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**POLARIZED INDIA: IMPACT ON STRATEGIC
ALLIANCES AND REGIONAL SECURITY**

by

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March 2022

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SECURITY**

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. sees China as a potential challenger to the U.S.-led liberal democratic world due to its coercive economic, diplomatic, and military policies and hegemonic designs in Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. To maintain rule-based order, particularly in Asia Pacific, a democratic India emerged as a key U.S. ally to check the rise of an aggressive hegemon (China) and to safeguard interests of the liberal democratic order due to its democratic stature, burgeoning economy, military potential, aspirations for a great power, and geostrategic location in the Indo-Pacific. A democratic and pluralist India appeared well on course to meet the China challenge as the U.S. and India strategic relationship strengthened over time. However, in 2014, the Indian government transitioned from a secular party to a right-wing Hindu extremist party under Narendra Modi, whose policies are leading India toward polarization and democratic backsliding, which has started to reflect on India's economy and relations with neighbors. Prolonged continuation of such policies, and an India embroiled in domestic issues and conflicts with smaller neighbors will impact the regional peace and stability, and the role of India as net security provider and counterbalance to China in the new great power competition. The paper explores the potential impact of Hindutva-driven policies on the region and challenges posed to the rule-based liberal democratic order.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BJP	Bharitaya Janata Party
BJS	Bharitaya Jana Sangh
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
COMCASA	Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement
CPC	Country of Particular Concern
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPC	Great Power Competition
HRV	Human Rights Violations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INC	Indian National Congress
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
JP	Janata Party
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
MNC	Multinational Corporation
NRC	National Register of Citizens
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
UN	United Nations
USCIRF	United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

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I. INTRODUCTION: POLARIZED INDIA—IMPACT ON STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND REGIONAL SECURITY

India, a Hindu-dominated country, managed an ethno-religious balance among a diverse populace for most of its history after independence in 1947. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, set the tone for an all-inclusive India to build on its democracy and ethno-religious-cultural diversity while following a policy of non-alignment and a closed economy based on India's geopolitical situation.¹ Pluralism, as envisaged by "Nehruvianism," faced challenges as extremists claimed that Hindus were the only true Indians; Muslims and Christians were decried as aliens in India.² The 1962 Indo-China war pushed India into the Soviet camp,³ and the closed economy hampered India's growth.⁴ Then in the 1990s, the neo-liberals under Prime Minister Narsimha Rao transformed India while eyeing a more prominent global role for the country. India emerged as a key state in the global arena toward the dawn of the 21st century.⁵ Today, it continues to face challenges posed by right-wing Hindu extremists.

The extremist Hindu ideology of Hindutva, vying for Hindu supremacy in India, first gained momentum in the 1920s. In 1925, Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, a 'Hindutva' ideologue, established an organization named Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which subsequently emerged as the largest platform of right-wing Hindu

¹ Harsh V. Pant and Julie M. Super, "India's 'Non-Alignment' Conundrum: A Twentieth-Century Policy in a Changing World," *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2015): 749, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12336>.

² Sudha Ramachandran, "Hindutva Violence in India: Trends and Implications," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 12, no. 4 (2020): 16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26918077>.

³ Pant and Super, "India's 'Non-Alignment' Conundrum," 752.

⁴ World Bank, "GDP Growth (Annual %)-India," accessed September 12, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=1990&locations=IN&start=1961&view=chart>.

⁵ Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 37.

extremists.⁶ The murder of the founding father of India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, by a Hindu extremist on January 30, 1948, clearly demonstrated the threat of rising extremism in Indian society.⁷ Nevertheless, despite these challenges, India continued to maintain its secular and pluralistic credentials.

The 2014 general elections turned the tide of Indian domestic politics. Right-wing Hindu extremist parties formed the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Under this government, the hyper-realist policies of Prime Minister Modi polarized India internally and entangled the country in disputes with smaller neighbors. Lackluster economic performance under the Modi government, even before the current pandemic,⁸ coupled with priority for populist policies over strategic interests could ultimately sidetrack the Indian government's focus from its perceived role in the region—as a potential counterbalance to China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Internal polarization of society and state institutions in India has the potential to affect its role in the new Great Power Competition (GPC) and impede India's ambition of becoming a state of global consequence. The thesis answers the question of whether an internally polarized India under the current hyper-nationalist leadership can effectively play the role of a net security provider to counterbalance China. Ultimately, this thesis explores the potential of these extreme right-wing policies affecting regional peace and stability.

⁶ Pieter Friedrich, *Saffron Fascists: India's Hindu Nationalist Rulers* (Independently Published, 2020), 8.

⁷ Tushar A. Gandhi, *Let's Kill Gandhi: A Chronicle of His Last Days, the Conspiracy, Murder. Investigations and Trial* (New Delhi, India: Rupa & Co, 2007), 12.

⁸ World Bank, "GDP Growth (Annual %)-India."

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

A pluralist India with strong democratic values, vibrant state institutions, the fifth-largest global economy,⁹ and the world's second-largest armed forces¹⁰ cannot be downplayed in the new GPC.

The Narendra Modi-led Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) won the 2014 general elections on the promise of economic turnaround for India, but turned to its Hindu extremist ideology after failure to deliver on electoral promises.¹¹ The government initially succeeded in reversing the fortunes of the country but could not maintain the momentum of the economic recovery.¹² To divert public attention from its failures, the government started playing the popular Hindu nationalism card, blaming minorities, particularly Muslims, for all the country's woes. Modi also let the government engage in and advance the agenda of right-wing extremism. The Citizenship Amendment Act, Delhi riots, and farmer protests contributed to domestic polarization, and the revocation of special status for Jammu and Kashmir and border issues with the neighbors negatively affected regional peace and stability. Numerous global institutions have pointed out democratic backsliding in India,¹³ and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has

⁹ "The Top 25 Economies in the World," Investopedia, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>.

¹⁰ "The Biggest Armies in the World Ranked by Active Military Personnel in 2021," Statista, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264443/the-worlds-largest-armies-based-on-active-force-level/>.

¹¹ Annie Gowen and Rama Lakshmi, "Hindu Nationalist Narendra Modi Promises a 'Shining India' in Victory Speech as He Prepares to Become PM," *Washington Post*, May 16, 2014, sec. Asia & Pacific, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/hindu-nationalist-narendra-modis-party-heads-to-victory-in-indian-polls/2014/05/16/c6eccaea-4b20-46db-8ca9-af4ddb286ce7_story.html.

¹² Nikhil Inamdar and Aparna Alluri, "India Economy: Seven Years of Modi in Seven Charts," BBC News, June 21, 2021, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57437944>.

¹³ Soutik Biswas, "'Electoral Autocracy': The Downgrading of India's Democracy," BBC News, March 16, 2021, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56393944>.

recommended that India be designated as a “country of particular concern (CPC)” for religious violence against minorities.¹⁴

The emerging geo-political situation in the region since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rapid collapse of the Afghan government underscores the need for a stable and strong India to maintain the strategic balance in the region and safeguard U.S. and Western interests while upholding the flag of the liberal democratic world against Chinese communism. However, the Hindutva-dominated policies of the current regime in India, which are fueling internal instability through polarization of Indian society and external volatility through hostile relations with almost all its neighbors, are posing a challenge to the mantra of the rule-based order of liberal democracy. The continuation of the Modi government policies of preferring narrow tactical gains over broader strategic interests may eventually affect the U.S. expectations of India’s role in the new global great game.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review mainly focuses on two aspects of the topic: first, the scholarly discourse on India’s pluralism as envisioned by its founding leaders and policies and actions of the incumbent government that have led to an internally polarized India; second, the significance of India as a net security provider to counterbalance growing Chinese influence in the region and the effect of growing Hindu extremism on India’s role in GPC.

1. India: From Pluralism to Polarization

Indian pluralism has been widely published and analyzed since India gained independence. Christophe Jaffrelot notes that India is the largest democracy in the world, which is constitutionally a secular country;¹⁵ in particular, Articles 15 and 25 of the constitution ban discrimination on religious grounds and recognize freedom of conscience

¹⁴ USCIRF, *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2020 Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF, April 2021), 20, [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF 2020 Annual Report_Final_42920.pdf](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report_Final_42920.pdf).

¹⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70: Toward a Hindu State?,” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3 (2017): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.

for all.¹⁶ Anish Kapoor observes that riding on the values of secularism and a liberal democracy set forth by its founding leaders, India boasted a diverse and tolerant society for most of its history.¹⁷ At the same time, hardline right-wing Hindu extremists have continued to advocate for a “Hindu nation (Hindu Rashtra)” with its ideological moorings based on the scholarly works of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.¹⁸ Kapoor observes that India’s secularistic values, its openness to religious minorities, and space for political differences are under serious threat as the incumbent Indian government continues to afford space to a “saffron-clad army of Hindu activists” who are monitoring and ferociously disciplining those betraying the “Hindu nation.”¹⁹

Liberal economic and diplomatic outreach policies coupled with Indian pluralism positively affected Indian stature among the nations until recently, but the extremist policies of the incumbent government are causing concerns within India and around the globe. Shiv Shankar Menon mentions that successive Indian governments, including a BJP government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee, followed liberalist policies from the 1990s onwards.²⁰ This continuity of policies turned the country’s fortunes, and a “shining India” started to emerge as a state of global consequence.²¹ However, the 2014 electoral victory of the right-wing extremist Hindu party, BJP, defaced secular and pluralist India.²² Chandra observes that results of the 2014 general elections indicated that the people not only elected a new government, but they also voted for the birth of India as a Hindu

¹⁶ Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70,” 52.

¹⁷ Anish Kapoor, “India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban,” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2015, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/12/india-hindu-taliban-narendra-modi>.

¹⁸ Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70,” 52.

¹⁹ Kapoor, “India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban.”

²⁰ Menon, *Choices*, 2.

²¹ Menon, 2.

²² Biswas, “Electoral Autocracy.”

nation.²³ Kapoor asserts that the accession to power of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India served as a serious blow to the secular and plural face of India, and Hindu extremists were emboldened due to BJP's policies, which viciously started following the agenda of a "Hindu Rashtra," particularly after the 2019 re-election of Narendra Modi.²⁴ Kapoor expresses concerns over increasing polarization and the growing influence of extremist elements in India's state mechanisms and democratic institutions that may not only endanger the world's largest democracy but may also cast shadows on regional peace and stability.²⁵

Extremist Hindu ideology and the ongoing wave of the Hindutva in India has inspired some ardent scholarly detractors who see Hindutva as not only a threat to India's democracy but as an analog to the intolerant and genocidal regime in Hitler's Germany. Eviane Leidig, while mentioning links between Hindutva's genesis and fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, highlights that this shift in ideology is mostly misrepresented as a religious move rather than a political ideology.²⁶ Similarly, Kalim Siddiqui mentions the influence of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy on the RSS leaders and quotes Golwalkar, who said in 1939:²⁷

To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging their country of the Semitic race—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has shown how well-nigh impossible it is for the races and cultures, having differences going to the

²³ Kanchan Chandra, "The Roots of Hindu Nationalism's Triumph in India," *Foreign Affairs*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2019-09-11/roots-hindu-nationalisms-triumph-india>.

²⁴ Kapoor, "India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban."

²⁵ Kapoor, "India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban."

²⁶ Eviane Leidig, "Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism," *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 3 (2020): 216, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2020.1759861>.

²⁷ Kalim Siddiqui, "Hindutva, Neoliberalism and the Reinventing of India," *Journal of Economic and Social Thought* 4, no. 2 (June 2017): 158, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1453/jest.v4i2.1280>.

root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us, in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.²⁸

The Indian intelligentsia also appears divided on this growing extremism, and the majority is critical of the Indian government's actions bolstering the "Saffron Wave,"²⁹ which is becoming increasingly confident and belligerent with every passing day.³⁰ These writers opine that growing extremism is tarnishing the global Indian image by impacting its secular face, and this growing trend may even threaten India's existence if not dealt with appropriately.³¹ A drop of 15 places in the World Fragility Index under the BJP government reflects the impact of the 'Hindutva' policies of the BJP government coupled with the security challenges faced by India in Red Corridor states,³² and in Jammu and Kashmir region.³³ The BJP, apparently, is not bothered by this rapid deterioration in the socio-political environment and the damage its policies are causing to the unity and integrity of the state of India.³⁴

2. India and the New Great Power Competition

Foreign policy of non-alignment dominated India for most of its history. It drew its moorings from the address of first Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, to the Indian Council of the World Affairs on 22 March 1949, in which he said that India should

²⁸ Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur, India: Bharat Publications, 1939), 87–88.

²⁹ Saffron is a sacred color for the Hindus that represents fire. The terminology "Saffron Wave" is used to describe activities of the Hindutva followers to project Hinduism and target minorities in India.

³⁰ Edward Anderson and Arkotong Longkumer, "'Neo-Hindutva': Evolving Forms, Spaces, and Expressions of Hindu Nationalism," *Contemporary South Asia* 26, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 371, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2018.1548576>.

³¹ Adil Rasheed, "Jihadist Radicalisation in India: Internal Challenges, External Threats," *Journal of Defence Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 2018): 86, <https://idsa.in/jds/jds-12-2-2018-jihadist-radicalisation-in-india>.

³² The Red Corridor is the region in the eastern, central, and the southern parts of India that experience considerable Naxalite–Maoist insurgency.

³³ Fund for Peace, "Fragile States Index," accessed September 6, 2021, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>.

³⁴ Rustam Shah Mohmand, "From Secularism to Hindutva," *The Express Tribune*, February 15, 2021, sec. News, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/2284290/from-secularism-to-hindutva>.

not align itself with the power blocs.³⁵ The policy statement affected India's relations with global powers, particularly with the United States. Despite an auspicious beginning with a visit of Mr. Nehru to the United States in 1949,³⁶ China remained an important factor in U.S.-India relations and in pushing India toward the Soviet Union.³⁷ The end of the Cold War and China's rise at the start of the 21st century linked U.S.-Indian interests, and both countries looked to develop a strategic partnership to counter growing Chinese influence. Adherence to the core and periphery concepts to enhance neighbors' stakes in Indian development, as advocated in 'Gujral Doctrine,' shaped India as an emerging regional power in the 1990s and first decade of the 21st century.³⁸ Along the policy continuum, the government of India under Modi has tried to woo China to bolster economic ties. In 2015, Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit China within the first year of assuming office.³⁹ However, India under Modi, changed its course to align more closely with the 'Indra Doctrine' of consolidation at its core and power projection at the periphery to achieve power parity vis-à-vis China.⁴⁰ Hence, the trinity of the U.S.-India strategic partnership, the Indian mantra of strategic autonomy, and Modi's ambitions for a prosperous "Hindu Rashtra" emerges as an important case to study.

Tanvi Madan explains Indo-U.S. relations in the historic context of China that how it created divergences and convergences between both the countries.⁴¹ Shiv Shankar Menon mentions Indian diplomatic choices while India was going through an economic

³⁵ "Jawaharlal Nehru: Select Speeches," *India Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1989): 369, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45072336>.

³⁶ Tanvi Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), Project MUSE, 15.

³⁷ Madan, *Fateful Triangle*, 15.

³⁸ Suzelle M. Thomas, "India's Grand Strategy: Ambitions and Capacity" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2019), 37, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/62755>.

³⁹ "India's Modi Seeks Closer Ties During China Visit," VOA, last modified May 14, 2015, <https://www.voanews.com/a/india-modi-to-see-closer-ties-during-china-visit/2767012.html>.

⁴⁰ Thomas, "India's Grand Strategy: Ambitions and Capacity," 21–22.

⁴¹ Madan, *Fateful Triangle*, 2.

and diplomatic crisis toward the end of the Cold War.⁴² He expands on the rapid economic growth of India and a rising China as the factors that drew the United States and India closer.⁴³ Daniel Twining describes India among three of the largest global economies measured by purchasing power parity and mentions Sino-Indian rivalry as dominating the region and China eyeing global supremacy.⁴⁴ Ronald O'Rourke in his report for the U.S. Congressional Research Service mentions that though China claimed a "peaceful rise" and vowed to settle its territorial disputes through "talks and consultation," it appears that China will be pressing its claims through coercive measures while defying international laws.⁴⁵ The emergence of a rising China as a potential challenger to the U.S. led unipolar world drew India and the United States closer as Twining and the U.S. Department of Defense believed that policy centered on maintaining and expanding a rules-based international order through alliances could contain China.⁴⁶ The U.S. Department of Defense maintains that "the U.S. is investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region."⁴⁷

Madan, while taking an optimistic view, also describes the U.S.-India partnership as "indispensable" for the peace, prosperity, and stability of the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁸ By contrast, a few books and articles take a pessimistic view of India acting as a counterbalance to China. Eric Heginbotham and George J. Gilboy see India playing a

⁴² Menon, *Choices*, 36.

