

# DECODE UPSC

## TOPIC - 6

**Crack Prelims, Ace Mains, Impress in Interview**



# SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION (SIR) OF ELECTORAL ROLLS

## Relevance of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls in UPSC

- **GS-II (Polity & Governance):** Directly linked to the Representation of People Act, Election Commission of India (ECI), electoral reforms, and citizen participation in democracy.
- **GS-II (Constitution):** Connects with **Article 324** (powers of ECI), universal adult suffrage, and free & fair elections.
- **GS-II (Social Justice):** Ensures inclusivity by adding marginalized, women, and youth voters, addressing democratic equality.
- **Essay & Ethics (GS-IV):** Can be used as an example of transparency, accountability, and people's trust in institutions.
- **Interview relevance:** Situational questions may ask how you would handle challenges in voter registration, fake entries, or awareness campaigns during SIR.

So, SIR acts as a **practical case study of democracy in action**—covering *GS-II (Polity, Governance, Constitution)*, *GS-IV (Ethics)*, *Essay*, and *Interview*.

## Context

- In September 2025, the Supreme Court intervened in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. The Court allowed voters excluded from the draft rolls to continue filing claims and objections even after the formal deadline, up to the last date for filing nominations. This came in the backdrop of large-scale exclusions — **nearly 65 lakh voters were dropped**, but only **33,000 re-inclusion claims** were filed compared to about **15 lakh new registrations**. The situation raised serious concerns of wrongful disenfranchisement and lack of clarity in the process. The Supreme Court directed the Bihar State Legal Services Authority to assist voters through para-legal volunteers and suggested that Aadhaar, ration card, and voter ID could be treated as valid proof of residence.

## Electoral Roll – Constitutional and Legal Framework

The electoral roll is the foundation of representative democracy as it determines who is eligible to exercise the right to vote.

- **Article 324** of the Constitution vests the Election Commission of India (ECI) with the power of superintendence, direction, and control over the preparation of electoral rolls.
- **Article 326** provides for **universal adult franchise**, granting the right to vote to every citizen aged 18 and above.
- The **Representation of the People Act, 1950** lays down detailed provisions:
  - *Section 16* excludes non-citizens and those disqualified.



- *Section 19* requires that a person must be a citizen, aged 18 or above, and “ordinarily resident” in a constituency.
- *Section 20* clarifies the meaning of “ordinarily resident,” which is more than temporary presence.
- *Section 20A* (inserted in 2010) allows Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to register in the constituency of their passport address.
- *Section 21* empowers ECI to undertake **special or intensive revision** whenever necessary.
- Thus, the legal foundation of SIR is well-established, and courts have consistently upheld ECI’s authority to revise rolls to ensure free and fair elections.

## What is Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

- SIR is a **comprehensive, time-bound, house-to-house verification** of electoral rolls conducted by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) under the supervision of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), District Election Officers (DEOs), and Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs). It aims to remove errors, delete ineligible entries such as duplicates or deceased persons, and add all eligible new voters.
- Historically, SIRs have been carried out in **1952-56, 1961, 1983-84, 1992-95, and 2002-04**, with Bihar’s last such exercise in **2003**. The **2025 SIR in Bihar** began on June 25 with a qualifying date of July 1, aiming to finalise rolls by September 30. With over **8 crore voters** to be covered before the upcoming Assembly elections in November 2025, the exercise was intended to ensure credibility of the electoral process.

## Why is SIR Needed?

- **Error-free rolls:** To eliminate duplicates, fake entries, and deceased voters.
- **Democratic legitimacy:** Free and fair elections depend on “one person, one vote, one value.”
- **Migration and urbanisation:** Rapid mobility creates mismatches between actual residence and voter registration.
- **Inclusion of new voters:** Ensures that first-time voters (18+) are not left out.
- **Technological upgrades:** Helps in linking electoral rolls with Aadhaar, enabling deduplication and future reforms like remote voting.

