

# Changing Voting Patterns in Rural West Bengal

## Role of Clientelism and Local Public Goods

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This paper uses two successive rounds of voter surveys in rural West Bengal in a household panel to find reasons for the recent decline in the Left Front's political popularity. It does not find evidence of any significant role of changes in voter age distribution, media exposure, private benefits received from development and welfare programmes administered by local governments, or the vote-generating effectiveness of such programmes. A more important role was played by voter dissatisfaction with local leaders on corruption and lack of involvement in the provision of education services, and with non-local leaders on attitudes towards women, the poor, and local communities.

### 1 Introduction

West Bengal politics witnessed a dramatic change in 2011, when the Left Front (LF) coalition lost its majority in the state assembly for the first time since 1977. The long innings of the LF – which had represented an unusual pro-incumbency pattern in comparison with other Indian states – was finally over. Much of this was because of a significant erosion of support in the countryside among core supporters of the left – the landless and marginal landowners, scheduled castes (scs) and scheduled tribes (sts). The purpose of this paper is to understand what underlay the reversal of popular left support in rural areas, and what this signifies for the changing nature of democracy and the pressure for accountability on elected governments in the state.

We focus in particular on sources of rising voter dissatisfaction with the LF, as revealed in changes in voting patterns of the same household heads a decade earlier. The analysis is based on a post-2011 election resurvey of a sample of rural voters who had been surveyed earlier in 2004 (analysed in Bardhan et al 2009, 2011). We do not intend to comprehensively study all the factors behind the LF's loss of power. We abstract from the origin and leadership of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), which appeared to voters as a credible alternative to the LF for the first time in many decades. Since the factors accounting for the TMC's recent successes are inherently difficult to disentangle from voter dissatisfaction with the LF, we make no effort to do so and concentrate instead on understanding the latter.

One may broadly classify the possible reasons for a rising anti-incumbency sentiment into two categories – rising accountability pressures because of changes in voter characteristics, and greater governance failures, as perceived by voters. The former could conceivably include a younger, more educated, better informed, and upwardly mobile set of voters with higher aspirations, who would be more dissatisfied than previous generations of voters despite an unchanging governance performance. It could also include a possible decline in the effectiveness of political clientelism as a vote-generating mechanism. Bardhan et al (2009, 2011) have provided evidence using data from a 2003 survey to show that a clientelistic distribution of benefits earlier helped the LF mobilise poor voters.<sup>1</sup> Clientelism often tends to become less effective in the course of development for a variety of reasons, as argued by some political scientists (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). As voters become better off and more economically self-reliant, they

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depend less on private benefits disbursed selectively by local governments in exchange for their support. Moreover, traditional networks based on clan or caste that act as intermediate political patronage machines tend to weaken as voters become more mobile and connected to the outside world.

The second category of governance failures includes rising dissatisfaction among voters with local incumbents on corruption, and the provision of education, health, or other local public goods (such as roads and irrigation), or the delivery of private benefit programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), housing, drinking water, ration cards, bank loans, agricultural mini kits, and pensions. Non-local leaders could be faulted for statewide policy failures such as the lack of growth of employment in urban areas, or the inability to control inflation. Problems with the LF's land acquisition policies would be manifested in dissatisfaction with non-local leaders in areas near Singur and Nandigram (the places where problems with these policies arose).

Our study is based on a resurvey of the same 2,400 households surveyed earlier in 2004. These households were selected randomly (stratified by landholdings) from 89 villages in 55 gram panchayats (GPs) across the state's 17 major agricultural districts. The survey included a range of questions on the socio-economic characteristics of households, changes in economic circumstances since 2004, the receipt of benefits from various government programmes administered by GPs, and on political activities and attitudes. To capture the role of governance failures, the 2011 survey included additional questions on the extent of dissatisfaction with local and non-local leaders, which were not part of the 2004 survey. Both surveys concluded with a secret ballot where the respondents cast votes across election symbols of the major political parties. For most of the households whose heads did not change, we were able to directly observe how the same individual voted in 2004 and 2011. We shall refer to these as the "survey ballots".

Our analysis is conducted at a much disaggregated level – individual heads of households, rather than villages, electoral constituencies, or districts. We use logit regressions to predict whether a particular respondent voted in our survey ballots for or against the LF in 2011 and in 2004 respectively, based on household characteristics, receipts of private benefits from local governments in the previous eight years, and in the case of the 2011 survey, on reported dissatisfaction measures with local and non-local leaders on different dimensions. Flows of private benefits received and dissatisfaction measures are interacted with whether the local government was dominated by the LF. Separate regressions are run for the 2011 and 2004 voting patterns rather than a common household panel regression spanning the two years, to allow the possibility of a political regime change. The purpose of the analysis is to document robust patterns of association between voting patterns and various explanatory variables representing the range of possible factors described above. The results should be viewed as key facts that any reasonable hypothesis would need to explain. They are suggestive of underlying causal mechanisms; further

research is needed to deal with possible concerns to do with endogeneity or omitted variables bias.

