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# **SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLLS IN INDIA: CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEGAL CONTROVERSIES, AND DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls is a recent and controversial exercise undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to cleanse and update voter lists through door-to-door verification, large-scale deletions, and fresh inclusions<sup>1</sup>. While the Commission claims that the exercise is grounded in its constitutional authority under Article 324 and its statutory powers under Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act 1950, critics argue that the concept of “Special Intensive Revision” goes beyond the text of the statute and the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 .This doctrinal research paper examines the legal basis, procedure, and judicial scrutiny of Special Intensive Revision, with particular reference to the Bihar experience in 2025, and evaluates its implications for the principles of universal adult suffrage, electoral integrity, and constitutionalism. The paper argues that while periodic revision of electoral rolls is indispensable for credible elections, the opaque design and hurried implementation of Special Intensive Revision risk undermining inclusiveness and equality in the franchise, unless carefully constrained by clear statutory guidelines and judicial oversight.<sup>2</sup>

## **I. Introduction**

Accurate and inclusive electoral rolls are the backbone of a representative democracy premised on universal adult suffrage. In India, the preparation and revision of electoral rolls is a constitutionally sensitive function entrusted to the Election Commission of India, an independent constitutional body meant to insulate

elections from partisan interference. Over time, concerns about duplication of <sup>2</sup>entries, migration, deaths, and wrongful inclusion or exclusion of voters have led to more frequent and intensive revision exercises, culminating in the recent practice described as “Special Intensive Revision” (SIR) of electoral rolls <sup>3</sup>.

In 2025, the ECI’s decision to conduct a Special Intensive Revision in Bihar, covering more than eight crore electors, triggered intense public debate and litigation . Supporters portrayed SIR as an essential cleansing operation to restore accuracy and trust in voter lists, while critics questioned its legal basis, methodology, and potential to disenfranchise vulnerable groups . Against this background, the present doctrinal research paper seeks to systematically analyse the constitutional and statutory framework governing electoral roll revision, the emergence and practice of SIR, the judicial response to recent challenges, and the broader democratic implications of such exercises <sup>4</sup>.

The central research questions of this paper are: what is the legal foundation for Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in India; does SIR conform to the statutory scheme under the Representation of the People Act 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules 1960; how has the judiciary responded to challenges

against SIR, particularly in Bihar; and what are the implications of SIR for electoral integrity, voter inclusion, and constitutional rights? .The hypothesis advanced here is that while electoral rolls cannot remain static and some form of special revision is necessary, the particular design of SIR, as currently framed and executed, suffers from statutory ambiguity and procedural opacity that can undermine constitutional guarantees of equality and the right to vote unless

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1. The Constitution of India 1950, art 324(2).

2. The Constitution of India 1950, arts 14, 21, 326.

3. Representation of the People Act 1950, s 21(3).

4. Registration of Electors Rules 1960, rr 10–26.

reforms are introduced<sup>5</sup>.

## II. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a doctrinal and analytical research methodology. It relies on constitutional provisions relating to the conduct of elections, particularly Article 324 and the scheme of Part XV of the Constitution; on statutory texts such as the Representation of the People Act 1950 (RPA 1950) and the Registration of Electors Rules 1960; on secondary sources including academic articles, editorial analyses, exam-oriented notes, and policy commentaries; and on judicial decisions and case reports relating to the ECI's powers over electoral rolls and specific challenges to the Bihar SIR. The paper deliberately avoids reliance on encyclopaedic web sources and prefers official documents, serious doctrinal commentary, and specialised current-affairs notes<sup>6</sup>.

## III. Constitutional and Statutory Framework

### (a) Article 324 and the ECI's Constitutional Role

Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections to Parliament, state legislatures, and the offices of President in the Election Commission of India. This broad constitutional mandate has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the power to decide various aspects of electoral administration, subject to statutory prescriptions and constitutional norms of fairness, non-arbitrariness, and equality. Electoral rolls form a crucial part of the "superintendence and control" function, as they determine who is entitled to vote in a given constituency. The Court has repeatedly emphasised that electoral rolls cannot remain static and must be periodically revised to remove names of deceased or migrated voters and to add newly eligible citizens. At the same time, Article 324 is not a *carte blanche*; the Commission's powers must operate within the framework of laws made by Parliament, especially the RPA 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules 1960. In leading

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5. *Mohinder Singh Gill v Chief Election Commissioner* (1978) 1 SCC 405