## Concerns and Challenges with the Current SIR in Bihar

Despite its objectives, the present SIR has drawn criticism on several grounds:

- **Risk of disenfranchisement:** The insistence on birth certificates of both the applicant and their parents is beyond the mandate of the ECI. It may exclude genuine voters, particularly the poor, women, and rural citizens who lack such documentation.
- **Impact on migrant workers:** India has nearly **15 crore migrant labourers** who often work outside their native constituencies. Strict interpretation of “ordinary residence” risks depriving them of voting rights, even though they habitually vote in their villages. Courts in past rulings have emphasised that ordinary residence does not require physical presence at all times.
- **Overlap with citizenship verification:** Verifying citizenship is the mandate of the Home Ministry, not the ECI. By demanding birth proofs, the SIR risks becoming a **de facto NRC exercise**, which is not its purpose.



- **Administrative burden:** With millions of voters to verify in a short time, BLOs are under pressure. This raises the chance of errors and arbitrary exclusions.
- **Low awareness and participation:** Despite large-scale deletions, very few re-inclusion claims were filed, suggesting that voters were either unaware or unable to navigate the process.
- **Digital exclusion:** Many voters, especially in rural areas, lack access to online systems, making it difficult to file claims.

## Judicial Stand and Safeguards

- The **Supreme Court** has repeatedly underlined the importance of inclusive voter lists. In *Mohinder Singh Gill vs Chief Election Commissioner (1977)*, it held that the ECI has wide powers under Article 324, but these must be exercised to uphold the democratic right to vote. In the current context, the SC allowed late filing of claims and suggested Aadhaar, ration card, and voter ID as valid standalone documents. This reduces the documentation burden and prevents mass exclusions.

## Pros and Cons of SIR

### Advantages:

- Cleans the rolls of ineligible voters.
- Enhances public trust in elections.
- Ensures all eligible voters are included.
- Updates the system in line with demographic changes.

### Disadvantages:

- May lead to wrongful exclusions of genuine voters.
- Citizenship verification goes beyond ECI's mandate.
- Disadvantages poor and marginalised groups without documents.
- Short timelines compromise accuracy and transparency.

## Way Forward

To balance accuracy with inclusivity, the following measures are crucial:

- **Simplified documentation:** Aadhaar, ration card, or voter ID should suffice for residence proof; parental documents should not be insisted upon.
- **Stronger verification process:** Greater involvement of BLOs, oversight by EROs, and participation of political parties through Booth Level Agents (BLAs).
- **Use of technology:** Employ AI to detect anomalies, link Aadhaar for deduplication, and consider blockchain-based secure rolls.
- **Special focus on vulnerable groups:** Camps for migrants, tribals, homeless, and disabled voters; multilingual awareness drives; helplines and para-legal volunteers for assistance.
- **Longer timelines and better awareness:** Give adequate time for claims and re-inclusions; ensure transparency in deletions.



- **Policy reforms:** Explore remote voting and portability of voter registration to better serve migrant populations.

## Conclusion

- The **Special Intensive Revision** of electoral rolls is a crucial exercise for strengthening Indian democracy. It ensures that electoral rolls are accurate, credible, and free from manipulation. However, excessive emphasis on eliminating errors without safeguards for inclusivity risks disenfranchising genuine voters, undermining the principle of universal suffrage guaranteed by Article 326. Therefore, the future of SIR must strike a balance: **clean rolls without clean sweeps**, where technology, awareness, and flexible documentation work together to uphold every citizen's right to vote.





# UPSC PRELIMS

## GS CSAT



## UPSC Prelims Multiple Choice Questions

1. With reference to the **Electoral Rolls in India**, consider the following statements:
  1. They are prepared by the Election Commission of India under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
  2. Non-citizens can be included in the electoral roll if they are ordinarily resident in the constituency.
  3. The qualifying date for inclusion in the roll can be the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, April, July, or October.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3



2. Consider the following provisions of the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**:

1. Section 16 – Disqualification of non-citizens from being enrolled.
2. Section 19 – Conditions for registration in the electoral roll.
3. Section 20 – Meaning of “ordinarily resident.”
4. Section 21 – Revision of electoral rolls.

Which of the above provisions are correctly matched?

- |                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| (a) 1, 2 and 3 only | (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4 |
| (b) 2 and 4 only    | (d) 1 and 3 only  |

3. The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls undertaken in Bihar (2025) was aimed at:

1. Removing duplicate and ineligible entries.
2. Ensuring inclusion of new eligible voters.
3. Verification of citizenship status of individuals.

Which of the above is/are the intended objectives of the SIR?

- |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| (a) 1 only       | (c) 2 and 3 only |
| (b) 1 and 2 only | (d) 1, 2 and 3   |

4. With reference to the **Supreme Court’s observations on the Bihar SIR (2025)**, which of the following is/are correct?

