

Why Is Narendra Modi So Popular?

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SUMMARY

The investigation into Narendra Modi's popularity reveals a complex portrait of a leader who transcends simplistic narratives of good and evil. Despite being labeled a dictator by global media, Modi's grassroots support among ordinary Indians stems from his transformative policies that prioritize dignity and development, particularly for the marginalized. His rise reflects a broader awakening in India, as the nation seeks to reclaim its identity and assert its place on the global stage.

- Modi's journey from poverty to prime minister highlights his deep understanding of the struggles faced by ordinary Indians.*
- His leadership during the 2002 Gujarat riots shaped public perception, with many viewing him as a strong leader in a time of chaos.*
- Modi's governance has focused on cutting out corruption and directly delivering benefits to the poor, leading to significant infrastructure improvements and economic growth.*
- Initiatives like demonetization and the introduction of digital banking have revolutionized financial access for millions.*
- Despite successes, Modi faces challenges in reforming India's outdated economic regulations, which hinder growth.*
- His approach to nationalism is rooted in a desire for indigenous dignity and decolonization, contrasting sharply with Western interpretations.*
- Under Modi, terrorism has significantly decreased, and Kashmir's integration into India has been marked by greater stability.*
- Modi's ability to connect with the aspirations of ordinary Indians has led to repeated electoral victories, despite criticism from elites and the media.*

No matter where you are in the world, you've heard the name Narendra Modi at least once. And when you heard it, you heard something extreme. Either he's the savior of a billion people, or he's a monster leading them to destruction. There's no middle ground. There never is with Modi. A poor boy who sold tea at a railway station became the most powerful man in the world's largest democracy. The global media says he's a dictator, but his people keep voting for him.

Every single narrative contradicts the evidence. Every expert prediction has been wrong. Every condemnation is followed by another election victory. How is this possible? What are we missing? What don't we understand about India? The answer to those questions will reveal something far bigger than one politician's rise. It will reveal how an entire civilization is waking up after centuries of oppression. So that's the question this investigation set out to answer. Why is Narendra Modi so popular? Not only popular among elites.

Not only popular in western capitals. Popular where it actually matters among the hundreds of millions of ordinary Indians who keep choosing him. Election after election after election. To answer that question meant going beyond the headlines, beyond the hot takes, beyond the comfortable narratives that make Modi either a saint or a demon. It meant understanding India itself, its history, its wounds, its dreams, and the man who somehow became the mirror for all of it. His story begins in poverty so deep that most people in wealthy nations cannot imagine it. A tiny town in Gujarat, a family so poor that survival meant every hand working. His father sold tea at a railway station. And as a boy, he stood beside him, learning that dignity comes from work, not wealth. This was not the childhood of prime ministers. This was the India of backbreaking labor in choosing between meals. But poverty taught him to understand the masses. He knew what it meant to be invisible, to be told you don't matter. He joined the RSS or controversial to this day.

Critics call it a paramilitary group. Supporters call it a volunteer movement teaching discipline and pride. For him, it was a school of service where cast and poverty didn't matter. But here's what most don't know. He nearly disappeared entirely. Driven by spiritual seeking, he wandered India for years as a renunciant. At a Himalayan monastery, he begged to become a monk. The teacher refused. Your destiny lies elsewhere. You are meant to serve something greater. Rejected, he returned to Gujarat and joined a small struggling political party, the BJP, a fringe group with little power. Nobody could have imagined what came next. Gujarat had been dominated by the Congress party for generations, the party of dynasties. But he understood something. India's power structures left entire communities voiceless. They were vote banks to harvest, not citizens to serve. His strategy was simple. Find the second most powerful local leaders. Find representatives from ignored communities. Build coalitions from the bottom up. It worked. In 1995, his party won Gujarat for the first time ever. By 2001, he became chief minister. Gujarat exploded with development. Roads appeared. Electricity reached dark villages. Infrastructure projects finished in months, not years. He called it the Gujarat model. What worked here can work for all of India. But there was a cost. Gujarat became known for something else. Something that would haunt him forever. February 27th, 2002.

