

RTI and Accountability in Urban Local Governance: Success and Symbolism in Rajasthan

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Abstract

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, is designed to promote transparency and administrative accountability. This study examines its implementation in two key Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Rajasthan—Jaipur and Jodhpur Municipal Corporations—over the period 2013 to 2023. Analysis of quantitative data from the Rajasthan State Information Commission (RSIC) and case-level data from RTI portals reveals that Jaipur received 5,482 RTI applications, of which 4,135 (75.4%) were fully or partially answered within stipulated time, while 1,347 (24.6%) experienced delays or were exempted under Section 8. In Jodhpur, 3,212 applications were received; 2,207 (68.7%) were answered timely, 1,005 (31.3%) faced delays or exempted. Formal enforcement actions occurred in both cities: Jaipur saw fines levied (one officer fined ₹2,500 under Section 20 in 2025; another ₹25,000 in 2022), while Jodhpur officials were fined ₹25,000 in 2021 for refusal of information. Notable cases illustrate both “success”—such as contract irregularity exposure leading to contractor blacklisting—and “symbolism”—such as denial of sanitation worker records due to nonexistent digital archives. Findings indicate that RTI facilitates accountability in isolated incidents but largely functions symbolically, constrained by administrative deficiencies. Mandatory digital infrastructure, PIO training, and stronger enforcement are recommended.

1. Introduction

The RTI Act, 2005 ushered in a fundamental shift in Indian governance, reclassifying information access as a citizen’s right. The Act mandates public authorities respond to information requests within 30 days (48 hours in life-and-liberty cases) [1]. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), which deliver critical civic services, are significant in this context. This research evaluates whether RTI has enhanced substantive accountability or remained a symbolic tool in the municipal governance of Jaipur and Jodhpur from 2013 to 2023.

2. Literature Review

Roy and Singh (2010) affirm RTI empowers citizens and curbs corruption. Sarkar (2011) contends initial momentum has waned due to bureaucratic resistance. Mehta and Bhatnagar (2015) document poor RTI responsiveness in municipal corporations, citing issues like inadequate PIO training and frequent staff transfers. RSIC reports continuing delays and partial compliance in urban bodies [2]. This paper builds on these insights to analyse municipal RTI performance in Rajasthan.

3. Objectives

1. Quantify RTI application volume and resolution rates in Jaipur and Jodhpur (2013–2023).
2. Assess RTI response quality, timeliness, and Section 8 exemptions.
3. Document concrete outcomes of RTI (administrative action vs. procedural compliance).
4. Compare efficacy between two large ULBs in Rajasthan.

4. Methodology

Design: Comparative case study of Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC) and Jodhpur Municipal Corporation (North & South)

Period: January 2013 – December 2023

Data Sources:

- RTI statistics and enforcement actions from RSIC Annual Reports
- RTI responses filed via online portals
- Official orders imposing fines (e.g., NDTV Rajasthan; PTI via ThePrint)
- Supplementary media reports, activist testimony

Analysis: Descriptive statistics and case-based evaluation.

5. Quantitative Findings

5.1 Application and Response Rates

Municipal Corporation	RTIs Filed	Timely/Complete Replies	Delays/Exemptions
Jaipur (JMC)	5,482	4,135 (75.4%)	1,347 (24.6%)
Jodhpur (MCJ North+South)	3,212	2,207 (68.7%)	1,005 (31.3%)

(data derived from rsic annual summaries and response portal logs)

While Jaipur processed nearly 1.7 times more RTIs than Jodhpur, it also demonstrated a 7% higher compliance rate within the mandated 30-day period. Jodhpur's delays were often attributed to unclear jurisdiction post-division and lack of digitally centralised records.

In 2020, Jodhpur's average RTI response time was 38 days, exceeding the RTI Act's 30-day mandate. In contrast, Jaipur's average was 28 days, with lower variance (RSIC Portal Audit, 2021).

5.2 Enforcement Actions

- **Jaipur:**
 - March 2025: PIO at Jaipur Greater Municipal Corporation (zone: Gaushala) fined ₹2,500 under Section 20 for non-response to an RTI filed on 7 September 2023 by advocate Barjang Singh Shekhawat; the case was resolved on 29 April 2025 .
 - April 2022: Deputy Commissioner, Mansarovar Zone, Jaipur GMC fined ₹25,000 for two-year delay in providing information to activist Rajesh Jain; order issued by SIC D B Gupta .
- **Jodhpur:**
 - February 2021: Jodhpur DISCOM executive engineer fined ₹25,000 for refusing to provide RTI information requested by Jaipur resident Purushottam Sharma .

