

# Modi's Victory: An Assessment

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## Adam Roberts

Thank you. Nice, brisk opening comments. I'm going to take the privilege of being the chair to ask the first question. Of course I'm going to ask it to Manoj. Given your role as communications director, and given that we had such a peculiar Indian campaign in a sense, it was very much a presidential campaign. Parliamentary democracy, as in Britain, and yet when I travel the country and I travelled to many, many different parts of the country during the campaign, again and again I was struck by how much it was a Modi campaign.

It wasn't a BJP campaign. A lot of ordinary people came out and said they were coming to vote for Modi. Of course Modi wasn't up to be a candidate where they were, but they were coming because they believed in Modi. They had some idea of what the Gujarat model was. They had some sense that he was a strong leader who would be decisive in comparison to what they'd had before.

I think that coincided with some other social changes that we've seen in India – a rising urban class, greater aspiration of young voters, a very large number of young voters who came out in this election, and one or two other significant changes. You mentioned social media, but I think other media, text messages on cell phones, cable TV, more sort of traditional forms of media, potentially more important.

Then on the other side, the utter uselessness of the Congress candidate. Basically, they didn't have anyone to confront Modi.

## Manoj Ladwa

The Economist was backing [indiscernible]...

## Adam Roberts

We can discuss that if you like.

## Manoj Ladwa

Sorry, I had to bring that in.

## Adam Roberts

The point I'm trying to get to is we had a very presidential campaign, which builds up enormous expectations of a presidential style government, the belief that there is a sort of superman who can deliver, as you say, jobs. But the reality of governing India, is that even Indira Gandhi couldn't run it in a presidential style. I wonder if the communication that was such a success in the campaign becomes a weakness in government

## Manoj Ladwa

I think during the campaign, and even afterwards, if you look at Mr Modi's [indiscernible], he talked about team India. The fact that he has been a chief minister for such a long time, he knows the strengths and weaknesses of the federal structure and on

the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, at the India Foundation, he spoke about strengthening the federal structure of India, because he recognizes one thing – there is a limitation to which the central government can do things. The implementation on various projects, including energy, happens at a state level. Therefore he recognizes the fact that he has to work with the chief ministers of various different states.

Yes, there is no denying he is a very clear, very decisive politician and that's what India voted for. But when it comes to operational matters, Richard you mentioned the meeting he had with all the secretaries of the government of India together in effect saying, 'Have no fear. Go out and do your job. Do it properly. Do it well, and if you do it well, I'm going to back you,' that devolution or that empowerment back into the bureaucracy.

That's not new. If you look at 2001, when Modi became the chief minister, he did exactly the same thing. He was seen as a strong leader, but he took his time understanding the bureaucracy and started to devolve power back to the bureaucracy, setting them very, very clear targets and acting like a chief executive.

#### Adam Roberts

So he can behave as a chief executive as prime minister? The ability to be a chief executive of a state is much more clearly established, clearly by him in Gujarat but also other chief ministers. The ability of a prime minister to behave as a chief executive has not been proven yet in India, I don't think.

#### Manoj Ladwa

Well, it's early days, but that's his experience, that's what succeeded in Gujarat. From the initial steps that we've seen, that's how he wants to present himself going forward as well.

#### Adam Roberts

I'm going to take the privilege one more time. Second theme of what I saw a lot when I was campaigning was the importance of volunteers on the ground. I saw this with the Aam Aadmi Party obviously in Delhi and the state assembly elections in December. I saw it with one or two Congress candidates, [indiscernible] Lakhani in Bangalore for example, had fairly decent, young, enthusiastic volunteers.

But by far and away the most effective party at getting fervent volunteers out and getting down to the booth level of 1,000 voters at a time in each constituency was the BJP, was the Modi campaign. A lot of those volunteers came from the RSS. How important is the RSS and that broad family of groups going to be for the party as we sort of see state elections coming up and the rolling out of government programmes?

#### Manoj Ladwa

The RSS plays a significant role within the polity, within the social fabric of India. It is India's largest voluntary organization, indeed probably the world's largest voluntary organization in terms of numbers. It plays a significant role. However, the BJP is its own party. It has its own decision-making structures. The BJP does take counsel from the RSS,

but ultimately especially with a strong leader like Narendra Modi, he will make his own decisions.

