



UPSC &amp; STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# The Right to Vote Is Not a Gift: West Bengal's Electoral Roll Crisis and Democratic Accountability

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**

12 April 2026

**POLITY****SOCIAL ISSUES****GS2****GS4**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**[bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com) →**ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 [epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

# The Right to Vote Is Not a Gift: West Bengal's Electoral Roll Crisis and Democratic Accountability

 The Indian Express

12 April 2026

GS2

GS4

 The Indian Express

4 tags ▾



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"The Election Commission of India has plenary Article 324 powers over elections — but is that power subject to judicial review when it appears to systematically disenfranchise a community before elections?"*

## WHY IN NEWS

The Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise removed **~91 lakh voters** from West Bengal's electoral rolls — reducing the state's electorate from **7.66 crore to 6.77 crore** (11.9% reduction). The Supreme Court intervened, deploying judicial officers from three states and establishing 19 appellate tribunals. *Indian Express* uses this crisis to examine the structural fault lines between administrative efficiency and democratic franchise.

## THE SCALE OF WHAT HAPPENED

When 91 lakh names are removed from an electoral roll in a single state within weeks of polling, it is not administrative routine — it is a **democratic emergency**. To put the scale in context:

- 91 lakh is larger than the entire electorate of Goa, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Meghalaya combined
- At 11.9% of West Bengal's electorate, it represents the largest percentage reduction by any major state in a single SIR exercise in recent memory
- The national SIR removed 6.08 crore across 9 states + 3 UTs — West Bengal alone contributed ~15% of national deletions

## WHAT IS SIR AND WHY DOES IT EXIST?

The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** process is a legitimate exercise. Electoral rolls must be continuously updated — deceased voters accumulate; people migrate; addresses change. If electoral rolls are not cleaned, they become tools for **bogus voting** (dead or phantom voters). The ECI is constitutionally mandated (Article 324) to ensure free and fair elections, which requires accurate rolls.

The problem is not the existence of SIR. The problem is **when** and **how** it is conducted.

### *The Structural Tension*

WHAT SIR SERVES	WHAT SIR RISKS
Removing genuinely dead, shifted, or duplicate voters	Removing genuine voters who are temporarily absent (migrants, seasonal workers)
Preventing bogus voting	Preventing legitimate voting
Electoral roll accuracy	Electoral roll manipulation
Administrative efficiency	Democratic franchise

The *Indian Express* editorial argues that **timing** is everything. A SIR conducted 18–24 months before an election allows time for robust objection processing. A SIR conducted weeks before polling — under the pressure of election logistics — compresses the adjudication window and increases the risk that genuine voters cannot be reinstated in time.

## THE GEOGRAPHIC PATTERN — A CONSTITUTIONAL CONCERN

The controversy centres on the distribution of deletions:

- Disproportionately high deletions were reported in **Murshidabad, Malda, and Uttar Dinajpur** — all Muslim-majority districts
- These districts have among the highest Muslim population shares in West Bengal
- Opposition parties alleged the deletions were not random administrative errors but systematically targeted communities likely to vote against specific parties

The ECI denied targeted deletions. It pointed to verification methodology — BLOs (Booth Level Officers) found more unverifiable voters in these districts.

**The editorial does not definitively adjudicate who is right.** It argues the *pattern* itself creates a constitutional concern — the appearance of systematically disenfranchising a community is a democratic harm regardless of intent.

*of the Constitution guarantees universal adult franchise — the right to vote — to every citizen above 18. This right is not a fundamental right (Part III) but a constitutional right. The Supreme Court has consistently held that arbitrary removal from electoral rolls without due process violates democratic principles embedded in the Constitution’s basic structure.*

## THE SUPREME COURT’S INTERVENTION — CONSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The SC’s intervention was both necessary and historically significant:

### What the SC Did

- ❶ Deployed judicial officers from **West Bengal, Odisha, and Jharkhand** — multi-state deployment to ensure neutrality
- ❷ Established **19 appellate tribunals** across West Bengal
- ❸ Set a deadline for adjudication before polling (April 23)
- ❹ Ordered ECI to publish district-wise deletion data

### Why Multi-State Judicial Officers Matter

A critical detail: the SC did **not** rely solely on West Bengal judicial officers to adjudicate deletions. Bringing officers from Odisha and Jharkhand was a recognition that West Bengal’s judicial officers — who are part of the state’s administrative ecosystem — might be subject to the same political pressures affecting the deletions. This is judicial prudence: ensuring adjudicators are structurally distanced from the controversy they are adjudicating.