A train carrying Hindu pilgrims, men, women, children returning from a religious site was set ablaze in the town of Godra. 59 people burned alive. Post-mortem evidence pointed to premeditation. Local Muslim extremists, locked doors, accelerants. The victims had no escape. He had been chief minister for exactly 4 months. What followed was catastrophe on a scale Gujarat had never seen. Violence erupted across the state like a wildfire. He called neighboring states for police reinforcements. They refused. Those states were controlled by his political opponents who saw an opportunity to watch him fail. The situation spiraled out of control. Riots consumed region after region. Hindu mobs attacked Muslim neighborhoods with horrifying brutality.

Muslim groups retaliated. Innocent people died in their homes. Businesses burned. Trust shattered. By the time military forces finally restored order, over 1,000 people lay dead. The majority were Muslim, but Hindus died, too. In numbers the international media rarely mentioned or acknowledged. The world's judgment was swift and brutal. He was labeled a bigot, a murderer, a man who had deliberately allowed his people to burn for political gain. The New York Times called for his resignation. Human rights organizations demanded his arrest. The United States denied him a visa. A humiliation for any Indian leader. But in Gujarat itself, something different happened. People saw a leader who had faced down chaos with limited resources and political opponents actively sabotaging his efforts. They saw someone who refused to apologize for defending his

community's grief over the train attack. They saw someone who spoke openly about what had happened in Gadra when others wanted to ignore it. They saw strength where others saw cruelty.

His political opponents demanded his resignation. He refused calling them hypocrites who had presided over far worse violence. They launched criminal investigation after criminal investigation. India's Supreme Court examined the evidence multiple times, deploying special investigation teams. Every investigation reached the same conclusion. Not enough evidence to prosecute. Not guilty. And here's what the data shows. During his tenure as prime minister, communal violence has dropped to its lowest levels in modern Indian history. The riots that plagued previous governments, the bloodshed that killed thousands under Congress rule nearly disappeared. Does that make him innocent? Does that make the deaths in 2002 acceptable? Does that erase the trauma of those who lost loved ones?

Those are questions each person must answer for themselves. But it does make the simple narrative, the monster story the media loves to tell fall apart under scrutiny. When he became prime minister in 2014, different groups saw different saviors arriving. Business leaders expected an Indian Reagan, someone who would privatize everything, deregulate aggressively and unleash capitalism completely. Religious conservatives expected a Hindu state where their values would finally be protected and promoted. Development advocates expected Gujarat's infrastructure boom replicated nationwide, turning India into an emerging superpower. He chose none of those paths entirely. Instead, he chose something unexpected, something that confused both his supporters and critics. He chose the poor, but not in the way India's poor had been helped before. For decades, India's welfare system had been a cruel joke played on the vulnerable. Money allocated for the needy disappeared into the pockets of corrupt middlemen. Benefits that should have lifted millions out of poverty instead enriched local politicians and their criminal allies. A farmer entitled to subsidize fertilizer would receive a fraction of what he deserved. A widow owed a pension would get pennies after everyone took their cut. The system was designed to keep people dependent and grateful for scraps while the powerful grew fat on stolen public funds. He learned from history. Another reform-minded prime minister named Atal Bihari Vajayi had tried pure economic liberalization years earlier. He did everything right by free market standards. Balanced budgets, reduced deficits, open markets, and he lost the next election because ordinary people saw no improvement in their lives before the reforms could bear fruit. So the strategy became clear. Give people dignity first. Make them feel the change in their daily lives.

