



## Women Reservation Act, 2023 - Women in Politics

**For Prelims:** [Constitution \(128th Amendment\) Bill, 2023](#), [Constitution \(106th Amendment\) Act, 2023](#), [Lok Sabha](#), [Rajya Sabha](#), [State Legislative Assemblies](#), [Delimitation Process](#), [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979](#), [Constitution \(104<sup>th</sup> Amendment\) Act, 2019](#), [Supreme Court](#), [Triple Test](#), [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#), [Global Gender Gap Report 2023](#).

**For Mains:** Impact of [Women's Reservation Act, 2023](#) on promoting inclusivity in the **democracy**, making it more participative and eliminating **gender gap** in the long run.

### What is the Women's Reservation Act, 2023?

#### ▪ About:

- The [Constitution \(106<sup>th</sup> Amendment\) Act, 2023](#), reserves **one-third of all seats** for women in [Lok Sabha](#), [State legislative assemblies](#), and the **Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi**, including those reserved for [SCs and STs](#).
- The reservation will be **effective after the publication of the census conducted following the Act's commencement** and endures for a **15-year period**, with potential extension determined by parliamentary action.
- The rotation of seats allocated for women will be governed by parliamentary legislation after each [delimitation process](#).
  - Currently, around **15%** of the total members of the 17th Lok Sabha (**2019-2024**) are women while in state legislative assemblies, women on average constitute **9%** of the total members.

#### ▪ Legislative Progression of Women's Reservation Bills:

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979** mandates the **eradication of gender-based discrimination in political and public spheres**, with **India** being a signatory.
  - Despite progress, the representation of women in decision-making bodies remains relatively low, **increasing from 5% in the first Lok Sabha to 15% in the 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha**.
- Constitutional amendments aimed at reserving seats for women in Parliament and state legislative assemblies were proposed in **1996, 1998, 1999, and 2008**.
  - The **first three Bills**(1996, 1998, 1999) **expired** when their **respective Lok Sabhas dissolved**.
  - The **2008 Bill** was introduced in and **approved by the Rajya Sabha** but also **lapsed when the 15th Lok Sabha dissolved**.
  - However, in the present case, it will require adherence to the **"Triple Test"** laid down by the [Supreme Court](#).

## Key changes between 2008 Bill and Bill introduced in 2023

	Bill introduced in 2008 as passed by Rajya Sabha	Bill introduced in 2023
Reservation in Lok Sabha	One-third of Lok Sabha seats in each state/UT to be reserved for women	One-third seats to be reserved for women
Rotation of Seats	Reserved seats to be rotated after every general election to Parliament/legislative assembly	Reserved seats to be rotated after every delimitation exercise

- The 1996 Bill underwent examination by a **Joint Committee of Parliament**, while the 2008 Bill was scrutinized by the **Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice**.
  - Both committees endorsed the idea of seat reservations for women. Some of their recommendations included:
    - considering reservations for women **from other backward classes (OBCs)** at an appropriate time
    - implementing **reservations for a 15-year** period with subsequent reviews
    - devising a plan for **reserving seats for women in the Rajya Sabha and state legislative councils**.

## Issue of Triple Test:

- Government sources said that **reservations for women would require clearing the "triple test"**.
- In 2010, the Supreme Court held that **backwardness with relation to local bodies has to be "political"** - such as underrepresentation in politics. It may differ from "social and educational backwardness", which is used to grant reservations for seats in educational institutions or government jobs.
- The **Supreme Court, while deciding on the legality of OBC reservations in Maharashtra local body elections, in a verdict in 2021, had set out a three-fold test** that state governments have to follow to provide these reservations.
  - First, the **state was mandated to set up a dedicated commission** to examine backwardness in local bodies within the state.
  - Second, **states were required to determine the size of the quota** based on the commission survey data.
  - Third, **these reservations, combined with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes quotas, could not be more than 50%** of the total seats in the local body.
- In 2022 and 2023, the **Supreme Court continued to make it mandatory for states to implement the triple test before the OBC reservation** in Local Body elections.
  - However, **such a "triple test" is not applied to political reservations for SC/STs**, since the reservation in elections applies under Article 334.
  - The **"triple test" for representation of SC/STs "only applies in the case of quota for promotions in government employment."**

