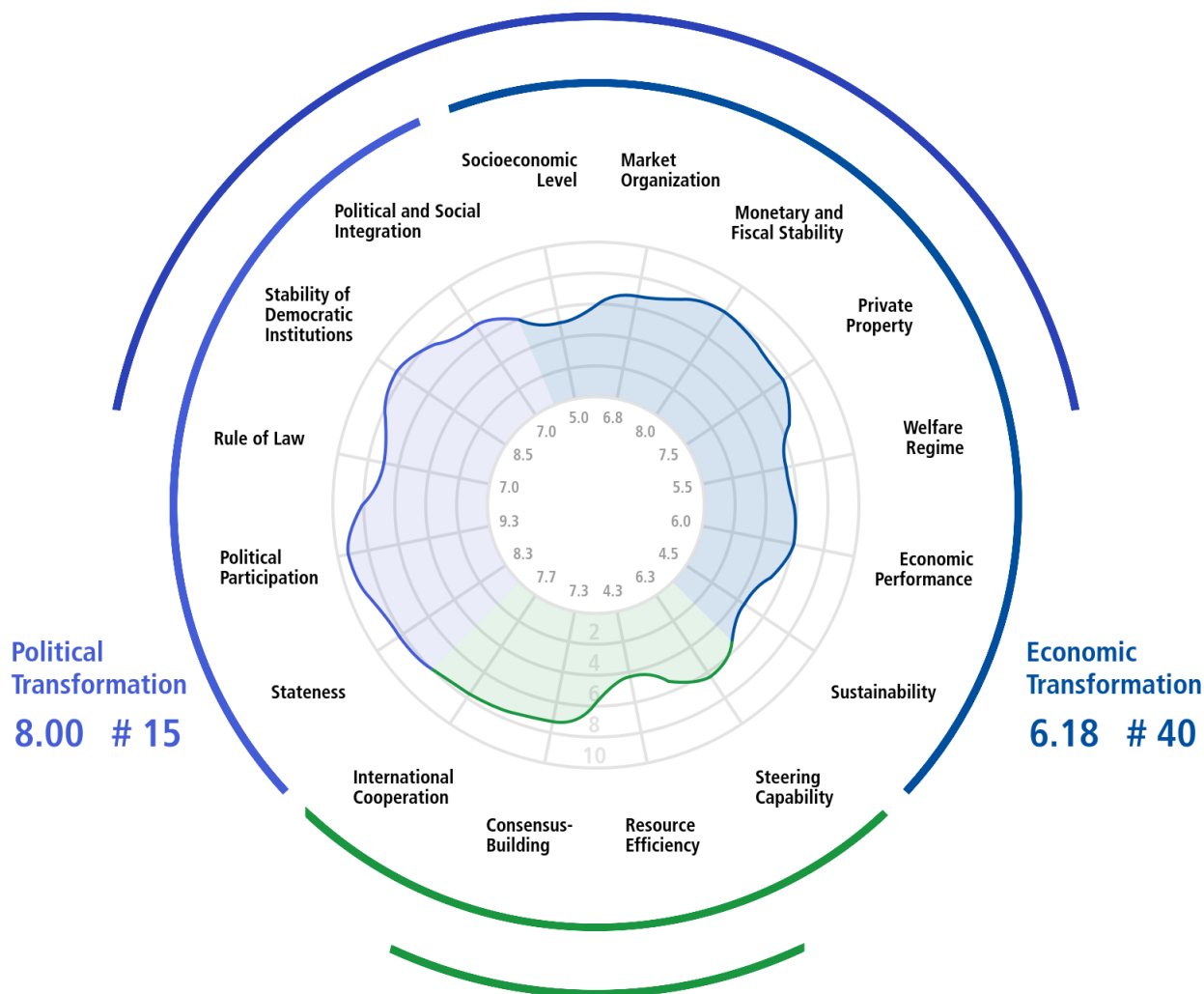


# Jamaica

## Status Index

**7.09 # 24**

on 1-10 scale out of 137



## Governance Index

**5.53 # 36**

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026**. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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**Key Indicators**

Population	M	<b>2.8</b>	HDI	<b>0.720</b>	GDP p.c., PPP \$	<b>11662</b>
Pop. growth <sup>1</sup>	% p.a.	<b>0.0</b>	HDI rank of 193	<b>117</b>	Gini Index	<b>39.9</b>
Life expectancy	years	<b>71.5</b>	UN Education Index	<b>0.676</b>	Poverty <sup>3</sup>	% <b>2.4</b>
Urban population	%	<b>57.8</b>	Gender inequality <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.358</b>	Aid per capita \$	<b>30.4</b>

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

## Executive Summary

During the review period, Jamaica experienced widespread political apathy and perceptions of pervasive corruption. Local government elections in February 2024 resulted in a marginal win for the ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), which won seven of the 13 local authorities; the People’s National Party (PNP) won the remaining six. Voter turnout rates continued to decline, with only 29.6% of the electorate participating in the election, indicating a significant degree of voter apathy. Jamaicans generally perceive the government as being inadequate and see corruption as a significant issue. Over the review period, Prime Minister Andrew Holness and opposition leader Mark Golding experienced a significant loss of public confidence, reflecting dissatisfaction among Jamaicans with the government’s ability to deliver on its promises. There is a growing sense that the government needs to be more responsive and accountable to the population’s needs.

Insecurity is a constant preoccupation for many Jamaicans. Homicide rates, while declining, continue to be high and are linked to the expansion of criminal gangs. High levels of public distrust in the police further complicate matters. States of emergency (SOEs), zones of special operations (ZOSOs) and community curfews continue to be used as primary crime-fighting tools. While these have proved somewhat effective in the short term, the government must develop a long-term sustainable solution to eradicate gang activity. The government has invested significantly in improving the capacity of law enforcement, which might have contributed to the decline in the homicide rate.

At the macro level, the economy largely stabilized post-COVID-19; however, for the period ending in September 2024, the economy contracted by 2.8% in part because of Hurricane Beryl and reduced agricultural output. The macroeconomic outlook improved following reforms required under Jamaica’s acceptance of the International Monetary Fund’s Extended Fund Facility (2013) and Stand-By Arrangement (2016). These reforms brought enhanced fiscal discipline and a gradual reduction in public debt, which reached its lowest level in decades during the 2023 – 2024 financial year (74.2% of GDP). Nonetheless, this fiscal discipline has constrained spending

on badly needed state functions including the health care system and social safety net programs for impoverished families and the elderly. Jamaica had a record-low unemployment rate of 3.5% in 2024, marking a significant improvement from the average of 11.5% seen over the past three decades, except in 1997, when unemployment jumped to 16.5%. Despite this historic decline, concerns have arisen regarding job quality and a low-paying labor market. Reliance on the informal sector persists, as some communities, especially in low-income and rural areas, continue to experience disparities in access to jobs, goods and services in the formal sector.

Governance challenges persisted. As the review period closed, the two main political parties were in electioneering mode in the lead-up to the 2025 general elections. However, voters seemed generally uninterested in the upcoming general elections and were more attentive to the government and the opposition's focus on topical issues, such as absenteeism by elected officials both from the House of Representatives and from parliamentary committee meetings. Other areas of concern include findings from the Integrity Commission (IC) and the Auditor-General's Department (AGD) regarding matters of non-compliance, duplication of services that squanders resources; and unaccounted-for government spending. These findings have reinforced the electorate's perception of the prevalence of government corruption and ineptitude within the administration. The public has increasingly relied on civil society organizations (CSOs) to keep informed, especially to track government breaches of policies, regulations and spending goals. However, the government has avoided meaningful civil society participation in consultations about policy design and implementation.

## History and Characteristics of Transformation

The historical legacies of slavery and plantations have produced an economy and society in which race, gender and class strongly shape access to economic and political power. Jamaica's transition to democracy has not proceeded linearly from early representative institutions to today's democracy; rather, it stems from the achievement of political independence in 1962. In the first three decades that followed, general elections were often marred by electoral fraud and violence between supporters of the two main political parties, the People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). Reforms to the electoral system in the 1990s and the formation of the independent Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ) in 2006 removed opportunities for electoral fraud. Elections have largely remained free of violence in the past three decades.

The JLP and the PNP have governed Jamaica since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1944. There have been 14 general elections since independence; the latest, held in September 2020, was won by the incumbent JLP. The PNP's most recent general election win was in December 2011. Despite smooth transitions between governing parties and the opposition, Jamaica also exhibits democratic shortcomings. Jamaica's democratic development is hamstrung by entrenched political tribalism and corruption. Additionally, structural issues such as intergenerational poverty, inequality and crime affect economic and political development prospects in Jamaica. Since independence, citizens have been integrated into politics through clientelist relationships with

political parties. Citizens from lower-income communities are given temporary work or provided with basic community amenities to secure their votes. Business elites are integrated into the political process through the provision of financial support for both parties in return for preferential access to opportunities, which helps maintain the status quo and discourages any significant reform of the electoral system. Independent candidates and third parties have not fared well in Jamaica. Strong patron-based clientelism makes it difficult for third parties to compete, as they typically lack the resources or networks to sway voters enough to win a seat in Parliament.

Jamaica's economy has suffered from decades of anemic growth and a high debt-to-GDP ratio. In 2013, the country's public debt reached a high of 147% of GDP. As a small island developing state (SIDS), Jamaica has limited industrial capacity and depends on the export of primary goods, tourism and services for revenue. Jamaica is highly dependent on imports of foodstuffs, household items and inputs for the construction, manufacturing and tourism industries. Multilateral lending agencies and foreign aid programs have had an outsized influence on Jamaica's macroeconomic development.

Historically, the macroeconomic reforms and structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been accompanied by negative or low growth rates, large fiscal deficits, high unemployment rates, and an unsustainable debt burden, leaving limited fiscal space for social and infrastructure investments. Under the guidance of economist Nigel Clarke, the former finance minister, the JLP implemented IMF-supported macroeconomic reforms. The reforms have produced some positive results. The fiscal deficit has been brought under control; public debt is once again below 100% of GDP, and the economy is projected to grow. During the first year of the pandemic, GDP dropped 12% due to government containment measures and external factors. Despite some progress in economic growth, poverty and inequality remained both prominent and structurally ingrained.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

## Transformation Status

### I. Political Transformation

#### 1 | Stateness

The monopoly on the use of force by state agencies is established nationwide, yet challenges stem from criminal elements, especially an estimated 250 gangs across the island. Much of the violence occurs between gang networks. South American and other Caribbean gangs engage in the regional trade in cannabis, cocaine, high-powered handguns and assault rifles, using both air and seaports in Jamaica. Joint police-military operations take place regularly across all parishes, either in zones of special operations (ZOSOs) or under a state of emergency (SOE).