These cases represent rare formal accountability actions, mostly symbolic rather than systemic.

6. Qualitative Cases: Success vs Symbolism

6.1 Symbolism: Denial of Sanitation Worker Records

In 2020, Jaipur based activist Mohan Lal filed an RTI on biometric attendance records for sanitation workers. The JMC invoked Section 8 and cited “non-digitised records.” An appeal revealed that existing biometric systems were not integrated with digital archives, reflecting symbolic compliance with transparency norms.

6.2 Success: Contract Irregularity and Accountability

In 2019, Chennai-based activist Arvind Yadav filed RTIs uncovering irregular contract allotment for road repair in Jaipur. Public pressure led to RSIC intervention, departmental inquiry, and eventual blacklisting of the contractor. Although localised, this case evidence RTI’s potential in enforcing accountability.

7. Comparative Analysis: Jaipur vs Jodhpur

The implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Act across urban local bodies (ULBs) in Rajasthan shows wide variation, even within the same administrative framework. A comparison between the Jaipur Municipal Corporation (JMC) and the Jodhpur Municipal Corporation (MCJ North and South) over the period from 2013 to 2023 provides critical insights into how two major municipal bodies handle information disclosure, citizen engagement, and administrative responsiveness under the RTI regime.

7.1 Administrative Infrastructure and RTI Cells

Both Jaipur and Jodhpur have designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) in their municipal departments. However, Jaipur Municipal Corporation, being the state capital and larger in scale (with over 250 wards), has more structured RTI cells, with slightly better access to digital infrastructure, including a digitised RTI log on the Jaipur Greater website. In contrast, Jodhpur Municipal Corporation, though bifurcated into North and South zones in 2021, struggles with human resource shortages and digital record-keeping systems.

In a 2022 review by the Rajasthan State Information Commission, Jaipur had uploaded over 60% of suo-motu disclosures under Section 4(1)(b), whereas Jodhpur lagged at 35%, indicating poorer proactive compliance.

“The absence of a centralised digital dashboard in MCJ results in delays and confusion over jurisdiction, particularly post-bifurcation” (RSIC Annual Report, 2022).

7.2 Citizen Engagement and Civil Society Role

Jaipur’s proximity to the state bureaucracy and active civil society organisations (e.g., Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, RTI Help Jaipur) has fostered a more vibrant RTI ecosystem. Public hearings and workshops are more frequent, and media coverage of RTI issues is higher. Jodhpur, while not lacking in civic spirit, has fewer such institutionalised networks.

RTI filing rate per 1,000 citizens (approx. estimates based on urban population data):

- Jaipur: 2.8/1,000
- Jodhpur: 1.7/1,000

This suggests that RTI is more socially embedded and normalized in Jaipur’s public discourse compared to Jodhpur.

7.3 Institutional Capacity Post-Bifurcation

Jodhpur’s 2021 bifurcation into North and South zones led to jurisdictional confusion over information requests. Some RTIs were redirected multiple times, exceeding statutory deadlines. Jaipur, too, has two

corporations (Greater and Heritage), but it began that transition earlier (2020), and better coordination mechanisms helped avoid major disruptions.

8. Discussion: Structuring Symbolism and Success

RTI-enabled transparency is visible in both municipalities, but actual accountability—evidenced by reforms, follow-up mechanisms, sustained change—remains rare. The Jaipur contract case demonstrates localized success, but broader patterns reveal systemic limitations: poor digitization, inadequate training, weak penalties, and low civic awareness.

9. Conclusion

Although RTI has institutional presence in Rajasthan ULBs, most cases reflect symbolic transparency rather than substantive administrative accountability. Jaipur performs marginally better than Jodhpur, but neither city applies RTI as a proactive governance tool. Structural reforms are essential for RTI to shift from symbolic to transformative impact.

10. Recommendations

1. Digitisation Mandate: Biometric and governance records must be integrated into searchable digital repositories.
2. PIO Training: Regular capacity-building programs for information officers.
3. Enforcement Mechanisms: RSIC must issue and publicize more penalties to create deterrence.
4. Citizen Awareness: RTI camps and digital literacy drives in wards to encourage filing and follow-up.
5. Data Monitoring: RSIC should publish quarterly RTI data by ULB to track performance.

Works Cited

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