⁴³ Menon, 39.

⁴⁴ Daniel Twining, "US-India Relations in a Multipolar World: Shaping the Balance of Power and Ideas," in *Power Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Donette Murray and David Brown (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 34.

⁴⁵ Ronald O'Rourke, "U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress," CRS Report No. R42784 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 26, 2022), 9–11, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42784.pdf>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century," Letter from Barack Obama (Washington, D.C.: The White House, January 3, 2012), http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership."

⁴⁸ Madan, *Fateful Triangle*, 291–293.

disruptive role to offset the U.S. efforts to uphold the liberal democratic order and control the new GPC since Delhi's interests are more aligned to Beijing as compared to Washington.⁴⁹ Stephen Cohen, Sunil Dasgupta, and others mention India's policy of "strategic restraint" and "strategic autonomy" as a cause of their pessimism.⁵⁰ Raja Mohan argues that India and the United States will remain "impossible allies"; however, he is optimistic about India's role in serving as strategic balancer in global power contestation. Mohan argues that Indian and American interests have enough convergence to develop a strategic partnership.⁵¹ He supports his argument by pointing to the Indo-China rivalry on land border issues, which is now transitioning into the maritime domain where American and Indian interests converge.⁵² Harsh V. Pant and Julie M. Super also express optimism and argue that despite its rhetoric of strategic autonomy, India will keep moving closer to U.S. and Western allies to effectively balance China's growing influence since India understands the role of strategic partnerships in maintaining strategic autonomy in the modern world.⁵³

Raja Mohan mentions domestic issues facing India and the United States due to the peculiar democratic environment of both states.⁵⁴ Besides a cautious approach by India on the issue, growing polarization in Indian society under right-wing extremist policies is another factor that may impact India's role in the GPC. To this end, Mohan has taken stock of the roles of bureaucracy, domestic societal actors and interest groups, social cohesion,

⁴⁹ George J. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, "Double Trouble: A Realist View of Chinese and Indian Power," *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (August 1, 2013): 125–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.825554>.

⁵⁰ Sunil Dasgupta and Stephen P. Cohen, "Is India Ending Its Strategic Restraint Doctrine?," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 163–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2011.562442>.

⁵¹ C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 248–258.

⁵² Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 248–258.

⁵³ Pant and Super, "India's 'Non-Alignment' Conundrum," 755–757.

⁵⁴ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 248–258.

and political economy that have a direct and indirect bearing on India's foreign policy.⁵⁵ He also mentions that improved relations of globalized India with the Western world has created the space for reordering India's relations with neighbors and extended neighbors.⁵⁶ Few authors have undertaken scholarly research on the impact of Modi's government on Indian society and the state as the democratic backsliding in India is now being discussed in U.S. and Western circles.⁵⁷ The human rights issue was highlighted during the U.S. Secretary of Defense's visit to India in 2021.⁵⁸ However, the scholarly work on its likely impact on the role of India in the new GPC, particularly after the changed geo-political situation in Afghanistan, merits deliberation in the light of Chanakya Kautilya's 'Mandala Theory' that asserts there are no morals in international politics.⁵⁹

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

The 2014 electoral victory of the right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP not only changed the government in India but also altered the course of Indian politics. Narendra Modi's government has advocated and manifested Hindu supremacy as envisioned by Savarkar.⁶⁰ The manifestation of Hindutva ideology has made the life of minorities exceedingly difficult and polarized India domestically. The false sense of Hindu supremacy and illusion of "Akhand Bharat"⁶¹ are leading to deteriorating relations between India with

⁵⁵ C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (India: Harper Collins, 2015), 20–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2015.1090719>.

⁵⁶ C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, India: Penguin Books, 2003), 207.

⁵⁷ Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, "What Does India's Democratic Backsliding Mean for the Quad?," *The Political Fix* (<https://scroll.in>), accessed January 20, 2022, <https://scroll.in/article/990178/the-political-fix-what-does-india-s-democratic-backsliding-mean-for-the-quad>.

⁵⁸ Venkataramakrishnan, "What Does India's Democratic Backsliding Mean for the Quad?."

⁵⁹ Roger Boesche, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 21–25, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/195624508/abstract/8ED44E9C27354717PQ/1>.

⁶⁰ Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70," 52.

⁶¹ A term used by the Hindutva ideologues. It literally means 'Undivided India,' claiming that modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, and Burma are one nation.

its neighbors at a time when global power politics is in flux and India is perceived to play a key role to counterbalance China and function as a security net provider in the region. Policies of the incumbent Indian government have the potential to affect this perceived role in the new GPC.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

To test the hypothesis just identified, the thesis examines the scholarly research and work on growing polarization in India and its impact on civil society and state institutions such as the military, judiciary, and the media. This thesis then examines the hypothesis vis-à-vis the role of India in the Indian Ocean Region and the new GPC to draw pertinent conclusions about the impact of societal polarization in India. The research focuses on books, journal and newspaper articles, and works of scholars by undertaking qualitative analysis to test the hypothesis.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The thesis is divided into five chapters leading to pertinent conclusions. The first chapter has introduced the topic and explains the research methodology being followed. Chapter II considers Indian liberalism and the role it played in the economic turnaround of the country, which eventually paved the way for a change in the strategic outlook of India, particularly in the wake of a rising China. Chapter III explores the evolution of Hindu extremism in India and the challenges it posed to a plural and secular India. Chapter IV analyzes the role of the Modi government in polarizing India, undermining state institutions, and disrupting relations between India and its neighbors and the challenges it poses for the United States-led liberal democratic order. Chapter V focuses on the role of India in the IOR and in containing China as part of the new GPC. The chapter also tests the hypothesis as to whether the factors discussed in Chapters III and IV have the potential to adversely affect the new GPC.

II. FROM NEHRUVIANISM TO LIBERALISM—RESHAPING INDIA’S STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge.... To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.

—Jawaharlal Nehru⁶²

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, set the tone for an all-inclusive India to thrive on its democratic values and ethno-religious-cultural diversity. He was India’s chief theorist who solely planned and executed India’s policies for nearly 20 years. The ‘Nehruvian doctrine’⁶³ envisioned and practiced a non-alignment path for India in global politics while following a socialism-inspired closed economy model to earn India a rightful place among the comity of nations. The “Nehruvian doctrine” continued to dominate Indian politics and policies until the 1980s. India, the second most populated country around the globe with vast economic potential, however, failed to emerge on the global political landscape, mainly due to failures of Nehruvian inward-looking economic policies. In the 1980s, a dwindling Indian economy forced political leadership to look beyond a socialism-based economic system and transition to liberalism in line with the emerging global order. In the 1990s, India transitioned to a liberalism economic model, which started to reflect on the economic, diplomatic, and military stature of India toward the end of the 20th century.

This chapter examines India’s economic policies by dividing these into three distinct phases, as described in the following list, to draw conclusions about how ‘Nehruvian doctrine’ impacted Indian growth and how liberalistic values and practices

⁶² Xplorer India, *Tryst with Destiny*, January 23, 2018, video, 4:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrEkYscgbqE>.

⁶³ Prime Minister Nehru advocated and followed the policies of non-alignment, pluralism, and a closed economy. This is termed Nehruvian doctrine.

shaped India's emergence as a key regional player in South Asia and Asia Pacific, ultimately earning India the prominent place in global politics that it has long sought:

- Period from post-independence of India (1947) until 1981, during which Nehruvian doctrine dominated Indian politics and policies. Though a defeat in 1962 Indo-China war pushed India away from its non-alignment policy to an extent, it largely continued to follow inward looking socialism-based economic policies.
- Period from 1982 to 1991, in which India started to realize the impact of Nehruvian doctrine and commenced a gradual transition toward liberalism.
- Period from 1992 onwards, the era of liberalism that reversed the economic fortunes of India and started to reflect on its diplomatic and security policies.

A. NEHRUVIAN INDIA (1947–1981)

Numerous endogenous and exogenous factors shaped post-independence India's policies. Though India inherited well-established political and economic institutions from British colonialism, the past exploitation at the hands of colonial masters led India toward inward looking economic system influenced by socialism.⁶⁴ The emergence of two power blocs at the end of the World War-II (WWII), British oppression during the colonial era, and Nehru's Indian nationalist aspirations formed the basis of non-aligned foreign policy, which drove the adoption of an organic economic model rather than a globalized one.⁶⁵ While addressing the Indian parliament on February 17, 1953, Nehru explained his logic in the words:

To become part of a power bloc means giving up the right to have policy of our own and following that of somebody else. Surely, that is not the kind of

⁶⁴ Chandra, Mukherjee, and Mukherjee, *India after Independence*, 9, 47.

⁶⁵ Itty Abraham, "From Bandung to NAM: Non-Alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 195–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040801990280>.

future any self-respecting person would like to envisage for our great country.⁶⁶

The Nehruvian model resulted in a sluggish economic outlook as the Indian economy grew at an annual average rate of 1.68 percent between 1949 and 1964.⁶⁷ The weak economy forced India to focus on domestic issues rather than on attaining its desired regional and global stature in diplomatic and security domains.

India's defeat in the 1962 Indo-China war was a setback for Nehruvian doctrine; the non-alignment mantra had stunted Indian options as the country looked for allies and the sluggish economy prevented India from developing its military muscle. After the war, India softened its non-alignment rhetoric and established close military ties with the Soviet Union to strengthen its defense capabilities, while maintaining a careful balance of its relations with the United States and the West.⁶⁸ Though the non-alignment aspect of Nehruvian doctrine witnessed changes, India maintained the economic model already in place. This inward-looking economic model coupled with complex bureaucratic processes continued to hamper India's economic growth for decades ahead, as shown in Figure 1:

⁶⁶ "Jawaharlal Nehru."

⁶⁷ Manas Chakravarty, "The Nehruvian Rate of Growth," Mint, November 17, 2014, <https://www.livemint.com/Money/76l5Klit1s3nWARdEbD4LI/The-Nehruvian-rate-of-growth.html>.

⁶⁸ Dietmar Rothermund, "India and the Soviet Union," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 386, no. 1 (November 1, 1969): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626938600108>.

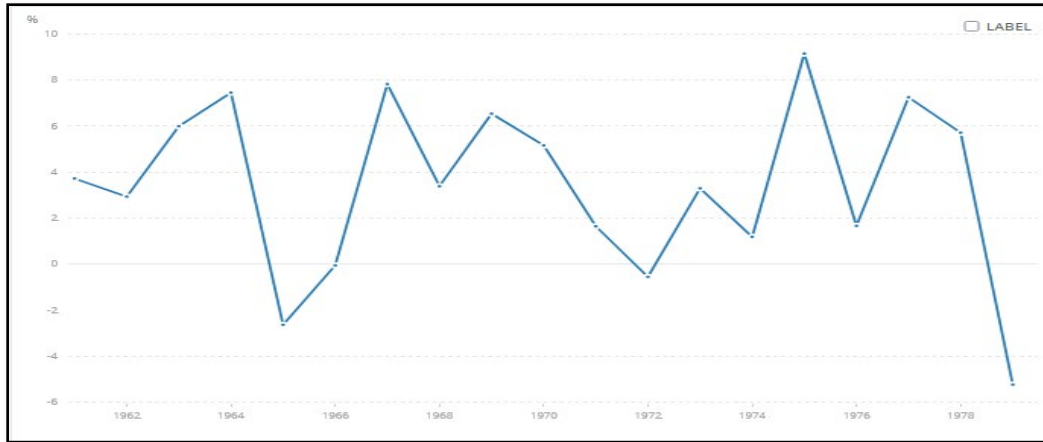


Figure 1. Indian Economic Growth (GDP), 1960–1979⁶⁹

After the death of Nehru, his daughter, Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister of India in 1966. She adopted a more pragmatic economic approach, and while following the Indian National Congress (INC) policy of socialism, she introduced numerous reforms focusing on public sector development to address issues of the downtrodden segments of the society.⁷⁰ The drought-induced food crisis led to reforms in the agricultural sector to make India self-reliant in food through a green revolution.⁷¹ Although the reforms pushed growth rate to over 4 percent, it overlooked the industrial sector for sustained economic growth. The Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Practices Act, introduced in 1973, further weakened the private sector and adversely impacted the entrepreneurs in India.⁷²

B. THE 1980s—A DECADE OF TRANSITION TO LIBERALISM

During her third term as Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi introduced a new reforms package in 1982 to deregulate different economic sectors and encouraged foreign

⁶⁹ World Bank, “GDP Growth (Annual %)-India.”

⁷⁰ K Parvathi, “Indian Economy During Indira Gandhi’s Regime - A Study,” *International Journal of Social Sciences Research and Development* 1, no. 2 (December 2019), 36, <http://www.iaeme.com/IJSS/issues.asp?JType=IJSS&VType=1&IType=2>.

⁷¹ Parvathi, “Indian Economy During Indira Gandhi’s Regime,” 37–38.

⁷² Parvathi, “Indian Economy During Indira Gandhi’s Regime,” 39–40.

investment in electronics and automobiles.⁷³ Deregulation of the cement sector, in particular, paved the way toward liberal economic policies. After the murder of Indira Gandhi in 1984, her son Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister of India. His government introduced substantial changes to the economic framework of India that raised the limits of industrial investment by private entrepreneurs, eased industrial licensing procedures, and facilitated import regimes.⁷⁴ This was a major shift toward a nonagricultural emphasis aimed at strengthening India economically. Table 1 and Figure 2 reflect the impact of the shift of focus to the manufacturing sector, and Figure 2 shows a consolidated picture of the Indian economy in this transitional era of the 1980s:

Table 1. Growth of Manufacturing Output, 1980–1989⁷⁵

	1980–81 to 1984–85	1984–85 to 1988–89
Food products	4.7	5.5
Cotton textiles	0.6	1.3
Chemicals and chemical products	9.3	13.1
Basic metal and alloy products	1.8	9.7
Machinery and machine tools	6.3	5.8
Electrical machinery, apparatus, and appliances	10.4	23.9
Transport equipment and parts	7.1	6.8
Total manufacturing sector	5.7	8.9

Note: Percentage share in industrial growth of India.

⁷³ Parvathi, “Indian Economy During Indira Gandhi’s Regime,” 40.

⁷⁴ Pulapre Balakrishnan, “Economic Consequences of Rajiv Gandhi,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 6 (1990): 301, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4395921>.

⁷⁵ Balakrishnan, “Economic Consequences of Rajiv Gandhi,” 301.

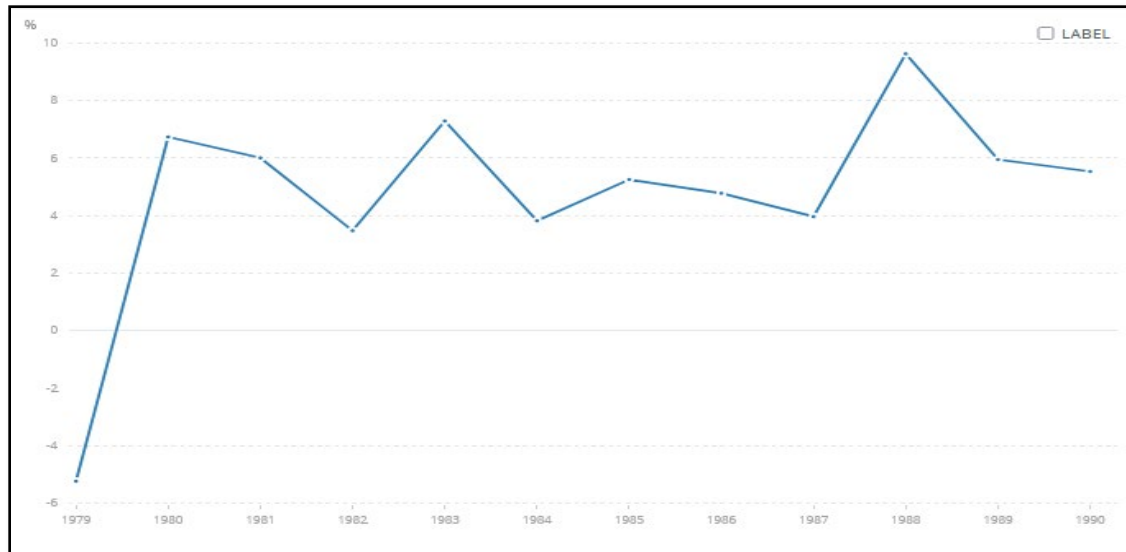


Figure 2. Indian Economic Growth (GDP), 1980–1990⁷⁶

1. Why Economic Reforms?

The reforms instituted by Rajiv Gandhi were aimed at steering India to a stabilized economy, which was necessary for India to claim a rightful place in regional and global politics. This policy overhaul of the economic framework of India was necessitated by a range of external and domestic causal factors.⁷⁷

a. External Factors

Several external factors, such as shifting global practices to neo-liberal economic policies, economic development to augment military capabilities, and balance of payment crisis, necessitated economic reforms in India. These factors are described in more detail in the following paragraphs:

⁷⁶ World Bank, “GDP Growth (Annual %)-India.”

