



Reservation for Women in Politics

For Prelims: Right to Equality, Women Reservation bill, constitutional provisions related to women empowerment.

For Mains: Issue of Under-representation of Women in Politics, Issues Related to Women, Women's Issues, Inclusive Growth, Human Resource, Government Policies & Interventions.

Why in News?

A political party recently called for the long-delayed Women's Reservation Bill to be introduced in [Parliament](#).

- The [Rajya Sabha](#) passed the [Women's Reservation Bill](#) on 9 March 2010. However, the [Lok Sabha](#) never voted on the bill. The bill lapsed since it was still pending in Lok Sabha.

What is the Background of the Reservation for Women in Politics in India?

- The issue of reservation for women in politics **can be traced back to the Indian national movement**. In 1931, in their letter to the British Prime Minister, submitting the **official memorandum jointly issued on the status of women** in the new Constitution by three women's bodies, leaders Begum Shah Nawaz and [Sarojini Naidu](#).
- The **National Perspective Plan for Women** recommended in 1988 that reservation be provided to women right from the level of the [panchayat to that of Parliament](#)
 - These recommendations paved the way for the historic enactment of the [73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution](#) which mandate all State governments to reserve **one-third of the seats for women** in Panchayati Raj Institutions and one-third of the offices of the chairperson at all levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, and in urban local bodies, respectively. Within these seats, **one-third are reserved** for [Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe](#) women.
 - Many States such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Kerala have made legal provisions to ensure **50% reservation for women in local bodies**.

What is Women Representation Bill?

- **About the Bill:**
 - The Women's Reservation Bill proposes to reserve **33% of seats** in the **Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women**.
 - Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.
 - Reservation of seats for women shall cease to **exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act**.
- **Need:**
 - According to [Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#), India ranks 48th out of 146 in

Political Empowerment (Percentage of Women in Parliament and in Ministerial Positions) dimension.

- Notwithstanding its rank, its **score is quite low at 0.267**. Some of the best-ranking countries in this category score much better. For instance, **Iceland is ranked 1 with a score of 0.874** and **Bangladesh is ranked 9 with a score of 0.546**.
- Women's right to self-representation and self-determination;
- The various surveys do indicate that **women representatives from Panchayati Raj have worked commendably in the development and overall well-being of society** in villages and many of them would definitely want to work on the larger scale, however, they face various challenges in the political structure prevalent in India.
- **Arguments Against the Bill:**
 - Women are **not a homogeneous community say like, a caste group**. Therefore, the same arguments made for caste-based reservations cannot be made for women.
 - Reserving seats for women is opposed by some who claim that doing so violates the **Constitution's guarantee of equality**. If there is a reserve, they claim, women won't be competing on merit, which could decrease their status in society.
- **Arguments in Favour of the Bill:**
 - Affirmative action is necessary to better the condition of women, as political parties are inherently patriarchal.
 - Women **are still under-represented in Parliament**, and reservations will ensure that women form a strong lobby to fight for issues that are often ignored.
 - More women in decision-making positions are needed **to address the high percentage of crimes against women, low participation of women in the workforce**, low nutrition levels, and skewed sex ratio.

What is the Status of Women Representation in Politics in India?

- **Prior to Independence:**
 - Patriarchal **social norms** and mindsets have historically allowed **women to be marginalized** and exploited in India.
 - Beginning of social reforms and involvement in the struggle for freedom: The Indian freedom movement, which began with the [swadeshi in Bengal \(1905-08\)](#), **also saw the impressive participation of women**, who organized political protests, mobilized resources, and held leadership positions in those movements.
- **Post Independence:**
 - India's Constitution stipulated that all political, social, and economic spheres would **treat men and women equally**.
 - At present, only about **14.4% of the members of the Indian Parliament are women**, the highest so far. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, India has a fewer percentage of women in the lower House than its neighbors such as Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.
 - 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%.

What are the Criteria to Evaluate Women's Political Participation in India?

- **Women as Voter:**
 - Almost as **many women as men cast ballots in the most recent Lok Sabha election in 2019**, marking a turning point in India's journey **towards gender equality in politics** and what has been dubbed a "quiet revolution of self-empowerment." There are many reasons for the growing participation, notably during the 1990s.
- **Women as Candidates:**
 - Generally, the proportion of female candidates in parliamentary elections has increased over time but has remained low when compared to male candidates. **Less than 9% of the**

8,049 candidates running in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections **were female**.

How can Women's Representation in Politics be Improved in India

- Women's representation in politics in India **has been a topic of discussion for several years**, and although progress has been made, there is still a long way to go. Here are some ways forward to improve women's representation in politics in India:
 - **Reservation of Seats:** The **reservation of seats for women in local bodies and legislative assemblies** has been a successful way to increase women's representation in politics. More such reservation policies could be implemented to provide women with more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.
 - **Increasing Awareness and Education:** Creating awareness among women about their rights and the importance of their participation in politics is essential. **Educational programs and awareness campaigns** can help to increase women's political participation.
 - **Addressing Gender-based Violence and Harassment:** **Gender-based violence and harassment** are major obstacles to women's participation in politics. Addressing these issues through policy and legal measures can create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics.
 - **Reforms in the Electoral Process:** Reforms such as introducing **proportional representation and preferential voting systems** can help to increase women's representation in politics by ensuring that more women get elected.
- These are only a few approaches to increase the number of women in Indian politics. To effect long-lasting change, **a multifaceted strategy addressing multiple challenges is required**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. "The reservation of seats for women in the institutions of local self-government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian Political Process." Comment. (2019)

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