



SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVIEW OF ELECTORAL LIST IN INDIA: REVIEW OF NATIONAL INTEREST AND POLITICS

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Abstract

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, initiated by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in 2025, represents a revolutionary step on Indian electoral history. This research article analyzes the constitutional position of SIR. ECI decided to accumulation of inaccuracies, duplications, and demographic shifts necessitating comprehensive electoral roll purification. At the same time the ECI critically examine the political impact of SIR, where in political parties have weaponized concerns about voter list accuracy to advance partisan interests, raising questions about the boundaries between legitimate electoral administration and politically motivated intervention. Through analysis of the Bihar state SIR (July 2025) extending the nationwide (October 2025), this article establishes that while SIR addresses genuine democratic deficits, the process has become entangled with partisan politics, federal-state tensions, and constitutional questions regarding the independence of the Election Commission. The article declare for a reconceptualization of electoral list management that balances collective inclusion, perfect accuracy, and public participation against the risk of disenfranchisement and political manipulation.

Keywords: *Special Intensive Revision, Election Commission, Voter Purification, Democratic Inclusion, Electoral Integrity*

Introduction

The electoral roll, is the list of eligible voters in the democratic nation. India's electoral rolls have become progressively corrupted by duplications, deceased voters, migrants appearing in different areas voter rolls, and other inaccuracies that undermine both the inclusivity and

integrity of elections. The last comprehensive house-to-house revision occurred between 2002 and 2004, more than two decades ago. Since then, demographic turbulence, rapid urbanization, internal migration, and inadequate updating mechanisms have accumulated substantial errors in the voter list.

In July 2025, confronted by this administrative reality, the Election Commission of India announced the Bihar Special Intensive Revision an unprecedented house-to-house enumeration and verification process targeting the state's 8 crore voters. The process marked a departure from the routine "Summary Revision" mechanism employed annually. Within three months, the process expanded nationally, with the CEC announcing nationwide SIR on October 27, 2025, encompassing nine states and three Union Territories ahead of major electoral contests.

However, SIR has rapidly become enmeshed in partisan politics. Political parties, perceiving the process through the lens of electoral advantage, have challenged the fairness and necessity of SIR. State governments have questioned the ECI's constitutional authority to mandate such intensive revision. Opposition parties have alleged that SIR targets specific electoral constituencies to manipulate voter composition. Civil society organizations have raised concerns about potential disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations. This article argues that while SIR responds to genuine administrative necessity the accumulation of inaccuracies threatening democratic legitimacy the process has become compromised by political contestation. A proper understanding of SIR requires disaggregating its administrative imperatives from its political dimensions, examining both the constitutional justification for intensive revision and the political economy surrounding its implementation.

The Electoral Roll Crisis: Constitutional Imperatives for Accurate Voter Lists

Constitutional Foundation and Electoral Integrity; Article 325 of the Indian Constitution provides that "no person shall be excluded from the electoral roll on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or descent." Complementarily, Article 326 establishes that all adult citizens (later reduced to 18 years through constitutional amendment) are entitled to vote. These foundational provisions establish the constitutional imperative for inclusive, accurate electoral rolls reflecting the universe of eligible voters. However, inclusivity and accuracy represent conflicting directives absent supplementary mechanisms. Perfect inclusion without verification creates fraudulent rolls filled with ineligible entries. Perfect accuracy without inclusivity creates restrictive rolls excluding eligible voters through overzealous purification. The constitutional challenge involves constructing electoral administration mechanisms that maximize both inclusion and accuracy simultaneously.

The Problem: Accumulation of Inaccuracies;

The 2025 SIR was triggered by mounting evidence of massive electoral roll corruption. Research across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and other states revealed alarming patterns:

- **Duplicate and Multiple Registrations:** Comprehensive audit of Bihar's voter list identified 67,826 cases of "demographically similar entries" with identical or near-

identical credentials across mere 15 assembly constituencies, suggesting many voters appeared multiple times on the rolls. Uttar Pradesh's audit exposed approximately 50 lakh duplicate voter names requiring deletion after verification.

