

Political Stability in West Bengal

Prosperity or Decay?

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The conventional belief indicates that the gradual success of an incumbent party lies in the economic progression of the state and the well-being of the majority of voters. However, the recent growth of the incumbent party in West Bengal does not support the belief entirely. A marginal improvement of agriculture and rural people, relying on the delivery of welfare schemes at the cost of overall growth (including industrial and service sectors), reveals a redistribute strategy employed by the state in the federal setting. This compels the dependency of low-income people on minuscule resources in the absence of modern sector growth along with building an organisation of cadres, mushroomed under the shadow of welfare schemes, to deliver those services among the networks against the agency fees and commission, worked effectively to engineer the popularity and helped to extinguish the unrest among the non-beneficiaries. This paper unfolds evidence in support of such a strategy that helped maintain incumbency.

In the 2021 state assembly elections held in West Bengal, the incumbent political party, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), came into power with an absolute majority for the third consecutive occasion. Out of the 294 seats in the state assembly, TMC won 213 seats with a commendable rise in the vote share at an all-time high of 47.9%. This is not the first time that the TMC's vote share has increased. Since the party came to power in 2011, its vote share has increased in all the elections (state assembly elections and general elections), except in the 2019 general elections, when the party's vote share declined marginally (Figure 1, p 122). Some of the scholars (Ghatak 2021) believed that the rise of rural consumption, a measure of

welfare improvement of the poor, helped to gain votes for the ruling party. But, this happened despite an extremely poor political image created by the incumbent party due to the alleged involvement of TMC leaders in several corruption cases (for example, Saradha chit fund scam and Narada bribery case).

For example, the Narada bribery case came out just before the 2016 assembly elections. It is currently being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the direction of the Kolkata High Court. Many leaders of the incumbent party have been seen taking bribes on camera in exchange for providing benefits to businesspersons. Ghatak's argument relies on the median voter theory. According to the theory, such gradual progress of political strength of the incumbent party seems to indicate that the economic conditions of the state and the well-being of the majority of voters must have been continuously rising. But, if the state economy does not reveal the signs of such economic progress for the entire decade, this conjecture can be contested. What then are the reasons behind the progress of the vote share? Against this stunning political performance, one is curious to investigate the reasons behind such a political upsurge.

On the contrary, it has been reported earlier that the presence of political violence in West Bengal is the highest among all the Indian states (Phadnis 2020), and it only escalates every election.¹ A report of the Ministry of Home Affairs submitted to the Election Commission of India suggests that as many as 693 cases of political violence occurred during the 2019 general elections. It also highlighted the continuation and escalation of violence even after the election. Between 1 June 2019 and 31 December 2019, as many as 852 cases of political violence were reported with 61 casualties (Singh 2021). Similar incidents of post-poll violence have also been reported after the 2021 assembly elections. Considering the seriousness of the incidents, the Kolkata High Court (vide order dated 18 June 2021) has requested the National Human Rights Commission to constitute a committee to examine all the cases of post-poll violence and submit a report to the court (*New Indian Express* 2021). While the exact number of incidents of political violence in the state during the entire TMC regime has not been properly documented, the anecdote evidences and reports seem to indicate that it has increased and reached astonishingly high levels with the rising trend of lumpenisation of public life in the state (Mukherjee 2021). These facts highlight two critical puzzles: (i) how does the TMC regime persist when the aggregate economy is not performing well? and (ii) if citizens of the state are satisfied with the performance of the government, as reflected by the high vote share of the incumbent TMC, then why are we seeing so many incidents of political

violence during each and every election? This paper finds out the plausible reasons behind the puzzles of regime persistence and political violence under the TMC rule.

In the context of a long-persisting Left Front rule in West Bengal, Sarkar (2006) describes how informalisation of the economy and a strong political organisation helped the incumbent Left Front to stay in power for 34 years even when the economy was dwindling and the impact of the initial land distribution had faded away. In the case of the TMC regime, the tightness of political organisation in the form of ideology and structure is nowhere close to the left. The question that then arises is how does TMC win elections after elections without having a strong base of political organisation? We argue that, in the absence of a strong political organisation and a high degree of informalisation of the economy, TMC has created a source of new incentive structure for rent-sharing by improvising two existing instruments of rent-seeking (namely, syndicate and cut money) to attach workers with the party.² This incentive structure helps them to form a centralised political organisation by successfully replacing the multilayer hierarchical political organisation of the Left Front.

