SIR and the BJP's Bengal Majority

Debraj Ray

May 10, 2026

It's probably fair to say that the resounding BJP victory in the historic West Bengal State Assembly election of May 2026 came as a shock to everyone — a happy surprise for fans of the BJP, a dark shudder for everyone else. In the weeks and months ahead, we will have a better idea of the factors that were at play, ranging from the considerable arrogance of the TMC, seismic events such as the R.G. Kar incident and government responses to such incidents, the miasma of perceived widespread corruption, and going all the way to Bangladesh, her migrant exports to India, and her own treatment of religious minorities. We are reminded that West Bengal is a border state. It is a partition state in fact. West Bengal has deep Hindu-Muslim fissures, papered over by decades of secular government rule and high-minded cultural attempts to transcend religion. Those cleavages have now been starkly exposed.

But none of this served as a first line of understanding as the news settled that the BJP had won 207 of 294 contested seats (293 declared at the time of writing). Rather, a different question emerged, a collective kneejerk really. The Election Commission's *Special Intensive Revision* (SIR) had cleaned the electoral roll of nearly 9 million names since October 2025. Did those deletions deliver the majority? We can call this the *deletions hypothesis*.

The short answer to that question is no, but the long answer needs some careful work.

To orient the outside reader, the SIR is the first deep revision of West Bengal's electoral roll since 2002, conducted between October 2025 and February 2026. According to the Election Commission's Press Note dated 28 February 2026, the pre-SIR electorate of 76.64 million was reduced to an operative polling-day roll of 67.70 million — a net deletion of about 8.9 million names. The deletions arrived through two procedural channels. About 5.82 million names were dropped during the door-to-door enumeration phase that preceded the Draft Roll, published on 16 December 2025; the Election Commission classifies these as deceased (2.42 million), shifted (1.99 million), absent (1.22 million), already-enrolled-elsewhere (0.14 million), or "other" (0.06 million). A separate 2.71 million voters were deleted between Draft Roll publication and the May polling day, via judicial adjudication — with a further 3.25 million held under adjudication during this window but eventually restored to the rolls.

Of these numbers, the most contentious was the judicially adjudicated elimination of 2.71m voters. They were not dead, nor missing, nor marked absent. They were simply deemed ("adjudicated") unfit to vote. Before and in the aftermath of the elections, conspiracies swirled. Perhaps these voters were somehow supportive of the TMC. Perhaps they were all Muslim and hated the BJP. Perhaps things would be (or would have been) entirely different had they not been so unceremoniously deleted. Few saw it even necessary to go beyond these relatively

narrow adjudicated deletions simply because no one foresaw the margins of victory to come. But the fact of the matter is that one could have asked questions of the non-adjudicated "shifted" or the "absent" as well — a Booth Level Officer (BLO) had simply seen fit to classify some hapless voters under one or another of these headings. Wasn't that even more arbitrary than judicial adjudication? Might these have affected the outcome to an even greater degree?

Parallel universes are often not worth talking about, because we have to guess at counterfactuals. In the matter at hand, we need to guess whether the missing voters would have participated at all, and if so, whom they would have voted for. Until we have a better sense of the religious composition of the deleted (though we will, because these identities are in the public domain), this is anyone's guess — and therefore serves as fuel for conspiracy. My goal is to think about these counterfactuals from a reasonable statistical perspective.

Part of it is easy, actually. If we restrict ourselves to the adjudicated SIR deletions, and even if we make the incredibly heroic assumption that *every* deleted voter would have obediently turned out, and that *every* such voter would have voted for the runner-up in each of their BJP-won assembly constituencies (ACs), that flips a maximum of 26 ACs away from the BJP. The resulting number, 207-26=181, leaves the BJP comfortably above the 148-seat majority threshold (Section 1). There is no chance that the adjudicated SIR deletions made any actionable difference.

Matters are more interesting when we broaden deletions to what might be called the *contestable bound*. This bound adds the pre-adjudicated, BLO-enumerated no-show flow (net of deceased and duplicated voters) on top of the adjudicated component (Section 2–3). Under the same heroic — and I should now carefully add, hopeful — view that every contestable deleted voter would have turned out and voted for the runner-up, it is indeed true that the BJP would have fallen ten seats short of the majority target. But before this generates an eruption of I-told-you-so vindication, wait just a minute: *heroism to this degree is empirically indefensible*, and that is the main point of this Note. Under any neutral calibration, the BJP retains majority by more than thirty seats. The deletions hypothesis only reverses this result at extreme calibrations that the data refuse to support, and I'll show you why.

Section 1 studies the strict adjudicated-deletions bound. Section 2 and Section 3 introduce the broader contestable bound, using the AC-level decomposition of the no-show flow provided by the Sabar Institute, constructed (a great public service) from disaggregated primary information. It then redoes the exercise in Section 1. Section 4 introduces two "heroism dials" (h_1, h_2) that map the extent to which the runner-up parties would have gained from restoring the deletions. The dial h_1 controls voting patterns for the deleted and now resurrected, ranging from AC status quo when set to 0, and full heroism (every restored voter votes for the runner-up) when set to 1. The dial h_2 represents counterfactual turnout patterns, replicating actual AC-level turnout when set to 0, 100% turnout when set to 1, and lower rates of turnout relative

to status quo when set to negative values. We can turn these dials up or down and examine the implications for the BJP victory. Or we can anchor the dials empirically. Section 5 carries out a cross-AC anchoring exercise, one that probes any possible partisan-targeting motives behind the SIR deletions. Section 6 summarizes.

Given my own ideological and cultural leanings, this is an unhappy Note with an unpalatable finding. But at the end of the day, I think it's the right one.

Where this Note sits. Apart from all the hoopla and controversy, the serious question of whether the SIR delivered the BJP its majority was addressed as my notes were being written, by Aparna Bhattacharya in *The Wire*[1] and by Samarth Grover in *Newslaundry*.[2] Both pieces frame the question in the right empirical terms; both end where this note picks up.

Bhattacharya tallies the BJP's win margin in each of the 207 seats it won and asks how many of those margins were smaller than the constituency count of SIR voters held under adjudication. Her answer is 25.[3] Her reading is that the SIR "did not manufacture" the BJP victory — "the BJP's social and geographic spread was too wide" for that — though it "may still have mattered in selected close contests." My supportive finding in Section 1 essentially replicates hers.