⁷⁷ Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 95.

(1) Economic Reforms and Global Business Environment

By the mid-1980s while the Cold War was drawing closer to an end, liberal political systems and economic order started dominating the global business landscape.⁷⁸ Similarly, a shift in the economic policies of India in line with global economic practices became imperative, and these liberalized policies positively impacted Indian economic growth in the 1980s (as illustrated previously in Table 1 and Figure 2).⁷⁹ This shift in policies attracted significant opposition from the beneficiaries of the old system from within India; hence, support of the international community remained crucial for these reforms. The international environment, favorable to liberalist policies, afforded the impetus to persuade Indian political leadership to press on with the reforms.⁸⁰

(2) Balance of Power

India struggled in maintaining a balance of power in the region with China and Pakistan, its adversaries. Hence, the “Balance of Power” theory motivated political leadership of the 1980s to press on with reforms to revitalize the Indian economy.⁸¹ Policies favoring industrialization were aimed to attract foreign investments to boost the Indian economy and to create a much-needed fiscal space, which was required to strengthen Indian armed forces to ward off any 1962-like Chinese adventure and to befittingly respond to Pakistan.⁸²

⁷⁸ Roberto Ventresca, “Neoliberal Thinkers and European Integration in the 1980s and the Early 1990s,” *Contemporary European History*, July 19, 2021, 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000199>.

⁷⁹ Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 349.

⁸⁰ Atul Kohli, *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139015080>.

⁸¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Reductionist and Systemic Theories,” *Theory of International Politics*, 1st ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 60–128.

⁸² Jeff Smith, *Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 24; Peter B. Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States & Industrial Transformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

(3) Foreign Aid and Investments

While strategically playing its non-alignment card, India attracted over \$55 billion in the form of economic aid from the United States and the Soviet Union between 1947 and 1990, the bulk of which was provided by the United States and international donors under the U.S. influence.⁸³ As evidenced from declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports, the support was being afforded to India by opposing camps of the Cold War to develop closer ties with India.⁸⁴ This financial aid was instrumental in keeping the Indian economy afloat; however, dwindling economic aid toward end of the Cold War created fiscal problems for the Indian economy (Figure 3). These problems forced Indian leadership to pursue economic reforms to meet growing the economic challenges of the country due to an emerging balance of payments issue.

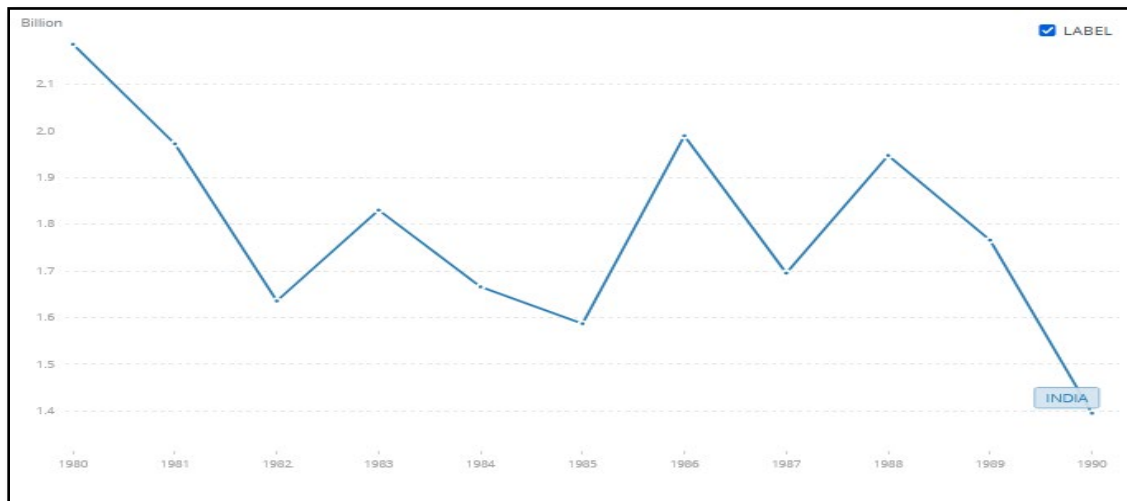


Figure 3. Decline in Foreign Aid to India, 1980–1990⁸⁵

⁸³ Shyam J. Kamath, “Foreign Aid and India: Financing the Leviathan State,” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* No. 170 (May 6, 1992), <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa170.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Kamath, “Foreign Aid and India”; “Warsaw Pact Economic Aid Programs in Non-Communist LDCs: Holding Their Own in 1986,” *Intelligence Assessment* (1988), http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000498651.pdf.

⁸⁵ World Bank, “Net Official Development Assistance and Official Aid Received (Current US\$) - India, Data,” accessed January 27, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?end=1990&locations=IN&start=1980>.

2. Domestic Factors

The shift from an agrarian economy toward industry and service sector-based growth was among the leading domestic factors that pushed Indian political leadership to pursue the reforms. Though the reforms were a major deviation from inward-looking economic policies under the ‘Nehruvian doctrine,’ the pluralism strand of the doctrine remained unchallenged until the Narendra Modi led BJP assumed power after the 2014 elections in India.

3. Industrial Reforms

Industrial sector reforms started positively impacting common Indians as per capita income grew gradually between 1980 and 1990 (Figure 4). The increase in per capita income led to a vibrant middle class in India that supported such reforms. Hence, the economic reforms emerged as a vital factor to garner public and political support, driving populist sentiment after years of economic stagnation.⁸⁶ While the Indian government was struggling to infuse capital investment in businesses and industry in response to the prevailing balance of payments issue, the introduction of private sector led reforms were warmly welcomed by the big businesses in the country.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Kohli, *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India*, 100.

⁸⁷ Kohli, *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India*, 102.

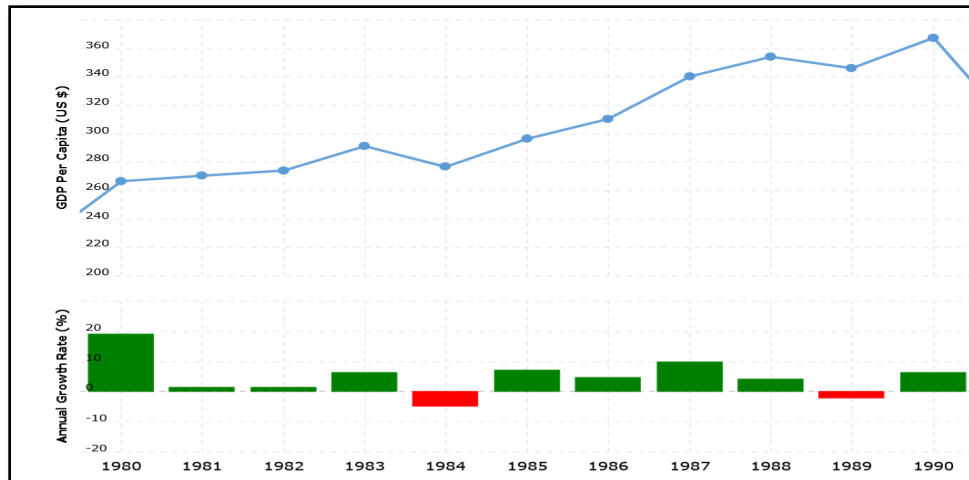


Figure 4. GDP Per Capita Growth, 1980–1990⁸⁸

Overall, the period from 1982 to 1991 was an important passage in Indian history in terms of economic transformation. Several domestic and external events eventually led to reforms in the economic, diplomatic, and security spheres under the umbrella of neo-liberalism, ushering in a new era of development in India and changing its global outlook. A pluralistic view of the society, as envisioned in the Nehruvian doctrine, remained a constant contributory factor on this transitional path.

C. LIBERALISM AND INDIA AFTER 1991

The positive results of the reforms introduced in the 1980s and the populist sentiment in their favor, emboldened Indian political leadership to press on with liberal economic reforms.⁸⁹ Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao, known as the Chanakya of Indian politics, became Prime Minister of India in 1991. By the time the Cold War had ended, the liberal democratic order under U.S. leadership was dominating the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union afforded India an opportunity to look for new partnerships and open its policies to the West. Narasimha Rao intelligently used existing weaknesses in

⁸⁸ “India GDP Per Capita 1960–2022,” Macrotrends, accessed January 27, 2022, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/gdp-per-capita>.

⁸⁹ Duk Ahm Kong and S. Sakthivel, “A Study on Foreign Investment in India Since 1990s,” *International Area Review* 7, no. 2 (September 1, 2004): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/223386590400700202>.

the economic system of India to put the country on a transformational path by setting in motion his ‘Neo-liberalist’ agenda.⁹⁰ This opening up of India also coincided with the boom of a globalized world economy after 1989.⁹¹

The diplomatic outreach coupled with liberal economic policies under Narasimha Rao and then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh turned India’s economic fortunes around. Indian GDP growth rate rose to more than 7 percent in the first four years of the introduced reforms against the historic average of 2 percent to 3 percent.⁹² The growth not only affected the lifestyle of common Indians but also attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indian industry, which jumped from \$244 million in 1992–93 to well over \$3.5 billion until 1996–97.⁹³ The rapid rise in FDI indicated growing global confidence in the rising stature of India. Hence, reforms under the umbrella of neo-liberalism transformed India’s domestic economy and facilitated the shaping of its diplomatic and security outlook externally. Ultimately, neo-liberalism played a key role in the emergence of ‘India Shining’⁹⁴ and making it a significant player in the regional and global arena. Although the non-alignment and inward-looking economy strands of ‘Nehruvian doctrine’ were transformed under neo-liberalization, the pluralistic view and tolerance of Indian society continued to play a significant role in presenting India as a liberal democratic state.

1. Economic Revival

The economic reforms under Finance Minister Manmohan Singh facilitated industrial growth in India and shaped fast-paced, sustainable economic growth. The economic boom resulted in a large and relatively wealthy middle class which forms the backbone of any economy and indicates a rise in the economic stature of a country (Figure

⁹⁰ Menon, *Choices*, 3.

⁹¹ Menon, *Choices*, 3.

⁹² Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee, and Mridula Mukherjee, *India After Independence* (New Delhi ; New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 347.

⁹³ Kong and Sakthivel, “A Study on Foreign Investment in India Since 1990s,” 25.

⁹⁴ Term used for India under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao led Indian National Congress (INC) government.

5). This middle class subsequently became more vocal for continuation of the reforms agenda and liberalized economic policies to ensure sustained economic development.⁹⁵

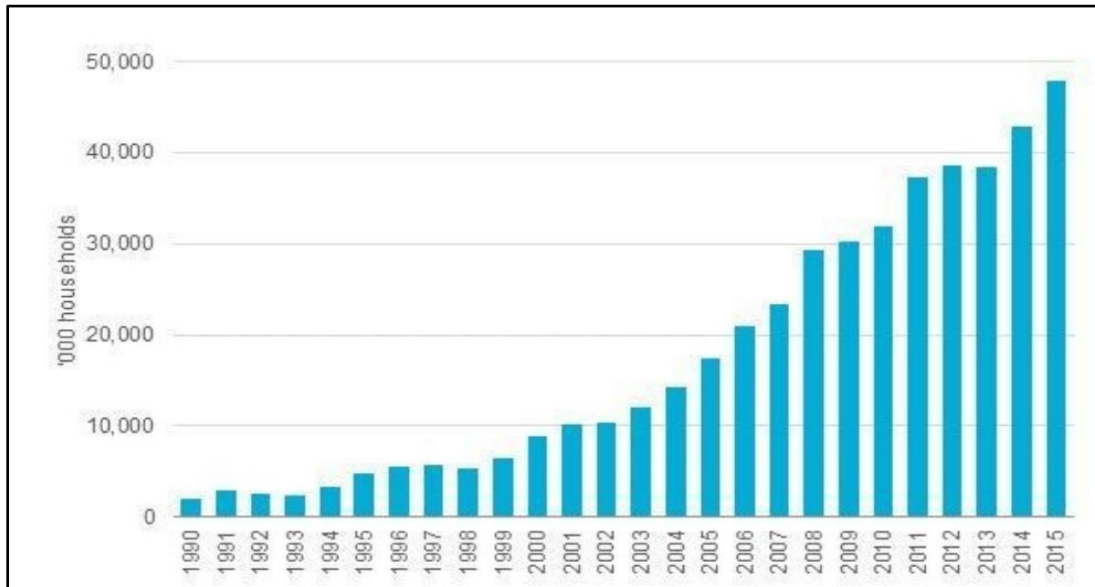


Figure 5. Households with Income over \$10,000, 1990–2015⁹⁶

2. Industrialization

The agrarian-based economic policies in India hampered industrial growth and prevented private entrepreneurs from venturing into various fields. The relaxations put in place during the 1980s not only encouraged private sector growth but also had an overall positive impact on India's economy. However, the policies post 1991 effectively and significantly relaxed these restrictions.⁹⁷ The relaxed policies coupled with a large middle class, cheap labor, and a relatively low language barrier (English is one of the official

⁹⁵ Rahul Mukherji, "The Political Economy of India's Economic Reforms," *Asian Economic Policy Review* 3, no. 2 (December 2008): 315–331, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-3131.2008.00118.x>.

⁹⁶ "6 Surprising Facts About India's Exploding Middle Class," World Economic Forum, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/6-surprising-facts-about-india-s-exploding-middle-class/>.

⁹⁷ Baldev Raj Nayar, "Opening up and Openness of Indian Economy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 37 (2001): 3534, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4411116>.

languages of India) afforded multinational corporations (MNC) an ideal opportunity to venture into the industrial domain. Hence, the decade of the 1990s witnessed nearly 50-percent growth in MNCs in India as over 4,800 new industrial units entered business from 1991 to 2005.⁹⁸

3. Foreign Direct Investment and Information Technology

The MNCs brought in huge FDI and afforded a much-needed fiscal space to the Indian economy which faced balance of payment issues. Taking advantage of the cheap and quality labor, most of the MNCs invested in the information technology (IT) sector, which eventually proved to be a game changer for India as this sector contributed around 2 percent to the Indian GDP from 1994 to 2000.⁹⁹ Table 2 shows the countries that invested in India most heavily from 1991 to 2001.

Table 2. Top Five Countries Investing in India (Rupees in Crores)¹⁰⁰

Year	USA	Mauritius	U.K.	S. Korea	Japan	NRIs	Others
1991-96	254,755	48,015	53,221	37,168	43,237	47,934	472,516
1997-2001	298,235	275,234	160,601	60,811	73,467	52,489	869,018
1991-2001	553,010	323,249	213,820	97,979	106,704	100,422	1,341,534

NRIs (Non-Resident Indians)

4. Policy Continuum

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, despite opposition rhetoric accusing him of selling out India to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), continued to pursue his reforms and insisted that his reforms were a “middle path” and not a radical transformation. After two years of initial stabilization in 1992–93, India’s economy grew at a record 7 percent from 1994 to 1997, which not only silenced his critics but also forced them to tread the same

⁹⁸ Laura Alfaro and Chari Anusha, “Deregulation, Misallocation, and Size: Evidence from India,” Working Paper (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, December 2012), 18, https://www-nber-org.libproxy.nps.edu/system/files/working_papers/w18650/w18650.pdf.

⁹⁹ Francine R. Frankel, *India’s Political Economy, 1947 - 2004: The Gradual Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2006), 785.

¹⁰⁰ Kong and Sakthivel, “A Study on Foreign Investment in India Since 1990s,” 29.

path.¹⁰¹ Since the 1990s, India has been ruled by different political alliances led by the INC and BJP. Although both these parties differed in their political character, their successive governments continued to follow the liberalization reforms agenda, set in motion by the INC government under Narasimha Rao, in letter and spirit.

D. IMPACT OF LIBERALISM ON INDIAN DIPLOMACY AND SECURITY

With rapid economic growth during the 1990s, the long-awaited Indian dream for a rightful place in regional and global politics started to materialize.¹⁰² The economic boom coupled with the emergence of a unipolar world after the disintegration of the Soviet Union increased strategic choices for India to market its narrative of ‘India Shining.’

