

Bihar Revises Voter Rolls Ahead of Elections

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The Election Commission of India (ECI) has launched a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, marking one of the most extensive updates in recent years. The revision, using July 1, 2025, as the qualifying date, comes ahead of the state's Assembly elections later this year, raising attention to the accuracy of the electoral rolls and efforts to include eligible voters.

The initiative is legally grounded in India's Constitution. Article 324 empowers the ECI to oversee elections, including preparation and maintenance of voter lists, while Article 326

guarantees universal adult suffrage for citizens aged 18 and above, subject to standard disqualifications. Parliament reinforced these rights through the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and subsequent rules, giving the ECI authority to conduct intensive revisions as needed.

The SIR involves door-to-door enumeration and verification against eleven official documents, including passports, driving licenses, and ration cards. Expanding the list of accepted documents from seven in earlier exercises aims to make registration more accessible. The process seeks to eliminate outdated or duplicate entries while enrolling new voters, including those reaching voting age. Preliminary reports indicate a significant portion of Bihar's approximately 79 million registered electors have submitted forms, suggesting substantial engagement.

However, the revision has faced scrutiny. Civil society groups allege potential exclusions, citing errors such as missing names or incorrect photographs. Some petitions submitted to India's Supreme Court claim that several million voters may have been omitted, with potential impacts on migrants, economically vulnerable groups, and minorities. The ECI maintains that the SIR is a routine update, not a removal campaign, and assures that no voter will be excluded without notification and appeal options.

Experts note that similar voter roll updates are standard in other democracies, including the United States and the United Kingdom, where revisions aim to protect election integrity while safeguarding participation. India's delisting of hundreds of unrecognized political parties is part of ongoing efforts to streamline electoral records.

Challenges remain in implementation. House-to-house verification can be prone to errors, particularly in remote or transient communities. Digital tools, such as the Voter Helpline app, offer self-verification options to reduce dependence on enumerators. The Supreme Court has emphasized evidence-based reforms and transparency to build public confidence in electoral processes.

The SIR in Bihar aims to balance electoral accuracy with inclusive voter participation. While legally robust, its success depends on careful execution to ensure that every eligible citizen can exercise their right to vote. Transparent procedures, outreach efforts, and timely corrections are expected to enhance public confidence and support the democratic process.