But it was not just the RSS, it was across... What I witnessed, and I travelled throughout Uttar Pradesh during the election campaign. I spent some of my time in Varanasi. It was a whole host of community organizations and groups, women's groups, youth groups, from across castes and across religions as well. Being based in Ashok Road in the headquarters of the BJP, there wasn't a day when there wasn't a delegation of Muslim leaders coming and saying they'd like to join the BJP or would like to offer services in our communities for Modi as well.

It was across communities, the sort of support that Mr Modi received. We see that continue.

### Adam Roberts

I'm conscious we've only got you for 10 more minutes, and I guess there might be questions in the room. Do we have the mic roving around?

### Question 1

We've heard description of Mr Modi as a clear, decisive and strong politician. Indeed, he's moved bureaucrats around and governors around already. In that context, how would you explain Arun Jaitley being given the finance minister's position and temporary charge of defence? What's the thinking behind that from a clear and decisive leader?

### Manoj Ladwa

As far as Mr Jaitley is concerned, he's a very experienced parliamentarian and one of the most experienced in the BJP. I think for months it was no secret that Mr Jaitley would get the finance minister's portfolio. As far as the defence aspect is concerned, there is discussion and thinking going on. I'm not privy to that internal discussion, but an announcement will be made at some point. He seems to be handling it pretty well up until now.

### Question 1

Do you read anything into that?

### Manoj Ladwa

No, I wouldn't read... Governments in the past have had ministers who have had two, maybe three portfolios. The fact is that what people are expecting is that Modi would retain, the discussions through the campaign, he would retain the home ministry, he may take finance himself, he may take defence himself. He's devolved all of that.

## Adam Roberts

How much longer, if Jaitley has both defence and finance for another six months, is that a problem? Does it look less decisive the more the time passes?

## Manoj Ladwa

I think you'll get a decision very soon.

## Question 2

My question is regarding relationships with Pakistan. We've seen very, very positive gestures from Mr Modi and these kind of positive exchanges between Mr Modi and Nawaz Sharif. Do you think that there is going to be a likely engagement vis-à-vis Pakistan from Mr Modi in the kind of near future? What is the timeline? If not immediately, or in the next six months, then what is the timeline for having some kind of, taking it a bit further? The positiveness which has been shared. Thank you.

## Manoj Ladwa

I think there is an on-going dialogue between the governments. There has been. Modi [indiscernible] set the tone. He surprised a lot of people, people that may have been ignorant about what Modi actually stands for. I would expect more interactions, there's a lot of second track work that still needs to be done. But the key theme will be trade and investment, and will be economic development, because ultimately, that's what the people of India want. That's what the people of Pakistan want.

Mr Sharif was elected on that particular mandate. Mr Modi's elected. They better get on with it now.

## Adam Roberts

I was very struck when I was in Pakistan a year ago for Nawaz Sharif's election, the very first thing he did was invite the Indian prime minister to come to his inauguration. Modi then took the initiative to do the reverse and Pakistan actually took up the offer. But there will again, as with the defence minister, become a question of if too much time passes without a follow-up, that the hope and expectation starts to wither.

## Manoj Ladwa

The momentum needs to be kept up.

## Question 3

India and Pakistan have been fighting wars over years, several wars, bitter war, and they are bitter enemies on that Kashmir front. Now recently, the prime minister of India made reconciliatory statements that there will be some kind of rapprochement between the two countries or agreement of a kind. But I think the sticking point between the two countries is Kashmir, and half a million soldiers are surrounding Kashmir. There's a lot gang raping

going on, torture, imprisonment and it is not a democratic country in that way, that half a million soldiers are guarding one province of the country.

How Modi is going to resolve that problem, because if this problem, Kashmir problem is not resolved, India can never actually make progress as a superpower. Thank you.

