

Daily Editorial Analysis 18 July 2025

July 18, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com

A Better Terror Fight With J&K Police Under Elected Government Reins

Context

- In June 2025, Jammu and Kashmir's Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reaffirmed the government's focus on eliminating terrorism from the region.
- Addressing police cadets at Sher-e-Kashmir Police Academy, Udhampur, he urged the J&K Police to combine modern technology, intelligence, community engagement, and inter-agency coordination with traditional beat policing methods.
- Against this backdrop, the present article highlights J&K's evolving security strategy and counter-terrorism efforts.

The Central Role of Local Police in J&K's Counter-Terror Efforts

- Lieutenant Governor of J&K rightly stressed the importance of the Jammu and Kashmir Police (JAKP) in fighting terrorism.
- This highlights a well-established fact: local police are the backbone of counter-terror operations, while central forces can only play a supporting role.
- The JAKP's strength lies in its deep familiarity with the region's terrain, demography, and strong community ties, which enable better human intelligence (HUMINT).
- The April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terror strike, where attackers remain at large, underscores gaps in such local intelligence.
- Addressing these gaps is essential to prevent future attacks. For this, continuous functional improvement of the JAKP is necessary, including ensuring its command is accountable to an elected government.
- Local representatives—sarpanches and MLAs—are trusted by the community and often possess vital information about terrorist activities, making their involvement in the security framework crucial for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Restoring Democratic Structures for Stronger Security in J&K

- Jammu and Kashmir has a strong tradition of democratic participation, especially in local body elections.
- However, due to prolonged security challenges, elected local representatives have rarely been given real authority as outlined in constitutional provisions.
- To strengthen counter-terrorism efforts, it is essential to restore and activate all levels of democratic governance—from panchayats and municipal bodies to MLAs and Members of Parliament—making them

accountable for security alongside the police.

- Without this, there is a risk of growing indifference among both leaders and the public, weakening local support against terrorism.
- Policymakers must promote structured dialogue between police forces and local leaders to share information, address community concerns, and enhance public safety.
- Given the region's varied challenges—such as the mix of local and foreign terrorist elements—solutions must be tailored locally rather than applying a uniform strategy.
- The JAKP, with its grassroots presence through local police stations, plays a crucial role in connecting governance with security, and this partnership needs to be reinforced for more effective outcomes.

Empowering Elected Leaders for Inclusive Security in J&K

- Keeping elected representatives outside Jammu and Kashmir's security framework weakens both governance and counter-terrorism efforts.
 - Restoring the JAKP under the control of an elected government would enhance accountability and ensure policing strategies reflect community needs and concerns.
 - Elected officials serve as a crucial link between the police and the public, helping build trust and cooperation essential for effective law enforcement.
 - While holding Assembly and parliamentary elections acknowledges people's democratic rights, true participatory governance requires involving these leaders in security matters, moving beyond a top-down, elitist approach.
 - Without this inclusion, Lieutenant Governor's vision of meaningful community engagement will remain incomplete.
 - Strengthening local democratic involvement is key to improving both governance and the region's overall security situation.
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The Parameters of 'Success' in Bihar's Poll Roll Revision

Context

- **Success, whether individual or institutional, is an elusive concept** and measuring it requires more than tallying outputs; it demands an evaluation of outcomes, processes, and legitimacy.
- The **distinction between the desire to be successful and the desperation to demonstrate success underscores the tension** many organisations face when their performance is under scrutiny.
- **Nowhere is this truer than in democratic institutions**, where credibility is both a function of competence and perception.
- The **recent controversy surrounding the Election Commission of India (ECI)** and its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral rolls **exemplifies the complexities of assessing success in governance**.

Institutional Legacy of ECI, Expectations and The Complexity of Its Success Metrics

- **Institutional Legacy of ECI and Expectations**

- The ECI's **historical reputation** compounds the **current dilemma**.
- From preparing the first electoral rolls in the nascent years of the republic to conducting elections for over a billion voters, **the ECI has earned global admiration as a gold standard**.
- Its **capacity to mobilise vast resources, standardise procedures**, and develop political consensus has strengthened its credibility.
- This **legacy creates high expectations**: any perceived faltering is amplified in public discourse.
- Thus, **the ECI's decision to launch an extraordinary revision of Bihar's rolls is judged not only on procedural correctness** but also against its storied record of efficiency and impartiality.

