

A Poliheuristics's Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) of Narendra Modi's Decision Calculus in Issuing Non-Basmati Rice Export Ban Policy in 2023

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Abstract

The 2023 non-basmati rice export ban shows case study on how domestic political survival functions as a non-compensatory filter in Narendra Modi's strategic decision-making process. This research employs a qualitative method, utilizing secondary sources including official government press releases, academic journals, and reputable news archives. By applying Poliheuristic (PH) theory through the Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) method, the study reconstructs the cognitive calculus of the Indian leadership. The theoretical framework utilizes a two-stage decision process, identifying political survival as the primary dimension that overrides economic and diplomatic considerations. The findings demonstrate that despite causing a global welfare loss of \$1.7 billion and a 0.017% decrease in India's real GDP, the total ban was selected over more "economically rational" alternatives like export duties or quotas. Narendra Modi's administration prioritized neutralizing the "Mehangai-Man" narrative and securing the 2024 electoral cycle following a significant defeat in the Karnataka state elections. Ultimately, the research confirms that the perception of political risk served as the final filter, leading the government to prioritize domestic price stabilization and retail-level welfarism to ensure the regime's continued legitimacy and power

Keywords: *Applied Decision Analysis, Food Security, Poliheuristic Theory, Export Ban*

Abstrak

Kebijakan larangan ekspor beras non-basmati tahun 2023 menyajikan studi kasus tentang bagaimana kelangsungan hidup politik domestik berfungsi sebagai filter dalam proses pengambilan keputusan strategis Narendra Modi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan memanfaatkan sumber sekunder seperti siaran pers resmi pemerintah, jurnal akademik, dan arsip berita terkemuka. Melalui penerapan teori Poliheuristik (PH) dengan metode Applied Decision Analysis (ADA), studi ini merekonstruksi pertimbangan kognitif pemerintah India. Kerangka analisis tersebut mengfilter keputusan melalui dua tahap, yang mengidentifikasi kelangsungan politik sebagai dimensi utama yang mengesampingkan kepentingan ekonomi dan diplomasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun memicu kerugian global sebesar \$1,7 miliar dan penurunan PDB riil India sebesar 0,017%, larangan total tetap dipilih ketimbang alternatif yang lebih "rasional secara ekonomi" seperti bea ekspor atau kuota. Pemerintahan Narendra Modi memprioritaskan upaya menetralisasi narasi "Mehangai-Man" dan mengamankan pemilu elektoral 2024 menyusul kekalahan telak dalam pemilihan umum negara bagian Karnataka. Hasil analisis mengonfirmasi bahwa persepsi terhadap risiko politik bertindak sebagai saringan akhir, yang mendorong pemerintah memprioritaskan stabilisasi harga domestik

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dan orientasi kesejahteraan tingkat ritel demi menjamin kelangsungan legitimasi serta kekuasaan rezim.

Kata Kunci: *Applied Decision Analysis, Ketahanan Pangan, oliheuristik, Ban Ekspor*

1. Introduction

In today's world, food security has become a primary concern for international stability due to climate disruptions and geopolitical tensions. Because rice is a daily staple for over 3.5 billion people, any market shift directly threatens the safety of vulnerable populations. This volatility was clearly seen when India, the world's top rice exporter with a 40% market share, banned non-basmati white rice exports in July 2023. This trade restriction coincided with climate-induced challenges like El Niño, which has historically reduced rice yields by 4% to 11%. Together, these factors pushed global rice prices to their highest levels since 2011 (Fathelrahman et al., 2024). Such events create a high-stakes environment where major producers must balance their role as global suppliers with the urgent need to protect their own domestic resources from rising food inflation. When leading nations pull back to safeguard local supplies, it creates massive pressure on the global supply chain. Understanding how nations navigate these pressures is essential to maintaining the resilience of the global food supply chain.

Exporting to over 140 countries, India commands 40% of the global rice market, acting as a primary provider for food-insecure regions in Africa and Southeast Asia. Because of this dominance, any shift in Indian trade policy, such as the transition from export duties to a full ban, sends immediate shockwaves through the global economy. In July 2023, the government banned the export of non-basmati white rice to ensure domestic availability and control rising local prices (India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2023). This decision caused global rice prices to surge to their highest level in twelve years, as the international market faced a sudden shortage of nearly 9.5 million metric tons of grain (Valera et al., 2024). This number makes India's policy decisions a critical focal point for both economic analysts and international diplomats. Consequently, Indian trade maneuvers remain the most significant variable in determining the affordability of this daily staple for billions of people worldwide.

Despite their central responsibilities in keeping global food price stability, the Indian government or in this sense, Modi's government, faced severe internal pressure in 2023 due to skyrocketing domestic food costs. Consumer food inflation in India surged to 11.5% in July 2023, marking a three-year high and reflecting a sharp jump from 4.5% just the previous month (Bhat, 2023). This volatility was largely driven by an unprecedented spike in the prices of household staples, with tomato prices soaring by as much as 1,500% in some wholesale markets due to erratic monsoon rains and crop diseases (Pardikar, 2023). For an administration that prioritizes its "Vikas Purush" image of steady economic development, these figures were not merely economic data but represented a direct threat to public trust ahead of critical state elections in 2023 and the 2024 general elections. This domestic crisis forced a strategic pivot, as the leadership concluded that maintaining an international trade reputation was secondary to neutralizing the political risks of local inflation. Due this crisis, the government implemented aggressive export bans to stabilize the internal market and prevent potential social unrest.

