

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

JAMAICA

May 2007

Research Directorate
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Research Completed: 20 April 2007

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Official name

Jamaica

Geography

Jamaica is a large island located in the Caribbean Sea, 145 km south of Cuba and 160 km south west of Haiti. Jamaica's total area is 10,991 km². The climate varies from tropical to temperate.

Population and density

Population: 2,758,124 (mid-2006 estimate).

Density: 241.2 (2004) per km².

Principal cities and populations

(Census 2001 unless otherwise indicated)

Kingston Metropolitan Area (capital city) 651,880; Spanish Town 92,383; Portmore 90,138 (1991 census); Montego Bay 83,446.

Languages

English is the official language (PHW 587, EUR 2390). Local patois is also used.

Religions

More than 100 Christian denominations, including: Church of God 24%, Seventh-day Adventists 11%, Pentecostal 10%, Baptists 7%, Anglicans 4%, other Christian, and Rastafarianism 0.9%.

Ethnic groups

Black 90.9%, East Indian 1.3%, White 0.2%, Chinese 0.2%, mixed 7.3%, other 0.1%.

Demographics

Population growth rate: 0.8% (2006 estimate).

Infant mortality rate: 15.98 deaths/1,000 live births.

Life expectancy at birth: 73 years (WHO estimate 2003).

Fertility rate: 2.41 children born/woman (2006 estimate).

Literacy: 87.9% of persons over the age of 15 have ever attended school.

Currency

Jamaican Dollar (JMD)

JMD 58.31 = CAD 1.00¹

National holidays

2006: 1 January (New Year's Day), 1 March (Ash Wednesday), 14 April (Good Friday), 17 April (Easter Monday), 23 May (Labour Day), 1 August (Emancipation Day), 6

August (Independence Day), 16 October (National Heroes' Day), 25 December (Christmas Day), 26 December (Boxing Day).

2007: 1 January (New Year's Day), 21 February (Ash Wednesday), 6 April (Good Friday), 9 April (Easter Monday), 23 May (Labour Day), 1 August (Emancipation Day), 6 August (Independence Day), 15 October (National Heroes' Day), 25 December (Christmas Day), 26 December (Boxing Day).

Head of state and government

Chief of State: Queen Elizabeth II (since 6 February 1952)

Governor General: Kenneth O. Hall (since 15 February 2006)

Head of Government: Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller (since 30 March 2006)

Form of government

Jamaica is a constitutional parliamentary democracy. The governor general is appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister. The governor general appoints the prime minister, who is the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives. The cabinet holds executive power and has a minimum of 12 members.

Legislative structure

The executive includes the Chief of State, the Governor General, the Prime Minister and cabinet. The bicameral legislature includes the House of Representatives, with 60 popularly elected members, and the Senate, with 21 members appointed by the governor general acting on the advice of the prime minister and the leader of the opposition.

Administrative divisions

Jamaica is divided into 14 parishes: Clarendon, Hanover, Kingston, Manchester, Portland, Saint Andrew, Saint Ann, Saint Catherine, Saint Elizabeth, Saint James, Saint Mary, Saint Thomas, Trelawny, and Westmoreland. The parishes of Kingston and Saint Andrew were merged in 1923 to form the Kingston and Saint Andrew Corporation.

Judicial system

Jamaica's judicial system is composed of magistrate's courts, a Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court, which has jurisdiction for primary hearings as well as appeals. The governor general appoints judges to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme court on the advice of the prime minister.

Elections

Universal suffrage is 18 years. Members of the House of Representatives are elected for five-year terms unless parliament is dissolved. The last election was held on 16 October 2002:

People's National Party (PNP): 52% popular vote; 34 seats

Jamaica Labour Party (JLP): 47.3% popular vote; 26 seats (CIA 6).

Defence

The Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) consists of the Ground Forces, Coast Guard, and Air Wing. In 2005, the divisions of the JDF had 2,500, 190, and 140 service members respectively, for a total of 2,830 and an additional 953 in reserve. Military service is voluntary and the minimum age of recruits is 18 years. Persons under the age of 18 may, however, enlist with their parent's consent. In 2004, the defence budget was JMD 3,230,000,000 or roughly CAD 55,394,500.00².

Media

The Jamaican constitution affirms freedom of expression and the law affirms freedom of the press. Jamaica's telecommunications are fully deregulated.

There are 10 AM and 13 FM shortwave radio stations (1998), and 7 television stations in Jamaica (1997). In 2004 there were approximately 166,000 personal computers and 1,067,000 internet users in Jamaica.

Daily English language newspapers include the *Daily Gleaner* (50,000), the *Daily Star* (45,000) the *Jamaica Herald* and the *Jamaica Observer*.