# WOMEN Reservation Act, 2023

(106<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act)

## OBJECTIVE

- Reserve 1/3rd of total seats in LS and state Legislative Assemblies (LAs) for women

## BACKGROUND

- Bill previously introduced in: 1996, 1998, 2009, 2010, 2014
- Related Committees:
  - Committee on the Status of Women in India (1971)
  - Committee under Margaret Alva (1987)
  - Geeta Mukherjee Committee (1996)
  - Committee on the Status of Women (2013)

## Key Features

### Articles Inserted:

- Article 330A - Reservation for Women in LS
- Article 332A - Reservation for Women in State LAs
- Article 239AA - Reservation for Women in NCT of Delhi
- Article 334A - Reservations to become effective after delimitation is undertaken and Census is conducted

### Time Period:

- Reservation to be provided for 15 years (can be extended)

### Rotation of Seats Reserved:

- After each delimitation

## NEED

- Political Underrepresentation:
  - Only **82 Women MPs in LS (15.2%)** and 31 in RS (13%)
  - On avg, women constitute only 9% of the total members in State LAs



## ARGUMENTS

- In Favour:
  - Vital step towards gender equality
  - Broader range of perspectives to the decision-making process
  - Helps eliminate discrimination against women in political/public life
- Against:
  - Delimitation based on 2021 census (yet to be conducted) is mandatory
  - No women's reservation in RS and State Legislative Councils

## STEPS AHEAD

- Reservation for women within political parties
- Independent political decision-making by women; overcoming Sarpanch-patism



## What are Different Committees and Their Reports on the Issue?

- 1971 Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI):**
  - It was **created in response to a request from the UN for a report on the status of women** ahead of International Women's Year, 1975.
  - Set up by the erstwhile Ministry of Education and Social Welfare.
  - It examined the constitutional, administrative, and legal provisions that have a bearing on the social status of women, their education, and employment — and the impact of these provisions.
  - It published the report - '**Towards Equality**' as per which, the Indian state had failed in its constitutional responsibility to ensure gender equality.
    - Following this, several states began announcing reservations for women in local bodies.
- 1987 Committee under Margaret Alva**
  - In 1987, the government constituted a 14-member committee under then Union Minister Margaret Alva.
  - In 1988, the committee presented the **National Perspective Plan for Women 1988-2000** to the Prime Minister.
    - Among the committee's 353 recommendations was the reservation of seats for

women in elected bodies.

- **Consequence**

- In 1992, the **73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts** were introduced under the Prime Ministership of **P V Narasimha Rao**.
- It was the doing of the **National Perspective Plan for Women** that mandated the reservation of **1/3<sup>rd</sup> of seats for women (via 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments) in Panchayati Raj institutions** (PRIs) and offices of the chairperson at all levels of PRIs, and in urban local bodies respectively.
  - 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.

## First Women's Reservation Bill

- On September 12, 1996, the Government of India tabled **81<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill** which sought to reserve 1/3rd of seats for women in Parliament and state legislatures.
  - However, many **MPs, especially those belonging to the OBCs, opposed the Bill**.
  - Consequently, the bill was sent to a Select Committee of Parliament headed by **Geeta Mukherjee**.
- **Geeta Mukherjee Committee 1996:**
  - **The** Committee had 21 members from LS and 10 from RS.
  - The panel noted that seats for women had been reserved within the SC/ST quotas, but there was **no such benefit for OBC women** because there is no provision for OBC reservation.
  - It recommended that the government “may consider...extending...reservation to OBCs also at the appropriate time so that the women belonging to OBCs will also get the benefit of reservation”.
- **2013 Committee on the Status of Women:**
  - In 2013, the **Ministry of Women and Child Development** constituted a **committee on the status of women**, which recommended ensuring at least **50% reservation of seats for women in the Local bodies**, State Legislative Assemblies, Parliament, Ministerial levels and all decision-making bodies of the government.