6. *Election Commission of India v Union of India* (1995) 4 SCC 611. 11

7. *M. Siddiq (Dead) through Legal Representatives v. Mahant Suresh Das*, (2019) 18 SCC 1 (India) (Ayodhya Title Dispute)

8. *Gopal Singh Visharad v. Zahoor Ahmad & Ors.*, Civil Suit No. 2 of 1950, Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad

9. *Sunni Central Waqf Board v. Gopal Singh Visharad & Ors.*, Judgment dated 30 Sept. 2010, Allahabad High Court, Lucknow Bench (Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid title suits)

10. Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry* (Govt. of India, 2009)

decisions, the Supreme Court has underlined that where Parliament has enacted a detailed statutory scheme, the ECI cannot act in a manner that directly contradicts that scheme, even under the guise of ensuring free and fair elections<sup>7</sup>.

### **(b) Representation of the People Act 1950**

The RPA 1950 provides the primary statutory basis for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. Section 21 of the Act authorises preparation and revision of electoral rolls for each constituency, including regular and special revisions, subject to rules made under the Act. Section 21(3) enables the Commission to direct that the electoral roll “shall be revised in any year or in any constituency” by various methods, including special revision, if it deems it necessary. Commentators note that this provision gives the ECI discretion to order special revision exercises, but does not explicitly use the phrase “Special Intensive Revision”<sup>8</sup>.

### **(c) Registration of Electors Rules 1960**

The Registration of Electors Rules 1960 set out the detailed procedure for registration, correction, inclusion, deletion, and revision of electoral rolls. They distinguish between general revision, special revision, and continuous updating through forms and objections, and also specify timelines, modes of publication, and rights of electors to file claims and objections. Analysts point out that although the rules contemplate different kinds of revision, they do not expressly recognise a hybrid category combining “special” and “intensive” revision. This textual silence forms the core of the legal debate about whether SIR is a legitimate use of discretionary power or an extra-statutory innovation that stretches the statutory framework beyond its intended limits<sup>9</sup>.

## **IV. Concept and Evolution of Special Intensive Revision**

### **(a) Defining Special Intensive Revision**

Special Intensive Revision can be described as a comprehensive, door-to-door verification exercise of electoral rolls, involving fresh enumeration, document scrutiny, and large-scale inclusion and deletion of entries, usually in the run-up to major elections. Unlike ordinary or summary revision, which often relies on applications and limited field verification, SIR combines features of a full-scale intensive revision with additional special focus areas identified by the Commission. Authoritative exam and editorial notes characterise SIR as an

attempt to produce a more accurate and inclusive voter list by systematically checking addresses, age, and eligibility of existing and potential voters.

The exercise is designed to remove duplicate entries, deceased or shifted voters, and ineligible persons, while also seeking to add first-time voters, migrants, and those previously left out. In principle, such an intensive revision should reduce errors of both inclusion and exclusion; in practice, however, its outcomes depend heavily on the quality of training, clarity of guidelines, and the level of transparency in implementation<sup>10</sup>.

### **(b) Legal Basis Claimed for SIR**

The ECI justifies SIR primarily on two grounds: its constitutional mandate under Article 324 to ensure free and fair elections, and its statutory authority under Section 21(3) of the RPA 1950 to direct special revision of electoral rolls, read with the Registration of Electors Rules 1960. Institutional summaries explain that the Commission issues a formal notification specifying the nature of the revision, the qualifying date, and the schedule for house-to-house verification and claims or objections. In these notifications, the Commission has described the exercise as “Special Intensive Revision”, asserting that the combination of special and intensive methods is within its discretion as long as the overall framework of Section 21 and the rules is respected<sup>11</sup>.

### **(c) Emergence in Recent Electoral Practice**

The practice of more aggressive and focused revisions has gradually evolved in response to political controversies over bogus voters, demographic changes, and allegations of partisan manipulation of rolls. In several states, especially those heading to crucial elections, the ECI has resorted to targeted revision campaigns, sometimes described as special summary or intensive exercises, before adopting the specific label “Special Intensive Revision”. The Bihar SIR of 2025 represents the most prominent recent instance, both because of its scale and because it was immediately challenged before the Supreme Court and closely tracked by legal commentators and civil society groups<sup>12</sup>.