Further details of the survey are provided in Section 2. This section also presents facts on the overall extent and nature of the LF's loss of voter support between 2004 and 2011 in our sampled areas. Section 3 examines the role of changes in voter demographics and media exposure. Section 4 examines the changes in clientelistic mechanisms, both with regard to changes in flows or targeting patterns of private benefit programmes disbursed by local governments, and the changes in effectiveness of such disbursements in generating votes. Section 5 then examines the role of dissatisfactions reported with local and non-local leaders on various dimensions. Finally, Section 6 summarises the main findings.

## 2 Survey Details and Aggregate Voting Patterns

The sample was randomly selected (stratified by landownership) in 2004 from 89 villages spread through all districts of West Bengal, excluding Kolkata and Darjeeling. Further details of the sampling procedure are provided in Bardhan et al (2009). The first survey was carried out between the second half of 2003 and first half of 2004. Table 1 describes household characteristics in 2004. Approximately half the households owned no agricultural land, and 90% of the heads were male. Average years of education rose with landholding, from six years of schooling for the landless to 14 years for big landowners. SCs and STs comprised 35% of the sample, with these groups frequently being landless or marginal landowners. The principal occupation of the heads of approximately two-thirds of the landowning households was agriculture. In contrast, only a quarter of the heads of landless households was engaged in agriculture.

**Table 1: 2004 Sample Characteristics – Household Heads**

Agri Landownership in 2004	Number of Households	Age Household Head	% Head Males	Max Education (in Household)	% SC/ST	% Agri Occupation
Landless	1,214	45	88	6.6	37.4	26
0-1.5 acres	658	48	88	7.8	38.9	65
1.5-2.5 acres	95	56	92	10.8	22.4	82
2.5-5 acres	258	58	93	11.1	27.1	72
5-10 acres	148	60	89	12.5	26.1	66
>10	29	59	100	13.9	30.9	72
All	2,402	49	89	8	35.4	47

The main changes in household demographics and economic status between 2004 and 2011 were the following. The average household size fell by 0.25 members, owing to the exit of 1 member per household and the entry of 0.75 members. Only a small portion of this movement of people out of households was associated with migration to towns – less than 5% of the households had a member who had left for town. Hence, the movement represented a combination of the effects of marriages, deaths and births, rural migration, and household division (the latter in about one-tenth of the sample). Over the period 1967-2004, approximately two-thirds of the households experienced the exits of individual members and/or household division (Bardhan et al 2013). Hence, the demographic changes since 2004 have occurred at roughly the same rate as in the previous three decades.

Household incomes rose by 39% in real terms, while assets owned fell by 16%. Average landholdings remained unchanged. There was a slight increase in the proportion of landless households, from 50% to 54%, with a corresponding drop in the proportion of medium and big landowners from 18% to 14%. Hence land distribution changed slightly in the same direction as it had in the previous three decades (ibid). Three-quarters of all households continued to be either landless or marginal landowners (owing less than 1.25 acres of cultivable land).

Table 2 describes the change in vote shares for major political parties across the 2004 and 2011 survey ballots. The LF's share fell from 58% to 34%, while the TMC's rose from 11% to 45%. These are larger than the changes in actual vote shares between the 2006 and 2011 state legislature elections in the corresponding election constituencies, where the LF share dropped from 50% to 41% while the TMC share rose from 24% to 35%. The difference may be partly accounted for by the difference in the time of the initial election (2003 rather than 2006), a period over which the LF had begun to lose popularity to the TMC. The 2011 survey was conducted a few months after the actual election, and voter attitudes against the LF may have further hardened after the poll.

Table 3 describes characteristics of the left's "secure" voters, defined to be those who voted consistently for the left in 2004 and in the preceding 25 years. This "vote bank" comprised nearly half the population in 2004, the huge size of which constituted the bedrock of the LF's political success in rural West Bengal after the late 1970s. scs and sts, and marginal and small farmers were more likely to be left-secure voters until 2004. But, only 48% of this vote bank voted for the LF in 2011. In other words, more than half the left-secure voters switched their allegiance in 2011.

**Table 3: Characteristics of 2004 Left-Secure Voters\***

Characteristic (X)	Percentage of Left-Secure Voters with Characteristic X	Percentage of Voters with Characteristic X That Are Left Secure in 2004
Scheduled caste	37	56
Scheduled tribe	5	67
HH is landless	9	47
HH is marginal farmer	68	51
HH is small farmer	6	55
HH is medium/big farmer	16	39

\*2004 Left-secure voters are those voters who reported to have voted for the same party in the last 25 years in 2004 survey and voted for Left Front in the 2004 survey ballot.

Table 4 breaks down the shift in vote shares across land and caste categories. The LF's loss of popularity was especially pronounced among its traditional support groups. The shift in the share of the landless (from 58% to 32%) slightly exceeded that in the general population. The decline was sharper among marginal landowners (from 64% to 35%), scs (65% to 37%), and sts (73% to 42%). On the other hand, it was equally pronounced among Hindus and Muslims. It turns out that the patterns of changing allegiances among left-secure groups were similar to those in the general population, and we focus on the latter in what follows.