- **The Complexity of Success Metrics**

- For the ECI, the **challenge is not merely operational but normative**.
- Political parties, **the judiciary, civil society, and citizens each employ different yardsticks**.
- For some, **success may mean the integrity of the electoral rolls; for others, it may be inclusivity and avoidance** of disenfranchisement.
- The **ECI, therefore, operates in a trilemma**, balancing legality, feasibility, and legitimacy under public gaze.

The Bihar Imbroglio: Intentions and Contradictions

- On June 24, 2025, **the ECI announced its decision to undertake a large-scale cleansing of Bihar's electoral rolls**, an initiative framed as necessary to ensure purity of the rolls by excluding ineligible and including all eligible voters.
- **At first glance, this appears unassailable**: who could object to clean rolls?
- Yet, **the timing and execution sparked opposition** from political parties and civil society, raising fears of disenfranchisement.
- **Critics likened the demand for proof of eligibility** to requiring a marriage certificate decade into a settled marriage, **technically defensible but socially disruptive**.
- The **ECI's subsequent relaxations**, accepting parent-based credentials for post-2003 voters and allowing forms without supporting documents, **further complicated the narrative**.
- While **these adjustments were intended to ease compliance, they also raised operational ambiguities**:
 - How will officials verify eligibility without documentation? Will such flexibility withstand judicial scrutiny?
- Ultimately, **the ECI risks replacing one controversy** (stringent requirements) with another (perceived arbitrariness).

Defining Success of ECI's Action and The Citizenship Conundrum

- **Defining Success of ECI's Action: Inclusion, Exclusion, or Optics?**

- Should the ECI measure its achievement **by the sheer volume of duly filled forms, or by the number of ineligible names removed?**
- If **success hinges on the latter**, was an extraordinary exercise necessary when routine revisions could have addressed issues like duplicate entries or migration?
- Moreover, **the reliance on presumptions, such as assuming the 2003 rolls as a citizenship baseline**, raises legal and ethical concerns.
- **Can the ECI guarantee that post-revision, all names on the rolls are indisputably linked to Indian citizenship?** If not, is the exercise more symbolic than substantive?
- **The Citizenship Conundrum**
 - Perhaps the **most profound implication lies in conflating electoral registration** with proof of citizenship.
 - The **Representation of the People Act authorises the ECI to maintain accurate rolls** but does not make it the final arbiter of citizenship, a role vested in other legal frameworks.
 - By operationalising presumptions of citizenship, **the ECI risks venturing into contested legal territory.**
 - **No individual chooses their birthplace or documentation;** it is the state's responsibility to ensure reliable systems.
 - **Burdening citizens with retrospective documentary obligations**, especially in a state like Bihar with high migration and socio-economic vulnerability, **could undermine democratic participation.**

Conclusion

- The **ECI's Bihar initiative underscores the paradox of institutional success:** actions taken to enhance credibility can, if poorly timed or inadequately communicated, erode trust.
- **Success, in this context, cannot be reduced to procedural compliance** or statistical milestones.
- It must **encompass fairness, transparency, and sensitivity** to citizens' lived realities.
- Ultimately, **the question for whom the bell tolls, resonates beyond Bihar**, it tolls for every democratic institution grappling with the dual imperatives of integrity and inclusion.

The Parameters of 'Success' in Bihar's Poll Roll Revision FAQs

Q1. Why did the ECI announce a Special Intensive Revision in Bihar?

Ans. The Election Commission of India announced the Special Intensive Revision to purify the electoral rolls by ensuring that all eligible voters are included and all ineligible names are removed.

Q2. What controversy arose from the Bihar exercise?

Ans. The exercise sparked controversy because critics feared mass disenfranchisement of genuine voters and questioned both the timing and the feasibility of implementing such a large-scale revision.

Q3. What is the main dilemma for the ECI?

Ans. The ECI faces a dilemma in balancing legal compliance, operational efficiency, and maintaining public trust while addressing the concerns of multiple stakeholders such as political parties, the judiciary, and civil society.

Q4. Does inclusion in electoral rolls prove citizenship?

Ans. No, inclusion in electoral rolls does not prove citizenship because the ECI is not the legal authority to determine citizenship under Indian law; that responsibility lies with other designated authorities.

Q5. What is the larger question raised by this episode?

Ans. The larger question is how institutional success should be measured, whether by strict procedural adherence, tangible outcomes, or the ability to sustain public confidence and democratic inclusiveness.

Source: **The Hindu**

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-18-july-2025/>

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