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11 Drishti IAS, ‘Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls’ (Daily News Editorial, 29 September 2025) <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/special-intensive-revision-of-electoral-rolls-1>

12 Special Intensive Revision In Bihar: Statutory Authority, Proof of Citizenship and Electoral Rolls’ (LiveLaw, 13 July 2025) <https://www.livelaw.in/articles/bihar-elections-special-intensive-revision-voters-list-and-proof-of->

## V. Procedure and Operational Features of SIR

### (a) Door-to-door Verification

The defining procedural feature of SIR is door-to-door verification of electors by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) or other field staff. During this exercise, officials visit households to verify the presence, eligibility, and particulars of all persons whose names appear on the rolls, as well as to identify eligible citizens whose names are missing. Sources summarising the Bihar SIR explain that BLOs were tasked with verifying age, citizenship, residence, and other details, and with collecting documentary proof where required<sup>20</sup>. In theory, such physical verification should reduce errors and improve accuracy, but in practice it raises concerns about subjective judgments, lack of training, and the risk of arbitrary deletions. Where BLOs treat certain entries as “doubtful” without clear criteria or adequate notice, the revision process can result in the quiet removal of legitimate voters from the rolls<sup>13</sup>.

### (b) Timeline and Qualifying Date

SIR is typically scheduled in the months preceding major elections and uses a specific qualifying date to determine eligibility; for the Bihar exercise, persons who turned eighteen on or before 1 July 2025 were eligible to be included. The compressed timelines of these revisions often generate anxiety among political parties and civil society about whether there is adequate time for genuine voters to file claims and objections, particularly in remote or disadvantaged areas. Commentaries emphasise that the shorter the period between publication of revised rolls and the election, the higher the stakes of any wrongful deletion or omission<sup>14</sup>.

### (c) Inclusion, Deletion, and Correction

During SIR, the Commission seeks to include first-time voters and those previously omitted, delete names of deceased, migrated, duplicate, or otherwise ineligible voters, and correct errors in names, addresses, or other particulars. While these objectives are sound, the method of implementation is critical. Analysts point out that where deletions are carried out on the basis

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113 Supreme Court Observer, ‘Challenge to the ECI’s Revision of Electoral Rolls in Bihar (SIR)’ (Case File, 3 February 2026) <https://www.scobserver.in/cases/challenge-to-the-ecis-revision-of-electoral-rolls-in-bihar-sir-association-for-democratic-reforms/>

14 ForumIAS, ‘Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls – Significance and Challenges’ (11 July 2025) <https://forumias.com/blog/revision-of-electoral-role-significance-challenges-explained-pointwise/>

of doorstep information without robust safeguards, there is a risk that eligible voters—particularly the poor, migrants, and linguistic or religious minorities—may be removed without adequate notice. The absence of clear, uniform criteria for “doubtful” entries, and the heavy reliance on field-level discretion, compounds these risks <sup>15</sup>.

#### **(d) Use of Technology and Data**

Recent descriptions of SIR suggest increasing reliance on digital tools to cross-check entries, identify duplicates, and track field verification. While digitalisation can improve efficiency, it also raises privacy concerns and questions about data accuracy, especially where databases used for cross-verification themselves contain inaccuracies or biases. The absence of a clearly articulated data-protection framework in the context of electoral roll management adds another layer of normative concern, particularly when personal information is aggregated and shared across agencies <sup>16</sup>.

### **VI. Judicial Scrutiny and the Bihar Litigation**

#### **(a) Supreme Court’s Endorsement of Revision Power**

In recent proceedings concerning challenges to the Bihar SIR, the Supreme Court upheld the ECI’s authority to conduct a special intensive revision under Section 21(3) of the RPA 1950, read with its constitutional powers under Article 324. The Court observed that electoral rolls cannot remain static and must necessarily be revised to maintain their integrity, and that the Commission enjoys considerable discretion in determining the manner of revision. It noted that the mere addition of the word “intensive” does not, by itself, invalidate the exercise, so long as the underlying legal requirements of fairness, transparency, and adherence to the statutory framework are respected.

This reasoning confirms that Article 324 can be used to supplement statutory powers where necessary for the conduct of free and fair elections, but cannot be exercised in a manner that contradicts or overrides explicit statutory provisions. The Court’s approach is consistent with earlier jurisprudence that recognises both the breadth and the limits of the ECI’s authority over

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115 The India Forum, ‘Explainer: What is the Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls?’ (21 July 2025) <https://www.theindiaforum.in/politics/explainer-what-special-intensive-revision-electoral-rolls>

16 Gautam Bhatia, ‘The Unravelling of the SIR Challenge’ (Indian Constitutional Law and Philosophy, 2 February 2026) <https://indconlawphil.wordpress.com/2026/02/03/the-unravelling-of-the-sir-challenge/>

electoral processes<sup>17</sup>.