- **Deceased Voters:** Substantial numbers of deceased individuals remained on electoral rolls years after death. The non-reporting of deaths by families, combined with lack of systematic cross-verification with vital registration systems, created "ghost voters" whose votes could theoretically be cast by fraudulent agents.
- **Non-Resident and Ineligible Voters:** The constitutional mandate specifying that only "citizen" and "resident" of specific constituencies can vote was violated through the continued registration of non-residents, foreign nationals, and individuals lacking proper residential qualifications.
- **Migrant Voters:** Rapid internal migration created situations where individuals appeared on electoral rolls in multiple locations, either maintaining old registrations while acquiring new ones, or registered in constituencies they no longer inhabited.
- **Address and Identity Errors:** Large numbers of voters were registered with incorrect names, wrong addresses, or mismatched biographical details, making it impossible to locate them during elections or verify their authenticity.

The ECI's own data revealed that the last nationwide intensive revision (2002-2004) was nearly two decades stale. Annual "Summary Revisions" had proven insufficient to manage the pace of demographic change. The cumulative effect was that India's voter rolls no longer reliably reflected the universe of eligible voters, threatening the democratic principle of universal adult suffrage.

Constitutional Necessity for Electoral Roll Cleansing

Article 324 of the Constitution vests the ECI with "superintendence, direction and control of elections." Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, explicitly authorizes the ECI to undertake "special revision of the electoral roll" in circumstances warranting comprehensive updating. The constitutional framework contemplates that electoral rolls require periodic intensive revision when cumulative inaccuracies threaten democratic legitimacy. The 22-year gap since the last comprehensive revision, combined with documented evidence of millions of erroneous entries, established constitutional necessity for SIR. The democratic legitimacy of elections depends on the normative foundation that electoral outcomes reflect the will of eligible voters. When electoral rolls are corrupted by massive duplications and ineligible entries, this foundation collapses. The voting population becomes indeterminate. Electoral outcomes become suspect. Democratic legitimacy itself becomes contested. Thus, from the perspective of electoral integrity and democratic principle, SIR represented a constitutionally necessary administrative intervention to restore the accuracy and legitimacy of electoral rolls.

The Special Intensive Revision: Process, Scope, and Implementation

Constitutional and Legal Basis

The legal authority for SIR derives from multiple constitutional and statutory provisions:

1. **Article 324 of the Constitution:** Establishes the ECI's authority to superintend, direct, and control elections, including electoral roll preparation and revision.
2. **Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Explicitly authorizes "special revision of electoral rolls" beyond the annual summary revision mechanism.
3. **Section 9 of the RPA:** Establishes procedures for electoral roll publication and objection/correction mechanisms.

These provisions collectively establish that the ECI possesses constitutional authority to initiate SIR without requiring legislative sanction or state government consent, reflecting the ECI's constitutional independence in electoral matters.

SIR Process and Methodology

The SIR process differs fundamentally from routine annual revision:

Notification: The ECI notifies the qualifying date (date by which individuals must become 18 to be eligible for inclusion). In Bihar SIR, the qualifying date was July 1, 2025, encompassing all individuals attaining 18 years by October 1, 2025.

House-to-House Enumeration: Unlike summary revision, SIR involves Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) visiting every household in their assigned polling booth area, distributing pre-filled enumeration forms to existing voters and new eligible persons. The 2025 SIR mobilized approximately 4 lakh volunteers alongside regular BLOs.

Document Verification: Applicants, particularly those seeking registration post-2003, were required to provide proof of identity, birth date, and parental details. This heightened evidentiary standard distinguished SIR from routine revision processes.

Deduplication Software and Field Verification: The ECI's deduplication software flagged probable duplicate entries based on demographic similarity (identical names, dates of birth, addresses within short distances). These flagged entries underwent field verification by EROs before deletion, preventing mechanical erasure without human verification.

Digital Integration: The 2025 SIR incorporated digital tools including SMS alerts to existing voters, online enumeration portals, and Aadhaar-based verification for voters whose names matched Aadhaar records.

Publication and Objection Period: Draft revised rolls were published with objection periods for citizens to challenge inclusions or claim wrongful exclusions. The process included appeals mechanisms and revisional authorities to address contestations.

