

## First Indian Prime Minister without an Aristocratic Past

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### DESCRIPTION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is popular. There is not an iota of doubt about that. He won the General Election 2014 on the strength of a strong campaign coupled with an anti-INC sentiment that was rife – and, of course, Ab Ki Baar Modi Sarkar did have a nice ring to it. He is still as popular, if not more, as he completes the first year of his second term and global surveys are testament to this. But it's not like the Modi government has got everything right in the last six years. The blunders, however, fail to sully Modi's popularity – the economy has been in a tailspin for the past year much before COVID-19 hit us, unemployment rates have consistently increased over the last term, the abrogation of Article 370 and the subsequent lockdown of Jammu and Kashmir, the CAA and NRC issue and the protests that followed, the Delhi riots that showed the communal polarisation that still rears its ugly head from time to time, and then very recently, the migrant exodus and the deaths of those walking hundreds of kilometres back home – nothing has dented to a very large extent the larger-than-life figure that is Narendra Damodardas Modi. At least to India's social-media savvy, upwardly mobile youth. There will always be detractors and opposition, but the numbers often pale in comparison to the legions of fans.

Imagine any other political leader in his place. Would they be as comfortably popular with a series of 'mistakes' following them? Probably not, not even if it was a leader from the ruling party, said Ramanand Pandey, a researcher at the Centre of Policy Research and

Governance, who works on policy research. "Modi has captured the imagination of the people. And the opposition has also played a major part in it. Whether to criticise the government or to talk about any of its mistakes, the opposition has only put Modi on the stand. So, he has been in every bit of political news that people consume, be it for or against the BJP or the government. For the past two to three years, the opposition and some power groups have been bringing up Modi's name in every aspect that they are discussing. So he is part of the discourse in one way or the other," added Ramanand.

Not just India, but the world has been increasingly leaning towards conservative and orthodox politics for the past few years. A crisis like COVID also amplifies the polarisation. The socialists and liberals have not been able to find solid enough ground to break his image yet and their lack of presence has also helped keep the PM's popularity quotient as high as it is. "To challenge or bring an alternative to the picture you need an opposition. Over the past few years, the opposition has been disseminated. His (Modi's) popularity is based on the unavailability of good opposition. The opposition has been ridiculed, challenged and been made into a comical entity. This is fuelled his popularity as well," said Dr Harish Wankhede, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University. "People are angry. But what will a common man do but seek an alternative? Now he has no other option. No other leadership. The masses always need a leader to guide them. They don't have one who can address their anger and get them justice," he added.

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