



Political Representation of Women

For Prelims: General Elections, [Election Commission of India](#), [Delimitation Commission](#), [Political Parties](#), Reservation.

For Mains: Issue and Reasons for Low Representation of Women in Parliament, Issues Related to Women, Women's Issues, Inclusive Growth, Human Resource, Government Policies & Interventions, [Women's Reservation Act, 2023](#)

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The recently concluded general elections in the United Kingdom have seen a record **40% women representation** in the **House of Commons**, highlighting the significant progress made by other countries in enhancing women's political participation.

- In contrast, **India's women's representation** in the [Parliament](#) remains **well below** the global average of 25%.

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Country wise data on women representation*

Women representation in parliament varies across different democracies



Moving forward: Trinamool Congress MPs take selfies at the Parliament House complex during the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, on June 25. PTI

Country	% of elected women	Quota in Parliament	Quota in political parties
Sweden	46%	No	Yes
South Africa	45%	No	Yes
Australia	38%	No	Yes
France	38%	No	Yes
Germany	35%	No	Yes
U.K.	40%	No	Yes
U.S.	29%	No	No
Pakistan	16%	Yes	No
Bangladesh	20%	Yes	No

*(as of September 2023) |

What is the Status of Women's Representation in Indian Parliament?

- **Women's Representation in Parliament:** In the Lok Sabha, the percentage of women members has risen from 5-10% until 2004 to 13.6% in the current [18th Lok Sabha](#), while in the Rajya Sabha, it is 13%.

Historical comparison	
	16th Lok Sabha (2014-2019): 64 women MPs
	17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024): 78 women MPs (highest)
	18th Lok Sabha (2024-Present): 74 women MPs

- Also, the **number of women contesting elections** has shown a gradual increase over the past 15 years.
 - In 1957, just 45 women candidates were contesting the Lok Sabha election; in 2024 there were 799 (9.5% of the total candidates contested).
- **West Bengal leads in electing the most women MPs**, with 11 representatives. The Trinamool Congress has the highest proportion of women among its Lok Sabha MPs, at 38% in the 18th Lok Sabha.
 - This is far below the **global average** of around **25%**.

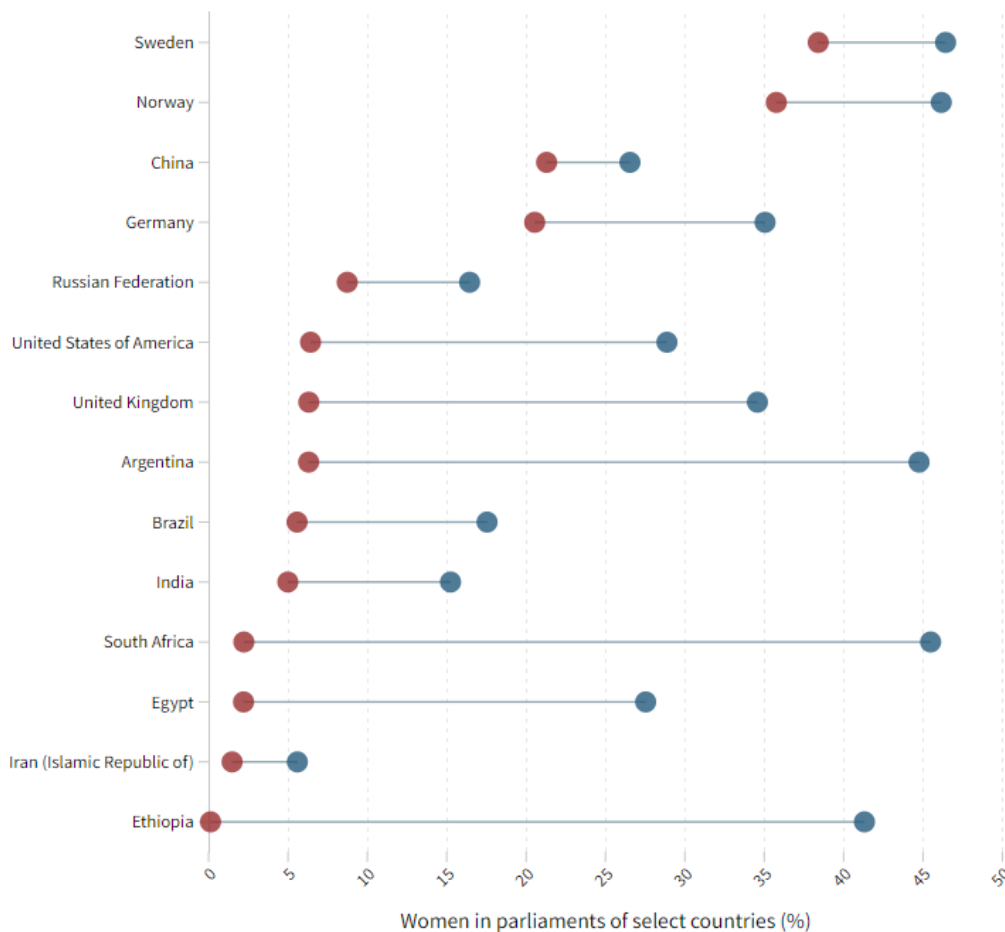
- **Women's Representation in State Legislatures:** The national average of women's representation in State Legislative Assemblies stands at a mere 9%, with no state having more than 20% women legislators.