**Table 4: Changes in Proportion of Household Heads Voting for Left by Caste, Religion and Landownership**

	Number of Households	Proportion Voting Left (2004 Survey Ballot)	Proportion Voting Left (2011 Survey Ballot)
All	2,384	0.58	0.32
SC	764	0.65	0.37
ST	83	0.73	0.42
Hindu	1,902	0.58	0.32
Muslim	462	0.57	0.35
Landless	1,143	0.58	0.32
Marginal land	697	0.64	0.35
Small land	150	0.56	0.31
Medium land	393	0.47	0.26

The classification of landholdings uses agriculture landholdings in respective periods: marginal land: 0<agricultural landholdings <=1.25 acres small: 1.25<agri land <=2.5 acres medium and big: agriland> 2.5 acres.

**3 Changes in Voter Demographics and Media Exposure**

It is often argued that the rising importance of new young voters in India is weakening traditional political allegiances based on caste or religion, or on a nationalistic or class ideology. Younger voters are on average more educated and upwardly mobile, and thus tend to vote on the basis of their perception of the governance performance of incumbents and how it has benefited them. To gauge the likely significance of the changing age of the voter population, we focus on approximately one-tenths of the sample households whose 2004 heads had passed away, giving place to new heads. Table 5 calculates the predicted effect of a change in the household head to be less than 1% change in the likelihood of voting left in 2011, after controlling for village dummies, landholdings, and other household characteristics such as caste, occupation, religion, and education. This difference was not statistically significant at any level of significance below 80%. Hence, the evidence does not show that the new household

**Table 5: Variation of 2011 Voting Pattern with Household Head's Age**

Variable	Predicted Difference in Likelihood of Voting Left	P-value of Predicted Difference
Head changed#	-0.009	0.802
Head age <30 Years##	-0.056	0.483
Head age 30-40 Years##	0.025	0.481
Head age 40-50 Years##	0.006	0.837
Head age 50-60 Years##	0.014	0.654
Head age 60-70 Years##	-0.058*	0.065
Mean likelihood of voting left: 0.334		

# Relative to households whose head did not change since 2004.  
## Relative to households with age over 70.  
Controls include village dummy and the following household characteristics: agricultural and other landholdings, maximum years of schooling in household, caste, religion and occupation dummies.  
\* Significant at 10%.

heads were prone to change the way they voted between 2004 and 2011.

We also compare voting patterns across different age cohorts of household heads, with the same set of controls. The youngest cohort (age below 30) and the cohort with ages between 60 and 70 were 6% less likely than those with heads above 70 years to vote for the left. Only the difference between the 60-70 and 70-plus groups was statistically significant at the 10% level. The difference between any two age groups was below 3%. Hence, the changing age composition is unlikely to have been important in accounting for the political reversal of the left.

Could greater exposure to the media have played a role? There was no upward trend in newspaper readership between 2004 and 2011 – the proportion of respondents who reported reading newspapers dropped slightly from 38% to 37%. On the other hand, the proportion of those who reported watching TV regularly rose from 46% to 59%. Table 6 shows, however, that those watching TV were only 0.3% less likely to vote for the left in 2011, after controlling for household and village characteristics, and this was statistically indistinguishable from zero. Hence, increasing exposure to TV is unlikely to account for the observed decline in the LF's vote share.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 6a: Changes in Media Exposure**

	2004	2011
Proportion HHs watching TV	0.46	0.59
Proportion HHs reading newspaper	0.38	0.37
Proportion readers that read:		
Left leaning newspaper	0.15**	0.04
TMC leaning newspaper	0.16	0.19

**Table 6b: Effect of Media Exposure on Vote Swing**

Variable	Predicted Difference	P-value of Predicted Difference
Watch TV	0.030	0.29
Reads at least one newspaper	-0.056**	0.02

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

The controls include village dummies, age of household head, total and agriculture land held, religion and caste dummies, maximum education in household, immigration and occupation dummies, number of one-time benefits, dummies for grievances and participation in campaigns.

#### 4 Private Benefits Disbursed by Local Governments

We now turn to the role of distribution of private benefits under various development and welfare programmes by GPs. Earlier work (Bardhan et al 2009) has shown the benefits distributed by left-dominated GPs acted as a clientelistic mechanism that helped the LF secure high vote shares until 2003. Did such benefit flows decline after 2003?

Table 7 provides data on the average flow of formal benefits distributed by GPs to households in the sample for eight-year periods before and after 2003. There was no change in the proportion of households receiving at

**Table 7: Percentage of Households Receiving At Least One Benefit**

	1993-2002	2003-11
Any benefit	61.45	62.5
MGNREGA	NA	33.89
BPL cards	17.7	18.08
Credit	4.66	2.1
Mini kit	5.37	10.53
Road	27.06	24.79
House or toilet	4.61	10.15
Drinking water	7.55	12.5
Old age pension	na	3.15
Widow pension	na	1.8

(1) MGNREGA scheme began in 2004, hence there is no data available for 1993-2002 for this.

(2) NA means "Not Applicable".

(3) na means "Not Available". Questions regarding these schemes were not asked in the 2003-04 survey.

least one benefit, which remained at 62%. This was despite the introduction of MGNREGA in 2007, a new programme that benefited almost one-third of the population and became the largest single programme administered by GPs. Table 8 breaks down these numbers across GPs that were and were not dominated by the LF. It shows that the average number of benefits distributed per household fell from 0.21 to 0.16 in left-dominated GP villages, and from 0.16 to 0.14 in the TMC-dominated ones. The drop was sharper for the landless. In TMC-dominated areas, scs, sts, and landless groups experienced a marked increase in receipt of benefits, as the distribution patterns between TMC and left-dominated GP areas tended to converge.