1. Liberalism and Indian Diplomacy

Political leadership and diplomatic circles, wary of Nehruvian non-alignment doctrine, started opting for liberalized policies in diplomatic spheres in line with Indian aspirations for a global role. Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Manmohan Singh, highly influential and experienced leaders, embarked on a well thought out mission to enhance India’s global presence, influence, and relations with the developed world.¹⁰³

a. Sino-India Relations

The transitional period of 1980–1991 played a significant role in easing historically strained Sino-Indian relations. The signing of a new trade agreement in 1984 and a Rajiv Gandhi-Zhao Ziyang meeting in New York served as an ice breaker in rather cold relations between these two neighbors and emerging economies.¹⁰⁴ Realizing the benefits of peace and mutual trade, India and China signed the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement in

¹⁰¹ Arvind Virmani, “India’s Economic Growth: From Socialist Rate of Growth to Bharatiya Rate of Growth” (working paper, 122, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Reforms), 42–45, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/176144/1/icrier-wp-122.pdf>.

¹⁰² Menon, *Choices*, 1.

¹⁰³ Menon, *Choices*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ “Trade Agreement Between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of India,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cein/eng/ssygd/zygx/xy/t80478.htm>.

1993 for peaceful settlement of bilateral border issues.¹⁰⁵ This agreement subsequently led to an agreement on Military Confidence Building Measures in 1996, significantly reducing the chances of an armed conflict between two Asian giants and ultimately affording an opportunity for both states to focus on economic reforms and development. The ‘Gujral Doctrine’ of promoting trust and cooperation amongst regional countries before embarking on a display of Indian power projection played a key role in improving ties with China and other neighbors.¹⁰⁶

b. U.S.–India Relations

The equation of historically cold relations between India and the United States underwent a meaningful change after the 1990s. With the largest share of FDI (Table 2), the United States played a significant role in the success of liberal reforms in India. Prime Minister Vajpayee single-handedly steered the idea of establishing strong relations between India and the United States, which was previously not well received in India due to the U.S. relations with Pakistan and China.¹⁰⁷ Despite the U.S. sanctions on India, post May 1998 nuclear tests, Vajpayee declared India and the United States to be natural allies and talked about a potential Indian alliance with the Washington and the West.¹⁰⁸ Reciprocal visits of two heads of states (President Bill Clinton’s visit to India in March 2000 and Prime Minister Vajpayee’s visit to the United States in September 2000) were indicative of the potential formulation of an alliance between both states.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, toward the end of the 20th century, with its rapid economic growth, China started emerging as a potential challenger to the rule-based liberal democratic order led by the United States. India, the largest democracy in the world and with its economy growing at a pace closer to

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, “Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas,” UN Peace Maker, accessed January 22, 2022, <https://peacemaker.un.org/chinaindia-borderagreement93>.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, “India’s Grand Strategy: Ambitions and Capacity,” 38.

¹⁰⁷ Menon, *Choices*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 49–50.

¹⁰⁹ Mohan, 51.

that of China, became a close U.S. ally to safeguard the interests of the U.S.-led liberal democratic order against rising China. U.S.-Indian relations continued to grow under successive governments as both needed to support each other for strategic gains, particularly after the emergence of the China challenge. The Indo-U.S. nuclear deal was a breakthrough in relations of both states.¹¹⁰ Policy consistency and closer ties with the United States contributed to the ushering in of a new era of Indian diplomatic clout in the region and around the globe.

c. India and Rest of the World

In addition to attention from the United States and China, the rapid economic growth of India also attracted the West and encouraged it to explore common avenues for mutual development. The strength of the democratic system in India and the European states, coupled with economic potential, bridged any gaps at a fast pace. India also prioritized strengthening of its relations with the West as it wanted to rapidly shed the tag of third world country.¹¹¹ Much of the rest of the world believed in India's potential, which ultimately contributed to the strong diplomatic clout of India.

2. Reshaping Security Potential of India

The economic reforms afforded a much-needed fiscal space for India to modernize its security forces to meet Indian aspirations of becoming a state of regional and global consequence. With the 'India Shining' slogan, India embarked on a mission to modernize its armed forces in line with its resolve to play a role in regional and global issues. Figure 6 shows a steady growth in Indian defense expenditures, particularly after 1996–97. Establishment of military bases outside India was a step to display Indian military strength and resolve to play an active role in crises around the globe. With the

¹¹⁰ Menon, *Choices*, 4.

¹¹¹ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 57–58.

opening its first foreign base in Farkhor, Tajikistan, India, began expanding its military presence in number of other countries.¹¹²

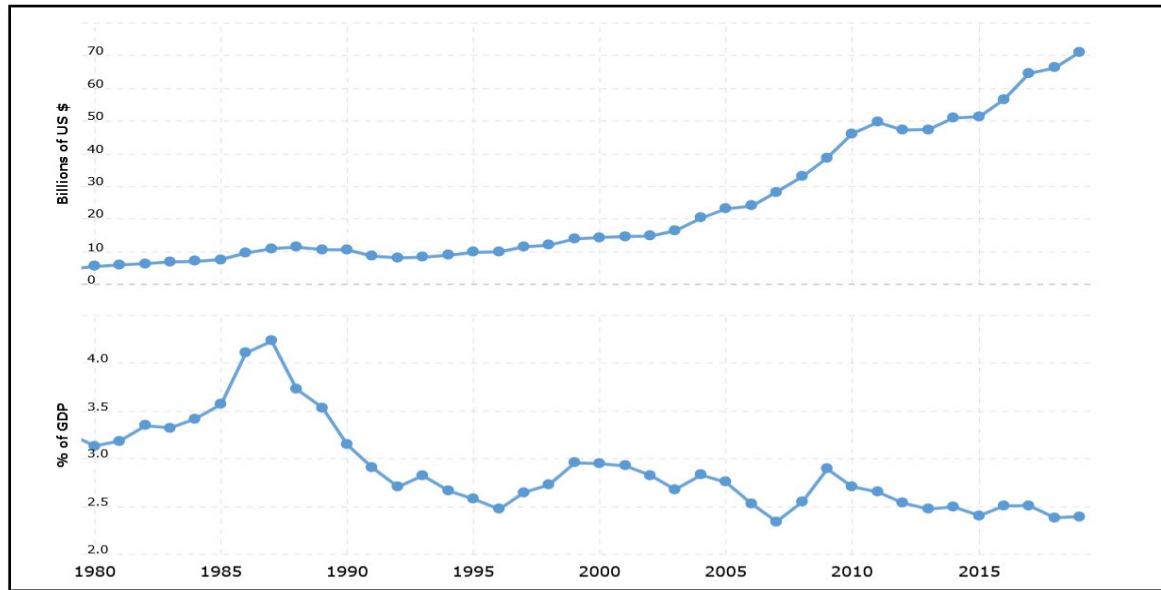


Figure 6. Indian Defense Expenditures, 1980–2020¹¹³

E. KEY TAKEAWAY

India’s dream of taking its rightful place in the world started to materialize after the adoption of liberalized economic, diplomatic, and security policies. At the same time, the secular, pluralist society that remained at the nation’s core significantly contributed to the emergence of “Shining India.”

¹¹² Arfa Javaid, “List of Indian Military Bases Outside India,” Jagranjosh, June 28, 2021, <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/indian-military-bases-outside-india-1624711766-1>.

¹¹³ “India Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960–2022,” Macrotrends, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/military-spending-defense-budget>.

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III. INDIA AND THE HINDU EXTREMISM

The mission of reorganizing the Hindu society on the lines of its unique national genius which the Sangh has taken up is not only a great process of true national regeneration of Bharat but also the inevitable precondition to realize the dream of world unity and human welfare. Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra.

—Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, ‘Mission’¹¹⁴

The democratic values and ethno-religious-cultural diversity advocated by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (commonly known as Mahatma Gandhi) and Nehru formed the basis of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious India. Despite doctrinal changes in diplomatic and economic realms, pluralism based on ethno-religious-cultural diversity remained a constant feature of Indian society and played a significant role in building India’s global image as a secular state and largest liberal democracy.¹¹⁵

During the independence movement, right-wing Hindu extremists envisioned the whole of India as a ‘Hindu Rashtra’ after the departure of the British Crown and claimed that ‘being a Hindu’ was a matter of superior race and blood.¹¹⁶ Hence, the idea of pluralism, as advocated by the state of India and its founding fathers, continued to face challenges right from outset in 1947.

This chapter explores the genesis of right-wing Hindu nationalism in India and how this mindset emerged, gained roots in society, and continued to flourish despite the projection of a secular outlook by successive Indian governments. Strikingly, while the right-wing Hindu nationalist parties advocated India be a Hindu state, they never openly targeted the secular nature of the state despite being in power in the past, but that has changed under the incumbent Indian government of Narendra Modi.

¹¹⁴ Leidig, “Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism,” 215.

¹¹⁵ Faisal Sharheel Qureshi, “Nationalism and Political Violence in India” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/62788>.

¹¹⁶ Marzia Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 4 (2000): 222–224, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408848>.

A. RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM

The intellectual journey of right-wing Hindu extremism, Hindutva, started as a challenge to the British Empire for its colonization of India and claimed Indian civilization as superior in terms of its ancient origins from Aryans and its language.¹¹⁷ The divide-and-rule strategy of the crown further polarized an already tense environment among Indian Hindus and Muslims as both strived for greater influence in post-independence India. Indian leadership (both Hindu and Muslim) of the time was divided over the modus operandi to be adopted to gain independence from the British Raj. While Gandhi advocated a harmonious Indian society comprising all religions and ethnicities, Hindu nationalists rejected this version and strived for Hindu supremacy in India, which subsequently led to greater Hindu-Muslim rivalry in the subcontinent.¹¹⁸ To enhance their influence, the extremist Hindu leadership across India formed Hindu Sabhas (associations). In 1914, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a Hindu nationalist leader, organized all Hindu Sabhas into the Hindu Mahasabha and opposed the idea of Indian nationhood that promoted an all-encompassing India for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and other minorities.¹¹⁹ Building on the ideology of Savarkar, M.S. Golwalkar advocated a “Hindu Rashtra” for the supremacy of Hindus in the subcontinent and termed Muslims and Christians as foreigners and ‘invaders.’¹²⁰ The Hindutva ideologues defined Hinduism as an ethno-cultural-political identity instead of a religion and refused to accept Indian minorities in the folds of India and Hinduism.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12–15, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=445497>.

¹¹⁸ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 98–99.

¹¹⁹ Vinay Lal, “Veer Savarkar: Ideologue of Hindutva,” MANAS, accessed January 23, 2022, <https://southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/hindu-rashtra/veer-savarkar-ideologue-hindutva/>.

¹²⁰ Leidig, “Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism,” 221.

¹²¹ Qureshi, “Nationalism and Political Violence in India,” 19.

1. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar established the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, in 1925 to afford a platform to Hindus of India to strive for a common heritage bestowed by a great Hindu civilization and culture.¹²² Savarkar's pamphlet, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* published in 1923, defined the concept of an Indian nation based on territorial belonging and according to ethnic Hindu-ness, and inspired the creation of this organization.¹²³ Moreover, RSS was also largely impressed by rising integral nationalism and fascism in Europe at that time, and it emerged as the largest most organized group advocating Hindu nationalism in India. RSS rejected Gandhi's approach of nonviolence for independence from the British Raj and strived to make India a Hindu Rashtra as advocated by Savarkar and Golwalkar. RSS linked Indian national identity to Hinduism and Hindu culture where minorities (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and others) were to pay allegiance to the majority (Hindus).¹²⁴ "Hindutva," an ideology that sought establishment of hegemony of Hindus and Hindu rituals in India, formed the core of the organization.¹²⁵

2. Fascism—Hindutva Connections

By the end of the 1930s, within five years of its establishment, the RSS in consultation with the Italian consulate in Bombay, recruited Indian students to learn Italian Fascist propaganda.¹²⁶ Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, Hedgewar's mentor, visited Europe in 1931; during his visit to Italy, he also met Mussolini. Inspired by the Italian recruitment process, physical exercises, and paramilitary drills, Moonje, on his return to India, advocated RSS cadres and volunteers to follow Italian drills and procedures.¹²⁷ The Hindu Mahasabha opined that Nazism and Hindutva had similarities due to Aryan links; hence,

¹²² Christophe Jaffrelot and Cynthia Schoch, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 14.

¹²³ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi's India*, 12.

¹²⁴ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 5.

¹²⁵ Qureshi, "Nationalism and Political Violence in India," 14.

¹²⁶ Leidig, "Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism," 222.

¹²⁷ Leidig.

the Mahasabha leadership rendered open support to the Third Reich that led to organizational and ideological links between Nazi Germany and the RSS.¹²⁸ Savarkar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha, continued to laud Germany's treatment of its Jewish population in his speeches and writings and recommended it as a model to address India's Muslim "problem."¹²⁹

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the RSS leader, opted for the extreme argument that 'being a Hindu' was a matter of "race and blood," an idea like the racial myths being promoted in Germany more than in Italy.¹³⁰ Golwalkar writes in his book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*:

The foreign races in Hindusthan (India) must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights. There, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt.¹³¹

The racial superiority mindset advocated by the Hindu leadership contributed to already volatile relations between Hindus and other minorities (Muslims in particular) of the sub-continent, which led to several violent incidents that are discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

B. HINDU-MUSLIM RIOTS BEFORE THE PARTITION OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

By 1920, the mutual trust between Hindus and minorities, in general, and Muslims, in particular, was badly shaken as many Indian cities witnessed frequent riots. Between

¹²⁸ Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s," 222–224.

¹²⁹ Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s," 222–224.

¹³⁰ Casolari.

¹³¹ Madhav Sadashiv, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 104–105.

1923 and 1926, India witnessed 11, 18, 16, and 35 riot incidents, respectively.¹³² Most of these riots took place in the areas of Bengal, Punjab, and United Provinces (UP) and indicated the volatility of the situation between two major communities of India.

The Riots in Nagpur city erupted on September 4, 1927, on the eve of 'Lakshmi Puja.'¹³³ Hindu mobs chanted anti-Muslim slogans while passing through Muslim dominated areas, which was responded with stone pelting by the Muslim youth. The riots continued for two days; reportedly, 22 people lost their lives and hundreds sustained injuries.¹³⁴

Riots in Lahore erupted on May 4, 1927, due to publication of scurrilous material against the last Muslim Prophet (Peace be Upon Him). The violent riots between Hindus and Muslims claimed 27 lives while over 270 individuals were injured.¹³⁵

Twenty-two riots took place in Bombay during 1928–29. Most of these incidents took place during the Muslim celebration of 'Eid-ul-Adha' as the Hindus got infuriated over the cow sacrifice by Muslims. The Bombay riots claimed 204 lives and over 1,000 people sustained injuries.¹³⁶

C. HINDU EXTREMISM AND POST-PARTITION INDIA

Right-wing Hindu extremist leaders blamed Muslims and the INC for the partition of India on religious lines against the idea of 'Akhand Bharat.'¹³⁷ Post partition, Gandhi and the INC advocated an all-encompassing Indian society, which further infuriated dissident voices in Congress and among Hindu nationalists. Mahatma Gandhi was

¹³² David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 165–166.

¹³³ Lakshmi Puja is a Hindu religious festival in which they celebrate the goddess of wealth.

¹³⁴ B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India* (Bombay, India: Thacker & Co, 1945), 152–170, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ambedkar/2015.514118.Pakistan-Or.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, 152–170.

¹³⁶ Ambedkar.

¹³⁷ Akhand Bharat, a term used to express the concept of One India in the subcontinent.

particularly targeted and faced two assassination attempts at the hands of these extremist elements. Though he survived the first one, he succumbed to injuries sustained during the second assassination attempt at the hands of Nathuram Godse, an ex-affiliate of the RSS.¹³⁸

Gandhi's murder led to a crackdown on extremist elements in India. Nathuram Godse and his accomplices, prominent Hindu Mahasabha members, and Savarkar, accused of being the mastermind, were arrested.¹³⁹ The arrests caused unrest among the extremist Hindu elements, which afforded an opportunity to the Indian government under Jawahar Lal Nehru to suppress such elements, and subsequently, the RSS was banned on February 4, 1948.¹⁴⁰

Despite advocacy of a secular, pluralist India by the Nehru government, Indian minorities, particularly Muslims, continued to suffer at the hands of right-wing Hindu nationalists. Successive Indian governments failed to protect Indian minorities, and India continued to witness communal riots, especially against the Muslims.

