

GENERAL STUDIES II

Conversion and Reservation in India: Supreme Court Clarification on Backward-Class Eligibility | UPSC GS Paper 2

Faculty/Author: Faculty Editorial Board**Date:** 16 October 2026**Platform:** Civil Service Gurukul Research Wing**Reading Time:** 5 Mins

India's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for 2028-29 highlights the importance of multilateral diplomacy, regional partnerships and global governance reform. This article explains the UNSC election process, India's strategic interests, the challenges of securing international support and the issue's significance for UPSC Civil Services Prelims and Mains.

Brief Summary

India's campaign for a non-permanent United Nations Security Council seat for 2028–29 highlights its ambitions in multilateral diplomacy and global governance. The election involves coalition building, regional diplomacy and support from countries with differing strategic priorities. This article examines the Council's composition, India's interests, the challenges of securing international backing and the significance of UN reform for UPSC Civil Services preparation.

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1. Why Is India's UNSC Bid in the News?

India is campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2028–29 term. The campaign places the country's diplomatic influence, international partnerships and approach to multilateral institutions in focus.

The Security Council is the UN body primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Its decisions can influence sanctions, peacekeeping mandates and responses to international crises. Membership therefore provides an important platform for shaping debates on conflict, terrorism and global stability.

For India, the campaign is also connected with its broader ambition to secure a greater voice for developing countries in international decision-making. However, a successful campaign requires support from a diverse group of UN member states, not simply recognition of India's growing economic or geopolitical importance.

UPSC takeaway: India's UNSC campaign connects directly with multilateralism, international institutions, representation of the Global South and the reform of global governance.

2. Understanding the United Nations Security Council

The Security Council has 15 members: five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. The permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The permanent members possess veto powers on substantive decisions.

Feature	Explanation	Why it matters
Total membership	15 countries	Combines permanent and elected representation.
Permanent members	China, France, Russia, UK and USA	Hold permanent seats and veto power on substantive matters.
Non-permanent members	10 countries elected by the General Assembly	Provide rotating representation across regional groups.
Term	Two years for non-permanent members	Members serve without immediate re-election for a consecutive term.
Election	Secret ballot in the UN General Assembly	Each candidate must secure the required two-thirds majority.
Primary responsibility	International peace and security	Includes conflict-related decisions and peacekeeping mandates.

How does the election work?

Non-permanent members are elected by the UN General Assembly. A candidate must obtain the support of two-thirds of the members present and voting. If all 193 members participate and cast valid votes, the threshold would be 129 affirmative votes.

Regional allocation influences the election process. Countries frequently seek regional consensus before the formal vote, but competing candidacies can turn an expected consensus election into a contest requiring extensive diplomatic mobilisation.

The election for the 2028–29 term is therefore not merely a popularity exercise. It requires sustained engagement with regional groups, bilateral partners and countries whose priorities may differ from those of India.

3. Why Does India Seek a Security Council Seat?

A. A greater role in global decision-making

India argues that contemporary international institutions should better reflect present-day political, economic and demographic realities. A Council seat would provide another opportunity to participate directly in discussions on peace and security.

B. Advancing Global South priorities

Developing countries frequently seek greater attention to development finance, food and energy security, climate concerns, debt vulnerabilities and equitable representation. India can use multilateral platforms to articulate these priorities and build coalitions around shared concerns.

C. Counterterrorism and international security

Terrorism, regional conflicts, maritime insecurity and emerging security threats remain important concerns for India. Participation in Council deliberations can provide a platform to advocate cooperation, stronger international responses and respect for relevant international obligations.

D. Building diplomatic influence

A non-permanent seat can strengthen a country's diplomatic visibility, but its influence depends on negotiation, coalition building and the ability to shape discussions. Membership does not automatically confer permanent status or veto power.

E. Supporting institutional reform

India has long advocated reforms to make the UN system more representative and responsive. Its campaign can reinforce the argument that global institutions should evolve to address contemporary challenges and the concerns of under-represented regions.

4. Major Diplomatic Challenges

Competition within the regional group

The availability of a seat for a particular regional group does not guarantee a single uncontested candidate. Competing countries may mobilise support by highlighting their own regional standing, development needs or claims to fair representation.

Small-state representation

Some UN members may favour smaller countries that have had fewer opportunities to serve on the Council. This creates a diplomatic challenge for larger states seeking repeated terms and requires careful engagement with the principle of equitable representation.

Balancing regional partnerships

A contested election can complicate bilateral relations, particularly when competing candidates are established strategic partners. India must weigh the potential gains from a Council seat against the costs of a divisive regional contest.

Different geopolitical priorities

UN members do not vote solely on the basis of economic size or historical relationships. Their decisions may be influenced by regional solidarity, development assistance, security partnerships and wider geopolitical disagreements.

The limitations of non-permanent membership

A two-year term offers a valuable platform, but non-permanent members do not possess the veto enjoyed by permanent members. Structural constraints can limit the Council's ability to act when major powers disagree.

Analytical point: A successful election campaign and comprehensive Security Council reform are separate objectives. Winning a temporary seat does not resolve the institutional barriers to permanent representation.

5. India's Strategic Options

Option 1: Build a broad diplomatic coalition

India can intensify engagement with countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Regular consultations and cooperation on shared development concerns can help build a broad base of support.