**Table 8: Annual Per Household Benefit Patterns, by Incumbency Type**

	GPs with Left Share>50%		GPs with Left Share<50%	
	1993-2002 Annual Per HH Benefits	2003-11 Annual Per HH Benefits	1993-2002 Annual Per HH Benefits	2003-11 Annual Per HH Benefits
All households	0.21	0.16	0.16	0.14
SC households	0.22	0.18	0.14	0.17
ST households	0.42	0.31	0.15	0.30
Landless households	0.21	0.13	0.14	0.13

Could this "catch-up" in distribution of benefits to vulnerable groups by TMC-dominated GPs account for the decline in the LF's vote share? Earlier work (Bardhan et al 2009, 2011) has indicated, however, that recurring benefits (employment, credit, mini kits) distributed by left-dominated GPs were more closely correlated with left votes in 2003 than one-time benefits (ration cards, housing and toilets, drinking water, and roads). This is a classic hallmark of clientelistic practices where votes are generated by promises of continuing current benefits into the future. Hence, the changing flows of recurring benefits are likely to be more relevant in explaining changes in vote shares.

Table 9 examines changes in the flow of recurring benefits eight years before and after 2003. Note that these benefits form a small fraction of all benefits, but their relative importance grew (partly as a result of the MGNREGA). There was a threefold increase in per household recurring benefits in left-dominated GPs, and a five-fold increase in TMC-dominated GPs. The flow of recurring benefits to every single group increased. This was particularly true for core members of the left-secure group – scs, sts, the landless, and marginal households. We also see a stronger increase in the flow of recurring benefits in TMC-dominated GPs, as they "caught up" with the left-dominated GPs in this respect. We shall examine below the extent to which this may have accounted for the reversal of the LF's vote share after 2003.

**Table 9: Annual Per Household Recurring Benefit Patterns, by Incumbency Type**

	GPs with Left Share>50%		GPs with Left Share<50%	
	1993-2002 Annual Per HH Benefits	2003-11 Annual Per HH Benefits	1993-2002 Annual Per HH Benefits	2003-11 Annual Per HH Benefits
All households	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.05
SC households	0.03	0.07	0.01	0.07
ST households	0.07	0.12	0.02	0.15
Landless households	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.04

In addition to the catch-up by TMC-dominated GPs on distribution of private benefits, the grip of the left on its traditional support base may have weakened as clientelism became less effective as an instrument of garnering votes. This could be due to a combination of rising incomes among poor voters, and the growing importance of sources of livelihood outside the village, which reduces vulnerability and made residents less dependent on benefits handed out by local governments. Increased mobility may provide them with opportunities to come into contact with people from outside the village and compare the performance of their local leaders with those in other areas. Increased incomes could induce greater concern for public goods and social services, relative to private benefits. Traditional ethnic and caste networks may weaken, lowering the ability of network leaders to “deliver” votes to parties. Scholars of comparative politics (for example, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007) have described these factors that typically contribute to the declining role of clientelism in the course of development.

The declining effectiveness of clientelistic benefits in generating votes for the left could also have resulted from rising voter pessimism about the likelihood of a LF victory. The LF suffered electoral reverses in the 2006 state assembly election, the 2008 panchayat election, and the 2009 Lok Sabha election, besides encountering widespread criticism from the media and civil society for its botched land acquisition efforts in Singur and Nandigram between 2006 and 2009. It is plausible that the credibility of the TMC as an alternative to the left was rising in the minds of voters. As a theoretical analysis of voting by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2012) shows, in the presence of clientelism, voters are less swayed by promises of future benefits made by parties that they perceive are less likely to win. This hypothesis predicts the declining effectiveness of recurring benefits distributed by left-dominated GPs, and the increasing effectiveness of recurring benefits distributed by TMC-dominated GPs. This prediction is in contrast to the alternative hypothesis of a general decline in clientelism owing to better economic conditions among voters and rising concern for public goods, which would result in a decline of

the effectiveness of recurring benefits distributed by both kinds of GPs. This provides us with a way to empirically discriminate between the two hypotheses.

Table 10 presents the predicted impact of the receipt of one-time and recurring benefits by a household on the likelihood of its head having voted left in 2004 and 2011 across four different kinds of incumbency in local governments (depending on whether the left or TMC dominated the GP and the district government or zilla parishad; ZP). This is generated from a linear probability cross-sectional regression which predicts the likelihood of the household head voting left in each of the survey ballots, after controlling for village dummies, and various household demographic and asset characteristics.

Confirming the results of Bardhan et al (2009), we see no significant effect of one-time benefits, while recurring benefits from left-dominated local governments raised the likelihood of voting left during both 2004 and 2011. The receipt of a recurring benefit from a left-dominated GP and ZP raised the probability of the head voting left by 78% in 2004, which was statistically significant at 1%. This effect fell to 42% in 2011, which was statistically significant at 5%. The effect of receiving a recurring benefit from a left-dominated GP when the ZP was dominated by the TMC was smaller (32% in 2003) and remained about the same in 2011. Hence, there is clear evidence of the declining effectiveness of clientelism as a vote-generating mechanism for the LF.