### **(b) Concerns Raised by Petitioners and Commentators**

Despite the Court's formal endorsement, several concerns raised in litigation and public commentary remain salient. First, critics argue that neither the RPA 1950 nor the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 explicitly envisage an exercise that combines "special" and "intensive" revision, leading to a form of statutory ambiguity. They contend that the ECI's notices sometimes speak in mandatory terms, invoking provisions meant for general revision while describing the process as special intensive, thereby blurring legal categories and weakening procedural safeguards<sup>18</sup>.

Second, commentators worry that large-scale deletions during SIR may amount, in substance, to a quasi-citizenship verification exercise, especially where proof of citizenship is demanded in practice, even if not expressly required by the statute. This could transform a routine electoral administration exercise into a mechanism with serious implications for Articles 14, 21, and 326, by effectively shifting the burden onto individual voters to prove not only their residence and age, but also their citizenship status<sup>19</sup>.

Third, the compressed timelines and limited public awareness around SIR may restrict the ability of voters to challenge wrongful deletions or to file claims for inclusion, particularly in rural and marginalised communities. Commentaries on the Bihar SIR highlight the risk that socio-economically vulnerable groups might be disproportionately affected if field officers treat them as "doubtful" voters or if documentation requirements are applied rigidly<sup>20</sup>.

### **(c) Ongoing Monitoring and Case Tracking**

Legal tracking platforms document that challenges to the Bihar SIR have involved both interim and final hearings, with the Supreme Court allowing the exercise to proceed while reserving

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117 Lukmaan IAS, 'Balancing Electoral Integrity and Universal Adult Franchise: Analysing the Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls in Bihar' (Blog, 9 July 2025) <https://blog.lukmaanias.com/2025/07/10/balancing-electoral-integrity-and-universal-adult-franchise-analysing-the-special-intensive-revision-of-electoral-rolls-in-bihar/>

18 The India Forum, 'Explainer: What is the Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls?' (21 July 2025) <https://www.theindiaforum.in/politics/explainer-what-special-intensive-revision-electoral-rolls>

19 The India Forum, 'Bihar's Electoral Revision Puts the Poor's Rights at Risk' (7 July 2025) <https://www.theindiaforum.in/politics/bihars-electoral-revision-puts-poor-rights-risk>

20 'Sentinel in the Dock: The Election Commission Today' *The India Forum* (PDF, November 2025) [https://www.theindiaforum.in/sites/default/files/article\\_pdf/2025/11/07/1896-1762487388.pdf](https://www.theindiaforum.in/sites/default/files/article_pdf/2025/11/07/1896-1762487388.pdf)

the right to examine specific grievances. This approach reflects the Court's traditional reluctance to interfere with the timing and conduct of elections, combined with a recognition that specific instances of wrongful exclusion can still be addressed through appropriate legal remedies. However, given the scale of SIR and the difficulty of individual litigation for each wrongful deletion, the effectiveness of such case-by-case remedies is open to question. This reinforces the need for structural safeguards within the SIR framework itself<sup>21</sup>.

## **VII. Democratic and Policy Implications**

### **(a) Electoral Integrity versus Voter Exclusion**

The normative case for SIR is grounded in the widely acknowledged need to maintain clean and accurate electoral rolls as a precondition for free and fair elections. Removing duplicates and ineligible entries prevents multiple voting and protects the principle of "one person, one vote". At the same time, the right to vote, while statutory in form, is closely tied to fundamental constitutional values of equality and democratic participation.

Thus, any revision exercise must balance the objective of cleansing the rolls with the imperative of avoiding wrongful disenfranchisement. When SIR is implemented aggressively, with ambitious deletion targets and limited safeguards, the risk of eligible voters being excluded may outweigh the benefits of marginal accuracy gains. In such situations, the revision process itself can undermine the legitimacy it seeks to protect, particularly if patterns of exclusion align with existing social or political cleavages<sup>22</sup>.

### **(b) Impact on Marginalised Groups**

Empirical and policy-oriented commentary suggests that revision exercises tend to disproportionately affect groups with weaker documentation and tenuous residence patterns, such as migrants, informal workers, urban poor, and certain minority communities. If SIR relies heavily on documentary proof and field-level discretion, these groups may face higher risks of deletion and greater barriers to re-enrolment. The combination of short timelines, low legal awareness, and bureaucratic complexity can compound these disadvantages. In extreme cases,

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21 Vajiram & Ravi, 'Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls' (Current Affairs, 1 February 2026) <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/special-intensive-revision-of-electoral-rolls/>

22 Drishti IAS, 'Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls' (News Analysis, 10 July 2025) <https://www.drishtiiias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/11-07-2025>

voters may only discover that their names have been removed when they arrive at the polling station, at which point effective remedy is practically impossible<sup>23</sup>.

