

India's voter purge: The Modi government's drive to disenfranchise the working class

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Mass protests have erupted across India since Friday, October 2, following an investigative report by *The Indian Express* (IE) exposing the staggering scale of the illegal deletion of voters from the electoral rolls by the Hindu-supremacist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The report revealed that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls—ostensibly a routine exercise to “clean up” voter lists—has been used to strike off between 130 and 150 million names so far, a purge without precedent in the history of the Indian republic.

The demonstrations, which have swept cities from north to south and east to west, are taking place to demand the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. But the movement's leadership—the bourgeois opposition parties including the Stalinist CPM and the petty-bourgeois Cockroach Janata Party (CJP)—is confining the struggle to the narrowest possible demand: the removal of this single official. None of them is calling for bringing down the Modi government, which now rules openly through police repression and autocratic methods against the youth and the working class, even though the BJP lacks a parliamentary majority. All of them are opposed to mobilizing the social power of the working class and linking the struggle to defend democratic rights to a broader challenge to contract-labour, pervasive mass hunger, dilapidated and non-existent public services, levels of social inequality that rival the height of the British Raj and the capitalist social order that has produced them.

The BJP's electoral-roll purge and introduction of new barriers to voting have elicited praise from none other than President Donald Trump who is similarly seeking to rig the 2026 midterm elections. In August, he publicly praised India's electoral system and Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, highlighting India's use of photo identification and SIR. Trump cited India's system to advocate for the US SAVE America Act and the deployment of federal databases to check the citizenship status of US voters, mirroring elements of India's SIR.

A purge aimed at the poor and the migrant workers

The overwhelming majority of those struck from the rolls are the poor, migrant workers, Dalits and Muslims—precisely the sections of the population that vote against the BJP. The SIR process requires voters to produce documents proving their eligibility to remain on the lists, a requirement that is confusing and, for millions who lack proper government records, impossible to meet. As *The Indian Express* investigation documented, the revision has been conducted through the centralization of the electoral roll database in Delhi, bypassing the statutory Electoral Registration Officers on the ground, and through “unauthorised and illegal” changes to the forms used to register new voters.

The mechanism of the purge is as revealing as its scale. In July of this year, the online version of Form-6—a new voter registration form for first-time voters—was deliberately altered, most likely with the connivance of Gyanesh Kumar, a close confidant of Modi. The form specifically asked whether applicants, their parents or their grandparents were listed in previous electoral rolls, which likely raised a red flag for the potential exclusion of certain voters.

Then there is the weaponization of Form-7, whose original intent was to keep voter rolls accurate by removing deceased voters, duplicate entries or individuals who have permanently moved out of their constituency.

According to reports, BJP leaders facilitated bulk voter deletion by distributing thousands of pre-filled Form-7s targeting large numbers of Muslim voters in Karnataka and Telangana. Formal police complaints have been filed against BJP leaders in Karnataka by a Booth Level Officer (BLO)—a local government or semi-government worker specifically assigned to update electoral rolls during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

The political character of the purge was laid bare in West Bengal, where the SIR removed roughly 9 million names—about 12 percent of the electorate—ahead of the state elections earlier this year. The BJP won the state for the first time in its history. As the WSWs reported in its analysis of the state elections, “with the complicity of the Supreme Court, the BJP-packed Election Commission arbitrarily removed millions of voters, predominantly poor people and disproportionately Muslims, from the electoral rolls under its highly contested Special Intensive Revision (SIR).”

The response of the Modi government to the protests has been characteristic. On Friday, October 2, celebrated as Gandhi Jayanti, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, New Delhi was turned into a fortress. Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita were imposed across the Parliament Street subdivision, banning assembly of five or more persons, slogans, speeches and processions. Around 4,000 police personnel, along with Central Armed Police Forces and Rapid Action Force units, were deployed to block the two main entry points to the Jantar Mantar protest site. Twelve Delhi Metro stations were closed. More than 500 protesters were detained, including former Delhi Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Chief Minister Atishi Marlena.

This is the same method the government used against the workers' uprising in Noida in April, when tens of thousands of contract workers struck against brutal exploitation and were met with mass arrests, frame-ups and violence, and against the student protests of July, when police fired tear gas and baton-charged tens of thousands marching on Parliament. The deployment of heavily armed paramilitary forces against unarmed protesters reveals the fear at the heart of a regime that “sits atop a political and social volcano—and it knows it.”

The demonstrations have been led by the opposition parties and the CJP, which was founded after a social-media firestorm by Abhijeet Dipke, a Boston University-trained communications strategist with deep ties to the

right-wing AAP. The CJP, as the WWSWS has documented, is “a political safety valve aimed at diverting India’s deprived youth” back into the channels of capitalist politics.