In the following sections, we first demonstrate a few performance indicators of the economy under the TMC rule. Then, we discuss how the instruments of rent-seeking activities have flourished and how they have created a new incentive structure to pursue such activities during the last 10 years. Finally, we present a political economy framework of extraction and sharing of rent in West Bengal under the TMC rule to answer the puzzles described above.

Did the State Economy Prosper?

The existing information reveals a mixed story. As far as the low-income people are concerned, there is a sign of prosperity under the rule of the current TMC government. It is argued that between 2011 and 2021, the growth rates of agriculture and rural per capita consumption expenditure in West Bengal have increased more than the national averages. Since more than 70% of the population lives in rural areas, the income of a large section of the population has increased (Ghatak 2021). Moreover, the welfare schemes like Sabooj Sathi and Krishak Bandhu, introduced by the state government to cater to the needs of the rural and semi-urban people have been quite popular (Nath 2017; Bhattacharya 2021; Ghatak 2021). A group of scholars have also praised that there is no evidence of discrimination along the party line in the delivery of these schemes (Nath 2017; Bhattacharya 2021). The evidence further suggests that the level of

informalisation of labour has slightly declined under TMC (Figure 2).³ All these convey sufficient reasons to believe a fair amount of popularity of the ruling party among the low-income people. However, it does not ascertain the prosperity of the entire economy. If the amount of spending on social welfare schemes by the West Bengal government is compared to the all-India average, it does not reveal an encouraging picture.

To evaluate the economic performance of West Bengal under the TMC rule, we have taken two different criteria: (i) performance of the economy during this period compared to their history and (ii) performance of the economy compared to the entire country. The average annual growth rate of per capita gross state domestic product (PCGSDP) of West Bengal and the average annual growth rate of per capita gross domestic product (PCGDP) of India for three consecutive periods of 1991-2000, 2001-10, and 2011-19 have been presented in Table 1. The trends reveal at least three crucial observations about the performance of the economy. First, while the per capita income of West Bengal was growing faster than the national economy during the last two decades of the Left Front rule, the growth rate has declined below the national average during the TMC regime. Second, not only has the economy of West Bengal grown slower than the rest of the Indian economy during 2011-19 (before the pandemic), but the per capita income growth rate of the state remained lower than the rate at which it was growing during the last two decades (1991-2010) of the Left Front regime. Finally, while India's per capita income growth rate has declined during 2011-19, it is much sharper in the case of West Bengal. While the world economy was passing through a recessionary phase after the financial crisis of 2008, the depth of depression in West Bengal was much deeper than the national economy.

To identify the sources of this decline in terms of production sectors, the average annual growth rates of the three broad sectors, namely agriculture, industry, and service, have been presented in Table 2. Although the agricultural sector has performed much better in West Bengal, growing at a rate of 3.3%—relative to 1.6% growth for the national economy, the two largest sectors (industry and service) have registered a slowdown. The growth rate of the industrial sector in the entire country improved from 7.4% to 8.6% between 2000-10 and 2012-20. However, the growth rate of the industrial sector in West Bengal has declined from 7.1% to 6.6%. Moreover, the decline in the growth rate of the service sector is much deeper in West Bengal as compared to the national trend. The growth rate of the service sector for West Bengal has declined by a massive 3.5% in comparison to only a 0.6% decline for the country between 2000-10 and 2012-20. So, the

industrial and service sectors, serving as the engines of growth of the modern economy, faced severe crises during this period. Therefore, one can argue that there must be factors other than the global recession contributing to the slowdown of the state economy.

Nevertheless, there are some areas where the state has performed better. The growth rate of per capita consumption expenditure in urban West Bengal is less than the corresponding national growth rate. However, in the rural areas, it has registered a staggering 5% increase. This is much higher than the 3% increase documented for the entire country. Due to this rapid improvement in the rural per capita consumption expenditure driven by the agricultural growth and expenditures on the social welfare schemes, the level of poverty in the state has declined sharply, making it the highest decline among any Indian state between 2011-12 and 2017-18

(Bhattacharya and Devulapalli 2019).⁴ Though the higher growth rate of agriculture and the expenditures on the social welfare schemes is one of the most probable reasons for the increase in rural per capita consumption expenditure (Ghatak 2021), it is unclear how a minuscule amount spent on rural welfare schemes can significantly increase the rural per capita consumption expenditure (Figures 4a and 4b). Hence, there may be other factors at work that may not be related to the expenditure rise on social welfare schemes. For example, the remittance by the huge number of migrant workers going to other states for work in recent years is one of the factors contributing to the increase.⁵ Such evidence confirms that the strategy of state development was designed to benefit the rural or agriculture sector at the cost of urban and industry/service sector development.

