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Panchayats

by

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The West Bengal Panchayat Model in Peril? A Survey-based Appraisal of West Bengal Panchayats¹

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Keywords: Panchayati Raj System, West Bengal, Democratisation, Performance,

ABSTRACT:

The Panchayati Raj System was aimed to be a tool for democratisation and development of the rural parts of India. The state of West Bengal was long time considered a model for a efficient and exemplary implementation of local self-government. Especially the early successes of the Communist government in land reforms and social justice during the late 1970s and the 1980s sparked academic interest in this model.

This paper intends to examine this view on the base of a survey amongst the rural populace in the West Bengal district of Burdwan about the perception of the Panchayat institutions itself and their perceived performance. The aim is to prove or disprove West Bengals perceived model character by investigating the view of the ordinary citizen on the Panchayats and the impression he/she has about the institutions performance in various fields, e.g. infrastructure. The paper also looks into the roles of both leading political parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), in the West Bengal Panchayats and how these roles are perceived.

INTRODUCTION

The Panchayati Raj³ is a system of local self-government in India which aims to empower the citizens at the grass-roots by giving them control over a great portion

¹ This paper is based on a survey conducted in August and September 2008 originally as a basis for my Magister Thesis.

² I would like to thank Professor Subrata K. Mitra for the support in the preparations for this survey and during the time of writing the thesis. I also would like to thank Professor Harihar Bhattacharyya for the support during the survey itself and the time after it. Further I am grateful to the Department of Political Science, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University and the team of the HPSACP. Last I would like to thank the reviewer of this paper. The Author can be contacted at kai.fabian@gmx.net.

of their political and economic affairs. Its implementation is aimed at introducing, supporting and stabilizing development and democratisation. A first attempt at a constitutional provision for Panchayati Raj was Article 40 of the Indian Constitution. But this article gave no clear instructions to the states who had to ratify the Panchayats into state laws under the federal constitution. The big leap for the Panchayati Raj System (PRS) came in the form of the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, which made the PRS compulsory for the states and gave clear introductions on the rights and privileges of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), which were now to be organised into three tiers.

West Bengal had begun the establishment of its PRS much earlier, in 1978, after the Left-Front (LF), led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), had come into power in 1977. The CPI-M had made a strong PRS part of its political manifesto, which focused mostly on rural development. The much acclaimed *Operation Barga*, which was conducted through the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in 1978, showed the success of such a decentralisation of power. The strong state support towards the PRI by the CPI-M-led government and the success of this system in developing the rural areas during the early years of the West Bengal PRS made it a model both for academic research as well as for the 73rd Amendment. But in recent years, cracks in the left's bastion of support in the rural areas have been found evident in the loss of considerable grounds in the last Panchayats polls in 2008 followed by the Lok Sabha (general) elections in 2009. While the government's fiasco in mishandling both the Nadigram events in 2007 and the Singur Tata small car (Nano) factory issue in 2008-09 will have produced impact on the outcome of the left performance, there is need for going beyond and look into the long term factors for explaining the apparent decline of the left Panchayats in West Bengal considered to be a model for the rest of India and acclaimed world over.

The aim of this paper is to take a look at the present situation by examining the perception of the citizens with the help of a case study in the district of Burdwan in order to assess and analyse the present situation with the help of a survey which examines the perception of the PRS by the citizens of the district of Burdwan. The question underlying my survey is the following: How is the actual situation perceived by the citizens and what can be inferred about the West Bengal PRS when the citizens' perception is taken into account? Furthermore, can the claim that the West Bengal version of the PRS as a model in decline be verified based on the findings of the case study?

I will try to answer the above questions by evaluating the data of a survey I conducted in the district in question during August and September 2008. This structured quantitative study contains, amongst other things, data concerning the perception of PRI services and the trust in the PRI. The design of the study thus enables me not just to gain an estimate of the situation in situ but also to gain insight into possible approaches to the problem from below. Additionally, I will also use the findings of the empirical study to test two theoretical approaches within Neo-Institutionalism: the Rational Choice approach and an approach based on Sociological Institutionalism.

3 Panchayati Raj derives from the Hindi words *panch* meaning "five" and *yat* meaning "assembly", *raj* means rule, thus Panchayati Raj literally means "the rule of the assembly of five".

STATE OF RESEARCH

A lot of research has been done on the PRS in the last decades. Most of these studies center on topics ranging from legal and institutional aspects (Datta 2006, Jain 2005, Mitra S. 1995, Goel and Rajneesh 2003), decentralisation and democratisation, and party control (Bhattacharyya 1998 & 2002; Jain 2005, Sen Gupta 2006) to social inclusion and exclusion (Baviskar and Mathew 2009, Gosh 1999). Additionally, various studies have focused on the PRI in West Bengal (Kohli 1987, Thörlind 2000, Westergaard 1986), but few studies are/are based on quantitative surveys. With regard to the problems of CPI-M governance, Bhattacharyya (1998) conducted a qualitative interview series and Mitra (in: Kohli 2001) made/carried out a quantitative survey concerning trust. Other quantitative studies about the PRI were made in regard to other states and different topics. Hust (2002) conducted a survey about women empowerment in Orissa and Widmalm (2008) did a large scale survey about education, healthcare and perception in Madhya Pradesh and Kerala. While these studies differ in topic and approach from this/my study, the methodology used for the surveys served as an inspiration for my own research. The problem/limitation of most of the research up to this date is that it is predominantly concentrated on the legal implications of the PRI or on programmatic approaches and operations by the CPI-M. With the exception of the above mentioned study by Mitra, which focuses on trust and is part of a much broader all-India survey, very few research engages the citizens' perspective systematically. However, a very interesting article on the topic of acceptance of institutions, written by Chatterjee (2009), was recently published. Because this article is related to my research I will give a short summary of it. Chatterjee focuses on stability and party clientelism in the West Bengal institutions. His research is based on a large quantitative sample survey and a small qualitative sample.⁴ In the wake of the current crisis of the left in West Bengal, Chatterjee has tried to use the survey results to answer an alternative question as well, that is, he tried to assess the role of internal problems to institutions which might endanger the LF-rule. I will engage more extensively with Chatterjee's study later on in the conclusion of this paper and will compare the results of my survey with those of his.