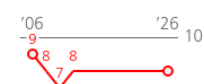
Reliance on SOEs, ZOSOs and community curfews remains the government's primary strategy to address violent flare-ups in areas known for high criminality. Over the reporting period, the government declared SOEs nine times across five parishes and in targeted police divisions in Kingston and St. Andrew. As of the time of writing, the most recent SOE was imposed on January 22, 2025, in Spanish Town following an upsurge of violence, and in St. Catherine after the fatal police shooting of a gang leader in the area. Over the review period, seven ZOSOs were operating across four parishes, and were extended until at least June 2025. The governing party's supermajority in Parliament has facilitated the frequent use of SOEs.

According to InSight Crime, Jamaica recorded the region's second-highest per capita murder rate in 2023. However, according to the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), murders decreased by 19% in 2024 compared with 2023, partly due to a drop in gang-related murders and in the wake of government efforts to reduce crime. The government also invested heavily in improving state law enforcement capacity, including through enhanced training. While developments in January 2025 could have threatened this management, the government acted quickly to maintain law and order by increasing the presence of security forces in hot spot areas. Jamaica recorded 59 murders from January 1 to 25, 2025, and 65 in January 2024.

Question  
Score

Monopoly on the  
use of force

8



1

Most of the population accepts the nation-state as legitimate. All individuals and groups have the right to acquire citizenship without discrimination, and no specific group is denied access to naturalization. However, some vulnerable groups report that their ability to exercise their full citizenship rights is constrained by public corruption and poor public infrastructure, including roads, hospitals and schools. Citizens also continue to voice concerns about personal security and access to essential services such as quality education, health care and clean water. The provision of these services and the maintenance of violence-free communities are regarded as citizenship rights.

Generally, the legal system, its jurisprudence and political institutions are based on secular norms. However, documented cases show that conservative and well-funded Christian groups have acted as powerful interest groups to influence consultations and decisions in Parliament. These groups readily use traditional and social media to contest recommendations to Parliament by women's organizations, LGBTQ+ advocacy groups and other civil society groups that are not in line with their views. This relates to questions of abortion rights, women's rights, gender identities and same-sex relationships. Abortion remains illegal, as attempts at reform have been stymied. Likewise, there continues to be strong opposition to attempts to decriminalize sexual acts between men, which are illegal under the Offenses Against the Person Act.

The administrative structures of the state extend beyond maintaining law and order to providing basic public services throughout the country, but their operations are deficient. During the reporting period, the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) reported that 93% of the population had access to basic drinking water services and 88% to basic sanitation services not shared with others. However, disparities persist between the richest households, 99% of which have access to nonshared basic sanitation services, versus only 77% of the poorest households. About 5% of Jamaicans use shared toilet facilities. There is near-universal access to electricity, with 97% of the population on the national grid. Electricity is supplied by a sole private provider, which is not reliant on the administrative structures of the state – except where the Ministry of Local Government is responsible for the maintenance and repairs of public streetlights and the Office of Utilities Regulation is charged with regulating the electricity sector. Moreover, according to Kepios, internet access among Jamaicans increased by 2.7 percentage points from 2023 to reach 85.1% in 2024. Internet access is increasingly viewed as a basic utility, and while providers are private companies, successive administrations have created public Wi-Fi hotspots across the island.

The high rates of access to basic utilities and increasing rates of internet penetration are undermined by operational deficiencies and service inefficiencies on the part of publicly and privately operated entities. Significant disparities in access persist between rural and urban areas and across households by income level. Deficiencies also affect access to affordable transportation, health care and educational facilities.

#### State identity

10



1

#### No interference of religious dogmas

8



1

#### Basic administration

7



1

There are ongoing concerns about corruption in the systems used for the repair and maintenance of road, water, education and health care infrastructure. The Auditor-General's Department (AGD) has repeatedly highlighted low levels of accountability for approved budgets, as well as non-compliance with government procurement regulations. Major challenges also persist regarding infrastructure and inventory management in the public sector. The health sector is extremely inefficient due to capital-related challenges.

## 2 | Political Participation

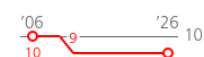
Elections in Jamaica are held every five years and are generally accepted internationally as free and fair. The most recent general elections were held in 2020; in these, JLP leader Andrew Holness retained his position as prime minister. The next elections were due by September 2025. The Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ), which reports to Parliament, includes independent members as well as representatives of both major political parties, and implements electoral laws impartially. During recent elections, the media had access to candidates and leaders of political parties. Nevertheless, the use of media during the 2020 election allowed the well-resourced governing JLP to gain more consistent distribution of its campaign messaging, while the PNP lacked comparable funding. This resulted in less exposure to PNP campaign materials and a weaker presence on the ground in some marginal seats. There has been a steady decline in voter turnout for both general and local elections. In the 2016 general election, the voter turnout rate was 48%, dropping to 37% in 2020. The turnout for the local elections in 2016 was 30%.

Three parliamentary by-elections took place in 2024. Two followed the resignations of sitting JLP members of Parliament in the constituencies of St. Ann North Eastern and St. Andrew North Western. Both seats were won by JLP candidates, and the PNP did not contest either race. Another by-election was held in the Trelawny Southern constituency. The seat had remained vacant since 2023, when Marisa Dalrymple-Philibert resigned as JLP lawmaker and House speaker following an investigation by the Integrity Commission (IC), which alleged that she made false statements in her statutory declarations. The by-election was won by a JLP candidate, with no major competition from the PNP.

In February 2024, the JLP government used its majority in Parliament to pass the Political Ombudsman (Interim) Amendment Act, subsuming the Office of the Political Ombudsman under the ECJ. The government claimed the merger would consolidate resources and expertise and promote efficiency, transparency and accountability. However, critical voices, including the opposition, argue that the law could compromise the authority of electoral commissioners, who now must serve as ombudspersons and both investigate and adjudicate candidates' behavior. There have been calls to repeal the legislation.

Free and fair elections

9



1

Democratically elected political representatives have effective power to govern. However, private sector interests often use their financial power to influence critical government decisions and support particular candidates, leveraging their positions once candidates assume office. In recent elections, the most influential private companies issued press releases stating that they had provided equal financial support to the main political parties. Some influence also originates from factions within the security forces and the political class. None of these groups has the ability to overtly undermine democratic procedures.

Effective power to govern

9



The constitution guarantees the freedoms of association and assembly, and laws are generally enforced. Independent political or civic groups generally can fully exercise their rights of association and assembly, which are protected against interference or government restrictions. However, the freedoms of association and assembly are curtailed when communities are under a SOE. Enforcement can be selective based on social cleavages.

Association / assembly rights

10



The freedom of expression is generally respected and guaranteed by the constitution. The media landscape offers a plurality of opinions. There are two main TV stations, more than 40 local cable stations, two daily newspapers, 18 radio stations with islandwide coverage, 11 community-based radio services, and active social media platforms. The issue of media coverage has become increasingly politicized over the past three years, with both major political parties accusing media houses of partisan allegiances in their executive structures, which in turn shapes how stories are published and framed. For instance, the PNP president accused parts of the media of being JLP-aligned. Holness has frequently called for a crackdown on what he views as misinformation from social media bloggers. In October 2024, major media houses, along with the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, condemned attacks on the press by the major political parties. The growing distrust between the media and government officials is reflected in recent fluctuations in the country's performance on Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index. Jamaica's rank dropped 20 positions in 2022 – 2023 to 32nd place out of 180, and its score fell 7.45 points to 75.89 in 2023. The country partially recovered in 2024, with a score of 77.3, taking 24th place.

Freedom of expression

9



Civilian obstruction of press freedom also puts the safety of journalists at risk. In September 2023, a lone gunman opened fire in the parking lot of the Nationwide Radio Station in Kingston, but no injuries were reported. In June 2024, a journalist received death threats after reporting on illegal drag racing in Jamaica.

Laws and penalties for libel against state and public officials exist and serve as intimidation for those who might engage in dissent. Freedom of information legislation (Access to Information Act 2002) is in place and effective, though it often takes longer than the stipulated 30 days to receive responses from the entities

receiving the requests. The Act is overdue for review and amendment. The last review was in 2011, and the recommendations made by the Joint Select Committee of Parliament were not acted on. In October 2021, the government indicated that it would “fast track” a review of the Act. As of the close of the review period, there had been no further update.

### 3 | Rule of Law

There is a clear and functional separation of powers in Jamaica. Checks and balances are occasionally subject to interference, either because of ministerial discretion in certain areas or because the weight of the executive turns the legislature into a rubber-stamp body. Restoration of balance is sought primarily through the judiciary.

Separation of powers

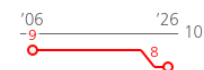
8



The judiciary is institutionally differentiated, operates independently and is free from undue external influence and corruption. Nevertheless, it faces limitations in its territorial reach and functional operability. This includes inadequate physical and technical infrastructure and a shortage of human resources relative to the large number of pending criminal cases. There are too few courts, especially in rural communities. This severely limits the judiciary’s ability to serve large parts of the country effectively. The courts also continue to experience difficulties in securing jurors, partly because of a lack of trust among potential candidates, as well as poor remuneration and concerns about personal security. The lack of jurors has delayed cases requiring jury trials. In May 2024, the government approved a 300% increase in the daily stipend provided to jurors. In March 2024, the minister of justice promised to take a bench trial proposal that would replace the long-standing practice of trial by jury to the cabinet for approval, but there has been no further update. Some observers have cautioned that bench trials could disadvantage citizens from poor communities, as members of the judiciary are perceived to exhibit a class bias favoring citizens from higher socioeconomic groups.

Independent judiciary

8



During the review period, the issue of replacing the United Kingdom-based Privy Council with the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as the final appellate court was again the subject of intense public debate amid the constitutional review process for Jamaica’s shift to republic status. The governing JLP favors retaining the Privy Council, while the opposition, members of the Jamaica Bar Association and many civil society groups favor the CCJ.

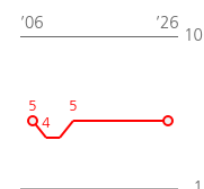
Public servants and politicians who violate the law and engage in corrupt practices are not consistently prosecuted, but do occasionally attract negative press. The Integrity Commission (IC) is responsible for holding public servants and politicians accountable for the allocation of public funds through contracts. However, its effectiveness is hindered by a lack of political will in the legislature and by government politicians' public disparagement of IC commissioners. Additionally, parliamentarians face criticism for failing to act on the findings and recommendations presented in reports by the Auditor-General's Department (AGD) to Parliament. Weak legislation allows little accountability, as the standards set do not readily lead to prosecution under existing laws. Successful prosecution of corrupt acts, particularly among high-ranking officials, is uncommon. The 2023 LAPOP survey showed that Jamaicans continue to believe that corruption is common among public officials; 66% said they believed more than half of the country's politicians were corrupt, and 86% agreed that political corruption was generalized. Only 46% of the Jamaican population agreed that the judicial system would prosecute criminals.