Since 1947, Indian minorities have suffered several violent acts at the hands of extremist Hindus and the Indian state has failed to protect its minorities. The Hyderabad massacre in 1948 was the first such incident after India's independence. Thousands of Muslims were massacred at the hands of Indian forces and Hindu militias as the Indian government forcibly annexed the princely state of Hyderabad in India.¹⁴¹ Gujarat remained a hotbed of Hindu-Muslim violence throughout Indian history. During 1969, Gujarat

¹³⁸ G.D. Khosla, *The Murder of The Mahatma* (Mumbai, India: Jaico Publishing House, 1965), 32–38, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/the-murder-of-the-mahatma.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Khosla, *The Murder of The Mahatma*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ “When Sardar Patel Took on the ‘Forces of Hate’ and Banned the RSS,” *The Wire*, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://thewire.in/history/sardar-patel-rss-ban-1948>.

¹⁴¹ A.G. Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, (New Delhi, India: Tulika Books), 221–246; Taylor C. Sherman, “The Integration of the Princely State of Hyderabad and the Making of the Postcolonial State in India, 1948–56,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 44, no. 4 (December 2007): 489–516, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946460704400404>.

witnessed 578 incidents, which resulted in 668 deaths and more than 1,000 injuries.¹⁴² Riots again broke out in Gujarat in 1985 and resulted in the deaths of over 250 individuals with over 1,000 injured.¹⁴³ Gujarat faced the deadliest riots of its history in 2002. The riots erupted after a train carrying Hindus on a pilgrimage was burnt by unknown miscreants and it resulted in the deaths of 58 passengers. Muslims were targeted during the riots while being blamed for the train carnage.¹⁴⁴ As per official figures, the riots claimed 1,044 lives and more than 2,500 injured.¹⁴⁵ The Muradabad riots in 1980, Nellie massacre of 1983, Bhagalpur riots of 1989, Hyderabad riots of 1990, Bombay riots of 1992–93, Malegaon bombings in 2006, and Muzaffarnagar riot of 2013 are other major incidents where Indian minorities, particularly Muslims, were targeted.¹⁴⁶

D. RIGHT-WING HINDU EXTREMISM AND POLITICS IN INDIA

Right-wing Hindu leadership started flexing its muscles well before India's independence and opposed the idea of partition. The RSS and its affiliate groups vehemently opposed the INC and its leadership for accepting partition and for not declaring India as a 'Hindu Rashtra.'

1. Bharatiya Jana Sangh

After the RSS was banned in 1948, Hindu extremist leadership opted to form a political platform. In 1951, around 200 Sangh leaders gathered in Delhi and formed a

¹⁴² Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation*, Comparative Politics and International Studies Series (London, UK: Hurst, 2012), 53–60; N. K. Vakil, Pingle Jaganmohan Reddy, and Akbar S. Sarela, "Report: Inquiry into the Communal Disturbances at Ahmedabad and Other Places in Gujarat on and After 18th September 1969" (Home Department, Government of India, 1971), 180.

¹⁴³ Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27–30.

¹⁴⁴ Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande, *Communal Violence, Forced Migration and the State: Gujarat Since 2002* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 98.

¹⁴⁵ Lokhande, *Communal Violence, Forced Migration and the State*, 86–87.

¹⁴⁶ Shashi B. Sahai, *India: Twilight at Midday : Untold Story of a Sick Society* (India: Gyan Publishing House, 1997) 123–124; "Chronology of Communal Violence in India," *Hindustan Times*, November 2, 2011, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/chronology-of-communal-violence-in-india/story-jJtcgvxFYh5N3jhSw7H4KN.html>.

political party, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS), under Syama Prasad Mukherjee.¹⁴⁷ Although the party was formed to raise a voice against Nehruvian policies, it promoted the RSS ideology. The BJS advocated for a strong and unified Hindu-dominated state that truly represented Hindu culture.¹⁴⁸

2. BJS and Elections in India

About 16 years after its establishment, the BJS performed fairly well in the 1967 general elections in India and succeeded in establishing a political foothold in the Hindi-speaking regions of northern India.¹⁴⁹ It emerged as the second largest party in terms of percentage share of total votes cast in the elections.¹⁵⁰ Though the INC continued to dominate the political landscape, its political stature witnessed erosion, mainly due to adverse economic performance.

The general elections of 1977 were a turning point in the political history of the BJS. Prior to the elections, the BJS under Atal Bihari Vajpayee entered an alliance with different political parties; the alliance was named as the Janata Party (JP).¹⁵¹ This alliance defeated the INC and took the reins of government under Morarji Desai.¹⁵² However, factionalism and internal disputes weakened this coalition government. The government wanted BJS leadership to distance itself from the RSS, which ultimately led to collapse of the alliance in 1979. Although it was a short stint for the BJS and Hindu nationalists in

¹⁴⁷ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi's India*, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Arun Anand, "On This Day 69 Years Ago, 200 Leaders Formed Jana Sangh. It Is Now the BJP," *The Print*, October 21, 2020, <https://theprint.in/politics/on-this-day-69-years-ago-200-leaders-formed-jana-sangh-it-is-now-the-bjp/528070/>.

¹⁴⁹ *Election Commission of India, Statistical Report of General Elections 1967* (New Delhi, India: Election Commission of India, 1968), 75, http://ceomadhyapradesh.nic.in/Links/Books/67_Vol_I.pdf, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Election Commission of India, *Statistical Report of General Elections 1967*, 75.

¹⁵¹ Farooq Ahmad Malik, "Politics of Coalition in India," *Journal of Power, Politics & Governance* 2 (March 2014): 3, <http://jppgnet.com/vol-2-no-1-march-2014-jppg>.

¹⁵² "IndiaVotes PC: All States 1977," IndiaVotes, accessed January 23, 2022, <https://www.indiavotes.com/lok-sabha/1977/all-states/6/www.indiavotes.com/lok-sabha/1977/all-states/6/0>.

power, it afforded them an opportunity to showcase their growing support among the masses.

3. Bhartiya Janata Party

Following the split in the JP coalition, Vajpayee, Lal Krishan Advani, and Murali Manohar Joshi established the Bhartiya Janata Party, or BJP, in 1980. The party was critical of the secular policies of the INC and advocated Hindu domination in all spheres under its concept of Hindutva. Capitalizing on the INC's economic failures, the BJP thrived on prevailing anti-Muslim sentiment in the society. Advocacy for the construction of Ram Mandar in place of historic Babri Mosque and the subsequent demolition of the mosque on December 6, 1992, resulted in widespread riots in India, but it afforded the BJP great political capital to be tapped in subsequent elections.¹⁵³

4. BJP's Road to Power

Thriving on the populist anti-Muslim sentiment, the BJP continued to increase its share in Indian Parliament in successive elections between 1996 and 1999. In the 1996 general elections, the BJP emerged as the single largest party and formed a coalition government, but it failed to run the coalition government.¹⁵⁴ In the 1998 general elections, the BJP increased its seats in parliament and again formed a coalition government under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with Vajpayee as Prime Minister of India. The government merely survived for one year in power and early elections were called in India due to political instability.¹⁵⁵ The 1999 general elections again resulted in a hung parliament, and BJP, being the largest party, led the coalition government under

¹⁵³ Sunaina Mullick, "10 Historically Significant Events that Led to the Demolition of the Babri Masjid & Riots in 1992," Mensxp, November 11, 2019, <https://www.mensxp.com/special-features/features/70093-10-historically-significant-events-that-led-to-the-demolition-of-the-babri-masjid-riots-in-1992.html>.

¹⁵⁴ "India: Parliamentary Elections Lok Sabha, 1996," India Parliamentary Union, accessed January 23, 2022, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2145_96.htm.

¹⁵⁵ "India: Parliamentary Elections Lok Sabha, 1998," India Parliamentary Union, accessed January 23, 2022, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2145_98.htm.

Vajpayee as the prime minister. This fragile government of the BJP managed to complete its tenure.¹⁵⁶

After remaining away from the corridors of power in subsequent years, the BJP returned to government in India in the 2014 elections. The BJP-led NDA alliance managed to win a simple majority in the parliament to form a government with Narendra Modi as the prime minister.¹⁵⁷ After completion of his term, Prime Minister Modi led the BJP to an electoral victory in the 2019 general elections with a clear majority. The party won over 300 seats in the parliament on its own and its dominance of the political landscape matched the dominance of the INC in the 1980s.¹⁵⁸ Figure 7 illustrates the increasing trend in BJP's vote bank in India since the general elections of 1994.

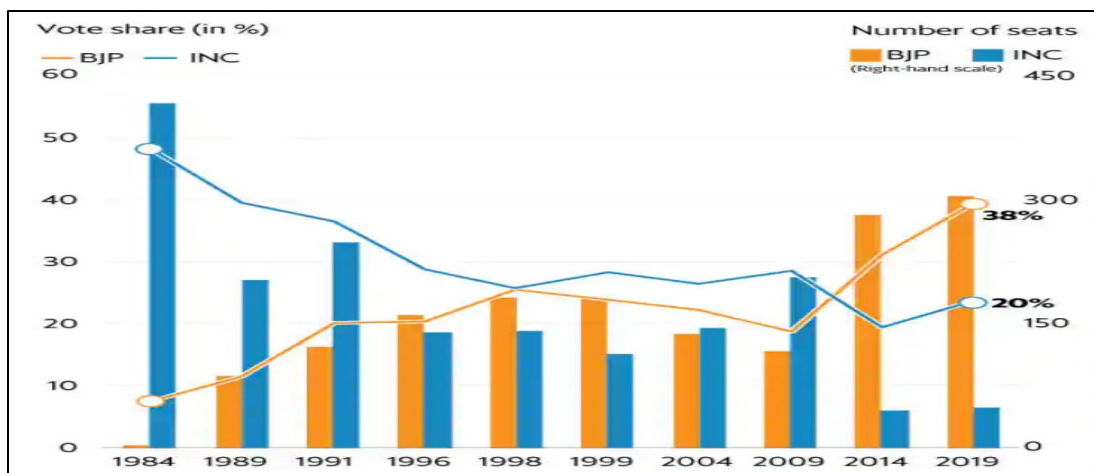


Figure 7. BJP-INC Electoral Comparison, 1984–2019¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ “India: Parliamentary Elections Lok Sabha - House of the People, 1999,” India Parliamentary Union, accessed January 23, 2022, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2145_99.htm.

¹⁵⁷ “IndiaVotes PC: All States 2014,” IndiaVotes, accessed January 23, 2022, <https://www.indiavotes.com/lok-sabha/2014/all-states/16/www.indiavotes.com/lok-sabha/2014/all-states/16/0>.

¹⁵⁸ “Ten Charts That Explain the 2019 Lok Sabha Verdict,” Mint, May 24, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/elections/lok-sabha-elections/ten-charts-that-explain-the-2019-lok-sabha-verdict-1558636775444.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Mint, “Ten Charts That Explain the 2019 Lok Sabha Verdict.”

E. BJP AND RIGHT-WING HINDU EXTREMISM

BJP, a staunch advocate of Hindu dominance in India, drew its political strength from the cadres closely related to Hindu nationalist organizations, particularly the RSS; in fact, most of BJP's leadership remained active members of the RSS. Despite three stints in power prior to 2014, the party propagated the Hindu nationalists' agenda but never openly targeted the pluralistic or secular face of India.

BJP, under Narendra Modi, contested the 2014 general elections on a reformist agenda to transform India's economy. Growing unemployment, inflation, and slowing economy, particularly after 2010 (as shown in Figure 8) under Manmohan Singh paved the way for the electoral victory of BJP.

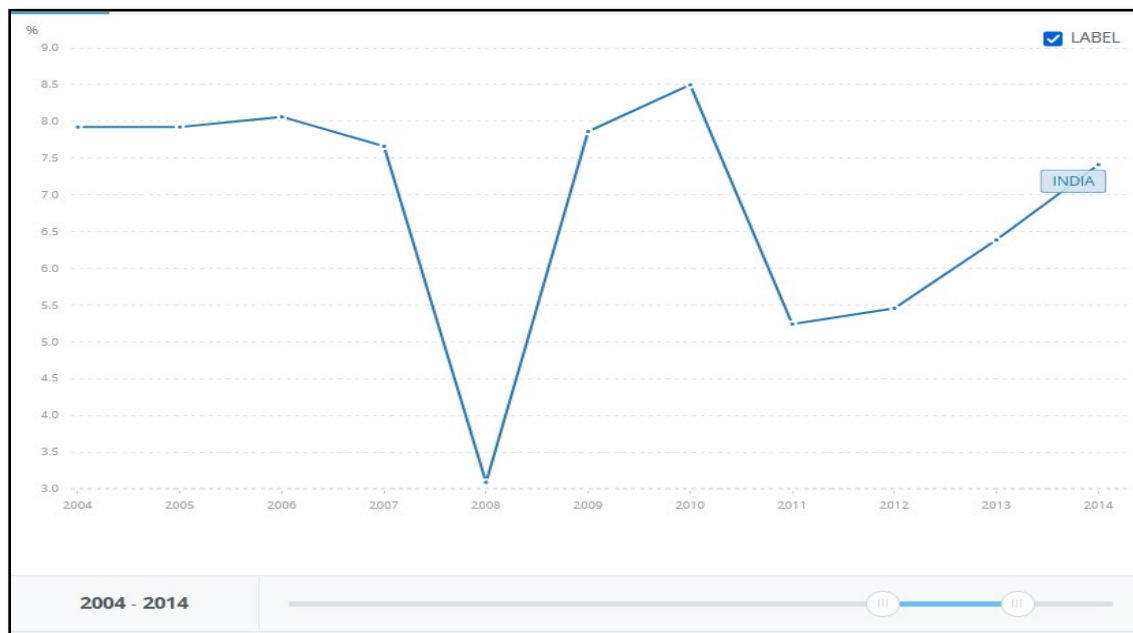


Figure 8. Indian GDP Growth Rate, 2004–2014¹⁶⁰

After becoming Prime Minister of India in 2014, Narendra Modi, a staunch Hindu nationalist leader and an active member of the RSS, besides other governmental challenges,

¹⁶⁰ World Bank, “GDP Growth (Annual %)-India.”

introduced benign Hindutva-inspired measures to promote Hindu nationalism which included enacting a ban on cow slaughter, renaming Muslim heritage sites with the names of Indian leaders (Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi, renamed as APJ Abdulkalam Road; Mughalsarai Railway Junction renamed as Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Railway Junction), and promoting Hindu culture instead of Indian culture through a revision of the history curriculum for schools in India.¹⁶¹

F. KEY TAKEAWAY

Indian pluralism continued to face challenges from Hindutva-inspired political parties and groups since the nation's independence in 1947, and the country witnessed numerous episodes of communal violence. Nonetheless, India's secularism was never openly challenged, and the successive governments in India continued to boast Indian pluralism despite intermittent governments of right-wing Hindu nationalists. The pluralism mantra significantly shaped the global perception of India as the largest liberal democracy in the world and remained an important element of Indian growth, particularly during the era of liberalist reforms.

¹⁶¹ Qureshi, "Nationalism and Political Violence in India," 41.

IV. MODI'S INDIA

Though the BJP ruled India and its different states intermittently since the 1970s and advocated the agenda of right-wing Hindu extremism, it never openly challenged Indian status as a secular state. In the 2014 general elections in India, BJP assumed power riding on the populist wave of economic reforms. Poor governance, rising inflation, and a high unemployment rate were reflected in the 2018 electoral results of five Indian states once considered a stronghold of the BJP.¹⁶² Failure to deliver on its electoral promises and dismal electoral performance in state elections led Modi's government to play the Hindu nationalist card to secure victory in the 2019 elections. Since then, secularism in India has been facing challenges from Hindutva, which is now openly threatening the democratic rights of all Indians and is intimidating minorities.¹⁶³ The state's inaction to check these trends is not only leading to a polarized India but is also hurting India in economic, diplomatic, and security spheres. Revocation of the special status of Kashmir through the abolition of Articles 370 and 35 A of the Indian constitution, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Delhi riots of 2020, cow vigilantes, and specific targeting of Muslims by declaring them as perpetrators of 'Corona Jihad' are a few significant highlights of the Modi era, which have not only polarized India internally but also pose a threat to regional peace and stability. The recent Indo-China skirmishes have the potential to escalate further, which will adversely impact the fragile Indian economy and will be a setback for India's global aspirations. Moreover, the world is also wary of the Indian state's high handedness against its minorities, as reflected in various global reports at different levels.

This chapter focuses on the rise of right-wing Hindu extremism under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The impact of this growing trend on Indian

¹⁶² "Assembly Election Results: Here's How the Five States Voted and How Seats Changed," *The Indian Express* (blog), December 11, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/elections/madhya-pradesh-rajasthan-telangana-mizoram-chhattisgarh-assembly-election-results-2018-5488011/>.