Table 10 shows that the effectiveness of clientelistic benefits distributed by the TMC increased at the same time. The effect of receiving a recurring benefit from a TMC-dominated GP was statistically insignificant in 2004, but became statistically significant in 2011 in areas where the TMC-dominated both GPs and ZPs. It is notable that the TMC's ability to generate votes out of recipients of recurring benefits in 2011 exceeded that of the left in areas where it controlled both the GP and ZP. Hence, the evidence does not support the hypothesis of a secular decline of clientelistic practices. Instead, voter expectations changed about the likelihood of the LF winning. Alternatively, there were improvements in TMC party organisation and grass-roots contact work.

To what extent was the vote-generating effectiveness of distribution of recurring benefits in left-dominated areas associated with traditional networks and occupational patterns? Table 11 (p 59) examines the predicted effects in a cross-section of specific sets of households receiving recurring benefits in 2011 – those with new heads since 2004 and those with the highest (fourth quartile) proportion of household income earned from non-agricultural sources. We see the effect of receiving a recurring benefit from a left-dominated GP and ZP was significantly lower for these types of households than for average households (seen in Table 10). Households with younger heads and those less reliant on agricultural income were significantly less likely to vote for the left when they received an additional recurring benefit in the preceding eight years from left-dominated local governments. And households with younger heads were significantly more likely to vote for the TMC when they received recurring benefits

**Table 10: Predicted Impact on Likelihood of Voting Left of Receiving Benefits, by Benefit and Incumbency Type**

Benefit Type	Incumbency Type	2004		2011	
		Predicted Impact of Receiving One Benefit of This Type in Incumbency Type	P-value	Predicted Impact of Receiving One Benefit of This Type in Incumbency Type	P-value
One-time benefit	Left GP and left ZP	-0.10	0.60	0.16	0.35
	Left GP and TMC ZP	0.39	0.30	0.11	0.44
	TMC GP and left ZP	0.06	0.82	0.31	0.100
	TMC GP and TMC ZP	0.06	0.86	0.10	0.71
Recurring benefits	Left GP and left ZP	0.78***	0.00	0.41**	0.04
	Left GP and TMC ZP	0.32	0.20	0.39**	0.02
	TMC GP and left ZP	0.78	0.43	-0.01	0.95
	TMC GP and TMC ZP	0.68	0.47	-1.31**	0.03

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

The controls include village dummies, dummy for whether head changed, number of one-time and recurring benefits, age of head, total and agricultural land held, religion and caste dummies, max education in HH, immigration and occupation dummies, and dummies for grievances in 2011.

from TMC-dominated local governments. This suggests that the arrival of younger voters and rising importance of non-agricultural occupations were underlying causes for the erosion of the traditional clientelistic networks of the left, while the former enabled the clientelistic network of the TMC to expand.

**Table 11: Predicted Impact on Likelihood of Voting Left of Receiving One Recurring Benefit Per Year by Incumbency and Household Type**

By Household Type and Incumbency Type	2011	
	Predicted Impact of Receiving One Recurring Benefit Per Year	P-value
Household head changed and		
Left GP - left ZP	-0.14	0.76
Left GP - TMC ZP	-0.49	0.31
TMC GP - left ZP	-0.65	0.43
TMC GP - TMC ZP	-3.93***	0.00
High share of non-agri Income and		
Left GP - left ZP	-0.23	0.57
Left GP - TMC ZP	0.04	0.89
TMC GP - left ZP	0.05	0.86
TMC GP - TMC ZP	0.46	0.53

(1) \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01

(2) High share of non-agri income dummy takes value 1 if the non-agri income share in total HH income lies in the top 25th percentile in 2011.

(3) Controls include village dummies, dummy for whether HH changed, number of one-time and recurring benefits, age of HH, total and agriculture land held, religion and caste dummies, max education in HH, immigration and occupation dummies, and dummies for grievances in 2011.

Having obtained evidence of the weakening role of clientelism for the left, and a rising role for the TMC, we examine the quantitative significance of these changes in explaining the shift of voters against the left between 2003 and 2011. Table 12 provides results of a Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition of changes in the probability of voting left between 2003 and 2011, into the effect of changes in regressors (the “endowment

**Table 12: Decomposition of Changes in Likelihood of Voting Left between 2004 and 2011**

	Endowment Effect	Coefficients Change Effect
One-time benefits*left GP and left ZP	0.001 (.002)	-0.003 (0.006)
One-time benefits*left GP and TMC ZP	-0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.007)
One-time benefits*TMC GP and left ZP	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.026** (0.12)
One-time benefits*TMC GP and TMC ZP	0.0005 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.002)
Recurring*left GP and left ZP	-0.010** (0.004)	0.006 (0.007)
Recurring*left GP and TMC ZP	-0.002 (-0.002)	0.002 (0.003)
Recurring*TMC GP and left ZP	-0.000 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.013)
Recurring*TMC GP and TMC ZP	0.001 (0.001)	0.002 (0.002)
Household characteristics	-0.002* (0.001)	0.054 (0.11)
Constant		0.23** (0.11)

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01; clustered standard errors in parentheses

(1) Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition of changes in likelihood of voting left into changes in one time benefits and recurring benefits received by households, interacted with incumbency type in preceding eight years, changes in household characteristics (the endowment effect), and the changes in the regression coefficients of these variables between 2004 and 2011 regression.