In September 2024, the IC tabled a report in Parliament, raising concerns about Prime Minister Holness' statutory declarations. The Commission said it could not conclude on the question of illicit enrichment due to discrepancies surrounding tax compliance and large transactions by companies connected to the prime minister. The IC did not certify the premier's 2022 and 2023 declarations and referred the matter to the Financial Investigations Division (FID). In September 2024, the prime minister filed an application to the Supreme Court (JSC) for judicial review, seeking to have the courts terminate investigations into his finances, invalidate the IC report, and strike down certain provisions in the Integrity Commission Act and Corruption (Prevention) Act as unconstitutional. In December 2024, the JSC permitted Holness to pursue the aspect of the judicial review seeking to invalidate the IC reports that questioned his finances, but rejected his petition to compel the IC to certify his declarations or recommend exoneration. Former JLP Minister of Education Ruel Reid and his co-accused were slated to return to court at the end of January 2025, accused of breaching the Proceeds of Crime Act and the Corruption (Prevention) Act, conspiracy to defraud, and misconduct in a public office at common law.

According to the AGD's 2024 report, 62 whistleblowing complaints were received in 2021 – 2024, affecting 51 state entities. In December 2024, after reviewing the AGD's annual reports for 16 government entities, the Jamaica Accountability Meter Portal (JAMP), a CSO, alerted the public to what it called an "accountability crisis" in government spending. It calculated an estimated JMD 3 trillion in unaccounted-for spending across the 16 entities over a six- to 11-year period, with the ministries of Education, Health and Labour as the main offenders.

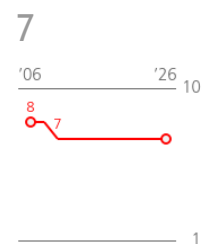
#### Prosecution of office abuse

5



Civil rights are comprehensively protected under the law, yet enforcement is inconsistent. Citizens sometimes face discrimination based on race, class or sexual orientation when attempting to access the judicial system. LGBTQ+ individuals, the homeless and the elderly are among those most likely to experience discrimination and abuse. Access to the courts is also limited for members of impoverished communities, primarily Black citizens and, occasionally, members of the Rastafari community who are unable to afford adequate legal representation. While a legal aid clinic exists to serve poor communities, it receives insufficient state funding. Attorneys are reluctant to take on more than one of these clients at a time because remuneration is not paid in a timely manner. LGBTQ+ individuals do not consistently receive effective remedies for their grievances. Prolonged detention without charge or trial sometimes occurs and disproportionately affects specific groups of citizens due to historical social stratification based on race, class, religion and political affiliation. Furthermore, the use of SOEs and ZOSOs has been linked to an increase in arbitrary detentions and police brutality, especially in low-income communities.

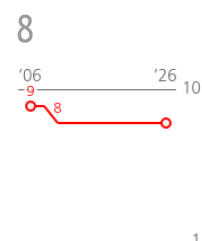
#### Civil rights



#### 4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Democratic institutions are well developed in Jamaica, though their maintenance and performance show shortcomings. Generally, political decisions are made at both the national parliamentary level – by the executive (cabinet) – and in local municipalities. Inefficiency arises due to friction between institutions, and is often linked to the release of funds from national ministries to local municipalities, which still rely on some funding from the central government to fulfill their functions. While local government reform has historically enjoyed bipartisan support, friction sometimes arises between local authorities and the parliamentary process, indicating a lack of true bipartisanship in the local governance sphere.

#### Performance of democratic institutions



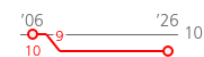
Chairpersons of parliamentary committees have traditionally been drawn from the opposition party to ensure that thorough examinations and reviews are conducted on expenditures in the budgets of ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). However, during the review period, most chairpersons were members of the governing JLP. In addition, absenteeism among parliamentarians from sittings of parliamentary committees and the House of Representatives has become a common practice, limiting performance. No one has been fined or removed from Parliament for effectively vacating their seats under the Standing Orders for the houses of Parliament.

Regarding the judiciary, the discussion and review of draft legislation are facilitated by the presence of the proactive, vigilant and strong Jamaica Bar Association. The Association frequently serves as a watchdog by allowing licensed attorneys to participate in parliamentary discussions. This involvement occurs when the chair of the relevant parliamentary committee is an attorney and a member of the opposition party.

Most relevant actors accept all democratic institutions as legitimate, although democratic shortcomings exist, especially regarding uneven commitment to prosecuting abuse of office. Some vulnerable groups, especially residents of low-income communities, persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community, question the legitimacy of some government bodies from which they receive inadequate services and which they say often discriminate against them.

Commitment to democratic institutions

9



## 5 | Political and Social Integration

The party system is stable, with both major parties institutionally organized and socially embedded. Levels of political fragmentation are low and voter volatility is moderate. A high level of polarization exists between the two main parties, creating a culture of political tribalism. The two dominant political parties were established before independence in 1962, the PNP in 1938 and the JLP in 1943. These organizations shaped the public discourse on independence and framed the postcolonial economy around their adopted ideologies. The two parties are entrenched among the citizenry through socialization and patron-client relationships. Both parties are also organizationally institutionalized across the country, with internal leadership structures, established rules for leadership contests, constituency offices and party headquarters (both located in the corporate area of St. Andrew). Independent candidates and third parties are therefore disadvantaged and have proved unable to gain sufficient traction among voters. Long-standing members of the PNP and JLP, if dissatisfied, tend not to vote at all rather than vote for the opposing party. There is a growing subset of the citizenry that is interested in politics but with only low to moderate levels of interest, if any, in either of the dominant parties. This disaffection has been reflected in low voter turnout rates in recent elections, as well as diminished approval ratings for the party leaders, Andrew Holness (JLP) and Mark Golding (PNP).

Party system

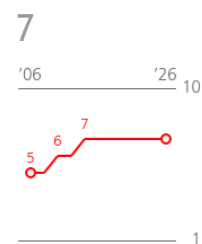
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Clientelism is an established part of Jamaica's political culture and tends to promote political stability as long as state resources are accessible. Extreme political partisanship means parties, especially when in power, tend to pursue policies and activities that secure the short-term goal of remaining in power rather than addressing more complex social issues. A system of rewards and punishments ensures that elected officials follow the party leader and collectively act in the best interests of the party first and in those of the country afterward. This has alienated voters.

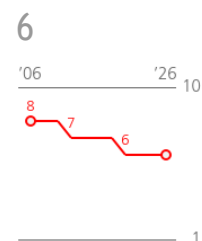
There are a substantial number of interest groups that reflect most social interests, yet a few powerful ones dominate. While trade unions have a recognized presence, their influence has lessened over time. The well-organized and well-funded private sector and conservative faith-based organizations have access to resources that allow them to exert a dominant influence in decision-making. The interests of vulnerable people and the lowest-income groups are traditionally under-represented in the broader political governance system. Despite the outsized role of some interest groups, they help reduce conflicts and allow a degree of cooperation between interest groups. Media organizations with progressive views have exerted a significant mediating influence on relations between the private sector and CSOs. Rural community groups, women's rights organizations, religious minority groups and LGBTQ+ organizations do not have adequate representation on this spectrum. However, the LGBTQ+ community benefits from international advocacy and financial support for social inclusion and health-related programs.

#### Interest groups



There was a loss of confidence in democratic norms and institutions in Jamaica over the review period. According to the 2023 LAPOP report, 57% of Jamaicans expressed support for democracy over any other form of government, a drop of four percentage points from 2021. Within the Latin America and Caribbean region, Jamaica and Suriname experienced the largest declines in support for democracy over the course of the 2006 – 2023 period – by 26 and 36 percentage points, respectively. In 2023, the public's level of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy declined significantly, with just 28% expressing satisfaction compared with 45% in 2021. This figure is among the lowest in the Caribbean region, followed by Haiti (11%) and Trinidad and Tobago (25%).

#### Approval of democracy



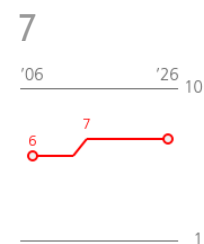
Opinion polls also indicate a loss of confidence in the leaders of the JLP and PNP. According to a Don Anderson poll, Prime Minister Holness' approval rating decreased by 18.7 percentage points between February 2022 and February 2023, to 25.3%. Meanwhile, the approval rating for opposition leader Mark Golding decreased by 2.3 percentage points between July 2022 and February 2023 to 14.7%. In the most recent Don Anderson poll from October 2024, 36% and 32.5% of respondents indicated their approval of Golding and Prime Minister Holness, respectively. According to the poll, Prime Minister Holness had an unfavorable (poor) opinion rating of 39.9%, whereas Golding had a 25.8% rating. These results do not necessarily reflect the performance of the overall democratic system; rather, they reflect discontent among Jamaicans with the government's inability to deliver on its promises. There is a growing lack of trust in the parliamentary system. The frequent absenteeism of parliamentarians has been coupled with incidences of abrupt suspension or adjournment of parliamentary meetings due to escalating tensions and disagreements, which undercuts performance. Salary increases for public sector workers have not translated into increased productivity.

There are a substantial number of autonomous, self-organized groups, associations and organizations. According to the 2023 LAPOP report, 29% of Jamaicans believe community associations provide the best mechanisms for social change. The population shows a medium to high level of interpersonal trust, which is especially strong among individuals within the same community. There is a moderate level of intercommunity distrust based on race, class and political affiliation, but this distrust by itself usually does not translate into confrontation or unrest between communities. At the local level, traditional attitudes and levels of trust between citizens are sometimes threatened by the presence of organized criminal gangs, which try to establish credibility by supporting community initiatives that promote solidarity and cooperation among citizens. Depending on the level of partisanship and the attitudes of the local party leadership in the given community, such dynamics can undermine initiatives that seek to build trust.

Amid high levels of interpersonal violence and crime, the lack of security is a constant preoccupation for many Jamaicans. According to the 2023 LAPOP report, 23% said they felt insecure in their neighborhoods, a mere one percentage point decrease from 2019. There is widespread distrust of the police across the island, especially in inner-city and low-income communities. Only 25% of Jamaicans place any trust in the police, down from 33% in 2021. There has been an effort to build trust in communities by focusing on community policing, and the data show that perceptions of community policing are more favorable than those of national policing, with 35% expressing trust in 2023. However, this figure dropped eight percentage points since 2021.

Voluntary environmental community organizations are increasing their presence islandwide. These organizations are supported by prominent national environmental advocacy organizations such as the Jamaica Environmental Trust (JET). Their advocacy puts pressure on the government to act in the best interest of communities and the environment, not just in the interest of local and foreign investors. Jamaica also has strong cultural capital, evident in sports and the creative industries. Cultural groups in Jamaica often adopt a national focus, and many rely on the minimal support provided by the government or private sector. Moreover, self-organization and volunteer work are evident and often occur with the support of faith-based organizations. These community initiatives promote solidarity and cooperation among citizens and provide fertile ground for building social capital.