Grover runs four threshold-count tests on the AC-level data digitised by the Sabar Institute.[4] His Test 1 is structurally identical to our full-heroism flag count under the contestable bound, modulo a definitional difference: he keeps Form-7 admin deletions and the already-enrolled-elsewhere line in his contestable bucket, where we strip both as defensible cleanup. His net-deletion total is 66.62 lakh, ours is 59.85 lakh; he flips 82 BJP wins, we flip 69. The gap is the expected consequence of the definitional difference. His other three tests vary either the deletion measure (under-adjudicated only) or the baseline (2021 → 2026 swing in margin rather than the 2026 margin); they are conceptually distinct exercises and we do not run them here. Grover's framing throughout is institutional and transparency-oriented: he explicitly avoids causal claims and ends with the observation that the question of who was removed and how they would have voted "may remain unresolved."

This note adds two methodological contributions on top of these. First, I add a two-parameter heroism dial (h_1, h_2) that allows the reader to extrapolate from each AC's actual electoral profile onto the counterfactual. Second, I provide a cross-AC *anchoring exercise* that pins the empirical value of the partisan dial, locating the region of the (h_1, h_2) parameter space that's

[1] A. Bhattacharya, "BJP's Bengal Sweep Was Broad, But the Numbers Reveal a More Complicated Story." *The Wire*, 5 May 2026. Thank you Ashwini Deshpande for alerting me to this article.

[2] S. Grover, "4 tests, 1 question: Did SIR shape Bengal outcome?" *Newslaundry*, 7 May 2026.

[3] We get 26 on the same exercise, a borderline arithmetical difference; see Section 1 below.

[4] Sabar Institute, AC-level digitisation of the SIR no-show flow and adjudication breakdown for West Bengal, 2026, available at https://sabar-institute.github.io/maps/asdd/ and https://sabar-institute.github.io/maps/overall/. State-level totals from the Sabar AC-level decomposition match the CEO West Bengal Press Note PN-05/2026 within 0.1% on every category.

defensible from the data. Grover leaves the state-level question open. His Test 1 shows the contestable bucket is, in principle, large enough to flip the BJP majority under full heroism; he does not take a position on whether full heroism is empirically defensible. The present note picks up precisely there: the heroism-dial framework and the anchoring exercise of Section 5 are designed to address what the threshold counts on their own leave open.

1. The Strict Bound: Adjudicated SIR Deletions

For each of West Bengal's 294 constituencies, we have a count of Form-7 adjudicated voters, 2.7+ million of whom (denoted by Δ^{adj}) were deleted over all of West Bengal. What if these deletions had all voted, and all voted TMC? Filtering the 207 BJP wins to those where the BJP's winning margin in 2026 was smaller than Δ^{adj}, we flag 26 constituencies, where the outcome would then flip. The list is reproduced as Table 1, sorted by the ratio of SIR-adjudicated deletions to win margin; see last column, in bold. Those deletions and win margins are reported separately, both in absolute numbers and as percentages of valid 2026 votes cast.[5]

The most striking case is Rajarhat New Town, where the BJP won by 316 votes but $\Delta^{\text{adj}} = 24,132$ deletions — a ratio of seventy-six to one. The next four ACs are not as dramatic but the ratio still exceeds four to one. Only at rank fifteen does the ratio fall below 1.5. In every case but one (Darjeeling, where the regionally based BGPM was the runner-up) the runner-up was the All India Trinamool Congress.

The ratios in the last column of Table 1 also answer the heroism question. The flagged set in the Table runs the counterfactual at the strongest assumption: *every* deleted voter shows up on polling day and votes for the runner-up. What if only some fraction had done so? Suppose only 90% of the deleted voters would have voted runner-up. The flagged set is unchanged at 26: every seat in the table has a Ratio comfortably above $1/0.9 \approx 1.11$, so weighting the deletions by 0.9 still leaves them above the margin. At a softer 70% share the count drops to 20; at 60%, to 11. The marginal flags drop out as the multiplier comes down — Ashoknagar (Ratio 1.1) goes first, then Sreerampur, Asansol Uttar, Nakashipara, Kakdwip, Hingalganj — but the high-ratio seats at the top of the table (Rajarhat New Town's seventy-six-to-one, Satgachhia's twenty-two-to-one, and so on) survive any plausible re-weighting.

These high-ratio seats notwithstanding, the bottom line is: had the deletions voted anywhere between 60% TMC to 100% TMC, the counterfactual seats lost for the BJP would range from between 11 to 26, nowhere close to overturning their dominant majority of 207 seats.

[5] The deletion percentage effectively answers the question: "had every deleted voter shown up and voted, by how much would they have outnumbered the margin in the actually-cast vote pool?" Columns 1 and 3, as well as 2 and 4, are therefore directly comparable, and the "Ratio" column equals their common ratio.

AC	Constituency	District	Margin [1]	Margin % [2]	Δ_i^{adj} [3]	Δ_i^{adj} % [4]	**Ratio [4]/[2]**
115	Rajarhat New Town	N. 24 Pgs.	316	0.12	24,132	9.55	**76.4**
145	Satgachhia	S. 24 Pgs.	401	0.17	8,785	3.67	**21.9**
261	Raina	Bardhaman	834	0.36	11,284	4.84	**13.5**
195	Jangipara	Hooghly	862	0.37	5,432	2.34	**6.3**
275	Pandabeswar	Bardhaman	1,398	0.80	5,898	3.38	**4.2**
58	Jangipur	Murshidabad	10,542	4.96	36,581	17.21	**3.5**
267	Bhatar	Bardhaman	6,528	3.04	17,481	8.14	**2.7**
187	Champdani	Hooghly	3,026	1.48	7,610	3.72	**2.5**
192	Pandua	Hooghly	5,228	2.23	11,494	4.92	**2.2**
168	Kashipur-Belgachhia	Kolkata	1,651	1.09	3,369	2.24	**2.0**
49	Manikchak	Maldah	13,938	6.18	23,726	10.53	**1.7**
272	Mangalkot	Bardhaman	12,723	5.80	21,061	9.61	**1.7**
65	Nabagram	Murshidabad	5,919	2.68	9,469	4.27	**1.6**
32	Karandighi	Uttar Dinajpur	19,869	9.03	31,562	14.35	**1.6**
263	Monteswar	Bardhaman	14,798	7.24	23,423	11.47	**1.6**
23	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	6,057	3.49	9,460	5.44	**1.6**
183	Jagatballavpur	Howrah	6,671	2.64	10,273	4.07	**1.5**
37	Kushmandi	Dakshin Dinajpur	9,063	4.54	13,581	6.81	**1.5**
177	Uluberia Uttar	Howrah	4,177	2.06	6,193	3.04	**1.5**
33	Hemtabad	Uttar Dinajpur	12,361	5.16	18,215	7.61	**1.5**
126	Hingalganj	N. 24 Pgs.	5,421	2.62	7,520	3.63	**1.4**
131	Kakdwip	S. 24 Pgs.	4,760	2.06	6,238	2.70	**1.3**
81	Nakashipara	Nadia	17,327	8.41	21,890	10.63	**1.3**
281	Asansol Uttar	Bardhaman	11,615	5.52	14,531	6.90	**1.3**
186	Sreerampur	Hooghly	8,685	4.66	10,445	5.61	**1.2**
101	Ashoknagar	N. 24 Pgs.	9,408	4.28	10,483	4.77	**1.1**