The importance of the scope of support for the institutions and parties should not be underestimated, especially considering the cracks in communist hegemony due to recent events.⁵ Even though the data gathered during my survey in 2008 are restricted to one district and 501 respondents, they are able to provide some insight into the situation "on the ground" concerning the trust in the PRI, the CPI-M and the perception of performance in both cases.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The institutions of the Panchayati Raj System (PRS) are the heart and soul of the approach for empowerment, democratisation and development in India. The institutions are the interface between the people and the system and therefore in the front line of perception. The citizens, whenever they have to interact with the PRS, will first notice the institution of the Gram Panchayat Office or, more particularly,

4 No details about the quantitative sample or the questionnaire are given; the qualitative survey was conducted with ethnographic methods and is thus of lesser accuracy.

5 The violent clashes in Nandigram and Singur in 2007/2008 respectively and the landslide losses of the CPI-M in the Panchayat elections 2008 as well as the heavy losses in the Lok Sabha elections 2009.

the people working there. In their daily life they experience the effects of the PRS depending on the efficiency and ability of their local institutions to interact with them, react to their demands and provide services needed. Thus, in order to gain an understanding of institutions and their interaction with their environment it is necessary to take a closer look at theory. One of the most complex theories concerning this topic is Neo-Institutionalism. This approach, or, more specifically, conglomerate of approaches, concerns itself with the foundation of institutions, their prevalence and their interaction with society (e.g. Powell/ DiMaggio 1991, Scott 2008).

The very word *institution* loses its commonly acknowledged meaning as a bureaucratic organisation of the Weberian kind and is associated with a wide range of meanings, from a series of cognitive framing to the bureaucratic notion. This idea of an institution as something cognitive, that is, the influence of the perception of the actor, often emphasised by Zucker (1991), is an important aspect in the analyses of bureaucratic institutions. In his attempt to divide institutions into three dimensions, a regulative, a normative and a cognitive dimension, Scott (2000) has offered a first attempt at an analysis of institutions. Senge (2006), however, argued that the first two dimensions can only be perceived through the last, the cognitive dimension. This is important because it brings in the context of the institution. This context becomes more important with regard to the question of the legitimacy of an institution. Suchman (1995) introduced the idea that institutions, or their actors, can use different ways to legitimise themselves. They can either do this by rational means, generating legitimacy through efficiency, or by purely cognitive means, generating legitimacy by relating to established cultural codes, traditions, etc.

Based on these two different ideas of generating legitimacy, two different theoretical approaches emerged within Neo-Institutionalism. The Rational Choice approach postulates that institutions are set up and legitimised by means of efficiency and rational considerations. Shepsle (2005) drew on game theory and argued that the actors can act freely within a defined political space, but only by means of rational choice. The institutions and rules are set up before the 'game' starts and produce the boundaries of the political space. This produces, nevertheless, the problem of a *tabula rasa* before the 'game'. Therefore, another approach, also presented by Shepsle (2005), regards the institutions and rules as constantly adapting and changing. The 'game' is thus a sequence of mutual influences and rational agreements by the actors on the institutions in question. Efficiency and legitimacy within this approach are based on the idea of pure utility. The actors agree on institutions when it is guaranteed that every actor involved gets out maximum utility and a minimum or, at best, no loss during the 'game'. A definition of a true Rational Choice actor is given by Jones:

“Fixed, transitive preferences for alternatives [...], an ability to calculate costs in terms of forgone opportunities, an ability to compare future and present benefits [...], a comprehensive utility function that integrates all aspects of the decision makers life”(Jones 2001)

The second approach is that of Sociological Institutionalism. In contrast to the Rational Choice approach, here, the emphasis lies on the context of the institutions and their rooting in society, that is, their grade of institutionalisation. Dobbins (1994) argues that the cultural context of the actor and the institution affects their interaction and the way an institution is legitimised. Pure efficiency based on rational choices is not sufficient to explain the success or failure of an institution. The way the actors perceive institutions through their cognitive lens and the

cultural traditions they are used to determine the way they act and the grade to which they legitimise an institution. The adherence to the rules and the unquestioned re-enforcement of them was analysed by March and Olsen in their paper on the “logic of appropriateness”. They argue that actors act according to the rules, when these actors are embedded in a strong social collectivity, because to act according to them seems natural and necessary, appropriate to act in such a manner (March/Olsen 2009)

This paper intends to test both strands on the case.

METHODOLOGY

The survey used in this article was conducted in the Burdwan District of West Bengal. This district was chosen because Burdwan is a relatively typical West Bengal district, encompassing agricultural villages, forestall areas, industrial sites and a few big cities. I chose Burdwan because it is a relatively typical West Bengal District, comprised of agricultural villages, forestall areas, industrial sites and a few big cities. This enables me to infer from the sample case of Burdwan some general conclusions about the state of West Bengal as a whole. Furthermore there are some blocks within the district where the Communist Party of India (Marxist) is not in power but which are ruled by the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), the biggest opposition party in West Bengal. This makes it possible to compare the two main parties, CPI-M and AITC, in terms of perception and performance.

The survey itself was conducted during August/September 2008 in seven different Panchayat Samiti (blocks) and ten Gram Panchayats (GP) (village level) within the district. These areas were chosen randomly but with the condition that the composition had to roughly represent the political situation in the Burdwan District.

Although the aim was to have a random sample, it is more a stratified sample in which the method of random choice applies as the *modus operandi*: all interviewees had to be 18 years old by the time of the interview, so they had suffrage. About half of all interviewees had to be women and after ten to twelve interviews another area of the village had to be visited to ensure the representation of all social groups in the survey. Overall the sample consisted of 501 interviewees, of whom 58.9% were male respondents and 41.1% were female respondents. The questionnaire for this survey consisted of 79 questions, subclassified into the following topics: *General Questions, Social Environment, Employment, Health, Public Sphere, Trust, Political Parties, Future Perspective and Special Questions* (including questions for women and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes). However, only four parts (*Trust, Rating, Political Parties and Perceived Performance*) will be relevant for this article. These are the parts which asked about the trust in the PRI, the ratings of them, the access to information provided by the PRI, the relationship to and perception of political parties and the perceived performance of the PRI. But prior to the assessment of the survey, an overview of the socio-economic background of the interviewees will be given. The evaluation will be made according to the above mentioned order. All parts will include a party-wise evaluation to see if the results are to be taken generally or if there is a distinction between GPs under CPI-M rule and those under AITC rule.