## Social capital



## II. Economic Transformation

### 6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Poverty and inequality are structurally ingrained and prominent. Inequality has historical roots and is associated with race, class and gender discrimination. The poverty rate decreased by 1.6 percentage points between 2021 and 2023, to 12.3%. Women and Black Jamaicans continue to be disproportionately affected. Black Jamaicans reside on the fringes of wealth generation and are excluded from numerous economic opportunities both due to a deliberate lockout by economic gatekeepers and a lack of networks and proximity to power brokers. Women are also especially prone to poverty. According to the 2023 Jamaica Gender Assessment report, young women have poorer labor market outcomes than young men. Poverty rates are also higher among women of reproductive and retirement ages as well as in households in which women are the only income earners. Poverty strongly correlates with unemployment, especially among the 10% of households with single women as primary caregivers. Among households with single women caregivers, those with an unemployed head of household are disproportionately below the poverty line. According to the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, Jamaica's gender parity worsened between 2023 and 2024, leading the country to drop 13 places to 37th out of 146 countries. Gender parity is assessed based on the issues of political empowerment, educational attainment, economic participation and opportunity, and health and survival.

There are disparities in labor market participation for the LGBTQ+ community, particularly among those who are open about their sexual orientation. According to the 2024 LGBTQ+ Community Experience and Needs Assessment Survey, while 89% of respondents reported being employed, 72.8% felt that identifying as LGBTQ+ had affected their ability to find work. Although education is free at the primary and secondary levels, access remains difficult for some families because of associated costs, such as transportation and meals. Those living in rural areas and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds can be effectively excluded if they do not receive support. According to the 2023 U.N. Human Development Index (HDI), the country remained in the high human development category, with a score of 0.706 (ranked 115th of 193 countries). However, that HDI figure was down from the country's highest-ever score of 0.716 in 2012. The overall loss in HDI when adjusted for inequality was 18.1%.

Question  
Score

Socioeconomic  
barriers

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Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	14657.6	17097.8	19423.4	<b>19930.3</b>
GDP growth	%	4.6	5.2	2.6	<b>-0.7</b>
Inflation (CPI)	%	5.9	10.3	6.5	<b>5.4</b>
Unemployment	%	5.2	4.1	4.4	<b>4.9</b>
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	2.2	1.9	2.5	<b>1.5</b>
Export growth	%	-	-	-	-
Import growth	%	-	-	-	-
Current account balance	\$ M	149.3	-136.4	568.9	<b>678.8</b>
Public debt	% of GDP	86.3	70.2	66.5	<b>62.4</b>
External debt	\$ M	16011.2	15800.3	15349.4	-
Total debt service	\$ M	1417.8	1483.0	2428.0	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	5.6	5.4	5.7	<b>5.5</b>
Public health spending	% of GDP	5.1	5.9	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.5	1.3	1.2	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

## 7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Market competition operates within a weak institutional framework, with uneven rules for market participants. Businesses in the formal sector encounter significant entry barriers, including administrative barriers to market access, licensing procedures and permit regulations. Some also face obstacles in opening business bank accounts and accessing credit. Licensed cannabis-related businesses, for example, are denied access to banking services. Many of these businesses have accounts in Canadian and European banks, but all operate as cash businesses in Jamaica and thus contend with added security risks.

Market organization

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The informal sector remains significant, accounting for 54.6% of total employment in 2023, according to the International Labour Organization. Demand for informal-sector activities, such as tourism services, is linked to the high cost of conducting formal business in Jamaica. The government's primary concern remains the loss of tax revenue from informal transactions. In recent years, the government has increased the use of indirect taxation to capture revenue otherwise avoided in informal exchanges. Under the current institutional framework, unregistered businesses cannot access credit and other opportunities available to formal businesses, and they remain excluded from financial and other markets. Registered microenterprises also face some of the same challenges as informal businesses, especially if the business lacks inventory or other physical assets. To scale and grow, many informal and formal microenterprises must rely on remittances, informal savings and investment schemes, and sometimes personal loans with high interest rates from predatory lenders.

There are opportunities and support systems for micro, small and medium-sized (MSME) businesses through business support organizations, university business incubators, pitch competitions and intervention programs. There are also support systems to help export-oriented businesses enter new markets. Prices are mainly set by market forces, and capital movement, including currency convertibility, is allowed. Regional cross-border labor within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) faces some restrictions.

Competition laws aimed at preventing monopolistic behavior and structures exist, but enforcement is inconsistent and ineffective. The Jamaica Fair Trading Commission (FTC) serves as the independent competition authority responsible for implementing the Jamaica Fair Competition Act (FCA). The FCA was designed to ensure that anti-competitive behavior does not undermine market activity in Jamaica. There is currently no regulatory framework for merger control to prevent the emergence of monopolistic business structures. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the FCA provides the authority to address mergers and establishes a regime for a class of transactions that includes them. Liberalization and mergers in the telecommunications sector have resulted in a duopoly, and the FTC seeks to ensure that competition is not stifled. Following the full liberalization of the sector in 2003, new entrants competed with the monopoly Cable & Wireless Jamaica (now FLOW). Since 2012, Digicel has become the dominant competitor, having acquired Claro in 2011. The FTC unsuccessfully challenged the Digicel-Claro merger, arguing it was harmful to competition.

Competition policy

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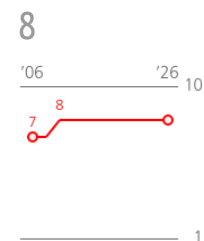
Foreign trade is liberalized in principle, with some exceptions, and is primarily determined by Jamaica's commitments as a World Trade Organization member since 1995. According to the 2017 National Foreign Trade Policy, the overarching goal of Jamaica's foreign trade policy is to increase exports of goods and services while managing import flows to sustainably benefit the economy. As a SIDS, Jamaica cannot meet its needs primarily through internal production and its domestic market, which makes foreign trade critical to sustained economic growth and development. However, exceptions to foreign trade liberalization are in place for domestic industries deemed key to reaching Jamaica's economic development goals. According to World Bank data, trade in goods accounted for 51.3% of GDP in 2023, about five percentage points less than in 2022, while trade in services accounted for 44.98% in 2023, down 0.28 percentage points from 2022. Trade policy instruments in use include tariffs, subsidies and special economic zones (SEZs).

The government views agriculture as having a special role in ensuring food security, promoting exports and creating employment. As a result, certain segments of the agricultural sector are protected by differentiated tariffs and preferential treatment. These protections directly help local tourism by creating a framework for farmers to supply hotels with local produce, which increases earnings for farmers and provides a stable market, and strengthens rural economies. Similarly, exceptions are made for locally produced poultry, as this is vital for the national food security program.

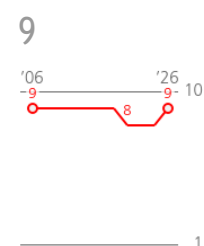
Jamaica is heavily reliant on multilateral and bilateral economic relations. Consequently, exigent international circumstances expose the extent of Jamaica's dependence on externally provided critical goods and services. In agriculture, Jamaica operates under a 40% common external tariff (CET) set by CARICOM. Under World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments on agricultural trade, there is flexibility for a margin of up to 100%, but changes require CARICOM approval. In 2023, the simple average most-favored-nation (MFN) applied tariff stood at 8.5%, with agricultural products facing an average rate of 19.4% and non-agricultural products a rate of 6.8%. The use of subsidies is limited and subject to regulation under the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM) and the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. The WTO also provides the framework for trade relations with other countries. These include regional arrangements with CARICOM, bilateral agreements with individual countries and multilateral arrangements.

The banking system meets international standards, with functional banking supervision and minimum capital and equity requirements. The banking system shows evidence of increased supervision and reforms in the financial sector. The Bank of Jamaica (BOJ), the country's central bank, produced a Basel III-compliant capital adequacy framework (2021) that addresses capital charge methodologies for credit, market and operational risks and provides a refined definition of regulatory capital. The BOJ also finalized a Standard of Sound Practice Framework that addresses capital adequacy ratios (CARs), disclosure rules, supervision, the share of

#### Liberalization of foreign trade



#### Banking system



non-performing loans, hard budget constraints and reforms in the financial sector. Financial institutions must submit comprehensive monthly calculations of their CARs, with explanations of how they are calculated, to the BOJ.

According to the BOJ's 2023 Annual Report, the central bank has normalized economic activity in line with the economy's post-COVID-19 rebound. The sector's capital adequacy ratio was 14.6% in 2023. While the CAR decreased by 0.5% from 2022, it remains well above the regulatory requirement of 10%, indicating a strong financial position and sectoral resilience to credit, market and liquidity shocks. A smaller share of deposit-taking institutions' (DTIs) deposits continues to be held in foreign currency, reflecting continued confidence in the Jamaican dollar. At the end of 2023, the deposit dollarization ratio stood at 35.7% compared with 39.2% in 2022. The non-performing loan (NPL) ratio was unchanged at 2.5% at the close of 2022, and was 2.4% as of September 2024. Mortgage loan quality remained stable, with NPLs comprising 1.7% of total mortgage loans. In March 2024, Fitch Ratings upgraded Jamaica to BB- from B+ (2019 – 2023) and revised its outlook from “stable” to “positive.” The improved outlook reflects Jamaica's favorable financing conditions backed by the IMF's Stand-By Arrangement, the “stability-oriented institutional framework” and the declining debt-to-GDP ratio.

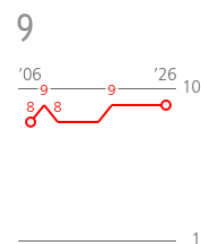
According to a March 2024 FTC staff report, the banking sector in Jamaica is stable but less competitive than it could be. Of the eight commercial banks, the top three control 72% of commercial banking assets, with the top two accounting for 62% of assets. These two banks together account for 59% of deposits and 58% of loans. This market concentration affects banking innovation, financial inclusion and customer experience.

## 8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Monetary stability is harmonized with other objectives of economic policy. The central bank is fully independent of the Ministry of Finance. Monetary policy decisions are made by majority vote of the five-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the de facto independent monetary authority. Monetary policy has been pursued with increasing consistency over time and shows no evidence of political influence. The government's budgetary policies generally promote fiscal stability. This is supported in part by institutional self-constraints and safeguards in the form of central bank oversight, in collaboration with the Financial Services Commission (FSC) and the Jamaica Deposit Insurance Corporation (JDIC). This takes place through three statutory committees – the Financial System Stability Committee (FSSC), the Financial Regulatory Committee (FRC) and the newly appointed Financial Policy Committee (FPC), which began operations in 2021.

Jamaica's inflation volatility has varied over time, with the rate reaching a low of 1.41% in 1962 and a record high of 51% in 1991. Since 2017, the main objective of the BOJ has been to manage inflation rather than the exchange rate, although the latter

### Monetary stability



is not ignored and remained relatively stable over the review period. The BOJ targets inflation while maintaining its independent mandate as a means of ensuring price stability and exchange rate flexibility. According to central bank data, as of December 2024, inflation stabilized at a rate of 4.99%, within the target range of 4% to 6%. This marked a notable improvement from a rate of 6.9% in December 2023 and 9.4% in December 2022, and reflected the BOJ's tight monetary policies. The downward trajectory of inflation can be attributed to adjustments to the interest rates offered to deposit-taking institutions, as well as lower commodity price volatility and improved domestic production capacity. The foreign exchange market exhibited increased volatility, with the Jamaican dollar depreciating by 1.95% over the September 2023 – September 2024 period. The average exchange rate was USD 1 to JMD 154.21 in 2022, JMD 154.99 in 2023 and JMD 157.22 in 2024.

