

## West Bengal Assembly Election: The TMC Faces Stiff Contest

Ronojoy Sen

### Summary

*West Bengal will have a two-phase assembly election on 23 and 29 April 2026. The state is seeing a high-stakes electoral battle between the ruling Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party.*

As West Bengal heads into its first phase of assembly election on 23 April 2026, much of the talk is about the impact of the Election Commission's (EC) Special Intensive Survey (SIR) on the polls. Nine million voters – about 12 per cent of West Bengal's 76 million voters – have been removed from the electoral rolls as part of the SIR. Of the nine million, more than six million deleted names were classified either as 'absentee' or 'deceased' voters. Judicial tribunals will decide whether another 2.7 million of the deleted voters are eligible to vote though there is no guarantee that this process will be completed before the election. Of the 13 states where the SIR has taken place, the additional adjudication is happening only in West Bengal following multiple lawsuits.

In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court has directed that persons whose appeals have been cleared by the tribunals before 21 April 2026 should be included for voting in the first phase of the assembly election. Part of the reason for the Court's intervention is that the SIR has been [embroiled in controversy](#) ever since it was rolled out. While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has maintained that the SIR has removed 'illegal infiltrators' from Bangladesh, the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) has alleged that many genuine voters have been disenfranchised.

As of now, 63 per cent of the [deleted voters](#) in West Bengal are Hindus, while 34 per cent are Muslims, which is higher than the Muslim population of the state at 27 per cent. However, 65 per cent of the 2.7 million people, whose voter status is still under adjudication, are Muslims. The assembly constituencies in West Bengal with the [highest deletions](#) are in the Muslim-dominated border districts of Murshidabad and Malda, all of which were won by the TMC in the 2021 assembly election. Unsurprisingly, the TMC, which gets a substantial number of minority votes, has alleged that the SIR has been biased.

Leaving aside the controversy over the SIR, the electoral battle in West Bengal is a bipolar one between the TMC and the BJP. The Left parties, which ruled West Bengal for 34 years till 2011, and the Congress, which was once the main opposition party, have been completely marginalised. The BJP has expended considerable resources and energy since 2016 in wresting West Bengal from the TMC. There are a few reasons for this. Besides the 42 members that West Bengal sends to the parliament, the state's chief minister, Mamata Banerjee, has been one of the most vocal critics of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra

Modi. In addition, it is somewhat less noted that West Bengal is where the Hindu nationalist ideology and many of its symbols were first articulated.

Though victory in West Bengal has eluded the BJP, the party has made impressive strides in the state. In the 2016 election in West Bengal, the BJP won 10 per cent of the vote share and three seats in the 294-seat assembly. By 2021, the BJP's voting share had jumped to 37 per cent and 77 seats. During the same period, in the general election, the BJP won 18 seats in 2019 with a vote share of around 40 per cent though it suffered a setback in 2024 when it won 12 seats with its vote share remaining the same. In terms of leads in assembly segments, the BJP led in 90 in 2024 compared to 121 in 2016.

Opinion polls have predicted a close race between the TMC and the BJP with the former having an edge. One of the reasons for this is the effects of anti-incumbency on the three-term Mamata government. While Mamata remains remarkably popular there is a sentiment, especially in urban areas, for *Poriborton* (Change), something that the TMC benefitted from in 2011 after nearly three decades of Left rule.

Second, one of the lynchpins of the TMC's success in West Bengal are its welfare schemes, especially those targeted at women. The BJP is promising much of the same and even more. The [BJP's manifesto](#) talks about doubling the cash benefits for women and unemployed youth. It promises ₹3,000 (S\$41) a month to women, which is double the amount provided by the TMC's *Lakshmir Bhandar* scheme. It also includes financial aid of ₹3,000 (S\$41) to unemployed youth, which is again double that offered by the TMC's *Banglar Yuva Sathi* scheme.

Third, alongside the cash handouts, the BJP's manifesto promises stopping illegal infiltration and implementation of a uniform civil code in West Bengal, which could aid religious polarisation and help consolidate the Hindu vote.

Fourth, the SIR's disproportionate impact on minority-dominated areas, which are also the TMC's strongholds, could affect the party's electoral prospects. Moreover, the presence of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP), formed by rebel TMC leader, Humayun Kabir, could hurt the TMC in some constituencies. However, the AIMIM, which is contesting 12 constituencies, has [broken off its alliance](#) with AJUP after allegations that Kabir had struck a deal with the BJP.

In the final days of campaigning, the central government's failure to pass an amended women's reservation bill in the parliament has become an electoral issue. While the BJP and Modi have blamed opposition parties like the TMC, the issue is unlikely to have much traction in a state headed by a three-term woman chief minister. Besides, the TMC has a better record on nomination of women candidates and their representation than BJP.

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Dr Ronojoy Sen is a Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Politics, Society and Governance) at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He can be contacted at [isasrs@nus.edu.sg](mailto:isasrs@nus.edu.sg). The author bears full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.