



India's ascent

Analyzing economic development,
foreign policy challenges and the path
to becoming a significant power



GIS Dossier



India's decade of reform presents a paradox: respectable economic growth overshadowed by neglected and stalled vital changes. GIS analysis unpacks the impact of successful and failed government policies, the risks posed by Southeast Asia's volatile neighborhood, the influence of Hindu nationalism and the hurdles that challenge New Delhi's aspirations as a global power.

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Introduction

In April 2023, India officially became the most populous nation, a title previously held by China. A fast-growing major economy and the world's largest democracy, India plays a pivotal role in Asia. With about 80 percent of its 1.4 billion-plus residents being Hindu and around 15 percent Muslim, it is home to one of the largest Muslim populations globally.

India's leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, envisions India as a Hindu nation and has pursued a Hindu nationalist agenda, raising concerns among the country's 180 million Muslims.

FACTBOX

Narendra Modi

*Born on September 17, 1950, in Vadnagar, Gujarat, he entered his **third term as prime minister** of India in 2024. In office since May 2014, he previously served as chief minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014. A graduate of the University of Delhi and Gujarat University, he rose from modest circumstances to become a globally recognized political figure. His **strengths** lie in his ambitious and dynamic leadership style. However, his mishandling of the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim riots¹ blemishes his record to this day.*

India has a frozen conflict with Pakistan, a nuclear power that borders India and China. Ongoing discrimination against Muslims in India, mostly taking place in Kashmir, has led to frequent skirmishes on the India-Pakistan border. India also faces tensions with China over the disputed Himalayan border and is concerned about China's growing military presence on the Tibetan plateau and naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Over the past two decades, Beijing's relationship with Islamabad has strengthened, allowing China access to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan via railways and a trans-Himalayan highway.

India's expanding ties with the United States and the European Union, along with its cautious participation in the Quad – a group comprising Japan, the U.S., Australia and India – are gaining strategic significance as a counterbalance to rising Chinese influence.

While Prime Minister Modi's reforms helped make India a fast-growing economy², they have largely fallen short of reducing bureaucratic burdens. Also, the promises to reverse increased central authority within India's federal system have not materialized, and plans for privatization and agricultural reforms have fizzled in the face of popular resistance.



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