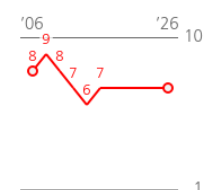
Jamaica's macroeconomic stability and financial sector resilience were reaffirmed in the 2024 IMF Article IV Consultation and the BOJ's September 2024 Macroprudential Policy Report. Jamaica has successfully managed inflation, maintained fiscal discipline and strengthened financial oversight. Real GDP contracted by 2.8 percentage points in the third quarter of 2024, following a marginal 0.2 percentage point expansion in the second quarter of 2024. Public debt remains a key area of focus, as securities dealers increased their holdings of government debt by 1.1 percentage points in the second quarter of 2024, leading to a slight rise in the public debt-to-assets ratio to 16.5%. While this increase is modest compared to the 5.4% growth in the first quarter of 2024, concerns remain that rising exposure to public debt could crowd out private credit, limiting financial institutions' ability to lend for productive investments. However, the government remains committed to reducing public debt to 60% of GDP by 2027 – 2028 (as prescribed by the IMF) and in fact managed to lower the debt to 73.4% of GDP as of FY 2023/2024 thanks to substantial revenue collection, disciplined expenditure management and liability management operations. This was the lowest level in 25 years, although economic growth remains modest.

Fiscal policy is focused on achieving a primary surplus of 6% of GDP, supported by tax administration reforms, digital tax collection systems and customs modernization initiatives. While these measures are expected to strengthen fiscal sustainability, the government faces significant debt-service challenges in 2024 – 2025 and 2028 – 2029, when bond maturities come due. The opposition has criticized the approach of paying down the debt faster than required by the IMF, noting that a slower pace would enable funding for urgent public needs, such as quality health care and social safety nets, without compromising fiscal stability.

On January 31, 2025, the Ministry of Finance reported an overall fiscal deficit of USD 26.45 billion, below the projected USD 27.42 billion, along with a primary surplus of USD 104.49 billion, exceeding the USD 103.73 billion budgeted. As of December 2024, the current account posted a surplus of 0.30% of GDP, down from

#### Fiscal stability

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1.3% a year earlier. The financial sector remains resilient, with the country's gross international reserves at USD 5.6 billion at the end of January 2025. Stress tests conducted by the BOJ confirm that financial institutions maintain strong capital buffers, suggesting a robust ability to absorb economic shocks.

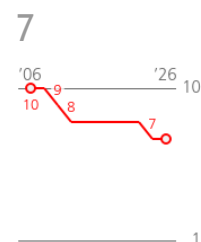
## 9 | Private Property

Property rights and regulations are well defined in the constitution, yet enforcement and implementation occasionally lag. There are also disparities in access to private property, as legal access to property is unattainable for large segments of the population, especially low-wage earners, those with seasonal employment and informal workers who tend to live below the poverty line. This is a long-standing issue. As a result, there are large numbers of squatter settlements across the country. Over time, some have been regularized by the government, but many remain informal housing settlements. Approximately 20% of the population resides in informal settlements, with 82% of squatters concentrated in urban centers. A significant share of these squatters – around 75% – occupies government-owned lands, which presents unique challenges for land administration and urban planning.

Jamaican law allows individuals to claim possessory rights to private land after 12 years of continuous, uninterrupted occupation or to state-owned land after 60 years. However, the legal and bureaucratic processes required to formalize land tenure remain complex, time-consuming and costly, preventing many squatters from securing legal ownership. The absence of clear property rights exposes squatters to eviction risks and contributes to ongoing conflicts between informal settlers and legal landowners. Landowners who pursue legal means to remove squatters often face significant delays in enforcement. This also affects large-scale development projects, which are stalled when individuals resist eviction notices. In some cases, politicians have tolerated and even encouraged informal settlements as a means of gaining electoral support. At the same time, eviction efforts – particularly in high-value urban areas – have led to protests and legal disputes.

The National Housing Trust (NHT) has worked to expand access to mortgages, lower interest rates for first-time homeowners and support low-income housing projects. These efforts aim to reduce housing shortages and offer legal avenues to homeownership for individuals who might otherwise turn to informal settlements. However, financial constraints, rising construction costs and bureaucratic delays continue to hinder the expansion of affordable housing.

Property rights



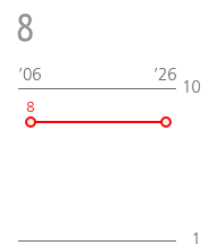
In Jamaica, private companies are viewed as important engines of economic production; however, there are occasions when they are insufficiently protected by existing legal safeguards. Private companies sometimes interpret strict adherence to existing legal safeguards as a limitation on their rights to operate in an unrestricted free market. Market principles dictate that state-owned companies be privatized using procedures that guarantee transparency and accepted procurement rules. The Development Bank of Jamaica oversees privatization processes and ensures transparency and fairness. Privatization is generally carried out following market principles, and transactions are usually through market tender. However, there have been occasions when the privatization of state-owned companies has not adhered to market principles, with business interests allegedly using political connections to win a bid. According to the U.S. 2023 Investment Climate Statements, in 2019 the government divested two of its major assets through initial public offerings: a 62-megawatt wind farm, which raised almost \$40 million, and a toll highway, which raised almost \$90 million.

## 10 | Welfare Regime

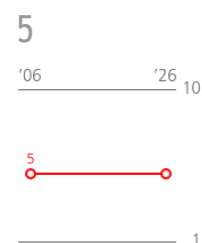
Jamaica's social welfare system struggles with inefficiencies, inadequate coverage and bureaucratic challenges, leaving a significant portion of the population vulnerable. Only 40% of the most at-risk population is covered by the system, a result of strict eligibility requirements, political influence and administrative barriers, according to 2023 reports by the World Bank and U.N. Women. The government has pledged to expand digital application procedures and simplify documentation requirements in order to make social programs more accessible by 2025.

A nominal increase in cash transfers under the Program of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) was granted in June 2024 to help counter the effects of inflation and improve food security and educational support for low-income families. The National Health Fund (NHF) program provides select subsidized services, supplies and pharmaceuticals for people with chronic illnesses. The NHF has improved access to health care for many Jamaicans; as of January 2025, more than 350,000 beneficiaries were active, and the expansion of subsidized services and pharmaceuticals continued. The National Insurance Scheme (NIS) provides pensions, benefits for those with employment-related injuries or disabilities, funeral grants, and maternity allowances for eligible domestic workers. However, according to a 2021 UNDP report, the NIS suffers from low coverage due to low wages, insufficient access to formal jobs and the years of contributions required to access benefits such as retirement pensions. The NIS and NHF are funded through a compulsory 6% payroll deduction for formally employed workers, while domestic workers and the self-employed can voluntarily contribute to the fund. Of the deduction, 5% is allocated to the NIS and 1% to the NHF. To access NIS benefits, workers must contribute consistently over a qualifying period based on the benefit requested.

### Private enterprise



### Social safety nets



The Auditor-General’s Department’s 2024 audit found that efforts to reform the distribution of social benefits, a key part of the social protection system overhaul, had not progressed. Fragmented and inefficient administrative structures, largely due to challenges in implementing long-standing reforms, limit the effectiveness of social benefit programs. The administration of social benefit programs is spread across various government agencies, and inadequate interagency coordination impedes the efficient delivery of social benefits. A lack of system integration and exchange of beneficiary data leads to duplication.

In 2024, life expectancy at birth was 71.6 years, lower than the regional average of 76. Jamaica’s public health care system remains underfunded, with public health expenditure at 4.5% of GDP, below the regional average of 6.3%, according to 2023 World Bank data. The country faces critical staffing shortages, particularly among nurses and doctors, as many migrate abroad to seek better pay and working conditions. Hospitals, especially those in urban centers, continue to suffer from overcrowding, outdated medical equipment and insufficient resources. In 2023, the government assessed that 30% of rural communities lacked access to adequate health care facilities. To address these issues, the government has committed to upgrading hospitals, purchasing equipment and introducing telemedicine services in order to expand access to medical consultations in remote areas.

Jamaica’s education system continues to face challenges; literacy remains a significant one. Jamaica’s adult literacy rate has hovered at 88% to 89% for more than two decades, with adult men’s literacy averaging 84% compared to 93% for adult women. By contrast, Caribbean neighbors Cuba and Barbados have reached the point of 100% adult literacy, while the rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 98%. While the youth literacy rate was estimated at 96.5% in 2023, gaps in early childhood education are concerning (see “Education / R&D policy”).

Gender equality in Jamaica has improved in recent years, particularly with respect to political representation. Women hold 29% of the country’s parliamentary seats, a 50% increase since 2020. Both the speaker and deputy speaker of Parliament are women for the first time. However, gender disparities remain significant in the broader labor market, where women are under-represented in executive roles despite holding 60% of middle-management positions, according to a 2023 report by the Borgen Project. In 2023, women in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors on average earned 61% less than men, according to the Development Bank of Jamaica, highlighting persistent wage inequality. A variety of government and private sector initiatives aim to assist women in business and increase women’s participation in entrepreneurship in order to improve economic mobility. The government plans to introduce corporate gender quotas and stricter enforcement of wage equality as a means of reducing gender-based disparities by 2025.

The LGBTQ+ community continues to face institutionalized discrimination, particularly with regard to employment, health care and legal protections. A 2023 U.N. Women report indicated that 50% of LGBTQ+ individuals experience

Equal opportunity

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workplace harassment or exclusion and that no comprehensive anti-discrimination law exists to protect against discrimination in housing, health care or public services. LGBTQ+ advocacy groups are pushing for stronger legal protections, but resistance from conservative religious groups has slowed progress.

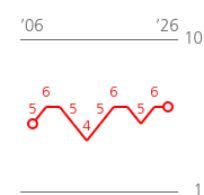
## 11 | Economic Performance

During the review period, Jamaica's economic performance showed signs of improvement as the economy recovered from the pandemic-driven recession. However, the underlying conditions limiting growth remained an issue. Jamaica's economic trajectory in 2024 reflected a combination of modest growth, fiscal prudence, external vulnerabilities and technological preparedness. In October 2024, the IMF projected that Jamaica's GDP would grow by 2.1% that year, which would mark a slowdown from the 2.6% recorded in 2023. While this growth remained positive, the decline underscores the fragility of the economy amid external shocks and structural constraints. The main drivers of growth were the services sector, particularly tourism, which continued to recover post-pandemic. However, critical sectors such as agriculture and mining experienced contractions due to natural disasters, including Hurricane Beryl, which disrupted production cycles and infrastructure in 2024. According to World Bank data, GDP per capita (on a purchasing power parity basis) rose from \$9,241 in 2020 to \$11,421 in 2023, showing a modest recovery to pre-pandemic levels. Jamaica was among the slowest-growing economies in the region due to a combination of issues, including sluggish productivity, a weak business environment and crime, among other obstacles. However, foreign direct investment is projected to increase to 3.1% of GDP by FY 2028/2029, bolstered by infrastructure expansion, tourism growth and renewable energy projects.