Table 1. Twenty-six BJP wins flagged under the strict bound. BJP-won ACs where SIR-adjudicated-and-deleted count (Δ^{adj}, or Form-7 cases adjudicated and upheld) exceeds BJP winning margin. "Margin %" in column 5 is winning margin [1] as a % of 2026 valid votes cast; "Δ^{adj} %" in column 7 is the adjudicated-and-deleted count [3] as a % of the same denominator. "Ratio" is [3]/[1] (equivalently [4]/[2]). TMC was the runner-up in 25 of 26 cases; in Darjeeling the runner-up was Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha. Source: ECI 2026 results portal; AC-wise SIR-adjudication tally (CEO West Bengal portal).

2. More Deletions, and A Tougher Challenge

Now, the variable Δ^{adj} captures only the adjudicated subset of all SIR-driven removals from the rolls. There were more deletions. The CEO West Bengal Press Note of 28 February 2026 makes the *overall* state-level flow explicit, and is displayed with some augmentation in Table 2. Note that the line "Final Roll (28-02-2026)" in the Table uses the Press Note's own label, but that figure was not the operative roll on polling day. The held-out 6.01-million category was partially resolved later, with 3.25m returning to the rolls, and 2.71m remaining deleted (the number used earlier) leading to the 67.7m number reported at the bottom of the Table.[6]

[6]The 3.25m were retained between February 28 and the May polling day, returning to the rolls via Adjudication Supplementary Lists 1-15A, and 2.71 million as deleted (this is the aggregate number corresponding exactly to our variable Δ^{adj}, summed across ACs).

Adjustment Headings	Voter Numbers
Pre-SIR electorate (27-10-2025)	**76,637,529**
− enumeration forms not received	-5,820,899
of which: deceased	(*-2,416,852*)
shifted	(*-1,988,076*)
absent	(*-1,220,039*)
already enrolled elsewhere	(*-138,328*)
others	(*-57,604*)
= Draft Roll (16-12-2025)	**70,816,630**
+ Form-6/8 inclusions	+188,707
− Form-7 admin deletions	−546,053
− Held out under adjudication	−6,006,675
= "Final Roll" (28-02-2026, press-note shorthand)	**64,452,609**
+ Adj. Supp. Lists 1–15A: adjudicated voters re-added (progressively issued between 28-02-2026 and May polling day)	+3,250,592
Adjudicated voters finally deleted from held-out -6.01m	(*-2,716,393*)
≈ Operative roll on polling day (May 2026)	**67,703,201**

Table 2. Voter Roll Adjustments, 2021-2026. Source: CEO West Bengal Press Note CEO/PN-05/2026 (28 Feb 2026), augmented by re-added voters. Numbers in parentheses are not part of the aggregate arithmetic. Re-added and deleted voters under adjudication (see the two penultimate rows) do not quite add up to the held-out 6.01m. The gap appears to be an administrative residual — voters whose status was resolved through channels not captured in the Adjudication Supplementary Lists — and does not reconcile in the public data.

Table 2 makes the following important point. The single line that has been doing all of the work in Table 1 and in much public discussion of SIR — the 2.71 million in Δ^{adj} — misses the 5.82-million pre-Draft no-show numbers entirely; this is the second entry in Table 2. That number is comparable to the *entire* universe of 6.01m adjudicated cases, and it's over twice the size of the adjudicated-and-deleted 2.71 million that we have already discussed. Whatever one believes about the procedural propriety of marking a voter "shifted" or "absent" on a single BLO visit, those names are off the operative roll just as completely as those who were Form-7 adjudicated and then deleted. One could even argue that these deletions could have been more arbitrary than an adjudicated deletion, made as they were by a single BLO.

Of the 5.82-million no-show flow, the Press Note reports 2.42 million as *deceased*. That is defensible as a valid removal.[7] So is the small sum of 0.14 million classified as already enrolled elsewhere, presumably, they are verifiable duplicates. Together, these two categories sum to 2.56 million, or about 44% of the no-show flow. The remainder, which is $(5.82 - 2.56) = 3.26$m, is the suspect, non-adjudicated *contestable* flow that we want to keep and examine.

[7]West Bengal's pre-SIR electorate was 76.64 million (CEO Press Note). At an annual CDR of around 5.5 per 1000 (Sample Registration System), this implies roughly 420,000 voter-relevant deaths per year. The 2.42-million deceased figure in the no-show breakdown thus corresponds to about five-and-a-half years of accumulated and un-removed deaths — broadly consistent with the Press Note's own framing of the SIR as a long-overdue cleanup of mortality backlog that previous annual revisions had only partially addressed since the last SIR in 2002. True, the CDR is computed on total population, so applying it to an older electorate marginally underestimates the per-year flow — which marginally overestimates the implied years of backlog. But this is second-order stuff.

For the present version of this note, we use the Sabar Institute's digitised breakdown of the no-show flow at the AC level.[8] For each constituency i, the data give

$$\Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}} \;=\; (\text{permanently shifted})_i \;+\; (\text{untraceable / absent})_i,$$

the part of the no-show flow that strips out the demographically defensible deceased and already-enrolled-elsewhere categories. Summed across the 294 ACs, $\sum_i \Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}} = 3{,}269{,}335$, which matches the press-note state-level contestable total of 3,265,719 to within 3,600 voters — a discrepancy within the error limits of OCR-rounding.

