

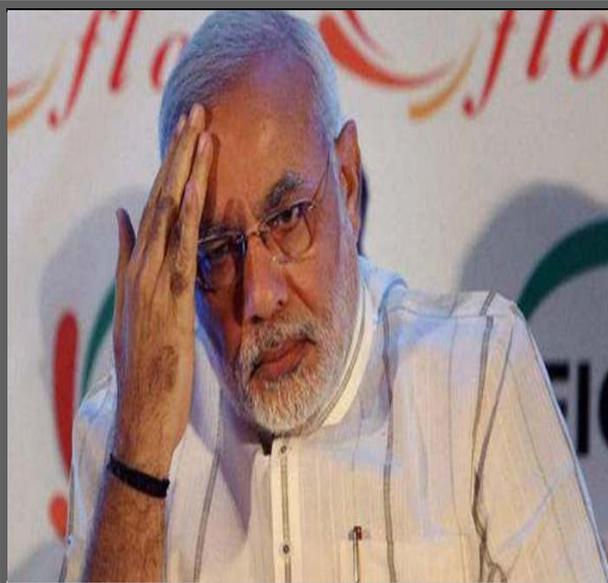
IS MODI PHENOMENON ON DECLINE IN INDIA?

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The year 2014 saw Narendra Modi taking India by storm. Emerging as the most powerful leader in decades, Modi was seen as a messiah who had come to rid the Indian people from the ills of unemployment, and corruption, put economic growth back on its track and save the nation against “enemy” (Pakistan and China).

Five years down the lane, the 2019 elections saw Modi coming back to power with even greater majority. To a large part, this spectacular return to power was because Modi was successful in convincing the Indian public (contrary to ground realities) that his government has taught a befitting lesson to Pakistan by conducting a surgical strike on Pakistan's Balakot area following Pulwama suicide attack. By beating war drums and creating war frenzy, Modi was able to play with the patriotism of the Indian public to his political advantage. Needless to say, this tactic paid dividends and Modi once again emerged victorious. In fact, to say, that Modi emerged as the sole leader will not be an exaggeration as no other party was even close to BJP in the race for the seat of Prime Minister.

However, since the beginning of the second half of 2021, Modi's popularity graph has been seeing a decline as is evident by the results of the survey poll “Mood of the Nation” that was conducted by *Raj Chengappa of India Today*.¹ *The graphs below clearly indicate the declining popularity of Modi as compared to what Modi enjoyed just few months back.*

¹ “Mood of the Nation,” India Today, August 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mood-of-the-nation-survey-august-2021>



Source: Twitter, August 16, 2021 ²

The graph clearly shows that Public confidence in Modi is gradually declining as in August 2020, 66% people wished Modi to be next Prime Minister as well which has now declined to mere 24 per cent. At the same time, it is also worth noticing that members/politicians of other parties are nowhere close to Modi. This fact alone is enough to make Modi's political future stable and bright.

When asked about the performance of Modi as Prime Minister, in January 2021 74 percent people voted in favour of Modi.

How do you rate Modi's performance as Prime Minister?

■ Poor
 ■ Average
 ■ Good
 ■ Outstanding
 ■ No Response



Source: India Today, January 2021.³

Whereas, the recent survey shows a downward trend. Today, 11 per cent Indians rated Modi's performance as poor whereas those who believe that Modi's performance as Prime Minister is good and outstanding has dipped to only 54 per cent. ⁴

² Shivam Vij, Twitter, August 16, 2021, 6:43 PM, <https://twitter.com/DilliDurAst/status/1427264871406604295/photo/1>

³ "Mood of the Nation," India Today, January 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mood-of-the-nation-survey-2021>

Similarly, in response to the question that if elections were held immediately, who would the Indian people vote for, the survey shows at least a dip of 55 seats that the BJP would be losing.

There seems to be two main reasons that are contributing in the popularity decline of Modi i.e. economy and Modi's handling of the second wave of Covid 19.

The second wave of Covid 19 turned out to be a nightmare for India. The death toll crossed 0.2 million in the second wave.⁵ There was a point when daily Covid cases rose to 400,000 per day⁶ which had put immense pressure on the hospitals and as a result, many patients were sent away by hospital staff. There was acute shortage of oxygen cylinders and medicines.⁷ Images of people gasping for oxygen on the roads and continuous burning of funeral pyres flashed on electronic media throughout the world.

Amid this massive human tragedy, Modi government was severely criticised for not taking timely precautionary measures. Election campaigns were held in five states where SoPs were ignored.⁸ International cricket matches were held between India and England that was witnessed live at the stadium by 130,000 people.⁹ But above all it was the kumbh Mela where approximately 1.3 million people participated.¹⁰ The catastrophe in the form of second wave of Covid -19 that fell upon India following all these events led to popular demand of Modi's stepping down as the Prime Minister of India.