¹⁶³ Shaukat Abbas, "India's Democracy Under Hindu Fundamentalists: The Question of Minority Condition" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/61196>.

pluralism, the country's economy, and its relations with neighbors is studied to draw conclusions about whether it has the potential to impact India's role in GPC or otherwise.

A. THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING HINDU EXTREMISM UNDER MODI

The BJP and Narendra Modi, an RSS affiliate, afforded a new impetus for the rise of Hindu nationalism that is striving for Hindu supremacy in India. Modi's stint in power as Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat remains instrumental in the current rise in political stature of the BJP and in the rise of Hindu extremism in India.

1. Modi and RSS

Narendra Modi started his political career from the platform of the RSS. He joined RSS as its permanent member in the 1960s and assisted the organization in charge of the Gujarat and Maharashtra chapters, Lakshmanrao Inamdar.¹⁶⁴ He rapidly rose through the ranks in the organization and became a *parant pracharak* (head of organization in a state) of Gujarat by 1981.¹⁶⁵ Considering his services for the RSS, Lal Krishna Advani, president of the BJP in 1986, enlisted Modi to serve the political wing and deputized him to the key post of *sangathan mantri* (organization secretary) of the Gujarat state.¹⁶⁶

2. Modi and the BJP

Modi's organizational abilities and his dedication to the Hindu cause earned the BJP a strong political base in the Gujarat state, which facilitated rapid strides for Modi in his political career. Modi played a key role in strengthening the BJP in the Gujarat state, enabling the party to win 121 seats out of a total 182 in the 1995 state elections, a fate achieved by the party for the first time in its history.¹⁶⁷ Owing to the results achieved and

¹⁶⁴ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi's India*, 35.

¹⁶⁵ Jaffrelot and Schoch, 36.

¹⁶⁶ Jaffrelot and Schoch, 36.

¹⁶⁷ "Gujarat Assembly Election Results in 1995," Elections in India, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.elections.in/gujarat/assembly-constituencies/1995-election-results.html/>; Ashok Sharma, "Just Who Is Narendra Modi, India's Man of the Moment?," The Conversation, accessed February 19, 2022, <http://theconversation.com/just-who-is-narendra-modi-indias-man-of-the-moment-26898>.

his dedication, Modi was elevated to Secretary-General of the party and was also made head of the BJP youth wing in New Delhi.¹⁶⁸ Continued internal rifts in the Gujarat chapter of the party further paved the way for Modi to become the chief minister of the state in 2001. His pro-Hindu policies as Chief Minister Gujarat ultimately resulted in the worst anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat in 2002.¹⁶⁹ Inaction of the Gujarat state machinery to prevent riots resulted in a massive increase in Modi's stature among the Hindu populace, which was reflected in the next state election in Gujarat.¹⁷⁰

3. The 2014 Indian General Elections and the Modi-Led BJP

For the 2014 general elections, the BJP planned to cash in on the economic failures of the INC government through populist promises to make India a globally competitive economy by proactive good governance, strong and effective institutions, reduced unemployment, and economic and political justice.¹⁷¹ Slogans like '*ek Bharat - shreshtha Bharat*' (unity in diversity) and '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*' (collective effort, inclusive growth) gained traction among the masses due to sluggish economic growth and rising unemployment under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's INC coalition government as shown in Figures 9 and 10.

¹⁶⁸ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi's India*, 38.

¹⁶⁹ Jaffrelot and Schoch, 40–41.

¹⁷⁰ "Gujarat Assembly Election Results in 2002," Elections in India, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.elections.in/gujarat/assembly-constituencies/2002-election-results.html/>.

¹⁷¹ Bharatiya Janata Party, *BJP Election Manifesto 2014* (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014), <http://library.bjp.org/jspui/handle/123456789/252>.

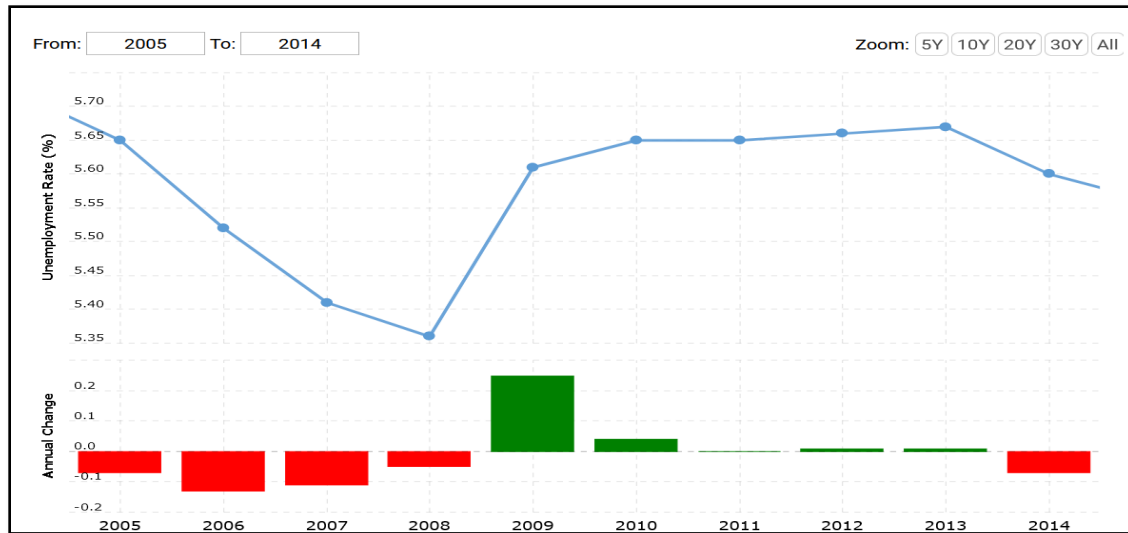


Figure 9. Rate of Unemployment in India, 2005–2014¹⁷²

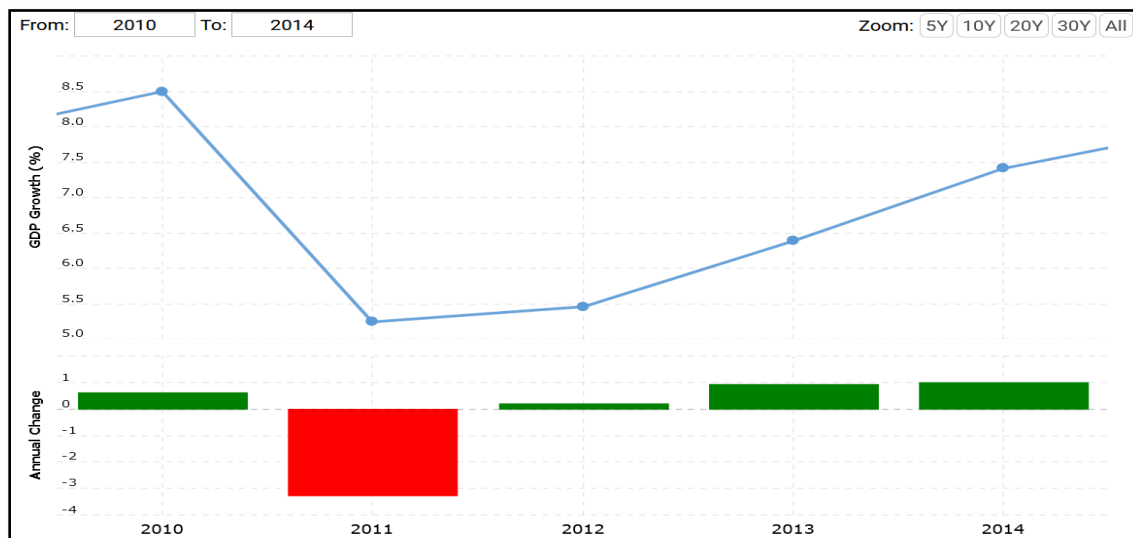


Figure 10. GDP Growth Rate of India, 2010–2014¹⁷³

¹⁷² “India Unemployment Rate 1991–2022,” Macrotrends, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/unemployment-rate>.

¹⁷³ “India GDP Growth Rate 1961–2021,” Macrotrends, accessed November 5, 2021, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/gdp-growth-rate>.

The Modi government failed, however, to deliver on its promise of economic turnaround for India. Figure 11 shows a comparison of major economic indicators between the Manmohan Singh government of 2009–14 and the Modi government of 2014–19, which indicates that the Modi government failed in its much-touted promises of economic turnaround.

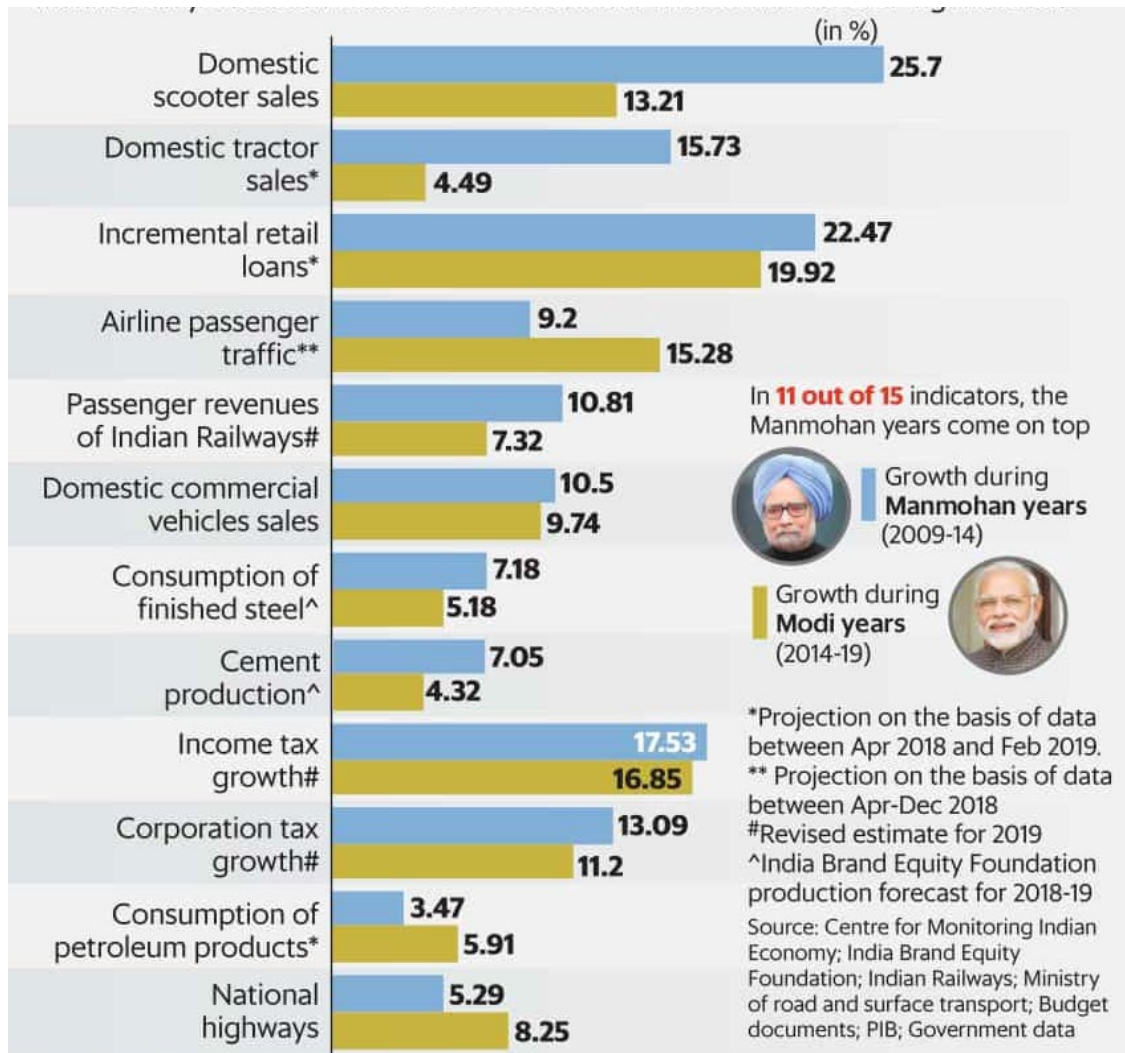


Figure 11. Modi vs. Manmohan—Comparison of Economic Indicators¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Vivek Kaul, “Manmohan Singh vs. Narendra Modi: The Real India Growth Story,” Mint, April 12, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/manmohan-singh-vs-narendra-modi-the-real-india-gdp-growth-story-1555034270688.html>.

Modi's economic miracle, which failed to materialize, left him in need of some equally or more attractive narrative to enable him to maintain his grip on power; taking refuge in the sentiment of right-wing Hindu extremism appeared to be a viable option.¹⁷⁵ Benign measures inspired by Hindutva failed to inspire Hindu extremists, but managed to poison the domestic Indian environment along religious and ethnic lines as violence against Muslims, Christians, and scheduled castes (subcommunities of the Hindu caste system historically facing deprivation, oppression, and social isolation in India, also known as 'Dalits') witnessed an unchecked increase.¹⁷⁶ Table 3 shows a consistent rise in violence in India on account of cow-related practices and beliefs.

Table 3. Cow Vigilante Violence in India, 2012–2018¹⁷⁷

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Incidents	1	2	3	13	30	43	31
Victims (persons)	2	0	11	49	67	108	57
Deaths	0	0	0	11	9	13	13

Poor governance, rising inflation, and a high unemployment rate were reflected in results of the 2018 elections in a few key Indian states,¹⁷⁸ which prompted Modi and the BJP to switch gears and focus on popular nationalist sentiment to win the 2019 general elections in India. The Pulwama incident in January 2019 afforded the perfect opportunity for Modi to garner public support by igniting a spirit of nationalism with the help of Indian

¹⁷⁵ Aatish Taseer, "Can the World's Largest Democracy Endure Another Five Years of a Modi Government?," *Time*, May 9, 2019, <https://time.com/5586415/india-election-narendra-modi-2019/>.

¹⁷⁶ Aatish, "Can the World's Largest Democracy Endure Another Five Years of a Modi Government?"

¹⁷⁷ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi's India*, 208.

¹⁷⁸ Sanjeev Miglani and Krishna N. Das, "India's Modi Suffers Biggest State Election Loss, Boosting Opposition," Reuters, December 10, 2018, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-election-idUSKBN1O92H3>.

media.¹⁷⁹ Thriving on rising sentiments, Modi and the BJP built right-wing Hindu nationalism hype in electoral rallies and propagated the narrative that “*If you are with Modi, you are with India; if you are not with Modi, then you are strengthening anti-India forces.*”¹⁸⁰ Riding on the popular Hindu nationalist wave, the Modi-led BJP and its allies managed to win a thumping majority in the 2019 general elections.

B. INDIA AFTER THE 2019 RE-ELECTION OF MODI

Kanchan Chandra, a professor of politics at the State University of New York, has written about India’s 2019 general elections, asserting that Indians voted not to elect a government alone; they voted for the birth of India as a Hindu nation with a state to match.¹⁸¹ The events following the 2019 re-election of the BJP has vindicated Professor Chandra’s assessment as the Modi government has opted to pursue the agenda of “Hindushtan” advocated by Golwalkar in his 1939 book, and life for minorities is being made exceedingly difficult with each passing day.¹⁸² Hindutva ideology is now openly targeting the secular face of India under the state’s patronage and with the help of state institutions.¹⁸³ Arundhati Roy believes that the Modi government and the RSS do not want India to be a secular state.¹⁸⁴ The events mentioned in succeeding paragraphs can help in understanding the Modi government’s mindset that is leading towards the polarization of Indian society.

¹⁷⁹ Jahani Mohan, “Media Bias and Democracy in India,” *Stimson Center* (blog), June 28, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/media-bias-and-democracy-in-india/>.

¹⁸⁰ Jaffrelot and Schoch, *Modi’s India*, 10.

¹⁸¹ Chandra, “The Roots of Hindu Nationalism’s Triumph in India.”

¹⁸² Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 115.

¹⁸³ The Wire, “Hindu Nationalism Could Breakup India but Ultimately People Will Resist Modi’s Fascism—Arundhati Roy,” February 12, 2022, video, 53:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACxkPzV6fLY>.

¹⁸⁴ The Wire.

