Modi has shown that he does not have any intention to open Pandora's box.

Indeed, so far, Modi does not seem to need the support of the RSS network. It is probably not a coincidence that the prime minister decided not to campaign for the round of by-elections held in September 2014 (which resulted in a rather severe defeat for the BJP) but, on the contrary, energetically campaigned for the state elections in Haryana, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra, where the party performed well.[68] It was a way of showing both his party members and the RSS that he is indispensable for winning elections.[69] However, if Modi's promise to create jobs remains unfulfilled, he may well need the full backing of the RSS network to have a chance of winning the next elections. The question is: to what point will Modi go in order to guarantee himself this support? This question is all the more relevant because, as already mentioned, the RSS is quite wary of Modi's centralising tendencies[70] as it fears that he will be able to prevent the organisation from having influence not only on the government, but on the BJP itself.

For the time being, there seems to be a division of labour between the RSS and the prime minister. The former is left free to pursue a rather radical cultural agenda, while Modi consolidates his position at the helm of the state apparatus. However, as will be seen below, the prime minister's grip on government affairs and, very importantly for the RSS, on the BJP is nearly total. It remains to be seen how the RSS-Modi relationship will develop in the future and to what extent Modi will be able to make the party independent or even turn it into a rival of the RSS.

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[66]P.B. Mehta, "Achhe din, like Old Times", *Indian Express,* 29 July 2014.

[67]Manor, "In Part, a Myth", 58.

[68]The BJP obtained an absolute majority in Haryana and Jharkhand, and the relative majority in Maharashtra. It performed very well in Jammu and Kashmir too, although it fell short of a majority.

[69]The author would like to thank Subhash Agrawal for pointing this out.

[70]Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi*; R. Ayyub, "So who's Inside the Sancta Sanctorum?", *Outlook,* 1 September 2014.

Centralisation

Power relations is the area in which the impact of the new government has been most dramatic. The last time a single party had an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha was in 1984, when Rajiv Gandhi's Congress won three-fourths of the seats in the wake of his mother's assassination. Since 1989, coalition governments have become the norm. An important implication of this transformation of India's party system has been a fundamental redistribution of power from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to the other institutions of the state, and from the central government to the states.[71]

The 2014 elections reversed (perhaps only temporarily) this trend. The influence of regional parties, a crucial component of coalition governments since 1989 and a major countervailing factor to the central government's power, declined significantly. This is not because their electoral performance was particularly bad. In fact, the number of seats won by regional parties decreased only marginally with respect to the 2009 elections.[72] But the crucial difference is that they are not indispensable for the survival of the government. This in itself is a major shift in power relations within the Indian polity,[73] and could have severe consequences for India's institutions and democratic framework.

The key issue here, however, is not so much the concentration of powers in the central government as the concentration of power in Narendra Modi's hands. Judging from the first 100 days of Modi's rule, it is clear that Modi is trying to replicate the governance model that he had established in Gujarat, where he was able to effectively crush alternative sources of power – including the RSS and the BJP – and establish a somewhat autocratic one-man rule.[74]

The process of personalisation of power can be divided into three sub-processes: the sidelining of Modi's enemies within the BJP; the concentration of powers in the PMO; and the appointment of loyal individuals to key institutions of the state.

Changes that have occurred within the BJP have already been dealt with in the previous section. However, it must be noted that, in the last year or so, Modi has been able to assume total control of the party. First, he was able to get the party to appoint him as the candidate for prime minister, despite the opposition of the party's entire 'old guard' (including Kishen Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi) and the scepticism of the RSS.[75] From that position, he was able to fill the list of BJP candidates with a number of "Hindu incendiaries, tweedy ex-civil servants, sundry

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[71]Manor, "What do they know?".

[72]L. Tillin, "Stories of a Wave", *Indian Express,* 20 May 2014.

[73]In fact, the only countervailing institution to the BJP's dominance is the Upper House (*Rajya Sabha*), where the party does not have an absolute majority.

[74]Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi*; Sud, *Liberalization.*

[75]See Torri's article in this issue, 56.

swamis, and so on [who] share one common characteristic: staunch devotion to the leader".[76] He was then able to install Amit Shah as party president.

