

Impact of Political Instability on Tourism in West Bengal.



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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to investigate the effects of political instability on tourism-related business performance, incoming tourist flows in West Bengal, and overall tourism-based earnings. The nonlinear effects of political risk and economic growth on tourism receipts are examined in this research. Nevertheless, the secondary data that is now accessible with the unobserved component model technique detection only provides a broad picture of the issue. Experts such as managers of lodging establishments, staff members of local tourism development offices, and tourism researchers were interviewed as a result. Expert interviews exposed West Bengal's tourism industry's prospects, challenges, and potential developments in the face of the region's five years of political unrest. The findings confirm earlier research showing that, in the near run, political unrest lowers tourism. However, the long-term viewpoint has yielded various results from the expert interviews with main province cities. Political instability benefits cities with developed tourism businesses that are located outside of crisis areas. Places that relied on visitors from the countries or continents like Europe, Germany, China, USA are mostly affected. The political unrest in eastern West Bengal did not significantly affect cities with low levels of tourism development.

KEYWORDS: Political instability; impact on tourism; tourism in West Bengal; human rights violation; instability;

INTRODUCTION

Travelers' right to worldwide travel was declared by the renowned international organization, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in its worldwide Code of Ethics for Tourism. According to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (2005), it upholds the "liberty of tourist movements" and defines the right to tourism as "a right equally open to all inhabitants of the world." To put it another way, "traveling" improves quality of life and is a fundamental human right. According to UNWTO, a government that upholds the right of its inhabitants to mobility can play a vital role in facilitating tourism both within and outside of its borders.

The eastern Indian state of West Bengal is renowned for its diversity. It provides unparalleled geographical diversity to its guests. The state is a tourist haven, home to sea beaches, hill stations, religious sites, and wildlife sanctuaries. West Bengal is a place of spectacular scenery, with plants and animals coexisting with the effervescent seas in the south and the undulating terrains in the north. This state is a unique fusion of endless life, art, entertainment, and culture. While the isolated hill stations and seashores provide the ideal haven for the busy metropolitan people, the flowing population of the streets presents a peculiar beauty of the urban atmosphere. West Bengal's exquisite natural beauty gives it everything it has to offer.

In the year 2021, the domestic tourists arriving to the state of West Bengal accounted for approximately 24 million, while the foreign tourist arrivals accounted for over 34 thousand. West Bengal has the Himalayas to its north and the Bay of Bengal to its south (Published by Statista Research Department, Aug 24, 2023).

Richter (1982) described tourism as "a highly political phenomenon." Public policy is increasingly incorporating tourism into its agenda, particularly in developing nations. Nonetheless, when compared to third-world nations, the governments of first and second world nations place a greater emphasis on public health, economics, literacy, and both internal and external national security.

Studies on development policy have so likewise focused in this manner. Subsequently, tourism also accelerated in the process of growing the government's revenue stream.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Heywood (2004), politics is the process by which individuals attempt to maintain and amend the broad laws that govern their lives. Politics, however, may communicate the reality of preserving the wellbeing of the populace and defending it against foreign or internal threats.

According to Edgell (1990), tourism is a crucial component of the global political economy as well as a “continuation of politics.” As a result, politics and the economy can use tourism as a tool.

According to Mill and Morrison (2006), a travel destination's perceived ability to meet demands is a factor in the decision-making process.

According to Rawls (1999), political stability in democracies promotes safety and security and may help the travel and tourist industry thrive. On the other side, prospective travelers can cancel their plans or choose to visit other places if they believe the nation is insecure.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To find out the inherent reason of declining flow of tourism during the elections in Bengal.
- 2) To find out the role of Government to sustain the flow of tourists during election time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In terms of being used politically, the tourism industry may be somewhat more vulnerable. When it comes to gathering and preserving data, conducting research, and providing policy recommendations, the Ministry of Travel and Tourism still primarily plays the role of a driver in liberal nations (Webster et al., 2010). Craig Webster and Stanislav Ivanov have shown that political ideology and national tourist management are related. According to the authors, the nature and reasoning for government interventions in the tourism sector are influenced by the prevailing political ideologies in the nation.