THE SITUATION IN WEST BENGAL DURING THE SURVEY

The political scene in West Bengal today is dominated by the tensions between the CPI-M led Left Front (LF), which has been in government for three decades now, and the AITC and its allies, which has become the most important opposition party in recent years. The LF government proposed a strong and fast industrialisation of the state via SEZs, for example in Nandigram and Singur, where they tried to acquire land from local farmers, partly through evictions and partly through compensation, which were said to be below market prices. The AITC, in contrast, presented itself as the defender of the land owners' rights and fought and still fights against the land acquisitions by the government.⁶

These contrary positions led not only to the well known violent clashes between CPI-M supporters and AITC supporters in Nandigram, Singur and elsewhere,⁷ and to the blockade of the Tata plant in Singur, but also established the AITC as a protest party and attractive/viable alternative to the ruling CPI-M.⁸ The tensions between the CPI-M and the AITC on the one hand and the failed policies of the LF government in regard to the land acquisitions⁹ on the other hand caused a decline of the power of the CPI-M, which is evident in the results of the 2008 Panchayat polls.¹⁰ The AITC was able to win over two ZP, Purba-Mindnapore, where Nandigram is located, 24-South Parganas,¹¹ and six of fourteen PS in the important district of Howrah as well as four PS in the Burdwan District.¹² Although the CPI-M and its LF allies were able to seize almost all ZPs and most PS, they experienced a serious backlash at the very core of the target group of voters, the rural base. Only about half of the GPs were won by the CPI-M and its LF allies, whereas the other half of the GPs were taken by the AITC and other minor opposition parties. This stands in stark contrast to the 2003 elections when the CPI-M had been able to secure almost all GP seats,¹³ This is a development that has shaken the LF government to its foundations and has changed the whole political situation in West Bengal, especially in the rural parts of the state where the CPI-M and its allies are now facing an enormous opposition.

Another considerable backlash for the CPI-M was the landslide victory of the AITC in the Lok Sabha elections held in 2009. The CPI-M, compared to the 2004 elections, lost 17 constituencies, whereas the AITC was able to win 19 constituencies, which are 18 more than in the 2004 elections.¹⁴¹⁵

6 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2130803.cms>, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Trinamool_gives_7day_ultimatum_threatens_fresh_stir/articleshow/3512094.cms, sighted on 26 November 2008

7 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2546872.cms>, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Trinamool_Congress_agitation_shuts_down_West_Bengal/articleshow/2504593.cms, sighted on 26 November 2008

8 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/WB_rural_polls_Trinamool_wins_Nandigram_Singur/articleshow/3059767.cms, sighted on 26 November 2008

9 <http://www1.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/498509.cms>, sighted on 26 November 2008

10 <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Trinamool-sweeps-WB-panchayat-pollsCPM-stunned/312674/>, sighted on 26 November 2008

11 http://wbsec.gov.in/FinalResult/FinalResult_zp.aspx, sighted on 26 November 2008

12 http://wbsec.gov.in/FinalResult/FinalResult_ps.aspx, sighted on 26 November 2008

13 <http://indiapost.com/article/india/2871/>, sighted on 26 November 2008

14 <http://info.electionsamachar.com/2009/03/loksabha-election-result-2004-west-bengal/>, sighted 17 July 2009

These results show one thing very clearly: the CPI-M-led LF is on the brink of losing power after they have already lost their former absolute hegemony in the West Bengal Panchayats. Additionally, the recent Lok Sabha results should also be regarded as an expression of the anger many voters harbour due to the local problems in West Bengal and are a clear indicator for the problems of the CPI-M as the ‘party of the people’.

BURDWAN – STATISTICS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

To put the data collected during the survey into context, the following part includes some statistical information about the district in general as well as some information about the political situation there in August and September 2008.

The district of Burdwan (Bengali: Bardhaman) lies in the south of West Bengal, and the north-west of Kolkata, with its district headquarters in Burdwan City, approx. 120 km away from Kolkata. It has a population of about 6.8 million inhabitants, of whom 3.5 million are male and 3.3 million are female. About 4.3 million inhabitants are living in rural areas and about 2.5 million live in urban areas. About 1.8 million people belong to the SC group and about 441,000 are ST. The district consists of 31 PS, 277 GPs and 3857 GSD.¹⁶

Burdwan is a predominantly agrarian district, but has also two big industrial sites in the sub-divisions of Asansol and Durgapur.¹⁷ Of the working population 42% is employed in the industrial sector, whereas 58% is employed in the agrarian sector. The main crop is rice, but also, potatoes, oil seeds and jute are cultivated in Burdwan. Only 35,5% of the population is registered as workers, but this number is misleading as a lot of workers in family businesses, farms and a lot of day-labourers are not included in such a statistics. About 2.7 million people in the district are illiterate, most of them in the rural areas. The overall literacy rate lies at 70.2%. The ZP of Burdwan is dominated by the CPI-M, which controls 52 of the 67 seats. Also, 27 of the 31 PS are controlled by the CPI-M, which leaves 4 PS under AITC control. The CPI-M and its mass-organisations are omnipresent in the district, especially visible through slogans and propaganda on nearly every wall in Burdwan. But the decline of the party in the wake of the loss of control over nearly half of all GPs in West Bengal is also recognisable in Burdwan. The CPI-M and its allies became nervous over the growing influence of the TMC. In some areas even the normally marginal BJP was able to take over control of a GP.¹⁸ This led to a phenomenon which I witnessed during my field research in Burdwan and which shows the tense situation. On the 20th of August 2008 the CPI-M in Burdwan City and in most parts of the districts called a *bandh*, a form of strike. This strike had the effect that the whole life in Burdwan city came to a halt. On the usually crowded streets were no lorries, busses or cars, just motor-cycles and bicycles. All shops and restaurants were closed with the exception of pharmacies and shops with essential goods. Even the rickshaw drivers did not work. At some points in the city supporters of the CPI-M and the LF had gathered to blockade the street and to show support for the strike. At the centre of the city a party rally was held by the CPI-M, where a few hundred supporters demonstrated. The one pressing question arising out of this is: Why does the ruling party shut down the whole city and