While the country's public debt-to-GDP ratio rose to 110% in FY 2020/2021, it has since fallen to 74.2% in FY 2023/2024 and is expected to fall below 70% in FY 2024/2025. This decline is attributed to prudent fiscal management, maintenance of a primary surplus and improved tax revenue collection. Revenue collection for 2024 amounted to 31.01% of GDP, a level that provided essential funding for public services and infrastructure projects. In addition, while the government maintained positive foreign exchange reserves of \$5.7 billion (as of October 2024), they were slightly below the threshold recommended by the IMF. The central bank actively intervened in the foreign exchange market, using its reserves to stabilize the currency. This strategy helped mitigate excessive depreciation of the Jamaican dollar. Despite positive fiscal trends, the government has limited room to maneuver and faces rising demands for social spending, particularly in the health and education sectors, and in the area of disaster recovery. According to the IMF, this underscores the importance of boosting foreign exchange earnings through export diversification and improved trade balances. In December 2024, Jamaica's inflation rate had risen to 5% from 4.3%

Output strength

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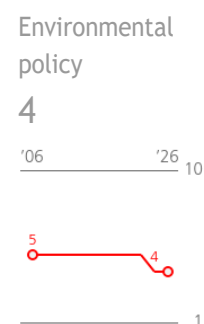
in November 2024, well below the general average inflation rate of 8.34% since 2002. The government and the BOJ continue to monitor these developments closely, implementing monetary and fiscal policies aimed at maintaining price stability and supporting economic growth.

Jamaica's labor market has improved in recent years, with an unprecedented employment rate of 96.4% in the third quarter of 2024. The labor force participation rate averaged 64.05% from 2012 to 2024 and peaked at 68.9% in the first quarter of 2024. Despite these positive trends, challenges persist, particularly regarding wage levels. Jamaica has the lowest salaries in the region, with compensation falling below the regional average in 91% of surveyed roles. Employment in the agricultural sector suffers from low growth, high unemployment rates and a scarcity of farm laborers. During the period under review, the government was assessing ways to address this challenge, including floating the idea of importing farm labor.

## 12 | Sustainability

Environmental concerns receive only sporadic consideration and are often subordinated to economic growth efforts. Within the current government, the environment portfolio is housed in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, a superministry. Environmental regulations are weak and inadequately enforced. Both the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) and local municipalities, which are charged with enforcing environmental regulations, are grossly understaffed and lack the skills and competencies to address environmental concerns effectively. Frequent allegations of corruption surround land-use approval processes, as these tend to favor business interests, such as property developers and companies with mining interests, over the environment. In rural areas, land previously identified as prime agricultural land has been sold or earmarked for commercial and residential construction projects, leaving only small areas for crop cultivation to address food insecurity. In areas with identified but unexplored or minimally explored bauxite deposits, environmentalists and residents struggle to keep the government from issuing mining licenses. Residents are concerned about dust and water pollution from mining and about forced displacement, which has been a pattern in the mining sector since the 1970s.

The government increased its target for renewable energy by 2030 but failed to complement it with import policies to affect consumption. Instead, it introduced a tax credit for the residential installation of photovoltaic solar systems, allowing homeowners to claim up to 30% of the cost of purchase, delivery and installation. There have been calls to adjust the policy to include mixed-use properties, which would be more inclusive and encourage wider adoption. Moreover, the number of hybrid and personal electric vehicles (EVs) has increased over the past few years, but the EV market is still in its early stages. As of January 2025, there were 10 public



charging stations and 30 EVs registered in 2024; these numbers are expected to increase in 2025 and beyond as more budget-friendly EV options become available and normalized. While the Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) reported that Jamaica had made progress on environmental matters in 2024, specifically in the areas of waste management, conservation and renewable energy, it also noted setbacks, particularly relating to pollution.

Although R&D investment is small, at less than 1.5% of GDP, it nevertheless appears strategically focused enough to yield positive results, as reflected in the Global Innovation Index (GII). Jamaica's ranking consistently reflects a significant disparity between innovation input and output. In the 2023 GII, Jamaica ranked 78th out of 132 countries, 69th for innovation output and 82nd for innovation input. In 2022, Jamaica ranked 76th overall, 60th for innovation output and 88th for innovation input. Investment in R&D could be improved if private sector organizations committed to conducting their R&D in Jamaica rather than outsourcing it to overseas entities, and if tertiary institutions were better able to commercialize their intellectual property.

To bolster the innovation ecosystem and the education system, the establishment of six science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) schools has become a national priority. In July 2023, the government launched its National STEM Tertiary Scholarships Program for 1,000 students from low-income households. The five-year program is a partnership between the Ministry of Finance, the Student Loan Bureau (SLB) and the University of Technology Jamaica (UTech). Additionally, the government launched teaching scholarships for 1,250 STEM teachers over five years, a partnership between the Ministry of Finance, the SLB and Mico University College. Nonetheless, further measures will be required in order to cultivate a well-educated human capital base within the country and to improve infrastructure to leverage emerging technologies. Jamaica's digital infrastructure requires greater investment in broadband expansion, cloud computing capabilities and cybersecurity frameworks to support the scalable application of emerging technologies.

The country's score on UNDP's Education Index remained relatively stable at 0.65 in 2022, down very slightly from 0.68 in 2021. While the youth literacy rate was 96.5% in 2023, gaps in early childhood education are a cause for concern. The most recent results from the Grade 4 diagnostic assessment tests in mathematics and language arts showed some improvement from 2023 to 2024, but overall performance remained low. In mathematics, 38.7% of students achieved proficiency or higher compared with 32.3% in 2023. In language arts, 44.3% of students achieved proficiency or higher compared with 38.7% in 2023. The government is working to increase access to vocational training programs in order to encourage technical education and workforce development for young men. The goal is to reduce dropout rates and increase employment opportunities for participants. World Bank data indicate that public investment in education in 2023 amounted to 5.65% of GDP compared with 5.35% in 2022 and 5.63% in 2021.

Education policy /  
R&D

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## Governance

### I. Level of Difficulty

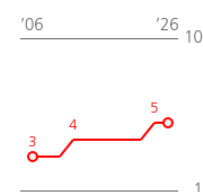
Governance is constrained by several structural impediments. First, generational poverty is a major challenge, particularly affecting female-headed households with multiple children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with health challenges. Second, the labor force is inadequately prepared due to insufficient high-quality education, which leads to low-wage jobs and low levels of economic growth. Third, as a small island developing state, Jamaica has limited physical and natural resources, making it vulnerable to climate disruptions. The country is especially susceptible to drought and rising sea levels, which result in flooding and shoreline erosion that can damage critical infrastructure. Severe climate events also exacerbate existing social issues, including poverty. According to the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, Jamaica's poverty rate was 16.7% – up from 11% in 2019 – with the rate declining again to 12.3% in 2023. Jamaica has a history of dramatic fluctuations in the poverty rate, which, as a 2024 analysis from the World Bank points out, highlights the country's vulnerability to economic shocks.

While CSOs have a high impact at the community level, their impact at the national level remains moderate. Few resources and opportunities exist for CSOs to work together and create common platforms through collective advocacy. Civil society traditions are fairly strong, although reduced funding options have led many traditional small- to medium-sized CSOs to severely reduce their activities or stop functioning. Those that have stopped functioning are usually replaced by smaller agile groups with piecemeal funding. Substantial funding is available to long-standing human rights organizations such as Jamaicans for Justice (JFJ) and National Integrity Action (NIA), which advocate for government transparency, or the environmental advocacy organization JET. These CSOs have built networks of engagement that include smaller CSOs in both rural and urban areas.

At the local level, community groups provide childcare support, education and training, youth leadership programs, and assistance for women facing gender-based violence. Many groups use diverse social media platforms to promote their advocacy activities, maintaining a presence in the public domain and engaging with government and private sector organizations alike. Private sector and faith-based organizations often provide resources to support volunteer work and engagement. Advocacy efforts during the review period addressed ongoing issues such as violence against women, agricultural development and climate resilience, among others.

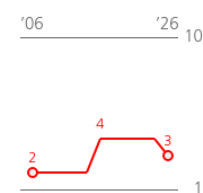
Structural constraints

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Civil society traditions

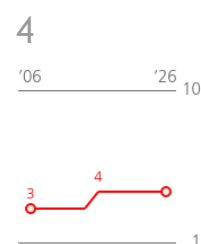
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Active civic associations and community organizations frequently organize around sports and local fundraising activities for families living in poverty and experiencing hardship. These spaces are where social trust and social capital are built and maintained. However, social exclusion remains a dominant characteristic of Jamaican society, affecting levels of broader social trust. At the national level over the reporting period, there was growing reliance on CSOs to keep the public informed and to track government breaches of policy promises, regulations and spending rules. This reliance significantly increased social trust in the relevance and usefulness of CSOs in Jamaica.

Political divisions are now rarely a source of intense conflict. While there are notable political, social, ethnic and religious differences, political actors have limited success in polarizing the population along these divisions. The use and spread of violence in the country have not been connected to these cleavages but rather to activities related to the commission of crimes (especially by criminal gangs) and to domestic abuse. The persistently high levels of crime and violence reflect social divisions and economic disparities as well as a political failure to implement an effective long-term anti-crime plan.

Conflict intensity



## II. Governance Performance

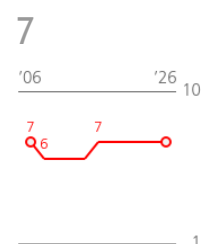
### 14 | Steering Capability

Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) is a long-term strategic plan crafted in 2009. Its goal is to position Jamaica to achieve developed-country status by 2030. The government's main priorities include improving the ease and speed of doing business; social inclusion and economic equality; the education system; increasing STEM proficiency; crime prevention and community safety; resilience to climate change; and the use of renewable energy. Government priorities reflect a mix of national and international interests, including local and transnational private sector interests. The JLP government pursues the goal of "prosperity" through a trickle-down approach that disproportionately benefits select businesses and the affluent. It takes a repressive approach to security policy, neglecting the need to address the root causes of crime and violence effectively.

Each government ministry, department and agency is charged with developing strategic plans aligned with government priorities. The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), the government's planning agency, coordinates (and sometimes initiates) the corresponding policies, plans and programs intended to address the stated priorities. The PIOJ also provides technical and research support as needed and manages external cooperation and funding, including by engaging relevant experts.