Option 2: Strengthen regional dialogue

Early discussions with competing candidates and regional partners may help identify common interests. Where feasible, negotiated arrangements can reduce diplomatic friction and preserve long-term relationships.

Option 3: Demonstrate constructive multilateral leadership

India can strengthen its diplomatic case by contributing to peacekeeping, humanitarian cooperation, development partnerships and discussions on international security. A credible record of constructive engagement can support its wider campaign.

Option 4: Evaluate the costs and benefits of competition

A contested election may be worthwhile if the strategic gains justify the diplomatic costs. Alternatively, an agreed timetable or negotiated regional arrangement may sometimes better serve long-term interests. Any such decision requires careful assessment rather than an assumption that either competition or compromise is always preferable.

6. The Wider Debate on UN Security Council Reform

The structure of the Security Council largely reflects the international order established after the Second World War. The rise of new economic powers, the growing role of developing countries and the complexity of contemporary conflicts have intensified demands for reform.

Reform debates commonly concern the number of permanent and non-permanent members, regional representation, working methods and the future of the veto. Any major restructuring faces political and procedural obstacles, including disagreement among existing members over the nature and extent of change.

Why reform matters

- **Legitimacy:** Broader representation can strengthen perceptions of fairness.
- **Effectiveness:** Better working methods may improve the Council's response to crises.
- **Accountability:** Greater transparency can strengthen trust in international decision-making.
- **Equity:** Reform can address concerns about the under-representation of developing regions.
- **Cooperation:** More inclusive processes may encourage wider participation in implementing decisions.

Nevertheless, membership expansion alone cannot guarantee an effective Council. Reform must also address political deadlock, the use of veto powers and the capacity of the institution to respond consistently to international crises.

7. Way Forward for India

1. **Prioritise inclusive diplomacy.** Engage countries across regions and political groupings rather than relying on a narrow set of established partners.
2. **Build issue-based partnerships.** Develop cooperation around food security, climate resilience, health, development finance, maritime security and counter-terrorism.
3. **Maintain regional relationships.** Pursue diplomatic objectives without unnecessarily weakening long-term partnerships with neighbouring and strategically important countries.
4. **Support credible UN reform.** Continue engaging with reform proposals and other member states to improve representation, transparency and institutional effectiveness.
5. **Link leadership with practical outcomes.** Demonstrate constructive contributions to peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, development and international cooperation.
6. **Use a long-term strategic perspective.** Assess the value of a temporary seat alongside India's broader objective of a more representative international order.

India's diplomatic success will depend not only on the result of an election, but also on its capacity to build durable partnerships and contribute to effective multilateral institutions.

8. UPSC Examination Relevance

Prelims: Important facts

- The Security Council has 15 members: five permanent and ten non-permanent.
- Non-permanent members are elected by the UN General Assembly.
- The term of a non-permanent member is two years.
- Election requires a two-thirds majority of members present and voting.
- The five permanent members possess veto power on substantive matters.

- The UN Security Council's primary responsibility concerns international peace and security.

Mains: GS Paper II connections

- Important international institutions and their mandates.
- India's foreign policy and strategic interests.
- Global governance and multilateral diplomacy.
- Representation of developing countries in international institutions.
- Reform of the United Nations and limitations of the Security Council.
- India's role in the Global South and international peacekeeping.

UPSC Mains practice question

Question: India's campaign for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat highlights both the opportunities and limitations of multilateral diplomacy. Discuss in the context of global governance reform. (150 words)

Answer approach: Explain the Council's role, identify India's diplomatic interests, discuss regional competition and institutional constraints, and conclude with the need for inclusive reform and sustained international cooperation.

Prelims practice MCQ

Consider the following statements:

1. The UN Security Council has five permanent members.
2. Non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms.
3. Every non-permanent member possesses a veto over substantive decisions.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 1 only
(B) 1 and 2 only
(C) 2 and 3 only
(D) 1, 2 and 3

Reveal answer

Correct answer: (B) 1 and 2 only.

The Council has five permanent members and ten elected members. Non-permanent members serve two-year terms but do not possess the veto power held by permanent members.

9. Frequently Asked Questions

What is India's UNSC bid for 2028–29?

It is India's campaign to secure a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2028–29 term. Success depends on the applicable election process and sufficient support from UN General Assembly members.

How many members are there in the UN Security Council?

The Council has 15 members, comprising five permanent members and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms.

Do non-permanent members have veto power?

No. The veto is held by the five permanent members. Non-permanent members participate in Council deliberations and voting but do not have an individual veto.

Why is the issue important for UPSC GS Paper II?

It links international institutions, India's foreign policy, multilateralism, global governance and the reform of international organisations. These themes are relevant in both conceptual Prelims preparation and analytical Mains answers.

Does winning a non-permanent seat make India a permanent member?

No. Non-permanent membership lasts for two years and does not change a country's permanent status or confer veto power. Permanent membership would require a separate institutional reform process.

Conclusion

India's campaign for a non-permanent Security Council seat illustrates the importance of diplomatic engagement, international partnerships and strategic decision-making. The effort also highlights a wider question: whether global institutions can adequately reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and the aspirations of developing countries.

For India, effective diplomacy must combine the pursuit of national interests with constructive engagement and a credible commitment to multilateral cooperation. For UPSC aspirants, the issue offers a valuable case study in international relations and global governance.

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