3. The Contestable Bound

Recall that the *adjudicated component* Δ_i^{adj} studied earlier captures the negative outcomes of judicial review for constituency i, located in the Adjudication Deleted Lists 1–15A between 28 February and the May polling day. The *non-adjudicated component* $\Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}}$ now captures the AC-specific suspect no-show flow. As reported in the statistics, the two are disjoint by construction.[9] So the maximum per-AC SIR removal that the deletions hypothesis can plausibly invoke is the sum of the adjudicated component Δ_i^{adj} and the non-adjudicated component $\Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}}$, which gives us what we call the overall *contestable component*:

$$\Delta_i^{\text{con}} \;\equiv\; \Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}} \;+\; \Delta_i^{\text{adj}}.$$

Filtering the 207 BJP wins by $\Delta_i^{\text{con}} > \text{margin}_i$ now yields 69 flagged constituencies, listed in Table 3. The arithmetic yields $207 - 69 = 138$, *10 seats below* the 148-seat majority threshold. At full heroism — that is, under the optimistic assumption that *every* contestable deleted voter shows up on polling day *and* votes for the runner-up — the contestable bound is large enough to overturn the BJP's majority. Recall that no degree of heroism mattered when we used the narrower measure Δ^{adj}. It matters now, so the argument needs to be more nuanced.

AC	Constituency	District	Margin	Margin %	Δ_i^{con}	Δ_i^{con} %	**Ratio**
115	Rajarhat New Town	N. 24 Pgs.	316	0.12	48,051	18.25	**152.1**
145	Satgachhia	S. 24 Pgs.	401	0.17	16,418	6.96	**40.9**
168	Kashipur-Belgachhia	Kolkata	1,651	1.09	37,801	24.96	**22.9**

[8] An earlier version of this Note, dated May 6, used approximations to allocate the flow across ACs, now made redundant by the data generously provided by the Sabar Institute. This is published as an interactive map at https://sabar-institute.github.io/maps/asdd/; the underlying AC-level table covers all 294 constituencies and decomposes the no-show flow into deceased, already-enrolled-elsewhere, permanently-shifted, and untraceable/absent. State-level sums match the CEO Press Note within 0.1% across every category.

[9] The non-adjudicated voters were dropped before Draft Roll publication, so they are not in the adjudication queue — which operates on Draft-Roll entries that were subsequently disputed. There is a conceptual path for some minor overlap: a non-adjudicated voter could file a Form-6 fresh-inclusion application during the Claims & Objections period (9 December 2025 – 8 January 2026), and that fresh inclusion could itself be disputed and land in the adjudication queue. In any case, the state-level press-note arithmetic does not double-count regardless, since the 5.82-million no-show line is subtracted before the Draft Roll while the 6.01-million adjudication universe is held out from the Final Roll.

AC	Constituency	District	Margin	Margin %	Δ_i^{con}	Δ_i^{con} %	**Ratio**
261	Raina	Bardhaman	834	0.36	16,065	6.93	**19.3**
275	Pandabeswar	Bardhaman	1,398	0.80	24,584	14.07	**17.6**
195	Jangipara	Hooghly	862	0.37	11,217	4.81	**13.0**
187	Champdani	Hooghly	3,026	1.48	33,266	16.27	**11.0**
165	Jorasanko	Kolkata	5,797	5.43	60,122	56.32	**10.4**
170	Howrah Uttar	Howrah	11,250	8.46	54,672	41.11	**4.9**
23	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	6,057	3.49	26,606	15.33	**4.4**
186	Sreerampur	Hooghly	8,685	4.66	36,795	19.74	**4.2**
58	Jangipur	Murshidabad	10,542	4.96	42,812	20.14	**4.1**
152	Tollyganj	S. 24 Pgs.	6,013	2.93	22,674	11.05	**3.8**
192	Pandua	Hooghly	5,228	2.23	19,672	8.39	**3.8**
281	Asansol Uttar	Bardhaman	11,615	5.52	42,560	20.23	**3.7**
267	Bhatar	Bardhaman	6,528	3.04	23,080	10.75	**3.5**
257	Indus	Bankura	900	0.39	3,180	1.38	**3.5**
177	Uluberia Uttar	Howrah	4,177	2.06	14,383	7.09	**3.4**
183	Jagatballavpur	Howrah	6,671	2.64	21,075	8.34	**3.2**
169	Bally	Howrah	11,997	10.18	37,459	31.79	**3.1**
131	Kakdwip	S. 24 Pgs.	4,760	2.06	13,580	5.88	**2.9**
151	Sonarpur Uttar	S. 24 Pgs.	9,807	3.83	27,259	10.65	**2.8**
126	Hingalganj	N. 24 Pgs.	5,421	2.62	14,127	6.83	**2.6**
65	Nabagram	Murshidabad	5,919	2.68	15,029	6.80	**2.5**
159	Bhabanipur	Kolkata	15,105	10.83	36,527	26.19	**2.4**
181	Amta	Howrah	4,454	1.88	10,647	4.49	**2.4**
101	Ashoknagar	N. 24 Pgs.	9,408	4.28	21,818	9.93	**2.3**
185	Uttarpara	Hooghly	10,415	5.07	24,023	11.69	**2.3**
49	Manikchak	Maldah	13,938	6.18	31,165	13.82	**2.2**
283	Barabani	Bardhaman	11,722	6.33	25,343	13.69	**2.2**
32	Karandighi	Uttar Dinajpur	19,869	9.03	42,206	19.18	**2.1**
37	Kushmandi	Dakshin Dinajpur	9,063	4.54	18,747	9.39	**2.1**
272	Mangalkot	Bardhaman	12,723	5.80	26,045	11.87	**2.0**
196	Haripal	Hooghly	3,488	1.42	7,137	2.91	**2.0**
33	Hemtabad	Uttar Dinajpur	12,361	5.16	25,273	10.55	**2.0**
278	Raniganj	Bardhaman	17,786	9.05	35,930	18.28	**2.0**
288	Labpur	Birbhum	3,550	1.59	7,161	3.21	**2.0**
166	Shyampukur	Kolkata	14,633	12.54	29,166	24.99	**2.0**
103	Bijpur	N. 24 Pgs.	13,343	9.21	25,640	17.70	**1.9**
263	Monteswar	Bardhaman	14,798	7.24	28,028	13.71	**1.9**
108	Barrackpur	N. 24 Pgs.	15,822	10.21	29,772	19.21	**1.9**
167	Maniktala	Kolkata	15,644	10.38	28,751	19.08	**1.8**
274	Galsi	Bardhaman	10,494	4.52	18,607	8.01	**1.8**
265	Memari	Bardhaman	7,106	3.12	12,258	5.38	**1.7**
189	Chandannagar	Hooghly	13,441	7.19	22,781	12.19	**1.7**
104	Naihati	N. 24 Pgs.	10,430	6.62	17,603	11.17	**1.7**
172	Shibpur	Howrah	16,058	8.85	26,711	14.72	**1.7**