Similar improvement has been observed in the labour market also. Although the unemployment rate has increased under the TMC rule (between 2011-12 and 2017-18), it remained lower than the entire country (Figure 2). According to the latest available data, in 2018-19, the unemployment rate in the urban and rural areas was 4.9% and 3.5%, respectively. Similar figures for the entire nation were 7.7% and 5%, respectively. Moreover, the share of formal sector workers has increased from 18% in 2011-12 to 22% in 2017-18 (Figure 3, p 123). Nevertheless, the share of the informal sector workers is still quite high.

This suggests that the aggregate economy did not perform well under the TMC regime. However, a significant improvement has been observed in some areas like the rural per capita consumption expenditure, poverty rate, and formal sector employment. It indicates that the economic conditions of

the low-income people have improved through redistributive strategies deployed by the state, although at the cost of economic growth of the urban and industrial/service sectors. This is not a bad strategy of a benevolent state who wants to ensure incumbency. In a federal setting, if a state bargains a greater share of tax revenue collected from the entire country, the burden of redistribute strategy can be reduced in the specific state, thereby ensuring greater popularity. While the redistributive strategies may be sufficient explanations for the persistence of the political incumbency, the success of these policies is heavily dependent on the effective delivery of welfare schemes and the formation of cadre organisation under the shadow of such schemes to deal with the grievances arising out of the minuscule amount of state resource allocation.

Formation of Political Society

An incumbent political party cannot be criticised if it wishes to ensure its re-election by favouring low-income and rural people who constitute a large part of the legitimate voters in the state. The current state government's welfare schemes for the rural and marginalised people (for example, Krishak Bandhu, West Bengal Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Projects, Geetanjali, Amar Thikana, Matir Srishti, and Pathashree Abhijan) to subsidise the loss from agricultural uncertainty and marketing the crops to a greater extent has marginally improved the economic condition in the rural areas. However, whether these expenditures are sufficient to ensure incumbency is not clear. Two questions become important to clarify the matter: (i) is the amount of spending sufficient to make a significant difference in people's lives? and (ii) how are they financed?

Although it is difficult to find an exact figure for the benefits received from the social welfare programmes from the available data, if one looks at the real per capita social sector spending, a large share of which is devoted to the delivery of social welfare schemes, it has registered a rising trend during the current regime in West Bengal. Despite the rising trend, the average per capita social sector spending disbursed by the state government (measured in 2011-12 base price) remained lower than the national average (Figure 4a). Moreover, the real per capita social sector spending relative to the all-India average has declined in recent years (Figure 4b). Thus, the welfare programmes targeted at the rural people may have benefited them marginally; the argument that this is the reason for the rising popularity of the incumbent party falls short of being convincing. In fact, the state has failed to mobilise resources because of the declining contribution of the industrial and other sectors that pay a large share of tax revenue. As a result, the state bargained for a greater share from the centre. Moreover,

while the centre and the state governments have competing interests to derive the credits from the delivery of welfare schemes. It is immensely difficult to separate the actual impact of the state's contribution.

Despite the success of state service delivery of the welfare schemes for the rural people, it is still a mystery how a minuscule amount spent on these programmes can result in the huge progress of popularity for the incumbent? In the past, there have been many examples of the political failure of states that had successfully delivered welfare programmes. Therefore, we need to focus on the shaping and mobilising of political society towards incumbency under political regimes to understand the continuing popularity of the incumbent party in West Bengal. Though the size of the informal sector declined, it still remains one of the largest in the country. A large informal sector has contributed to the formation of what Chatterjee (2004) calls a "political society." The most important feature of a political society is people's dependence on the incumbent political party in everyday life. This definitely arises with the heavy reliance on the development strategy based on the welfare schemes and subsidies.