The timing of the rice ban was indirectly linked to an electoral cycle that necessitated immediate political victories. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party of Narendra Modi, faced nine critical state elections in 2023, coming shortly after a major defeat in

Karnataka where the Indian National Congress won a landslide victory (Ganguly & Dash, 2023). This loss was widely attributed to local frustrations over governance and the rising cost of living, as the BJP's "double engine government" campaign failed to distract voters from food inflation. Narendra Modi's leadership style relies on a personal bond with the masses, which means failing to address inflation would harm the "Vikas Purush," or development man, image essential for the upcoming 2024 general elections (NDTV, 2023). Historically, food price volatility in India has been an electorally salient issue capable of toppling governments, as seen in past "onion elections" where staple price surges led to ruling party collapses (The Economic Times, 2023). Political survival thus became the priority through which all economic and trade alternatives were filtered. By prioritizing domestic consumers over global trade commitments, the administration sought to secure its voter base and maintain its reputation for decisive action.

The decision to implement a total export ban acted as a blunt instrument that appeared economically irrational from a global perspective. While the policy aimed to lower domestic prices, it resulted in a global welfare loss of approximately 1.7 billion dollars and a domestic net welfare loss of over 1.04 billion dollars (Fathelrahman et al., 2024). Simulation data indicates that Indian rice farmers experienced a 17% reduction in producer prices for their goods, leading to a massive loss in producer surplus and a 9% fall in total rice output. Next, the country's real GDP decreased by about 0.017% as a direct result of these trade restrictions. Standard economic models often struggle to explain why a state would pursue a policy that causes a significant GDP decrease and damages its reputation as a reliable trade partner (Valera et al., 2024). This contradiction suggests that the decision-making logic was guided by factors beyond pure economic utility, specifically prioritizing immediate market stabilization to manage domestic political risks.

Most research only explain why India through economics lens. These research findings only capture an incomplete understanding of how domestic political interest could potentially take roles in shaping the issued policy. It remains unclear how the decisions logics behind it, on why the government takes the controversial stances neglecting other potential alternatives. This paper will addresses the decision-making logic behind Modi's government 2023 non-basmati white rice export ban by applying Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) method in order to proving Poliheuristic decision filter, this research analyzes why the ruling administration rejected efficient trade alternatives, such as export duties, in favor of a total prohibition. Specifically, this study demonstrates how domestic political survival and the 2024 electoral cycle functioned as a non-compensatory filter, overriding international economic welfare considerations. By reconstructing the decision-maker's cognitive process, this paper explains the mechanism through which internal political pressures dictated India's global trade behavior.

2. Literature Review

Economic and Global Impacts of India's 2023 Rice Export Ban

Current research on the 2023 Indian non-Basmati rice ban primarily focuses on its economic and global welfare impacts. Fathelrahman et al. (2024) use simulation models to show that the policy resulted in a negative global net welfare impact of USD 1.7 billion, particularly affecting food security in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Similarly, Valera et al. (2024) investigate domestic price dynamics and conclude that the export restrictions were not entirely sufficient to lower domestic retail prices in all zones of India, despite this being one of the key policy goals. Indrasto et al. (2025) extend this analysis to importing partners such as Indonesia, noting that protectionist measures can encourage importing countries to diversify their rice supply sources.

In addition, Kumari (2023) examines the broader context of food inflation and climate-induced disruptions such as El Niño, which further tightened global food supplies when the ban was implemented. These studies provide a comprehensive ex-post assessment of the market consequences of the rice ban. However, their primary focus remains on external market outcomes, price dynamics, trade, and global welfare rather than on the internal decision-making process that led the Indian government to adopt the policy.

Narendra Modi's Leadership and Domestic Political Considerations

The broader literature on Indian politics and decision-making highlights the importance of strong leadership, populism, political credibility, and domestic political considerations in policy formulation. Sinha (2021) describes Narendra Modi's leadership through the concept of authoritarian populism, in which policies are often framed as efforts to protect "the people" from perceived crises, including through strong state intervention. Jain and Ganesh (2019) further emphasize that Modi's leadership is closely associated with credibility and image management, meaning that political actions need to reflect the aspirations and expectations of domestic voters. This perspective is relevant to understanding policies concerning food prices because food security and inflation directly affect the welfare perceptions of the domestic population. Therefore, the decision to restrict rice exports can be examined not only as an economic or trade policy but also as a policy situated within the domestic political environment and the government's efforts to maintain political credibility.

2.3 Poliheuristic Theory and Political Decision-Making

Poliheuristic (PH) theory provides a framework for explaining how political leaders make decisions when faced with complex alternatives and competing interests. Several studies have applied the PH model to explain foreign policy decisions by political leaders. Davidovich (2019), Simchayoff (2020), and İpek (2025), for example, use the PH framework to examine decisions made by leaders such as Barack Obama, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Saddam Hussein. These studies generally demonstrate that political leaders first eliminate alternatives that pose unacceptable threats to their political survival before evaluating the remaining options based on other dimensions. Within the Indian context, Vijayalakshmi (2017) applies PH theory to the 2008 Civil Nuclear Deal and demonstrates how Manmohan Singh's decision-making was influenced by political survival within a coalition government. In this framework, political survival functions as a non-compensatory dimension, meaning that an option threatening political survival can be rejected regardless of its potential advantages in other dimensions. The PH framework therefore provides a basis for examining policy decisions by considering both the initial elimination of politically unacceptable alternatives and the subsequent evaluation of the remaining alternatives.

