

Dissent on File: Inside India's Election Commission

Two of India's three Election Commissioners objected in writing at least 14 times in 10 months to decisions taken in the Commission's name during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. This is how it unfolded.

14+

written objections by EC Sandhu and EC Joshi

10

months of objections, from late 2025 to August 2026

130M+

names removed across three SIR phases

1.6M

Bengal appeals Sandhu asked about: who filed them?

- Objection on file
- SIR on the ground
- Law, appointments and politics

PART ONE

Setting the stage, 2023 to 2025

2 Mar 2023

○

Supreme Court sets a neutral panel
A five-judge Constitution Bench rules that the PM, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice should pick commissioners until Parliament legislates.

Dec 2023

○

Parliament rewrites the rules
The CEC and ECs Act, 2023 replaces the Chief Justice with a Union minister chosen by the PM, and bars court proceedings over commissioners' official acts.

14 Mar 2024

○

Kumar and Sandhu appointed
Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu become Election Commissioners under the new law. The Opposition's member of the panel records dissent.

19 Feb 2025

○

Kumar becomes Chief Election Commissioner
Vivek Joshi joins as the third member. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi again records dissent on the selection.

Jun 2025

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The SIR begins in Bihar
The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls starts in Bihar and later rolls out to 30 states and Union Territories.

PART TWO

Ten months of objections

28 Oct 2025

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First objection on file
Sandhu records that letters and orders are going out in the Commission's name without the Commission's approval.

4 Nov 2025

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Warning to the IT division
At Sandhu's direction, a deputy election commissioner writes that IT systems must not curb the legal powers of EROs, DEOs and CEOs.

Dec 2025

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Software flags millions as suspect
Mid-SIR, a mapping tool marks 36.6 million voters in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh for "logical discrepancies" (The Reporters' Collective).

2 Jan 2026

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A second warning to the IT division
A further note insists the system must not restrict an ERO's discretion on electoral-roll matters.

22 Jan 2026

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ECINet goes live
More than 40 apps and portals, including the roll software ERONet, are merged into one platform run from the Commission's IT division in Delhi.

11–17 Feb 2026

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97 Goa voters stay deleted
After a 29 January Supreme Court order, officers find 97 people eligible, but the software cannot record it. Eight requests to Delhi in seven days go unanswered; all 97 are left off the final roll.

Feb–Apr 2026

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Judges take over in Bengal; the state votes
The Supreme Court hands flagged cases to judicial officers; 2.7 million names are deleted. The BJP wins in April. Deletions exceed the winning margin in 49 seats, which split 26 BJP, 21 Trinamool.

16 Apr 2026

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Kept out of the loop
Sandhu learns of new IT modules from the media. Both commissioners say orders go out in the Commission's name without its approval; Joshi has had no agendas or minutes for over a year.

16–19 May 2026

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Warning on Form 6
Joshi writes that the new-voter form cannot be changed without amending the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Sandhu agrees.

29 May 2026

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"Gradual centralisation"
Joshi flags central control of the roll database and proposes an audit, with an outside IIT expert, of who holds credentials to change voter data.

Jul 2026

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Form 6 is changed anyway
A new declaration asks applicants whether they, a parent or a grandparent appeared on the roll of the last SIR.

13 Jul 2026

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Audit endorsed
Sandhu backs Joshi's audit and asks that it go before the full Commission. The audit never happens.

28–30 Jul 2026

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Letters to the Cabinet Secretary
An order strips a layer of oversight from the IT division. Both commissioners write separately to Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan, then jointly set the order aside.

12–13 Aug 2026

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"Unauthorised and illegal"
Sandhu demands the Form 6 change be withdrawn, and asks who authorised 1.61 million appeals against Bengal voters that judicial officers had kept on the roll.

14 Aug 2026

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Field officers locked out
Sandhu records no action on the audit, and that state and district officers lack full ERONet access because control sits with the Director General (IT).

9 Sep 2026

○

First full meeting in four months
The CEC and the two commissioners meet as a full Commission for the first time in four months.

PART THREE • 23 SEPTEMBER 2026

The disclosure, and one day of fallout

The investigation

The Indian Express publishes Ritika Chopra's findings on the 14 objections, Form 6, ECINet, Goa and West Bengal.

The Supreme Court splits

Justices Datta and Sharma differ on whether the challenge to the 2023 Act needs a Constitution Bench. The matter goes to the Chief Justice.

The Commission responds

A press note calls differing views a normal part of deliberation and says all final decisions over the past year were unanimous.

The Opposition mobilises

Parties demand the CEC's removal, impeachment or arrest; Trinamool factions call for a fresh West Bengal election on the pre-SIR roll.