The Political Culture of Democracy in Jamaica and in the Americas, 2016/17: A Comparative Study of Democracy and Governance

Executive Summary

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May 2018

This study is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this study are the sole responsibility of the authors and LAPOP and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.
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Introduction

Democracy has been facing a number of challenges across the world, and the Americas are no exception. Issues many nations are confronting include economic and security problems, political corruption, low levels of public trust in public institutions, and inadequate service provision. In such environments, citizens can be uncertain about whether democracy, as it exists, can positively influence the quality of their daily life. The 2016/17 AmericasBarometer survey adopts a comparative approach across countries, time, and sub-groups to inquire into citizens' perceptions and experiences pertaining to democratic governance, with the aim to provide a basis for strengthening existing policies and programmes and informing new policy directions.

This executive summary presents main findings of the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer survey for Jamaica. LAPOP has carried out this study in Jamaica since 2006, and so the current study marks a ten-year anniversary. The latest round was conducted under the auspices of the Centre for Leadership and Governance, University of the West Indies, Mona, between February and April of 2017. A nationally representative sample of 1,515 Jamaicans was interviewed in this island-wide survey.

This summary of results focuses on attitudes about democracy and core institutions of democracy; perceptions of the degree to which citizens believe that their countries offer basic liberties associated with democratic governance; citizens' experiences and evaluations of democracy, corruption, and police-community relations; and citizens' perceptions and experiences pertaining to lottery scamming, human trafficking, and marijuana decriminalization.

1. Support for Electoral Democracy in the Americas

This chapter considers support for democracy in the abstract and two of its most fundamental components: elections and political parties. On the question of support for democracy, the results show a significant decline in the extent to which the public agrees that democracy, despite its flaws, is better than any other form of government. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, support for democracy decreased by almost 9 percentage points, on average, between 2014 and 2016/17.

Figure 1 shows results for Jamaica. Although most citizens have expressed strong support for democracy since the 2006 round of the survey, the percentage has declined to its lowest level in 2016. A little more than half of the citizens (55.8%) support democracy as the best form of government in 2017, an outcome that places Jamaica in the middle range of support for democracy compared to other the countries in the region.
Figure 1. Support for Democracy in Jamaica and in the Americas

Public trust and participation in political institutions are important indicators of citizen support for democracy as it functions in the real world. They also signal citizens' levels of commitment to a democratic system of government. Accordingly, citizens legitimize electoral democracy by participating in elections and by trusting elections as a mechanism for selecting political leaders. In the Americas, trust in elections is low on average, with less than half of citizens of most countries expressing trust in their elections. Figure 2 shows that Jamaica falls below the intermediate range, with about one-third of respondents reporting trust in elections. Trust was highest in 2012 at 43.6%, but declined substantially to 24.5% in 2014, then increased to 31.8% in 2017.
Political parties also serve an important role in democratic governance. They facilitate participation in the democratic process, fostering greater citizen representation. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents reporting trust in parties in the 2016/17 round. Trust in political parties ranges from 7.5% in Peru to 35.1% in Nicaragua. Jamaica is sixth from the top of the chart, with 22.5% of the populace expressing trust in political parties. The 2017 result represents a marked increase compared to the level of trust reported in 2014, and the 2017 result is similar to 2006, when the survey first asked this question.
2. The Supply of Basic Liberties in the Americas

Basic liberties, such as freedom of the media, freedom of expression, and fundamental human rights, are critical to public engagement and inclusion in the democratic political system. Restrictions on basic liberties may undermine motivations to participate and erode individuals' support for the political administration and the democratic system more generally.