United Nations (UN) Human Development Index and Country Rank^A

Value: 0.724/1 (2004)

Rank: 104 of 175 countries (2006).

UN Gender-related Development Index and Country Rank^B

Value: 0.721/1 (2004)

Rank: 77 out of 175 countries (2004)

Population below the national poverty line

18.7% (1990-2003)

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)^C

Score: 3.6/10

Rank: 64 out of 158 countries surveyed

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)^D

Information not available

^A The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value.

^B The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women.

^C The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflects the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (159).

^D The Transparency International GCB is a public opinion survey used to gauge people's perceptions of corruption within their own state.

[Information compiled from: *The Europa World Year Book 2006 2006*, 2390-2405; *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006 (PHW 2005-2006) 2006*, 587-591 ; *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 341-343; Transparency International 2005; UN 2005; US 8 Mar. 2006]

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Since Jamaica's first elections in 1944, the People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) have been at the centre of the political environment.³ *Political Parties of the World* reports that the parties are supported by opposing armed gangs, particularly in the capital city.⁴ During the campaign for the 2002 elections, where the PNP won a fourth consecutive term, approximately 80 murders were committed.⁵ This was a decline in the number of deaths compared to earlier elections, which is attributed to the signing of a code of conduct between political parties.⁶ More recently gang violence in Jamaica has evolved into "powerful" networks of organized crime involved in money laundering,⁷ drug trafficking, criminality and turf wars.⁸

3. POLITICAL PARTIES

Leading Party:

People's National Party (PNP): The PNP was established in 1938.⁹ In the October 2002 elections, the PNP won a majority with a total of 34 seats.¹⁰ The PNP is a socialist democratic party,¹¹ though in recent years it has moved towards the political center.¹² The leader of the PNP is Portia Simpson-Miller.¹³

Jamaica Labour Party (JLP): The JLP was established in 1943.¹⁴ In the October 2002 elections, the JLP won 26 seats.¹⁵ It was under the JLP that Jamaica reached independence in 1962.¹⁶ The JLP has conservative policies and supports a free market economy.¹⁷ The leader of the JLP is Orrett Bruce Golding.¹⁸

Other parties:¹⁹

No third party has challenged Jamaica's two leading parties.²⁰ Other parties include: Christian Conscience, Imperial Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated Political Party, Jamaica Alliance Movement (JAM), Jamaican Alliance for National Unity (JANU), Jamaica Communist Party, Jamaica United Front, National Democratic Movement (NDM), Natural Law Party, Republican Party of Jamaica (RPJ), Revolutionary Marxist League, United People's Party (UPP), Trotskyite Revolutionary Marxist League, Jamaica-American Party, United Progressive Movement.

4. ARMED GROUPS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS

In May 2006, Jamaica's Special Task Force on Crime, led by the leader of the opposition, Bruce Golding, published its report entitled Road Map to a Safe and Secure Jamaica.²¹ According to the task force, based on 2005 statistics, Jamaica has one of the highest rates

of murder per capita worldwide.²² The report noted that Jamaica is experiencing a “deep crisis of public safety,” and that there is a crisis of confidence in the policing and justice systems.²³

In the February 2006 follow-up report on recommendations made to Jamaica, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions noted that several of Jamaica’s communities were run by gangs whose equipment and arms often surpassed that of the police.²⁴

5. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The Jamaican economy has suffered a number of setbacks and its future is challenged by high interest rates, high levels of unemployment,²⁵ hurricane damage and depressed tourism revenues, post September 2001.²⁶ Economic instability has exacerbated public disquiet and has stoked drug-related gang violence.²⁷ However, revenue from the tourism sector is expected to improve.²⁸ Parliamentary elections in Jamaica are scheduled to take place no later than October 2007.²⁹

¹ Canada. 7 Dec. 2006a.

² Ibid.

³ *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 342

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ US 30 Nov. 2006

⁸ *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 342

⁹ *The Europa World Yearbook 2006 2006*, 2399

¹⁰ *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 342

¹¹ *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006 (PHW 2005-2006) 2006*, 589

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The Europa World Yearbook 2006 2006*, 2399

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 342

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *The Europa World Yearbook 2006 2006*, 2399

¹⁹ Ibid; *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006 (PHW 2005-2006) 2006*, 590

²⁰ *Political Parties of the World 2005*, 342

²¹ Jamaica 1 May 2006

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ UN 27 Mar. 2006, Para. 46; US 8 Mar. 2006, Sec. 1.a

²⁵ US 30 Nov. 2006

²⁶ *Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006 (PHW 2005-2006) 2006*, 588

²⁷ US 30 Nov. 2006

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ US 30 Nov. 2006

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