

Modi's Comeback: How a Wounded PM Cracked India's Last Holdouts

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Note: the original article is provided as a separate file (attached to the email or downloadable from the website).

1. Reading Passage

Two years ago, Narendra Modi looked finished. India's prime minister had led his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) into the 2024 national election expecting a third straight parliamentary majority – and walked away without one. The BJP fell to 240 seats, forcing Modi to govern through a coalition for the first time in a decade. Opposition leaders called it a tectonic shift. Pundits drafted his political obituary.

They drafted it too soon. In May 2026, the BJP wrested control of West Bengal, an opposition fortress of roughly 100 million people that the party had never governed. The result ended the long reign of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee – once seen as Modi's most formidable national rival – and the BJP now governs 22 of India's 36 states and union territories, a level of single-party dominance not seen in decades. Allies inside the party are already preparing for Modi to seek a fourth term in 2029.

How did this happen? Analysts point to a distinctive blend of three strategies working in concert. First, Modi has aggressively promoted Hindu nationalism – an ideology that centres Hindu identity in Indian public life. Critics warn the project edges into hostility toward the country's roughly 200 million Muslims; supporters describe it as overdue cultural confidence. In Bengal and neighbouring Assam, the BJP fused that ideology with border anxiety, campaigning hard against alleged infiltrators from Bangladesh. The framing turned an immigration debate into a referendum on who counts as authentically Indian.

The second strategy is welfare. The BJP has poured resources into direct-benefit programs – cooking gas connections, housing, cash transfers, sanitation – that reach voters who never felt seen by previous governments. The third, and most controversial, is electoral machinery. Ahead of the Bengal vote, a Special Intensive Revision of voter rolls removed roughly nine million names – about twelve per cent of the state's electorate. The BJP called it a cleanup of bogus entries and illegal migrants. The opposition called it disenfranchisement of legitimate voters and fought it in court.

But here's the catch: none of these tools alone explains the comeback. Welfare without ideology might have produced a competent but unloved party. Ideology without welfare might have alienated India's huge population of low-income voters. And neither, by themselves, would have flipped a state where the BJP had no historical roots. The combination is what makes the project formidable – and what makes the opposition's path back so unclear. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress had ruled Bengal for fifteen years; anti-incumbency was real, jobs were scarce, and the BJP arrived with a message tailored to every fault line.

The deeper question is what kind of democracy India is becoming. Long stretches of single-party dominance are rare in functioning democracies but not unheard of – Japan's Liberal Democratic Party ran the country for most of the post-war era, and Mexico's PRI did the same for seven decades. Whether India follows that pattern depends on three things: whether opposition parties can finally unite into a credible alternative, whether courts continue to scrutinise contested voter-roll revisions, and whether economic growth keeps delivering jobs for the millions of young

Indians entering the workforce each year. If growth slows, the identity-politics engine has to work harder to compensate – and that is precisely the moment when democracies are most stress-tested. For now, Modi's bet is that the combination he has built can outrun any of those pressures. The Bengal result suggests, at minimum, that the bet is paying off.

2. Explanation

Two years ago, pundits wrote Narendra Modi's political obituary. This week his party stormed West Bengal – an opposition fortress it had never cracked – and suddenly a fourth term in 2029 looks plausible.

What's Going On?

In 2024, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was supposed to cruise to a third straight parliamentary majority. Instead it fell to 240 seats, forcing Modi into a coalition government for the first time in a decade. Opponents called it a 'tectonic shift' and started writing his political eulogy.

Then came May 2026. The BJP toppled Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal – a state of roughly 100 million people the party had never governed – and won big in neighbouring Assam too. The BJP now runs 22 of India's 36 states and union territories, a level of single-party dominance India hasn't seen in decades.

How To Think About It

Modi's comeback isn't one move – it's a layered strategy that mixes ideology, identity, and pocketbook politics. Two parallels help:

- Think of a basketball coach who loses a playoff series, then spends the off-season rebuilding the bench, redrawing plays, AND lobbying the league about the rules. Modi did all three: rebooted welfare delivery, sharpened the Hindu-nationalist message, and his government oversaw a controversial voter-roll 'cleanup' that critics say tilted the field.
- Or think of how a dominant streaming platform expands: it doesn't just make hit shows (welfare schemes), it absorbs rivals' territory (flipping opposition states), and quietly reshapes the recommendation algorithm (electoral machinery) so its content surfaces first.

