

Analysis of indira gandhis leadership style politics essay



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Indira Gandhi-one of the first female prime ministers in the world (preceded only by Sirimavo Bandaranaike who became prime minister of Sri Lanka in 1960), as well as the longest serving prime minister of India, the most populous democracy in the world-was an ideal candidate for this assignment. An exceedingly complex individual, Indira Gandhi was frequently perceived as a shy, aloof young woman. And yet her behavior as Prime Minister was engaged and aggressive, climaxing in her declaration of a State of Emergency in 1975.

Born into India's most prominent political family in 1917, Indira Nehru was immersed in politics from an early age. Stepping into the void left by her mother's untimely death in 1936, as a young woman she became her father's hostess, a role that expanded into confidant and advisor over the ensuing years. After her father's death in 1964, she accepted a minor portfolio in the Shastri government. Lal Bahadur Shastri's subsequent death, two years later, made her the compromise choice of the ruling Congress Party hierarchy for the post of the prime minister, since she was thought to harbour no political ambitions of her own.

Over the next 11 years, she proved to be a formidable political leader, consolidating her control over the party and the country, winning the 1971 war with Pakistan that saw the creation of Bangladesh, and declaring a State of Emergency in 1975. This latter action, a culmination of bitter relations with the opposition, led to her political defeat in the 1977 elections. Out of power for the next three years, she returned triumphantly in 1980, and ruled India with an increased determination to maintain herself in office. Not above manipulating communal grievances to stay in power, ironically she, herself, eventually fell victim of one of these crises. In 1984, she was assassinated by her own bodyguards, members of the Sikh community, thus ending a remarkable political career.

Leadership Style: A New Synthesis

While every scholar seems to have his or her own definition of leadership style, the underlying concepts appear to be similar-how the leader carries out the responsibilities of his or her office; more specifically, the leader's work habits, and how they relate to those around them. After reviewing various studies of presidential leadership style Hermann and Preston (1994) distilled five common leadership style variables involvement in the policymaking process, willingness to tolerate conflict, motivation for leading, and preferred strategies for resolving conflict. Kaarbo (1997, pp. 561-563) adopted and modified these five variables and added two variables from the literature on organizational leadership style-relations with members of the cabinet and task orientation.

This study adapted five of the variables (motivation for leading, task orientation, cabinet management strategy, information management strategy, <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-indira-gandhis-leadership-style-politics-essay/>

and relations with the party) developed by Hermann and Preston (1980) and Kaarbo (1997, pp. 561-563), and added another five variables that examine the prime minister's relations with personnel, opposition parties, the media, and the public, and his/her investment in job performance. These have been grouped into three spheres of activity: first, the leader and his/her motivation, task orientation, and investment in job performance; second, the leader and the executive-cabinet and information management strategies; and third, the leader and relations with other personnel, caucus, the party, the opposition, and the media.

Leadership Style of Indira Gandhi

This section examines the empirical evidence of Gandhi's leadership style: motivation for leading; task orientation; investment in job performance; management style, both with the cabinet and in the realm of information gathering; and her interpersonal relations with her associates, the caucus, the extra-parliamentary party, the opposition, the media, and the public. Results showed that she was motivated primarily by pragmatism and power, focusing on goals rather than process. With her cabinet, she functioned largely as an advocate for her goals and preferred to rely on independent sources of information. In her dealings with personnel, the party caucus, the extra-parliamentary party organization and the opposition parties, she was largely demanding, domineering, competitive, controlling, and oppositional. She was capable of being both accessible and friendly to the media as well as being hostile and closed, depending on the time period. It was only with the public that Indira demonstrated a consistent pattern of openness and warmth.

Motivation

The first leadership style variable centers around the question of a prime minister's motivation for leading. A survey of the literature has suggested that a variety of needs and incentives induce individuals to assume leadership positions in politics (see Kaarbo & Hermann, 1998, pp. 251-252). The leader may be motivated by pragmatism (a belief in an obligation to the party to shape government policies along incremental lines); by personal validation (the wish to be popular and to be accepted); by an ideological agenda (a coherent system of political beliefs that shapes government policy); or a desire for power (dominance and control).

In the area of motivation, it can be observed that notwithstanding a brief flirtation with socialism, Indira Gandhi was a decidedly non-ideological leader.

Investment in Job Performance

The amount of energy and time that a prime minister brings to the office is another variable of leadership style (Barber, 1972/1992). It demonstrates whether the leader places limits on the extent of the commitment to the office or whether there is a tireless outpouring of energy. Prime ministers may be interested primarily in the process of government, the building of concurrence, and the development of good relations among the members of cabinet, or they may be more goal oriented, focusing on specific ends and their implementation.

Indira Gandhi was heavily involved in her role as Prime Minister. Politics took over her life as she travelled extensively crisscrossing India with extraordinary energy (Gupte, 1992, p. 331). A 16-hour or longer working day was the norm with very little time for family, friends, or relaxation (Frank, 2001, p. 355).

Task Orientation

The way in which the prime minister organizes the composition of and manages the decision-making process within the cabinet is another facet of leadership style. How are policy dilemmas resolved? To what extent is there involvement in the policy process? Who becomes part of the locus of decision making is also something the prime minister decides. In these activities, the prime minister's style may run the gamut from being largely uninvolved, to a consensus builder, to an arbitrator, and finally, to a strong advocate

The empirical evidence indicates that Indira Gandhi was overwhelmingly concerned about task implementation and little concerned with the issue of building concurrence among her cabinet. Rather, she treated many of her cabinet colleagues as potential challengers, and if any grew too powerful, she saw to it that their powers were curbed, even if it meant dismissing capable individuals.