AC	Constituency	District	Margin	Margin %	Δ_i^{con}	Δ_i^{con} %	**Ratio**
81	Nakashipara	Nadia	17,327	8.41	28,655	13.91	**1.7**
107	Noapara	N. 24 Pgs.	17,656	9.04	28,386	14.53	**1.6**
160	Rashbehari	Kolkata	20,865	15.03	33,531	24.15	**1.6**
224	Kharagpur Sadar	P. Medinipur	30,506	18.87	46,931	29.03	**1.5**
7	Dinhata	Cooch Behar	17,447	6.51	25,371	9.47	**1.5**
153	Behala Purba	S. 24 Pgs.	25,137	10.72	35,754	15.25	**1.4**
282	Kulti	Bardhaman	26,498	13.93	37,177	19.54	**1.4**
68	Kandi	Murshidabad	10,335	5.18	14,259	7.15	**1.4**
105	Bhatpara	N. 24 Pgs.	22,807	21.45	30,293	28.49	**1.3**
117	Rajarhat Gopalpur	N. 24 Pgs.	27,757	14.18	36,670	18.73	**1.3**
154	Behala Paschim	S. 24 Pgs.	24,699	10.34	31,499	13.19	**1.3**
279	Jamuria	Bardhaman	22,514	12.39	27,877	15.34	**1.2**
4	Cooch Behar Dakshin	Cooch Behar	23,284	11.33	27,896	13.57	**1.2**
271	Ketugram	Bardhaman	27,610	12.60	33,064	15.09	**1.2**
106	Jagatdal	N. 24 Pgs.	20,909	11.41	24,944	13.61	**1.2**
150	Jadavpur	S. 24 Pgs.	27,716	12.00	32,151	13.92	**1.2**
273	Ausgram	Bardhaman	12,535	5.55	14,438	6.39	**1.2**
220	Nayagram	P. Medinipur	6,424	3.10	7,335	3.54	**1.1**
262	Jamalpur	Bardhaman	11,178	5.20	12,632	5.88	**1.1**
66	Khargram	Murshidabad	9,333	4.56	10,247	5.01	**1.1**
113	Baranagar	N. 24 Pgs.	16,956	10.01	18,095	10.68	**1.1**
268	Purbasthali Dakshin	Bardhaman	16,662	7.57	17,581	7.99	**1.1**

Table 3. Sixty-nine BJP wins flagged under contestable bound at full heroism. BJP-won ACs where contestable bound Δ_i^{con} exceeds BJP win margin. Bolded ratio is $\Delta_i^{\text{con}}/\text{margin}_i$. Margin % and Δ_i^{con} % are both as fractions of 2026 valid votes cast. Sorted by ratio descending. Runner-up was TMC in 68 of 69 cases; in Darjeeling the runner-up was Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha. Sources: ECI 2026 results portal: AC-wise SIR-adjudication tally (CEO West Bengal portal), Sabar Institute: AC-level breakdown of the SIR no-show flow (permanently-shifted plus untraceable/absent categories).

As just noted, a counterfactual where every voter in the contestable component is assumed to turn up and vote, and vote *against* the BJP, is the most permissive version of the deletions hypothesis that we can reasonably entertain. Under this counterfactual, the count is sufficient to overturn the BJP's majority by 10 seats. But clutching at such heroic straws is empirically indefensible. We will need to combine plausible runner-up vote-share assumptions with plausible turnout assumptions among the counterfactually resurrected pool of deleted voters.

In the 69 ACs that we've flagged as flippable, the runner-up's actual share of valid votes averaged 41% (median 41.3%, range 32%–46%).[10] The deletions hypothesis, however, typically claims more than this: it argues that the SIR removed voters who were systematically TMC-leaning. If we were to grant that selection effect, the counterfactually resurrected voters could

[10]Computed from the BJP-wins panel; the runner-up was the TMC in 68 of 69 cases and BGPM in Darjeeling.

plausibly be voting for the runner-up in the range of 55–70%. This will constitute one of the two heroism dials in our exercise below.

West Bengal's 2026 polling-day turnout was historic at about 92%,[11] the highest in the state's electoral history. But this is the rate for voters who were on the rolls on polling day, i.e., those who survived the SIR. The voters in our contestable pool, by SIR's own classification, were marked shifted, absent, or otherwise non-respondent on a Booth Level Officer visit during the enumeration phase. We have no idea whether that criterion is likely to be negatively correlated with civic engagement: whether the deleted pool is, on average, a less-engaged population than the on-roll pool, or more active. That is, we could play with 92% or higher or lower values. This counterfactual turnout will be the second of our two heroism dials.

4. Calibrating the Counterfactual

In this section, we set up a simple two-parameter dial that allows us to tweak the electoral profile of the deleted voters. We could, of course, have as many dials as there are constituencies, but the exercise below illustrates the main point clearly. Let r_i and w_i be the runner-up's and the winner's vote shares in AC i in 2026 (so $w_i > r_i$ in every BJP-won AC by definition), and let t_i be the AC's polling-day turnout among the operative roll. Define two *heroism parameters*:

$$h_1 \in [0, 1] \quad \text{(partisan heroism)}, \qquad h_2 \in [-1, 1] \quad \text{(turnout heroism)}.$$

At $h_1 = h_2 = 0$ each set of deleted voters in an AC inherits the observed voting characteristics of their constituency: deleted voters turn out and vote exactly like their on-roll neighbours in the same AC. At $h_1 = h_2 = 1$ the dial is turned up full blast in favor of the heroic assumptions that every deleted voter turns out to vote, *and* votes for the runner-up in their constituency. Additionally, a negative value of h_2 would push turnout below the AC's baseline. This is not an empty possibility: if some fraction of the deletions are indeed "real deletions," it is reasonable to suppose that on average, they would not turn back up in the same proportions as their undeleted counterparts. However, we do not extend h_1 below zero. Doing so would correspond to deleted voters being *more* pro-BJP than the on-roll voters in their own AC — a logically coherent but substantively unmotivated possibility.