Research Gap: A Poliheuristic Analysis of India's 2023 Rice Export Ban

Based on the existing literature, a gap remains in the application of the Poliheuristic decision-making process to the Indian government's decision to impose the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban. Existing studies have explained the economic consequences of the ban, including its effects on global welfare, domestic prices, food security, and importing countries (Fathelrahman et al., 2024; Valera et al., 2024; Indrasto et al., 2025). Other studies have examined Narendra Modi's populist leadership and the importance of domestic political credibility (Sinha, 2021; Jain & Ganesh, 2019). However, these strands of literature have not yet been sufficiently connected to explain how the Modi government arrived at the specific decision to impose the rice export ban through a two-stage decision-making process. This gap is important because a policy that generates negative externalities at the global level may nevertheless be

considered politically acceptable when domestic political risks are treated as non-compensatory. From a Poliheuristic perspective, the government's concern over domestic food prices and political credibility could have influenced the initial rejection of policy alternatives perceived as carrying greater political costs. Applying PH theory can therefore provide an alternative explanation of the 2023 rice export ban by connecting the domestic political considerations of Modi's leadership with the strategic selection of the final policy option.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the decision-making process of the Indian Government in implementing the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban. The qualitative approach is appropriate because this research seeks to understand and explain the context, considerations, and process underlying a particular state policy rather than to measure relationships between variables statistically. Sugiyono (2019) explains that qualitative research is used to examine objects in natural conditions, with the researcher functioning as the key instrument and emphasizing meaning rather than statistical generalization. Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or political problem.

The descriptive character of this research is used to systematically describe and reconstruct the decision-making process surrounding the 2023 rice export ban. The research does not statistically test whether domestic political considerations caused the policy. Instead, it identifies the relevant political, economic, and diplomatic considerations, reconstructs the available policy alternatives, and examines the decision-making process using Poliheuristic (PH) theory and Applied Decision Analysis (ADA).

The use of a qualitative descriptive approach is scientifically relevant because the research question focuses on how and why the Indian Government reached a particular policy decision. The decision-making process cannot be directly observed after the policy has been implemented. Therefore, the research relies on documentary evidence to reconstruct the sequence of events, identify the government's stated considerations, and examine the relationship between domestic political interests and the policy choice.

Process Tracing

This research also employs process tracing as an analytical strategy to reconstruct the sequence of events leading to the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban. Collier (2011) explains that process tracing can be used to examine evidence concerning processes, sequences, and mechanisms within a particular case.

Process tracing is relevant because the research seeks to explain how and why the Indian Government moved from the emergence of a domestic food-policy problem to the adoption of an export restriction. The analysis therefore reconstructs the chronology of relevant developments, including domestic rice prices, food inflation, food-security concerns, government statements, the emergence of policy alternatives, the implementation of export restrictions, and the international reactions to the policy.

Process tracing in this research is not used as a separate theory. Rather, it functions as an analytical strategy within the qualitative research design to organize documentary evidence chronologically and identify the decision-making process that can subsequently be examined through the Poliheuristic framework.

Level and Unit of Analysis

The level of analysis in this research is the state level, while the unit of analysis is the Indian Government. The state level is selected because the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban represents a state policy adopted and implemented by the Government of India in response to domestic and international circumstances.

The unit of analysis is the Indian Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The research examines the government's decision-making process rather than treating Narendra Modi as an individual unit of analysis. Modi is considered a key political actor within the Indian Government, particularly in relation to the political context and leadership considerations surrounding the policy. However, the analysis remains focused on the government as the state-level decision-making actor.

The specific case examined is the 2023 Indian non-Basmati rice export ban. The analysis focuses on three dimensions of the government's decision-making process: political, economic, and diplomatic. The political dimension concerns domestic political consequences and political survival; the economic dimension concerns domestic food prices, food security, trade, and economic consequences; while the diplomatic dimension concerns the consequences of the policy for India's relations with trading partners and the international community. Thus, the analytical positioning of this research can be summarized as:

Research Context and Social Situation

The social situation in this research refers to the political and policy environment surrounding the Indian Government's decision to impose the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban. The main institutional actor is the Indian Government, including relevant government institutions involved in food, agriculture, trade, and economic policy.

The research focuses on the period surrounding the implementation of the export ban in July 2023. However, relevant developments before and after the implementation are also examined when they provide evidence concerning the government's decision-making process. Particular attention is given to the domestic food-price situation, food-security concerns, political pressures, available policy alternatives, and international consequences.

The broader domestic political context preceding the 2024 Indian general election is also considered because political survival is a central dimension in Poliheuristic theory. Nevertheless, political motivations are not assumed in advance. They must be identified and supported by relevant documentary evidence.

Data Sources and Sampling

This research uses **secondary data** obtained through purposive selection of documents relevant to the 2023 rice export ban and the decision-making context surrounding it. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that qualitative research can utilize documents as important sources of information for understanding a research problem and its context.

The data consist of four main categories.

First, official government documents are used to identify the government's formal policy position, including government press releases, policy notifications, official statements, speeches, and relevant publications from Indian government institutions.

