



Original Article

The Making of New India: Twelve Years of Narendra Modi, Inclusive Development, and Democratic Governance

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Abstract

This paper focuses at how developmental politics in India changed over a period of Narendra Modi's twelve years in office (2014–2026). It examines how governance has placed a greater emphasis on inclusive development, citizen-centric welfare, and state capacity as essential pillars of democratic legitimacy. The paper presents the argument that the vision of "New India" signifies a change toward a development-oriented political framework that integrates economic growth with social inclusion, digital governance, infrastructure expansion, and institutional efficiency by examining significant policy initiatives and governance reforms. It also looks at how this strategy aims to promote access to public goods for a variety of social groups, increase citizen participation, and broaden opportunities. The study places development within larger discussions on nation-building, political legitimacy, and governance rather than viewing it only in terms of economics. It emphasizes how inclusive development politics have emerged as a key characteristic of modern Indian democracy, transforming both governmental procedures and the state-citizen interaction.

Keywords: Narendra Modi; New India; Inclusive Development; Welfare Governance; Development Politics; Viksit Bharat 2047.

Introduction

As of May 26 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to complete twelve years in office, and on 10 June 2026, he will become India's longest-serving continuously elected Prime Minister, surpassing Jawaharlal Nehru's record. However, the number of years in office should not be the only factor taken into account when evaluating the significance of this milestone. Instead, it should be understood through the prism of his leadership in a variety of fields, including his enduring dedication to the "Viksit Bharat" goal, his charismatic grassroots political involvement, and his rise to prominence as a worldwide leader. Many scholars argue that Narendra Modi's governance framework integrates welfare delivery, economic empowerment, infrastructural development, digital innovation, and cultural self-confidence into a larger plan of national transformation in pursuit of the vision of Viksit Bharat. In order to support inclusive development, bolster state capacity, and increase opportunities for citizens across all areas and social groups, this strategy aims to integrate economic growth with social welfare rather than viewing them as conflicting goals (Swaminathan, 2015).

This approach aims to integrate social security with productivity, entrepreneurship, and long-term development rather than seeing welfare and economic progress as conflicting goals. The government has made an effort to lessen regional inequities while increasing access to opportunities through programs focused on financial inclusion, digital governance, infrastructure expansion, and targeted welfare delivery. As a result, Modi's developmental vision is not just a shift in public policy but also a reorganization of the state-citizen relationship with development, where governance is increasingly assessed by results, the delivery of services, and the desire for a more self-sufficient and inclusive New India (Dua et al., 2025). This paper analyses Narendra Modi's political leadership and makes the argument that his capacity to match developmental governance with the goals of common people is a major factor in his continued popularity.

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It examines how his governance model aims to present citizens as active players in India's development process rather than just as passive recipients of state welfare. This notion, which is based on the idea of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas," promotes a more inclusive vision of nation-building by stressing that everyone should benefit from development, regardless of caste, religion, gender, or geography. The paper continues on to state that this approach has helped India's political rhetoric move away from identity-centered mobilization and toward a development-oriented paradigm where citizen empowerment, welfare delivery, and governance have grown to be significant sources of political legitimacy.

The Politics of Inclusive Development: From Independence to the Present

Although its meaning and policy focus have changed dramatically over time, development has been a primary goal of the Indian state since independence. The main tools of nation-building, according to the Nehruvian model of development, were state-led industrialization, centralized planning, and the growth of the public sector. Although this strategy established the institutional framework for the contemporary Indian state, it was also marked by a highly centralized decision-making structure and little citizen involvement in the process of development. As a result, socioeconomic inequalities and barriers to equal opportunity continued to exist across many societal divisions, and the advantages of progress were frequently dispersed unevenly (Singh & Saxena, 2011; Menon, 2021).

The centralization of political power was reinforced even more during the Indira Gandhi era. Even while initiatives like "Garibi Hatao" aimed to combat poverty and social injustice, government became more consolidated, especially during the Emergency (1975–77), which raised significant concerns about institutional autonomy and democratic accountability (Prakash, 2024). Although these developmental strategies aided in state-building and economic modernization, they remained primarily state-centric and failed to fully achieve the more expansive goals of inclusive, participatory, and opportunity-based development, which subsequently became crucial to discussions about governance in India (Ganguly et al., 2007; Prakash, 2024).