## Present Status of Women Representation

- As per the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)'s Global Gender Gap Report 2023](#), India has made strides in political empowerment, achieving **25.3% parity in this domain**.
- Women represent **15.1% of parliamentarians**, which is the highest representation since the inaugural report in 2006.

## What is Status of Women's Reservation in Panchayats and ULBs?

- **Women's Reservation - Initiatives and Current Data**
  - **Early Initiatives:**
    - In 1985, the state government of **Karnataka implemented 25% reservation for women** in Mandal Praja Parishads with a sub-quota for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women, **becoming the first state to do so**.
    - In 1987, the **erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh implemented 9% reservation** for women in gram panchayats.
    - In 1991, **Odisha affected 33% reservation** for women in Panchayats.
      - The 1992 Constitutional amendment made this quota national, and inserted a 33% sub-quota for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women.
- **73<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments:**
  - In 1992, following the recommendations of the **National Perspective Plan for Women**

- 1988-2000**, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts (1992) mandated the reservation of **1/3<sup>rd</sup> of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and in urban local bodies.**
- 'Panchayat', being "Local government", is a **State subject and part of the State list of the Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution of India.
    - **Article 243D** of the Constitution ensures participation of women in PRIs by mandating at least 1/3rd reservation for women out of total number of seats to be filled by direct election and number of offices of chairpersons of Panchayats.

## Status In Different States

### ▪ States with >50% Reservation:

- According to government data, as of Sept 2021, in at least 18 states, the **percentage of women elected representatives in PRIs was more than 50%:**
  - Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Kerala, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Manipur, Telangana, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.
    - These 18 states, including Gujarat and Kerala have also made legal provisions for 50% reservation for women in PRIs.
  - Highest proportion of women representatives in PRIs - **Uttarakhand** (56.02%)
    - Lowest - **Uttar Pradesh** (33.34%)
    - Overall percentage in India - 45.61%
- **Bihar was the first one** to increase the reservation percentage to 50% (in Panchayats and ULBs) in 2006 **followed by Sikkim the next year.**

### ▪ The Nagaland Controversy:

- In April 2023, **Nagaland** was amid controversies regarding the **reservation of seats for women in urban local body (ULB) polls.**
  - The issue centers around the Nagaland Municipal Act of 2001, which mandated a 33% reservation for women in ULB polls (as per 74th amendment).
  - Many traditional tribal and urban organizations opposed it, arguing that it would violate the special provisions granted by Article 371A.
    - Their apex tribal body argues that **women have traditionally not been part of decision-making bodies.**
    - **Nagaland is the only state where ULB seats are not reserved for women.**

## What is Status of Women's Reservation in Services in Different States?

### ▪ Women's Reservation and Horizontal Reservation:

- The **Constitution of India does not expressly permit reservation for women** in public employment. On the contrary, **Article 16(2)** prohibits discrimination in public employment on the ground of sex.
- Therefore, women can, at best, be provided only horizontal and not vertical reservation on the basis of the Supreme Court's pronouncement in the famous **Indra Sawhney's case (1992).**
- **Horizontal Reservation** refers to the equal opportunity provided to categories of **beneficiaries such as women, veterans, the transgender community, and individuals with disabilities**, cutting through the vertical categories.
  - The horizontal quota is applied separately to each vertical category, and not across the board.
    - For example, if women have **50% horizontal quota**, then **half of the selected candidates will have to necessarily be women in each vertical quota category** i.e., half of all selected Scheduled Caste candidates will have to be women, half of the unreserved or general category will have to be women, and so on.

