



## Women Representation in Parliament

**For Prelims:** Inter-Parliamentary Union, ECI, Social Mobility, MLAs, Article 243D, PRI.

**For Mains:** Reasons for Low Representation of Women in Parliament.

### Why in News?

Recently, the representation of women in parliament in New Zealand crossed the **50% mark**.

- According to the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#), New Zealand is among a half-dozen nations in the world that can claim at least 50% female representation in their parliament by 2022.
  - In 1893, New Zealand became the first nation to allow women to vote.
- Other nations include **Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Rwanda and the United Arab Emirates**.
- Globally, about 26% of lawmakers are women.

### What is the Indian Scenario?

- As per the data compiled by the IPU, of which India is a member, women **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%**.
- In electoral representation, India has fallen several places in the **Inter-Parliamentary Union's global ranking of women's parliamentary** presence, from 117 after the 2014 election to 143 as of January 2020.
  - India is currently behind Pakistan (106), Bangladesh (98) and Nepal (43) and ahead of Sri Lanka (182).

### What are the Reasons for Low Representation?

- **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 politicians 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 Political Networks:**
  - The lack of openness in political decision-making and undemocratic internal processes pose a challenge for all newcomers, but particularly for women as they tend to lack insider knowledge or political networks.
- **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.
  - Public attitudes not only determine how many female candidates win a general election but also directly and indirectly how many are considered and nominated for office.
- **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.
  - There has been increasing violence in politics. A significant rise in [criminalization](#), corruption, insecurity has driven women out of the political arena.

## What are the Government Efforts?

- **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 11th 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.

## Way Forward

- It is the need of the hour in a country like India to have equal participation of all the sections of society in mainstream political activity therefore necessary steps should be taken to promote it.
- All 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.
- There is a pool of women out there who **have been sarpanches**, and members of local bodies, with experience of governance at the local level over a period of three decades.
  - They are waiting to play a larger role in state assemblies and in Parliament.
- 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.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question

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

**Q. Discuss the desirability of greater representation to women in the higher judiciary to ensure diversity, equity and inclusiveness. (2021)**

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