BLOGS

# Supreme Court Eases 3 Year Practice Rule To 1 Year: Judiciary Aspirants Get Major Relief

Shruti chauhan · 21 Aug 2026

**The Ruling in Brief:** In a 2:1 split verdict, the Supreme Court has reduced the mandatory Bar practice requirement for the Civil Judge (Junior Division) exam from three years to one year, and replaced the remaining gap with a structured one year training and clerkship program. The new rule applies only from April 1, 2027, and until then, all law graduates can apply regardless of practice experience.

The Supreme Court delivered a major verdict today on the mandatory three year practice rule for entry level judicial service. This ruling has been eagerly awaited by thousands of law graduates and judiciary aspirants across India.

In a 2:1 split verdict, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, along with Justice Augustine George Masih and Justice K. Vinod Chandran, modified the earlier requirement while dismissing the review petitions. Here is a complete and simple breakdown of what changed today.

## Background: How This Rule Came About

To understand today's judgment, you need to know the history behind it. On May 20, 2025, the Supreme Court had ruled that fresh law graduates could no longer directly appear for the Civil Judge (Junior Division) examination.

That judgment came in the All India Judges Association v Union of India case. It restored a mandatory three year legal practice requirement, overturning an earlier 2002 position that had allowed fresh graduates to enter judicial service without prior Bar experience.

The 2025 verdict caused significant concern among law students and recent graduates. Several review petitions were filed challenging this decision, arguing it created an arbitrary barrier and unfairly affected candidates, especially women and persons with disabilities.

## What the Court Was Asked to Reconsider

The review petitioners argued that the three year mandate discouraged bright, meritorious graduates from joining the lower judiciary immediately after their law degree.

They also contended that the rule violated Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution, which guarantee equality before law and equal opportunity in public employment. Petitioners suggested that structured training and judicial education could achieve the same objective without shutting the door on fresh graduates.

On the other side, several respondents and Bar bodies maintained that courtroom exposure remains essential for anyone stepping directly into a judge's role at the trial court level.

## Today's Verdict: The Key Changes

The Court did not scrap the requirement of prior legal experience altogether. However, it substantially eased the burden by reducing the mandatory practice period.

Here are the major takeaways from today's ruling.

**The three year requirement has been reduced to one year.** Going forward, candidates will only need one year of legal practice as a prerequisite, rather than three years, to be eligible for the Civil Judge (Junior Division) examination.

**A new training and clerkship model fills the remaining gap.** Selected candidates will now be appointed as Trainee Judicial Officers. They must undergo one year of intensive training at their State Judicial Academy, followed by a structured one year clerkship, split into six months under a District Judge or Higher Judicial Service officer and six months under a sitting High Court judge.

**This new one year plus training model applies from April 1, 2027.** Only recruitment notifications issued on or after this date will require candidates to have completed one year of verified active practice at the Bar.

## The Transition Period: What Happens Right Now

The Court also carved out an important transitional window, recognising that more than a year has already passed since the original 2025 judgment.

For any judicial service examination notified between May 25, 2025 and March 31, 2027, all law graduates can apply, regardless of whether they have completed any practice at all.

Candidates who apply and succeed during this transition window will be deemed to have automatically completed one year of practice. They will not need to submit any separate practice certificate for that period.

**Example to understand better :** A law graduate who completed their degree in 2026 can appear for a Civil Judge exam notified in early 2027 without having practised for even a single day, since the transition rule treats them as having met the one year requirement.

Once selected, these candidates will still be designated as Trainee Judicial Officers and must complete the one year State Judicial Academy training. This training period will count as their second year of practical exposure, followed by the structured clerkship year described above.

## What the Majority Said

Chief Justice Surya Kant, delivering the majority verdict, clarified that the Bench saw no reason to disturb the core reasoning behind the original 2025 judgment. The Court reaffirmed that some degree of exposure to the legal profession remains important before a person takes on judicial responsibilities.

However, the majority also acknowledged that the requirement must have a reasonable connection to its purpose and should not cause undue hardship to young advocates. This is the reasoning that led the Bench to reduce the standalone practice period while introducing a more structured and supervised alternative through training and clerkship.

## The Dissenting Opinion

It is important to note that this was not a unanimous decision. Justice K. Vinod Chandran dissented from the majority view.

He was in favour of upholding the original May 2025 judgment in its entirety, meaning he would have retained the full three year practice requirement without any modification. This dissent is a significant part of the ruling, since it shows the Bench was not entirely aligned on how much flexibility should be given to fresh graduates.

## Why This Matters for Judiciary Aspirants

This judgment directly affects lakhs of law students and judiciary exam aspirants preparing for Civil Judge recruitment across various states.

For those preparing for exams notified before March 31, 2027, this is a major relief, since the practical requirement of prior Bar experience has effectively been suspended for this window. For those planning to enter after April 2027, the effective practice requirement has still been cut down from three years to just one year, supplemented by structured, supervised training rather than unregulated courtroom practice alone.

This also addresses a long standing concern raised during the hearings, that fresh graduates, particularly women and candidates from leading law schools, were being discouraged from applying due to the earlier three year condition.

Today's Supreme Court verdict represents a carefully balanced middle path. It does not abandon the principle that judicial officers benefit from real world legal exposure before assuming their role, but it significantly eases the entry barrier that many felt was excessive.

For judiciary aspirants, the immediate effect is clear. If your target exam falls within the transition window ending March 2027, you can now apply without worrying about the three year Bar practice condition that had caused so much uncertainty over the past year.