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# Bengal's Panchayat Polls Turned Violent

## Why In The News?

- With At Least **17 People Killed**, Numerous Polling Booths Vandalized And Ballot Papers Set On Fire, West Bengal Witnessed Widespread Violence As Voting For The Crucial **Three-Tier Panchayat Polls** Went Underway On Saturday (July 8).
- While The Ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) Blamed The Central Forces On The Ground For Failing To Curb The Clashes, The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Union Minister Anurag Thakur And The Opposition Parties **Accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Of "Crushing Democracy"**.

**mint**

Protests take centre stage after West Bengal panchayat polls turn violent | Top updates



## Current Situation In West Bengal?

- The Death Toll In Saturday's Violence Climbed To 17 On Sunday, With The Death Of 4 People Who Were Injured In The Clashes. Among The Dead **11 Are Workers Of The Ruling TMC, Two Each From The CPI(M) And Congress And One From The BJP**. One Of Those Dead Had No Political Affiliation.
- **59,000 Personnel Of The CAPF And Other State Armed Police Forces Have Been Deployed** At Sensitive Polling Booths While The Rest Of The Troops Of CAPF & SAP Along With Local State Police Have Been Given The Responsibility Of Security At The Remaining Polling Booths.



## What Is The Election For?

- **Panchayati Raj System:** Gram Panchayat (Village Level), Mandal Parishad Or Block Samiti Or Panchayat Samiti (Block Level), And Zila Parishad (District Level). West Bengal Has 3,317 Gram Panchayats And A Total Of 63,283 Panchayat Seats. The Number Of Village Panchayat Election Centres Is 58,594.

## What Is The Reason Behind The Violence?

- Tensions Have Been Simmering Ever Since The State Government **Declared The Date For Conducting Panchayat Polls**. The Opposition Openly Opposed The Announcement, Claiming That **60,000 Candidates** For The Elections Didn't Have Enough Days To File Nominations.
- The BJP, The Left And The Congress Have **Accused The TMC Of Preventing Their Candidates From Filing Nominations**. The TMC, On The Other Hand, Claimed Innocence And Asked Party Workers To Ensure Violence-Free Elections. However, Clashes Continued Even On The Day Of Voting.



## How Were The Last Panchayat Polls?

- In 2018, TMC Won More Than 95% Of Gram Panchayats, Of Which **34% Of The Seats Were Uncontested**, A Record In The History Of Bengal Panchayat Polls. Then Too, The Opposition Had Alleged They Were Not Allowed To Submit Nominations.
- The **TMC Had Faced Criticism** Over Allegations Of Large-scale Violence And Poll Rigging. The Role Of The Police Was Also Questioned. The Following Year, In 2019, The Ruling Party's Performance In The Lok Sabha Elections Took A Hit, With The **BJP Winning 18 Parliamentary Constituencies**.
- After The **State Assembly Elections In 2021**, The TMC Again Faced Allegations Of Perpetrating Violence Against BJP Workers And The Cases Went To The Central Bureau Of Investigation (CBI) Following The Calcutta High Court's Directions.



## Why Are The Panchayat Polls Crucial?

- Ahead Of The 2024 Lok Sabha Election, The Panchayat Polls Are **A Litmus Test For All Major Political Camps**. In The 2021 Assembly Elections, The TMC Returned To Power With A Thumping Majority Despite Campaign By The BJP Spearheaded By PM Modi And Home Minister Amit Shah.
- However, Since Then, There Have Been Massive Allegations Of Corruption Against The Ruling Party. TMC Leaders Have Been Arrested In The **SSC Scam Case And The Coal Smuggling And Cattle Smuggling Cases**. The CBI Has Also Begun A Probe Into The Alleged **Municipal Recruitment Scam**.

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