

Why West Bengal in 2026 Is an Uncertain Dream for the BJP

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Swetasree G. Roy

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Although the Bharatiya Janata Party is the opposition party in the Bengal state assembly today, in the 2026 election they are most likely to slip from that designation. In the last assembly election in Bengal in 2021, BJP could bag only 77 seats compared to 213 of the Trinamool Congress and in the parliamentary elections this year, their downfall continued. BJP secured only 12 seats, compared to 18 seats in 2019.

There is strife at the top level between the new turncoats and the old members, especially regarding distribution of tickets. Dilip Ghosh, who had previously won from Medinipur, was made to contest from the Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency. This resulted in his loss and even the Medinipur seat was lost by BJP.

Given the current state of affairs, when people are protesting against the rape and murder of a 31-year-old woman doctor at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, Bengal's main opposition party has remained mostly away from media. Protests in front of police stations by some BJP leaders like Locket Chatterjee and Agnimitra Paul have not garnered popular support.

Both Paul and Chatterjee, leaders and activists of the BJP's women wing, told reporters that they want to "purify" the police as some officials have been connected to the crime. However, the few times that BJP leaders like Suvendu Adhikari and others have tried to join R.G. Kar protesters, they have faced 'go back' slogans.

In this vacuum, the main opposition party in Bengal has emerged the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – cadres of which party were at least not sent back. They unfurled their party flags and continued to march with the protestors. Stalwarts of the CPI(M) have been vociferously vocal about the ghastly crimes committed by the administration of medical colleges across Bengal. Most of the public rallies outside Kolkata has so far been arranged by the CPI(M).

[Also read: 'TMC-Aided Bullying': Not Just R.G. Kar, Bengal Doctors Allege Deep Rot Pervades Medical Education Across State](#)

The main protest is still meanwhile being led by the West Bengal Junior Doctors' Front. That the rightwing student union Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad will hardly participate in them has come as a surprise. Instead, the Minakshi Mukherjee-led DYFI has captured the attention of the nation with respect to standing in solidarity with the junior doctors.

Mukherjee has been in an active role throughout the protests. It was she who blocked the hearse to delay the allegedly hurried cremation process of the murdered doctor. She has appeared before the Central Bureau of Investigation and promised to cooperate as much as possible.

Reclaiming the throne

CPI(M) was unable to secure any seat for themselves in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, but have been blamed several times for dividing the Hindu vote bank in favour of TMC. Both BJP and TMC, top contenders in Bengal's political landscape see a common enemy in a new and rejuvenated CPI(M).

A complete comeback in 2026 is a far-fetched dream but occupying the opposition seat is possible for the party.

However, CPI(M)'s vote shares have not been remarkable in Lok Sabha and assembly elections post 2011. The 2016 assembly elections was the last time that the party saw a double-digit vote share (20.1%). Despite its lacklustre performance in the state, this year in Lok Sabha election, they have been able to turn the heads of the voters towards themselves, thereby making BJP's foothold shaky.

A good mix of young and old candidates was a strategy used by CPI(M) in 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This attracted attention. Besides, political analysts also retorted that the people of Bengal are keen to save the state from a TMC-BJP binary.

Caste politics does not fare well in this particular state. The overall literacy rate in WB is much above the national average. Bengalis are often attached to their culture and its preservation. With a rule of over 34 years, the Left front ensures that it still has a core support base which does not switch over to the BJP.

Disenchanted rural Bengal

Despite being in the state now for a decade, BJP has failed to capture the imagination of Bengalis. The urban Bengali *bhadralok* believe in a reformist BJP and detest corrupt practices of TMC. But Mamata Banerjee's stronghold is the rural area.

As per the Census 2011, approximately 70% of people in Bengal live in the rural areas. In 2024, TMC emerged victorious across south Bengal, while BJP was somehow able to maintain its place in the northern part of the state. TMC meanwhile also controls 35,000 gram panchayats and most zilla parishads.

Moreover, TMC has a strong organisational structure at the grassroots level. With Mamata Banerjee being the face of the party for well over 20 years, the party contests elections depending on one particular figure.

Also read: [Mamata Banerjee Has Failed to Measure the Public's Pulse](#)

In urban areas, the party has been successful in using neighbourhood clubs to change the discourse of elections. Significant amount of grants are given every year by the TMC government to these clubs to organise cultural and sporting events. Club members thus become foot soldiers of the TMC, allowing a unique fusion of decentralised governance and centralised organisation. These foot soldiers are also unlikely to switch to the BJP.

CPI(M), in order to make a comeback, will have to think about its strategy to disenchant the rural population sitting in TMC camps. The welfare politics that Didi plays in rural areas through her various schemes has expanded its net far and wide. In 2024, almost all of the women vote in rural areas went to TMC.

BJP's failure to trade horses

The top leadership within the BJP is a borrowed one. Suvendu Adhikari, current leader of opposition in the state assembly, was once considered the right-hand man of Mamata Banerjee.

There were talks within the political circles that he left TMC because Banerjee favoured her nephew as a successor. However, reality is that Adhikari was under the radar of the CBI for the Narada case for a long time, but central agencies did not act upon it.

Many leaders including TMC stalwarts Mukul Roy joined the BJP but later returned to TMC after their names were absolved from various scams they were involved in. This has institutionally weakened the BJP from its core.

Meanwhile, TMC, over the past 11 years, has become a lucrative money-making business. For many young individuals, in rural and pre-urban areas, a viable job is working as a party cadre for TMC.

Despite Bengal's dismal economic realities, TMC manages its position very well. Bengal has seen the sharpest decline amongst all Indian states in its share in India's GDP, which sits at 5.6% in 2023-24. Totally deindustrialised, with stagnant growth, and widespread unemployment and severe corruption, Bengal has been ailing for a decade now.

Bengal has not been able to draw investments either.

In recent times, BJP has not been very successful in luring MLAs or MPs to their side from TMC. Its last was Tapas Roy in March 2024. It has been unable to cause a dent in the TMC camp amidst such widespread protests as well.

While BJP banks on the faces of its New Delhi leadership in the state, the youth's attention to CPI(M) could help it chart a path of return in the state.

Swetasree G. Roy is a professor of political science in the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy. Sachin Mukkar and Animesh Sanyal are final year students of Masters in Public Policy at Jindal School of Government and Public Policy.