According to Nolen-Hoeksema (2010), since the turn of the century, the mainstream media has cultivated in the public consciousness a perception of an abundance of natural disasters, political crises, acts of terror, and war. People's perceptions of risk and anxiety are influenced by both the frequency and level of organization of terrorist acts (Wolff, K., & Larsen, S. (2017)). Political, economic, and ecological variables are regarded as the three main causes that are generally outside the purview of the tourism sector. Thus, in order to investigate the factors influencing travelers' destination preferences, traits such as unique political situation, customs, and attitudes were examined.

Factors affecting tourist flow in West Bengal

Compared to other tourist destinations, Bengal has been a latecomer in acknowledging the significance of tourism development and in building the required infrastructure. Bengal's tourism industry has great potential, yet the outcomes are unsatisfactory. There are several factors like, unplanned destination, unprofessional attitude of tourism intermediaries, poor infrastructure etc, affect the flow of tourists in West Bengal. Among these, political problems have made things challenging for travel and tourism in West Bengal.

Political beliefs influence not just the structure and form of government, but also how the government contributes to the growth of the travel and tourism sector. There are 23 districts in West Bengal, divided into five administrative divisions, and each and every district has an individual tourist attraction and specialty.

Districts of West Bengal – Administrative Divisions					
	Presidency Division	Burdwan Division	Medinipur Division	Malda Division	Jalpaiguri Division
All districts	Kolkata	Bardhaman(E)	Medinipur(E)	Malda	Jalpaiguri
	Howrah	Burdwan(W)	Medinipur(W)	Murshidabad	Alipurduar
	24-Parganas(N)	Hoogly	Bankura	Uttar Dinajpur	Cooch Behar
	24-Parganas(S)	Birbhum	Purulia	Dakshin Dinajpur	Kalimpong
	Nadia		Jhargram		Darjeeling

Political violence in West Bengal (During elections, from 2014 to 2024)

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Lok Sabha Election:

Election	Year	No. of incidents/Death	Reference
16th Lok Sabha	2014	740(injured) 7 (death)	https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politicsand-nation/lok-sabha-elections-2014-poll-violence-inwest-bengal-claims-seven-lives-740injured/articleshow/34497287.cms?from=mdr
17th Lok Sabha	2019	693(injured) 11(death)	https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/bengalsaw-693-cases-of-violence-during-2019-lok-sabhapolls/articleshow/81321892.cms
18th Lok Sabha	2024		

Assembly Election:

Election	Year	No. of incidents/Death	Reference
16th Assembly	2016	600 party offices attacked and burnt, 1 dead, several injured.	https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2016/0529_pd/postpoll-terror-west-bengal https://www.indiatoday.in/assembly-elections2016/west-bengal-election/video/west-bengal-onedead-several-injured-as-violence-reigned-third-phaseof-election-441531-2016-04-21
17th Assembly	2021	11(death)	Times of India report dated May 4, 2021.

Relation between tourist flow and local violence

The majority of the time worries regarding crime and tourism center on travelers becoming victims of crime. In recent times, there have been numerous well-known worldwide incidents where criminals intentionally targeted visitors for their crimes. Some of these have been politically motivated terror operations, where visitors are targeted for their perceived economic dependence on the tourism industry as well as their symbolic position as representatives of foreign cultures. Studies examining the connection between political unrest and travel are extremely rare. In an attempt to determine the causes of this, Richter (1983a, 1991), Hall (1989), and Matthews (1991) identify a number of connected elements that explain the current state of affairs: First off, a lot of decision-makers in the public and commercial spheres are reluctant to recognize the political component of tourism. Second, officials don't seem to be interested in learning more about the politics of travel. Thirdly, they do not consider tourism to be a legitimate academic field. Lastly, there are significant methodological issues with the way political and administrative studies are conducted. In case of West Bengal a statistical record published in Annual Final Report of Tourism Survey for the State of West Bengal (April 2014-March 2015) clearly reveals that tourist flow decreased after the 16th Lok Sabha election, 2014.