15 <http://www.indiaelections.co.in/lok-sabha-constituencies/west-bengal/>, sighted 17 July 2009

16 <http://bardhaman.gov.in/adminunit.html>, sighted 28 November 2008

17 <http://bardhaman.gov.in/indus/industry.htm>, sighted 28 November 2008

18 http://wbsec.gov.in/FinalResult/FinalResult_gp.aspx, sighted 28 November 2008

eventually the whole state? The answer seems pretty straight forward: apparently, to show their strength. Although in decline, the CPI-M and the LF want to demonstrate that they still have enough power to shut down public life whenever they want. This can also be interpreted as a threat directed at the electorate, not to vote against the CPI-M or as a reminder that they are still the only alternative, for better or worse. Another phenomenon was the growing visibility of the AITC. Not only did the propaganda slogans on houses and walls, even in CPI-M dominated areas, increase, but AITC supporters also increasingly held rallies and demonstrations in such areas. On the 23th of August 2008 I became witness to a demonstration of a few hundred AITC supporters in the Galsi I block, near Mankor GP, which is strongly dominated by the CPI-M.¹⁹ The demonstration moved down the main road, blocking it for hours, without interference by CPI-M cadres. Although it is very probable that most of the supporters came from other areas, it is still a demonstration of power by the AITC. The declining political power of the CPI-M and the LF and the rising influence and support of the AITC and other opposition parties, i.e. the BJP, produce a very tense situation in Burdwan. In some situations, this has led to violent clashes between the supporters of the two parties: for example, an AITC supporter was beaten to death by two CPI-M cadres.²⁰ After the Panchayat polls there were also several violent clashes between CPI-M supporters and supporters of the AITC and INC in Burdwan.²¹ All these developments show the urgent need of further research on PRS and citizens' perception in the West Bengal region.

THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In the following section, the data which I collected for the survey in 2008 will be evaluated. As already mentioned, I will focus on four parts of the questionnaire. However, first, it is necessary to take a short look at the social composition of the sample.

Social Structure

In order to gain an idea about the composition of the sample I will first introduce the social positions of the interviewees regarding the religious and social group they belong to.

The vast majority of respondents were Hindus, who made up 89.6% of the sample. Further, only 8.8% Muslims were included. This is about 11% less than the the statistical average of about 20% for the district, a discrepancy which can be explained due to the lack of female Muslim respondents, who were very reluctant to be interviewed. The other religious communities, like Buddhists or tribal religions, are marginal with overall only 1.6%. The social group is defined according to the *varna* of the interviewee, which can be roughly translated as 'caste'. Groups who are not part of the classical *varna* system, like regional *jatis* or Muslims, or who belong to the group of 'Other Backward Castes' (OBC) are included in the group 'other'. In this sample 12.4% of the respondents were Brahmins, 25.6% belonged to the Kshatriya group, 4.4% were Vashyas and 31.2%

19 http://wbsec.gov.in/FinalResult/FinalResult_gp.aspx, sighted 28 November 2008

20 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-3395109,prtpage-1.cms>, sighted 28 November 2008

21 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/609243.cms>, sighted 28 November 2008
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/690356.cms>, sighted 28 November 2008

are lumped together in the group 'other'. Of the sample 23.2% belong to the group Scheduled Castes (SC) and 3.2% to the group Scheduled Tribes (ST). Since SC and ST often belong to the most marginalised groups and make up a big proportion amongst the rural poor, it is important to take a closer look at their perception later on. Another important information concerning the composition of the sample relates to the question of origin. The answers to the question shows that the majority still lives in the village where they were born (59.4%). From this can be inferred that the rate of migration among the population of Burdwan is moderate. The majority migrated within the district (28.4%), a minority came from other districts within West Bengal (9.4%) or from another state in India (2.2%). Only a very small group of merely 0,6% immigrated from Bangladesh.

Trust

The most important factor for effective governance is trust. A government, even on the local level, which does not have the trust of its citizens, cannot govern effectively. The trust in an institution is also an indicator of its legitimacy and its acceptance by the citizens. Thus, a governmental institution which does not have the trust of the majority of the citizens will also have also a low degree of legitimacy and therefore difficulties in enforcing decisions through persuasion. Such a governmental institution has to implement decisions by force or cannot implement them at all. In relation to this study this means that the PRI(s) have to be trustworthy or they will not be able to work efficiently towards development and democratisation. The numbers given here are the general levels of trust in the district of Burdwan for the whole sample. The data are evaluated concerning trust in the institutions of the Gram Panchayat (GP), the Panchayati Samiti (PS) and the state government of West Bengal as a reference. Further, the trust into GP will be compared between CPI-M ruled areas and AITC ruled areas. Although it is hard to measure a feeling like trust, it was measured in this survey in the following way: the interviewees had the choice between three different expressions which are: "a great deal" for almost complete trust in the institution in question, "somewhat" for basic trust in the institutions but with a critical distance and "not at all" for distrust in the institutions.

Table 1: Trust in GP

		Trust in Local Gram Panchayat			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a great deal	89	17,8	17,8	17,8
	somewhat	285	56,9	57,0	74,8
	not at all	110	22,0	22,0	96,8
	no reply	12	2,4	2,4	99,2
	Don't know	4	0,8	0,8	100,0
	Total	500	99,8	100,0	

As the table shows the general trust level in the GP, the lowest of the PRI and therefore the least distant to the citizens, has a high rate of basic trust. Even though not a fifth of the interviewees have a great deal of trust in their local village

government, the addition of 57% who have basic trust in it makes for a healthy three quarter majority (74.8%!) which supports at least the existence of the institution. Still, the number of respondents who do not trust the GP at all lies at 22% and outnumbers the number of strong supporters by more than 4%. On the brighter side, this result is clearly a statement of the citizens' general trust in the institution of GP, even more if this number is compared to the average level of trust in local government institutions in European states like Germany, where general trust lies at 65%, or France with 62% of general trust.²² The high rate of trust will become more interesting when we regard the evaluation of the perceived performances of PRI, especially in connection with the theoretical backdrop. To determine a party-wise trust rate there will be a separate evaluation of those GPs under CPI-M rule and those under AITC rule.