The first dial h_1 works as follows. What matters is the *net* swing toward the runner-up per resurrected voter that turns up to vote. At baseline that is $r_i - w_i$ (negative in every BJP-won AC); at full partisan heroism it is +1 (every deleted voter votes for the runner-up and the BJP gets nothing). Linearly interpolating between these, we can define a swing propensity for the average resurrected voter in every AC i by:

$$s_i(h_1) \;=\; (1 - h_1)\,(r_i - w_i) \;+\; h_1.$$

[11] See, e.g., ECI press release, 4 May 2026, reporting 91.91% statewide turnout.

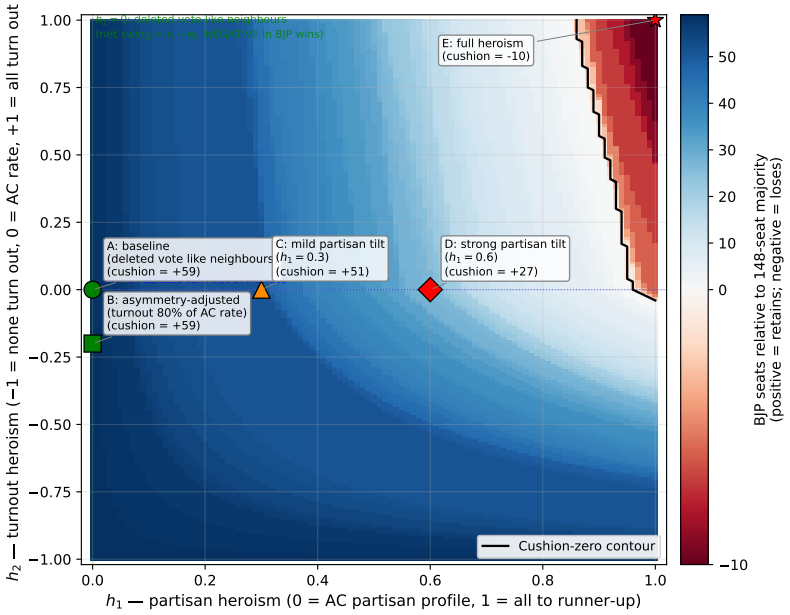

Figure 1. Heroism dials and the BJP cushion above absolute majority. Anchor A is ($h_1 = h_2 = 0$); deleted voters vote like their undeleted compatriots. Anchor B drops h_2 to -0.20 (so deleted-voter turnout is 80% of the AC's actual rate). Anchors C and D, located along the equal-turnout slice, exhibit different degrees of partisanship. These flip more seats but not enough to overturn a majority win. Anchor E depicts full heroism ($h_1 = h_2 = 1$); then the BJP loses its absolute majority by 10 seats. The black curve is the cushion-zero contour — BJP just loses to the right of it. The contour does not exist for $h_2 \leq -0.10$ because BJP retains majority for *every* value of $h_1 \in [0, 1]$ once the deleted population is assumed to turn out at 90% or less of the voting population.

Observe that $s_i(h_1) \to r_i - w_i$ as $h_1 \to 0$ and $s_i(h_1) \to 1$ as $h_1 \to 1$. We combine this with the dial h_2 that generates counterfactual turnout among resurrected voters according to the formula:

$$p_{t,i}(h_2) \;=\; \begin{cases} t_i + h_2(1 - t_i) & \text{for } h_2 \in [0, 1] \quad \text{(interpolates between } t_i \text{ and 1)} \\ (1 + h_2)\, t_i & \text{for } h_2 \in [-1, 0] \quad \text{(interpolates between } t_i \text{ and 0).} \end{cases}$$

The flag condition that generates a seat flip can be written as

$$p_{t,i}(h_2) \cdot s_i(h_1) \cdot \Delta_i^{\text{con}} \;>\; \text{margin}_i. \tag{1}$$

where recall that Δ_i^{con} is the number of contested deletions, and margin_i is the win margin of the BJP, both in AC i. In words, the left hand side recovers net votes in favor of the runner up in any AC. The seat in question is flipped if that number exceeds the existing win margin.

Figure 1 maps the BJP cushion above the 148-seat majority threshold over the (h_1, h_2) plane. At each point, the cushion equals $207 - n - 148$ where n is the number of BJP wins flagged under the test that we've just described and summarized in equation (1). Blue cells are BJP-retains, red cells are BJP-loses, and the black curve is the contour that traces a cushion of zero.

The parameter values that allege zero discrimination are given by ($h_1 = h_2 = 0$) located on the vertical axis of the diagram. Obviously, this point flips nothing and so the BJP retains

all its seats, with a cushion of +59 above majority. To overturn the BJP majority from this baseline requires turning the partisan heroism dial h_1 up to roughly 0.95 at $h_2 = 0$, which asks for deleted voters to turn up at a rate of 92% and for roughly 95% of them to vote for the runner up candidate. If we assume that deleted voters turn up with a vengeance, so that *all* of them vote, then 86% or more of them must vote for the runner-up to flip the seat in question. (The critical h_1 falls as h_2 rises because additional turnout amplifies whatever partisan tilt the deleted pool has.) For any $h_2 \leq -0.10$, so that deleted voters turn up at 90% or less of the record-breaking turnout rate of their undeleted compatriots, *no* value of h_1 in $[0, 1]$ can flip the seat. Even *full* partisan heroism among the newly-resurrected does not deliver if their counterfactual turnout sits even modestly below the AC's actual rate.[12]

A line through the surface at $h_2 = 0$ shows the slice at which deleted voters turn out at the AC rate, but partisanship varies. We summarize some salient points in the chart below:

h_1	Flipped	BJP seats won	Cushion
0.00	0	207	+59
0.10	6	201	+53
0.20	8	199	+51
0.30	8	199	+51
0.50	25	182	+34
0.70	45	162	+14
0.95	59	148	0 (critical)
1.00	65	142	−6

In this situation, as already noted, it would take a very high value of partisanship, over 95%, to drive the BJP cushion to 0.