Then they'll support deeper reforms when those reforms eventually come. The plan was revolutionary. Cut out every single middleman. Destroy the corruption networks that had stolen from the poor for generations. Suddenly, old currency became invalid. Every Indian had to go to banks and exchange their money. The infamous demonetization that sent shock waves through the economy. Chaos erupted. Lines stretched for blocks. Critics screamed about economic sabotage, about destroying the livelihoods of the poor who depended on cash. But something else happened, something that would transform India more than any single policy in its history. Millions of Indians opened bank accounts for the first time ever through a program called Yandon. A digital infrastructure emerged. unique IDs called Aadhar, mobile payment systems called UPI, direct transfers that bypassed every corrupt hand. The government could now send money straight to individuals, verifying their identity digitally, ensuring every rupee reached its intended recipient. Over 520 million bank accounts open, 20 billion digital transactions per month, more than Visa and Mastercard combined globally. India

leapfrogged decades of financial development in just a few years. And then the benefits started flowing. Not through politicians, not through gangsters, not through bureaucrats who demanded bribes. Directly into people's hands. Housing for 20 million families who had never owned four walls in a roof. Free cooking, gas cylinders for 100 million households, saving women from smoke inhalation that had killed their mothers and grandmothers. Tap water in villages that had never seen plumbing. Where women had walked kilometers daily to fetch water.

Electricity in homes that had lived in darkness since before independence. Where children had studied by kerosene lamps their entire lives. Free health care coverage for 500 million people under a program that became the world's largest health insurance scheme. Subsidized loans for women entrepreneurs who banks had never taken seriously. Direct income support for farmers who had been exploited by middlemen for generations. And yes, toilets. Over 100 million toilets built across the country. It sounds almost absurd to celebrate toilets. The elite certainly mocked it. Western comedians made jokes, but for decades, India's English-speaking upper classes ignored the reality that millions of their countrymen, their fellow citizens, had to defecate in open fields every day.

The humiliation of having no privacy, the disease that spread through contaminated water, the indignity of it all. He came from that poverty. He remembered that shame and he ended it. By 2019, open defecation had been virtually eliminated. Look at satellite images of India from space. Compare 2014 to today. The difference is stunning, almost unbelievable. The country is literally glowing brighter. Villages that lived in darkness for centuries now shine at night. Roads connect places that maps once left blank.

Infrastructure appears in regions that the government had ignored since independence. The numbers sound impossible. The kind of statistics authoritarian regimes invent to make themselves look good. Except these numbers can be verified. The roads exist. The airports operate. The railways run. National highways expanded by 60% in just one decade from 91,000 kilometers to 146,000 kilometers. That's enough new road to circle the earth four times. Four times. Railway electrification that ended the nightmare images of humans packed onto train roofs like cattle. 45,000 km of track electrified, allowing higher speeds, greater capacity, and actual safety.

Those viral videos of 50 people clinging to the outside of trains, they're becoming history. Airport count doubled from 74 to 159. Nearly one new airport opening every single month for a decade. Cities that had never had air connectivity suddenly became accessible to the entire nation. Port capacity almost doubled, an 87% increase. And not just capacity, efficiency. Shipping times that used to be the slowest in Asia now beat Singapore. The global gold standard. Energy, connectivity, infrastructure, all of it expanding at a pace that seems reckless until someone realizes what it means for ordinary Indians. It means a farmer in a remote northeastern village can now get his organic produce to markets in Mumbai before it spoils. It means a talented student in rural Rajasthan can reach IIT Delhi without spending 3 days on buses.

It means India's potential trapped for so long by the simple absence of basic infrastructure can finally be unleashed. But here's what makes this truly remarkable. He's doing it while his country still struggles with massive poverty. While facing criticism from every direction, while the global economy wobbles, while

geopolitical pressure mounts, while navigating a pandemic that killed millions worldwide, other leaders would have chosen easier paths. They would have given speeches and blame their predecessors. They would have focused on enriching their allies and securing their next election. He chose to build and the building hasn't stopped. But there's a problem and it's the same problem that has destroyed India's potential for 70 years. The same problem that has kept a civilization of 1.4 billion people from achieving its destiny. The economy still isn't free.