The Congress government's 1991 economic reforms significantly changed the character of the Indian state by moving away from a state-led model of development and toward market liberalization, privatization, and more economic integration with the rest of the world. These changes improved India's interaction with international markets, increased private sector participation, and speed up economic growth. However, academics have pointed out that the benefits of liberalization were not uniformly spread, leading to regional inequalities, agricultural hardship, unemployment, the informalization of labour, rural-to-urban migration, and mounting pressure on small and medium-sized businesses. As a result, one of the main issues facing public policy in post-liberalization India is balancing rapid economic growth with social justice and

inclusive development (Rao & Dutt, 2006; Ganguly et al., 2007; Mukherji, 2009; Prakash, 2024).

A growing recognition that not all facets of society had benefited equally from economic liberalization led to the return of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. The Manmohan Singh-led administration adopted the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–2012) with the goal of "Faster and More Inclusive Growth," acknowledging the continued existence of socioeconomic inequality and regional inequities. The plan sought to achieve a balance between social justice and economic growth by increasing funding for welfare, employment, healthcare, and education. The results of inclusive growth continued to be unequal in spite of these efforts. Even though India's economy grew at a comparatively rapid rate throughout this time, issues including unemployment, infrastructure deficiencies, agrarian misery, and regional inequality continued to exist. Furthermore, a series of high-profile corruption allegations and governance controversies generated widespread public discontent, leading to large-scale anti-corruption movements and citizen mobilizations demanding greater transparency and accountability in public life (Venkatesh, 2013; Swaminathan, 2015).

A more decisive model of governance and alternative leadership were demanded as a result of the public's declining trust in long-standing political institutions. Narendra Modi became a well-known national leader in this political setting by outlining a vision focused on administrative responsibility, development, and efficient governance (Kumar, 2025).

Under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) administration made investments in infrastructure, rural connection, telecommunications, and education in addition to economic reforms in an effort to address these new issues. Projects like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), and the Golden Quadrilateral Project demonstrated an attempt to integrate market-oriented reforms with more general developmental goals (Kumar, 2025; Bharatiya Janata Party, 2004). Even while these programs improved India's economic base, the country's development goal was nevertheless shaped by concerns about social inclusion, employment creation, and equitable growth.

Building upon this trajectory, the Narendra Modi government, since 2014, has sought to advance a more integrated model of governance under the broader vision of "New India". This approach seeks to bridge the divide between economic reforms and social welfare by combining technology-driven governance, financial inclusion, digital public infrastructure, and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) with targeted welfare programmes (Goyal, 2022). The government is increasingly framing welfare as a tool of empowerment that increases access to opportunities, builds state capacity, encourages transparency, and makes it possible for citizens to engage more successfully in social and economic development rather than just as a redistribution mechanism. This change is part of a larger effort to rethink inclusive development by associating welfare provision with democratic governance, institutional

effectiveness, and economic empowerment. This paper explores Narendra Modi's twelve years in office and evaluates how his leadership and policies have shaped New India in the following sections. It delves deeper into how welfare delivery, economic reforms, democratic governance, education, and foreign policy contribute to the larger vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 (Balasubramaniam, 2024; Bhandari, n.d.; Goyal, 2022).

Twelve Years of New India: A Cursory Review:

In their paper, "The 'New Welfarism,' Good Governance, and Electoral Success in Modi's India", Shalendra Sharma and Anjali Kanojia argue that the success of Narendra Modi's governance model lies not only in economic growth but also in the effective delivery of public goods and welfare benefits to citizens. They argue that a new kind of welfare politics that prioritizes responsible administration, effective program delivery, and direct interaction with beneficiaries has been responsible for the notable decline in multidimensional poverty since 2014. The authors claim that governance and economic well-being have become more important to Indian voters than traditional identity-based political divisions, especially among women, the impoverished, and the growing middle class. At the heart of this model lies the philosophy of "Antyodaya"¹, which seeks to ensure the welfare of the poorest, the marginalized, the elderly, and those facing social or economic vulnerabilities. Reinterpreted for contemporary India, Antyodaya has informed a range of welfare initiatives aimed at expanding both social protection and economic empowerment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the government provided free food grains to more than 800 million people, reflecting its commitment to protecting vulnerable populations during times of crisis (Sharma & Kanojia, 2024).