(2) The mean difference in dependent variable between 2004 and 2011 is 0.25.

effect”), changes in regression coefficients, and interactions between these. The endowment effect represents the effect of changes in flows of benefits from varying incumbency types and of household characteristics, assuming unchanging effectiveness of these benefits in generating left votes. The effect of changing coefficients includes changes in the effectiveness of recurring benefits in generating votes for the two parties. Of the observed total reduction of 25 percentage points in the average likelihood of voting for the left, the change in the regression coefficient of recurring benefits received from left-dominated and TMC-dominated local governments accounted for only 0.6 and 0.2 percentage point declines. Moreover, both these effects were statistically insignificant.

On the other hand, the rising flow of recurring benefits administered by left-dominated local governments accounted for a statistically significant 1 percentage point increase in the likelihood of voting left. This would thus have nullified the effects of the changing effectiveness of clientelism. As a result most of the reduction in the left vote share remains unexplained by changing patterns of benefit distribution and their effectiveness. The constant term, the part of the change in the LFs vote share that remains unexplained, consists of 23 percentage points, out of an actual change of 25 percentage points.

## 5 Voter Dissatisfaction with Policies, Public Goods, and Corruption

Alternative explanations for the shift in voter attitudes away from the left could include rising grievances regarding public health and education services, perceptions of corruption or elite capture, or the land acquisition policy of the state government. Questions pertaining to grievances or corruption perceptions were not included in the 2004 survey, so we are unable to compare these between 2004 and 2011. We therefore have to rely entirely on cross-sectional variations in the 2011 survey data, rather than changes that occurred since 2004.

In the 2011 survey, we included questions regarding grievances with government health and education services, and voter dissatisfaction with local and non-local political leaders in the state on various dimensions on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 5 indicating the highest level of dissatisfaction). The phrase “non-local” in the questionnaire referred to political leaders or workers in other parts of the state. The specific dimensions of dissatisfaction were chosen on the basis of consultations with local citizens and political ethnographers working in West Bengal villages. They were worded in terms that would be widely recognisable by the respondents. They were also designed to avoid direct mention of land acquisition policies or the events in Singur and Nandigram to avoid “leading” people on.

With regard to local leaders, voters were asked to express the extent of their dissatisfaction on the following dimensions – (i) resolution of household disputes; (ii) socio-economic justice; (iii) participation in school education; (iv) participation in government health centres; (v) participation in irrigation, construction, and other public works; (vi) contact and rapport with local traders; (vii) honesty of political workers; (viii) political organisation and factional conflicts; (ix) competence and

judgment of leaders; (x) work motivation; (xi) empathy towards citizens; and (xii) changes in activities of current party workers compared to past workers. Concerns about the land acquisition policy would be expected to be reflected in items (ii) and (xi). Items (iii) to (v) would be likely to reveal dissatisfaction with the performance on delivery of public goods and services, and items (vi) and (vii) with corruption.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to non-local leaders, respondents were asked to register their dissatisfaction on the following dimensions – (i) leader’s image; (ii) image of party workers; (iii) party organisation; (iv) extent to which party espouses divisive causes; (v) party infighting; (vi) corruption; (vii) pro-poor attitude; (viii) relations with other political parties; (ix) attitude towards women; and (x) relations with citizens/local community. Attitudes towards the land acquisition policy would be reflected in items (i), (ii), (vii) and (x).

Table 13 provides mean dissatisfaction scores with local leaders on specific dimensions, separated into left-majority and TMC-majority GP areas. The highest dissatisfactions pertain to participation by leaders in public services in health and education, followed by their role in irrigation, roads, and other public works. In all these dimensions, dissatisfaction was significantly greater in left-dominated GP areas. Dissatisfaction with local leaders in left-dominated areas was also significantly high in areas pertaining to corruption (items vi and vii), and political organisation (item viii). There was also greater dissatisfaction on account of changes in the activities of current political workers compared to past workers (item xii). On the other hand, left-dominated areas registered less dissatisfaction with socio-economic justice, competence, work motivation, and empathy with citizens.

**Table 13: Mean 2011 Scores for Dissatisfaction with Local Leaders on Different Dimensions**

	GP Left-Dominated		GPTMC-Dominated		P-value of Difference in Means
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	
Public goods					
Participation in school education	3.17***	1.10	3.01	0.93	0.00
Participation in government health centres	3.01**	1.20	2.93	1.02	0.09
Participation in irrigation, construction and other public works	2.76**	1.13	2.42	1.16	0.00
Corruption					
Contact/rapport with local traders	2.40***	1.13	2.08	1.05	0.00
Honesty	2.57***	1.23	2.34	1.24	0.00
Dispute resolution	2.55	1.16	2.55	1.00	1.00
Socio-economic justice	2.59	1.10	2.66	0.95	0.14
Political organisation and intra-party conflict	2.41***	1.20	2.08	1.05	0.00
Competence and judgment	2.62	1.23	2.71***	1.02	0.00
Work motivation	2.69	1.20	2.77	1.00	0.11
Empathy with citizens	2.62	1.19	2.70*	1.03	0.08
Changes in activity of current political workers compared to past workers	2.64***	1.26	2.49	1.26	0.01

Standard Deviation refers to the sample standard deviation of dissatisfaction scores.  
\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01 for differences between left- and TMC-dominated GPs,

This suggests that the land acquisition policy was not an important source of dissatisfaction with local leaders. This makes sense as the blame for the land acquisition debacles in Singur

and Nandigram would likely be placed on LF leaders at the state level. Table 14 shows average dissatisfactions with non-local leaders in the overall sample in different dimensions. Attitudes towards women registered the highest dissatisfaction, followed by image of leaders and party workers, pro-poor attitude, and relations with the local community.

