

Youth Involvement in Politics: The Impact of Access to Legal Education in Sri Lanka

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Youth form a distinct group in society, representing new and innovative ideas. Their role as legislators is vital for a state that wishes to adopt a holistic attitude towards development. Even though the Sustainable Development Goals include opportunities for youth as a distinct priority, and the stated political manifestos of political parties in Sri Lanka pledge to promote youth involvement in politics, the reality is that youth are severely under-represented in politics, and even where representation is available, it is not meaningful and informed.

The major reason for this situation appears to be the lack of access to legal education. If parliament's major task is to pass new legislation, then it is imperative that legislators must have some idea about the kind of legal change that is both required and viable. It is submitted that this cannot be achieved unless there is legal education accessible to all youth.

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the degree to which the lack of access to legal education has impacted on the ability of Sri Lankan youth to engage effectively in politics. The study was done as a library research, utilizing secondary data.

The study establishes that the majority of legal education is offered at the youth age group. However, at the state level, it is extremely limited and highly competitive. Though private legal education is offered, this is often done by offshore campuses of foreign universities, making cost and relevancy key issues. This, in turn, blocks access to legal education for many youth who otherwise have the potential to contribute meaningfully as legislators, and who may highlight the real issues affecting the majority of the Sri Lankan public.

It is therefore proposed that the government increases access to legal education by improving the standards and resources of the state-run institutions that engage in the teaching of law. The establishment of private local colleges that teach law must

also be considered in order that the study of the law does not remain confined only to those who can afford a foreign education.

Key words: *Youth, Politics, Legal Education, Access.*