Second, academic journal articles are used to provide scholarly analysis concerning India's rice policy, food security, food prices, trade restrictions, domestic politics, and the international consequences of the export ban.

Third, reputable news reports are used to reconstruct the chronology of events and identify statements, reactions, and political developments surrounding the policy that may not be fully available in official documents.

Fourth, institutional and international reports may be used when they provide relevant and credible information concerning India's rice market, food security, international trade, or the consequences of the export restriction.

The sampling technique is purposive sampling, in which sources are deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research problem. Documents are included when they provide evidence concerning at least one of the following: the government's rationale for the export

ban, domestic food prices, food security, political considerations, available policy alternatives, economic consequences, diplomatic consequences, or statements by relevant state actors.

Data Collection Technique

Data are collected through documentary research. The researcher identifies, collects, reads, and categorizes documents relevant to the Indian Government's decision to impose the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban.

The collected data are organized according to two main requirements. First, the documents are arranged chronologically to reconstruct the sequence of events through process tracing. Second, the information is categorized according to the three analytical dimensions used in the decision matrix: political, economic, and diplomatic.

Information extracted from the documents includes the government's stated objectives, domestic conditions, political considerations, economic conditions, international considerations, available policy alternatives, and reactions to the adopted policy.

3.7 Data Validation

The validity of the qualitative data is maintained through source triangulation. Sugiyono (2019) explains that triangulation can be used to examine the credibility of qualitative data by comparing information obtained from different sources.

In this research, triangulation is conducted by comparing information from official government documents, academic literature, reputable news reports, and institutional reports. For example, a government statement regarding the purpose of the rice export restriction is compared with independent reports and academic studies concerning domestic rice prices, food inflation, food security, and the timing of the policy.

The research also applies source criticism by considering the authority, purpose, temporal proximity, and potential limitations of each source. Official government documents are particularly important for identifying the government's formal position, while academic and independent sources provide additional contextual evidence. This combination allows the research to distinguish between the government's publicly stated justification and broader evidence concerning the circumstances surrounding the decision.

Data Analysis Technique

The data are analyzed using Applied Decision Analysis (ADA) as the operational analytical procedure for applying Poliheuristic theory. Mintz (2005) explains that ADA can be used to reconstruct a decision matrix by identifying the alternatives, decision dimensions, implications, and decision rules associated with a particular decision.

The ADA analysis in this research consists of six stages:

1. Identification of the decision problem

The research identifies the policy problem faced by the Indian Government in 2023, particularly the conditions concerning domestic rice prices, food inflation, and food security that preceded the export restriction.

2. Identification of available alternatives

The research reconstructs the policy alternatives available to the Indian Government based on documentary evidence. These may include maintaining existing export policies, imposing partial restrictions, imposing a broader export restriction, or adopting alternative domestic measures to address food-price and supply concerns.

3. Identification of decision dimensions

Three dimensions are used in the decision matrix: political, economic, and diplomatic. The political dimension represents domestic political consequences; the economic dimension represents domestic and international economic implications; and the diplomatic dimension represents consequences for India's external relations and trading partners.

4. Identification of implications

Each alternative is examined according to its implications for the three dimensions. The implications are identified from documentary evidence rather than assumed by the researcher.

5. Rating of implications

The implications of each alternative are represented using a numerical scale from -10 to +10, following the ADA procedure described by Mintz (2005). Negative values represent adverse implications, while positive values represent beneficial implications.

However, these scores are treated as an analytical reconstruction, not as direct measurements of the actual calculations made by Indian decision-makers. The ratings are based on the evidence identified in the documents and are used to make the comparison between alternatives systematic and transparent.

6. Identification of the decision rule

The final stage identifies the decision rule reflected in the reconstructed decision matrix. The analysis examines whether the decision demonstrates the two-stage logic proposed by Poliheuristic theory, particularly whether political considerations functioned as a non-compensatory filter before the remaining alternatives were evaluated through other dimensions.

3.9 Application of Poliheuristic Theory

Poliheuristic theory provides the theoretical framework for explaining the Indian Government's decision-making process. According to Mintz (2005), political decision-making can involve a two-stage process in which political considerations are addressed before the remaining alternatives are evaluated through other dimensions.

In the first stage, the decision-maker applies a non-compensatory political filter. An alternative that poses an unacceptable threat to political survival may be eliminated regardless of its potential benefits in other dimensions. In this research, the political dimension is therefore treated as the primary analytical dimension.

The indicators of political survival are derived from the Poliheuristic literature and include threats to political support, significant declines in public support, electoral defeat, domestic opposition, threats to political power or legitimacy, inter-party rivalry, internal or external challenges to the regime, potential coalition instability, and other forms of political pressure (Mintz, 2004).

However, these indicators are not all automatically included in the analysis. Only indicators supported by empirical evidence concerning the Indian Government's 2023 rice policy are incorporated into the decision matrix. This prevents the analysis from attributing political motives to the government without sufficient evidence.

In the second stage, alternatives that survive the political filter are evaluated according to their implications across the remaining dimensions. Economic and diplomatic considerations are therefore examined alongside political considerations to understand the final policy selection.

Through this framework, the research examines whether the Indian Government's decision to impose the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban can be explained through the Poliheuristic decision-making process.

Application of Applied Decision Analysis

Applied Decision Analysis functions as the operational mechanism for translating the Poliheuristic framework into a systematic analysis of the case. The method works by reconstructing the decision matrix of the Indian Government based on observable evidence concerning the policy alternatives and their consequences.