**Table 14: 2011 Scores for Dissatisfaction with Non-Local Leaders on Different Dimensions**

	All Villages	
	Mean	Std Dev
Attitude towards women	3.03	1.06
Leader’s image	3.01	1.18
Image of party worker	2.80	1.11
Pro-poor attitude	2.77	1.08
Relations with citizens/ local community	2.72	1.21
Party organisation	2.58	1.20
Relation with other political parties	2.49	1.08
Party in-fighting	2.23	1.19
Resort to violence and terrorising	2.22	1.19
Corruption	2.18	1.23

Standard Deviation refers to the sample standard deviation of dissatisfaction scores.  
\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01 for differences between Left and TMC dominated GPs.

Voter dissatisfactions with both local and non-local leaders are significantly correlated with differences in voting patterns within the sample in 2011, as shown in Table 15. This table presents a linear probability regression across household heads voting for the left in the 2011 survey ballot, on aggregate dissatisfactions with non-local leaders, and local leaders interacted with whether the GP and ZP in question was left dominated between 2004 and 2011. Controls include household characteristics and village fixed effects.<sup>4</sup> In areas where both GP and ZP were left dominated, dissatisfaction scores with local leaders were strongly and negatively correlated with the likelihood of voting left. An increase in the local dissatisfaction score by one unit in such areas (which was smaller than the standard deviation of the local dissatisfaction score) was associated with a 21% reduced likelihood of voting for the LF. The effect was slightly smaller and less significant statistically in areas where the left dominated the GP but the TMC controlled

**Table 15: Regression of Probability of Voting for Left Front in 2011 on Dissatisfaction with Local and Non-local Leaders, by Incumbency Type**

	(1)
Dissatisfaction(local)* left controlled both GP and ZP	-0.21*** (0.03)
Dissatisfaction(local)* left GP & TMC ZP	-0.19* (0.09)
Dissatisfaction(local)* TMC GP & left ZP	-0.12 (0.05)
Dissatisfaction(local)* TMC controlled both GP and ZP	-0.27 (0.08)
Dissatis. Score non-local leaders	-0.15*** (0.03)
Constant	1.51*** (0.12)
Observations	2015
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.23

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01 Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at mouza level.

(1) Dependent variable measures probability of voting for Left Front in 2011.

(2) Controls include village fixed effects and HH characteristics: agricultural and other landholdings, age and age-square of HH head, maximum education in HH and dummies for caste, religion and occupation.

the ZP. Increased dissatisfaction with non-local leaders also had a significant negative correlation (a 15% effect of a unit increase in dissatisfaction) with the likelihood of voting left.

As mentioned above, dissatisfaction with local leaders was higher in left-dominated GPs relative to TMC-dominated GPs mainly with regard to local leaders' participation in schools, health centres, and infrastructure construction, and corruption (averaging dissatisfaction scores across "honesty" and "contact with local traders"). Table 16 explores the effect of these specific dimensions of dissatisfaction. In villages where both GP and ZP were controlled by the left, higher corruption dissatisfaction by one unit was associated with a 9% lower likelihood of voting left. It was a lower likelihood of 5% in the case of dissatisfaction with participation in education services by one unit. Together with the effect of dissatisfaction with non-local leaders (17% effect), a unit standard deviation increase in these three collectively explains a 32% lower likelihood of voting left. Hence, they account for most of the observed reduction in the left's vote share.

**Table 16: Effect of Dissatisfaction with Leaders on Probability of Voting for Left Front in 2011**

	(1)
Dissatis. Score non-local leaders	-0.17*** (0.03)
Dissatis. Score local leaders corruption* left both	-0.09*** (0.02)
Dissatis. Score local leaders education*left both	-0.05*** (0.01)
Dissatis. Score local leaders education*left GP & TMC ZP	-0.01 (0.02)
Dissatis. Score local leaders health*left both	0.02 (0.02)
Dissatis. Score local leaders other public goods*left both	-0.03 (0.02)
Constant	1.41*** (0.14)
Observations	1956
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.221

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01 Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at mouza level.

(1) Dependent variable measures probability of voting for Left Front in 2011.

(2) All specifications include village fixed effects and HH characteristics: agricultural and other landholdings, age and age square of household head, maximum education and dummies for caste, religion and occupation.

To what extent did the land acquisition policy of the LF play a role in increasing voter dissatisfaction? As explained above, such concerns are much more likely to have played a role in affecting dissatisfactions reported with non-local rather than local leaders. Interpreting the reported dissatisfactions with non-local leaders is not straightforward, owing to ambiguity with regard to exactly which non-local leaders the respondents may have had in mind. Our field investigators think that mostly the respondents interpreted "non-local" leaders to mean LF leaders in the state government until May 2011. In that case, the incidents in Singur and Nandigram would be likely to affect reported dissatisfactions with non-local leaders, and we would expect to see higher scores in areas closer to these two areas.