### **(c) Institutional Trust and Transparency**

SIR also has implications for public trust in the Election Commission and the electoral process more generally. Transparent procedures, clear communication of criteria, and accessible grievance-redress mechanisms are critical for maintaining confidence that the revision exercise is neutral and fair. Where SIR is perceived as opaque or selectively targeted, it may fuel suspicions that revision is being used to influence electoral outcomes by shaping the composition of the electorate. Such perceptions, even if not proved in every instance, can be deeply damaging in a polarised political environment and may prompt further litigation and political contestation<sup>24</sup>.

## **VIII. Suggestions for Reform**

In light of the above analysis, several reforms can be proposed to bring Special Intensive Revision into closer alignment with constitutional and statutory principles.

First, Parliament should consider amending the RPA 1950 or the Registration of Electors Rules 1960 to explicitly define “Special Intensive Revision”, its permissible scope, and its relationship to existing categories of revision. Clear statutory language would reduce ambiguity and guide both the ECI and the courts. Second, the ECI should publish comprehensive guidelines on SIR, including criteria for identifying doubtful entries, documentation requirements, and safeguards against arbitrary deletion, and should disseminate these guidelines in regional languages through public campaigns<sup>25</sup>.

Third, before deleting names, the Commission should ensure robust notice to affected voters, including multiple modes of communication and reasonable time for filing objections, with special arrangements for persons with disabilities, the elderly, migrants, and others who may face difficulties in attending hearings or producing documents. Fourth, SIR exercises, especially in politically sensitive states, should be subject to independent monitoring by neutral

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2323 Drishti IAS, ‘Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls’ (Daily News Editorial, 29 September 2025) <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/special-intensive-revision-of-electoral-rolls-1>

24 ForumIAS, ‘Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls – Significance and Challenges’ (11 July 2025) <https://forumias.com/blog/revision-of-electoral-role-significance-challenges-explained-pointwise/>

institutions, such as human rights commissions, academic centres, or citizen committees, and periodic audits of deletion and inclusion patterns should be undertaken to detect systemic biases or irregularities <sup>26</sup>.

Fifth, as SIR increasingly relies on digital tools and database cross-verification, the ECI should adopt explicit data-protection protocols, limiting the use, sharing, and retention of personal data collected during the revision and aligning electoral administration with broader constitutional commitments to privacy and dignity. Finally, the Supreme Court and High Courts should develop more precise standards for evaluating SIR-related disputes, balancing the Commission's operational autonomy with the need to protect the right to vote and equality, so that courts can intervene in cases of systemic violation without unduly disrupting legitimate electoral management <sup>27</sup>.

## IX. Conclusion

Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls represents a significant evolution in India's electoral management practices, reflecting the Election Commission's desire to maintain accurate, inclusive, and trustworthy voter lists in a large and mobile democracy. Its legal justification rests on a combination of Article 324's broad constitutional mandate and Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1950, as interpreted by the Supreme Court. However, the concept and implementation of SIR raise serious questions of statutory fidelity, procedural fairness, and democratic inclusion, particularly when large-scale deletions are carried out within compressed timelines and under conditions of limited transparency.

The Bihar experience and related litigation underscore both the necessity of periodic revision and the dangers of over-broad or poorly regulated exercises that risk disenfranchising vulnerable citizens. This paper has argued that while SIR can, in principle, strengthen electoral integrity, it must be firmly grounded in explicit statutory provisions, detailed procedural safeguards, and robust judicial and public scrutiny. Only then can special intensive revision truly serve its stated objective of deepening India's democratic commitments instead of inadvertently undermining them <sup>28</sup>.

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225 Supreme Court Observer, 'Challenge to the ECI's Revision of Electoral Rolls in Bihar (SIR)' (Case File, 3 February 2026) <https://www.scoobserver.in/cases/challenge-to-the-ecis-revision-of-electoral-rolls-in-bihar-sir-association-for-democratic-reforms10>

26 Gautam Bhatia, 'The Unravelling of the SIR Challenge' (Indian Constitutional Law and Philosophy, 2

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