



Women in State Bar Councils

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Why in News?

- The **Supreme Court** has mandated **30% reservation for women** in **State Bar Councils (SBCs)** for states where elections are yet to be announced.

Key Directions of the Supreme Court

- **For the current election cycle:**

o**20% seats** - to be elected **directly by women advocates**.

o**10% seats** - to be filled through **co-option** by existing members.

- **Co-option:**

oA procedure where members are **nominated/appointed** by the existing council rather than elected.

About Bar Councils

Statutory Basis

- Created under the **Advocates Act, 1961**.

Bodies

Bar Council of India (BCI)

oApex statutory body.

State Bar Councils (SBCs)

oOne in each state or group of states.

Functions

BCI:

oPrescribes **standards of professional ethics**.

oRegulates **legal education** with universities.

oSupervises and controls the functioning of SBCs.

SBCs:

- oEnroll advocates on their rolls.
- oSafeguard **rights, interests, and privileges** of advocates.
- oConduct **State Bar Council elections**.

Status of Women in the Legal Profession

Representation in Bar Councils

- o**BCI**: 0 women members among 20.
- o**State Bar Councils**: Only **9 women out of 441 representatives**.

Representation in Judiciary

- o**Supreme Court**: Only **11 women judges** since 1950.
- o**High Courts**: **13.4%** of judges are women.
- o**District Judiciary**: **36.3%** women (State of the Judiciary Report, 2023).

Why is Women's Representation Low?

Entry-Level Barriers: Judicial recruitment rules requiring **continuous practice** disadvantage women due to career breaks for childcare or family responsibilities.

Retention Issues: Lack of **mentorship**, gender-sensitive work norms, and **slow career progression** restrict long-term presence.

Infrastructure Challenges

Many courts still lack:

- oWomen's washrooms
- oCreches
- oSafe workspaces - discouraging women from full-time litigation.

Cultural & Social Norms: Persistent **patriarchal attitudes** and stereotypes discourage women from joining litigation, which is seen as demanding and male-dominated.