# Aadhaar-Based Reform for Electoral Rolls

***Mains:*** *GS II – Governance.*

## Why in news?

*Recently, The Election Commission of India (ECI) has been conducting the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls across the nation, resulting in the deletion of over 13 crore entries.*

## What is  SIR Form?

- **SIR Form** – Special Intensive Revision Form / Enumeration Form is an official voter verification document issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- It is used by booth Level Officers (BLOs) during door-to-door verification, to verify living voters, remove duplicate or ghost entries, update details, and remove deceased individuals.

## Why Traditional SIR lacks efficiency?

- **Paperwork Burden –** Checking voter records in person requires too many paper documents.
- This puts a heavy burden on regular people who have to collect and show these papers in a very short time.
- **Risk of Deleting Real Voters –** The schedule is so rushed, officers often accidentally delete real voters from the list, especially people who are temporarily away from home or don't have old family documents.
- **Danger of Losing Government Benefits –** In some areas, if a voter's name is wrongly deleted from the list, their family risks losing access to important support like food rations and pensions.

## What is the need for a "Smarter" Approach?

- **Using Technology –** Using smart tools like Aadhaar's system for finding duplicates, secure phone apps, and digital tracking can help prevent human errors.

- **Targeted Verification –** Instead of forcing every citizen through a long, strict paper process, officials can use targeted updates to focus only on unusual records without bothering regular residents.
- **Protecting the Right to Vote –** Make sure that efforts to remove fake or deceased voters ("ghost voters") do not accidentally stop real, poor, or disadvantaged citizens from exercising their right to vote.

## What are the main challenges associated with the current Special Intensive Revision (SIR)?

- **Socio-Economic Disruptions**
  - **Documentation Barriers –** Paper verification burdens marginalized groups lacking continuous documentation trails.
  - **Welfare Disruption –** Linking roll deletions to welfare databases threatens poor families' access to rations and pensions.
  - **Judicial Bottlenecks –** Manual field deletions cause legal friction, creating long delays in clearing administrative appeals.
- **Administrative Inefficiencies**
  - **Human Resource Strain –** Revision drives pull 10 lakh public servants—mostly school teachers—from core duties.
  - **Recurring Exchequer Costs –** Door-to-door cycles waste thousands of crores without creating permanent digital infrastructure.
- **Constitutional and Technological Dimensions**
  - **Federal Jurisdiction Deficit –** Doorstep surveys cannot determine citizenship, as constitutional authority rests exclusively with the Ministry of Home Affairs.
  - **Digital De-duplication –** Aadhaar face-authentication offers a voluntary, zero-knowledge framework to eliminate ghost voters efficiently.

> *An **exchequer** is a national treasury or the government department responsible for managing public money and state revenue.*

## How can Aadhaar integration address these vulnerabilities?

| Structural Issue | Traditional SIR Limitations | Aadhaar-EPIC Solution |
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| **Verification Method** | Manual door-to-door visits by 10 lakh field staff requiring paper documents. | Voluntary digital face-authentication via mobile or web applications. |
| **Deduplication and Ghosts** | Prone to human error, duplicate registrations, and delayed appeal disposals. | Biometric uniqueness guarantees zero duplicate entries and eliminates ghost voters. |
| **Age Eligibility Check** | Demands historical birth registration, which was patchy for rural and poor populations. | Verified through Aadhaar enrolment history (biometrics captured $\geq 5$ years of age prove $\geq 18$ $CO_2e$ status today). |
| **Fiscal Burden** | Recurring exchequer cost of thousands of crores every revision cycle. | Modest, one-time software build over existing national digital infrastructure. |

## How can technology facilitate a seamless revision process?

- **Scalable Biometric Authentication –** Linking UIDAI face-authentication with Voter ID (EPIC) uses proven, privacy-focused digital technology.
- **Proven Scale –** Face authentication already works at scale in DigiYatra at airports and Jeevan Pramaan for pensioner life certificates.
- **Privacy-by-Design Architecture –** The verification framework uses a zero-knowledge setup, returning a simple "yes/no" response without revealing personal data.
- **Targeted Administrative Workflows** – Voluntary digital updates let citizens verify details remotely while using data analytics to flag outliers for Ministry of Home Affairs review.

## What lies ahead?

- **Commission a Joint Application –** The Election Commission of India should collaborate with UIDAI to launch a voluntary Aadhaar-EPIC face-authentication application to serve as the primary engine for electoral roll updates.
- **Maintain Inclusive Hybrid Options –** Digital linkage must remain voluntary. Individuals who opt out or lack digital access.
- It must be supported through a streamlined manual route, ensuring full

democratic inclusion.

- **Respect Jurisdictional Boundaries –** Adhere strictly to the judicial mandate by using digital identity tools solely to manage roll accuracy (age, address, duplicate removal, and life status), while leaving statutory citizenship determination to the MHA.
- **Transition to Continuous Digital Revisions –** Replace periodic, resource-intensive door-to-door drives with a continuous, tech-enabled revision process to protect public funds and eliminate administrative harassment.

## Reference

**Indian Express | SIR**