Table 17 examines how dissatisfaction with non-local leaders varied with the distance from these two areas. We order

households in accordance with their distance from these two locations, and then examine the variation in dissatisfaction (averaged across different dimensions) in different quartiles of this distribution, after controlling for household characteristics and private benefits received. We see that relative to the first quartile (25% households located closest to these areas), dissatisfactions were considerably lower in the second and the third quartiles.<sup>5</sup> Hence, this provides evidence consistent with the hypothesis that the LF's land acquisition policies played some role in affecting voter attitudes adversely.

**Table 17: Effect of Varying Distance from Nandigram, Singur on Dissatisfaction Scores for Non-Local Leaders**

	Distance from Nandigram	Distance from Singur
Second quartile	-0.248** (0.107)	-0.244** (0.107)
Third quartile	-0.381*** (0.142)	-0.191 (0.145)
Fourth quartile	-0.093 (0.225)	0.011 (0.212)
Obs	1931	1931

\* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01 Robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at mouza level.

(1) The base for distance measure is the 1st quartile.

(2) Dependent variable is a continuous variable measuring dissatisfaction score for non-local leaders, averaged across different dimensions.

(3) All specifications include one-time and recurring benefits received, reported grievances with local health and education services, dummy for left majority in GP, and following household characteristics: landholding, age and square of age of household head, maximum education and dummies for caste, religion and occupation.

Our regression results, however, indicate that land acquisition policies were not the only factor affecting the reversal experienced by the LF in 2011. Dissatisfaction with local leaders also played a role, as indicated by Tables 15 and 16. Table 13 showed an estimated 0.2 difference between dissatisfactions in left-dominated GPs and TMC-dominated GPs with respect to participation in education services, and 0.3 with respect to corruption. Using the estimated coefficients of .05 and .09 of the likelihood of voting left in Table 16 with respect to these two variables, we obtain a total 4% reduction. This is comparable to the effect of 0.25 higher dissatisfaction with non-local leaders, which is of the same order of magnitude as the difference between areas close to Nandigram and Singur and those further away (that is, in the second and third quartiles).<sup>6</sup>

## 6 Summary

This paper has used two successive rounds of voter surveys in a household panel in rural West Bengal to gauge reasons for the recent decline in the political popularity of the LF. We do not find evidence that this was the result of changes in age distribution or media exposure of voters, or changes in flows of the private benefits in development and welfare programmes administered by local governments, or changes in the vote-generating

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effectiveness of such programmes. These potential sources of rising accountability pressures cannot account for the anti-incumbency exhibited by voters in 2011 after many decades.

Respondents were asked to evaluate local and non-local leaders on different dimensions pertaining to party activities and policies in the 2011 survey. Higher dissatisfaction with local leaders in left-dominated GPs and with non-local leaders accounts for a substantial portion of the variation in cross-sectional voting patterns in 2011. Two dimensions of local governance

seem particularly relevant here – corruption and the provision of local public goods. There is some indirect evidence that the left’s land acquisition policy in recent years also played a role, since voters living in the proximity of Nandigram and Singur were more dissatisfied with non-local leaders. The evidence indicates both sets of factors play some role in explaining the low vote share of the LF in 2011. There is also some evidence that the Singur-Nandigram effects diminish in strength in areas away from them.

NOTES

- 1 See also Bhattacharya (2009), Majumdar (2009), and Dasgupta (2009) for detailed narratives based on ethnographic studies in six villages in our sample.
- 2 Table 6 also shows that those reading newspapers were 5.8% more likely to vote for the left, in which case rising newspaper readership would have increased the left’s vote share. Of course, as mentioned, there was no trend in newspaper readership between 2004 and 2011.
- 3 Our field investigators reported that respondents tended to interpret the item “contact/rapport with local traders” as reflecting corruption.
- 4 These results are robust with respect to inclusion of benefits received, and expressed grievances with local health and education services provided by the government.
- 5 It fails to be statistically significant for the third quartile of households located relative to Singur, but the absolute size of the coefficient is quite large (nearly 0.2) but fails to be statistically significant owing to a large standard error. The fourth quartile representing mainly those located in north Bengal districts registered high levels of dissatisfaction comparable

to those near Nandigram and Singur, but this possibly reflects specific concerns regarding the treatment of north Bengal areas by state government leaders.

- 6 Of course, this is an imprecise estimate of the extent to which the land acquisition policy may have raised dissatisfaction with non-local leaders on average. Estimating the latter involves assessing a counterfactual which is not possible based on the evidence we have available.

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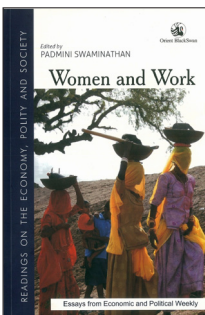
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## Women and Work

Edited by

**PADMINI SWAMINATHAN**



The notion of ‘work and employment’ for women is complex. In India, fewer women participate in employment compared to men. While economic factors determine men’s participation in employment, women’s participation depends on diverse reasons and is often rooted in a complex interplay of economic, cultural, social and personal factors.

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