Sarkar (2006) provides a detailed description of people of urban and semi-urban areas in the political society of West Bengal. He divides them into two groups based on their access to the formal legal system under the regime of the Left Front government. First category consists of a group of people who live beyond the formal legal framework and are living or earning a livelihood in the illegally occupied city space. For example, the people engaged as daily wage earners, street vendors, small manufacturing units, small shopkeepers, rickshaw pullers, etc, would be the obvious candidates. There are two common features among them: (i) almost all of them are economically vulnerable; and (ii) they do not have a clearly defined property right. The economic vulnerability and missing property rights make them depend on the incumbent political party for their everyday livelihood and informal settlement of disputes.⁶ The second group of people in the urban areas living and earning a livelihood within the formal legal framework are not so economically vulnerable. However, individually they cannot protect themselves from the local musclemen, extortionists, goons, etc. This vulnerability is enhanced in the presence of a costly legal system.⁷ This group depends on the ruling political party for protection. Petty shopkeepers, small- to medium-sized entrepreneurs, traders, etc, fall in this category. In exchange for the benefits received from the political party, people remain loyal to them by casting vote in their favour during elections. This right to vote makes them attractive to the political parties.

The above description of the formation of a political society based on the informalisation of the economy is primarily focused on the urban and semi-urban areas. Our understanding of political society will remain incomplete unless we describe why people in rural areas depend on political parties since more than 70% of the population live in rural areas. The rural population in West Bengal are mostly small and marginal farmers (almost 96% of the total farmers in the state [GoWB 2017]) who survive with very low and uncertain incomes. Their vulnerability comes from low farm income (one of the lowest in the country according to NSSO [70th Round]), declining or low farm profit, the unpredictability of weather, etc. Assistance in subsidised seeds, fertilisers, farm insurance, etc, is provided by the government and implemented through the panchayats. Thus, people in the rural areas depend on the ruling political party and the local political leaders running the panchayats. This is particularly the case when the drivers of growth do not offer much income opportunities.

Mobilisation in Political Society: Syndicates and Cut Money

A minuscule amount for welfare programmes cannot satisfy the majority of voters from rural and semi-urban areas or from the informal sectors, which host more than 70% of citizens from the state. The incumbent political party banks on this segment of voters. Thus, the failure to include all the voters under the welfare programme may generate anti-incumbency. For example, an aspirant denied service by the state may feel deprived and go against the incumbent party or may even raise voice against the deprivation. The party can try to resolve this crisis in two ways: (i) the party can involve political cadres to ensure effective delivery of the welfare schemes to the voters at the political level; or (ii) the party can hire an external consultant to manage the crisis. In the first case, incentives can be given to the political cadres. However, what can be these incentives? No doubt, they find a scope to earn agency fees (or rents/commission) for the delivery of state services. Such a system invites agency and moral hazard problems that essentially generate chaos in the organisation. Therefore, the party had to hire an outside consultant to overcome the crisis in the absence of any strong political ideology. In both cases, the party needs to generate rent from the voters to pay the agency fee. Therefore, an incumbent party needs an efficient system that generates rent and/or agency fees from the beneficiaries of the welfare schemes.

Let us now see how this kind of rent-seeking activity has flourished under the TMC rule in both rural and urban areas. The two instruments that have been used to extract rent are popularly known as “syndicate” and “cut money.” While syndicates operate mainly in the urban and semi-urban areas,

cut money functions in the rural areas. The available evidence suggests that this rent is shared between the local and central leaders of the incumbent political party.

Syndicate is a term popularly used for organised corruption and extortion rackets mainly operating in the manufacturing and construction sectors of West Bengal (Chaudhary 2018). It is a small group of unemployed youth connected to the ruling political party who control a geographical area and charge a substantial share of any significant transaction, including the construction of buildings, raw materials, and land transfers. During the Left Front government in the early 2000, syndicates had been formed primarily to provide employment to the unemployed youths of the families displaced and affected by the land acquisition for the infrastructure project in the Rajarhat-Newtown area near Kolkata. Initially, cooperatives were formed and registered under local bodies to supply construction material to the infrastructure project. However, after the 2008 panchayat elections, when TMC got hold of the Rajarhat-Newtown area after winning the local body election, syndicates metamorphosed into corruption and extortion rackets. In 2011, when TMC came to power, the party controlled as many as 175 syndicates in the Rajarhat-Newtown area (Das 2021). Thereafter, syndicates have spread to the entire state and entered into activities involving land dealings, labour hiring, finding rented accommodations, and even college admissions. The evidence suggests that the extorted money by the syndicates is shared between the syndicate members and the political leaders controlling the syndicates (Chaudhary 2018).

One crucial question needs to be addressed here. Why are syndicates found to be associated with political parties? The answer to this is that since the members of the syndicates are involved in extortion and other unlawful activities, they need protection from the law and order and police. It is the incumbent political party that can provide that. On the contrary, the political parties also require them. The requirement comes at least for two reasons. To receive a share of the extorted money of the syndicates is definitely a strong incentive (Ghosh 2015). However, more importantly, the political parties use the muscle power of the syndicate members to intimidate and oppress voters of the opposition parties, especially during elections (*Hindustan Times* 2016).

