

SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLLS: POLITY

NEWS: Why has ECI initiated SIR of Bihar's electoral rolls?

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Election Commission of India launched a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar before the 2025 Assembly polls to update voter lists, but it has drawn legal and political criticism over its state-wide scope, July 1 qualifying date, and potential voter exclusion. The issue raises questions on constitutional powers, natural justice, and electoral inclusivity.

Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls in Bihar – 2025:

Background of the Issue

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) launched a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar in June 2025.
- The initiative is being conducted ahead of the Bihar Legislative Assembly elections scheduled in November 2025.
- It has sparked political controversy and legal challenges, with opposition parties alleging it is aimed at disenfranchising voters.

About Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

- SIR is a state-wide house-to-house verification of voter rolls to clean the electoral database.
- It includes addition of eligible voters (citizens aged 18+) and deletion of ineligible, duplicate, or non-citizen entries.
- The order for SIR was issued on **June 24, 2025**, with a qualifying date set as **July 1, 2025**.
- It is conducted under **Section 21(2)(b)** of the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**.

Objectives of the SIR (As per ECI)

- Ensure only genuine Indian citizens aged 18 and above are listed as voters.
- Remove duplicates, deceased individuals, and foreign nationals from electoral rolls.
- Enhance the credibility of elections by maintaining clean and lawful voter lists.
- Support the goal of free, fair, and transparent elections.

Constitutional & Legal Framework

- **Article 324:** Empowers the ECI with overall control and supervision of elections.
- **Article 326:** Guarantees universal adult suffrage for all citizens aged 18+, unless disqualified.
- **Section 19, RPA 1950:** Defines voter eligibility based on age and ordinary residence.

- **Section 20, RPA 1950:** Clarifies the definition of “ordinarily resident”.
- **Section 21:** Allows ECI to revise rolls annually and also specifically in parts of constituencies (21(3)).
- **Section 16 & 11A:** Lists disqualifications from voter registration (non-citizens, unsound mind, etc.).

Judicial and Procedural Framework

- **Mohinder Singh Gill v. CEC (1978):** ECI must follow statutory provisions if available; otherwise, Article 324 applies.
- **Rule 8, Registration of Electors Rules:** Applicants are only required to submit documents "to the best of their ability", not proof beyond doubt.
- **Supreme Court Principles:** ECI's power is not absolute; it is subject to natural justice and judicial review.

Key Issues & Legal Concerns Raised

- **Qualifying Date Legality:** Section 14 mandates 1st January as the qualifying date; ECI has used 1st July, leading to legal uncertainty.
- **Scope of SIR:** Section 21(3) allows special revision only in a constituency or part thereof—not for an entire state.
- **Transparency and Natural Justice:** Risk of rejecting applications due to lack of documents violates Rule 8 and natural justice principles.
- **Legal Challenges:** Several petitions filed in the Supreme Court questioning the legality and scope of the ECI’s order.

Pros and Cons of the Special Intensive Revision

Aspect	Pros	Cons
Implementation	Technology-enabled; 1L+ BLOs, 4L volunteers; can replicate success of SIR 2003.	Huge burden on 8 crore voters to re-verify themselves; tight deadlines.
Legal Backing	Supported by Section 21(2)(b) of RPA, 1950.	State-wide revision may violate Section 21(3) which limits scope to a part/constituency.
Exclusion of Aadhaar	Aligns with legal stance that Aadhaar is not citizenship proof.	Risks excluding poor and underprivileged who mainly rely on Aadhaar.
Duplicate Removal	Helps eliminate fake and foreign entries; improves electoral roll accuracy.	Marginalised and migrants could be wrongly removed due to documentation issues.
Ordinary Residence Clause	Enforces legal definition of "ordinarily resident".	Misinterpretation could unjustly exclude temporary migrants.
Political Impact	Seen as strengthening voter roll	Compared to NRC by critics; alleged to

Aspect

Pros

integrity and election fairness.

Cons

be suppressive towards minority votes.

Way Forward

- ECI should guarantee **no exclusion of genuine voters**, particularly migrants and the poor.
- Use **Aadhaar linkage only for de-duplication**, not for proving citizenship.
- Allow extended window for **claims, objections, and grievances** from voters.
- Emphasize **inclusive verification**, especially in vulnerable communities.
- Provide **clear guidelines to field-level BLOs** to prevent wrongful deletions.
- Ensure **public awareness campaigns** so voters understand procedures and their rights.

Conclusion

While the Election Commission of India holds vast constitutional authority to safeguard electoral integrity, the **Special Intensive Revision in Bihar raises concerns** over its legal scope, timing, and implementation.

Judicial review will be crucial to determine whether ECI's actions respect the **balance between electoral purity and democratic inclusivity**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bihar/why-are-bihars-electoral-rolls-being-revised-explained/article69779885.ece>