

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Jamaica

Score:	2006	2007	Change			
Polity:	9	9	0			
Democ:	9	9	0			
Autoc:	0	0	0			
Durable:		48				
Tentative:		No				
SCODE	JAM	CCODE	051	Date of Report	1 November 2008	
Polity IV Component Variables						
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP	
3	3	4	7	2	4	
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)						
End Date			Begin Date			
			4 July 1959 (Ind.)			
Polity Fragmentation: No						
Constitution	1962					
Executive(s)	Prime Minister Bruce Golding (JLP); appointed as leader of majority party, 11 September 2007					
Legislature	Bicameral: House of Representatives (60 seats; directly elected; most recent election, 3 September 2007) Jamaica Labor Party (JLP): 33 People's National Party (PNP): 27 Senate (21 seats; 13 seats assigned to dominant party, 8 seats to the opposition)					
Judiciary	Supreme Court					

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

A former British colony that gained independence in 1962, Jamaica can trace its parliamentary tradition back to 1664. The Jamaican prime minister is recruited through a competitive multiparty electoral system. The majority party in the House of Representatives selects the prime minister. Members of the House of Representatives are directly elected. As a result of the October 2001 general elections, Prime Minister Percival Patterson of the People's National Party (PNP) was reelected to his third consecutive term; it was the fourth consecutive PNP government; however, the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) made major gains against the PNP, gaining 13 seats. A coalition of smaller parties, the New Jamaica Alliance, failed to secure a seat in the legislature. In March 2006, Portia Simpson Miller was appointed Jamaica's seventh Prime Minister

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following the retirement of Percival Patterson, who had held the position since March 1992. She is the first woman to hold this post. On 8 July 2007 Prime Minister Simpson Miller announced that a general election would be held on August 27. Simpson Miller and Bruce Golding, the leader of the main opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) earlier had issued a joint statement appealing for an end to an outbreak of political intimidation and violence. The opposition JLP won a narrow majority in the parliamentary elections on 3 September 2007 (postponed due to Hurricane Dean), thereby ending an 18-year period of uninterrupted rule by the People's National Party (PNP). JLP leader Bruce Golding became prime minister on 11 September 2007. While the election was relatively peaceful by Jamaican standards, nonetheless, issues of vote-buying remained a problem.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The parliamentary structure of government found in Jamaica places significant constraints on the autonomous actions of the chief executive. The prime minister is elected from, and is directly responsible to, the national legislature. In addition to the significant powers of the legislative branch, horizontal accountability in Jamaica is maintained by an autonomous judiciary.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)

Jamaica has an active multiparty political process. Freedom of speech and assembly are constitutionally protected and the civil rights of citizens are generally respected. However, despite the presence of democratic structures and institutions in this country, democracy in Jamaica continues to be influenced by factional tendencies. Two political parties, the social-democratic People's National Party (PNP) and the conservative Jamaica Labor Party (JLP), have dominated political life in Jamaica since independence in 1962. The competition between these two parties has traditionally been intense and often violent. Each party has historic ties to several territorial strongholds, or "garrison communities," in which armed gangs limited the extent of opposition democratic activity. The JLP gangs (or posses) dominated the east and south of Kingston while the PNP posses were mainly found on the western side of the capital city. While it was the political parties which originally helped organize these garrison communities in the 1960s as a way of mobilizing the political vote, with the rise of the drug trade in the 1970s the parties lost their control over the gangs. As inner-city violence between armed drug gangs escalated in the 1980s and '90s (Jamaica currently has one of the highest murder rates in the world), the political parties began to renounce the strategy of garrison politics. While the trend toward peaceful electoral competition has flourished in recent years, it is still too early to tell if Jamaica has made the transition to fully "competitive" political participation. While over 800 people died in the electoral campaign of 1980, only five people died during the run-up to the 2007 election. Contributing to this decline in political violence has been the decision by the PNP and the JLP to break their long-standing relationships with criminal gangs.