1. The Court allowed filing of claims and objections even after the official deadline.
2. It suggested Aadhaar, ration card, and voter ID as valid standalone documents for voter enumeration.
3. It held that the Election Commission lacked the authority to carry out the revision.

- |                  |
|------------------|
| (a) 1 and 2 only |
| (b) 2 and 3 only |
| (c) 1 and 3 only |
| (d) 1, 2 and 3   |

5. Why is the concept of “**ordinarily resident**” significant in the context of electoral rolls?

- (a) It prevents multiple entries of a voter in different constituencies.
- (b) It ensures that voters maintain real ties with the constituency for accountability.
- (c) It prevents migrant labourers from voting in their home constituencies.
- (d) It allows Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to be registered in their passport-based constituency.



## Answers

### 1. (b) 1 and 3 only

- Electoral rolls are prepared by ECI under **Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RPA, 1950)** → **Correct**.
- *Section 16* of RPA, 1950 **excludes non-citizens** → **Incorrect**.
- The **qualifying dates** for determining age eligibility (18 years) are 1<sup>st</sup> January, April, July, and October of the year → **Correct**.

### 2. (c) 1, 2, 3 and 4

- *Section 16* → Disqualifications (non-citizens, disqualified persons).
- *Section 19* → Age (18+) & ordinary residence.
- *Section 20* → Defines "ordinarily resident".
- *Section 21* → Preparation and **revision (summary or special)** of electoral rolls.
- → All correctly matched.

### 3. (b) 1 and 2 only

- The objective of SIR is to **clean electoral rolls** (remove duplicates, deaths, errors) and **add new voters**.
- Verification of citizenship is **not ECI's mandate**; that lies with the Ministry of Home Affairs. But in practice, demanding birth documents blurred this line, which is a major criticism.

### 4. (a) 1 and 2 only

- SC allowed filing of claims beyond Sept 1 → **Correct**.
- Aadhaar, ration card, voter ID suggested as valid → **Correct**.
- But SC **rejected** the petitioners' claim that ECI lacked authority. It upheld ECI's power under **RPA 1950** → **Incorrect**.

### 5. (b) It ensures that voters maintain real ties with the constituency for accountability.

- "Ordinarily resident" (*Section 20, RPA 1950*) means the place where a voter **habitually resides** and maintains social/political ties.
- It ensures genuine representation & prevents fraud.
- Migrant labourers remain a challenge, but the law does not intend to deprive them of voting rights.



# UPSC MAINS



## UPSC Mains Basic Questions

### 1. Why electoral rolls are considered the backbone of Indian democracy?

#### ✓ Answer Framework:

- **Introduction:**

In India, elections are the foundation of representative democracy. Electoral rolls determine who can vote, making them the backbone of the democratic process. Without an accurate and inclusive voter list, the principle of universal adult franchise under Article 326 loses meaning.

- **Body:**

**Role of electoral rolls:**

- Provide the list of eligible voters for every election.
- Prevent fraud by ensuring *one person, one vote*.
- Guarantee inclusion of all citizens above 18 years.



- **Legal foundation:**
  - **Article 324:** Election Commission controls electoral rolls.
  - Representation of the People Act, 1950: lays down rules on eligibility, exclusions, and revisions.
- **Practical importance:**
  - Error-free rolls strengthen public faith in elections.
  - Inclusion of new voters ensures fairness for youth.
  - Deletion of deceased/duplicate entries prevents manipulation.
- **Examples:**
  - In the 2025 Bihar case, 65 lakh voters were excluded, raising fears of wrongful disenfranchisement.
  - Past revisions (2002–04) improved credibility before Lok Sabha elections.
- **Conclusion:**

Electoral rolls are not just lists of names but the very foundation of people's power in a democracy. For India, the world's largest democracy, maintaining clean, inclusive, and up-to-date rolls ensures every citizen's right to vote is respected, keeping democracy vibrant.

## 2. Explain the need for revising electoral rolls regularly in India.

### ✓ Answer Framework:

- **Introduction:**

India has over 90 crore voters, with millions turning 18 every year. Migration, urbanisation, and demographic changes make it essential to revise electoral rolls periodically. Regular revision ensures fairness and accuracy in elections.
- **Body:**

**Why revision is needed:**

  - To add new voters (first-time 18+ citizens).
  - To delete names of deceased or ineligible persons.
  - To update residence details due to migration.
  - To prevent duplication and impersonation.