Scope and Geographic Expansion

The SIR process was initially launched in Bihar (July 2025) with the qualifying date of July 1, 2025. The enumeration period extended through November 2025. Following Bihar's completion, the nationwide SIR was announced on October 27, 2025, encompassing nine additional states and three Union Territories. The nationwide expansion represented an unprecedented administrative undertaking, involving 8+ crore voters across multiple states with different demographics, administrative capacities, and political contexts. The decision to expand SIR nationally, rather than limiting it to Bihar, signified the ECI's assessment

that electoral roll corruption represented a pan-Indian problem requiring comprehensive addressing.

National Interest and Democratic Necessity: The Case for SIR

Electoral Legitimacy and Public Confidence; Democratic legitimacy depends fundamentally on public confidence that electoral outcomes reflect the will of eligible voters. When electoral rolls contain millions of erroneous entries, duplications, and ineligible voters, this confidence erodes. Citizens question whether their votes count against phantom votes. Opposition parties question electoral outcomes by citing roll inaccuracies. The election process itself becomes delegitimized.

The accumulation of documented evidence regarding electoral roll corruption created a democratic crisis. The 67,826 double voters in 15 Bihar constituencies, the 50 lakh duplicates in Uttar Pradesh, and similar findings across states demonstrated that electoral rolls no longer reliably reflected eligible voters. This corruption was not marginal; it was systemic and massive. SIR addresses this crisis by comprehensively cleansing electoral rolls of erroneous entries. By removing duplicates, deceased voters, and ineligible registrations, SIR restores the democratic legitimacy of electoral rolls. It creates voter lists that accurately reflect the universe of eligible voters, providing the foundation for legitimate electoral outcomes.

Universal Adult Suffrage and Inclusive Democracy

Paradoxically, while some criticism portrays SIR as restrictive, the process simultaneously serves the democratic imperative for universal inclusion. When electoral rolls contain duplicates and fraudulent entries, administrative space for genuine but unregistered eligible voters is constrained. Voter list capacity becomes consumed by erroneous entries rather than potential new voters. Cleansing the rolls of duplicates and ineligible entries frees administrative and database capacity for genuinely eligible voters. Intensive enumeration through house-to-house surveys identifies previously unregistered eligible voters, particularly among vulnerable populations (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities) who historically experience under registration. Thus, SIR serves both accuracy (removing erroneous entries) and inclusion (adding previously unregistered eligible voters) simultaneously. The process is ostensibly democratic in its dual imperative.

Constitutional Supremacy and Rule of Law

The Constitution's electoral provisions establish that elections determine democratic legitimacy. Allowing electoral rolls to deteriorate through inaction violates the constitutional commitment to democratic governance. The ECI's constitutional responsibility to ensure fair elections includes maintaining accurate electoral rolls. The 22-year gap since comprehensive intensive revision represented an administrative failure violating constitutional responsibility. The accumulation of documented roll corruption compounded this failure. SIR represents the ECI's assertion of constitutional duty to restore electoral roll accuracy, regardless of political opposition.

Political Economy of SIR: The Partisan Dimension

Political Party Contestation of SIR; despite the apparent democratic imperative for SIR, political parties have vigorously contested the process. The contestation reveals how administrative measures ostensibly addressing democratic deficits become enmeshed in partisan calculation.

Allegations of Partisan Targeting: Opposition parties alleged that SIR was designed to remove voters from constituencies where they possess electoral strength. In Bihar, opposition parties specifically alleged that SIR targeted constituencies with high minority populations or constituencies where opposition parties performed strongly.

Federal-State Tensions: State governments, particularly those governed by opposition parties, challenged the ECI's constitutional authority to mandate SIR without state consultation or consent. Tamil Nadu specifically argued that the ECI's October 27, 2025, order for nationwide SIR was a "copy-paste" of the Bihar order, showing insufficient attention to state-specific electoral roll challenges.

Disenfranchisement Concerns: Civil society organizations and academic researchers raised concerns that SIR could disenfranchise vulnerable populations lacking documents proving identity, residence, or birth dates. The heightened evidentiary standards for post-2003 registrants potentially excluded individuals unable to produce documentary proof.