India remains shackled by regulations written in the socialist 1950s. Labor laws that make hiring workers a legal nightmare. Land acquisition rules that make infrastructure projects take decades. agricultural restrictions that keep farmers poor while claiming to protect them. Every Indian leader who has tried serious economic liberalization has lost the next election. Labor reforms failed, land reforms failed, agricultural reforms, spectacular public failure with protests forcing complete reversal. He tried to reform agriculture in 2020, offering farmers the freedom to sell to anyone at any price instead of being forced to use government controlled markets. The reforms were designed to increase farmer income and reduce government waste.

Economists praised them. International organizations endorsed them. Massive protests erupted. Farmers convinced by opposition propaganda that this was a corporate conspiracy to steal their land blockaded Delhi for months. Eventually he backed down. He apologized. He repealed the reforms. Indians want development. They want prosperity. They crave the success they see in China and Southeast Asia. But they fear change. They fear losing the little security they have, even if that security is an illusion that keeps them poor. So he's trying something different.

something borrowed from China's playbook adapted for India's democracy. Decades ago, China faced the same resistance to capitalism. Communist hardliners opposed markets. Workers feared unemployment. The old guard saw reform as betrayal. So, Dong Xiaoping didn't force it nationwide. He created special zones, places where regulations relaxed, where capitalism could prove itself. Fishing villages became mega cities. Backwaters became economic powerhouses. Shenzhen, Guangha, Shanghai, they became showcases. Other Chinese provinces watched with envy, then admiration, then imitation. Reform spread not through force, but through success being too obvious to deny. India is attempting the same experiment. Now states in the west and south Gujarat, Maharashtra, Carnitaka, Tamil Nadu are deregulating aggressively. Investment is pouring in.

Growth is exploding. Manufacturing is surging to levels India hasn't seen in 20 years. Just recently, India's purchasing managers index hit its highest point in two decades, signaling massive success in business activity and production. Factories are opening. Jobs are being created. Young Indians are building startups instead of applying for government jobs. The goal is beautifully simple. Make capitalism work so visibly well that other states demand the same freedoms. Make success so undeniable that even the socialists have to admit they were wrong. Will it work?

Nobody knows. Transforming a continental democracy is harder than reforming an authoritarian state. But for the first time in generations, Indians are daring to dream big. And that shift in mindset might be more important than any policy. Now comes the part that makes people uncomfortable. The part that gets videos

demonetized and careers destroyed. The part that Western audiences have been told never to question, never to examine, never to understand in its proper context. Nationalism. That word alone triggers immediate reactions in the modern West. It conjures images of fascism, of ethnic hatred, of 20th century violence, of minorities being oppressed, of democracy dying. But India is not the West. And India's nationalism is not what outsiders think it is. For a thousand years, India was conquered, occupied, exploited, and humiliated.

Muslim empires swept down from central Asia, destroying Hindu temples by the thousands, forcing conversions at swordpoint, extracting wealth and reminding Hindus daily that they were inferior in their own ancestral land. The Mughal Emperor Babour destroyed sacred sites as symbols of conquest. His descendants continued the tradition. Then came Christian colonizers, the British, who drained India's economy so thoroughly that manufactured famines killed millions while British elites dined on Indian grown food shipped to London. India's share of global GDP collapsed from 23% to less than 4% under British rule. The richest civilization on Earth was reduced to the poorest. The northern half of the Indian subcontinent was almost completely wiped clean of pre-Islamic architecture. Temples that had stood for a thousand years demolished.

Universities that had educated scholars when Europe was in darkness destroyed. A civilization's heritage systematically erased. And then after independence in 1947, something [clears throat] bizarre happened. India's new elite educated in British schools, speaking English better than their native languages, drinking British tea and reading British newspapers decided that India's indigenous religions were embarrassing. Hinduism was backward. Sanskrit was a dead language for dead rituals. Yoga was superstition. Indian culture was something to escape, not celebrate.