A look at these results reveals something interesting: In GPs where the AITC rules the trust rate is much higher than in CPI-M ruled GPs. The average for the three AITC GPs in this survey is 93.9% general trust of which 42.6% have a great deal of trust. In the CPI-M ruled GPs the numbers are much lower. Here 69.9% have general and just 7.7% have a great deal of trust. Although there are still more than two third of the respondents in the respective GPs who have general trust in their institutions, these numbers can by no means compete with those from the AITC GPs. It should be kept in mind that all GPs regardless of party rule had similar social structures and average incomes.

When taking a look at the result for the PS, which is situated on the block level, a well known phenomenon as regards trust is visible.

Table 2: Trust in PS

Trust in Local Panchayat Samiti

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a great deal	67	13,4	13,4	13,4
	somewhat	226	45,1	45,2	58,6
	not at all	136	27,1	27,2	85,8
	no reply	35	7,0	7,0	92,8
	dont know	36	7,2	7,2	100,0
	Total	500	99,8	100,0	

The number of respondents who have a great deal of trust is much lower compared to those of the GP. The same is valid for the interviewees who trust the institution somewhat. Here the result is most remarkable showing a 12% difference between GP and PS in respondents having basic trust. Even more interesting is the small increase of 5% in respondents who have no trust at all. The number which has increased the most is the group of respondents who have no idea about the PS or who do not want to answer the question. This number increased by 11% cumulated (4.6% for "no reply" and 6.4% for "don't know"). While this phenomenon is interesting, it is not surprising: The more distant an institution is, the less it seems

²² Spezial Eurobarometer 307

to be related to everyday life of the citizens. If the citizens are not well informed about the work of that institution, they cannot give an informed response to the question of trust. This is reflected in the 11% of respondents who could not or would not answer the question. It is also possible that this distance is reflected in the lower levels of general trust in the institution. Unfortunately though, it cannot be said what percentage of those respondents who had lower levels of trust or no trust in the PS had so out of lack of information or due to the distance of the institution. Information is decisive in this context, but this will be evaluated later on. In order to have a reference for the average level of trust, we will now take a closer look at the results for the state government of West Bengal.

Table 3: Trust in the State Government

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a great deal	39	7,8	7,8	7,8
	somewhat	220	43,9	43,9	51,7
	not at all	163	32,5	32,5	84,2
	no reply	51	10,2	10,2	94,4
	dont know	28	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

It is particularly noticeable that the state government commands a level of general trust by only a slight majority of the respondents. Moreover, only 7.8% have a great deal of trust in this institution. This is 10% less than the level of the GP and, furthermore, the level of a great deal of trust diminished by 28.8% if compared to a survey published by Mitra in 2001. Additionally, one third of all interviewees do not have any trust at all in their state government and nearly 16% could not or would not answer this question. There are probably various reasons for this outcome. On the one hand the state government is a very distant institution and seems to have little impact on the daily life of the average citizen in a village. This could explain that almost 16% of respondents did not answer the question. On the other hand, the state government had made some questionable policy decisions at the time of the survey, which had a major impact on citizens' daily life.²³ These decisions, which mainly pertained to land acquisition for economical purposes, might have led the perception of the state government as oppressive and not trustworthy. Especially the land acquisition policies for the so-called Special Economic Zones (SEZ) at Nandigram and Singur provoked a strong opposition movement which was led by the AITC. The mobilisation of political opposition was also carried out in the district of Burdwan, although this district was not directly affected by the policies. Therefore, it can be assumed that political mobilisation by both parties, especially during rallies and blockades, and strong media attention to the problem, led to an increase in information available to the citizens, and thus might have influenced the feeling of trust in the state government - obviously, in a negative way. It is important to note the difference in the

23 See pp. 6

allocation of trust at the different levels. Whereas at the GP level the respondents have an “agreement without cheer”, that is, basic trust in the institution at large, the institutions at the state level, often led by the CPI-M, are much more distrusted.

In principle, it is possible to generalise from this section that the “agreement without cheer” is highest at the local level, diminishing gradually further up on the institutional structure. This could be due to two reasons: first of all, the party cadres of the CPI-M, as well as of any other party, like the AITC, are strongest at the lowest level, deeply embedded in the daily life of a village. The cadres themselves are often important people from the area having strong connections to the GPs elite. In this environment it is therefore relatively easy to uphold the appearance of indispensability and to make the citizens believe that they have no alternative then to vote for, support and trust the ruling party. This effect is especially visible in the areas ruled by the CPI-M. Secondly, the farther you upwards the more attention the media pays to party scandals, inter-party clashes and general politics. In the case of the land acquisitions the media reported widely on the topic. It is very likely that this affected the level of trust engendered by the CPI-M led state government. At the same time, this did not necessarily affect the trust in the local CPI-M government in Burdwan, as it is not directly affected by these land acquisitions.

Rating of the Work

While trust measures the support an institution gets from the citizens, the rating of its work measures the subjective impression the citizens have of the overall capability of the institution to deliver. Here, the performance of the GP and PS²⁴, as perceived by the citizens, will be evaluated.

Table 4: Rating of the Job of the GP:

Rating of the Job done by the Gram Panchayat					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	excellent	24	4,8	4,8	4,8
	good	135	26,9	26,9	31,7
	ok	235	46,9	46,9	78,6
	not good	60	12,0	12,0	90,6
	bad	40	8,0	8,0	98,6
	no reply	4	0,8	0,8	99,4
	dont know	3	0,6	0,6	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

This table shows that approx. 80% are content with the performance of their GP (if we define that ‘ok’ is an approving expression). This is in accordance with the number of respondents with basic or a great deal of trust in their GP. This answer was to be expected since the question asks only for an overall assessment of the

²⁴ There were no data collected on the rating of the state government

performance of the local GP and is not directed at a specific program or project. In the perception of the interviewees the support via trust for their institution and a general rating of its performance are closely connected because it seems unlikely to support and trust an institution and then assess incompetence of this institution. It is more likely that a larger amount of people rate the working of the GP better than their level of support (trust) might suggest because they might have the impression of a good working institution and nevertheless distrust the party in power. This assumption can be validated if we compare the numbers, although only by a small margin (approx. 4%). Like in the trust ratings the rating of the work done by the GP in AITC areas are also much better than those of the CPI-M. 90.1% (75.1% in CPI-M GPs) rate the job carried out by their GP as 'ok', 59.2% (20.1% in CPI-M GPs) said the GP does a good job and 9.2%, compared to just 2.9% in CPI-M GPs, rate the job as excellent.