**Special Intensive Revision (SIR):**

  - House-to-house verification by Booth Level Officers.
  - Conducted periodically to ensure inclusivity.
  - Helps in linking rolls with Aadhaar for accuracy.



### Consequences of not revising:

- Fake entries may distort election outcomes.
- Exclusion of genuine voters weakens democracy.
- Reduces trust in Election Commission and democratic institutions.

### Examples:

- Bihar 2025 SIR aimed at covering 8 crore voters before assembly polls.
- In 1983–84, intensive revision corrected large-scale errors, strengthening electoral legitimacy.

### Conclusion:

- Regular revision of electoral rolls ensures that democracy reflects the will of the people. It balances accuracy with inclusivity, safeguarding universal adult franchise and keeping elections both free and fair.

## Advanced UPSC Mains Questions

### 1. Critically examine the significance of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the context of free and fair elections in India.

#### ✓ Answer Framework:

##### ● Introduction:

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy, and the electoral roll forms its foundation. Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a time-bound, house-to-house verification exercise aimed at cleaning electoral rolls. In 2025, Bihar's SIR attracted national attention when nearly 65 lakh voters were excluded, prompting Supreme Court intervention.

##### ● Body:

##### Significance of SIR:

- **Accuracy of rolls:** Eliminates duplicates, deceased voters, and fake entries.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensures eligible first-time voters (18+) are added.
- **Democratic legitimacy:** Upholds the principle of "one person, one vote, one value."
- **Adaptation to change:** Accounts for migration, urbanisation, and demographic shifts.
- **Technological readiness:** Supports linkage with Aadhaar for deduplication and future reforms like remote voting.

##### Concerns in practice:

- **Wrongful exclusions:** Over 65 lakh deletions in Bihar; only 33,000 re-inclusion claims filed.



- **Documentation burden:** Insistence on parental birth certificates goes beyond ECI's mandate.
- **Migrant exclusion:** Around 15 crore migrant workers risk being left out.
- **Digital divide:** Limited access to online claim systems in rural areas.
- **Administrative overload:** BLOs pressured to verify millions of records in short time.

#### **Judicial safeguards:**

- **Mohinder Singh Gill vs CEC (1977):** ECI has wide powers under Article 324 but must uphold voting rights.
- **SC in Bihar case (2025):** Allowed late claims, relaxed documents (Aadhaar, ration card, voter ID), and directed legal aid.

#### **Examples:**

- Bihar's 2025 SIR exposed risks of disenfranchisement.
- Past nationwide SIRs (1952-56, 1983-84, 2002-04) enhanced credibility of elections.

#### **Conclusion:**

- SIR plays a vital role in strengthening India's democracy by ensuring accurate and credible voter rolls. However, excessive focus on error elimination without safeguards for inclusivity risks disenfranchisement. The way forward lies in simplified documentation, use of technology, awareness campaigns, and judicial oversight – striking a balance between clean rolls and inclusive democracy.

## **2. "Clean rolls without clean sweeps" – In light of the Supreme Court's intervention in Bihar's 2025 Special Intensive Revision (SIR), discuss the challenges of balancing accuracy and inclusivity in electoral rolls.**

### **✓ Answer Framework:**

#### **• Introduction:**

Electoral rolls are the lifeline of India's representative democracy. While accuracy is essential to prevent fraud, inclusivity ensures that no genuine voter is excluded. The Bihar SIR (2025) demonstrated the tension between these goals when 65 lakh voters were excluded, raising fears of disenfranchisement, leading the Supreme Court to step in.

#### **• Body:**

##### **The need for accuracy:**

- Prevents bogus voting and impersonation.
- Removes deceased and duplicate entries.
- Enhances credibility of elections.



### **The need for inclusivity:**

- Universal adult franchise under Article 326 is a constitutional right.
- Excessive documentation requirements (like parental birth certificates) exclude poor, women, and rural voters.
- Migrant workers (15 crore in India) often lack proof of residence but are habitual voters in villages.
- Exclusions undermine trust in democracy.