After the elections, the old guard of the party was completely sidelined. Vajpayee (whose health had already precluded him from political activity for about a decade), Advani and Joshi, have all been kept out of the party's two highest decision-making bodies, the parliamentary board and the central election committee, and will be part of a powerless body called Margdarshak Mandal, which has yet to hold its first meeting.[77]

The only representative of the old power structure who managed to keep his position is Rajnath Singh, who was appointed Home Minister. This is probably due to the fact that Singh, on the one hand, favoured the nomination of Narendra Modi as the prime ministerial candidate, despite the resistance of a sizable section of the BJP and the RSS; and, on the other hand, is very close to the RSS. However, past acrimony between Modi and Singh – the latter threw the former out of the party's parliamentary board in 2006 – may have compromised the relationship between the two. Not only was Singh basically excluded from the selection of candidates in his home state, but even his son, Pankaj (general secretary of the UP's BJP), was denied a ticket for the UP by-elections.

Modi's control over the party is important not so much because it will have any major role in policy- or decision-making. Gujarat's BJP (under Modi) was relegated to playing a merely ceremonial role: Modi used to rely on close advisors such as Shah and top bureaucrats from the Chief Minister's Office, who did not have any political ambitions.[78] At the national level, the BJP will most likely assume a rubber stamp role, similar to that of the Congress Party during Indira Gandhi's time.[79] Control of the party apparatus is nevertheless important because it allows Modi to sideline internal opponents and to nip potential threats in the bud. Modi may also use the party as a counterweight to the RSS, although it is too early to say.

The real centre of power, however, will be the PMO, just as during Indira Gandhi's time. Only a few days after the proclamation of the election results, Modi had already made it clear that he intended to centralise decision-making in the PMO. He scrapped the Groups of Ministers and the Empowered Groups of Ministers that had been set up by the previous government,[80] and then summoned all chief secretaries – not a single minister was present at the meeting – and told

[76]J. Manor, "Modi and India", http://www.governanceanddevelopment.com/2014/05/modi-and-india-other-elephant-in-room.html.
[77]S. Singh, "Amit Shah Shunts Advani out", *Firstpost,* 27 August 2014.
[78]S. Vij, Interview with Christophe Jaffrelot, "Modi's Plan A will be Economy. If that does not Work, Hindutva", *scroll.in,* 15 May 2014.
[79]A few BJP leaders have already expressed their discontent with the supremacy of one leader over the entire party. R. Ayyub, "So who's Inside the Sancta Sanctorum?".
[80]B.M. Reddy, "Modi Scraps GoMs, EGoMs", *The Hindu,* 31 May 2014.

them that they could approach him directly, without keeping their ministers in the loop.[81]

The prime minister's supremacy over the cabinet became fully evident when senior ministers started complaining – anonymously – that Modi would not allow them to choose their own top bureaucrats. Not only were ministers not allowed to appoint any senior bureaucrats that had had a prominent role during the UPA regime[82] (again, very much Indira Gandhi's style);[83] they were not even allowed to choose their own personal secretaries and advisors, as all senior appointments had to be vetted by the PMO.[84] It seems that the only minister in Modi's cabinet who has retained some clout over governmental affairs is Finance and Defence Minister Arun Jaitley, one of Modi's most trusted allies.[85]

Other ministers have been relegated to virtual irrelevance. Foreign policy, for example, is being handled by Modi directly, whereas Foreign Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, one of the prime minister's internal enemies, has been completely sidelined.[86] The PMO's long reach, however, goes far beyond this. The office clears even routine and ordinary issues, such as the composition of the Indian delegation for the Asian Games, not to mention infrastructure-related issues, one of Modi's flagship economic policies.[87] Ministers have been told not to talk with the media.[88]

Moreover, the press has reported a number of rumours that shed a disturbing light on Modi's governing style. Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Rural Development and Drinking Water and Sanitation, Nitin Gadkari, for example, allegedly complained to the RSS chief that his residence (along with that of other BJP leaders) had been bugged.[89] Gadkari later denied that any listening device was found in his residence. However, he is not the only senior politician who has reportedly been spied upon. Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Prakash Javadekar, was on his way to Delhi's airport to attend a conference in Kenya when he received a call from the PMO requesting him to dress appropriately. "What bothered Javadekar was the thought that somebody was keeping a tab on his movements and giving minute-by-minute information to the PMO."[90] These rumours

[81]V. George, "Approach me Directly, PM tells Secretaries", *The Hindu,* 4 June 2014.

