

ELECTORAL ROLLS - POLITY

NEWS: The Election Commission of India (EC) **has initiated a Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of the electoral rolls in Bihar before the general elections for its Legislative Assembly.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

About SIR (Special Intensive Revision)

- Refers to a **house-to-house field verification process** for thoroughly revising electoral rolls from the ground up, rather than relying on past records.
- Its core aim is to **identify and include all eligible citizens** aged 18 and above and to **remove ineligible, duplicate, or foreign entries** from the voters' list.
- It is conducted by **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)**, under the authority granted by **Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950**, and **Article 324(1) of the Constitution of India**.

Objectives of SIR

- Ensure that **only genuine Indian citizens** who have attained the age of 18 years are included in the electoral rolls.
- Detect and eliminate **illegal immigrants, ineligible entries, and duplicate voters** to enhance the accuracy of the list.
- Maintain the **credibility, transparency, and legal integrity** of the electoral rolls.
- Strengthen the foundation of Indian democracy by ensuring **free and fair elections**, based on a clean and updated electoral database.

Electoral Roll – Constitutional and Legal Foundations

- The **electoral roll** is a **comprehensive list of all eligible voters** in a defined territorial jurisdiction, prepared irrespective of caste, class, or gender.
- It ensures **natural justice** by allowing claims and objections for inclusion or exclusion, promoting **transparency**.
- **Article 324** of the Constitution empowers the **Election Commission (EC)** to supervise, direct, and control the preparation of electoral rolls.
- **Article 326** guarantees the **universal adult franchise**, giving every Indian citizen above 18 years the right to vote.

Legal Provisions under the Representation of the People Act, 1950

- **Section 16:** Prohibits non-citizens from being included in electoral rolls.
- **Section 19:** Specifies eligibility criteria—individual must be **18 years or older** and an **ordinary resident** of the constituency.
- **Section 20:** Clarifies that **ownership of property alone does not confer residency status**.
- **Section 21:** Authorizes the EC to revise electoral rolls via **Special Intensive Revision**, especially in cases of outdated or flawed rolls.

Historical Evolution of Electoral Roll Revisions

- **1952–56:** Electoral roll revisions were staggered across **1/5th of each state** annually.
- **1960 Amendment:** Institutionalized the window of **January 1–31** as the official period for summary revisions.
- **1983–84:** Rural constituencies saw **intensive revision** before the 1985 elections.
- **1993:** Introduction of **Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPIC)** significantly enhanced voter verification.
- **2002:** The last **nationwide de-novo preparation** of the electoral roll was conducted.

Types of Electoral Roll Revisions (Rule 25(1), Registration of Electors Rules, 1960)

- **Summary Revision:** A routine and periodic update of the existing rolls, usually involving minor inclusions or deletions.
- **Intensive Revision:** A complete and fresh enumeration process conducted without reference to earlier rolls.
- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** A **targeted and hybrid approach**, conducted when the existing electoral roll is considered **unreliable or outdated**, combining fresh verification with reference to old rolls.

Suggestions for a Fair and Inclusive SIR

- The EC must ensure that **no eligible voter is excluded**, particularly **migrants, students, and economically disadvantaged groups**.
- While using **Aadhaar for de-duplication**, the EC must ensure **data privacy and legal safeguards**.

- Sufficient **time must be provided** for citizens to file claims and objections, and a strong **grievance redressal mechanism** must be put in place.
- Striking a **balance between voter list purity and inclusiveness** is critical; **exclusion of eligible citizens is as harmful** as retaining ineligible ones.

Why Bihar's Case is Unique

- The last Special Intensive Revision in Bihar was conducted **more than 20 years ago, in 2003**.
- The **current SIR in Bihar** includes **door-to-door verification**, but **now mandates that every individual** must fill the enumeration form themselves—**earlier, only the head of the household** needed to.
- Individuals added after 2003 must now **submit documentary proof of citizenship** to be included in the rolls.
- The process blends **fresh intensive verification** with reference to the **2003 electoral roll**, creating a **hybrid verification model**.

Key Statistics and Implementation in Bihar

- As of **January 1, 2025**, Bihar's **draft electoral roll** includes approximately **7.96 crore electors**.
- Of these, around **4.96 crore electors were already present** in the 2003 roll and are **automatically considered eligible**.
- **Children of voters listed in 2003** can use their parents' entry as proof of eligibility.
- However, the **2003 roll includes many who are now deceased or have migrated**, necessitating thorough verification.

Accepted Documents for Citizenship Proof

- Acceptable documents include:
 - **Extracts from the 2003 Electoral Roll** (especially for parental linkage)
 - **Birth Certificate, Passport, Land Allotment Records**
 - **Family Register, Pension Orders, NRC Extract (where applicable)**
- **Aadhaar is not accepted**, as it does **not establish citizenship status**, only identity and residence.

Concerns and Challenges

- The process requires **more than 8 crore individuals** to submit forms, including **nearly 3 crore who must provide documentary proof** of citizenship.
- **Migrants, students, and the urban poor** are at high risk of exclusion due to **lack of documentation**.
- Many may possess only **Aadhaar**, which is insufficient for citizenship verification.
- There are growing concerns of **bureaucratic overreach, data errors, and unjust exclusion**, potentially impacting **electoral participation and democratic inclusion**.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/bihar-assembly/bihar-voter-roll-revision-five-of-11-documents-sought-do-not-show-date-or-place-of-birth/article69788102.ece>