

Review of: "MODI 'Wave'-Leadership Legitimation and Institutionalization in Indian Politics"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The Modi Wave leadership legitimization is a good attempt to unpack the new Indian politics. However, arguments remain simplistic. The wave phenomenon is extremely complex. I highlight some entrypoints that can help to look at multiple nuances.

It needs to be theoretically argued how one determines the institutionalization of political legitimacy. What are the indicators for the same? Can legitimacies gained on waves ever be institutionalized, or will they always be transient? A wave denotes transience. It brings unexpected electoral gains. It worked until the second successful election of Modi. In several state elections after that, we see that it does not work. The BJP remains stable in some states but falls in others and gains new states. The author has evaluated the wave phenomenon only from the perspective of national elections, and hence much remains hidden than said. Even from the perspective of national elections, the 2024 results reveal a much more diverse pattern.

If one keeps the author's wave framework, then the 2024 election result is a reflection of a weakening Modi wave. The charisma of Modi has broken down in a couple of states. The author now needs to explain that as well. In fact, this is an indication that waves can never be institutionalized.

The author conflates the wave with other means that BJP adopted for legitimizing Modi's authority. The selective placing of the agenda is to be discussed in detail. For example, the development and governance agenda keeps coming in and going out in the Modi wave discourse. The media also played a significant role in this.

Again, the core of the Modi wave is its Hindutva politics, and how the electorate responds to it across caste, class, religion, and region over the 10 yrs of his rule needs to be critically looked at. Particularly, how Dalits and other marginal castes respond to the Hindutva hegemony needs to be talked about for a more balanced framing of the argument.

There is a need to further delineate the relationship between legitimacy and wave at the theoretical level.

There is also a need to distinguish between the Modi wave and the Congress wave at different points in time. Waves are highly contextual, and along with the leader, the institutions play a significant role in creating, managing, and extending it. The emotive pull of a wave is extremely short-lived.

The narration of BJP's successful governance model needs to be supplemented by data. Just a reference to approval ratings is not sufficient. Again, there are changes in this state by state, particularly in U.P., where the share of Rahul

Gandhi has gone up and that of Modi has come down, as per the most recent CSDS survey.

And lastly, it would be pertinent to mention that the ideological metamorphosis in the party system of India began with the Ramjanambhoomi Movement itself in the early 1990s. The emergence of the BJP as a national party was the beginning of the same. Yes, Modi's regime saw the spread of this beyond the party and the RSS. The apolitical upper caste/class became a repository of political opinion, and social media played a role in this.

If some of these changes are taken into account, the author can present a much more complex picture of the wave phenomenon that deserves academic attention.