4 "Modi's popularity dips to 24%, but BJP best bet if polls held now :Survey," *Deccan Herald*, August 17, 2021, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/modis-popularity-dips-to-24-but-bjp-best-bet-if-polls-held-now-survey-1020840.html>

5 "Over 50% of total Covid deaths during peak of second wave," *Economic Times*, July 21, 2021 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/over-50-of-total-covid-deaths-during-peak-of-second-wave/articleshow/84622071.cms?from=mdr>

6 "India's daily Covid-19 cases pass 400,000 for first time as second wave worsens," *REUTERS*, May 1, 2021 <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/india-posts-record-daily-rise-covid-19-cases-401993-2021-05-01/>

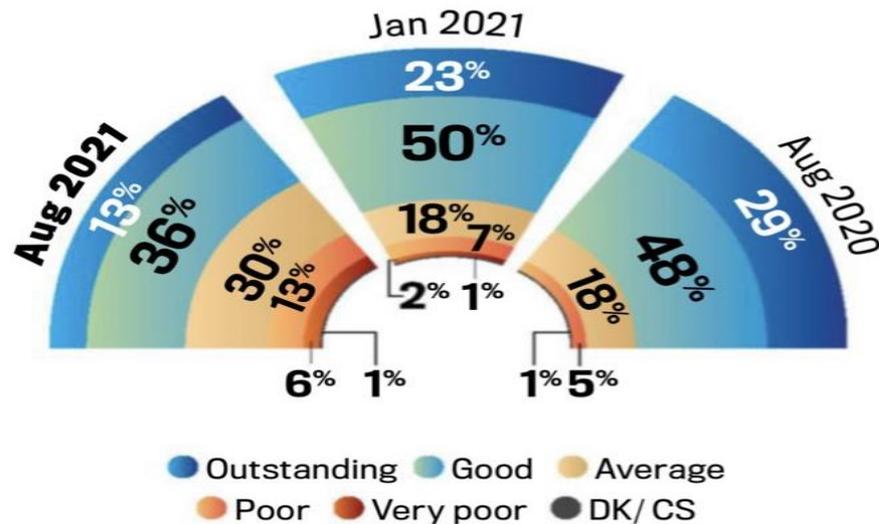
7 Covid-19: India outrage over 'no oxygen shortage death data, claim," *BBC News*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57911638>

8 "Covid-19: How India failed to prevent a deadly second wave," *BBC News*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56771766>

9 Ibid

10 Sunjib Kumar Das, "Covid-19 second wave : From IPL to elections, India undone by 'opiate' of cricket and politics," *Gulf News*, May 5, 2021, <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/covid-19-second-wave-from-ipl-to-elections-india-undone-by-opiate-of-cricket-and-politics-1.78965948>

Q. HOW DO YOU RATE PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S HANDLING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?



Note: Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding off

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Source: Twitter, august 16, 2021¹¹

Similarly, on the economic front, Modi has not been able to bring the economic reforms that were promised during his 2014 and 2019 election campaigns. In the fourth quarter of 2019-2020, India's GDP stood at 3.1 from 7-8 per cent when Modi took power.¹² The nightmare of 2016 demonetization is still fresh in the minds of people. The rising unemployment, which has climbed to 45 years high in 2019¹³ is also a source great disappointment particularly in the younger generation. As per one estimate, around 25 million people lost their jobs in 2021 whereas, 75 million people plunged back into poverty.¹⁴

¹¹ Shivam Vij, Twitter, August 16, 2021, 6:50 PM, <https://twitter.com/DilliDurAst/status/1427266416097386504/photo/1>

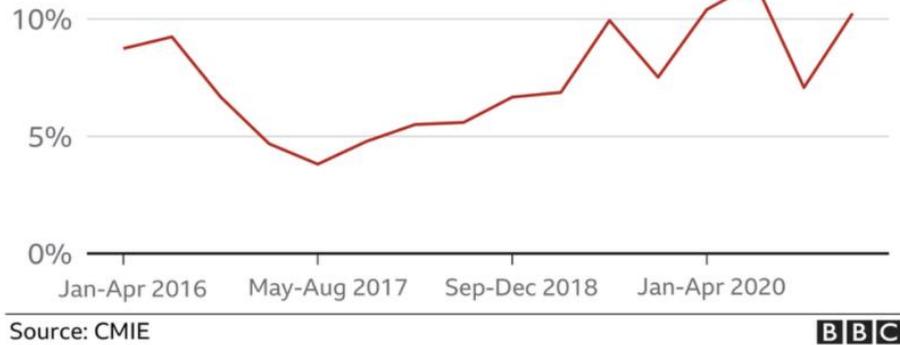
¹² "India GDP growth slows to 3.1% in Q4 as Covid-19 lockdown hits economy," Business Standard, May 30, 2020, https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-gdp-growth-slips-to-44-quarter-low-of-3-2-in-q4-11-yr-low-in-fy20-120052901552_1.html

¹³ "Cat finally out of bag: Unemployment at 45 year high, Government defends data," *India Today*, May 31, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/business/story/india-unemployment-rate-6-1-per-cent-45-year-high-nssr-report-1539580-2019-05-31>

¹⁴ "India economy: Seven years of Modi in Seven Charts," BBC News, June 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57437944>

Unemployment has been on the rise

Unemployment rate, 2016-21



Source: BBC News, June 22, 2021¹⁵

In this scenario, it is not a surprise that the popularity of Modi government is on constant decline. However, at the same time, it is also worth mentioning here that at present there is no other political force that can actually challenge Modi. The Indian National congress Party is itself more or less in chaos and Rahul Gandhi has still to prove his leadership qualities to bring back Congress's lost glory. Last, but not the least, looking at Modi's track record, it is clear that whenever he finds himself in a politically difficult situation, the easiest way to regain his lost ground is to hype anti-Pakistan sentiment and create war frenzy and portray himself as a leader who can thwart "enemy's" designs. This is exactly the tactic Modi adopted during 2019 elections and in all probability, will be adopting in next elections.

¹⁵ Ibid.