The afore mentioned link between performance and trust levels must also become visible in the ratings of the PS through a proportional decrease in positive assessment of the job carried out by this institution.

Table 5: Rating of the Job of the PS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	excellent	12	2,4	2,4	2,4
	good	100	20,0	20,0	22,4
	ok	180	35,9	35,9	58,3
	not good	67	13,4	13,4	71,7
	bad	58	11,6	11,6	83,2
	no reply	35	7,0	7,0	90,2
	dont know	49	9,8	9,8	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

The overall number of respondents rating the performance of the PS generally positive (again assuming that 'ok' is a positive rating) is almost identical to those responding positive in relation to their trust in the PS. Nevertheless, the assumption that there will be a slightly higher rate in terms of positive work assessment is not confirmed, for the number of interviewees generally trusting the institution of PS is marginally higher (0.3%) than the number of interviewees giving a positive rating of the performance of this institution. As regards the rating of the performance by the two PRI, again, like in relation to trust, a majority has a positive attitude towards these institutions. Also, again, this positive attitude decreases, the higher the institution level is. Interestingly, the numbers seem to decrease proportionally to the decrease in trust, indicating a strong connection between these two aspects.

Perceived Improvements

This part is concerned with the perception of various improvements in the fields of infrastructure and agriculture. The questions were fashioned in such a way that the

interviewee had the possibility to choose up to three objects of the field where he thinks improvements had been made under the PRS.

For the measurement of improvement it is not only important how many interviewees choose an option or answered that they had not perceived any improvement, but also how many of the three options were used by the respondents. The first data which will be evaluated are about the infrastructural improvements as perceived by the respondents.

Table 6: Improvements in Infrastructure 1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes/better maintenance on streets	249	49,7	49,7	49,7
	yes/new/repaired drains	17	3,4	3,4	53,1
	yes/new/better equipped primary schools	48	9,6	9,6	62,7
	yes/new hospital	5	1,0	1,0	63,7
	yes/new/better maintenance market	5	1,0	1,0	64,7
	yes/better access to the local administration	1	0,2	0,2	64,9
	yes/but cannot name it	18	3,6	3,6	68,5
	no	144	28,7	28,7	97,2
	no reply	2	0,4	0,4	97,6
	Don't know	12	2,4	2,4	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

As regards the first option, nearly half of the respondents chose the improvement in street maintenance; whereas only approx. 19% (combined) saw any other improvement. This is at least a two-thirds majority who perceive improvements in infrastructure in regard to the first option, compared to nearly one third of respondents who saw no improvement at all. It is even more interesting when we look at the second and third option in this question. Considering the high support for PRI and the positive ratings of the performance of the PRI, one would expect that the perceived performance in relation to specific topics would be high too, but the numbers show otherwise. Only 377, out of 501 interviewees could respond to the question about a second improvement. Of those 377 respondents, more than one third answered that they did not perceive any second improvement. That leaves us with only 219 out of 501 interviewees who were able to name a second improvement, which is less than half of the sample (43.7%). Even worse are the

results for a third improvement. Only 267 could answer the question in regard to the third option and of those, only 108, or 21,5%, could name a third improvement. If we look at the results of the ratings of the GP, where almost 80% gave a positive assessment about the work done by the PRI, it is nearly incomprehensible why the respondents who had such a positive attitude towards the PRI in general did not perceive great improvements when it comes to a specific but vital topic like infrastructure. From a subjective point of view, I have to add that during the conduct of the survey I experienced the streets as badly maintained and the infrastructure in general as very underdeveloped, especially outside the urban areas. Since approx. 17% of the interviewees declared to be directly involved in agricultural activities, approx. 10% were farm owners, and much more interviewees were probably involved in agricultural work as day-labourers but did not specify that, it is important to evaluate the perceived improvements made by the GPs concerning agriculture.

Table 7: Improvements of Support in Agriculture

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes/new/improved irrigation	101	20,2	20,3	20,3
	yes/education in crop farming	13	2,6	2,6	22,9
	yes/education in the use of pesticides/herbicides	8	1,6	1,6	24,5
	yes/support/education in general questions	2	0,4	0,4	24,9
	yes/but cannot name it	14	2,8	2,8	27,8
	no	224	44,7	45,1	72,8
	no reply	4	0,8	0,8	73,6
	dont know	131	26,1	26,4	100,0
	Total	497	99,2	100,0	
Missing 99		4	0,8		
Total		501	100,0		

Just a little more than a quarter of the respondents were able to name an improvement in agricultural support by the GPs. Of those who could not name an improvement, 131 (approx. 25%) used the option “don’t know”. We can assume that this is the number of respondents not directly involved in agricultural activities. This assumption is backed by the fact that this number remains stable in regard to all three options. A look at the numbers of the second and third option shows a similar trend as we have seen in relation to infrastructure, just worse. Only 63 interviewees (14.9%) could name a second improvement and only 26 respondents (6.7%) could name a third improvement. Even if we claim that the

above mentioned number of 17% of interviewees directly involved in agricultural activities is accurate and we exclude the high probability of a large number of respondents to be day labourers in agriculture, we can nevertheless assume that most of the interviewees, especially in the rural areas, must have had some form of direct contact to agriculture. Most of the families in the rural areas have at least small patches of land for self-sufficiency rice or vegetable farming. It is therefore very probable that most of the respondents in the rural areas must have had exposure to farming either through their own patch of agricultural land or through their families and/or distant relatives. This assumption is supported by the above mentioned number of respondents who chose “don’t know” as their answer. It is essential to keep in mind that support and education in relation to agricultural questions is an important aspect of PRI, more so in areas where large numbers of people are dependent on self-sufficiency farming, whether to improve their income or to survive. Especially education in the use of herbicides and pesticides is important, for those are often hazardous fluids and the use of it should be guided carefully by experts. Also education in the use of effective irrigation techniques could help improve harvests. . But only 21.2%²⁵ believe that irrigation techniques have improved and only 12.8%²⁶ responded that the education in the use of herbicides and pesticides has become better. Again, the question arises: Why have almost 80% of the respondents given a positive rating about the performance of the GPs but are not able to name any specific improvements in the area of agriculture? The most striking answer is probably: Because they really did not perceive any! The question whether there really were no improvements is of course another story. It is not determinable from the data whether the interviewees did not perceive improvements because there were, for example, no education courses for herbicide and pesticide use or because they were did not know about such courses. It is interesting to look at the numbers party-wise. Whereas in the CPI-M ruled GPs the percentage of respondents who perceived three improvements in infrastructure lies at 21.2%, the percentage of respondents perceiving three improvements in AITC controlled GPs lies at 22.3%. Except for respondents perceiving two improvements (here the difference is approx. 10% in favour of the AITC) the numbers are very similar. This is striking insofar as the trust rates and performance ratings carried out by the GPs are much better than in the CPI-M ruled GPs.