Question  
Score

Prioritization



Policymaking and regulatory impact assessments are usually coordinated by the portfolio entity and regularly engage foreign expertise either through technical assistance programs with international development agencies or through financial support from a donor government.

The cabinet, led by the prime minister, holds ultimate decision-making power over policy recommendations and priorities from the houses of Parliament. The cabinet consists of the most senior members of the ruling party, appointed to ministerial portfolios by the prime minister. These ministers are responsible for overseeing relevant ministries, departments and agencies. Key figures driving the current reform efforts include Prime Minister Holness; the minister of finance; the minister of health; the minister of science, energy and telecommunications; and the minister of tourism. The remaining cabinet ministers have relatively little impact and would best be categorized as defenders of the status quo.

The government continues to struggle to implement some of its priority policies effectively. One of the government's main priorities is reducing the incidence of crime and violence so as to enable economic growth and job creation. The recent strategy involves an "all-of-government" approach to address crime, with the Ministry of National Security leading and coordinating the process. Key drivers of this approach include Minister of National Security Horace Chang and Police Commissioner Kevin Blake. As part of this initiative, government agencies such as the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) and the Social Development Commission (SDC) have implemented social intervention programs that aim to facilitate effective social inclusion. These programs have been accompanied by strict policing and containment measures. Portions of the population have lived under protracted SOEs and ZOSOs since 2018, as the government has attempted to rein in gang violence and criminality (also see "Monopoly on the use of force").

According to the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI), the government's anti-crime approach is inadequately funded. CAPRI reports (2022 – 2024) that the effectiveness of social interventions has been undermined by siloed policymaking, fragmentation and inconsistencies at the ministerial and programmatic levels, and a lack of collaboration with established community organizations. Compounding these issues has been the fact that there is no framework in place to measure the impact and results of social interventions; therefore, decisions lack an evidence base and are prone to politicization.

Another government priority is digital transformation. In 2019, the government passed legislation establishing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Authority. It was announced that eGov Jamaica Ltd (eGov), the entity responsible for implementing IT functions within the government, would transition into the role of the ICT Authority by the end of 2020. The ICT Authority's mandate is to drive digital transformation and improve the use of technology across government by developing a sustainable agenda. In 2023, though the Authority was

Implementation

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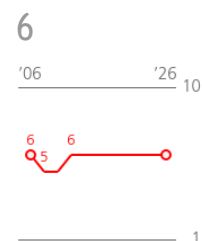
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not yet operational, there were discussions about rebranding eGov/ICT Authority as “Jamaica Digital Services.” As of January 2025, the Authority had not yet been launched.

The government demonstrates a general ability to engage in policy learning, but its flexibility is limited by a reluctance to acknowledge policy failures. Failures are often attributed to the policies of previous opposition-party governments. Policies are occasionally reframed and/or renamed to appear new and relevant. The value of policy learning is often overlooked, and recommendations or concerns are often perceived as being anti-government, resulting in their dismissal. The government does not utilize opportunities to develop a solid knowledge foundation on which to base new policies. Additionally, existing policies and legislation are reviewed and amended only inconsistently, leaving stakeholders frustrated.

Of all the essential sectors, the financial sector, led by the central bank and the Ministry of Finance, has been the most consistent with regard to policy learning and flexibility. To institutionalize the tenets of fiscal responsibility, the Ministry of Finance has established the Independent Fiscal Commission (IFC) and the Fiscal Advisory Committee (FAC) to replace the Economic Programme Oversight Committee (EPOC), which was set up in 2013 to monitor implementation of Jamaica’s economic reform measures as guided by the IMF. The IFC is an oversight agency focused on the fiscal, monetary and financial sectors. Its commissioner was sworn into office in March 2023, and the IFC was expected to be operational by December 2023. However, it did not begin operations until January 2025.

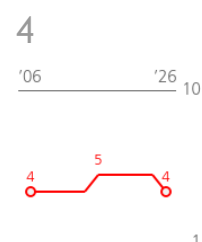
Policy learning



### 15 | Resource Efficiency

The Auditor-General’s Department (AGD) assesses government agencies’ performance and prepares an annual report that is presented to parliamentary committees in sessions open to the press and public. These audits examine records and identify any misallocation of public funds and assets, with the goal of ensuring efficient performance by government entities. In addition, the AGD reviews public entities’ compliance with statutory reporting requirements enabling budget spending and resource use to be tracked. The audits consistently show that the government only partially uses available human, financial and organizational resources efficiently.

Efficient use of assets



Most public bodies did not have their financial statements or appropriation accounts certified during the period under review. In 2024, the AGD certified 90 financial statements and appropriation accounts, while 421 statements remained outstanding, spanning several financial years. Public bodies have been delinquent in providing timely and complete documentation to assist with the auditing process. Therefore, it is unclear whether public bodies are employing financial resources effectively and efficiently. The AGD has exposed excess expenditures, procedural failures and financial losses. However, Parliament often fails to follow up effectively, despite a

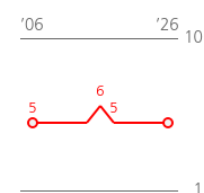
parliamentary committee's close examination of the AGD's findings. The Jamaica Accountability Meter Portal (JAMP), a CSO, has been filling this gap for the past six years, making it easy for journalists and the public to access relevant information online.

Estimates of revenue and expenditure are presented annually to the houses of Parliament, outlining the government's social and economic priorities. During the review period, the government for the first time presented trillion-dollar budgets in two separate years. A JMD 1.34 trillion budget was presented in 2024, a 31% increase from the one presented in 2023. Moreover, the government has failed to effectively monitor and maintain its current assets. Mismanagement and inconsistent internal auditing across government entities have led to the deterioration of infrastructure in transportation, technology and agriculture. Additionally, there are ongoing administrative deficiencies that hinder resource efficiency, such as bureaucratic and regulatory inadequacies, corruption and lack of accountability for waste and mismanagement.

The government often fails to coordinate conflicting objectives. Different parts of the government tend to compete with one another, and some policies have counterproductive effects on others. The AGD's 2024 report showed this by identifying overlap among government programs. These programs suffered operational deficiencies because of a lack of interagency coordination and a failure to share information. For instance, government policy aims to promote and advance agricultural production, driving rural development by increasing employment, ensuring food security and providing produce for the tourist industry. As part of this policy, projects are implemented to benefit farmers; however, the tourism sector also relies heavily on duty-free food imports, which undermines local food production. Consequently, this diminishes employment opportunities in rural areas and contributes to Jamaica's food insecurity. The various policies' trade-offs with respect to supplying the tourist industry with imported foods in order to offer diverse international cuisine, supporting the local agricultural industry and promoting rural employment are poorly balanced. Similarly, in contrast to the Ministry of Agriculture's initiative to increase local production, the Ministry of Labour has addressed rural underemployment by facilitating the temporary migration of farmers to the United States and Canada. Local architects and contractors face unfair competition because of ongoing bilateral relations with major Chinese investment companies. These companies are allowed to import the primary inputs for major infrastructure and building projects duty-free. Additionally, they are allowed to import low-wage Chinese labor at the expense of local labor in areas with high rates of underemployment. Private sector businesses have also engaged these Chinese companies for business and residential construction projects. These developments have counterproductive effects on government policies that promote job creation and the design and production of building projects by local creative industries.

Policy  
coordination

5



The government has made only partial efforts to improve the country's anti-corruption systems. There is no single anti-corruption agency in Jamaica. However, an institutional framework comprising various anti-corruption bodies has been established. The Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption Act (2018) established the Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA), which addresses corruption in the public sector, with the primary aim of bringing high-value targets to justice. MOCA's mandate was expanded in 2024, when legislative amendments empowered it to investigate and prosecute a broader range of serious offenses. MOCA is awaiting regulations that would enable it to function independently of the police force. The few integrity mechanisms that have been implemented are mostly ineffective.

While MOCA's scope was broadened in 2024, central figures in the government have sought to limit the functions of the Integrity Commission (IC), the country's primary anti-corruption body. IC laws and regulations are largely ineffective at sanctioning parliamentarians and public officials who do not declare personal assets or breach conflict-of-interest rules. The IC reports during the review period revealed four cases involving breaches by parliamentarians under the Integrity Commission Act (2017) or the Corruption Prevention Act (2001). The law requires that public officers and private contractors who collude in corrupt acts face sanctions. While anti-corruption agencies have managed to complete investigations that have led to the arrest of public officials, the agencies have been less successful in prosecuting these officials. The government has yet to pass anti-bribery legislation or legislation enabling the impeachment of parliamentarians.

Two integrity mechanisms available to the government – auditing of state spending and transparency rules within the public procurement system – are essential for controlling corruption. AGD audits address governance, procurement management, project management, resource management and ICT issues. Resource management remains the predominant issue, followed by project management, governance, procurement and contracts management. Over the years, reports from the AGD have revealed that contracts for road infrastructure work were awarded through a non-competitive process without sufficient justification and in violation of procurement law.

The Electoral Commission of Jamaica requires financial reporting, and political parties must declare their assets and sources of funding. A regulation on elections and political party financing (including campaign funds) has been in force since 2016. However, few provisions of the Election Campaign Financing Act, 2016, require local government candidates to declare campaign funding. The Electoral Commission of Jamaica issues an annual director's report after each election that offers general information on ballot administration, training and results, but this does not disclose spending by political parties or candidates. This makes it difficult to assess compliance with campaign financing regulations.

Anti-corruption  
policy

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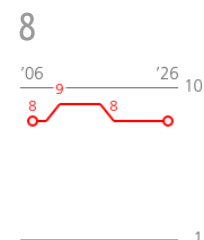
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## 16 | Consensus-Building

While there is a consensus between the two political parties on the goals of economic development, democratic transformation and crime reduction, both parties struggle to align strategic priorities toward working together efficiently. Since gaining its parliamentary supermajority in 2020, the JLP has continued to use its control of both legislative chambers to amend and implement policies. The PNP has mostly countered government proposals by criticizing the strategy, rationale or other minor material elements. Frequent disagreements between the parties have occasionally led one side or the other to walk out of Parliament, ending parliamentary sittings abruptly and prematurely. Difficulties in building consensus between the PNP and JLP have affected critical policy initiatives aimed at democratic transformation. During the review period, a constitutional reform aimed at transforming Jamaica from a constitutional monarchy to a parliamentary republic was under debate. While the government has proposed a phased approach, with the removal of the British monarch as head of state the priority, the opposition has argued that the reform process must also include changes to the country's top appellate court, which today remains the Privy Council in the United Kingdom. Failure to agree on these elements has delayed the reform. In 2024, the government introduced a bill to initiate the first phase, but the opposition refused to attend parliamentary committee meetings to review the bill unless its concerns were addressed by the government. Another area of contention is the government's imposition of states of emergency (SOEs) as a crime-fighting tool without support from both houses of Parliament and the opposition. The opposition has insisted that the frequent use of SOEs to fight crime is ineffective and unconstitutional. By law, the government can declare an SOE for two weeks, after which it must secure a two-thirds majority in both houses for an extension. The PNP has refused to support motions to extend SOEs since 2022. The prime minister has indicated that his party is willing to change the voting rules for SOE extensions, removing the consensus required by the constitution.