### Manoj Ladwa

Again, going back to the election campaign, and that's what we've got to see this in the context of, that one of his first rallies was in Jammu and Kashmir. At that time, he talked about the principle of Kashmiriyat, Jammuriyat and Insaniyat. That struck a chord with the people in the valley. The BJP increased its three seats in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

One thing that had never been done before is that the BJP reached out to the people in the valley by producing campaign material, literature in Urdu and distributing it throughout the valley as well. It hadn't ever been done. BJP government, with a nationalist leader like Narendra Modi, reaching out to the people of Jammu and Kashmir and talking about one thing and one thing alone, about development. The time now is to come... To use the phrase of [indiscernible], to put in cold storage issues of contention and focus on the issues that matter to people on the ground. The most important issue is that of development.

### Question 4

In terms of the domestic agenda, great expectations. What areas of economic policy do you think will prove the most difficult for Modi to carry out his policies? I'm thinking particularly in terms of potential resistance from the states. What do you expect to be the trouble spots?

### Manoj Ladwa

I think the biggest challenge, and Gareth and Richard may want to come in here, but the biggest priority and challenge is the energy sector and energy security and getting electricity across. That's where there's going to be a huge requirement for coordination between the central government and the states. There will be other issues like that were there will be challenges.

India has a huge fiscal deficit, which needs to come under control. But one of the interesting things that have happened over the last few weeks is that Modi has almost encouraged Indian companies and public sector units to borrow overseas, and to take advantage of the low interest rates. So I can see a restructuring of India's debt taking place as we speak on that side.

I don't know, Gareth or Richard, if you want to...

## Richard Heald

On the energy point, I think that that's absolutely critical. I find it very interesting that three of the energy ministries have been combined under Piyush Goyal. He's a very dynamic individual. Clearly that has been done for a reason.

The energy crisis that India suffers from is certainly profound. The only way that that can be solved is by effectively allowing the states to become very much more empowered in terms of generation, in terms of transmission and distribution. I think that one of the key things that we have to bear in mind, statement of the obvious, is that the prime minister has a fundamental advantage, which is he was a chief minister.

He absolutely understands the pressures that chief ministers have. I think we should also put into context the interactions that we expect that the prime minister will have with chief ministers, and we think it's going to be very much more regular than has been the case, certainly under UPA 2, which I think – correct me if I'm wrong – there was only one meeting that Manmohan Singh had with the chief ministers. We're going to see very much more active interaction to solve exactly this issue.

## Question 5

The Election Commission seemed to get upset during the campaign. What are the views on that? Should it have just been brushed aside or what happened to –

## Adam Roberts

When you say they got upset, do you mean Amit Shah's comments on Muzaffarnagar?

## Question 5

Yes, I think there was an FIR against... Because he was taking some selfies or his was wearing a lotus in front of the TV which was not technically allowed because it's a political statement or something. I mean it was brushed aside, but is that fair?

## Manoj Ladwa

The Election Commission has to be absolutely commended. It ran the biggest democratic process in the world's history and it did overwhelmingly, fantastically well. It also, according to its own judgement in reading at times, pulled up politicians for making statements that the Election Commission deemed inappropriate or fell foul of its rules and politicians adhere to that, including Amit Shah. He said, 'Look, I bowled and I'll bowl. I respect what the Election Commission has had to say to me.'

I think the Election Commission has actually gained in respect, rather than lost respect.

## Adam Roberts

But to follow up on the question, one of the concerns that people have about Modi is that he may not respect institutions in the way that he should. Some of the criticisms that his campaign made of the Election Commission at the end of the campaign, thinking

especially in Varanasi when he wasn't allowed to have that final rally in the city, some of the language used against the Election Commission was quite troubling.

### Manoj Ladwa

And it was part and parcel of the rough and tumble of the election campaign, lots of things are said at that particular point but then we move on. In the heat of the election campaign, obviously each political party wants to make sure that it presents itself to the electorate as effectively as possible. To give you one example, the BJP, we were churning out television commercials, five or six every day for approval from the Election Commission.

At one point, we had somewhere in the region of about 70 or 80 different pieces of electoral material before the Election Commission. The Election Commission said, 'Look, we're only going to take five at a time.' That would mean that by the end of the election, we would have hopefully got all our television commercials... They needed more capacity. Part of the reason was that the issue in Varanasi was more to do with the influence of the Samajwadi Party on what we felt was one of the officials had been influenced by the Samajwadi Party at that particular time.