Visitors (May 2014)

S. No.	District	No. of Visits by Tourists			No. of Visits by Same day visitors		
		Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total
-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8
1	North 24 Parganas	132613	113	132726	18888	29	18917
2	South 24 Parganas	121095	118	121213	17248	17	17265
3	Bardhaman	50235	2149	52384	7155	44	7199
4	Murshidabad	68119	204	68323	9702	10	9712
5	Paschim Medinipur	48921	33	48954	6968	0	6968
6	Hugli	113355	135	113490	16145	23	16168
7	Nadia	106821	487	107308	15215	56	15271
8	Purba Medinipur	422978	171	423149	60745	96	60841
9	Howrah	79876	118	79994	11377	61	11438
10	Kolkata	610335	108229	718564	87624	116	87740
11	Maldah	101230	339	101569	14418	0	14418
12	Jalpaiguri	89765	4190	93955	12785	17	12802
13	Bankura	40389	145	40534	5753	12	5765
14	Birbhum	310515	197	310712	44527	41	44568
15	Uttar Dinajpur	14133	12	14145	2013	17	2030
16	Puruliya	20859	55	20914	2971	14	2985
17	Cooch Behar	18656	168	18824	2661	68	2729
18	Darjeeling	120301	3205	123506	12134	63	12197
19	Dakshin Dinajpur	16851	399	17250	2294	0	2294
May-14	Total	2487047	120467	2607514	350623	684	351307

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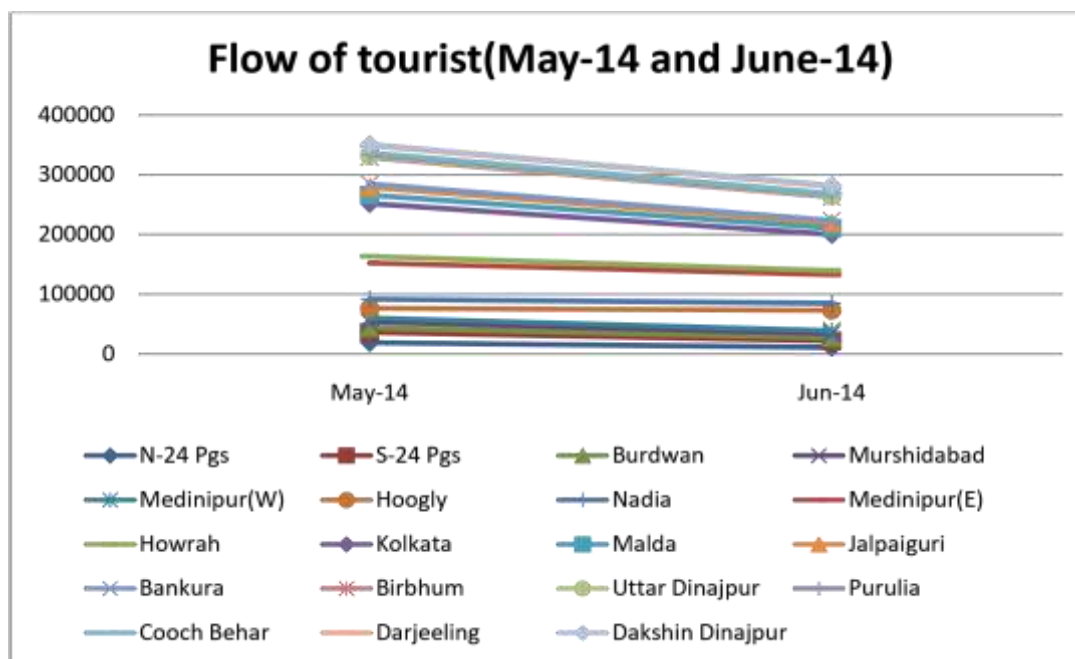
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		Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total
-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8
1	North 24 Parganas	81253	51	81304	10867	19	10886
2	South 24 Parganas	82816	76	82892	11076	12	11088
3	Barddhaman	39012	1762	40774	5217	25	5242
4	Murshidabad	43289	153	43442	6592	5	6597
5	Paschim Medinipur	40081	27	40108	5360	0	5360
6	Hugli	253189	108	253297	33861	21	33882
7	Nadia	87216	452	87668	11664	46	11709
8	Purba Medinipur	357356	124	357480	47792	69	47860
9	Howrah	51289	158	51447	6932	43	6974
10	Kolkata	451283	78723	530006	60354	124	60475
11	Maldah	80211	303	80514	10727	0	10727
12	Jalpaiguri	61952	303	62255	8258	14	8272
13	Bankura	33629	97	33726	4498	10	4508
14	Birbhum	290113	136	290249	38799	32	38831
15	Uttar Dinajpur	12659	6	12665	1693	0	1693
16	Puruliya	18117	22	18139	2423	15	2438
17	Cooch Behar	14392	96	14488	1925	49	1973
18	Darjeeling	89001	2212	91213	11903	10	11913
19	Dakshin Dinajpur	12806	325	13131	1712	24	1736
June-14	Total	2099664	85134	2184798	281653	518	282164