The main political actors identify consolidation and development of the market economy as a long-term strategic goal. The current JLP government, with the support of powerful private sector interests, has continued to build on the foundations laid by the previous PNP government. While the JLP has increasingly adopted a neoliberal vision of the market economy, the opposition has positioned itself as acting in the interest of the ordinary Jamaican – thus seeking to counter the JLP's strictly market-led approach to managing the economy. Accordingly, the government has been increasingly reluctant to meet with the PNP to discuss issues on this topic. The administration has also been disinclined to meet with active civil society groups that advocate environmental protection in areas where the private sector has vested interests. Given the strategic importance of large private sector interests in tourism, banking, agriculture, food manufacturing and the export sector, these interests continue to dominate consultations on policies that affect these areas of the economy.

Consensus on goals



The government’s reluctance to regulate labor provisions across these sectors led to unrest in key industries such as tourism, which experienced a short series of labor disputes in tourist hubs in 2024. Negotiations with workers and trade unions during the period were often contentious and usually culminated in industrial action across the public sector.

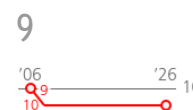
In Jamaica, the most common way reformers successfully co-opt anti-democratic interests is through the courts. When the government has passed laws with serious human rights implications with little or no public consultation and while ignoring suggestions from the parliamentary opposition, opposition members of Parliament have turned to the courts. For the most part, constitutional rules and rights are maintained through Supreme Court rulings.

Policymakers prevent conflicts rooted in social divisions from escalating. The political system does not reflect the deep divisions in society that exist along the lines of race, class, gender and urban vs. rural areas. The main political parties have membership bases that transcend these divisions. Both parties openly practice clientelism, which serves as an effective tool to attract and retain supporters. As long as sufficient resources are available, incumbent governments use creative methods to “keep the peace” by preventing conflicts based on social divisions from arising or escalating. These methods may involve drawing on state resources as well as those of financial supporters, both local and foreign.

Class-based conflicts typically do not rise to the level of violence, at least not when initiated by the “aggrieved” class (usually from lower-income groups). Protests and vandalism may occur, but they are usually quickly managed by police, usually at the behest of the “offending” class (typically representing the business and upper class).

The government continues to avoid meaningful civil society participation in the form of consultations about policy design and implementation. Instead, the administration turns to public consultation as a means of rubber-stamping policies that have already been agreed upon. Community-based groups, especially those in lower-income communities, are rarely consulted before agreements are put in place regarding development initiatives in their areas. The government belatedly included the general public in the constitutional reform process. A series of town hall meetings was held across the island to present information and solicit feedback. However, the meetings were criticized for not providing adequate information and for being used as a forum for the government to convince the public of its plans. Despite these shortcomings, the government has partnered with some CSOs that represent vulnerable groups to design better policies for their protection. For instance, in 2024, Children First and the Jamaican Association for the Deaf partnered with the Ministry of Justice to strengthen access to the judicial system for children and the deaf community.

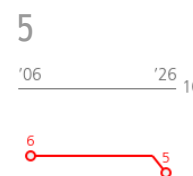
Anti-democratic actors



Cleavage / conflict management



Public consultation



Past injustices analogous to the human rights violations during the military dictatorships in Chile or Argentina have not characterized Jamaica's more recent past. Instead, major historical injustices in Jamaica are associated with slavery, the post-emancipation period, and the social and political uprisings of the early 20th century. Attempts have been made by political leaders to reconcile some of the human rights violations of the recent past. The government apologized and provided some material restitution for transgressions connected to the 1963 Coral Gardens incident, in which state security forces detained and killed members of the Rastafari community. In addition, a Commission of Enquiry was created to investigate the events of the 2010 West Kingston unrest, a violent confrontation between state security forces and criminals, which resulted in the deaths of 70 – 75 civilians and security personnel. These historical wrongs remain part of the sociopolitical consciousness of the affected communities and contribute to the distrust and unease that some low-income communities feel toward the government and security forces.

Reconciliation

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## 17 | International Cooperation

Jamaica has long-established relationships with international and regional development partners in support of its development agenda. International partners have provided financial and technical assistance to support development. Areas of focus have included macroeconomic stability, physical infrastructure, agricultural diversification, rural development and capacity-building for the security forces, among others. Partners have included various U.N. agencies; USAID (up to January 2025); the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; EU Aid; Global Affairs Canada; the Inter-American Development Bank; the Caribbean Development Bank; and the China Harbour Engineering Company, a development and investment agency of the Chinese government. The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) manages these relationships as well as the implementation of projects with international development partners.

Effective use of support

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The government continues to seek international assistance to meet its development objectives, guided by Vision 2030 and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. However, Jamaica has been unable to provide the local resources and technical expertise needed to implement large-scale projects successfully and on time. Additionally, organizational weaknesses and inefficiencies, coupled with bureaucratic and political corruption, lead to duplication of effort and waste of resources, so available assistance is not effectively integrated and does not translate into sustainable project success. One area in which Jamaica has used external support effectively is incorporating IMF institutional reforms that promote a longer-term perspective. For the IMF, Jamaica has been a credible, reliable partner, with a productive relationship particularly involving former Finance Minister Nigel Clarke.

Jamaica has a well-established presence in regional and international organizations, yet it is not always compliant with the organizations' conventions. This is especially evident in obligations related to the care and protection of children in state custody, the persistence of child labor across the country, the provision of care and support for survivors of rape and incest, and the lack of support enabling members of the LGBTQ+ community to exercise their full citizenship rights. Jamaica actively participates in WTO trade negotiations aimed at benefiting less-developed countries, and advocates on behalf of the group of small island developing states (SIDS). The country is also a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which often focuses on addressing the challenges posed by disasters and risks resulting from climate change.

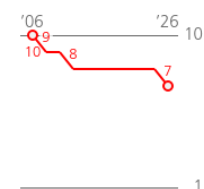
During the review period, the government was criticized for attacking the media, as well as for its positions on human rights at home and abroad. In October 2023, the government did not take part in a vote on a resolution calling for a humanitarian truce in Gaza, while 12 CARICOM countries voted in favor. This sparked online backlash as citizens voiced disappointment with its failure to participate. The government subsequently voted in favor of a U.N. resolution calling for a cease-fire in December 2023, and in May 2024 the government voted in favor of a resolution to grant full U.N. membership to Palestine.

A large proportion of Jamaica's cooperative regional and international relationships, particularly trade agreements, involve CARICOM or other regional initiatives, such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative, the EU-CARIFORUM Agreement and the Caribbean-Canada Trade Agreement (CARIBCAN). The current government has not always played an assertive role in CARICOM compared with previous governments. However, the government has stepped up to help address the crisis in Haiti. In 2023, the government committed to sending troops to Haiti as part of an international security mission to contain gang violence. In September 2024, Jamaica deployed the first group of security personnel to work alongside the Kenyan troops already on the ground. Jamaica will be joined by other CARICOM members. Cooperation efforts remain hindered by a lack of collaboration and consensus between Jamaica and other CARICOM member states regarding relations with Haiti, Cuba and the United States, among other issues.

Jamaica has maintained diverse bilateral relations with countries in the Americas. While the United States is Jamaica's most important trading partner, Jamaica also maintains strong trading relationships with Canada and other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Its long-standing strategic relationship with Venezuela was adversely affected by sanctions levied against the country during Donald Trump's first administration in the United States. Jamaica closed its embassy in Caracas in 2019, and the relationship has not been revived. Although the current Jamaican government has not been as supportive of Cuba as previous administrations, Jamaica continues to maintain collaboration agreements with Cuba in the areas of trade,

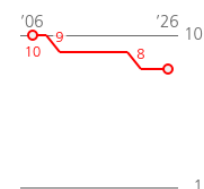
### Credibility

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### Regional cooperation

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agriculture, tourism, health, climate change and disaster mitigation, culture and education. The Cuban government also continues to provide much-needed medical staff and teachers through an ongoing agreement with Jamaica.

## Strategic Outlook

Jamaica faces a number of challenges ahead, but fighting corruption is among the most pressing of these. The government must fully commit to enforcing and implementing anti-corruption measures. This includes acting on corruption findings from the Integrity Commission (IC) and Auditor-General's Department (AGD), allocating sufficient resources to anti-corruption efforts and ensuring that the Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA) is free of obstruction from political interference and members of criminal organizations. Developing anti-bribery legislation is also necessary. Ensuring that those accused of political corruption and misappropriation of public funds are prosecuted effectively could also deter individuals from committing future corrupt acts. International actors could assist Jamaica by sharing best practices, helping to strengthen the country's legal framework, and assisting in building capacity to promote transparency and accountability. CSOs could also assist in tracking the progress of anti-corruption campaigns aimed at holding the government accountable and ensuring compliance. By improving its anti-corruption efforts, the government could help restore public trust in the democratic process and governance. Other prominent issues, such as crime and socioeconomic inequalities, must also be effectively addressed.

A sustainable, long-term approach to insecurity is crucial to restoring public trust in government institutions, especially the police. While the government has made efforts to ensure social inclusion, these efforts are inadequately funded and suffer from other shortcomings, such as a lack of collaboration with established community organizations. The government also relies heavily on force to contain violence, as highlighted by its ready use of states of emergency and zones of special operations in affected areas. The government should sustain investment in strengthening national security and reducing crime. While investment efforts should continue to focus on modernization and capacity improvements among law enforcement officers, it is also imperative to address the root causes of crime and gang violence. The participation of civil society actors and local communities in the policymaking process will be essential for identifying local needs and shortcomings in the government's current approach and for creating a workable plan. The international community could also play an important role in enhancing policing by sharing best practices, supporting institutional reforms and providing training to law enforcement officials.

The economy is poised to maintain fiscal discipline; however, it will take just one significant natural disaster or the indirect impact of an international crisis to overturn the gains made over the past five years. Digital transformation, which has as yet been slow in most government entities, will be necessary to enhance economic resilience. Despite the historic decline in the unemployment rate, concerns remain about the low-wage environment in the labor market. As a start, the minimum wage should be raised to ensure that workers can cover basic living expenses. Additionally, the government should diversify its revenue sources beyond taxation of the working class. The government should revisit the tax holidays, tax credits and incentives given to foreign companies that repatriate all their profits. Consistency in the collection of mining levies is necessary, as is discontinuing the periodic granting of levy concessions to bauxite companies.

Another notable challenge is environmental sustainability. Policies to encourage the use of more environmentally friendly energy sources, such as the income tax credit for residential solar installations, need to include provisions that ease their use for low-wage earners and mixed-use properties. This would increase the share of the country's energy consumption produced from renewable sources and help it achieve its 2030 goals. The government also needs to partner with the private sector and environmental experts to create a plan for the recycling and disposal of solar and EV batteries as their use becomes more widespread.