So we raised an objection. Mr Jaitley went onto the streets as well and demonstrated.

### Adam Roberts

But at that point, as you said before, you must have known that most of the voting was already over. You had already not assumed that you were going to get a majority on your own. Did you really need to challenge institutions in that way? And therefore give those who worry about respectful institutions that fig leaf?

### Manoj Ladwa

That particular incident, and I apologize if... It was in relation to Mr Modi... We sought permission for Mr Modi to address a section of his constituents in Varanasi and the excuse given by the district magistrate was that there would be a law and order issue. Therefore we felt that, well, it's the responsibility of the Election Commission, and it has all the levers of power to be able to ensure that there shouldn't be a law and order situation.

You know that Modi has chosen to fight from Varanasi. You know he's going to come here, and therefore you've got to make adequate provision. That was the issue.

### Question 6

A question to the whole panel, if I may. The picture that has been painted is of a prime minister who is a pro-jobs, anti-poverty campaigner who almost incidentally just happens to be a Hindu. Do you buy that? I suppose I'm asking the people from outside.



## Manoj Ladwa

I don't think he's ever hid that, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. So what? Do you have a problem with it?

## Question 6

I don't have a problem with it, but...

## Manoj Ladwa

Tony Blair was a Christian, is a Christian.

## Adam Roberts

Well, there's a particular part of Mr Modi's history that I think perhaps you're referring to, which is there were riots in Gujarat in 2002 and which we can talk about the controversy of it. But Tony Blair didn't have a history of being chief minister of a state where this had happened. So there's a particular thing about Modi's Hindu nationalism that is a perfectly legitimate question to raise.

## Manoj Ladwa

He's been very clear. He's a Hindu and he's a nationalist. He said that during one of the interviews during the election campaign. People still voted for him.

## Question 6

He's certainly not hidden it, but it's been quite... It's not been brought up much this evening. You haven't mentioned it; other people on the panel haven't mentioned it much.

## Manoj Ladwa

He ultimately fought on the mandate of economic development. That's what he's focusing on.

## Richard Heald

I think I'm on Manoj's side on this one. 282 seats for the BJP, 300-whatever seats for NDA, he would not have been able to achieve that on what was a presidential campaign unless he appealed to the broad, a very broad spectrum of society, castes and religion, etc. That's his electorate. He has to answer their aspirations, and those aspirations are nothing to do with religion. They're all to do with ambitions and jobs, etc. That's where he's focusing.

## Question 7

I'd like to ask what Mr Modi's government approach and attitude is to NGOs. I ask this partly because shortly after he was elected, there was an intelligence bureau report leaked which suggested that NGO activity, naming for example Amnesty International and

Greenpeace, could cost two to three per cent of GDP. I'm not quite sure how they calculated that, but I'd be interested in your comments.

### Manoj Ladwa

I'm in close contact with Salil as well. I just spoke to him the other day, who heads up Amnesty International, so I think the focus, and there has been concerns not just within the BJP but within the Congress over the last 10 years to 15 years, in terms of the misuse of NGOs by organizations that are funding terrorist activities. That's where the concern is. Not in relation to the activities of groups like Amnesty who are well respected.

### Adam Roberts

You think it's about terrorism, not about the economic stuff that was mentioned in the report?

### Manoj Ladwa

It's terrorism.

### Question 8

I've heard wonderful things about Mr Modi. One thing I wanted to say, he got only 31 per cent of the votes, despite the 272 seats that we're talking about, so 69 per cent did not vote for him. You said that most of the ministers in the portfolio weren't shadow ministers, they're learning on the job. While the map may be clearly set out, is it going to take a very long time for the country to grow? On what basis were the ministers chosen? I'm sorry, Manoj is leaving. I think this is...

### Speaker

The question about the vote share... [indiscernible] just over 400 seats. If you take it on that basis, [over 44] per cent. [indiscernible]

### Question 8

Even 44 per cent, it's less than 50 per cent. It's just a comment I was making.

### Speaker

[Indiscernible]

### Adam Roberts

Thank you very much, Manoj.