In West Bengal, the instrument to extract rent from the rural economy is popularly known as cut money. This is the term used in the state to represent the unofficial commissions charged from the beneficiaries of government schemes by local TMC leaders (*Financial Express* 2019). For example, people need to pay `10,000-`15,000 to entitle themselves for Indira

Awaas Yojana (Nath 2017). Similar evidence of cut money extraction by local TMC leaders is in abundance in popular media. A Google news search of the term “cut money in Bengal” provides around 1,57,000 news items. The cut money collected by local leaders is shared among the leaders from the grassroot levels to the topmost political hierarchy of TMC (*Times of India* 2019). In 2019, after the party workers were dictated to return cut money, one of the members of Parliament affiliated to TMC responded by saying, “a person who has taken cut money directly is only the frontman. There are others who are behind him. They have also taken their shares, so money has to be returned according to this chain” (*Times of India* 2019). While the direction provides evidence of extraction of rent by the local TMC leaders, the statement of the member of Parliament clearly suggests that this rent is shared by a large number of people in the political chain of the party.

There are two important reasons why people pay cut money to the incumbent party leaders: (i) information asymmetry and (ii) take or leave it offers. Poor people in the rural areas do not have all the information on the government schemes available to them (maybe due to poor education). While local political leaders associated with the panchayats have this information, the information asymmetry makes it difficult for people to verify whether they have to pay money to receive the benefit of a government scheme. For example, a village woman in Hooghly district paid ₹550 to a local TMC leader to get a cooking gas connection under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, a central government scheme for providing free cooking gas connection to poor village women, thinking it is the installation charge (*Financial Express* 2019). Similarly, a poor person in the rural areas often faces the “take it or leave it” offers by the TMC leaders. Those who do not agree to pay may not be considered for the entitlement.

Unfolding the Puzzles

Based on the above discussion, we present a political economy framework of rent extraction and sharing among the political agents in West Bengal. There are two political agents in this framework: central and local political elites along with their associates. The central political elites include members of legislative assembly, members of Parliament, and the state-level leaders of TMC. The local political elites and their associates include syndicate members in the urban and semi-urban areas and local leaders of TMC running the panchayats in the rural areas. While the central political elites are the same in both rural and urban areas, the local political elites and their associates are different. In the rural areas, the instrument used to extract rent is cut money, while in the urban and semi-urban areas the

instrument is the syndicate.

In the rural economy, rent is generated from the money rural people receive through government schemes (both central and state government schemes) and extracted by the local political elites and their associates controlling the panchayats. This rent is shared between political agents, central political elites, and local political elites and their associates in rural areas (*Times of India* 2019). Similarly, in the urban and semi-urban economy, rent is generated and extracted from people involved in different economic activities like real estate business, manufacturing, and land dealings, by the syndicate members. This rent is also shared between political agents, central political elites, and local political elites and their associates in urban areas (Chaudhary 2018).

In the absence of any ideological bonding, the rent-sharing strategy between the political agents helps political parties to attach agents strongly. During the Left Front rule, this role was played by their strong political organisation driven by an ideology. However, in the absence of a strong political ideology, TMC needed to involve political agents and hire a consultant to mitigate the conflicts within the organisation and people's unrest, which they successfully did by creating the monetary incentive structure discussed above and hiring a consultant (Kundu 2021).

Now, let us discuss how this model provides an answer to the question of regime persistence, political violence, and economic stagnation during the TMC regime in West Bengal. In majority cases, the local political elites and their associates in TMC are mostly the whole-time party workers or syndicate members (in urban and semi-urban areas). Thus, their livelihood is entirely dependent on this rent.⁸ Since the rent generation is linked with the persistence of the political regime that allows them to extract rent, their livelihood is dependent on the persistence of the regime itself. Thus, during elections, in order to protect their livelihood, they do not hesitate to apply violent methods to intimidate and oppress opposition political party voters or anyone who they consider a threat to the survival of the political regime. This explains why there are so many incidents of intimidation and oppression of the voters during each and every election and why we observe regime persistence of TMC (or increasing vote share) during the last three state assembly elections despite a poor economic performance by the government.