Key Things To Know

- Scale of the win: the BJP took roughly 200+ of West Bengal's 294 seats, ending Mamata Banerjee's 15-year rule – even Banerjee herself initially trailed in her own constituency.
- The 'SIR' controversy: a Special Intensive Revision of voter rolls removed about 9 million names in Bengal – roughly 12% of the electorate. The BJP called it a cleanup of bogus entries; the opposition called it disenfranchisement.
- Hindu nationalism is the engine: an ideology centring Hindu identity in public life. Critics say it edges into hostility toward India's roughly 200 million Muslims; supporters call it overdue cultural confidence.
- The 'infiltrator' frame: in Bengal and Assam the BJP campaigned hard against alleged illegal immigrants from Bangladesh – a message that fuses border anxiety with religious identity.
- Common misconception: Modi's 2024 'setback' wasn't a defeat. He still became PM. Coalition rule slowed him down but didn't end the project – and the state-level wave shows the brand is intact.

Why It Matters

India is the world's most populous democracy and a swing player between the US, China, and Russia. Whoever runs Delhi shapes global supply chains, climate policy, and the tech labour market your future employer probably depends on. If you're considering a career in tech, manufacturing, or international relations, the durability of Modi's coalition is one of the most consequential variables of the next decade.

The Bigger Picture

India is drifting toward something rarer in democracies: long-running single-party dominance, like Japan's LDP or Mexico's old PRI. Watch three things: whether opposition parties can finally unite into a credible alternative, whether courts push back on voter-roll changes, and whether economic growth keeps delivering jobs for the millions of young Indians entering the workforce each year. If growth stalls, the identity-politics engine has to work overtime — and that's when democracies get tested.

3. Key Terms Glossary

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

India's ruling right-wing party, led by Narendra Modi. Combines Hindu-nationalist ideology with pro-business economics.

Hindu nationalism

An ideology that defines Indian identity primarily through Hindu culture and religion. Supporters call it cultural pride; critics say it marginalises India's large Muslim and Christian minorities.

Coalition government

When no single party wins enough seats to rule alone, so it must govern alongside smaller allies who can extract concessions in return for support.

Election Commission

India's independent constitutional body that runs elections, sets the schedule, and maintains voter rolls. Its neutrality has become a major political flashpoint.

Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

A voter-roll cleanup process. In West Bengal it removed roughly 9 million names – about 12% of the electorate – sparking accusations of voter suppression.

Anti-incumbency

The tendency of voters to boot out whoever is currently in power, simply because they're tired of them. A bigger force after a party has ruled for many years.

Trinamool Congress (TMC)

The regional party led by Mamata Banerjee that ran West Bengal for 15 years before the 2026 BJP wave.

4. Reading Comprehension Quiz

Circle the best answer for each question.

Q1. The passage primarily argues that:

- A) Modi's 2024 setback marked the permanent decline of the BJP's national power
- B) Modi has engineered a striking political recovery built on multiple overlapping strategies
- C) Regional parties like the TMC will always dominate India's state-level politics
- D) India's coalition governments tend to deliver stronger economic outcomes than majorities

Q2. According to the passage, the BJP's 2026 victory in West Bengal is significant because:

- A) It was the first time the BJP had won any election in eastern India
- B) It ended a long opposition rule in a state the BJP had never governed
- C) It triggered a constitutional crisis between Delhi and the state government
- D) It produced India's first coalition government in over a decade

Q3. Which choice best states the central idea of the section on Modi's strategy?

- A) Modi's success rests on a single charismatic appeal to voters
- B) Economic reform alone explains the BJP's dominance across Indian states
- C) The BJP combines ideology, welfare delivery, and electoral machinery
- D) India's opposition parties have entirely abandoned identity-based campaigning

Q4. As used in the passage, the word 'wrested' most nearly means:

- A) borrowed
- B) seized
- C) inherited
- D) rejected

Q5. As used in the passage, the word 'fortress' most nearly means:

- A) a heavily defended military post
- B) a politically secure stronghold
- C) a fortified physical structure
- D) an isolated rural region

Q6. Which statement about the Indian opposition can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

- A) It has fragmented and struggled to mount a unified challenge to the BJP
- B) It controls a majority of India's state governments as of 2026
- C) It has formally accepted the legitimacy of recent voter-roll revisions
- D) It has shifted its base of support entirely to urban middle-class voters

Q7. The passage suggests that the deletion of voter names in West Bengal:

- A) Was a routine update with no political consequences
- B) Was unanimously praised by all political parties involved
- C) Became a contested issue tied to citizenship and identity
- D) Was reversed before the 2026 election by court order

Q8. The author's tone toward Modi's political comeback is best described as:

- A)** celebratory and openly admiring
- B)** analytical with notes of unease
- C)** dismissive and openly hostile
- D)** nostalgic for earlier Indian leadership

Q9. Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about the BJP's strategy in eastern India?