1. Revocation of the Special Status of Kashmir

The Indian parliament stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special autonomous status by revoking articles 35A and 370 of Indian constitution on August 5, 2019.¹⁸⁵ This fulfillment of this campaign promise was the long-cherished desire of Hindu nationalists. The declaration of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as Ladakh, as union territories not only added to the discontent of the public but was followed by a long virtual siege of the region and disrupted access in the region to basic needs (communication and travel bans) against globally established human rights norms on education, standard of living, and social security.¹⁸⁶ Despite upheaval in the region and United Nations Security Council resolutions, the Indian government continues its efforts of demographic re-engineering in Jammu and Kashmir by establishing Sainik (soldiers) colonies and through the issuance of over 250,000 domiciles of Kashmir to non-locals.¹⁸⁷ The issue has emerged as a threat to regional peace as it has escalated hostilities between Pakistan and India, as well as between China and India.

2. Citizenship Amendment Act

The controversial amendment to 1951 Citizenship Act, known as the CAA, was meant to supplement the National Register of the Citizens (NRC). The act passed in December 2019, particularly targeted the Muslim minorities in Assam. Left out of the NRC were 1.9 million people, mostly Muslims, who feared deportation.¹⁸⁸ The CAA not only challenged the citizenship of Muslims but also made it difficult for them to complete the

¹⁸⁵ Hijab Shah and Melissa Dalton, "Indian Revocation of Kashmir's Special Status," Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 12, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indian-revocation-kashmirs-special-status>.

¹⁸⁶ Robina Khan, Muhammad Zubair Khan, and Zafar Abbas, "Moving Towards Human Catastrophe: The Abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir Valley," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 41, no. 1 (2021): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2021.1894387>.

¹⁸⁷ Umair Gul, "India's Efforts to Change Demography of Jammu & Kashmir and Its Implications," Foreign Services Academy, Islamabad, Pakistan, October 2016, 9–10, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.13035.08484>.

¹⁸⁸ Siddhartha Deb, "'They Are Manufacturing Foreigners': How India Disenfranchises Muslims," *The New York Times*, September 15, 2021, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/15/magazine/india-assam-muslims.html>.

legal formalities required for Indian citizenship. The act was termed as discriminatory against religious minorities in India by Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and USCIRF.¹⁸⁹ While explaining the Act, Ritu Sharma, an Indian journalist wrote:

If ever in the post-independence history of India its secular character was under the threat of obliteration, it is now. The Citizenship Amendment Bill, the latest but not the last episode in the “politics of belonging” in India, has Muslims in its crosshairs. Any other explanation given by the ruling dispensation is malarkey.¹⁹⁰

The CAA resulted in widespread violent protests affecting 36 districts across the country including New Delhi, Hyderabad, and Varanasi; hundreds of people sustained injuries, while 30 people lost their lives during the protests.¹⁹¹

3. Delhi Riots of 2020

A continued sit-in and prolonged protest by Muslims against the CAA and Indian state high handedness ultimately triggered riots in New Delhi on February 23, 2020.¹⁹² A majority (nearly two thirds) of the 53 dead were Muslims who were brutally murdered and burned later.¹⁹³ Muslim properties, including four mosques, were vandalized and burnt.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Narender Nagarwal, “The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019: An Insight through Constitutional and Secularism Perspective,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, December 6, 2021, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096211058883>.

¹⁹⁰ Ritu Sharma, “The Citizenship Amendment Bill and the ‘Theocratization’ of India,” *The Diplomat*, December 18, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/the-citizenship-amendment-bill-and-the-theocratization-of-india/>.

¹⁹¹ Katharina Buchholz, “Citizenship Amendment Act: Where CAA Protests Turned Violent in India,” Statista, January 13, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/20473/states-with-the-highest-number-of-districts-recording-violent-incidents-police-action-deaths-during-caa-protests/>.

¹⁹² Hannah Ellis-Peterson and Shaikh Azizur Rahman, “Delhi’s Muslims Despair of Justice After Police Implicated in Riots,” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/delhis-muslims-despair-justice-police-implicated-hindu-riots>.

¹⁹³ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “Inside Delhi: Beaten, Lynched and Burnt Alive,” *The Guardian*, March 1, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/01/india-delhi-after-hindu-mob-riot-religious-hatred-nationalists>.

¹⁹⁴ Sameer Yasir, Suhasini Raj, and Atul Loke, “Indian Police Sweep through Riot Zone, Making More Arrests,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/28/world/asia/india-new-delhi-violence.html>.

Inexplicably, the state machinery was nowhere to be seen during all this violence and vandalism.¹⁹⁵ The environment of fear was such that even lawyers refused to plead the cases of riot victims in the courts of law.¹⁹⁶ The Indian crackdown on Jamia Millia and the Delhi Riots were not only a demonstration of growing Hindu extremism but a big question mark on the secular face of India.

4. COVID-19 and Indian Muslims

The extremist mindset of the Indian government did not spare Muslims during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hindutva-inspired Indian politicians and community blamed and marginalized Muslims for being super spreaders of the coronavirus, citing a Muslim religious event held in mid-March 2020 in New Delhi as major reason for the spread of COVID-19 and referring to it as ‘Corona Jihad.’¹⁹⁷ Extremist elements used the opportunity to target Muslims’ properties, businesses, and lives as Muslims faced the wrath of the state during these testing times.¹⁹⁸

5. Christians in India

The 31 million Christians (2.3 percent of the total population), who form the second largest religious minority in India after Muslims, were equally impacted by the ‘India for Hindus’ mindset like all other minorities. A steady rise in violence against Christians has been reported since 2014; the number of such incidents rose to 486 in 2021 from the 127

¹⁹⁵ Maria Abi-Habib, “Violence in India Threatens Its Global Ambitions,” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/05/world/asia/india-violence-diplomacy.html>.

¹⁹⁶ Joe Wallen, “Lawyers Representing Delhi Riot Victims ‘Attacked by Police,’” *The Telegraph*, March 13, 2020, sec. News, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/13/lawyers-representing-delhi-riot-victims-attacked-police/>.

¹⁹⁷ Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shaikh Azizur Rahman, “Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Targeting Muslims Spread in India,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/13/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-targeting-muslims-spread-in-india>.

¹⁹⁸ Joanna Slater and Niha Masih, “As the World Looks for Coronavirus Scapegoats, Muslims Are Blamed in India,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-world-looks-for-coronavirus-scapegoats-india-pins-blame-on-muslims/2020/04/22/3cb43430-7f3f-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html.

in 2014.¹⁹⁹ Approximately 70 percent of the Indian Christian population comprises Dalits, who are an easy target as a scheduled caste, and right-wing Hindu extremists blame them and other Christians for practicing a “foreign faith” that was bringing bad luck to their communities and the country.²⁰⁰

C. INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS

India under Modi has disregarded ‘Gujarat Doctrine’ and maintains an aggressive stance in the region. The ultra-nationalist mindset of the Indian government has started impacting relations with its neighbors, which traditionally remained under India’s clout.

1. Indo-Nepal Relations

Nepal, a small Hindu state in India’s North, signed a Treaty of Friendship and Peace with India in 1950. The 83,000-megawatt hydropower potential of Nepal has the promise to turn around the economic fortunes of not only Nepal but also the region, but India continues to hamper mega projects like the Upper Karnali hydropower project and Saptakoshi high dam multipurpose project to force Nepal to sign contracts on Indian terms and conditions.²⁰¹ In November 2019, the Indian Home Ministry issued a new political map of India that showed the disputed Kalpani region as part of India.²⁰² While Nepal protested diplomatically and sought a political solution to the issue, India took a step further and unilaterally built an 80-kilometer-long road connecting India and China at Lipulekh

¹⁹⁹ Bijay Kumar Minj, “India Sees ‘Record Level of Violence against Christians,’” UCA News, January 3, 2022, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/india-sees-record-level-of-violence-against-christians/95567>.

²⁰⁰ M. Sudhir Selvaraj, “Violence against Christians in India: A Decade after Kandhamal,” *The Diplomat*, August 22, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/violence-against-christians-in-india-a-decade-after-kandhamal/>.

²⁰¹ Promod Tandan, “Challenging Hydro-Hegemony of India: Resistance of Nepal in the Upper Karnali and Saptakoshi Dam Project,” *Sustainable Water Resources Management* 7, no. 6 (October 31, 2021): 106, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40899-021-00580-2>.

²⁰² Sohini Nayak, “India and Nepal’s Kalapani Border Dispute: An Explainer,” Observer Research Foundation, April 29, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-and-nepals-kalapani-border-dispute-an-explainer-65354/>.

Pass, a disputed border region between India and Nepal.²⁰³ The events reflect India's disregard for sovereignty of small neighboring states and its high handedness to bulldoze international treaties.

2. India-Pakistan Relations

The unilateral Indian action of August 5, 2019, to revoke the special status of Kashmir and Ladakh, significantly contributed to hostility between India and Pakistan. The tense situation along the Line of Control between India and Pakistan remains a threat to regional peace and stability.

3. India-China and South Asia Relations

China expressed "serious concerns" over Indian actions of August 5, 2019, and decried them as an act that challenged the sovereignty of China through the inclusion of Chinese claimed land in Indian union territories.²⁰⁴ The resultant tensions led to Indo-China border skirmishes in Galwan valley in August 2020 and was assessed as a collapse of the "entire architecture of border and military agreements between India and China."²⁰⁵ The continued border tensions between the two nuclear neighbors remain a threat to regional peace and stability.

China is aggressively using its economic leverage to dominate the South Asian region.²⁰⁶ Huge infrastructure investments by China are rapidly eroding Indian influence in the countries that historically remained under Indian influence. Countries such as Sri

²⁰³ Constantino Xavier, "Interpreting the India-Nepal Border Dispute," *Brookings* (blog), June 11, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>.

²⁰⁴ Vivek Kumar Mishra, "The Abrogation of Article 370: International Reactions," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 33, no. 1/2 (2020): 122, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27003440>.

²⁰⁵ Tong Zhao and Toby Dalton, "At a Crossroads? China-India Nuclear Relations After the Border Clash," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 19, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/08/19/at-crossroads-china-india-nuclear-relations-after-border-clash-pub-82489>.

²⁰⁶ Deep Pal, "China's Influence in South Asia: Vulnerabilities and Resilience in Four Countries," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 13, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/13/china-s-influence-in-south-asia-vulnerabilities-and-resilience-in-four-countries-pub-85552>.

Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the Maldives see China from an economic perspective as well as a hedge against Indian efforts to dominate the region.²⁰⁷

4. Polarized India and the World

India has been attracting the world's attention for the wrong reasons in the recent past. USCIRF, in its 2018 annual report, observed and reported a consistent downward trend in religious freedom in India against historically secular values of the country as right-wing Hindu extremists attempted to "saffronize" India through coercion and intimidation of Indian minorities and Dalits.²⁰⁸ USCIRF's annual reports for 2018 and 2019 placed India in its tier 2 list of "countries of particular concern (CPC)" due to continued and systematic violence against minorities.²⁰⁹ The commission's 2020 annual report was even harsher than the previous two reports as it noted a drastic increase in violence against minorities, particularly Muslims, and pointed out the BJP government's patronage of extremist elements.²¹⁰ The CAA and NRC were particularly mentioned as corrective tools for the Hindu majority that caused major unrest in the country, and owing to such concerns, the report recommended the U.S. Department of State designate India as a CPC.²¹¹ Violence against minorities, particularly Muslims, is picking up pace with every passing day in India as right-wing Hindu extremists continue to advocate their version of 'Hindu Rashtra,' in which India is free of all minorities without any fear of impunity. A

²⁰⁷ "China's Influence on Conflict Dynamics in South Asia," Senior Study Group Report (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, December 16, 2020), 39–40, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/12/chinas-influence-conflict-dynamics-south-asia>.

²⁰⁸ USCIRF, *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF, April 2018), 162, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRFannual2018_tagged508.pdf.

²⁰⁹ USCIRF, 162; USCIRF, *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2019 Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF, April 2019), https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_INDIA_2019.pdf.

²¹⁰ USCIRF, *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2020 Annual Report*, (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF, April 2020), 20.

²¹¹ USCIRF, 20.

recent three-day long summit of such elements openly threatening to kill minorities indicates the state's silent patronage.²¹²

The largest democracy in the world is also witnessing a rapid decline in its democratic norms and practices due to a host of non-democratic practices, such as suppression of the media and difference of opinion. India now ranks 53rd in the democracy index and has been termed a 'flawed democracy' and 'electoral autocracy' by various global organizations.²¹³

D. KEY TAKEAWAY

Emboldened extremist elements in the Modi's India are leading the country toward religious and communal polarization. Balkanization of India is feared due to the sustained continuation of such policies.²¹⁴ On the external front, Indian policies are leading to a state of uneasy peace along India's borders with most of its neighbors. Border skirmishes with China and continued tensions along the Line of Control between India and Pakistan carry the potential to spark a conflict that will destabilize the region. The United States led liberal democratic world desires India to focus on its role of net security provider and counterbalance to China instead of getting embroiled in less significant domestic and regional issues. Nevertheless, India under Modi continues to move in a direction that has the potential to destabilize the region and draw India away from its role in the new GPC.

²¹² Vikram Singh, "Haridwar Hindu Meet: Police Inaction Is a Recipe for Disaster," *The Quint*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/haridwar-hindu-meet-police-inaction-is-a-recipe-for-disaster>.

²¹³ Biswas, "'Electoral Autocracy.'"

²¹⁴ *The Wire*, "Hindu Nationalism Could Breakup India but Ultimately People Will Resist Modi's Fascism—Arundhati Roy."

V. THE NEW GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND MODI'S INDIA

China, with its rapid economic rise and coercive economic, diplomatic, and military policies around the globe in general and in the Indo-Pacific in particular, has challenged regional peace and stability as well as the United States led liberal democratic order.²¹⁵ The emerging challenge prompted the United States to look beyond its traditional partners in the region and forge new alliances with countries willing to serve as a counterbalance to China—to help offset its growing influence.²¹⁶ India, the largest democracy in the world, with its vast economic and military potential and geo-strategic location in the Indian Ocean region, emerged as a viable choice and partner for the United States.²¹⁷ With rapid economic development during the 1990s and in the first decade of the new millennium, India was well on course to emerge as a potential challenger to growing Chinese influence in the region. Yet, the incumbent Indian government under Modi is leading India toward polarization, democratic backsliding, and economic stagnation, as studied in the previous chapter, against the values that contributed significantly toward India's rise.

This chapter examines the United States – India convergences and divergences to answer the question as to whether right-wing Hindu extremist policies of the incumbent Indian government have the potential to impact Indo-U.S. strategic convergences, particularly in terms of India's role in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions to counterbalance China. Although India continues to strike a balance between its alliance with the United States and the mantra of strategic autonomy and has disregarded U.S. concerns about arms deals with Russia, will the United States continue to disregard India's democratic backsliding, subjugation of minorities, and human rights violations for its strategic interests against the core values of liberal democratic order?

²¹⁵ S. Paul Kapur, "Biden Must Build on Trump's Partnership with India," *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, October 24, 2021), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/biden-must-build-trumps-partnership-india-195254>.

²¹⁶ Kapur.

²¹⁷ Kapur.

A. INDIA AND THE GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Most importantly, we must concentrate our efforts on bettering our own affairs, continually broadening our comprehensive national power, improving the lives of our people, building a socialism that is superior to capitalism, and laying the foundation for a future where we will win the initiative and have the dominant position.

—Xi Jinping, January 5, 2013²¹⁸

Xi Jinping's public admission of a Chinese dream to emerge as a dominant power indicated the seriousness of the challenge that it posed to the United States and the liberal democratic world. The challenge of an emerging China called for the United States to re-evaluate its alliance system and forge new alliances to safeguard and strengthen open, free, fair, and rule-based order.²¹⁹ A democratic India afforded the United States an ally which has the potential to maintain a check on China.²²⁰

1. U.S. – India Convergences

Historically, the United States continued to maintain good working relations with India besides the two sanction regimes following its nuclear explosions in 1974 and 1998.²²¹ The United States rendered economic, diplomatic, and technological assistance to India, but both countries lacked strategic relations, mainly due to Indian skepticism over the U.S. relations with Pakistan and China.

a. China Challenge and Shared Values

Upon realization of the challenge posed by an emerging China, Condoleezza Rice opined in 2000 that although India is not a great power, it has all the potential to be the

²¹⁸ Tanner Greer, "Xi Jinping in Translation: China's Guiding Ideology," *Palladium* (blog), May 31, 2019, <https://palladiummag.com/2019/05/31/xi-jinping-in-translation-chinas-guiding-ideology/>.

²¹⁹ United States Department of State, Policy Planning Staff, "The Elements of the China Challenge" (Washington, D.C. : Office of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State, 2020), 2.