As shown in Figure 4, trust in the media has decreased progressively in Jamaica since 2010. Looking at the comparative perspective, trust is highest in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Paraguay, and lowest in Jamaica, Colombia, and the United States. Less than half of Jamaicans (37.9%) trust the media.
Freedom to express political opinions is particularly important in a democracy. Nearly half of the public in the Americas (49%) believes there is very little freedom of expression in their country. Of course, these averages mask significant cross-national variation. Figure 5 shows the proportion of individuals who give each assessment—very little, sufficient, or too much—for each country in which the question was asked in the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer. In Jamaica specifically, 61% report very little freedom of expression, 24% report sufficient levels, and 15% report too much freedom of expression.
While concerns about deficiencies in levels of freedom of the press and of expression are elevated in the Americas, data from the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer reveal that concerns about human rights are even more pronounced. As Figure 6 shows, in the vast majority of cases (all but four countries), more than 50% of the population reports that there is a deficit in human rights protections in their country. Jamaica is second from the bottom, just above Haiti, with 78% of Jamaicans reporting that there is very little protection of human rights.
3. Citizens’ Opinions on Corruption and Anti-Corruption Agencies in Jamaica

In Jamaica, anti-corruption efforts have prevailed as a ‘good governance’ imperative for a number of years. These policy and programmatic efforts have been pursued on the understanding that extant levels of corruption are an ‘obstacle’ to meaningful and sustainable national development (World Bank, 2015).¹

In this section, we seek to better understand the nature and extent of corruption in Jamaica. Firstly, we consider citizens’ perception of its prevalence among the nation's political leaders, and then we estimate the prevalence of corruption victimization, measured in terms of citizens' direct personal experience with certain corrupt acts or proposals in their dealings with public officials. We also examine the factors that might influence both perceptions of corruption and citizens' likelihood of being a victim in corrupt dealings.

The perception of the integrity of a country's political and/or other public officials is a critical requirement for good democratic governance. In this regard, corruption perception has routinely been a topic of interest in the AmericasBarometer.

The findings show that 97% of those surveyed believe that the nation's politicians are involved in corruption (Figure 7). Three out of four Jamaicans feel that half of politicians or more are corrupt.

![Figure 7. Perceptions of the Prevalence of Corruption among Politicians in Jamaica](chart.png)

LAPOP has developed a series of items to measure corruption victimization. These questions measure victimization simply in terms of whether people have been victimized or not in the 12 months prior to the survey. Figure 8 shows that the majority of Jamaicans report that they had not been subjected to corruption within the past 12 months. However, one in ten reports having been a victim of corruption.
Figure 8. Total Index of Corruption Victimization, 2017

Figure 9 illustrates change in reported victimization over four rounds of the survey. The rate of victimization for 2017 is similar to that reported in 2014, and marginally higher than the measures found in 2010 and 2012.

Figure 9. Percent of Population Victimized by Corruption, 2010-2017

In order to determine the likelihood that an individual might be a victim of corruption, we analyse corruption victimization by core demographic and socio-economic subgroups. Of the variables included in the model, gender, education, and wealth were among the most important predictors, with men being more likely to be victimized than women, wealthier persons more
likely than the less wealthy, and persons with higher levels of education more likely to be victimized than those with less education.

We seek to further understand the dynamics of corruption in Jamaica by assessing the extent to which Jamaicans tolerate or are likely to justify acts of corruption. As Figure 10 shows, 26.7% of Jamaicans feel that paying a bribe is justified under certain conditions.

![Figure 10. Percentage of Population Justifying Acts of Corruption](image)

Figure 10 shows that there is a notable decline in tolerance for corruption since 2006. The 2017 AmericasBarometer indicates that the proportion of Jamaicans expressing their acquiescence with bribery as a means of accessing services has declined by more than half since the 2006 round of survey.

![Figure 11. Justification of Acts of Corruption in Jamaica, 2006-2017](image)
The 2017 results show, further, that gender and age are statistically significant in determining a person’s likelihood of justifying corrupt practices, with males and younger persons being more likely to justify paying a bribe.

Level of trust in a particular societal institution is a good measure of the extent to which that institution functions at the level expected by the citizenry. Figure 12 shows that, notwithstanding statistically significant increases in trust in all three institutions, the degrees of confidence remain middling for the Offices of Utilities Regulations and the Contractor General, with trust in the Independent Commission of Investigations above the mid-point on a 0–100 scale in 2017.

![Figure 12. Trust in Selected Public Oversight Bodies](image)

For other institutions examined, levels of trust hover just above the midpoint – the Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA), the Public Defender, Auditor General’s Department, and the Director of Public Prosecution - in the 2017 survey (Figure 13).