Procedural Opacity: Critics noted that detailed guidelines for SIR were not publicly available, creating concerns about inconsistent implementation across states and opportunities for local officials to exercise discretion in potentially partisan directions.

Political Parties and Voter Purification: Partisan Interests

The political contestation of SIR reflects deeper partisan interests regarding voter composition. Different political parties mobilize different voter segments. Removing voters from rolls systematically affects different parties unequally.

Regional Parties and Migration: In states with significant internal migration, incumbent regional parties with entrenched voter networks may benefit from purifying rolls of migrant voters registered in multiple constituencies. National parties with geographically dispersed support may suffer disproportionately from voter purification.

Religious and Caste Dimensions: Voter purification based on documentary requirements may disproportionately exclude voters from communities with lower documentation rates. If particular religious or caste groups have lower rates of formal documentation, heightened evidentiary standards effectively purge voters from those communities.

Urban-Rural Divides: Voters in urban areas with higher documentation rates may be less affected by stringent document requirements than voters in rural areas with lower documentation. If particular parties draw stronger support from urban or rural constituencies, the distributional effects of purification differ.

The Bihar SIR Experience: Evidence of Partisan Effects

The Bihar SIR experience provides concrete evidence of how electoral roll revision becomes entangled with partisan politics. Post-SIR analysis revealed:

- *Uneven Deletion of Voters:* Some constituencies experienced significantly higher deletion rates than others. Constituencies where opposition parties possess electoral strength experienced higher purge rates, while constituencies favoring incumbent parties experienced lower purge rates.
- *Incomplete Deduplication:* Despite the ECI's claims of comprehensive deduplication, analysis by researchers revealed that many duplicate entries remained on finalized rolls, suggesting that deduplication was selective rather than comprehensive.
- *Technical and Procedural Problems:* The ECI skipped fraud-busting software in certain phases of Bihar SIR despite claiming to use advanced deduplication technology. Electoral Registration Officers in some constituencies used outdated methods for identifying duplicates.
- *Persistence of Errors:* Even in finalized rolls, researchers documented cases of incorrect voter photos mismatched with voter names, suggesting that verification processes were perfunctory rather than rigorous.

These empirical findings suggest that while SIR addressed genuine democratic deficits in electoral roll accuracy, the implementation was compromised by inconsistency, technical failures, and potentially partisan considerations affecting which voters were ultimately purged.

Constitutional Tensions: Independence, Federalism, and Democratic Accountability **Electoral Commission Independence**

The ECI derives constitutional authority to conduct elections independently from Article 324. This independence is essential to prevent political manipulation of electoral processes. However, SIR demonstrates tensions inherent in asserting independence when electoral administration affects different parties unequally. ECI's decision to initiate nationwide SIR without explicit state government consent raises federalism questions. While the Constitution vests elections authority in the ECI, Indian federalism contemplates that elections involve both Union and state governments, with states playing roles in voter registration and polling. The Supreme Court's December 2025 intervention, questioning the ECI's rationale for nationwide SIR and challenging the "copy-paste" nature of the nationwide order, reflected judicial concern that the ECI was asserting independence in ways that lacked sufficient constitutional grounding.

The Disenfranchisement Problem

A fundamental democratic concern regarding voter purification is the risk of disenfranchising eligible voters. While SIR aims to remove ineligible voters and duplicates, implementation can create "false positives" eligible voters incorrectly identified as duplicates or ineligible and wrongly deleted from rolls. The heightened evidentiary standards requiring documentary proof of identity, residence, and birth date particularly risk disenfranchising:

- Economically disadvantaged populations with lower documentation rates

- Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes with historical under registration
- Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, facing presumptions of ineligibility in politically charged environments
- Elderly voters with outdated or missing documents
- Internally displaced and migrant populations with documentation difficulties.

The constitutional imperative for universal adult suffrage (Articles 325, 326) requires that disenfranchisement risks be carefully managed. Procedures must balance accuracy with inclusion, preventing the pursuit of perfect accuracy from becoming a vehicle for systematic disenfranchisement.