[82]A. Ranjan, "Narendra Modi Diktat", *Indian Express,* 20 June 2014.

[83]Maiorano, "Indian Institutions".

[84]R. Ayyub, "So who's Inside the Sancta Sanctorum?"; N. Mookerji, J. Mukul and S. Mukherjee, "Modi's PMO Overloaded as Ministries go Slow on Decisions", *Business Standard,* 10 September 2014.

[85]"The Enablers", *The Economist*, 25 October 2014.

[86]"Early Days", *The Economist*, 23 August 2014.

[87]Mookerji *et al.*, "Modi's PMO Overloaded".

[88]"Early Days".

[89]R. Ayyub, "So who's Inside the Sancta Sanctorum?", *Outlook,* 1 September 2014.

[90]*Ibid.*

tend to be more credible since similar allegations regularly emerged when Modi was chief minister of Gujarat.[91]

The idea of concentrating decision-making power in the PMO resonates well with the middle classes and with liberal opinion-makers, who were extremely upset by the power duo – Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh – of the UPA regime which, according to them, had caused a virtual policy paralysis. Quite ironically, however, the concentration of power could very well overwhelm the PMO, thus causing delays in decision-making.

Finally, the third sub-process that is leading towards a concentration of powers in Modi's hands is the penetration by the prime minister's loyalists of some key institutions. Part of this sub-process can be considered normal politics. For example, like the UPA government, Modi replaced a good number of state governors with trusted BJP leaders.[92] Similarly, and again part of India's normal political life, a number of chairpersons of various government-constituted bodies and committees,[93] and of some public sector undertakings,[94] were replaced with people more in line with the new government.

In at least one instance, however, the spoils system took on suspicious characteristics. In June 2014, the Supreme Court gave the government a short list of four names for the appointment of a vacant justice. The list included former Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam. The government rejected him on fairly shaky grounds.[95] It remains a matter of speculation whether the fact that Subramaniam had assisted the Supreme Court as *Amicus Curiae* in the Sohrabuddin fake encounter case[96] – in which Amit Shah was accused of murder – played any role in the government's decision. In any case, the final choice for the new Supreme Court judge was Uday Lalit, a prominent lawyer who worked on a number of high profile cases, including as public prosecutor in the 2G scam[97] and who appeared for Amit Shah in the fake encounter case.[98] Of course, this is not to say that Supreme Court independence is in jeopardy, but Narendra Modi's track record of dealing

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[91]S. Singh, "The Ace in Modi's Pack", *Tehelka,* 19 April 2014; "Early Days", *The Economist*, 23 August 2014; "Narendra Modi aide Amit Shah used Police to Spy on Woman at 'saheb's' Behest, Accuse Cobrapost, Gulail", *Financial Express,* 29 November 2013; A. Malekar, "The War Within", *The Caravan,* 1 September 2012.

[92]This occurred in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Nagaland and Haryana. Singh, "Amit Shah Shunts Advani out", *Firstpost,* 27 August 2014.

[93]V. Kumar and B.M. Reddy, "Govt Eases out UPA Appointees", *The Hindu,* 20 June 2014.

[94]"Speedy Stake Sales", *Business Standard,* 11 September 2014.

[95]P. Bhushan, "Scuttling Inconvenient Judicial Appointments", *Economic and Political Weekly,* 12 July 2014.

[96]In 2005 the Gujarat police killed criminal Sohrabuddin Anwarhussain Sheik while in custody. Amit Shah is accused of having orchestrated the assassination of Sohrabuddin.

[97]The 2G scam erupted in 2010. A number of UPA politicians along with some senior bureacrats are accused of having undercharged telecommunication companies for the allocation of 2G frequencies in exchange for kickbacks.