²²⁰ Saifurrahman Malik, *India's Relations with Neighbours: Cooperations or Confrontation?*, 1st ed. (Islamabad, Pakistan: India Study Centre Institute of Strategic Studies, 2021), 72.

²²¹ "A Timeline of U.S.-India Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-india-relations>.

one, and the United States should be looking at India through a China prism instead of a Pakistan one.²²² The realization of India's potential and the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States brought both countries closer, and India emerged as a key ally for the United States and the West to counter growing Chinese influence in the region.²²³ Shared democratic values, the pluralistic outlook of Indian society, and a burgeoning economy made the United States believe in India's power potential to act as a counterbalance to China in the region, and successive U.S. administrations continued to strengthen strategic relations with India.²²⁴ The 123 Nuclear Deal and Indo-U.S. strategic partnerships were aimed at boosting India's capabilities to protect and advance the liberal democratic order.²²⁵

b. Rebalancing Strategy and the Indo-Pacific Region

Successive U.S. administrations continued to advance a rebalancing strategy in the region by strengthening India in the economic, military, and diplomatic domains.²²⁶ However, in order to maintain peace and stability, the United States preferred cooperation over competition with China and believed China to be a "responsible stakeholder" in the prevailing global system.²²⁷ President Trump's administration changed gears from cooperation to competition and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy started shaping the environment to check growing Chinese influence.²²⁸ Subsequently, emergence of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and the reinvigoration of Quadrilateral Security Group (QUAD)

²²² Menon, *Choices*, 38.

²²³ Menon.

²²⁴ Jarrod Hayes, *Constructing National Security: U.S. Relations with India and China* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 159, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²²⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, "A Timeline of U.S.-India Relations."

²²⁶ Danah Ali Alenezi, "U.S. Rebalance Strategy to Asia and US-China Rivalry in South China Sea from the Perspective of the Offensive Realism," *Review of Economics and Political Science* (forthcoming), (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1108/REPS-10-2019-0132>.

²²⁷ Aaron Friedberg, "Getting the China Challenge Right," *The American Interest* (blog), January 10, 2019, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/01/10/getting-the-china-challenge-right/>.

²²⁸ Hayes, *Constructing National Security*, 178.

comprising the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, pointed toward the strategic significance of India in U.S. policy-making circles. The political leadership of the United States and India opined that the closer ties would serve the interests of both countries seeking peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.²²⁹ The U.S. Secretary of State at that time, Rex Tillerson, defined the Indo-Pacific region as “the entire Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and the nations that surround them.”²³⁰

c. *Shared National Interests*

The emergence of China as an influential power in Asia and a challenger to global order conflicted with vital national interests of the United States and India. The United States remains a critical stabilizing force to maintain the status quo in the region and around the globe with its diplomatic, political, economic, and military power projection.²³¹ A strong and influential United States is significant for India’s regional and global ambitions. At the same time, India emerges as a key player to safeguard U.S. strategic interests of preventing the rise of a hostile hegemon in Indo-Pacific region.²³² Hence, close collaboration between India and the United States serves the national interests of both states to maintain a balance of power in Asia and for international peace and stability.²³³

d. *The Nuclear Deal*

The nuclear issue formed a major source of concern in the U.S.-India relations in the past; hence, the 2005 nuclear deal served as a major breakthrough in developing

²²⁹ Madan, *Fateful Triangle*, 1.

²³⁰ “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, October 18, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>.

²³¹ Council on Foreign Relations and Aspen Institute India, *United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future* (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), 7, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3137467>.

²³² Council on Foreign Relations and Aspen Institute India, *United States and India*, 7.

²³³ Madan, *Fateful Triangle*, 1.

strategic relations between both states.²³⁴ The nuclear deal ultimately paved the way for closer strategic ties to strengthen India's position for a bigger role in the region as revealed in the declassified documents of the U.S. Indo-Pacific framework, which asserted India's role as a key partner in security issues in the Indo-Pacific region and Indian Ocean.²³⁵

e. Free and Open Oceans

A free and open Indian Ocean and South China Sea are not only vital for the United States and India but also for the entire world as it is the most important sea line of communication (SLOC) that counts for almost two thirds of the global trade, including energy.²³⁶ Freedom of navigation in these seas is significant for all countries, and the United States remains committed to maintaining freedom of navigation in the high seas around the globe. The commitment is more significant for India on account of the volume of its sea-based trade as well as for the energy imports.²³⁷ While being wary of the emerging Chinese threat, particularly in the Indian Ocean, India continues to augment its military capabilities through strategic agreements with the United States like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).²³⁸ Similarly, Indian plans to upgrade and modernize its naval assets are aimed at strengthening Indian military capabilities, not only to assist allies in maintaining freedom of navigation but also to pose an effective challenge to Chinese ambitions, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region.²³⁹

²³⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 34.

²³⁵ Mohamed Zeeshan, "India and the US: Ideological Convergence No More?" *The Diplomat*, January 18, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/india-and-the-us-ideological-convergence-no-more/>.

²³⁶ Gregory F. Gresh, *To Rule Eurasia's Waves: The New Great Power Competition at Sea* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 3–4.

²³⁷ Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 205–207.

²³⁸ Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India," *United States Department of State* (blog), January 20, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>.

²³⁹ Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, 3–5.

f. Military Collaborations

Strong and capable U.S. and Indian militaries serve the national interests of both states, and the United States continues to augment Indian military capabilities to enable it to act as a net security provider in the region.²⁴⁰ The defense cooperation has increased significantly in the last two decades, which reflects not only the U.S. priorities to augment military capabilities of its strategic partner but also for a bigger share of India's weapons import bill. The United States sale of weapons to India has witnessed a sharp increase, surpassing \$20 billion by the year 2020.²⁴¹ The U.S.-India defense cooperation also caters for production and export licenses for India, not only to strengthen India militarily but also to boost its economy through weapons exports in the future. Joint exercises and military drills between the United States and India in land, sea, and air domains have also picked up at a considerable pace and are an important facet of military diplomacy between both states. All these developments are aimed at enhancing U.S.-India military interoperability and building Indian military capabilities to protect economic and security interests in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions.²⁴²

2. Potential friction in India–U.S. Relations

The Hindutva dominated policies of Prime Minister Modi's government are leading to a polarized India, which is also witnessing economic reverses. Both these aspects coupled with India's strategic autonomy mantra have the potential to challenge Indo-U.S. strategic convergences.

a. Economic Reversals

Economic growth remained at the heart of India's rise as a regional power, and Modi exploited the slowing economy under the INC government during his electoral campaign for 2014 elections under the slogan of "*Subka Saath, Subka Vikas* (collective

²⁴⁰ Menon, *Choices*, 36–37.

²⁴¹ Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India."

²⁴² Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

effort, inclusive growth).”²⁴³ However, after a slight positivity in first few years under Modi, the Indian economy witnessed a consistent decline in growth rate (Figures 10 and 11), and India was among the countries with highest economic contraction for the year 2020.²⁴⁴ The prolonged sluggish or negative economic growth can potentially challenge Indian aspirations and capabilities. The growing inflation rate coupled with declining GDP growth (Figure 12) carry the potential to be counterproductive for India’s regional and global ambitions, and for its status as a potential challenger to China. This proposition may not augur well with the United States’ interests in the region and may potentially strain an already under pressure economy of the United States to stabilize the Indian economy to achieve strategic objectives, if the situation so arises.

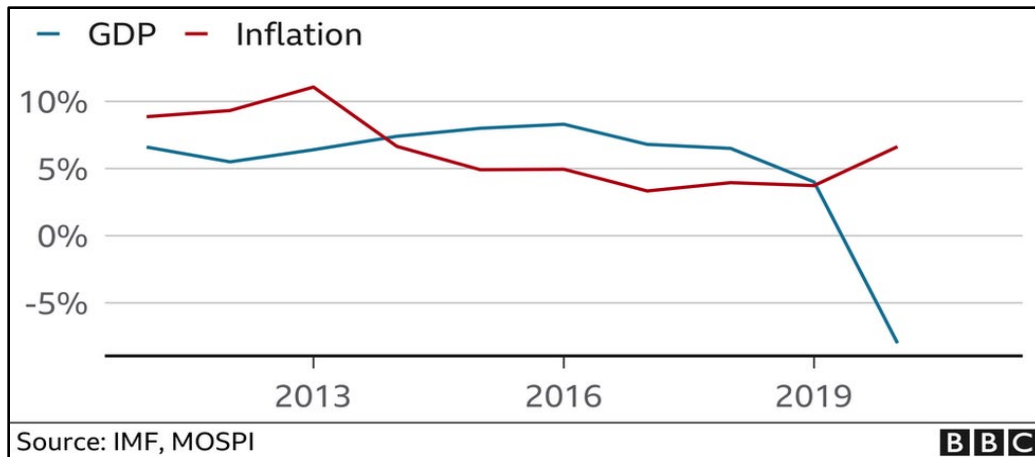


Figure 12. GDP Growth and Inflation in India, 2011–2020²⁴⁵

b. *Human Rights Violations in India and the Rule-Based Liberal Democratic World*

The human rights watchdogs have expressed concerns about escalating human rights violations in India, particularly against minorities, which contradicts the United

²⁴³ Bharatiya Janata Party, *BJP Election Manifesto 2014*.

²⁴⁴ “India GDP Growth Rate 1961–2021.”

²⁴⁵ Inamdar and Alluri, “India Economy.”

States stance of a liberal democratic world, valuing freedom and human rights. USCIRF declared India as a country of particular concern in regard to religious freedom abuses, and the U.N. Human Rights Council called for an international inquiry into human rights violations by India.²⁴⁶ The U.S. Secretary of Defense raised the human rights issue in his meetings with Indian ministers during his March 2021 visit to India.²⁴⁷ Most recently, President Joseph R. Biden, during the September 2021 summit with Modi at the White House, mentioned the importance of Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence, respect, and tolerance.²⁴⁸ Although the United States administration ruled out any immediate action against India for its blemished human rights record, the raising of the matter at the highest bilateral forums expresses U.S. concerns about such abuses in India.²⁴⁹ If the trend continues unchecked for a prolonged period, it may lead to domestic as well as international pressure on the United States administration to adhere to its advocacy of rule-based global order.

c. India's Strategic Autonomy Mantra

The U.S.-India strategic partnership lacks convergence in all defense and security related matters, and India apparently advocates for a strategic autonomy and selective partnership with the United States.²⁵⁰ The Indian strategic community, however, remains

²⁴⁶ "UN Rights Chief Calls for International Inquiry into Kashmir Violations," UN News, June 14, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/06/1012172>.

²⁴⁷ Press Trust of India, "Human Rights of Minorities Discussed with Indian Ministers: U.S. Defence Secy," *Business Standard India*, March 20, 2021, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/human-rights-of-minorities-discussed-with-indian-ministers-us-defence-secy-121032000891_1.html.

²⁴⁸ Oval Office, "Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Modi of the Republic of India Before Bilateral Meeting," The White House, September 24, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/09/24/remarks-by-president-biden-and-prime-minister-modi-of-the-republic-of-india-before-bilateral-meeting/>.

²⁴⁹ Sunita Viswanath, Peter Cook, and Rasheed Ahmed, "The Biden Administration Is Enabling India's Human Rights Abuses," *Aljazeera*, December 5, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/12/5/the-biden-administration-is-enabling-indias-human-rights-abuses>.

²⁵⁰ Guillem Monsonis, "India's Strategic Autonomy Dilemma and the Rapprochement with the United States," *Manohar Parikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis*, March 20, 2009, https://idsa.in/event/IndiavsUS_gmonsonis_200309.

wary of the United States influence on India's relations with other countries such as Iran and Russia. India's disregard for the U.S. concerns in the purchase of a Russian S-400 Air Defense system indicates India's preference for strategic options. Similarly, the United States decision of unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan without safeguarding Indian interests was not well received by India.²⁵¹ While India continues to face the challenge of growing Chinese influence in the region, it remains cautious in its engagement with the United States as regards the new GPC and India's aspirations to become a major player.²⁵² The recent abstention of India from UNSC and UNHRC Ukraine related votes indicate India's preference of maintaining a balance between friend (Russia) and strategic partner (United States).²⁵³ The continued mantra of strategic autonomy has the potential to cause U.S. and Indian strategic choices to diverge at some point.

d. Peaceful Periphery and Indian Dominance

The United States is looking toward an India that dominates regional and peripheral countries to ward off Chinese hegemonic designs in the region. In contrast, the Modi government policies toward smaller neighbor countries are marked by coercion instead of cooperation (as exemplified in the case of Nepal, discussed in the previous chapter), which can potentially drag India away from the strategic objectives as regards to the GPC and may irritate the United States.

B. CONCLUSIONS

Indian economic, diplomatic, and security policies have witnessed changes throughout its history since independence. The study of the Indian journey from

²⁵¹ Rudra Chaudhuri and Shreyas Shende, "Dealing with the Taliban: India's Strategy in Afghanistan after U.S. Withdrawal," Carnegie India, June 2, 2020, <https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/02/dealing-with-taliban-india-s-strategy-in-afghanistan-after-u.s.-withdrawal-pub-81951>.

²⁵² Monsonis, "India's Strategic Autonomy Dilemma."

²⁵³ "After UNSC, India Abstains from Ukraine-Related Vote in UNHRC," The Wire, February 28, 2022, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-ukraine-russia-unhrc-vote-abstain>.

“Nehruvianism” to “Liberalism,” from secularism to polarization, and switching between Indra and Gujral Doctrines leads the thesis to following conclusions.

1. Shining India

Chapter II concludes that the shift from Nehruvianism to Liberalism significantly impacted India’s dream of being a state of regional and global stature. At the same time, a secular and pluralist society remained a core that significantly contributed to emergence of “Shining India.”

2. Hindu Extremism and the World

Chapter III leads to a conclusion that right-wing Hindu extremists have continued to challenge secular India under their agenda of a Hindu Rashtra. Despite episodes of communal violence, the state and the society resisted their agenda. Chapter IV highlights the silent support of the Modi government that has emboldened extremist elements, and Indian pluralism is fast eroding, contradicting the values of the liberal democratic world. USCIRF and various human rights organizations have started highlighting the high handedness of the Indian state against its minorities.

3. China Challenge

The challenge posed by a rising China to the liberal democratic world afforded India an opportunity to be a flag bearer of the rule-based world order under the United States against Chinese hegemonic designs in the region and around the globe. The Indo-U.S. strategic alliance significantly contributed to enhancing India’s stature in the liberal world. Liberalism coupled with Gujral doctrine remained at the core of Indian policy making from late 1990s onward.

4. India and the Eroding Peaceful Periphery

Policies of the incumbent Indian government under Prime Minister Modi are leading India to confrontations with its neighbors. The peaceful periphery of influence is being replaced by confrontation; Indo-Nepal relations, as discussed in Chapter IV, are a case in point.

5. India, the Great Power Competition, and the Region

Internal polarization, a declining economy, and a state of uneasy peace with its neighbors carry the potential to drive India away from the larger canvas of its role in GPC. Indian embroilment in self-created internal and external crises, coupled with its strategic autonomy mantra, at odds with the United States policies in the region, not only pose a challenge for the GPC but also threaten the regional peace and stability.

6. India and Challenges for the United States

The United States, as flag bearer of the liberal democratic order, has always voiced for upholding democratic order, representative governments, universal freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.²⁵⁴ Upholding these core values of liberal democratic order are essential to effectively meet the China challenge.²⁵⁵ The incumbent Indian government continues to challenge most of these values of the liberal democratic world. Apparently, strategic necessity is likely to prevail for the foreseeable future as the United States may continue to ignore these trends; however, prolonged continuation of Indian extremist policies carries the potential to impact this relationship.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study has focused on the possible impact of right-wing Hindu extremist policies in India domestically and in the region, as well as on its role in GPC. The United States remains a key stakeholder in the region, and policies of the incumbent Indian government are at odds with the rule-based liberal democratic order advocated by the United States. Historically, the United States has preferred realpolitik over realism and liberal democratic practices as per the dictates of its national interests (as evidenced by U.S. support to the authoritarian regimes of Saudi Arabia and Egypt aimed at serving U.S.

²⁵⁴ Friedberg, “Getting the China Challenge Right.”

²⁵⁵ United States Department of State, Policy Planning Staff, “The Elements of the China Challenge,” 2.

energy and regional interests).²⁵⁶ Going forward, it will be important to study whether the United States continues to prefer realpolitik for a longer duration, particularly when China may use the same excuse against the liberal democratic order to advance a new world order.

²⁵⁶ Bernd Kaussler and Glenn P. Hastedt, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East: The Realpolitik of Deceit* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315660073>.

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