## Question 8

Sorry, the question was to you two about ministers, and you said they really don't have experience. They're learning on the job. So if the map is being clearly laid out, is it going to take a long time? On what basis were they chosen then? Were they arbitrary or ad hoc if they don't have any experience in the portfolios they have.

### Richard Heald

Like ministers in this country, one relies on bureaucracy and the secretaries to provide the background to which ministers take decisions. Clearly, they're brought in for their competency in decision-making. But actually, if you look at the government, the NDA government, the depth of experience is relatively thin amongst the inexperience in terms of Jaitley's experience, or other ministers' experience.

There are probably about four or five ministers who have experience of being in a governmental situation. Beyond that, you have for instance in the skills ministry or indeed even in something as important as commerce ministry, you have people who are having to learn on the job, relying on the civil servants in order to get the information and to take decisions going forward.

I think that you will... It's going to be a process which will take three to six months in terms of seeing the full impact of these ministers coming through.

### Adam Roberts

It's maybe a little unfair to put this question to you, but there's one point which is that you've got ministers coming in who maybe don't have a great deal of experience. The second point is you have a series of people who are rather good who didn't get ministries. So, to name some names, Arun Shourie, many people thought could get an interesting role in government, Suresh Prabhu. People who were capable, experienced and have a good reputation who did not land jobs.

So it's by choice that Modi has kept some experienced and capable people out of government. I don't think we can be too forgiving if this government is thin, because it's by choice.

### Richard Heald

I'm not... Unfortunately the gentleman who's left who may be able to shed some light on that. I'm not privy as to why Arun Shourie did not receive a portfolio. In part, I was slightly surprised, like most people, because rather like Raghuram Rajan, he is a person who the international community knows and respects. However, I'm sure there are reasons as to why that didn't transpire, but I'm not aware of that.

### Adam Roberts

As I say, it's very unfair to ask you that.

## Question 9

As an observer of the election, I was absolutely staggered to see really how Congress capitulated, a little bit like Brazil against Germany last week. It was all over by half time. My question for the panel is, what role do you think Congress have going forward in terms of playing a responsible role in opposition? What is the future for the Congress Party and the first family?

### Gareth Price

I remember reading an interesting article during the campaign, which said Congress has changed from a broad social movement to a kind of dynastic fiefdom. If it wants relevance, it needs to go back to its roots, but it seems to be scared that if it doesn't have a Gandhi leading it, then it's nothing.

When I was in India, I don't know if you've heard the same thing, but there are people out there who say maybe it is time for Congress to call it a day, essentially. There are very good people within Congress, but it seems over the course of the last two terms to have lost its purpose. Its purpose was to be Congress and Congress was to be run by a member of the Gandhi family.

Clearly that's been so massively rejected that it needs to go and introspect and see if it can come back, essentially.

### Adam Roberts

I take a slightly different view. I think, obviously it did collapse terribly and even if we look at vote share, it did very badly. If it had the ability to have proper introspection, if it really wanted to enquire into what went wrong, there are some fairly clear answers to what went wrong – clearly very bad leadership in the campaign. So what you need to do is to rethink how you get a stronger leader and maybe do away with the first family.

But as for what the purpose of the Congress is, I think that will be easier to solve. It depends what the government does. If the government turns out to be more Hindu nationalist, Congress becomes the more secular voice and the voice for minorities and the voice for those who don't want their country to be dominated by a particular world view.

If the BJP, if the Modi government becomes a very pro-growth, pro-infrastructure, pro-corporate government, Congress can come out of the Aam Aadmi Party, the party of the common man and welfare and so on.

But where Congress failed so comprehensively, as you say, it failed to consider the urban vote. There were lots of people who naturally would be Congress supporters who have just been put off by its utter failure to think about what urban voters want, betting entirely on villagers sticking to the old feudal way of doing politics. I was astounded to follow Priyanka Gandhi when she went campaigning for her brother.

To listen to the sort of speeches she gave, which were basically, 'We are family. You belong to us. Don't trust anyone who isn't from the family, because they're not family.' It was such a feudal idea of how to do politics. But Congress is full of rather smart people

who, if only they could command some of the techniques that Manoj could tell them, they could capitalise on. They have fallen low in seats, but I think they are just about the only opposition party that's able to do anything.

