

## **An Analysis of Citizens' Participation in Governance in Sri Lanka**

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This article explores the impact of the Right to Information Act, Personal Data Protection Act, and Online Safety Act of Sri Lanka, respectively enacted in 2016, 2022, and 2024, on citizen's participation in governance. Although the laws serve different purposes according to their respective preambles, they purport to safeguard citizens' ability to participate meaningfully in public life, to safeguard their personal data and overall safety in the online space. Through a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, including where possible, political developments that led to the enactment of the respective Acts, this article draws two main conclusions. First, through a textual interpretation of the Acts, the implementation of the Right to Information Act, and relevant constitutional provisions, the article observes that while these legislative enactments promise robust citizen participation in governance, they undermine it by allowing compromises in privacy, information self-determination, and online speech. Secondly, although the three Acts may be theoretically reconcilable, the complex web of legislation creates contradictions, raising concerns about the meaningful implementation of any of these laws. This article excludes certain other laws that may have an impact on citizens' participation in governance, such as laws on elections, terrorism and security, as they, respectively, focus on procedure and have been enacted to prevent terrorism and facilitate public safety as opposed to specifically citizens' participation in governance. Thus, the article offers an examination of citizen participation in governance in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how laws can be severely compromised when inherent tensions between them are not explicitly addressed and reconciled, resulting in weak enactments and ineffective implementation.

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