

The Three-Year Practice Mandate for Judiciary: Balancing Experience and Aspirations

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The three-year practice requirement for entry-level Civil Judge (Junior Division) positions was recently reintroduced by the Supreme Court of India in the case of *All India Judges Association v. Union of India (2025)*. By rejecting a 2002 decision, this decision seeks to guarantee that prospective judges have the necessary hands-on experience with the legal system prior to taking on judicial responsibilities. Although the goal is to improve the quality of the judiciary, the decision has generated controversy, especially in relation to its effect on young candidates and the more general comparison between a career in the judiciary and lobbying.

What the Reinstated Mandate Means

According to the Supreme Court's ruling, applicants cannot take the Civil Judge (Junior Division) exam unless they have practiced law for at least three years. A minimum of 10 years of standing as an advocate is required to formally certify this experience. Crucially, experience working as a judge's legal clerk will also be taken into account for this prerequisite. Future hiring cycles will be impacted by the decision because it is prospective in nature.

The Judiciary: Always Better than Advocacy?

The premise of the user's request suggests that "judiciary is always better than advocacy." This is a strong and subjective statement. While a judicial career offers immense prestige, stability, and the opportunity to serve society, advocacy presents its own unique set of rewards and challenges. Both paths are vital to the functioning of the legal system, and their "betterment" is largely dependent on individual aspirations, skills, and values.

Pros of a Career in the Judiciary:

- **Prestige and Respect:** A judicial position holds immense social standing and respect in India.
- **Job Security and Financial Stability:** Judges enjoy secure tenure until retirement and competitive salaries with various allowances.
- **Opportunity to Serve Society:** Judges play a direct role in upholding justice, protecting rights, and enforcing the rule of law, contributing significantly to societal well-being.

- **Intellectual Challenge and Growth:** The role demands continuous intellectual engagement with complex legal issues, fostering ongoing learning and professional development.
- **Professional Autonomy:** Judges operate with a significant degree of independence, making impartial decisions based on law and facts.
- **Work-Life Balance (Relative):** Compared to the often-demanding hours of advocacy, a judicial career can offer more structured work hours.

Cons of a Career in Advocacy:

- **Financial Instability (especially for juniors):** The initial years can be financially challenging, with low stipends and no guaranteed income.
- **Long and Irregular Working Hours:** Advocacy often demands extensive hours, including weekends, and can have an unpredictable schedule.
- **High Pressure and Competition:** The profession is highly competitive, and building a successful practice requires immense dedication and resilience.
- **Lack of Job Security:** Unlike judicial positions, advocacy does not offer inherent job security, especially for those in independent practice.
- **Mental Health Toll:** The high-pressure environment, client demands, and the adversarial nature of litigation can contribute to stress and burnout.
- **Networking Challenges:** Establishing a client base and professional network can be a significant hurdle, particularly for first-generation lawyers.

Impact on Judiciary Coaching: A Nuanced View

The three-year practice mandate is designed to ensure practical exposure, not to undermine the value of judiciary coaching. Judiciary coaching centers focus on equipping aspirants with the theoretical knowledge, analytical skills, and exam strategies required to clear the judicial services examinations. This academic preparation remains crucial.

The argument that "judiciary is always better than advocacy" is a subjective opinion. The mandate seeks to create better judges, not to diminish the value of a practicing advocate. In fact, a robust bar is essential for a strong judiciary.

How judiciary coaching can adapt without being "impacted negatively":

- **Focus on Practical Application:** Coaching centers can integrate more scenario-based questions, judgment writing exercises, and mock court simulations that mirror real-world legal challenges encountered during the three-year practice period.
- **Guidance on Internship/Clerkship Opportunities:** Coaches can actively guide students towards meaningful internships with practicing lawyers or judicial clerkships that fulfill the experience requirement.
- **Guest Lectures by Practicing Advocates:** Inviting experienced advocates to share their practical insights and courtroom experiences can be invaluable for aspirants.
- **Emphasis on Core Legal Skills:** Beyond rote memorization, coaching should emphasize critical thinking, legal research, and persuasive communication, which are honed through practical experience.
- **Career Counseling:** Provide comprehensive counseling on the realities of both advocacy and judiciary, helping students make informed career choices that align with their strengths and aspirations.

In conclusion, the three-year practice mandate for judicial eligibility is a reform aimed at strengthening the quality of the judiciary by ensuring practical grounding. While it redefines the path for aspiring judges, it does not diminish the prestige or importance of a judicial career, nor does it inherently undermine the role of judiciary coaching. Instead, it necessitates a more integrated approach to legal education and career planning, where theoretical knowledge is complemented by invaluable practical experience. Both judiciary and advocacy offer distinct and rewarding career paths, and a thriving legal system depends on the excellence of professionals in both domains.

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