In a similar vein, initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have improved financial inclusion and enabled the direct transfer of welfare benefits by bringing millions of previously unbanked residents into the official financial system. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA), the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), the PM Awas Yojana (PMAY), rural electrification programs, and other landmark initiatives have all aimed to raise living standards by increasing access to clean energy, housing, sanitation, and basic infrastructure. In addition to addressing public health issues, the construction of millions of home restrooms under Swachh Bharat improved women's safety and dignity (Sharma & Kanojia, 2024; Dua et al., 2025).

One of the largest public health insurance programs in the world, "Ayushman Bharat," which attempts to shield millions of needy families from catastrophic medical costs, is another example of the government's emphasis on human development. When taken as a whole, these programs demonstrate a change from welfare as simple redistribution to welfare as empowerment, allowing

citizens to engage more successfully in social and economic life (ibid).

The New India vision aims to change the intellectual underpinnings of growth in addition to providing welfare. By encouraging a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and culturally grounded approach to learning and decreasing reliance on colonial frames of knowledge, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a significant attempt to decolonize India's educational system. By emphasizing Indian languages, indigenous knowledge systems, innovation, skill development, and critical thinking, the policy seeks to combine educational reform with nation-building. In this sense, NEP 2020 complements the broader agenda of inclusive development by linking education with empowerment, cultural self-confidence, and the creation of a knowledge-based society (Raj, 2024; Kaibarta & Saha, n.d.).

Jagannath P. Panda makes the argument in his paper "Narendra Modi and His Mode of Governance" that Modi's leadership exemplifies a distinctive type of governance marked by creativity, practicality, and what he terms a "politics of symbolism." Panda claims that Modi's leadership has garnered a lot of attention from the general public and academics. Supporters see him as a transformative leader on par with leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Indira Gandhi, while detractors are still wary of the wider ramifications of his political endeavour. However, Panda argues that Modi stands apart from many of his predecessors because of the fresh dynamism his style of government has brought to both international and domestic affairs (Panda, 2016).

Modi's proactive global perspective and his readiness to take a more assertive stance toward India's regional and international interactions are important aspects of this leadership. Panda emphasizes how Modi has made foreign policy the focal point of government, making India a more self-assured and powerful player in world events. This strategy is especially clear in India's relations with China, where the government has attempted to strike a compromise between the need for greater regional and international influence and strategic pragmatism. Modi's leadership is an attempt to win a more prominent role for India in the changing global order by highlighting India's strategic autonomy and international status. Moreover, many scholars contend that Modi's foreign policy and his vision for India's prosperity are inextricably linked. The convergence of economic diplomacy with national development goals is exemplified by initiatives like Make in India (Panda, 2016; Tremblay & Kapur, 2017).

The government has made an effort to connect local economic transformation with international participation by luring foreign investment, encouraging manufacturing, and fortifying India's place in global supply chains. Efforts to improve regional connectivity and strengthen ties with India's extended neighbourhood through programs like the "Act East" strategy and "Neighbourhood First policy" further demonstrate this internationalist perspective. When taken as a whole, these initiatives show that the New India project goes beyond welfare and internal administration. It includes a more

¹ Shri Deen Dayal Upadhyaya formulated it into a philosophy called "Integral Humanism" which also resulted in a welfare program named Antodaya.

comprehensive vision of national transformation where regional connectedness, diplomatic engagement, economic progress, and global leadership all reinforce one another. In this way, Modi's governance approach aims to establish India as a major force in the twenty-first century in addition to enhancing state capacity and inclusive growth domestically (Panda, 2016; Tremblay & Kapur, 2017).