Other core aspects of the PRS and therefore a crucial task for PRI, especially on the village level, are disease control, the treatment of ailments and the support of pregnant women through the provision of health-care facilities and services. The next data is based on the perception of improvements in the health-care sector since 1993. Again the numbers show a low outcome in relation to improvements in the health-care sector. Just 41.6% saw any improvement in health-care during the 15 years from 1993 to 2008. This low outcome is even more striking when taking into account the fact that only 18% of the respondents who needed medical attention during the previous six month answered that they had consulted a public medical doctor or nurse. Especially in rural areas where roads are often mere pathways and access to urban centres with hospitals depends on weather conditions, public health-care facilities and services are essential. The development of such facilities is a crucial task of the PRI and should not be regarded as a minor objective. The fact that not even half of the interviewees perceived any improvements in this area and a large majority obviously does not trust the public medical personnel and facilities is evidence of the neglect of this sector by the PRI or, at least, of inadequate information policies.

25 Combined number from options 1, 2 and 3

26 Combined number from options 1, 2 and 3.

Information Policy

As I have referred to information policies above it is necessary to evaluate the perceived provision of information by the PRI too. The provision of information is important insofar as it is needed by the citizens to form an enlightened decision. based on the information about the projects in progress or conducted by the institutions about which the elections are. The worse the information, the more citizens have to depend on perception, partisan propaganda and rumours.

Table 9: Provision of Information by Local GP

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	217	43,3	43,3	43,3
	no	255	50,9	50,9	94,2
	no reply	8	1,6	1,6	95,8
	dont know	21	4,2	4,2	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

The table shows that only 43.3% of the respondents, that is, less than half of the respondents, claim to be provided with information about the GPs work. But in order to make effective and informed decision, it is essential that the citizens are provided with sufficient information about projects and plans. Otherwise, they have to rely, at best, on media reports (which normally do not include the day-to-day business of administrative institutions) or on rumours and propaganda, especially if they are unable to read and understand comprehensive newspapers. In such a situation the party cadres have it much easier to spread their propaganda and convince people that their party is the only feasible choice. Especially for the ruling party it is much easier to spread positive propaganda about the performance of their party representatives in the PRI when the voters are unable to judge the actual work for themselves. Then again, the information issued by the GPs can itself be used as an medium of propaganda. As we have seen before, the AITC has much higher trust rates and much better performance ratings, while at the same time, the provision of services, as, for example, the ratings in relation to infrastructure show, does not seem to be much better. But the information policy in AITC GPs seems to be much better: while only 38.2% of respondents in CPI-M ruled areas claimed to be provided with information by the GP, in villages ruled by the AITC the number lies at 64.1%. We might thus assume that the AITC has understood that normal propaganda is not sufficient enough, but that official information channels can be used for propaganda too. This allows for the active promotion of a few successful projects, producing a much better impression of the services provided by the local government than they really are. Just how important this exercise of influence by a party is, will be shown in the next section.

The Perception of the Importance of Political Parties

The following table shows the importance of the local party group of the CPI-M according to the respondents of the survey. The respondents were given various options to choose from, such as the local GP, the local Zamindar, the local CPI-M or other local party groups.

Table 10: Importance in Local Politics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	your local gram panchayat	97	19,4	19,4	19,4
	the local group of the Communist Party	229	45,7	45,7	65,1
	other local party groups	91	18,2	18,2	83,2
	the local Zamindars/landlords	3	0,6	0,6	83,8
	no reply	16	3,2	3,2	87,0
	Don't know	65	13,0	13,0	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

Nearly half of all respondents (45.7%) regard the local CPI-M group as the most important institution in local politics, whereas just 19.4% think their local GP is the most important institution. Regardless of party affiliation or whether this prominent role is considered good or bad, the results show how influential the CPI-M is on the GP level and how indispensable it must appear to the citizens. The next table shows how important political parties are considered in general. The respondents were asked which they consider more important: local party groups or the local GP.

Table 11: Importance of Political Parties Compared to Local GPs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	329	65,7	65,7	65,7
	no	64	12,8	12,8	78,4
	no reply	14	2,8	2,8	81,2
	Don't know	94	18,8	18,8	100,0
	Total	501	100,0	100,0	

Nearly two-thirds of the interviewees consider political parties as more important than the institution of the GP. This is a tough blow for the PRS, because this attitude enables party groups to build up and maintain parallel structures and even to shift decision making processes to the level of party committees. A look at the number of respondents who are members in a political party reveals just how few people are part of this parallel structure: only 23.4% of respondents were members of one of the many political parties.

If we regard this through the lens of the two-level hypothesis in Neo-Institutionalism, we can assume that these party members are part of the elite which engineers an institutionalised environment in which the citizens are left without the ability for real choices and the impression of a lack of alternatives. Furthermore, it shows an impressive ability of the two leading parties, the CPI-M and the AITC, to mobilise their followers. On nearly every wall in Burdwan is a political slogan or at least a party sign. Party propaganda, especially by the CPI-M but also increasingly by the AITC, is omnipresent, even in more remote villages. The citizens are not able to get away from the influences of political parties., even if they probably do not perceive it on a conscious level anymore. This bombardment with propaganda and the omnipresence of parties in various forms, on signs on houses or walls, by announcements from cadres or rallies held nearby might account for fact that the respondents of this survey perceive political parties as more important than their local PRI. The PRI should influence the daily life of village citizens by constructing and maintaining infrastructure, promoting irrigation techniques in agriculture and keeping the citizens informed through public announcements, instead the villagers are living in an environment totally pervaded by party politics. Even if the personnel of the PRI were willing to be more visible in public and provide more information, they would still be unable to compete with the power of the parties in terms of presence in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

In order to conclude this short study, it is important to summarise and evaluate the findings of my survey again. At first glance the data show a high rate of trust in the GPs, although it is just general, not ‘cheerful’ trust. A clear distinction between CPI-M-ruled GPs and AITC-ruled GPs is visible when regarding the data for the parties separately. While the respondents in the CPI-M ruled GPs are in “agreement without cheer” with their institutions, the respondents in AITC GPs “cheerfully agree” with their institutions. Similar results are visible in the ratings concerning the performance of the respective GPs. While nearly 60% of respondents in AITC areas perceived their GP as doing, at least, a good job, only about 20% in the CPI-M-ruled GPs had the same impression. The same difference applies to the results on information policies. About 64% of interviewees in AITC areas claimed to be provided with information by their GP, whereas only about 38% said that about their GP in CPI-M areas.