- A)** It avoided immigration and citizenship issues entirely
- B)** It linked national identity to fears about cross-border migration
- C)** It focused exclusively on industrial development pledges
- D)** It abandoned Hindu-nationalist themes for secular appeals

Q10. Which choice provides the BEST evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A)** 'The BJP fell to 240 seats, forcing Modi to govern through a coalition'
- B)** 'Pundits drafted his political obituary'
- C)** 'In Bengal and Assam, the BJP campaigned hard against alleged infiltrators from Bangladesh'
- D)** 'The BJP now governs 22 of India's 36 states and union territories'

My Score: _____ / 10

5. Answer Key with Explanations

Q1. The passage primarily argues that:

Answer: B

The passage frames the West Bengal win as evidence that Modi's comeback is real and built on ideology, welfare, and electoral machinery working together. A flips the actual argument (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: When a question asks for the 'primary' argument, look for the option that captures the passage's overall arc – not a detail that appears in just one paragraph.

Q2. According to the passage, the BJP's 2026 victory in West Bengal is significant because:

Answer: B

The passage says West Bengal was an opposition stronghold of roughly 100 million people that the BJP had never previously governed, and the win ended Mamata Banerjee's long tenure. D reverses the timeline – the coalition came in 2024, before the Bengal win (Trap A). SAT Tip: When a question begins 'According to the passage,' the answer must be directly stated, not merely plausible – eliminate any option that requires outside knowledge.

Q3. Which choice best states the central idea of the section on Modi's strategy?

Answer: C

The passage repeatedly stresses that Modi's comeback works because several tools operate together – Hindu nationalism, welfare programs, and a controversial voter-roll process. A is too narrow (Trap B: passage vocabulary, wrong combination). SAT Tip: 'Central idea' questions reward the option that covers the *most* of the passage – narrow options that capture only one paragraph are usually traps.

Q4. As used in the passage, the word 'wrested' most nearly means:

Answer: B

'Wrested control of West Bengal' means the BJP took power forcefully from a rival, which matches 'seized.' 'Borrowed' implies temporary and consensual transfer – neither fits an election upset (Trap C: real-world plausible, passage-wrong). SAT Tip: For vocab-in-context, plug each option into the sentence and check whether the meaning still holds – 'borrowed control' sounds wrong immediately.

Q5. As used in the passage, the word 'fortress' most nearly means:

Answer: B

The passage uses 'fortress' figuratively to describe West Bengal as an opposition political stronghold the BJP could not previously breach. A and C use the literal meaning, which is the common-meaning trap (Trap B). SAT Tip: SAT vocab questions almost always test the *less common* meaning of a familiar word – if option A looks like the dictionary definition, be suspicious.

Q6. Which statement about the Indian opposition can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

Answer: A

The passage notes the BJP runs 22 of 36 states and that even Modi's 'most formidable national rival' just lost her state – implying the opposition is weakened and divided. B contradicts the passage (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: Inference questions ask what *must* be true given the passage, not what *could* be true – choose the option you can defend with a specific line.

Q7. The passage suggests that the deletion of voter names in West Bengal:

Answer: C

The passage describes the voter-roll revision as a controversy interpreted through the lens of citizenship, infiltrators, and identity politics – exactly the contested terrain the campaign was fought on. B is the absolute-language trap (Trap B). SAT Tip: Watch for distractors with absolute words like 'unanimously,' 'always,' or 'entirely' – they're rarely correct in inference questions.

Q8. The author's tone toward Modi's political comeback is best described as:

Answer: B

The author lays out the strategy clearly while flagging concerns – voter-roll deletions, hostility toward Muslims, single-party dominance – without celebrating or attacking. A overstates approval; C overstates criticism (Trap C: real-world view, not the passage's). SAT Tip: For tone questions, look at adjectives and qualifiers the author chose ('controversial,' 'critics warn') rather than the topic itself – neutral words = analytical tone.

Q9. Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about the BJP's strategy in eastern India?

Answer: B

The passage describes the BJP campaigning against alleged 'infiltrators' from Bangladesh in Bengal and Assam, fusing border anxiety with national identity. D contradicts the passage's emphasis on Hindu nationalism (Trap A: opposite direction). SAT Tip: When the passage gives a specific example (here, the 'infiltrator' framing), the right inference will generalise from it – wrong answers will ignore or contradict that example.

Q10. Which choice provides the BEST evidence for the answer to the previous question?

Answer: C

Option C directly supports the inference that the BJP linked migration to national identity in eastern India. D is true but speaks to scale, not strategy (Trap C: factually correct, doesn't answer the question). SAT Tip: On evidence-pairing questions, pick the line that *most narrowly and directly* proves the previous answer – broader true statements are seductive but wrong.