The reconstructed matrix contains three main components: **alternatives, dimensions, and implications**. The alternatives represent the policy options available to the Indian Government.

The dimensions represent the criteria through which those alternatives are evaluated. The implications represent the potential consequences of each alternative for each dimension. The political dimension receives particular attention because Poliheuristic theory identifies political survival as a possible non-compensatory dimension. The economic and diplomatic dimensions are then used to examine the consequences of the alternatives that remain after the political filter is applied.

The analytical process can therefore be represented as:

This procedure enables the research to systematically examine whether domestic political considerations shaped the Indian Government's decision to impose the 2023 non-Basmati rice export ban while still considering the economic and diplomatic implications of the policy.

Research Limitations

Because this research relies primarily on secondary data, the internal thoughts and private deliberations of Indian government decision-makers cannot be observed directly. Consequently, the decision matrix reconstructed through ADA represents an evidence-based analytical reconstruction rather than a literal reproduction of the government's internal decision matrix.

The research therefore does not claim direct access to the private cognition of Narendra Modi or other government officials. Instead, it examines observable documentary evidence and uses Poliheuristic theory and ADA to reconstruct the decision-making logic that can reasonably be identified from the available evidence. This limitation is important to maintain analytical transparency and avoid overstating the conclusions of the research.

4. Results and Discussion

Narendra Modi Personalities

Narendra Modi became a national leader after working for many years in the RSS and the BJP. Born in Gujarat in 1950, he started working full-time for the RSS in 1971, moved to the BJP in 1985, and became the party's general secretary by 1998. He served as the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 until 2014, where he focused on business growth and government organization to build his reputation before the BJP chose him to run for Prime Minister in 2013. During the 2014 election, his party promised better economic rules and less corruption, winning 282 seats and forming the first single-party majority in thirty years. Modi took office on May 26, 2014, and led the BJP to an even larger victory in 2019 with 303 seats, helped by his focus on border safety and his high approval ratings (Al Jazeera, 2019).

For years, Narendra Modi has built a political identity that combines a focus on national economic development with a strong commitment to Hindu nationalism. He projected himself as the "Vikas Purush," or development man, during his rise to national power, using his record as the Chief Minister of Gujarat to promise similar progress for the entire country. For example, in his 2014 campaign, he highlighted the "Gujarat model" of growth to contrast his record with the perceived failures of previous governments (Jaffrelot, 2015). This focus on development was designed to appeal to the urban middle class who wanted better jobs and economic stability. At the same time, he maintains a clear identity as a Hindu nationalist, often using religious symbols and visiting sacred sites to connect with his core supporters. This dual identity allows him to be seen as both a modern reformer and a protector of traditional cultural values, which has helped him win large groups of voters across different parts of society (Sinha, 2021).

His communication strategy is defined by a move away from traditional press interactions in favor of direct engagement through modern technology and personal messaging. Instead of

holding regular press conferences, he uses social media platforms like Twitter, the NaMo App, and his monthly radio show, *Mann Ki Baat*, to speak directly to the public. By using simple language and hashtags like "#achchedin" (good days), he makes his political goals easy for the average person to understand and remember. This direct way of talking helps build a feeling of trust and a personal bond between the leader and the people.

The personality Modi projects is a mix of a strong, decisive authority figure and a humble person from a simple background. He often speaks about his past as a "chaiwala," or tea vendor, to show that he understands the struggles of the common man and is not part of the traditional political elite. This humble image is balanced by his reputation as a "strong leader" who is capable of making fast and tough decisions, such as the implementation of the demonetization policy or the repeal of special status for certain regions (Thiruppathi & Arunachalam, 2023). He reinforces this image through his body language and his choice of clothing, which often reflects the local culture of the places he visits. His supporters see him as a "doer" who is dedicated to the nation above all else, partly because he is seen as someone who has given up his personal life for public service (Jain & Ganesh, 2019). This combination of being a relatable commoner and a powerful, masculine figure makes him a very effective leader in the eyes of his followers.

Modi's political identity also shaped by a populist leadership style that often defines "the people" in opposition to perceived "enemies." He consistently criticized the Nehru-Gandhi family and other opposition groups as a corrupt elite that has held the country back for decades. By framing politics as a struggle between himself and these "enemies of the people," he is able to mobilize large electoral mandates that give him the power to centralize authority in his own office (Jyotasana, 2025). He has used these mandates to bypass traditional party structures and implement major economic and social reforms through executive orders. This style of leadership also involves a strong focus on national security and a muscular approach to foreign policy, which further enhances his image as a protector of the nation. In short, his political identity is centered on his own personal authority and the belief that he alone can lead the country toward a more prosperous and culturally unified future (Sinha, 2021).

In short, Modi's personality is a carefully crafted blend of the relatable common man and the unstoppable strongman. By constantly referencing his humble beginnings as a tea vendor, he breaks the image of a distant elite and builds a direct, personal bond with the masses through social media and radio. He frames himself as a "doer" who isn't afraid to make tough, controversial calls, positioning his personal authority as the only force capable of protecting the nation from its enemies. Or to put it this way, he projects the image of a selfless protector who has traded his private life for the country's progress, making his political survival feel identical to the nation's success.