### Gareth Price

I'd go slightly against that, because I think they need to reinvent what they're for. They are seen as a party of redistribution and the trend is for aspiration, not to get redistribution or hand-outs or welfare is growing in India and has created a sort of American dream like notion in the election campaign. And a trend, and the trends of urbanization and so forth, it will need a lot of reinvention unless the BJP goes very wrong, as a couple of people have suggested it might.

### Question 10

What does the term 'nationalist' mean when applied to Modi? What are the impacts of that analysis in terms of India itself, internally, and externally?

### Adam Roberts

Who is keen? That's a great question.

### Richard Heald

It is a great question. I think that nationalism as applies to Modi is basically what happens within the boundaries of India. I've heard comments from Gareth and Manoj in relation to foreign policy. Ultimately, what Modi is focusing on is how everything impacts on growth in India, how everything impacts on the aspirations of the electorate.

His foreign policy I think will be dictated predominantly by that, securing supply lines, again building commercial relations, bringing in FDI into the country in order to stimulate that growth and get it back up to eight, 8.5 plus going forward. I think nationalism is very much driven by the domestic agenda.

### Gareth Price

I would add to that that it's about being proud of being Indian, so in some respects it is constructed against Congress, where everyone speaks English. One of the first things he did is instruct all of the civil servants to speak in Hindi. So he'll be the first Indian prime minister which leaders of the US and the UK speak to through an interpreter. It's partly because he's slightly more comfortable in Hindi, but he does speak English. It's partly to say, 'We should be proud of what we are.'

It's also about saying, what's the Gujarat model that he's benefited from? It's about making the system work. In a lot of spheres in India, there are a whole bunch of excuses as to why the system doesn't work. Narendra Modi sells a message that actually, India can work. Government officials don't have to be corrupt. You can do things through IT and the system works. It's quite a powerful message, and obviously worked in the election.

The issue obviously is how that pride of being Indian correlates with a pride in being Hindu and you've seen some comments from ministers already saying, 'Muslims aren't minorities. Parsis are minorities.' So the question of how Muslims fit in within this construct of what it is to be Indian is the issue.

Clearly 10 years ago his rhetoric was very different. If you take his rhetoric now, it is more inclusive, but the rhetoric of some of his foot soldiers is less inclusive. I think it goes to the point of how he actually governs, if he finds that it's much harder to deliver his economic growth, his jobs and so forth. Does he revert to the more narrow-minded nationalism of the past?

## Speaker

[Indiscernible]

## Adam Roberts

I was going to say that what I think is so good about that question, and the reason we can't actually answer it is because [indiscernible], because we're going to have to see what he does. There are so many threads to it, so Modi is someone who believes in globalization I think as a way of getting the economy going, but he heads a party that is very much anxious about letting foreigners in and believes in the domestic solutions to things.

So you saw the battle for example on what level of FDI for the defence or the insurance, or whether to let foreign supermarkets into India. His ability to play that off, his instincts to get the foreign capital in a party that doesn't like the idea is one test of what he means by nationalism.

But the term is such an interesting term, because it also refers to how he campaigned. Despite what Manoj says, I don't believe this was only a campaign about jobs and development. There were moments in the campaign, and I heard it myself, where it was a Hindu nationalist campaign. You had Amit Shah standing up and talking about getting revenge in Muzaffarnagar for what had happened six months earlier.

There were moments when caste was an issue in the election. It wasn't all about the Gujarat model. The message was very carefully tailored depending on the audience. The more urban, the more sophisticated, educated audience got one lot; the English speaking audience got one lot of messages; different audiences in other places got other messages.

I think we don't know what sort of nationalist he is. I think they're very concerned about the word 'nationalist' as well. Look at the RSS. It's set up to be a Hindu nationalist organization. If you talk to a leader of the RSS today, they say, 'No, no, we're a nationalist organization.' You say, 'Well what does that mean? Does that mean you would allow non-Hindus to have prominent roles in your group?' And they say, 'Yes. Now we're broadening the definition of what it is to be a nationalist.'

I think this term is in play and it's being redefined in India at the moment. It's very interesting to see where it ends up. It may be a great benefit to the country that it is rethought.

