

A surprising convergence: the politics of India and China under Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping

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Abstract

Since the mid-twentieth century, Asia's two giants have represented alternative models of political modernity. But the dramatic rise of Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping since 2012, two self-avowed strongmen, has witnessed an unprecedented historical convergence in the aims, structure and exercise of power in both countries. What are the causes, trajectory and ramifications of this surprising development? The first part of the paper examines the remarkably similar circumstances marked the rise of Modi and Xi. Decades of rapid economic growth had increased national prosperity. But growing social inequalities spurred the development of new welfare regimes. And systemic challenges—growing political corruption, environmental degradation, economic slowdown—intensified in the years immediately preceding the ascent of these two new leaders. Part two of the paper analyzes how, despite their strikingly divergent biographies, Modi and Xi have restructured and exercised power in convergent ways and for similar ends. Both leaders have embraced high-modernist projects, concentrated political authority in their persons, expanded state power over the economy and to curb political opposition, independent institutions and social dissent, and justified their actions in singular nationalist tropes to avenge perceived historic injustices. Part three of the paper highlights notable contrasts in their patterns of rule and the constraints their respective political regimes still impose.