



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Discuss the desirability of greater representation to women in the parliament to ensure diversity, equity and inclusiveness. (250 words)

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### Approach

- Start your answer by briefly explaining the present status of women in parliament.
- Discuss the reason for low women representation in parliament.
- Discuss briefly how women participation in legislature would ensure diversity, equity and inclusiveness.
- Discuss some steps taken by the government to enhance women representation in parliament.
- Conclude accordingly.

### Introduction

- While more women than ever are being elected to parliament, but equality is still a long way off, and current progress is far too slow. Most parliaments in the country are still heavily male-dominated, and some have no women MPs at all.
- Present status of according to the data compiled by the Inter Parliamentary Unit (IPU), women in India **represent 14.44% of the total members of the Lok Sabha.**
- As per the latest **Election Commission of India (ECI) data:**
  - As of October 2021, Women represent **10.5%** of the total members of the Parliament.
  - The scenario for women **Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs)** across all state assemblies in India is even worse, with the national average being a pitiable 9%.
  - In the last 75 years of independence, **women's representation in Lok Sabha has not even increased by 10%.**

### Body

- **Reasons for low women representation in parliament:**
  - **Gender stereotypes:**
    - The role of managing household activities has been traditionally assigned to women.
    - Women should be **encouraged to move outside their stereotypical roles** and participate in the decision-making process of the country.
  - **Competition:**
    - Politics, like any other field, is a field of competition. At the end of the day, Women politicians are their competition as well.
    - Many of the politician's fear that, in the case of **women reservation, their seats can rotationally be reserved for women candidates**, thus, making them lose any chance of even fighting from their seats.
  - **Lack of Political Education:**
    - Education influences the **social mobility of women**. Formal education such as provided at educational institutions create opportunities for leadership and impart leadership essential skills.

- Because of a lack of understanding of politics, **they do not know about their basic and political rights.**
- **Work and Family:**
  - Uneven distribution of family care responsibilities means that women spend far more time than men in home- and child-care.
  - A woman not only has to give her time and effort at time of pregnancy and childbirth, but it continues till the child is dependent on parents for care.
- **Lack of Resources:**
  - Because of their low proportion in the inner **political party structure of India**, women fail to gather resources and support for nurturing their political constituencies.
  - Women do not get adequate financial support from the political parties to contest the **elections.**
- **Social Conditioning:**
  - They have to accept the dictates imposed on them and bear the burden of society.
- **Unfriendly Environment:**
  - Overall political parties' environment too is not women-friendly, they have to struggle hard and face multi-dimensional issues to create space for them in the party.
- **Women participation ensures diversity, equity and inclusiveness:**
  - Improvements in women's representation in the legislature remain intrinsic to constitutional ideals of gender equality and social justice.
  - Women's greater participation in the legislature will provide impetus to fighting gender stereotypes and can pave the way for women's greater representation, in others decisions, making positions, such as in judiciary and executive branches of the government.
  - Women participation in legislature would achieve gender equality and inclusiveness as per the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG 5 and SDG 16, in particular), which calls for having gender equality and women's representation in public institutions.
  - Institutional accessibility and removal of structural impediments, can **increase political mobilization of women.**
  - A more **gender-inclusive discourse of political participation** would ensure descriptive as well as substantive representation of women in institutions of politics and governance.
- **Steps taken to resolve low representation of women in parliament:**
  - **The Women's Reservation Bill 2008:**
    - It proposes to amend the Constitution of **India to reserve 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all seats** in the Lower house of Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women.
  - **Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions:**
    - **Article 243D of the Constitution ensures participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions** by mandating not less than one-third reservation for women out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election and number of offices of chairpersons of Panchayats.
  - **Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women:**
    - The Committee on Empowerment of Women was constituted for the first time in 1997 during the 11<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha of the Parliament for improving the status of women.
    - The Members of the Committee are expected to work together for the empowerment of women cutting across party affiliations.

## Conclusion

- The all-major political parties have to reach a **consensus and ensure the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill**, which calls for reserving 33 % of seats in Parliament and all state legislative assemblies for women.
- Further, there is a need to implement the proposal of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to make it mandatory for the **recognized political parties to ensure putting of minimum agreed percentage for women in State Assembly and Parliamentary elections**, so as to allow them to retain the recognition with the Election Commission as political parties.

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