## Richard Heald

I think it's very difficult to read at this present moment in time. One thin you could say with absolute certainty is that he's a pragmatist. His attitude and his willingness to go to Washington, for instance, where I believe on a personal level he must still have issues with the Americans. The fact that he's going there I think is symptomatic of the fact that he subsumes his own personal views or feelings in relation to what he perceives as the greater good of India. That I think, we're going to see other examples of that, taking Gareth's point, that the real issue is if a black swan occurs, something occurs which blows him off course. Be it economic or be it terrorist or whatever. That will be the real test as to how deep his pragmatism runs.

## Question 11

What does the setting up of the BRICS regional bank imply for the West about Modi as an individual? *The Economist* amongst others said we can't bring ourselves to support Modi. There are obviously all the visa bans, which is quite embarrassing for the West that they very rapidly had to turn that around. Does this mean that Modi is going to be anti-Western? Does it mean that he's trying to create a threat and can the new bank set up be effectively two fingers being put up to the West and make things problematic for India? Is Modi taking account of that?

## Gareth Price

I think the development bank would have been set up now because of the evolution of the BRICS. I mean, the starting point for the BRICS development bank, to some extent there were a lot of Western critics who said, 'What are the BRICS? They don't have any institutions.' The thinking amongst the BRICS is, 'We're not being taken seriously because we don't have any intuitions. Therefore let's set up an institution,' and it's the BRICS development bank.

The rhetoric from the different members of the BRICS varies from anti-Western to more pro-Western. It was interesting at the latest summit, they have started talking about having more political discussions, but as yet, that hasn't got anywhere. I think from an Indian perspective, these institutions are seen for different purposes.

The point of the BRICS which was coined as a sort of, these are the fast-growing large economies of the world, was to advertise India to the world as a member of the fast growing economies club, along with Brazil and China, in particular. Another part of India's foreign policy is to gain a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, so for that its conduit, which is a much more political organization, is IBSA, with Brazil and South Africa.

But it also plays a role in the G20. I think there are elements of the BRICS, of which Vladimir Putin would be the obvious example, that do want it to be set up as a rival. But

from an Indian perspective, this is something that was going to happen anyway. They do like their engagement. They want to be taken seriously, and again, the same answer as earlier. The proof in the pudding will be in the eating.

## Question 12

I'd just like to take the question of language a little further. Is Modi's intent to progressively displace the many other languages by getting everybody to take Hindi speaking as essential for success in the country? In that sense, a nationalist movement. Or is he actually trying, as for example the Malaysians did, to remove the distinction of the elite as English-speaking? And what is the impact on the historic position of India as being welcoming to foreign investment? And in particular, easy to deal with, because they're not easy to deal with on many other factors, because they speak English.

## Richard Heald

I probably am going to be corrected on this one, but I seem to recall that the instruction for the civil servants should communicate in Hindi, is actually just an affirmation of what the rules were in any event. So it wasn't as if he changed something by imposing Hindi on people. It was what was required of them in any event.

India is a vast country, 28 states, whatever it is. The multiplicity of languages is firmly embedded within the population. I think it would be extremely difficult for somebody to impose and change the way that people behave and speak. I mean, I can recall asking a taxi driver in Bangalore who came from Pondicherry what his languages were – Tamil, French and then Hindi, and then English. It is very difficult, I think, to impose change in that sort of way.

## Adam Roberts

I think that's right. I think the language issue was very interesting. I think it was a bit more than just a reaffirmation of what came before. It was a deliberate effort to sort of give him a slightly greater prominence in the civil service and one or two other areas. But very quickly it was met with resistance, notably from Tamil Nadu, and southern India where Hindi is really not particularly favoured. I think there's also a sense of, although Modi himself can speak English, I've interviewed Modi at some length. His English is okay. He's much more comfortable using Hindi or Gujarati.

I think as an outsider who's coming into national politics for the first time, he's quite happy to send a message out that others who are not part of that urban English speaking Delhi elite, who he's clearly not part of, it's not theirs anymore. This is something of a revolutionary change that's happened. One way of indicating that was to talk about language.