Cabinet Management

Although information in a cabinet setting is usually channelled through the various ministries, prime ministers will differ as to how they choose to review

such information and how they relate to their close advisers. The same, of course, is true for presidents in a presidential system (George, 1980, 1988; George & George, 1998; Hermann, 1978, 1987; Hermann & Preston, 1995; Kaarbo, 1997). They may want all the facts about the problem or situation and do the interpretation themselves, or they may only be interested in seeing summaries and policy options. Of interest here is how much input the prime minister wants into the way problems and issues are framed and get onto the agenda.

Strategy Indira Gandhi's dealings with her cabinet demonstrated overwhelmingly that her preferred role was to act as an advocate, rather than a consensus builder, or arbitrator between various government ministers. But advocacy only partly captures the extent to which she dominated her colleagues; she dismissed those who might have challenged her and placed her favourites in senior government posts. Her advocacy was, in fact, an authoritative, peremptory exercise of power.

Information Management Strategy

In managing the flow of information that comes to the office, does the prime minister use a system of individuals to filter information and minimize direct involvement, or is close scrutiny more likely? Closely related is the question on which the prime minister relies for information. Does the prime minister prefer to receive policy relevant data from his cabinet and senior civil servants, or is there a reliance on other sources?

As part of her overall activist stance as Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi

demonstrated a high degree of involvement in the management of
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information, preferring to search out what she wanted to know, rather than waiting for it to be presented to her.

Relations with Personnel

The final cluster of leadership style variables focuses on the prime minister's interpersonal relations with those with whom he/she works, i. e., state-level, governmental officials, members of the judiciary, etc., with his or her own party, with the opposition, the media, and the public. The prime minister interacts with a number of individuals on a daily basis. The extent of the involvement may be high or low; stylistically it may encompass patterns ranging from solicitous, to polite, attention seeking, demanding, and even exploitative. With both the caucus and the extra-parliamentary party organization, the prime minister may behave cooperatively or be competitive or combative and overbearing. Since conflict is a very pervasive element in cabinet life, especially in highly factional single party cabinets and in coalition cabinets (see 't Hart, 1994), the management of party relations by a prime minister is extremely important.

Indira Gandhi's dealings with her aides, advisers, and members of other branches of government were coded for the degree of involvement and the type of behavior exhibited.

Relations with other stakeholders

Analysts have also focused on " how the leader carries out or implements decisions," the way in which the leader mobilizes, orchestrates, and consolidates support for his or her policy decisions (Renshon, 1996a, 1996b).

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Does the prime minister attempt to sell policies by going beyond the party and parliament to appeal to the public at large? Does he or she try to educate or manipulate the public? Or does the leader display little direct engagement with the public, preferring government officials to articulate and defend government policy? Those prime ministers who focus on policy achievements are more likely to use the office of the prime minister as a bully pulpit, while those who stress the policy process will be less inclined to try to generate additional support among the attendant public.

I . Party Caucus and Extra-Parliamentary Party Organization

Indira Gandhi's relationship with the party caucus-and more particularly her cabinet colleagues-was overwhelmingly contentious from 1966 until 1970. From 1970 on, as power shifted from the Cabinet to the Prime Minister's Secretariat, her relations with the party caucus became manipulative/exploitative. Later, power would shift even more to the Prime Minister's house next door (Frank, 2001, p. 354). The party caucus and the cabinet increasingly assumed a rubber stamp function and the cabinet no longer operated as a center of policy making. Indira's relations with the party organization largely mirrored those with the party caucus. Given the nature of her competitive and controlling relationships with both her caucus and the Congress party organization, it is hardly surprising that Gandhi would manifest the same type of behavior with the various opposition parties.

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father's hostess, a role that expanded into confidant and advisor over the ensuing years. After her father's death in 1964, she accepted a minor portfolio in the Shastri government. Lal Bahadur Shastri's subsequent death, two years later, made her the compromise choice of the ruling Congress Party hierarchy for the post of the prime minister, since she was thought to harbour no political ambitions of her own.

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II. Media and Public

Lastly, in relations with the media, the prime minister may be accessible and informative or inaccessible and hostile. Prime ministers who emphasize the implementation of significant policy changes are more likely to generate greater opposition, which in turn will be reflected in some parts of the media, than those who are more concerned with maintaining the political process with incremental changes. In the face of hostility on the part of the media, the Prime Minister is more likely to become less accessible and more hostile.

Gandhi's relations with the media vacillated between being accessible, informative, and friendly to being uninformative, inaccessible, and unfriendly after the imposition of Emergency Rule in 1975. However, in her relations
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with the public, Indira Gandhi's leadership style was extremely open. The Indian crowds seemed to energize her, and she felt a special bond with the Indian masses who loved the combination of her aristocratic background and her simple down-to-earth manner.

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Conclusion

Analysis shows Indira Gandhi as strongly goal-oriented, tireless in the exercise of her job, an advocate within her cabinet with a preference for receiving information from independent sources. As well, the type of involvement she exhibited with associates, the caucus, the party organization, and the opposition, which was largely competitive and controlling, also fitted expectations for the Ambitious, Controlling, and Contentious leader. Indira Gandhi's leadership behavior in the selected categories revealed that her leadership style patterns strongly indicate

toward her Ambitious, Dominant, and Contentious personality as well as Reticent, Retiring, and Aggrieved personality patterns.

Although, Indira Gandhi demonstrated some Reticent personality traits when she assumed the office of the Prime Minister, the demands of the job and the initial hostility she encountered from the Congress elites-the Syndicate-seem to have galvanized the Ambitious, Dominant, and Contentious dimensions of her personality into action. “ Compensatory narcissism” allowed Indira to appeal over the heads of the Syndicate and establish a strongly personal and very effective relationship with the masses that bolstered her self-esteem and fueled this aspect of her personality.