Meanwhile, these same elites gave minorities special legal privileges that made a mockery of the secularism they claimed to uphold. Muslim and Christian institutions operated free from government interference while Hindu temples remained under state control with their revenues seized. Muslims and Christians got separate civil codes allowing practices Hindus were forbidden. Hindus got lectured about secularism and tolerance. This isn't secularism. This is hierarchy with the historical victims and oppressors reversed with the indigenous population discriminated against in their own homeland. So when he talks about Hindu nationalism, he's not talking about supremacy. He's talking about indigenous people reclaiming their dignity after a millennium of humiliation. He's talking about decolonization. The same kind of decolonization the West celebrates everywhere else. Between 2004 and 2014, an average of 1,500 Indians died from terrorism every year. Not in distant wars, not in foreign conflicts, at home, in markets, in temples, on trains.

Bombings happen so frequently that people learn to avoid crowded places during festivals. Mothers told their children not to linger in shopping areas. Kashmir burned constantly with terrorism funded by hostile neighbors. Left-wing naxalite insurgents controlled a third of India's territory running parallel governments and killing officials. India lived in fear and the government seemed helpless to stop it. After he took power, terrorism collapsed, not reduced, not managed, collapsed.

Kashmir's special status article 370 which effectively created an apartheid state where non-Muslims and women faced legal discrimination was revoked in 2019. For the first time in India's history, actual secularism came to

Kashmir. Women received equal inheritance rights. Lowercast Hindus could buy property. The region was finally integrated into India as a normal state. The global media predicted catastrophe. They warned of genocide, of mass uprising, of Pakistan invading. None of it happened. Kashmir today is more peaceful than it has been in three decades. The Knackalite movement, which once terrorized onethird of the country across 96 districts, just officially surrendered in 2025. After decades of violence, after killing thousands of security personnel and civilians, they gave up. Their leadership laid down arms. Their movement collapsed. Indians no longer fear random car bombs when they go shopping. Temple attacks have nearly stopped. Temples that were being bombed regularly under previous governments.

Village massacres by insurgents have ended. Women can travel without wondering if their bus will be attacked. Is this because of him? Is this coincidence? Is this the result of longer trends finally bearing fruit? And for the first time in modern history, he rebuilt a temple that Muslims had destroyed 500 years ago. The ram mande destroyed by the mogul emperor Babore in 1528 as a symbol of conquest and humiliation has been reclaimed and rebuilt. Imagine if indigenous Americans reclaimed Mount Rushmore and rebuilt their sacred sites. Imagine if indigenous Australians reclaimed Uru completely. Imagine if colonized peoples everywhere were allowed to restore what was stolen from them. That's the emotional and spiritual weight this carries for Hindus. The global media called it dangerous nationalism, a provocation, a step toward theocracy.

But to Indians who had been told for generations to forget their humiliation, to accept their dispossession, to [clears throat] be ashamed of their heritage and move on, it felt like justice finally arriving. So why is he so popular? Why does he keep winning? Why do hundreds of millions of Indians support him despite everything the world tells them? Modi told them something different. India will rise and you will rise with it. You don't have to settle. You don't have to accept less. You deserve dignity. The cynics, the elites, the English-speaking classes who vacation in London and send their children to American universities, they never believed him. They still don't.

They mock him on Twitter. They write opinion pieces predicting his downfall. They wait for India to fail so they can say, "I told you so." But hundreds of millions of ordinary Indians did believe. They saw the roads connecting their villages. They received the subsidies in their accounts. They watched terrorism end. They felt dignity for the first time in their lives. And they kept voting for him again and again and again. Maybe the world called him a monster and India called him a leader because a billion people saw something the critics refused to see. And sometimes that's all the answer we need.

Now I want to hear from you. What do you think? Is Modi the leader India needed or is there something the world sees that Indians don't? Drop your thoughts in the comments below.