### ▪ The Scenario of Women's Job Quota in Different States:

- **Uttarakhand:**

- In 2006, Uttarakhand state government issued an order ensuring **30% horizontal reservation for women candidates** in the state. This reservation was for public employment **exclusively to state-domiciled women**.
- In August 2022, the High Court of Uttarakhand stayed this order. However, in Nov 2022, the **Supreme Court allowed the government** to continue with its 16-year-old decision and stayed a HC order that had opened up the quota for women from anywhere in India.
- In January 2023, the **government again came out with an ordinance** to continue with the provisions of the reservation.
- **Karnataka:**
  - In 2022, the Karnataka government reserved **33% for outsourced women employees in all the departments**.
  - As per the circular, the state government recruits data entry operators, housekeeping staff and other group D employees, drivers through outsourcing.
  - The 33% reservation is applicable for **all autonomous bodies, universities, urban local bodies, and other government offices**.
- **Tripura:**
  - In 2022, on the occasion of Women's Day, Tripura govt has announced its decision to give a reservation of **33% to all women for any state govt job, or for higher educational institutions**.
- **Punjab:**
  - In 2020, the **Punjab state govt approved 33% reservation for women in direct recruitment for the Punjab Civil Services**, boards and corporations.
  - The 'Punjab Civil Services (Reservation of Posts for Women) Rules, 2020' provided such reservation for women for direct recruitment to posts in government, as well as in recruitment to Boards and Corporations in **Group A, B, C, and D posts**.
- **Bihar:**
  - In 2016, the state cabinet granted **35% reservation to women in all government jobs**.
  - Earlier, the state govt also made a provision for a reservation of **35% for women in the recruitment of police constabulary in the state**.

## Representation of Women in Other Sectors

- **Governance:**
  - India has had **one woman prime minister and two female presidents** since independence in 1947.
  - **Fifteen women have served as chief ministers** so far.
- **Judiciary:**
  - **India's Supreme Court has not had a single female chief justice so far**.
  - As of August 2023, there were three women judges in the apex court of a sanctioned strength of 34, 106 women judges out of 788 in the 25 high courts and 7,199 in the lower courts.
  - **Justice BV Nagarathna** is in line to become the first woman Chief Justice of India in 2027.
- **Defence And Police:**
  - As of March 2023, there were **6,993 women officers in the Indian army**, 748 in the navy. The strength of women officers in the Indian Air Force stood at 1,636, excluding medical staff.
  - Women constitute 11.7% of the 2.1 million-strong police force.
- **Aviation:**
  - India has the **highest proportion of female pilots to males in the world**, making up 15% out of a total of about 10,000 pilots in the South Asian country, against 5% globally.
- **Agriculture:**
  - With 62.9% female participation, **agriculture has the highest percentage of women workers**, followed by manufacturing, at 11.2% in 2022.
  - Millions of Indian women are employed in unorganised sectors such as domestic and daily wage labourers.
- **Corporate:**
  - **Women accounted for 18.2% of board seats at NIFTY 500 companies in 2023**, with

- the life sciences sector reporting the highest female representation on boards at 24%.
- The **tech industry has a high representation of women in the workforce at 34% but lags behind other industries** when it comes to women in executive positions. There are 8.9% of firms with women in top managerial posts.

## What are the Issues Related to Delimitation?

- **Will come into effect after the Delimitation:**
  - The reservation shall come into effect only after delimitation is undertaken and delimitation will be undertaken only after the relevant figures of the next census are published.
    - The 2021 Census that was postponed because of the Covid pandemic and several other reasons has been **further pushed to 2024-25 until further orders**.
    - The Union Home Minister explained that **the decision to implement reservation after delimitation is to ensure that a quasi-judicial body like the Delimitation Commission can decide** which seats to reserve, after public consultation.
    - The Law Minister claimed that it was **against the provisions of the Constitution to provide reservation immediately**, noting that someone may challenge it in a court of law. And the government will not allow the Act to get stuck in some technicality.
- **Present Issues With Delimitation:**
  - According to rough estimates, the country's population has increased by about 30 percent since the last census in 2011. **Therefore, the seats in the Lok Sabha will also increase in the same proportion.**
  - It is expected that there will be an increase of about 210 seats over the 543 seats in the current Lok Sabha. That means the total seats would likely be around 753.