I don't think we should read into it that somehow India is going to give up on the spread of English. If you travel anywhere in India, you see endless English language schools. Everybody knows that the way to get a better job is to get some proficiency in English. I think although it could be much better than it is, India will keep on adding to the stock of people who speak good English. That's my guess.



## Question 13

Adam gives very insightful analysis into India, but from what I understand, *The Economist*, one minute it was against Modi, one minute for. That creates a lack of credibility. When you're reading a publication, he might not be responsible for that, but what is his view exactly on that? It doesn't give much credibility when someone forces someone against them. I mean, you were on the trail, you understand the different rallies and the different rhetoric. Why all this change?

### Adam Roberts

Why our position on Modi? The long-term position on not endorsing him, there are lots of other people we've chosen not to endorse in different elections, but the reasons for not endorsing him in this election was all 2002 and what we felt was a lack of serious effort by him to address what had happened and what his role was in those riots and the murders of 2002.

We took a decision that that was so important, and especially for a country like India which has such a diverse range of groups, that that trumped everything else. That trumped however good – and we conceded at that time that he was extremely good, we thought on what he did with development in Gujarat, and so on. Having taken that decision, Indian public for some reason didn't listen to us. So they went ahead and gave him a massive mandate.

We then had to accept that something had changed, and that he'd won that election. Then we had to analyse, well what can he do? The scale of his victory, despite what we heard there, did surprise a lot of people including in the BJP. The strength of that mandate is extraordinary. First time in 30 years to have one party with a majority in parliament.

So for example, when we talked about the budget before, we hoped before the budget that he now with that mandate has the ability to fix a lot of things that we've long been saying was wrong with India. We haven't stopped worrying about 2002 and his failure to address that. We also think that the Hindu nationalist side of Modi is still there and could return, given an unfortunate event.

## Question 13

I think in India you're never getting perfect solutions. There was the problem in 2002, as there was Union Carbide in '83, '84. There's no perfect solutions, as you know. You're right about... Things all the time, and there's no perfect solutions in the world. That's not, in my view, a proper analysis of why you don't back someone because of one thing, but then there are a lot of things that aren't resolved in Indian politics either.

### Adam Roberts

Sure, I agree that there was no perfect candidate to be prime minister in India. We can talk afterward at length if you like. But I think in most democracies, if you'd had a candidate to be prime minister who had a blot in his past this big, you would at least

expect the candidate to address it and talk about it in detail. And he didn't. Asking why he chose not to talk about it, I think is a very legitimate question for a journalist to ask.

The fact that the Indian press chose to stop doing that, the fact that most of the foreign press lost interest in that, was probably a reflection of the obvious, that he was going to win, and so it's much smarter in terms of keeping your access with the government to back the winning side.

We're in a lovely position of not caring whether he won or lost. We just wanted to raise the issue that we raised, but we can talk about it at length afterwards. It may be boring for everyone else.

### Question 14

My question is the BRICS development bank, and Russia's role. What do you think it would be towards the energy security for India? There have been further articles about India being in between Russia and US in context to gas and oil security. What do you think would be the role of Russia and BRICS development bank towards energy security?

### Adam Roberts

Gareth, you touched before on India's foreign policy. A crucial one is if India doesn't have access to enough oil and gas.

### Gareth Price

This is where the region comes in. I think a lot of potential energy sources for India are out there. One of them would be hydropower in Nepal. One of them would be Russian gas, so in India there's concern about, is this Russian gas going to go to China? One of the points of regional engagement is maybe engagement with Myanmar, which also has gas. I think a lot of things will be mooted over the next year or so, and wherever there's most traction, be it building dams in Nepal, be it getting gas from Russia, be it pipelines from Central Asia, the problem is well known.

There's a shortage of energy sources. The solutions are out there. There's a finite list of... Is it solar power? Which has played a huge role in Gujarat. Where there is most attraction for potential energy supplies... I wouldn't particularly connect it to the BRICS development bank, except that that is a forum in which these quite interesting countries – Russia, China, India – will sit down together.

### Adam Roberts

I think we should wrap it up there. I'm sorry we haven't got our key speaker with us at the end, but thank you very much for your questions and thank you to our panellists.