

Current Issue

Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

Question 02

The integrity of the electoral roll is the bedrock of a healthy democracy. In this light, critically evaluate the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) as a mechanism to address the challenges of 'ghost voters' and illegal migration in border states.

Question Understanding - Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
(GS Paper – II)
- **Marks and words limit:**
 - The marks-oriented approach to answering **(10-mark, 150-word)** questions in the question is to use **Bullet Points** (one idea per bullet point), **Brainstorming**, or a combination of both.
 - The way to score good marks in questions worth **(15 marks. 250 words)** is to use the **Heading** and **Subheading** method while writing your answers.
- **Nature of the Question:**
 - Statement based + Critical evaluation with reference to the statement
 - Requires balanced assessment, not endorsement
- **Directive words:**
 - Critically evaluate → merits + limitations + safeguards
- **Focal points of the questions:**
 - Integrity of electoral rolls
 - Special Intensive Revision (SIR)
 - Ghost voters
 - Illegal migration
 - Border states (higher vulnerability)

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

Introduction Paragraph

- Normative democratic value
- Link SIR to electoral integrity

Body Paragraph

A. Why SIR is Relevant in Border States

Go through:

- High population mobility
- Cross-border migration
- Weak civil registration systems
- Political sensitivity of demographics

B. Strengths of SIR in Addressing Ghost Voters & Migration

Mention:

- Door-to-door verification improves accuracy
- Removal of deceased / duplicate entries
- Updating of habitual residence
- Enhances electoral legitimacy
- Reinforces “one person, one vote”

C. Limitations & Concerns

Highlight:

- Risk of exclusion errors, especially among migrants
- Documentation gaps in border areas
- Possibility of administrative overreach
- Fear of conflation with citizenship determination
- Time-intensive and resource-heavy exercise

D. Way Forward / Safeguards

Briefly suggest:

- Transparency
- Robust grievance redressal
- Use of technology + human oversight
- Clear distinction from citizenship processes

Conclusion (max. 40 Words)

- End with democratic balance.

Dos & Don'ts

- **Do for Maximum Marks**
 - ✓ Use terms like electoral integrity, democratic legitimacy
 - ✓ Maintain critical balance
 - ✓ Focus on administrative mechanism, not politics
 - ✓ Link SIR to border-specific challenges
- **Don't do these Common Mistakes**
 - × Don't equate SIR with citizenship verification
 - × Don't take partisan positions
 - × Don't ignore risks of exclusion
 - × Don't over-detail operational minutiae

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

Maintaining the integrity of the electoral roll is essential for the legitimacy of India's representative democracy. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is a comprehensive, time-bound house-to-house verification drive launched by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure that voter lists are accurate and error-free.

Understanding Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

- **Legal Basis:** Conducted under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and powered by Article 324 of the Constitution, which grants the ECI discretionary powers to revise rolls as it deems fit.
- **Methodology:** Unlike routine summary revisions, SIR involves fresh enumeration through house-to-house visits by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) to verify voter identity, residence, and document authenticity.
- **Current Context:** The ECI recently launched SIR 2.0 across 12 states and UTs, including border states like West Bengal, following concerns over demographic manipulation and long-standing errors.

Addressing 'Ghost Voters' and Illegal Migration

The SIR acts as a robust tool to identify and remove ineligible entries that undermine electoral purity:

- **Elimination of Ghost Voters:** Physical door-to-door verification effectively identifies deceased persons and duplicate entries that may have accumulated over years.
- **Tackling Illegal Migration:** In border states like West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar, SIR requires voters to provide documentary proof of birth and parentage, particularly for those enrolled after January 2003. This "legacy linkage" aims to purge non-citizens who may have fraudulently obtained voter identity cards.
- **Addressing Demographic Shifts:** Rapid urbanisation and internal migration have led to many voters being registered in multiple places; SIR maps these patterns to ensure voters are registered only in their place of "ordinary residence".

Critical Evaluation: Challenges and Concerns

While essential for roll purity, the SIR mechanism faces significant criticisms:

- **Risk of Mass Disenfranchisement:** Stricter documentation requirements (e.g., birth certificates or legacy records) can disproportionately impact the poor, homeless, and marginalised groups who lack formal records.
- **'De Facto' Citizenship Test:** Critics and some opposition parties argue that SIR functions as a stealth National Register of Citizens (NRC), shifting the burden of proof to citizens to prove their eligibility through complex ancestry-linked documents.
- **Impact on Internal Migrants:** Mobile workers often return home periodically; if they are absent during a BLO visit, they risk being categorised as "permanently shifted" and removed from the rolls.
- **Political Manipulation:** There are fears that the process can be politicised, with allegations of targeted deletions aimed at suppressing the votes of specific communities or opposition supporters.
- **Administrative & Logistical Strain:** The massive scale of re-verifying millions of voters within tight pre-election deadlines can lead to human error and a lack of transparency in the hearing and objection process.

Way Forward

To balance electoral integrity with inclusivity, the following measures are suggested:

- **Broaden Acceptable Documents:** The Supreme Court has suggested including widely held IDs like Aadhaar (as residency proof), ration cards, and voter IDs to prevent the exclusion of genuine citizens.
- **Community-Based Verification:** Empowering BLOs to rely on local inquiry and community witnesses for vulnerable populations who lack formal papers.
- **Technological Integration:** Using AI/ML tools to identify suspicious patterns in deletions and providing real-time digital dashboards for public tracking of roll updates.
- **Continuous Updation:** Shifting towards strong, continuous annual updating mechanisms to reduce the need for disruptive, episodic "intensive" overhauls.

Overall, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has the potential to strengthen the integrity of the electoral roll by identifying duplicate, fake and ineligible entries, particularly in sensitive border states. However, its effectiveness depends on strict adherence to due process, transparency, and adequate safeguards against arbitrary exclusions. A technology-enabled, inclusive and legally sound SIR supported by inter-agency coordination and robust grievance redressal can address the menace of 'ghost voters' and illegal migration without undermining the fundamental democratic right to vote.

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