## Previous Delimitation Exercises

- The Delimitation Commission of 2022 had taken about five years to complete the exercise, based on the 2001 Census report.
  - Election Commission also said that delimitation exercises undertaken in the years **1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002** have not considered the exact number of women in a constituency.
- Even after the 2001 census, the **delimitation exercise for Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Manipur was left out by the 2002 Commission.**
- The **delimitation exercise for the newly formulated [Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir](#)** went on for over two years between March 2020 to May 2022.
- In **Assam**, it was started by the Election Commission in 2022, and the final draft was published in August 2023. The process, however, has been challenged before the Supreme Court.
- As for Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, the **Supreme Court was informed recently by the central government** that it is "considering" setting up a delimitation commission for the two states, while delimitation in Manipur would be delayed.

## What is the OBC Issue?

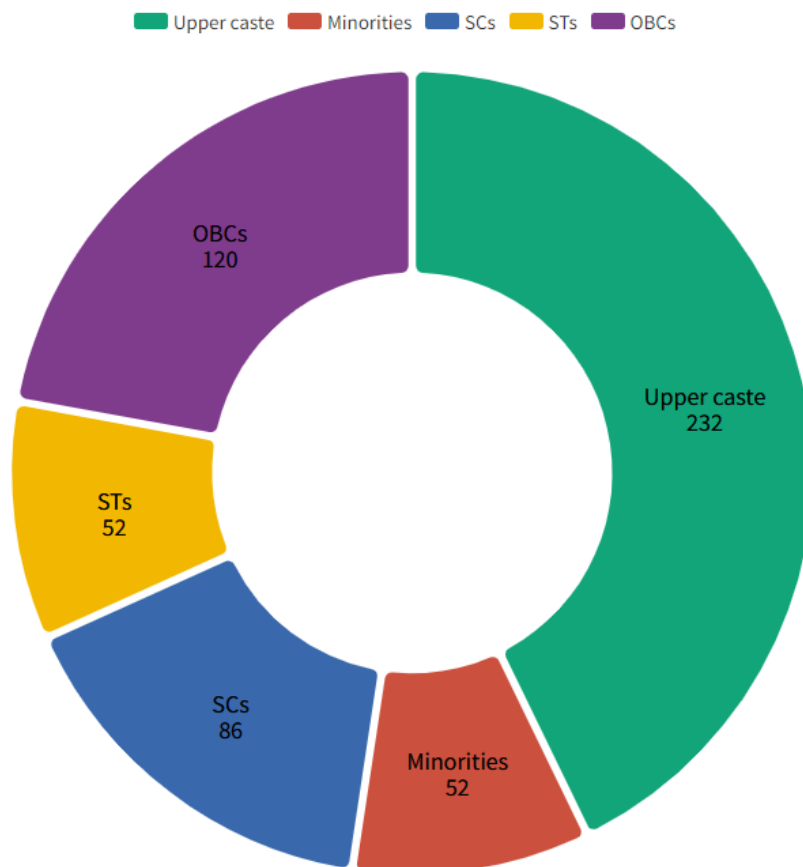
**Unlike SCs and STs**, the Constitution does not provide for political reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the Lok Sabha or state assemblies.