So much for the differences, let us now consider the similarities: even though the AITC gained much better ratings and higher levels of trust, they seem to be as incapable as the CPI-M, to deliver services through PRI. Although improvements in agriculture and infrastructure are the two core tasks of the PRI as postulated in the West Bengal Panchayati Raj Act 1994, in all areas of the survey only a small minority could name three improvements. An average of only 21.5% of

respondents had perceived three different improvements in infrastructure during the 14 years from the ratification of the Panchayati Raj Act 1994 and the survey in 2008, despite the large variety of tasks and responsibilities in the field of infrastructure which the GPs have. Additionally, just 6.7% of the interviewees perceived three improvements in agriculture, even though this is one of the core responsibilities of the GPs and in spite of the fact that improvements in agriculture could be accomplished with little financial and personal effort. Also the health-care system, another one of the main tasks of the PRI, is also not delivering effective services in the eyes of the respondents. About 41% acknowledged that there had been improvements in health-care since the effect of the Panchayati Raj Act. Still, only 18% of those who were in medical treatment consulted public medical personnel. This is clearly a hint that public-health care is not trusted, possibly because it is in a deplorable condition.

So what can be deduced from the data? Clearly a large gap exists between the general agreement on the usefulness of the institutions and the perception of the actual performance of the same institutions. The question remains why about 75% generally trust the institutions and nearly 80% think that the work done by the GPs is, at least, ok, when in fact they cannot think of much improvements during the one and a half decade of the PRS. Why is there such a difference in the perception of the institutions as such and the performance of the very same institutions?

An answer can be found when taking into account that the PRS election system is based on party democracy. That is, normally the persons elected into an office of a PRI are representatives of political parties. As can be gathered from the survey, citizens consider parties of greater importance than the PRI, but with party representatives in office the institutions become closely connected to the representatives and the representatives with the party in power. While the institutions as such might be closely aligned with the party in power in the perception of citizens, the same citizens fail to establish a direct connection between the performance of these institutions and the party in power. General trust is invested in the institution because it is represented by a certain party. The same is valid for the general rating of its performance. One reason for this can be found in the massive political propaganda by the parties, which generates the impression that the party in power is the only viable choice, even if citizens disapprove of the party or its performance. This is known as the “logic of appropriateness” (March/Olsen 2009), which produces the perception that in a highly institutionalised environment only one choice could be acceptable. In the case of the CPI-M this logic has brought forth the aforementioned “agreement without cheer”. In case of the AITC with its “cheering agreement” it should be taken into account that during the survey the Singur agitation of the AITC leader Mamata Banerjee against land acquisitions was at its peak and the media covered it almost 24/7. This might have contributed to the increase in trust and its performance ratings. The good ratings of the AITC GPs might thus be due to the success of their agitation campaign and the media attention it received. Taking into account all of the above, I would argue that the glory days of *Operation Barga* are over and that West Bengal has lost its model status. The objectives of the CPI-M-led Left-Front have changed in the last three decades. The CPI-M now tries to impose large scale industrialisation and has succumbed to capitalism as can be seen, for example, in that it has established Special Economic Zones and built large industrial complexes, all under the direction of the central state government. This not just interferes with and ultimately renders impossible local democratisation and development.. The survey data shows that there is “agreement without cheer” by the citizens for the lower PRI, especially in CPI-M ruled GPs, but at the same time

it also clearly indicates that the citizens do not see much improvement, which very likely points to the fact that there has not been much improvement in actual terms. The main achievement of the CPI-M in the past three decades has been to cement its position in the social and cultural environment of West Bengal, thus making itself appear indispensable. When comparing this to Chatterjee's findings, the 2008 survey and his 2006 survey arrive at nearly the same conclusion: The institutions of the PRS as such are not questioned. Chatterjee mentioned that a large number of interviewees in the 2006 survey regard the PRI as a fact and accept it. However, he also came to the conclusion that a majority of the respondents does not believe that the institutions carry out good services. Similar to the results of my 2008 survey, support for the institutions and their effectiveness do not correlate. Unfortunately, Chatterjee gave no accurate numbers in his article, nor did he print the questionnaire or outline the exact method of his survey.

No data points towards the conclusion that the West Bengal PRS can be further be referred to as a model. It is also highly unlikely that a rise to power of the AITC could change this and reassert its model status. The AITC is currently using the same mechanisms as the CPI-M. Additionally, the AITC is too focused on the anti-land-acquisition agitation and the person of Mamata Banerjee. The best possible scenario would be a stabilisation of both parties on equal voting shares on all levels as this might force them to learn that effective policies and democratic governance is the most effective propaganda for elections.

Concerning the two theoretical approaches, Rational Choice Institutionalism and Sociological Institutionalism, it is clear that none of the two approaches can be regarded as offering a satisfactory explanation of the results of the survey. The Rational Choice model can explain the action of the party elite, but fails to answer the question why the citizens still support a system which does not deliver, although this is not a rational decision.. The Sociological model, on the other hand, is able to answer the question of the irrational support of the PRI. But as far as the behaviour of the political elites is concerned it is much less fitting than the Rational Choice model, which exactly describes the ability of those party actors to act in the above mentioned way.

This study thus calls for a realistic model which combines both approaches. In this model the elite actors, which decide rationally utilise the inability of the sociological actors to perceive alternatives to the elite actors, and the elite actors consciously reinforce this perception, for example, through propaganda.

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