Modi's Continuing Dream of Viksit Bharat 2047

This paper examines the making of New India during Narendra Modi's twelve years in office, but it contends that this endeavor is but a part of a larger national vision. The goal of Viksit Bharat 2047, which aims to make India a developed, inclusive, self-sufficient, and globally significant nation by the centennial of its independence, is to be achieved by the reforms and developmental projects carried out since 2014. In this way, the creation of New India is a step toward the greater objective of achieving Viksit Bharat 2047 rather than the pinnacle of Modi's vision.

Ensuring that welfare programs reach their intended beneficiaries has been a crucial part of Narendra Modi's vision of inclusive growth and Viksit Bharat 2047. In this regard, the "Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra" became a noteworthy outreach program designed to close the gap between individuals and government policy. The program was established on the understanding that people's awareness of and access to welfare programs is just as important to their success as their design (Ruparelia 2015).

According to Kumar (2024), a lack of knowledge and awareness frequently keeps eligible beneficiaries from taking advantage of government programs, which restricts the achievement of inclusive development. By directly contacting poor and marginalized groups, especially those who eligible for welfare programs but had not yet benefited from them, the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra aim to fulfil such gaps Through the sharing of individual experiences, the effort sought to promote citizen participation, facilitate beneficiary enrolment, and raise awareness of key government programs. The Yatra, which aimed to attain "100 percent saturation" of important social programs, was described by the Press Information Bureau (PIB, 2023) as the biggest outreach initiative carried out by the Indian government. Beyond raising awareness, the program highlighted last-mile delivery, citizen engagement, and accountability, reflecting a larger shift in governance. Success stories from "Meri Kahani, Meri Zubani" demonstrated how people's lives had been enhanced by their access to welfare programs, supporting the government's effort to go beyond the creation of policies to their successful execution. In this regard, the Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra is a significant step in realizing the vision of inclusive development and furthering the more general objective of creating an empowered and developed India by 2047.

Conclusion

A pivotal period in India's post-liberalization political economy, the twelve years of Narendra Modi's leadership (2014–2026) are characterized by both continuity and change in the character of the progressive state. This time frame not only illustrates his solidification as a three-

term prime minister, but it also points to a more profound change in the ideology of governance, where development is more gauged by delivery, visibility, and public experience rather than just policy accomplishments. In this sense, the idea of "New India" emerges as a political project that seeks to redefine the relationship between the state, society, and development.

The endeavour to address long-standing structural disparities by combining welfare expansion, infrastructure development, financial inclusion, and digital governance is at the heart of this revolution. A transition from dispersed welfare delivery to a more integrated, technology-driven governance architecture is seen in programs like Direct Benefit Transfer, Jan Dhan banking inclusion, housing projects, sanitation initiatives, and health insurance interventions. In addition to redefining welfare as empowerment and tying social policy to economic engagement, this has increased governmental capability. Politically, this era also marks a significant reorientation of India's democratic landscape. It is widely interpreted as a departure from the earlier phase of prolonged Congress dominance, moving towards a leadership-centric and performance-oriented model of governance. Modi's political appeal is rooted in his ability to combine developmental governance with mass political communication, symbolic representation, and direct public engagement. As a result, political legitimacy has been reconfigured, becoming more rooted in aspirational politics and governance achievements than in inherited political structures. With comparisons to established economies in terms of scale, infrastructure expansion, and institutional modernization, this period also illustrates India's growing aspiration to establish itself as a more powerful global actor.

This trajectory is further extended by the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, which presents development as a long-term national objective as opposed to a short-term election agenda. But this change is still up for scholarly discussion, especially when it comes to issues of federalism, institutional balance, and the concentration of decision-making power. Critics warn about the dangers of centralization and unequal political representation, while advocates see it as a time of decisive government and faster nation-building. Overall, the twelve years of Modi's rule can be seen as a redefining of the Indian developmental state, where political leadership, market reforms, welfare, and technology come together to create a new grammar of government. According to this developing framework, the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 and the ongoing balancing act between development, democracy, and power have shaped New India, which is more than just a policy consequence.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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