[98]"Uday Lalit to be Elevated as Supreme Court Judge", *Hindustan Times,* 11 July 2014.

with the judiciary is worrisome. In 2004, the Supreme Court felt compelled to transfer some trials on the 2002 Gujarat riots outside of the state because it feared that the independence of the state's high court had been compromised.[99]

Significantly, at the time of writing (mid-January 2015), the one post that Modi has not been keen on filling is that of Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) under the Right to Information (RTI) act.[100] This is a crucial post for ensuring the working of the RTI and hence for promoting transparency and accountability, both of which India urgently needs, but which could be at odds with Modi's ambitions for personal domination of India's political system.

Conclusions

Modi's political strategy involves two parallel discourses. The first, development, is being propagated at the national (and international) levels. The second, Hindutva, constitutes the main mobilisation strategy at the local level, particularly in sensitive areas like UP. Even Delhi witnessed a major communal conflagration in October 2014, apparently sparked off by BJP members.[101]

The two strategies are complementary and overlapping. For the time being, Modi is pushing the development card, leaving Hindutva on the back burner. However, if Modi's economic strategy should prove to be unsuccessful, or unable to generate tangible outcomes in the very short term (especially in terms of employment generation), Modi might be tempted to take the high road to Hindutva to keep his support base intact.

It is definitely too early to say whether Modi's economic agenda will succeed. As pointed out, it will not be easy, given the enormity of the challenges ahead. For the time being, Modi has limited himself to highly-publicised announcements (in particular the launch of the Make in India campaign) and a few symbolic gestures (such as requesting officials to be at work at 9 am). To be sure, these are politically important steps, as they seek to mark a break with the inactivity and virtual policy paralysis of the UPA 2 government. In an attempt to speed up economic reforms, the cabinet has also enacted a number of ordinances on some key areas like coal, insurance and land acquisition,[102] but it remains to be seen whether these will be confirmed by the Upper House, where the BJP lacks a majority.

Modi is aware that resorting to Hindutva means undertaking a very slippery path. On the one hand, there is some evidence that pursuing a tough Hindutva agenda could win some votes among the most radical Hindus. It is also true that

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[99]Human Rights Watch, "India: a Decade on, Gujarat Justice Incomplete", 24 February 2012, http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/24/india-decade-gujarat-justice-incomplete.
[100]A. Bhardwaj and A. Johri, "Poor Marks for Transparency", *Indian Express,* 12 September 2014. The author would like to thank Rakesh Reddy Dubbudu for pointing this out.
[101]D. Jha, "Trilokpuri Riots may be an Attempt to Polarise Dalits as Delhi Polls seem Likely", *scroll.in*, 28 October 2014.
[102]"Ordinance Raj: 8 in 225 Days of Modi Government", *Times of India,* 8 January 2015.

Modi cannot take the support of the RSS network for granted, especially if none of the three big issues on the RSS' agenda are tackled. On the other hand, adopting such an agenda would certainly result in a sizable part of liberal opinion turning its back on Modi. Moreover, it is unclear whether Modi would be able to control Hindu extremists who, since the BJP has come to power, are apparently feeling free to target Muslims in various ways. India's social stability could be at risk.

Narendra Modi's first three months in office – along with his track record in Gujarat – cannot help but bring to mind Indira Gandhi.[103] In 1971, she obtained a historic victory promising to "abolish poverty" which, exactly like Modi's promise to ensure "*acche din*" to India's citizens, generated enormous expectations in the electorate. Indira Gandhi did not fulfil those expectations and, just four years after being called "the Empress of India" by the London *Times*, resorted to authoritarian rule in order to remain in power. India's institutions are much stronger now than they were in the mid-1970s, and the sizable number of states controlled by non-NDA parties should ensure that India's democracy will not be destroyed. However, Modi's centralising tendencies and his ambitions of personal domination could cause severe damage to India's institutions and its democratic framework.

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[103]This parallel has been suggested by a number of analysts, including Manor, "Modi and India"; Jaffrelot in S. Vij, "Modi's Plan A will be Economy. If that does not Work, Hindutva", *scroll.in,* 15 May 2014; R. Guha, "The Man who would Rule India", *The Hindu,* 8 February 2013; and A. Varshney, "Modi's Institutional Designs", *Indian Express,* 28 July 2014.

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