- Even **Chhattisgarh**, the state with the highest representation, has only 18% women MLAs.

- **Global Scenario:** India ranks **143** out of 185 countries in terms of **women's representation** in the lower house of Parliament.

- **Sweden** has **46% female MPs**, South Africa (45%), the UK (40%) and the US (29%).
- India lags behind countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, Pakistan, and China in gender representation.

Year ● 1990 ● 2023



What are the Reasons for the Underrepresentation of Women in Politics?

- **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes limit women's participation in politics. Household responsibilities and lack of family support, along with disparities in education and economic empowerment, especially in rural areas contributes to such barriers.
- **Political Party Dynamics:** Male-dominated parties often hesitate to field women candidates, relegating them to "safe" or "unwinnable" seats. The lack of internal quotas or affirmative action policies further hinders women's candidacy.
- **Electoral System Challenges:** The [first-past-the-post system](#) favours established male candidates with strong financial and organisational backing. High election costs and the prevalence of criminalisation and money power in politics further disadvantage women.
- **Institutional and Legal Barriers:** The delayed implementation of the [73rd and 74th constitutional amendments](#), which provide for **one-third reservation for women in local bodies**, has limited the pipeline of women entering politics.
 - The repeated failure to pass the **Women's Reservation Bill**, which proposed 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, is another major institutional barrier.
- **Lack of Political Will:** Insufficient prioritisation of women's political empowerment by major parties and lack of sustained pressure from women's movements and civil society perpetuate the status quo.

What are the Arguments in Favour of Women's Reservation in Indian Parliament?

- **Enhancing Women's Political Representation:** Currently, women's representation in Parliament is far below the global average of around 25%. A 33% reservation would help bridge this gap and ensure a more equitable representation of women in the

Indian Parliament.

- Promoting Gender Equality and Inclusive Governance: Women in India face socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers to political participation, including patriarchal norms, lack of resources, and gender-based violence.
 - Also, they make up **nearly 50% of India's population** but are underrepresented in political decision-making. Increasing **their representation** would lead to more **gender-sensitive policies** and better address the unique challenges women face.
- **Strengthening Democratic Participation: Reserving one-third of seats for women would empower their active participation in politics, strengthen inclusive democracy and will initiate more women and children-centric policies that will help in human development.**
 - For instance, in many villages, women representatives have played a crucial role in eradicating child marriage, improving maternal health, and ensuring access to clean drinking water.

What Measures Have Been Taken to Address the Underrepresentation of Women in Indian Politics?

▪ Constitutional Amendments:

- The [73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments \(1992/1993\)](#) provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities, increasing their participation in local governance.
- The [106th Constitutional Amendment \(2023\)](#) proposes a **one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies**, though its implementation is contingent on the next delimitation exercise.
 - The reservation will be implemented after the first census following the commencement of the 106th Amendment Act including a delimitation exercise.

▪ The Women's Reservation Bill:

- The bill, **first introduced in 1996**, proposed **33% reservation for women** in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Despite several attempts, the bill has not been passed due to a lack of political consensus among major parties.

▪ Voluntary Party Quotas: Several political parties in India have female representation in their candidates for elections.

- The Naam Tamar Katchi stands out with 50% women candidates, followed by Lok Janshakti Party and Nationalist Congress Party with 40% each.
- Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Biju Janata Dal, and Rashtriya Janata Dal had 33%, 33%, and 29% female representation, respectively.
- Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party had 20% and All India Trinamool Congress had 25% women candidates.

▪ Empowerment Schemes and Programs:

- Initiatives like the **Mahila Shakti Kendra**, [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#), and [STEP](#) have aimed to improve women's socio-economic status, **but have had limited direct impact on enhancing their political participation.**

▪ Civil Society and Women's Movements:

- There has been sustained advocacy by women's rights groups, activists, and organisations for greater political representation.

WOMEN Reservation Act, 2023

(106th 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



Drishti Mains Question:

What are the major challenges hindering women's representation in politics in India and what measures can be taken to overcome them?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question

Q.1 What are the continued challenges for Women in India against time and space? (2019)

Q.2 Discuss the desirability of greater representation to women in the higher judiciary to ensure diversity,

equity and inclusiveness. **(2021)**

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