(Source: Annual Final Report of Tourism Survey for the State of West Bengal (April 2014-March 2015))

DISCUSSION

Political beliefs influence not just the structure and form of government, but also how the government contributes to the growth of the travel and tourism sector. The primary basis for all industrial expansion, including tourism, is the political structure and its stability. The main component of the political system is the term-limited continuation of the government. However, it also shapes legislators, bureaucrats, politicians, and other individuals engaged in the creation of public policy.

Graphical representation will reveal the declined or decreased flow of tourist before and after Election.



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Role of Government in tourism development

The government's function in the growth of tourism has been recast as a catalyst rather than as a regulator. Tourism development plans now prioritize integrated infrastructure development through efficient partnerships with several stakeholders, in addition to marketing and promotion. The primary focus of this Ministry's operations is to promote domestic and inbound travel within India. This is required to capitalize on the direct and multiplicative impact of tourism on job creation and the nation's efforts to eradicate poverty. The Ministry's other main goals include presenting the nation as a year-round travel destination, encouraging tourism in a sustainable way through the active involvement of all societal segments, ensuring standards of quality for tourism service providers, etc. In addition to this, there is an emphasis on the integrated development of tourism amenities and infrastructure via successful collaboration with several stakeholders. India's Ministry of Tourism presents the nation as a comprehensive travel destination, showcasing its diverse tourism offerings across its several States and Union Territories. Some initiatives are:

- Extension of the e-Visa option to 167 countries' citizens.
- National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD).
- Adding more traveler information about India to the Incredible India website redesign.
- The "Swachh Paryatan Mobile App" and a 24-hour, multilingual tourist helpline launched. etc.

CONCLUSION

Tourism flows are also impacted by political shifts. Due to the visitors' desire to visit locations that had previously stayed closed, many once-popular destinations were replaced with these countries, resulting in imbalances caused by these political developments. Political unrest during election has a negative impact on future flow of tourists.

Since tourism depends on peace, terrorism and conflict have an immediate impact on it. Travelers typically steer clear of regions plagued by conflict, terrorism, and political instability. The secret to boosting tourism at any place is political stability. Travel to several locations can be severely impacted by terrorism in one area of the world.

It's not always the case that traveler flow to a nation or location experiencing a conflict, terrorist attack, or political unrest is disrupted. The majority of the time, the entire continent or even the area is impacted. Terrorists have attacked tourists in certain nations in an effort to discredit the ruling political party. Government has tried to take few initiatives to maintain the flow of tourists so as to revenue generation continues.

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