### The Article 324 vs Judicial Review Question

The ECI derives its powers from **Article 324** — the “superintendence, direction, and control” of elections. The ECI argues these powers are plenary and not subject to routine judicial supervision. The SC’s intervention represents a counter-principle: that plenary Article 324 powers cannot override constitutional rights (Article 326; basic structure doctrine). The balance between these two positions is one of constitutional law’s live questions in India.

## THE DEEPER ISSUE — MIGRANT WORKERS AND ELECTORAL EXCLUSION

One under-examined dimension: **seasonal migrant workers**.

West Bengal, particularly from Murshidabad, Malda, and Uttar Dinajpur, is one of India’s largest sources of seasonal migrant labour. Workers who migrate to brick kilns in Bihar, construction sites in Gujarat, or garment factories in Bengaluru are:

- Not present at their home address when BLOs visit
- Technically “unverifiable” under the SIR methodology

- Likely to be deleted from rolls despite being legitimate, alive voters

The **SIR methodology does not distinguish** between a dead voter and a live migrant worker. Both show up as “absent from home.” This is not a minor administrative gap — it is a structural flaw that systematically disadvantages India’s most economically marginalised citizens.

## THE ELECTION DATES — TIME PRESSURE

EVENT	DATE
Phase 1 voting	<b>April 23, 2026</b>
Phase 2 voting	<b>April 29, 2026</b>
Vote counting	<b>May 4, 2026</b>

The 19 appellate tribunals have days — not weeks — to adjudicate lakhs of deletion disputes before April 23. Each tribunal must process thousands of cases. The procedural justice available to deleted voters is constrained by time in a way that further disadvantages those with less administrative literacy and legal access.

## WHAT DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIRES

*Indian Express* argues that democratic accountability in electoral roll management requires:

- 1 **Time-bound SIR** — Major revisions should be completed at least 6 months before polling date, not weeks
- 2 **Migrant voter protection** — A specific procedural category for seasonal migrants who are absent but alive
- 3 **Transparent data** — District-wise and community-wise deletion data must be published proactively, not ordered by courts
- 4 **Independent oversight** — Judicial monitoring of SIR exercises, not just post-hoc adjudication

## UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Article 324 (ECI powers); Article 326 (franchise); SIR under RP Act 1950; SC's electoral oversight
GS2 — Governance	ECI accountability; electoral roll management; BLO system
GS4 — Ethics	Ethics of administrative efficiency vs. franchise protection; procedural fairness; community-specific impact
Mains	“Large-scale electoral roll revisions close to elections pose a greater threat to democracy than the bogus voting they prevent. Discuss.”
Mains Keywords	Article 324, Article 326, SIR, Booth Level Officer, universal adult franchise, basic structure, migrant voter disenfranchisement

*Electorate: 7.66 crore → 6.77 crore (-91 lakh, -11.9%) | Controversy: Disproportionate deletions in **Murshidabad, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur** (Muslim-majority) | SC orders: Officers from **WB + Odisha + Jharkhand**; 19 appellate tribunals | Elections: **April 23 & 29, 2026** | Counting: **May 4, 2026** | National SIR: 6.08 crore removed across 9 states + 3 UTs | Legal basis: **RP Act 1950**; Registration of Electors Rules 1960 | Constitutional basis for franchise: **Article 326** | ECI power: **Article 324** | Right to vote: Constitutional right — NOT a fundamental right | GS2: Polity & Governance; GS4: Ethics*

### RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

12 Apr [Current Affairs Today — April 12, 2026](#)

12 Apr [West Bengal Electoral Rolls: SIR Controversy and...](#)

12 Apr [CAPF \(General Administration\) Act, 2026: India's First...](#)

11 Apr [Current Affairs Today — April 11, 2026](#)

[OLDER EDITORIAL →](#)

**RBI's Cautious Hold: Why 5.25% Is the Right Call — and Why...**



CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari](#) →<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/04/west-bengal-voter-deletion-franchise-electoral-democracy/>

### ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

## BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing](http://bharatnotes.com) → [bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)

### 📌 OPPORTUNITY

## Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

**Ideal for:** Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) · [bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)