- **OBC Issue with the Act:** The women's reservation Act, which reserves 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, **does not include a quota for women from the OBCs.**
  - OBCs who constitute **41% of the population (as per the 2011 census) are inadequately represented in the Lok Sabha, State Legislatures and Local**

## governments.

- They have been **demanding a separate quota for themselves in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies**, similar to the reservation for SCs and STs.
  - However, the **government has not implemented such a quota**, citing legal and constitutional hurdles.
- Several State Governments like **Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have provided them representation in Local Body elections**.
  - But the Supreme Court has put a **cap of 50% on the overall reservations (Vikas Kishanrao Gawali vs State of Maharashtra) which limits OBC reservation to 27%**.
  - This 50% upper limit is in the lines with the **Indira Sawhney vs Union of India judgment**.
- **Strength of OBCs in Lok Sabha:** The 17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha has **around 120 MPs** from the OBC community. Which **accounts for approximately 22% of the total Strength** of Lok Sabha
  - The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2018 (insertion of new articles **330A and 332A**) **proposes to ensure a proportionate representation to OBC in representative bodies** -- House of the People and the Legislative Assemblies of the State.

## Caste profile of 17th Lok Sabha



Source: Lok Sabha

## Should There be an OBC Women Reservation Under the 33% Reservation?

### Arguments in favor

- OBC women **face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression** based on their caste, class and gender. They are often denied access to education, health, employment, political

### Arguments against

- The **Act already provides for the reservation of seats for SC/ST women**, who are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the society.



representation and social justice.

- OBC women constitute a large and diverse section of the population, with different cultures, languages, religions and regions. They have **different needs and aspirations that may not be adequately represented by women from other categories.**
- OBC women have been **historically underrepresented and marginalized in the political sphere**, both at the national and state levels. They have **faced barriers such as patriarchal norms, caste prejudices, violence and intimidation**, lack of resources and awareness, and low self-confidence.

- **Adding another quota for OBC women would reduce the seats available for the general category of women, who also face discrimination and challenges** in the male-dominated political system.
- The idea of having a **separate reservation for OBC women would create further divisions and conflicts** among the women's movement. It would also undermine the solidarity and unity of women as a collective force for social change.
- Separate reservation for OBC women **would not address the root causes of their problems**, such as poverty, illiteracy, violence, patriarchy, casteism and corruption.
- It would also **not guarantee their effective participation and representation in the political arena, as they may still face obstacles such as tokenism, co-option, manipulation and domination** by the male leaders of their parties and communities.

## What are Different Constitutional Provisions Related to Women's Reservation?

- **Reservation for Women in Lower House:** The Act provides for **inserting Article 330A** to the constitution, which borrows from the provisions of Article 330, which provides for reservation of seats to SCs/STs in the Lok Sabha.
  - The Act provides that reserved seats for women **may be allotted by rotation** to different constituencies in states or Union Territories.
  - In the seats reserved for SCs/STs, the **Act seeks to provide one-third of the seats to be reserved for women** on rotational basis.
- **Reservation for Women in State Legislative Assemblies:** The Act **introduces Article 332A**, which mandates the reservation of seats for women in every state Legislative Assembly. **Additionally, one-third of the seats reserved for SCs and STs must be allocated for women, and one-third of the total seats filled through direct elections to the Legislative Assemblies shall also be reserved for women.**
- **Reservation for Women in NCT of Delhi ( New clause in 239AA):** Article 239AA to the constitution grants special status to the Union Territory of Delhi as national capital with regards to its administrative and legislative functioning.
  - **Article 239AA(2)(b) was amended by the Act accordingly** to add that the laws framed by parliament shall apply to the National Capital territory of Delhi.
- **Commencement of Reservation (New article - 334A):** The reservation will be effective **after the census conducted** after the commencement of this Act has been published. Based on the census, **delimitation will be undertaken** to reserve seats for women.
  - The reservation will be provided for a **period of 15 years**. However, it shall continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.
- **Rotation of Seats:** Seats reserved for women **will be rotated after each delimitation**, as determined by a law made by Parliament.

