



Jamaica — Va-PoReg Country Report

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05/10/1655 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: Jamaica was given the status of a British Crown Colony on 05/10/1655 (Lansford 2021: 836). In 1884 limited self-rule was reintroduced again and a Legislative Council was created. However, only a small number of the members was elected and suffrage was very restricted.¹ A two-party system was developed before World War II under the leadership of Sir Alexander Bustamante and Norman W. Manley, founders, respectively, of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP). According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

11/20/1944 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: On this day, a newly established constitution gave Jamaica a considerable measure of self-government, but full independence was delayed by attempts to set up a wider federation embracing all or most of the Caribbean Commonwealth territories. Universal suffrage was introduced in the same year.² The constitution was modified in 1953 and in 1957.³ On the 11/11/1957, the Jamaican (Constitution) Order in Council 1957 came into effect, establishing a cabinet of ministers in Jamaica, who were to be suggested by the Governor to the House of Representatives, who then were to approve the ministers. This was an important step in Jamaica's slow transition toward independence.⁴ Only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period according to LIED. V-Dem's LDI recognizes a significant increase in scoring in the year 1944. This means that the constitution made relevant steps towards establishing liberal democratic freedoms. Jamaica became a member of the West Indies Federation in 1958 but withdrew in 1961 due to disputes regarding taxation, voting rights, and the location of the federal capital. The Federation disbanded in 1962 (Lansford 2021: 836). According to LIED political liberties were absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as somewhat present until 1946 and as present from 1947 onward.

07/04/1959 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Jamaica (Constitution) Order in Council 1959 came into effect, granting internal self-government to Jamaica.⁵ Since 1959, according to Polity5, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. On 08/06/1962 Jamaica gained its official independence, however remaining part of the commonwealth with the British Crown as ceremonial head of state. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as somewhat free and fair while their CEI scores electoral cleanliness only as ambiguous. This is, likely, in part due to the so-called „Jamaican Political conflict“ which continues to this day. From the 1970s up until the 1990s, however, the conflict between the two major parties was especially violent. The two parties paid off criminal organizations and fielded possess that would commit violence upon the opposing party and their

supporters.⁶ The violence intensified during elections, afflicting most parts of the country. It included hundreds of killings and attacks on party as well as state infrastructure.⁷ The political violence and the associated impairments of political and civil rights prevent us from classifying Jamaica as a Democracy at that time. According to FH, the country is classified as free during this period, fluctuating between 3 and 5 from 1972 until the end of the period. It thus moves between our categories of free (2-4 points) and rather free (5 points). In addition to that, political liberties were absent until 1980 according to LIED, whereas V-Dem's PCLI already indicates that full political liberties were achieved. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

12/18/1997 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this day, Jamaica held the first general elections which can be considered free and fair, as political violence subsided somewhat. Although it remains an issue up until today, its effect on democratic quality has reduced. We code this regime change event as a strategic liberal or democratic restructuring. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI initially continued to score elections as somewhat free and fair but upgraded the score to free and fair elections in 2002. Their CEI scored elections somewhat clean until 2007. After that, it scores elections as clean. RoW classifies Jamaica as an electoral democracy which is the second highest tier, behind liberal democracy. This is more akin to a full democracy, a judgement which we do not follow for the entire time, as Jamaica only fulfills our requirements for being classified as a liberal democracy after the general election of 12/18/1997. The constitution promulgated in 1962 vests legislative power to its parliament. The country is a parliamentary democracy that, as part of the Commonwealth of Nations, recognizes the British monarch as head of state. The monarch is represented on the island by a governor-general, which the monarch elects on proposition by the prime minister. The governor-general fulfills a largely ceremonial role.⁸ The legislative consists of two chambers, the house of representatives and the senate. Eligible for election to the house of representatives is any commonwealth citizen above the age of 21, who has lived in Jamaica for at least one year.⁹ The regularly held elections are largely considered competitive, fair and free. While the judiciary is considered independent and limits executive power, corruption remains an issue.¹⁰ The judiciary is qualified as independent by a US Human Rights report, although it also noted the judiciary being overburdened.¹¹ Nevertheless, corruption poses a significant challenge, and enduring ties between officials and organized crime elements are believed to endure. The nation continues to grapple with issues of violent crime, along with instances of harassment and violence targeting the LGBT+ community.¹² While civil liberties such as freedom of expression, religion and press are generally guaranteed by the constitution, the prevalent presence of criminal groups threaten to hamper the freedom to express beliefs and views on political/sensitive issues.¹³ According to FH, in the year 1997 as well as between 2001 and 2017, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. Otherwise, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. However, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI score constant full political liberties since 1997. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. Between 1997 and 2006 Jamaica experienced increasingly strong legislative constraints on the executive, our interpretation of V-Dem's LCE shifting from moderate to robust in 2000 and finally to comprehensive in 2007. In the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive for. Although the judiciary is generally perceived as independent, instances of corruption persist within certain lower courts.¹⁴ The latest round of elections took place in 2020 with the incumbent Jamaica Labour Party with Prime Minister Andrew Holness winning 49 out of 63 seats while the oppositional People's National Party won the remaining 14. The result is a major defeat of the PNP and a loss of 17 total seats in the house of representatives to the ruling JLP.

This marks the second electoral victory in a row for the JLP.¹⁵ According to local and international election observers, the elections have been free, fair and generally peaceful.¹⁶

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Wüst 2005)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Jamaica

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamaica/Self-government>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1957/1744/contents/made>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamaica/Self-government>; <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1959/862/contents/made>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamaican_political_conflict

⁷ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/western-hemisphere-region/jamaica-1962-present/>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jamaica/Government-and-society>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_Jamaica

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jamaica/freedom-world/2020#CL>

¹¹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/jamaica/>

¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jamaica/freedom-world/2022>

¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jamaica/freedom-world/2020#CL>

¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jamaica/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Jamaican_general_election

¹⁶ <https://caricom.org/elections-results-reflect-will-of-the-people-caricom-observation-mission-preliminary-statement/>

References

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