Opacity and Democratic Accountability

The absence of detailed, publicly available SIR guidelines created accountability deficits. Electoral administration requires transparency to ensure democratic oversight. When procedures for identifying duplicates, evaluating documentary evidence, and determining voter eligibility lack public documentation, democratic accountability becomes impossible. The Supreme Court's December 2025 questioning of the ECI reflected this concern—the nationwide SIR appeared to lack principled justification specific to each state's circumstances. The nationwide order appeared to apply Bihar's SIR approach indiscriminately to all states, despite differing electoral roll challenges across jurisdictions.

Comparative Constitutional and International Perspectives

Comparative analysis reveals divergent approaches to electoral roll accuracy and purification across democracies:

United Kingdom: Maintains continuous electoral rolls with annual updates. Voter purification based on non-responsiveness to registration notices. No comprehensive house-to-house enumeration for decades. Purification is incremental rather than intensive.

United States: Electoral rolls managed at state level with significant variation. Purification based on death records, change of address data, and felony convictions. Voting Rights Act restrictions prevent purification techniques that disproportionately affect protected classes.

Australia: Maintains compulsory electoral enrollment with regular roll updates. Purification occurs through computerized cross-checks with vital registration systems and address data. No intensive house-to-house enumeration required.

Kenya and South Africa: Both post-apartheid African democracies have conducted intensive electoral roll revisions following democratic transitions. Both experienced political contestation of purification exercises with concerns about partisan targeting.

The comparative perspective suggests that intensive revision is not standard international practice in mature democracies but occurs in transitional contexts or when rolls become severely corrupted. This places India's SIR within a category of extraordinary electoral intervention rather than routine administration.

International Election Standards on Voter Purification

International election monitoring organizations, including the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and the United Nations, provide guidelines on voter purification:

Criterion of Transparency: Purification procedures should be transparent, publicly documented, and subject to independent verification. Opaque procedures risk manipulation.

Non-Disenfranchisement Principle: Purification should not disproportionately exclude protected categories of voters. Evidentiary standards should be calibrated to avoid excluding voters based on characteristics like economic status, literacy, or linguistic ability.

Adequate Remedies: Citizens wrongly purged should have effective remedies to restore their voting rights before elections occur.

Procedural Fairness: Purification decisions should provide reasonable notice to affected individuals and opportunity to contest wrongful exclusion.

Evaluated against these standards, the 2025 SIR demonstrates partial compliance: notification occurred, objection mechanisms were provided, and efforts were made toward transparency. However, concerns remain regarding potential disproportionate exclusion of vulnerable populations and the adequacy of remedial procedures given SIR's accelerated timeline.

Critical Analysis: Synthesizing Democratic Necessity and Political Risk

The Genuine Democratic Deficit

The evidence for electoral roll corruption is substantial and cannot be dismissed as partisan fabrication. Millions of duplicate voters, deceased individuals on rolls, and non-residents registered across constituencies represent a genuine democratic problem. Electoral rolls corrupted to this extent undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and public confidence in democratic processes. SIR addresses this problem through comprehensive cleansing. The intensive house-to-house enumeration, deduplication software, and enhanced verification represent technically sound approaches to electoral roll rehabilitation. The democratic case for SIR is substantial.

The Political Risk and Partisan Exploitation

Simultaneously, the political contestation of SIR reflects legitimate concerns about how administrative measures ostensibly addressing democratic deficits can become vehicles for partisan advantage. The evidence from Bihar SIR—inconsistent deletion rates across constituencies, incomplete deduplication, and procedural irregularities—demonstrates that implementation risk converting democratic purpose into partisan effect. Political parties rationally analyze how SIR affects voter composition in different constituencies. While administrative necessity justifies purification in principle, implementation can systematically advantage some parties over others depending on which voters are purged. The absence of transparent, consistent criteria for purification creates opportunities for partisan effect.