Decision Dimensions

- **Political Survival, Value: 9**

2023 opened with the two-day national executive meeting of the BJP. JP Nadda, Party President declared that the year would be a relentless battleground where the BJP must secure victory across nine critical state elections (Livemint, 2023). BJP is the ruling party at that time, this period served as a decisive stage before the 2024 general elections, creating a domestic political environment where every policy move was scrutinized for its electoral impact. In this climate of imminent electoral tests, maintaining the image of a stable and providing government became the paramount objective, setting the stage for a policy landscape dominated by the

need for immediate political security. For the BJP Party, it's mandatory mission sustain the momentum of the Modi "strongman" brand. The party recognized that any sign of economic distress, particularly rising food prices or supply shortages, could be weaponized by the opposition to disrupt their narrative of development and national strength. This means the urgency to win these nine states transformed domestic stability into a non-negotiable priority. This intense focus on electoral dominance explains why high-risk domestic variables were treated as existential threats, forcing the leadership to prioritize local survival over global economic expectations.

Then May comes, and the political landscape shifts violently as the BJP suffers a crushing defeat in the Karnataka state elections, losing its only stronghold in southern India to the Congress party (NDTV, 2023). The results were a mathematical wake-up call, with Congress securing 135 seats in the 224-member assembly while the BJP was pushed back to just 66 seats, signaling a dangerous erosion of the ruling party's dominant image. This loss exposed a vulnerability in the Modi brand, showing that even a high-profile campaign could not override local frustrations over governance and economic pressure. Voters in this key region sent a clear message of discontent, forcing the central leadership to realize that the path to the 2024 general election was no longer guaranteed. At the heart of this electoral backlash was the biting reality of food inflation, which had become a primary weapon for the opposition and a growing source of anger for the common citizen, making the price of daily essentials a direct threat to the party's political survival. This posed an alarm that Modi's government is defeatable.

4th July, Congress blame Modi government policies for the food inflation. They demands government to excise on fuel to control the food inflation., campaign that labeled the Prime Minister as "Mehangai-Man," or the Man of Inflation. This narrative directly attacked the core of the Modi brand by contrasting his "strong leader" image with the reality of a vegetable basket where the cost of basic staples like tomatoes had surged from 15 to 150 rupees per kg in a single month. By highlighting that the price of rice had climbed 25 percent and flour 46 percent since the previous administration, With unemployment hitting record highs and the cost of nine out of ten essential commodities skyrocketing, the government faced a double whammy that threatened to dissolve its electoral mandate (Shrinete, 2023). For a leadership that views political survival as an existential necessity, this mounting public anger transformed food prices into a "non-compensatory" red line, where no other achievement could mask the danger of a hungry and frustrated electorate.

To counter these aggressive attacks, the BJP central leadership immediately shifted its focus toward the next series of battles in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan. This move was a strategic necessity to regain momentum and prove that the party remains the dominant force in national politics. High-level meetings were called to reorganize local units and ensure that the government's message reached every household before the voting began. With the opposition feeling energized, the ruling party recognized that it could no longer rely on past reputation alone. The focus turned toward securing the support of the rural poor and middle-class families who were most affected by rising costs, making it clear that winning these upcoming states was the only way to stabilize the party's path toward the 2024 general election.

The intense pressure from these events aligns with the Non-Compensatory Variables of Poliheuristic theory, specifically regarding the threat to a leader's survival and political legitimacy. The rise of domestic opposition (Congress's Karnataka Win) and the fierce inter-party rivalry (Congress's Attack) created a situation where the Prime Minister's image as an unbeatable leader was put at risk. A significant drop in popularity in a key region meant the BJP

lost its foothold in the South India, proving to the opposition that the Modi's government was not undefeatable (Apoorvanand, 2023). These factors created a threat to Modi's Presences, especially with the looming prospect of an electoral defeat across nine state elections in 2023. (Times of India, 2023) The high stakes of these regional contests transformed the rising cost of food into a non-compensatory issue for the BJP.

- **Economics, Value: 8**

During late 2022, India's domestic economy was heavily influenced by a widening gap between the food available and the increasing needs of its people. The pressure reached a breaking point when consumer price inflation jumped to a 15-month high of 7.44% in July, driven primarily by a staggering 11.5% surge in food costs (Reuters, 2023). As the population continued to grow, a significant shift in wealth meant that many families moved into the middle class. With higher incomes, these households began to change their eating habits, moving away from simple grains toward more expensive items like proteins and vitamin-rich foods. This change in consumption patterns put persistent upward pressure on the prices of pulses, dairy, and vegetables. Experts noted that this was not just a temporary spike but a deep structural challenge (Kumari, 2023). The sheer scale of India's economic growth meant that the demand for diverse food items often outpaced the ability of local markets to provide them, keeping inflation a primary concern.

The agricultural supply during this period faced severe challenges from unpredictable weather events and failed policy experiments. Before the 2023 crisis, the Modi's government attempted to curb exports by imposing a 20% export duty on non-basmati white rice in September 2022, but the measure failed to cool domestic prices as global demand remained relentless (The Economic Times, 2023). This policy failure was compounded when heavy monsoon rains caused significant damage to the kharif rice crops, which are essential for the country's food security. This initial supply shock was followed by mounting concerns over the El Niño weather pattern. Scientists predicted that these conditions would bring less rain and much higher temperatures, threatening future harvests across various states. Such environmental uncertainty often leads to cautious behavior in the domestic market. When farmers and traders expect a shortage because of bad weather, they may hold onto their grain stocks, which naturally causes prices in local shops to rise (Valera et al., 2024). These climate-related risks highlighted how sensitive India's domestic food prices are to the volume of seasonal rainfall every year.

