

Challenges Confronting the Election Commission of India

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Election Commission Latest News

- The Election Commission of India is in the news over the Bihar Special Intensive Revision exercise, which led to mass voter deletions and Supreme Court scrutiny on electoral roll transparency.

Introduction

- The Election Commission of India (ECI), one of the most vital constitutional bodies safeguarding India's democracy, is under increasing scrutiny.
- Allegations of electoral roll discrepancies, the controversial **Special Intensive Revision** (SIR) in Bihar, and political criticism have placed the Commission in the spotlight.
- Recent interventions by the Supreme Court (SC) and protests by the Opposition have intensified debates around the ECI's role, autonomy, and credibility.

Constitutional Mandate of the Election Commission

- The Election Commission of India is a permanent constitutional body entrusted with the **superintendence, direction, and control** of elections to Parliament, state legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.
- Initially headed only by a **Chief Election Commissioner** (CEC), it now comprises two additional Election Commissioners, forming a three-member body.
- Its mandate is to ensure **free, fair, and impartial elections**, the cornerstone of Indian democracy.

The Appointment Controversy

- The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** reshaped the appointment process.
- The selection committee now includes the **Prime Minister, a Union Minister**, and the **Leader of the Opposition**.
- Opposition parties argue this structure compromises independence, as the government side holds a **2:1 majority**, raising fears of bias in appointments.

Allegations of Voter Roll Manipulation

- The EC has faced repeated accusations from Opposition parties:
 - **Maharashtra (2019-20)**: Allegations of lakhs of voters being added between Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.
 - **Haryana and Delhi**: Similar claims of manipulated voter lists before the Assembly elections.
 - **Karnataka (2024 Lok Sabha)**: INC alleged large-scale discrepancies in the Mahadevapura constituency, including duplicate and bulk registrations.
- These allegations have renewed calls for **machine-readable voter rolls**, which the EC has resisted, citing cybersecurity concerns, a stance earlier upheld by the SC.

The Bihar SIR and Supreme Court Intervention

- The EC's Special Intensive Revision in Bihar, announced in June 2025 ahead of Assembly polls, mandated voters to submit proof of birth and citizenship.
- This led to the deletion of **65 lakh names** from the electoral rolls, reducing Bihar's voter base from 7.89 crore to 7.24 crore.
- The SC, in an interim order, directed the EC to:
 - Publish booth-wise lists of deleted names.
 - Provide reasons for deletion (death, migration, duplication, etc.).
 - Accept Aadhaar as valid proof of identity.

Challenges of Migrant Voters

- India's internal migrant population continues to face barriers in exercising voting rights.

- Migrants must travel back to their registered constituencies, which imposes costs and reduces turnout.
- Experts stress the need for a **cheap, transparent, and secure system**, tailored to the realities of poor migrants, unlike models in advanced economies.

Political Fallout and Growing Protests

- The controversy has escalated politically:
 - INC's press conference on voter roll manipulation spurred the Opposition to demand accountability.
 - Protests outside the EC office led to the arrests of opposition MPs.
 - Parliament's Monsoon Session has faced repeated disruptions over the Bihar SIR issue.

Broader Concerns for Electoral Integrity

- The unfolding events raise critical challenges for the EC:
 - **Ensuring Transparency** – Addressing claims of voter roll manipulation.
 - **Protecting Voter Rights** – Preventing mass exclusions while maintaining accuracy.
 - **Balancing Cybersecurity and Accessibility** – Providing machine-readable rolls without compromising data safety.
 - **Safeguarding Institutional Independence** – Resisting political influence in appointments and decision-making.

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