### **Challenges in striking a balance:**

- Administrative overload on BLOs with short timelines.
- Lack of awareness campaigns leading to very few re-inclusion claims.
- Overlap with citizenship verification, which is beyond ECI's mandate.
- Digital divide makes filing claims difficult for many.

### **Judicial and institutional safeguards:**

- SC allowed late claims and objections until nomination filing.
- Relaxed documentation: Aadhaar, ration card, or voter ID as sufficient proof.
- Directed para-legal volunteers to help excluded voters.

### **Examples:**

- **Bihar 2025:** 65 lakh deletions but only 33,000 re-inclusion claims – highlighting exclusion risks.
- **2002-04 SIR:** Enhanced credibility of rolls nationwide without large-scale controversy.

### **Conclusion:**

- Balancing accuracy and inclusivity in electoral rolls is critical. While fraudulent entries undermine legitimacy, wrongful exclusions erode universal suffrage. The future of SIR lies in adopting a “clean but inclusive” approach – simplified documents, use of AI and technology, awareness drives, and judicial oversight. Clean rolls must not mean clean sweeps, but a stronger, more inclusive democracy.



# UPSC INTERVIEW



## UPSC Interview-Based Questions

1. If you were a District Election Officer (DEO) during the SIR and found that thousands of genuine voters were excluded due to lack of birth certificates, what steps would you take immediately?

✓ **Answer:**

As DEO, my first priority would be to prevent wrongful disenfranchisement. I would immediately direct BLOs to accept Aadhaar, voter ID, or ration cards as alternative proof, as also suggested by the Supreme Court. At the same time, I would escalate the issue to the CEO for official guidance while setting up help desks for affected voters. This balances legality with inclusivity.

2. As a Booth Level Officer (BLO), you notice that migrant labourers are not present in your constituency during the verification process. How would you ensure their right to be included in the electoral roll?



✓ **Answer:**

I would coordinate with their families and local leaders to verify their residence status, as courts have clarified that “ordinary residence” does not require continuous physical presence. Awareness drives through camps and NGOs could be arranged before migrants return home seasonally. Remote claim filing or Aadhaar-based verification can also be promoted to include them.

**3. Imagine political parties accuse you of favouring one side in deletions during the SIR process. How would you maintain impartiality and transparency?**

✓ **Answer:**

I would maintain a transparent system by publishing daily updates of claims and objections. Political party Booth Level Agents (BLAs) would be encouraged to observe the process, ensuring fairness. If allegations persist, I would invite an independent review by the CEO to restore trust. Impartiality must not only be done but also be seen to be done.

**4. Suppose an elderly woman comes to you saying her name was wrongly deleted, but she has only an Aadhaar card and no other proof of residence. What would you do?**

✓ **Answer:**

I would reassure her that Aadhaar is accepted as a valid document, as clarified by the Supreme Court in the current context. I would personally guide her through filing Form 6 for re-inclusion and track her case till it is processed. The aim is to combine empathy with efficiency so that no eligible citizen loses her right to vote.

**5. If as DEO, you are given only two months to finish SIR in a district with 25 lakh voters, how would you organise your staff and resources?**

✓ **Answer:**

I would break down the district into manageable zones and assign BLOs with clear daily targets. Regular video conferences would track progress and resolve bottlenecks. Technology like mobile apps for BLOs could speed up verification. Parallel awareness campaigns would ensure people know how to file claims. Strict time management and teamwork would make the deadline achievable.

**6. Why are electoral rolls called the backbone of Indian democracy?**

✓ **Answer:**

Because they decide *who can vote*. Clean and inclusive rolls ensure *universal adult franchise* under Article 326. Without them, elections lose credibility.



**7. What is the difference between general revision and Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls?**

✓ **Answer:**

General revision updates rolls annually through claims and objections. SIR is a *comprehensive, house-to-house verification* when large errors are suspected. It ensures accuracy before crucial elections.

**8. What risks arise if electoral rolls are not revised properly?**

✓ **Answer:**

Errors may allow fake or duplicate voters while excluding genuine ones. This weakens democratic legitimacy and invites disputes. Credibility of the Election Commission also suffers.

**9. In your opinion, how can technology make electoral rolls more accurate and inclusive?**

✓ **Answer:**

Linking with Aadhaar helps deduplication, while AI can detect anomalies. Blockchain can secure voter data. However, safeguards must ensure *privacy and inclusivity*.