The Synthesis: Conditional Support for SIR

A balanced analytical position supports SIR's democratic necessity while acknowledging political risks requiring institutional safeguards:

SIR is necessary to address documented electoral roll corruption that threatens democratic legitimacy. SIR must include rigorous safeguards against disenfranchising eligible voters, particularly vulnerable populations. Documentary requirements must be calibrated to inclusion, not exclusion. SIR must operate with maximum transparency, with detailed guidelines publicly available, implementation monitored by independent observers, and inconsistencies requiring justification. SIR must provide effective remedies for citizens wrongly excluded, with appeals mechanisms operating before elections occur. SIR should incorporate judicial oversight to ensure that administrative discretion remains constrained by constitutional principles of equality, liberty, and universal suffrage. Without these safeguards, SIR risks becoming a vehicle for systematic disenfranchisement masked by the rhetoric of accuracy and electoral integrity.

Implications for Indian Federalism and Electoral Governance

SIR demonstrates a centralizing tendency in Indian electoral administration. The ECI, as a Union body, unilaterally initiates nationwide electoral roll revision without state consent or consultation. While the ECI's constitutional independence is legitimate, its unilateral exercise affects state governments and state electorates.

The tension between ECI independence and federal principles requiring state participation in elections remains unresolved. The Supreme Court's December 2025 intervention suggesting that ECI's nationwide SIR order lacked sufficient principled justification reflects judicial concern about this tension.

Democratic Participation and Electoral Roll Management

Electoral roll management directly affects democratic participation. Citizens excluded from rolls cannot vote. Citizens on rolls with incorrect information cannot be located or verified. Both types of errors damage democratic participation. Balancing inclusion and accuracy requires mechanisms ensuring that accuracy-seeking does not become a vehicle for exclusion. India's experience with SIR suggests that administrative processes designed to improve accuracy require robust democratic safeguards against disenfranchisement.

Future Electoral Governance Architecture

The 2025 SIR experience suggests several directions for future electoral governance:

Regular, Scheduled Intensive Revision: Rather than ad hoc intensive revision following decades of inaction, India might benefit from scheduled, periodic intensive revision every 5-10 years. Regular revision prevents the accumulation of massive errors requiring extraordinary intervention. **Technology-Enhanced Continuous Updating:** Integration of vital registration systems, Aadhaar databases, and address-change data could enable continuous automated updating of electoral rolls rather than episodic revision. **State-Federal Coordination:** Electoral administration could be restructured to require explicit coordination between ECI and state governments regarding electoral roll revision,

respecting both ECI's constitutional independence and federal principles. Enhanced Democratic Safeguards: Regardless of revision mechanisms, robust safeguards protecting against disenfranchisement, transparent procedures, and effective remedies should be constitutionalized.

Conclusion

The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in 2025 represents a pivotal moment in Indian electoral governance. The initiative addresses a genuine democratic necessity—the accumulation of massive inaccuracies in electoral rolls threatening both the accuracy and legitimacy of electoral outcomes. The evidence of millions of duplicate voters, deceased individuals, and non-residents on rolls demonstrates a democratic deficit requiring institutional response. However, SIR's political contestation and implementation challenges reveal that administrative interventions ostensibly addressing democratic deficits can become entangled with partisan interests and political risk. The uneven implementation across constituencies, persistent duplicates despite purification claims, and heightened documentary requirements risking disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations demonstrate that SIR, in practice, deviates from its democratic purpose.

The synthesis of these tensions suggests that SIR is neither purely necessary democratic reform nor purely partisan manipulation, but rather an administrative necessity complicated and compromised by political contestation. Future electoral governance requires mechanisms ensuring that accuracy-seeking serves rather than undermines democratic inclusion. The constitutional path forward involves recognizing that both accuracy and inclusion are essential to democratic elections. Electoral roll management must balance these imperatives through transparent procedures, robust safeguards against disenfranchisement, effective remedial mechanisms, and institutional accountability structures ensuring that administrative discretion remains constrained by constitutional principles of universal adult suffrage and democratic equality. The 2025 SIR experience demonstrates that electoral administration, despite its technical and administrative character, remains fundamentally political. The boundaries between democratic necessity and political manipulation are not always clear. Robust institutional safeguards, judicial oversight, and democratic transparency are essential to ensuring that electoral administration serves democratic governance rather than undermining it.

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