The CJP’s conduct in Mumbai is instructive. Dipke publicly praised the Maharashtra Police for their “cooperation” during the CJP’s October 2 protest in Mumbai and for not using batons “like the Delhi Police.” Within days, the same police issued notices to CJP volunteers travelling to Delhi, demanding an account of their journey and expenses. “Do the police now need an account even for a train ticket costing ₹1,000-1,500?” Dipke asked, professing himself “heartbroken.” The episode exposes the naivety—or the deliberate self-deception—of a movement that imagines it can win concessions from the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state by appealing to its “better nature.”

Especially rotten is the role of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist). The CPM and its student front, the Students’ Federation of India, participated in the protests, but only to subordinate them to the parliamentary manoeuvring of the bourgeois opposition.

The CPM, which has spent decades propping up right-wing governments in the name of “fighting the BJP,” has no interest in mobilizing the working class against the Modi government, which would jeopardize its relations with the Congress Party and the Indian state. Its general secretary has spoken of the CJP as a phenomenon “needed to be studied with all seriousness”—the language of a party calculating whether an alliance with it can be useful to its own decaying electoral fortunes. As the WWSWS has repeatedly documented, the Stalinists are an integral part of the political establishment, suppressing the class struggle and binding the working class to the Congress Party and other right-wing caste-based and ethno-communal parties.

The Election Commission: an instrument of the BJP

The relationship between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Chief Election Commissioner or CEC is central to understanding the purge. Under the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act of 2023, pushed through by the Modi government, the selection of the election Commissioners was stripped of even a nominal independent process and handed to a panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The result is that only BJP sycophants are now selected. Gyanesh Kumar was elevated to CEC in February 2025, with the Leader of the Opposition recording his dissent.

The SIR was announced in October 2025 and has since been rolled out across most of India’s states. *The Indian Express* investigation revealed an unprecedented rupture inside the Commission: two of the three Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, lodged at least 14 formal objections over ten months to decisions taken by Kumar without their knowledge—including the “unauthorised and illegal” changes to voter registration forms, the “gradual centralisation of the electoral roll database,” and the filing of appeals against voters whom judicial officers had restored to the rolls. The objections were ignored.

The Supreme Court has played a rotten role throughout. It approved the SIR process, and when the scale of the deletions in West Bengal became undeniable, it merely took the final stage of the revision out of the Commission’s hands and handed it to judicial officers—while leaving the purge of voters intact. The court—whose Chief Justice has denounced unemployed youth as “parasites” and “cockroaches”—has, in keeping with the violent lurch of the Indian bourgeoisie to the right over the past three decades, become a rubber stamp for the Hindu supremacist BJP government, as exemplified by its 2019 decision ordering the government

to build a Hindu nationalist shrine on the site of the razed Babri Masjid mosque.

The purge is not confined to the manipulation of lists. In Uttar Pradesh, the police have been deployed directly to suppress the vote. In the Sambhal constituency during the 2024 general election, police descended on Muslim majority villages, ordered voting stopped, confiscated identity cards, and lathi (baton)-charged voters, including women and the elderly. Similar violence marred the 2022 Rampur by-election, where turnout collapsed to 27.8 percent and the BJP won a seat the Samajwadi Party had held for two decades. The police claimed to be preventing “voter fraud”; the reality, as one local leader put it, was “open police thuggery” aimed at bullying voters into supporting the BJP.

The demand for the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar is a dead end. The opposition parties and the CJP confine themselves to this single demand precisely because they dare not confront the system of which Kumar is merely a functionary. The Election Commission is not a neutral arbiter that has been “captured” by the BJP; it is instead an instrument of the capitalist state. Its manipulation of the electoral rolls is a measure of the crisis of bourgeois rule in India. The BJP, lacking a parliamentary majority, is resorting to the disenfranchisement of tens of millions of voters because it cannot win elections on the basis of popular support.

But the opposition offers no alternative. The Congress Party and its INDIA alliance are co-architects of the class war on the working class, committed like the BJP to anti-worker, pro-investor reform and to New Delhi’s anti-China war alliance with US imperialism. The Stalinist CPM and its older, smaller ally, the Communist Party of India (CPI), far from being an alternative, have for decades suppressed the class struggle, propped up reactionary governments, and in the states where they have formed the government themselves imposed pro-investor policies. The CJP, whatever the genuine anger of the youth it mobilizes, channels that anger back into capitalist politics.

There is no solution within the existing political framework, because all the parties—including the Stalinist parties—are political representatives of big-business interests. The struggle against the voter purge must be linked to the struggle against the entire capitalist order—to the fight for a workers’ government and the socialist reorganization of society, as part of the world socialist revolution. Only an independent political mobilization of the working class, freed from the Congress, the BJP, the Stalinists and the pseudo-left, can defeat the Modi government and realize the democratic and social aspirations of Indian toilers.



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