



Franchisee Politics and Elite Bargains: Analyzing TMC Governance in West Bengal Through the Political Settlement Framework

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Abstract

This paper applies the Political Settlement Framework (PSF), developed by Mushtaq H. Khan, to analyze the political durability and governance strategy of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal. Moving beyond dominant lenses such as populism, clientelism, and identity politics, the paper argues that the TMC's rule is best understood as a strategic elite bargain, where power is distributed across symbolic leadership and decentralized brokers. The study uses the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme—a monthly cash transfer program for women—as a case study to illustrate how welfare policy reinforces elite stability and mass dependency within the political settlement. Through this lens, the TMC's governance emerges not simply as affective populism but as a durable and exclusionary order shaped by informal power arrangements and strategic resource distribution.

The PSF allows for a structural understanding of why certain institutions persist and others fail, and why reforms in sectors like manufacturing or education remain weak. This paper concludes that sustainable institutional reform in West Bengal must account for the political settlement underpinning the state's governance model, where informal authority and mass appeasement operate in tandem. The study contributes to the broader literature on state capacity, elite negotiation, and the institutional dynamics of subnational politics in India.

Keywords: clientelism; informal institutions; political economy; welfare; west Bengal