## What is 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 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> 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.
- The discussion upon the reservation of women reservation bill is prevalent since the **1996**. As the then Government lacked a majority, the Bill could not have been approved.
- **Earlier Attempts at Reserving Seats for Women:**
  - **1996:** First Women Reservation Bill was introduced in the Parliament.
  - **1998 – 2003:** Government tabled the Bill on 4 occasions but failed.
  - **2009:** Government tables the bill amid protests.
  - **2010:** The Union Cabinet passes the Bill and RS passes it.
  - **2014:** The Bill was expected to be tabled in LS.
- The **National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)** had stated that reservation will be considered in **higher legislative bodies**.
- In May 2013, **the Ministry of Women and Child Development** constituted a committee on the status of women, which recommended ensuring at least 50% reservation of seats for women in the Local bodies, State Legislative Assemblies, Parliament, Ministerial levels and all decision-making bodies of the government.
- In **2015, the Report on the Status of Women in India** noted that the representation of women in state assemblies and Parliament continues to be dismal. It recommended reserving at least 50% seats for women in local bodies, state legislative assemblies, Parliament, ministerial levels, and all decision-making bodies of the government.

## What Are the Arguments in Support of the Act?

- **Need:** There are 82 women Member of Parliaments in LS (15.2%) and 31 women in RS(13%). While the number has increased significantly since the 1st Lok Sabha (5%) but is still far lower than in many countries.
  - According to recent UN Women data, **Rwanda (61%), Cuba (53%), Nicaragua (52%)** are the top three countries in women representation. Bangladesh (21%) and Pakistan (20%) as well are ahead of India in case of female representation.
- **Gender Equality:**
  - Women representation in politics is a vital step towards gender equality. However, according to **Global Gender Gap Report 2022**, India ranks 48th out of 146 in Political Empowerment.
  - 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.
- **Historical Underrepresentation:**
  - The number of women MPs has increased from 5% in the first Lok Sabha to 15% in the **17<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha**; but the number continues to be quite low.
  - A 2003 study about the effect of reservation for women in panchayats showed that women elected under the reservation policy invest more in the public goods closely linked to women's concerns.
  - The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2009) had noted that reservation of seats for women in local bodies has enabled them to make meaningful contributions.
- **Women's right to Self-representation and Self-determination:**
  - If a group is not represented proportionally in the political system, its ability to influence policy-making is limited. The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** provides that discrimination against women must be eliminated in political and public life.
  - 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 society.

- **Diverse Perspectives:**
  - A more diverse legislature that includes a significant number of women can bring a broader range of perspectives to the decision-making process. This diversity can lead to better policy formulation and governance.
- **Empowerment of Women:**
  - Women's reservation in politics empowers women at various levels. It not only encourages more women to participate in politics but also inspires women to take on leadership roles in other sectors.
- **Promotion of Women's Issues:**
  - Women in politics often prioritize and advocate for issues that directly affect women, such as gender-based violence, women's health, education, and economic empowerment. Their presence can lead to the prioritization of these issues in policy discussions.
- **Role Models:**
  - Women leaders in politics can serve as role models for young girls, encouraging them to aspire to leadership positions in various fields. Representation in politics can break stereotypes and inspire future generations.
  - Indira Gandhi served as the first and only women Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1977.
  - Sushma Swaraj was the second woman external affairs minister of India after Indira Gandhi.

### What are the Arguments Against the Act?

- Women are **not a homogeneous community like, 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.

### What More Can be Done to Ensure Effective Representation of Women?

- **Strengthen Independent Decision Making:**
  - Establish an independent monitoring system or committees that explicitly prohibits family members from influencing the decision making process of women representatives.
  - It can be implemented by **reducing the influence of patriarchal mindset**.
- **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)

### Prelims

**Q. With reference to the Delimitation Commission consider the following statements: (2012)**

1. The orders of the Delimitation Commission cannot be challenged in a Court of Law.
2. When the orders of the Delimitation Commission are laid before the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly, they cannot effect any modification in the orders.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (c)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/women-reservation-act-2023-women-in-politics>

