

Form 7 Controversy and Electoral Roll Revisions in India

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Electoral Roll Latest News

- Concerns have emerged over the alleged misuse of Form 7 applications during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, leading to large-scale deletion of voters' names across several States.

Electoral Rolls and Their Importance in Indian Democracy

- Electoral rolls form the foundation of India's democratic process, ensuring that every eligible citizen has the right to vote.
- Prepared and updated under the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**, these rolls are periodically revised to include new voters and remove ineligible entries.
- The credibility of elections depends heavily on the accuracy, transparency, and fairness of this process.
- Any large-scale error or manipulation can directly impact political representation and voter confidence in the electoral system.

Form 7 and Its Legal Framework

- Form 7 is a statutory mechanism used to object to the inclusion of a person's name in the electoral roll.
- Under the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, objections can be raised on specific grounds such as death, duplication of entries, shifting of residence, ineligibility due to age, or lack of citizenship.
- Earlier, objections could be raised only by voters from the same polling booth.
- However, a 2022 amendment expanded the scope, allowing any voter within a constituency to file objections.
- While intended to improve roll accuracy, this change also increased the risk of misuse.
- To prevent abuse, rules mandate verification by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), especially when an individual files more than five objections.

Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls

- The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a comprehensive exercise undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to update electoral rolls in select States and Union Territories.
- Phase II of the ongoing SIR has covered nearly 51 crore voters across multiple regions, including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and others.
- The revision follows a compressed timeline, involving enumeration forms, objections, verification by Booth Level Officers (BLOs), and hearings before final publication of the rolls.

Nature of the Form 7 Controversy

- The controversy centres on the **bulk filing of Form 7 applications**, allegedly without the knowledge or consent of the voters concerned.
- Opposition parties have accused organised actors of misusing Form 7 to systematically delete the names of eligible voters, thereby distorting the electoral process.
- Reports from States such as Rajasthan and Gujarat have highlighted cases where individuals claimed that Form 7 applications were submitted in their names without their involvement.
- This has raised serious concerns about impersonation, procedural lapses, and administrative oversight.

Scale of Voter Deletions

- According to draft electoral rolls released during the SIR, around **6.5 crore voters** were removed from the rolls across nine States and three Union Territories.
- These deletions reduced the total electorate from about 51 crore to 44.4 crore in the affected regions. The removed voters were categorised as **ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead/Duplicate)**.
- The highest number of deletions was reported from Uttar Pradesh, followed by Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.
- Critics argue that the sheer scale of deletions, combined with a tight revision schedule, raises questions about the adequacy of verification and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Verification Process and Safeguards

- Once a Form 7 application is submitted, Booth Level Officers are required to conduct physical verification.
- In cases of alleged death, confirmation from neighbours and a death certificate are necessary.

- If a voter is reported absent, BLOs must conduct multiple visits to confirm relocation.
- Affected voters are entitled to receive notice and attend hearings before final deletion.
- Appeals against ERO decisions can be filed with the district magistrate within 15 days of the roll publication.
- Despite these safeguards, concerns persist about their effective implementation under time pressure.

Concerns and the Way Forward

- At the core of the controversy lies the risk of **voter disenfranchisement**, particularly among marginalised and economically weaker sections.
- Filing a false declaration under Form 7 is a punishable offence under Section 32 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Experts suggest stricter scrutiny of bulk applications, improved digital tracking, longer verification timelines, and enhanced transparency to restore trust in the electoral revision process.
- Ensuring balance between roll accuracy and voter protection remains crucial.

Source: TH

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