To protect rural livelihoods and ensure a steady supply of staples, the Indian government continued to rely on the Minimum Support Price system. The government aggressively raised these prices, such as the 7% increase for common paddy to 2,183 rupees per 100 kg, to encourage farmers to plant more despite climate risks (Press Information Bureau, 2023). This program guarantees that farmers receive a set price for their produce, shielding them from sudden market crashes. While this system is highly valued by growers for providing an assured income, it also plays a significant role in domestic inflation. Because the government sets a floor price for essential commodities like rice and wheat, retail prices rarely fall below a certain level. This created a complex balance where the government aimed to encourage high production while trying to manage the cost of living for people in the cities. Supporting the farmers through these price guarantees was seen as vital for maintaining the flow of food from the fields to the national market.

While support programs like the Minimum Support Price helped maintain farmer morale,

the underlying pressures from a growing population and dietary shifts kept inflation high. The government had to monitor domestic stock levels constantly to prevent local shortages that could disrupt broader economic progress. These domestic efforts were focused on ensuring that the internal market remained well-supplied, regardless of global price trends or tensions in other countries. In the end, it was clear how significant it is for a large nation to secure a reliable domestic supply to keep inflation under control. In short, structural system which made inflation inevitable which demands government to intervene heavily in securing domestic supply for controlling inflation.

- **Diplomatic, Value: 7**

India commands a dominant 40% share of the global rice trade, exporting to over 140 countries. This immense market power means that India is not just a participant in global trade but its primary stabilizer. During his address at the G20 Summit, Prime Minister Modi emphasized that "the need of the hour is to show compassion and spirit of service," positioning India as a reliable partner for the Global South (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022). Known in the current circumstance, this leadership image is highly vulnerable to domestic pressures. If India were to prioritize internal supply over external commitments, it would directly contradict its self-proclaimed role as a dependable provider of essential commodities, potentially triggering a global price surge that would disproportionately affect food-insecure nations in Africa and Southeast Asia.

The potential for a restrictive trade policy poses a significant threat to India's diplomatic credibility during its G20 presidency. Throughout 2023, India used its leadership platform to advocate for "One Earth, One Family, One Future," aiming to bridge the gap between developed and developing nations on issues of food and energy security (Katriana, 2023). The economic consequences of a trade disruption could India's long-term standing as a stable investment destination. While the government previously attempted to use a 20% export duty to manage prices without a total ban, the continued volatility in the domestic market suggests that more drastic measures are always a possibility (Nandy, 2023). Such uncertainty in trade regulations creates a "reputational risk" that can deter international trade partners from relying on Indian supply chains in the future. As global leaders gathered in New Delhi for the G20, the focus remained on building resilient supply chains that can withstand climate and geopolitical shocks (G20 Secretariat, 2023). If India, as the chair, fails to maintain its own role as a steady supplier, it risks ceding market influence to competitors and weakening its strategic leverage.

Alternatives Set and Potential Implications

- **Alternatives #1: Do Nothing (On-Going 20% Export Duty)**

This would have kept foreign currency flowing into India and protected the income of farmers and exporters who benefit from high global prices. Diplomatically, it was the safest move, as it signaled that India was a stable partner during its G20 presidency and would not abandon the 140 countries that rely on its grain. But, the political implications were dangerous. With domestic rice prices climbing, the government would have appeared indifferent to the struggles of its own citizens. In a year with nine state elections, staying the course would have given the opposition a massive advantage, allowing them to argue that the Prime Minister cared more about global trade than the hunger of the Indian people. This could have led to a significant loss of voter trust and seats in key regions.

- **Alternatives #2: Increase Export Tariff**

The government could have raised the export tax to a much higher level, such as 40%, to make shipping rice abroad less profitable. Economically, this would have discouraged some exports and potentially lowered local prices, but it offered no guarantee. If global demand remained strong, international buyers might have simply paid the higher price, leaving the domestic market empty and prices high for Indian families. Internationally, it would have been seen as a move toward protectionism, though less aggressive than a ban, likely causing minor friction with trading partners. Politically, however, this "middle ground" was risky. It lacked the immediate impact needed to stop the "Mehangai-Man" narrative. If the price of rice didn't drop quickly after the tax increase, the government would look weak and ineffective, failing to solve the inflation crisis while still damaging its reputation as a fair trade partner.

- **Alternatives #3: Quota System**

A quota system would have set a hard limit on the total amount of rice allowed to leave the country each month. Economically, this provides a predictable amount of supply for both the domestic and international markets, preventing a total collapse of trade while ensuring Indians have enough to eat. Diplomatically, this is often viewed as a responsible compromise because it allows for "managed" exports to the most vulnerable nations. However, the administrative burden of such a system is high, requiring constant monitoring and complex paperwork that could take months to perfect. Politically, a quota is a slow-acting tool. In the face of rapid price spikes and looming elections, a slow bureaucratic response would not be enough to appease angry voters. The government needed a clear, loud signal of action, and a quota was simply too quiet to drown out the political noise from the opposition

- **Alternatives #4: Full Export Ban**

Choosing a total ban meant stopping all shipments of non-basmati white rice to the outside world immediately. Economically, this was a blunt instrument that caused an instant surge in domestic supply, which helped lower local prices but cost Indian exporters billions in lost contracts. Diplomatically, this was the most damaging path, as it shocked the global market and forced prices to rise for millions of people in Africa and Asia, directly contradicting India's G20 promise to be a friend to the world. However, the political implications were the most powerful. By cutting off exports, the government sent a clear message to its voters that their survival was the top priority. This move effectively neutralized the opposition's attacks on inflation just in time for the elections. For a leader focused on staying in power, the domestic victory of cheaper rice was worth the cost of a bruised international reputation.

