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

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The paper focuses on the transformative impact of Narendra Modi's leadership in India since 2014 and defines the 'Modi wave', discussing how this controversial phenomenon impacted India's political spectrum with a base in Hindu majoritarianism, thus redefining the BJP's role in Indian politics. The 'wave' – as framed by the author – poses a challenge to politics on the Indian peninsula and fuels mixed socio-political feelings about Modi's charismatic leadership, political legitimacy, and cultural nationalism. Particularly, critics question, among other things, the PM's political legitimacy, but also populism, citing problems of democratic deficit, incompetence of governance, and inability to represent the entire population.

With a savvy use of sources connected to Political Theory, the author delves into the concept of political legitimacy, emphasizing the role of elections in justifying the authority of rulers. Modi's leadership is widely acknowledged to be characterized by populist rhetoric and Hindu nationalism – something that has only increased in recent years. His behavior has facilitated the BJP's institutionalization from purely charismatic rule to a more rule-bound approach – which poses gross concerns in terms of democracy and institutional transparency. However, despite various criticisms, the PM's leadership has garnered considerable public support throughout the years.

The author makes a convincing argument on Modi's transformative impact on and by the BJP in the country and explains the party's ideological metamorphosis and the emergence of Hindu majoritarianism and its role in today's politics. I argue that the author offers a nuanced analysis of his electoral victories and the consolidation of his political dominance and seems to address some criticisms from (center-)left / liberal perspectives, engaging with the notion of democratic deficit and incompetence in governance of the current PM. Importantly, the authors acknowledges the fragility of the BJP's 'system' and the challenges posed by Modi's dependence on personal popularity – which might increase political polarization in the country (an aspect that is not treated much throughout the paper).

The analysis provides, in general, a comprehensive examination of political legitimacy, drawing on the theoretical frameworks of political science. The legitimacy of Modi's leadership is multifaceted and includes elements of economic growth, governance effectiveness, and cultural nationalism. Perhaps it is too soon to identify this odd style of government, although traces can also be found in the past in other contexts. Modi's (some would say dangerous) deft handling of political authority and the PM's ability to navigate diverse dynamics are duly emphasized. Furthermore, the author acknowledges the challenges posed by volatile voter identities and the risks inherent in the de-institutionalization of parties, signaling a nuanced understanding of the complexities in Indian politics.

However, I also identify some shortcomings in this paper. The author might be interested in building upon these suggestions, starting with ensuring a bit more clarity of terminology, e.g., providing clear definitions of terms such as 'wave' or 'legitimacy' would help to better understand the arguments presented – and perhaps using the very same sources he consulted. The inclusion of a comparative analysis with other recent or past, Indian or non-Indian, populist political leaders or parties might provide a broader perspective, just as addressing potential counterarguments or criticisms from various ideological perspectives might strengthen the paper's argumentative framework. In other words, a political comparison with other Modi-like political leaders might strengthen even more the author's argumentative framework.

Furthermore, reinforcing the argument with empirical evidence and data would lend more credibility to the paper – e.g., economic data should be supplemented with additional data and research findings to effectively support the thesis (try IMF, World Bank, to name a few, but also local think tanks focused on economics). Furthermore, I would recommend considering the long-term implications of Modi's policies and style of governance on Indian democracy and society – and not just in the light of this year's elections. Exploring how his social policies – and the resulting concerns – may shape future political dynamics and societal trends would provide good insight into Modi's leadership.

Finally, I would suggest that future research directions be more engaging and in-depth with the existing literature on Indian politics and democratic theory to enrich the academic contribution of this paper. By identifying gaps in the literature, the current analysis might stimulate even more a broader academic debate on the topic – perhaps with the help of non-academic sources, but equally impactful, e.g., relevant foreign affairs reviews to assess the external dimension of the "Modi wave." I would highlight discussing populism and theories – e.g., incorporating theories of populism, including the works of Cas Mudde, Nadia Urbinati, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, or Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser – in the Indian political context, with close attention to the PM.