I've applied h_1 uniformly across all 207 BJP-won ACs, and to the entire contestable bucket Δ_i^{con}. Both choices are conservative; i.e., they are generous to the deletions hypothesis. A more disaggregated version of the hypothesis is seat-specific: BJP MLAs allegedly drove deletions in their own ACs, not in the 130 of our 207 BJP-won-2026 seats that flipped from TMC in 2021. Restricting partisan heroism to BJP-held-2021 ACs only (so $h_1 = 0$ in the 130 flips), the cushion at $(h_1, h_2) = (1, 1)$ rises from −10 to +52; restricting further to the adjudication channel — where the regression in Section 5 below finds the only positive partisan signal — yields a cushion of +58, essentially the baseline. The uniform-h_1 result reported in Figure 1 thus overstates the reach of the deletions hypothesis in two ways at once. A reasonably specified disaggregated version of the hypothesis cannot, under any heroism setting in $[0, 1]^2$, breach the BJP majority. I return to a closely related point below.

[12] Remember that deleted voters are heterogeneous. Even if we were to presume that a good fraction of them were staunchly against the BJP and would have shown up to vote, it would be too much to presume that *all* deleted voters were deleted for malicious reasons.

5. An Anchoring Exercise

In this Section, I run a cross-sectional regression across the 294 ACs. What I do amounts to a broad correlation exercise. I do not make a serious attempt at causal identification, as might be possible with a regression-discontinuity design or some source of exogenous variation. My goal is the modest one of using whatever pattern the cross-section exhibits to discipline the choice of the partisan-heroism dial h_1 on the surface of Section 4.

The deletions hypothesis, in its strongest form, claims that the SIR removed voters who were strategically inconvenient for the BJP — in seats where their removal could plausibly flip the outcome. A natural cross-sectional implication is that AC-level deletion rates should be higher in seats where the partisan stakes were greatest. We test this in two ways. The first is a *closeness* measure that takes the value 50 when the TMC's 2021 vote share is exactly at the 50% flip threshold and falls toward 0 as the share moves away in either direction:

$$\text{closeness}_i = 50 - |\,\text{TMC share}_{2021,i} - 50\,|.$$

If strategic targeting drove deletions, the deletion rate should be *higher* in close seats, so we expect a positive coefficient. The closeness measure is, however, symmetric around 50% — a closely-contested AC could have had either a BJP MLA or a TMC MLA in 2021, and the two situations have very different governance implications for local SIR efforts. So I include a second variable: a dummy for whether the BJP held the AC in 2021. If BJP MLAs drove strategic deletions in their own constituencies, this coefficient should also be positive. Under the strategic-targeting hypothesis, both regressors carry the same predicted sign.

Table 4 reports OLS regressions of the three deletion rates — contestable, adjudicated, and non-adjudicated, each scaled per thousand voters of the 2021 electorate — on closeness and the BJP-MLA dummy, progressively adding controls. Standard errors are HC1-robust; $N = 294$.

I make the following observations.

First, the overall *contestable rate* appears to be driven neither by TMC closeness nor the BJP-MLA dummy, at least in the full specification (column [4]). If anything, the closeness coefficient is negative (-0.43, $p = 0.32$): the overall deletion rate is slightly higher in seats further from the 50% threshold, not closer to it. Strategic targeting would predict the opposite.

Second, and quite strikingly, the two procedural deletion channels move in opposite directions, and are affected by the explanatory variables in at least three mutually consistent ways. Looking at the full specification for adjudication (column [8]), adjudication-based deletions are affected positively by the presence of BJP-MLA-2021 ACs (+14.7 per thousand voters, $p < 0.01$). What is more, they rise sharply with proximity to Bangladesh (-6.3 per thousand voters per log-km on log-distance, $p < 0.01$). Finally, the closeness coefficient on adjudicated deletions is

	Contestable rate $\Delta_i^{\text{con}}/E_{2021}$				Adjudicated rate $\Delta_i^{\text{adj}}/E_{2021}$				Non-adjudicated rate $\Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}}/E_{2021}$			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
closeness	−0.66	−0.69	−0.66	−0.43	−0.05	+0.26	+0.41	+0.45**	−0.61*	−0.94**	−1.06**	−0.89**
	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.32)	(0.79)	(0.20)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.04)
BJP MLA 2021		−1.47	−0.47	+5.64		+14.3***	+13.5***	+14.7***		−15.7***	−14.0***	−9.08*
		(0.82)	(0.94)	(0.40)		(<.01)	(<.01)	(<.01)		(<.01)	(<.01)	(0.08)
borders BD			−19.5	−16.2			−13.4	−12.9			−6.11	−3.32
			(0.11)	(0.20)			(0.16)	(0.18)			(0.39)	(0.64)
log dist BD			−2.89	−2.89			−6.29***	−6.32***			+3.40*	+3.43*
			(0.31)	(0.31)			(<.01)	(<.01)			(0.08)	(0.07)
SC seat				−17.1***				−3.49				−13.6***
				(<.01)				(0.25)				(<.01)
ST seat				−20.6***				−2.74				−17.8***
				(<.01)				(0.38)				(<.01)
constant	61.1	61.3	73.9	78.2	19.6	17.7	41.6	42.5	41.6	43.7	32.4	35.7
R^2	0.009	0.010	0.016	0.041	0.000	0.058	0.131	0.134	0.011	0.038	0.074	0.097

Table 4. Cross-sectional correlation of deletion rates with closeness and BJP-MLA presence in 2021. OLS with HC1-robust standard errors, $N = 294$. Outcomes are deletion rates per thousand of the 2021 electorate. "closeness" is $50-|\text{TMC share}_{2021}-50|$ in percentage points (higher values = closer to the 50% flip threshold). The BJP-MLA-2021 dummy equals 1 for the 77 ACs the BJP won in 2021. Specifications add controls progressively: (1) bivariate; (2) + BJP-MLA dummy; (3) + Bangladesh-border indicator and log-distance-to-Bangladesh; (4) + SC and ST reservation indicators. *p*-values in parentheses below each coefficient; stars denote significance at 10%/5%/1%.

significantly *positive* (+0.45, $p < 0.05$) — the only place where the strategic-targeting prediction is directionally borne out. Remarkably, non-adjudicated deletions in the full specification (column [12]) move the other way on every dimension. They fall by 9.08 per thousand voters in BJP-MLA-2021 ACs ($p = 0.08$). They fall with proximity to Bangladesh (positive coefficient of +3.4 on log-distance, meaning more BLO deletions further from the border). And the closeness coefficient is significantly *negative*, with more non-adjudication deletions further from the 50% threshold. The two sets (of three effects each) offset each other on the contestable sum, which displays no net partisan signal. The large negative SC/ST coefficients on contestable and non-adjudicated rates fit the same pattern: reserved constituencies, largely rural, have lower voter mobility and therefore fewer "no-show" classifications by BLOs; the effect is seen via the non-adjudicated channel and is essentially absent under adjudication, reinforcing the broader pattern that non-adjudicated deletions might track demography while adjudicated deletions track partisanship and border geography.