- **Decision Matrix**

Dimensions	Political Survival	Economics	Diplomatic	Total Score
Weight	10	9	7	

Dimensions	Political Survival	Economics	Diplomatic	Total Score
Status Quo	-8	+5	+9	28
Increase Tariff	-4	+2	+4	50
Export Quota	-2	-1	+2	-15
Total Export Ban	+9	-6	-8	-20

In this Matrix, Modi's government assigns the highest weight to political stability, a poliheuristic approval alternatives, because losing the support of the domestic voter is an unacceptable risk that no amount of economic gain or diplomatic praise can fix (Mintz, 2005). While keeping the market open or simply raising taxes might have protected India's global reputation and kept the economy moving, these options failed to stop the immediate threat of rising food prices at home. Any choice that results in a negative political score is instantly discarded, regardless of how well it performs in other areas. This is why the total export ban became the final choice; even though it caused significant damage to international relations and trade revenue, it was the only move that successfully lowered the cost of rice for the common person. By prioritizing a positive result in the political dimension, the leader ensures their own survival, treating the resulting economic and diplomatic friction as a necessary price to pay for staying in power.

Policy Outcomes: Failed Policies

Daily retail prices in most zones increased after the policy began on 20 July 2023. Statistical estimates show that the ban is associated with price increases of 0.16% in the North Zone, 0.28% in the South Zone, and 0.25% in the West Zone. (Valera et al., 2024) More pronounced shifts were recorded in the Northeast Zone with a 19% to 24% rise and the South Zone with a 3% to 9% rise. One reason for these unexpected increases was speculative storage by traders and farmers who anticipated future supply needs. Furthermore, rice prices in India had already climbed by more than 30% between October 2022 and the start of the ban (Diwani, 2025).

The export ban has created significant challenges for Indian rice producers and the

national economy. Simulation data suggests that rice farmers experienced a 17% reduction in producer prices for their goods (Fathelrahman et al., 2024). This caused a massive loss in producer surplus totaling over USD 1 billion. The impacts, total rice output in the country fell by approximately 9%. Macroeconomic data indicates that India's real GDP also decreased by about 0.017% as a direct result of these trade restrictions. The total net welfare loss for India is estimated at more than USD 1.04 billion (Valera et al., 2024). Farmers have begun to redirect their resources and land away from rice toward other crops like wheat to cope with these losses. In fact, while rice exports vanished, wheat exports from India expanded by approximately 4.7%. Beyond financial data, the ban has also negatively impacted India's reputation as a reliable global trade partner (Kumari, 2023). While designed to stabilise the market, the policy has instead created a significant trust deficit between farmers and the government.

To mitigate the domestic fallout and secure the electoral landscape ahead of the critical November-December 2023 state elections, the government pivoted toward aggressive welfare-based interventions. Central to this strategy was the launch of the Bharat Atta initiative on November 6, 2023, which offered subsidized wheat flour at a fixed price of ₹27.50 per kg, which significantly lower than the prevailing market rates of ₹36-40 per kg (DD News, 2023). This move was explicitly designed to dampen the impact of high food inflation on middle- and lower-income households. Following the success of this model, the government further expanded its "Bharat" brand by introducing Bharat Rice at ₹29 per kg to tackle the persistent 15% year-on-year increase in retail rice prices (The Economic Times, 2024). These "market intervention" schemes served as a powerful tool for public sentiment management, effectively framing the BJP as a proactive guardian of food security. This retail-level welfarism is widely credited with neutralizing opposition critiques regarding the cost of living, contributing to the BJP's decisive victories in the key "Hindi heartland" states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh in December 2023 (The Hindu, 2023).

5. Conclusions

The 2023 non-basmati rice export ban policy shows how domestic political interests functions as a non-compensatory filter in Narendra Modi's strategic decision-making process. This study has elaborate the decision logics behind Modi's administration, which prioritized internal electoral security over its foreign policy interests and India's reputation as a reliable trade partner. The study elaborates three decision dimensions (Political Survival, Economics, Diplomati) as anchor, by assigning value on each one of dimension. Which then, shows potential alternative decision set which are: Do Nothing, Increase Export Tarrif, Quota System, Full Export Ban. These alternative set, then being analyze by assessing each potential implication towards Decision Dimensions. Which in the end, Full Export Ban have bigger value in securing domestic public image. Despite the policy resulting in significant domestic welfare losses, a 17% reduction in producer prices for farmers, and a measurable decrease in real GDP, the administration viewed these economic costs as secondary to the existential threat posed by skyrocketing food inflation which could hurting the Modi's administration image. The imminent state elections and the upcoming 2024 general election, the Modi's image and the personal bond Modi maintains with the masses necessitated a blunt, decisive intervention to neutralize the narrative utilized by the opposition. Fast Forward in 2024, the Modi's administrative won the General Election preserving status quo as defending champions.

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