Let us look at the decline in economic growth? The framework predicts that the impacts of rent extraction in the rural and the urban economies are going to be different. In the urban and semi-urban areas, where syndicates extract rent, there will be a decline in economic activity. Extortion of

businesspersons and investors discourages investment in the non-farm sector of the economy. However, rent extraction in the rural areas will be different. In these areas, rent is generated from the government schemes. The amount of rent generated depends on how many government schemes are being implemented and how much funds are being spent. In order to increase the amount of money political agents receive through rent-seeking, they have to spend more money through government schemes.

Hence, there is a clear incentive for both the local and central political agents to implement more government schemes and spend more money in the rural areas. This is going to increase the speed of public service delivery and increase economic activity in the rural areas (Nath 2017). Table 2 shows that during the TMC regime, the aggregate economic growth in West Bengal has declined more than the decline of the national gross domestic product (GDP) growth; the agriculture sector in the state performed much better than the performance of the agriculture sector in the entire nation (Ghatak 2021). Moreover, the non-farm sector has registered a massive decline under TMC. Since more than 80% of the GSDP in West Bengal comes from the non-farm sectors, the spectacular performance of agriculture is overshadowed by the massive decline in the non-farm sectors of the economy. This is the reason for the decline in the overall economic growth during the TMC regime.

In Conclusion

It is conventionally believed that if the political parties in a democratic setting are engaged in a competition to serve the majority of the population, it may ensure the economy's prosperity. This seems to suggest a positive correlation between political competition and economic growth. Thus, the political stability of a state is the outcome of economic prosperity brought about by the party. This may not always be true. The recent election outcome in West Bengal seems to be one such example. While economic agents can have mutually conflicting interests in an unequal society, the incumbent party prefers to better serve the people at the bottom of the income distribution. To gain popularity among the people of the lower income distribution, it demands resources to be mobilised to subsidise them. This can be achieved in two alternative ways. First, the people on the top of the income distribution need to be taxed. This would essentially discourage some of their economic activities. But lower taxation reduces the amount to be distributed among the low-income people. The available resources collected from taxation to be distributed among the poor tend to be lower, making the incumbent unpopular among the poor who are the majority of voters in a typical developing society.

Second, a trade-off in which a state can bargain for a significant share of grants from the union government in a federal setting can be avoided. However, in both the cases, the resource mobilisation from government schemes and their distribution must mushroom rent-seeking activities and fuel leakages in the economy. Interestingly, such leakages essentially feed and encourage a group of individuals or cadres who worked for the incumbent political interests and popularity. Since the resources are not directly collected by the state in the second case, the direct conflict between the poor and the rich is bypassed to some extent. However, they can definitely raise dissatisfaction due to insufficient benefit, favouritism, deprivation, poor governance, and a lack of transparency. If anyone tries to revolt for these reasons, this group of individuals nurturing the leakage funds helps the incumbent politicians by spreading fear among the people. So, the dependence on welfare grants (more so from the centre) serves to gain popularity to survive a group of cadres, helping to ease out the unrest among the deprived individuals. Such a model offers a negative correlation between growth and political competition. The persistence of the incumbent political party in power in West Bengal seems to suggest that the state has taken the second route. Though mobilisation of social welfare schemes for the poor and rural individuals has marginally improved their economic condition, the benefits are so small that they do not attract the majority in favour of incumbency unless the cadre networks work. The cadre who grew up under the shadow of welfare schemes favoured the incumbent party for their self-interests. The severe exposition of violence around the elections confirms their presence, functions, and effectiveness.

Notes

- 1 According to Daxecker (2020), political violence during elections is a strategy to manipulate election outcomes. In most of the cases, the intention is to influence the electoral competition by trimming down voter turnout of the opponents (Bratton 2008; Collier and Vicente 2012). Electoral violence is levied by political actors to purposefully influence the process and outcome of elections, and it involves coercive acts against humans, property, and infrastructure (Bekoe 2012; Harish and Toha 2019; Höglund 2009).
- 2 Both these instruments were present during the Left Front regime; these were in fact developed by the leftists only. However, they were less known, most probably due to strong political organisation the rent-seeking was less prevalent.
- 3 This may be due to the growth of labour intensive micro, small and

medium enterprises.

4 Poverty rate for 2017-18 has been calculated based on a report that the government had initially published and then withdrawn.

5 West Bengal has become one of the most out-migrating states in the country in recent times.

6 This is due to the fact that the formal legal system is costly and inaccessible to them.

7 The legal system is costly both in terms of time and money.

8 This kind of dependence of political agents on political rent was present during the time of Left Front rule as well. However, due to strong political organisation, there were some checks and balances.

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