In summary, BJP MLAs were associated with more adjudicated deletions in their own seats, about 15 more per thousand voters. Given the average 2021 electorate of ≈ 250,000 per AC, that is on the order of 3,500–4,000 additional adjudication-deletions per BJP-MLA AC. This is a real number. It is consistent with the strategic-targeting story *for the adjudication channel* in the seats where the BJP held office in 2021. But the offsetting movement in non-adjudicated deletions along the same dimensions means that the overall contestable rate, summed across both channels, shows no partisan-targeting signal.

What does all this say about the anchoring of h_1 and h_2? A narrowly empirical reading might observe that the contestable rate as a whole shows no partisan tilt and set $(h_1, h_2) \approx 0$. That would be a mistake. If we take the channel-asymmetry at face value, there is strong evidence that adjudicated deletions are indeed strategic. In keeping with our goal of giving the deletions hypothesis its empirically defensible best case, let's set (h_1, h_2) for this group equal to $(1, 1)$, which is the heroically extreme assumption.

On the other hand, non-adjudicated deletions display systematic but anti-strategic correlations with the political-stakes variables: more non-adjudication at lower closeness, less in BJP-MLA-2021 seats, less in reserved seats. The largest non-adjudicated rates concentrate in TMC strongholds with no BJP MLA — broadly the urban Kolkata-and-suburbs cluster — and the cleanest reading is that BLO door-to-door enumeration generates more "shifted/absent" classifications in urban-mobile demographics. Whether the underlying mechanism for such absences is demographic-logistical throughout is more than the data we have can settle. What we can say is that there is strong evidence that strategic targeting is not at work. It is reasonable to set $(h_1, h_2) = 0$ for this case, which means that we are effectively back to our starting exercise in Section 1, where we considered just adjudicated deletions alone.

This calibration still implies a behavioral parameter that's generous to the deletions hypothesis: the overall runner-up share among the counterfactually resurrected pool is approximately $0.37 \cdot 1 + 0.63 \cdot 0.41 \approx 63\%$ (where 0.37 is the average adjudication share of the contestable bucket across BJP-won ACs). This lies in the middle of the 55-70% range we cited earlier.

Under these anchors, we just went full circle — from adjudicated deletions alone to all contestable deletions and then back again, but we wouldn't have known that ex ante had we not considered non-adjudicated deletions at all. Moreover, the argument in the previous paragraph leaves the floor open to other, potentially better estimates; with more work, we can settle on alternative values of (h_1, h_2) for the adjudicated and non-adjudicated buckets and predict sharper counterfactuals. What I am fairly confident about is that no such reasonable counterfactual can flip the realized absolute majority for the BJP.

6. The Bottom Line

The BJP's win in Bengal cannot be attributed to SIR deletions, except under extreme conjectures regarding the behavior of deleted voters. If we go only by adjudicated deletions Δ_i^{adj} for every AC i, and assume that every deleted voter turns up for the runner-up in every constituency once resurrected, then 26 BJP wins are indeed reversed. Even under this heroic assumption, then, that leaves the BJP comfortably above majority by thirty-three seats.

We can (and should) expand our consideration of deletions to the no-show flows recorded by BLOs in each constituency. With deaths and duplicates removed from these deletions, we

have a sizable quantity of non-adjudicated deletions, given by $\Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}}$ for every AC i. What we call the contestable bound is the sum $\Delta_i^{\text{con}} = \Delta_i^{\text{adj}} + \Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}}$. This sum is capable of flipping 69 BJP wins, but under the heroic counterfactual that every absent, shifted, or otherwise missing voter and every voter deleted by SIR adjudication would have shown up to vote for the runner-up. Under that assumption, the BJP would have fallen ten seats short of majority.

In my reluctantly held opinion, however, this extreme counterfactual is implausible. We've demonstrated this by introducing a pair of dials, which allows us to scale up both the turnout rate of the resurrected, as well as their partisan bias towards the runner-up, to any degree we please. Figure 1, which collects together the results of this exercise, shows us that the dial pairs that correspond to a possible BJP loss of absolute majority, are extreme to a degree. As just one example (and there are others in the discussion earlier), if deleted voters participate at a rate of 92% — which equals the turnout rate in this historic election — fully *ninety five percent* of them would have to vote against the BJP to overturn its majority stranglehold. They would have to be overwhelmingly more partisan than the local electorate. It's a stretch.

This is not an argument that the SIR did not matter. It clearly mattered in particular constituencies; the 152:1 ratio in Rajarhat New Town[13] cannot be brushed off as electorally irrelevant in that seat. It mattered, too, in Bhabanipur, where $\Delta_i^{\text{con}} = \Delta_i^{\text{non-adj}} + \Delta_i^{\text{adj}} \approx 36{,}500$ against a winning margin of 15,105 — a ratio of about 2.5:1 in the seat that the Chief Minister herself contested and lost. *Particular* outcomes did indeed turn on the deletions. My argument is that the state-level outcome does not turn on them under any plausible counterfactual.

SIR is also of concern as a matter of principle. Why individuals had to be put through this ordeal in *this* particular election, with many plausibly denied their constitutional rights, is a question that should hold our attention. SIR has cast a shadow over this entire election, and paradoxically enough has robbed the BJP's robust victory of its clarity — whether the BJP itself is to be held responsible for this is worth reflecting on.

The conclusion drawn in this Note may be unwelcome to some who would prefer a comforting explanation. It is surely unwelcome to me. But the facts are the facts, at least as best as we can understand them.

Acknowledgments. Underlying data: ECI 2026 results portal; TCPD/LokDhaba historical series for 2021; CEO West Bengal AC-wise Draft Elector SIR 2026 publication located at (`ceowestbengal.wb.gov.in/Downloads/SIR2026/`); CEO West Bengal Press Note CEO/PN-05/2026 of 28-02-2026; and the Sabar Institute's AC-level digitisation of the SIR no-show flow at `sabar-institute.github.io/maps/asdd/`. All processing scripts and the merged AC-level panel are available on request from the author. And thank you, Claude Opus 4.7.

[13] The BJP win margin is 316 votes, as opposed to a contestable component of about 48,100.