![Figure 13. Trust in State Anti-Corruption Investigative Bodies](image)
As a non-state agency, the National Integrity Action (NIA) has been in the forefront of the effort to combat corruption in Jamaica. Charts in Figure 14 show that 47.2% of Jamaicans reported that they have heard of the NIA, and of this percentage, 82.4% were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the work of NIA.

![Figure 14. Knowledge of and Satisfaction with the Work of the National Integrity Action](image)

4. Police-Community Relations in Jamaica: Attitudes and Perceptions of the Police in the Context of Increasing Public Insecurity

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) is Jamaica’s official policing body. In general, the force tends to operate within a military culture that is based on policing through control, which is at odds with the community policing camp’s focus on partnership and policing through consent. The foundational differences between this longstanding culture and the newly-implemented system of community policing create challenges for the improvement of police-citizen relations. Studies over the years, including previous AmericasBarometer surveys, have reported high levels of mistrust between citizens and the police in Jamaica.

This section examines the issue of police–community relations in Jamaica, focusing on citizens’ attitudes toward and perceptions of the police, and the extent to which they are willing to participate in measures to improve neighbourhood security by fostering better relationships with the police.

Figure 15 shows that in 2017, approximately 28% of Jamaicans support authorities occasionally crossing the line to catch criminals, while the majority (around 72%) think the police should always abide by the law.
The trend over the last 10 years regarding beliefs towards authorities occasionally crossing the line (side-stepping the rule of law) to catch criminals (Figure 16) declined by more than half in 2008, but has steadily increased each round to reach similar levels found in 2006.

Further analysis of the data finds that older Jamaicans are less likely to support bypassing the rule of law than younger cohorts. Jamaicans with lower levels of wealth and education are also less likely to offer support in order to bypass the rule of law.
Citizens’ trust of the police is based on the belief that the police can be relied upon to act competently, to wield their authority in a fair way, and to provide equal justice and protection across society. Figure 17 shows the average degrees of trust in police, where the responses to the original question are rescaled to fit a 0 to 100-point scale. The 2017 AmericasBarometer revealed an increase over 2014 in citizens’ trust in the police. However, overall trust remains below the midpoint, illustrating a culture of low levels of trust in the police in Jamaica.

Figure 17. Trust in the Police, 2006-2017

When asked for their view about criminal wrongdoings among police officers, about four out of ten Jamaicans report that the police were involved in criminal activity, while six out of ten Jamaicans report that the police protected people from crime (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Citizens’ Views on Role and Activities of the Police in Jamaica
Perceptions of the level of protection that the police offer residents against crime vary according to place of residence, age, and level of education. Those residing in the urban areas report less faith that police protect against crime. Younger cohorts report less faith than older, and those with more education also report less faith in the intentions and activities of the police.

About 8% of Jamaicans report that the police come to their neighbourhood to abuse them. However, the majority of Jamaicans (64.8%) report that the police come to their neighbourhood to help (see Figure 19).

![Figure 19. Citizen Perceptions of Police Actions and Intentions in Communities](source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2017; vJamts 1.0)

The majority of Jamaicans feel that a closer working relationship between police and the community would reduce crime (see Figure 20).
Figure 20. Perception of the Potential Benefits of Citizen-Police Collaboration for Crime Control

Figure 21 shows that 65% of Jamaicans are willing to work with police to combat crime, 22.9% are somewhat hesitant, and 12.1% were very hesitant to work with the police in their community to combat crime.

Figure 21. Citizen Attitudes toward Cooperation with the Police in Crime Control Initiatives
5. Lottery Scamming, Human Trafficking and Marijuana Decriminalization in Jamaica

This section focuses on three issues affecting Jamaica: lottery scamming, human trafficking, and marijuana decriminalization. The first two have been singled out for special attention, firstly because of the presumed relationship between citizens’ attitudes about these issues and the potential for success of measures taken to contain or reduce the associated problems. Secondly, the reported increases in the incidence, the reach of these problems, and the related organized criminal activities are purported to have a serious negative impact on national security, the country’s international image, and its investment and development prospects.

Regarding the topic of marijuana decriminalization, the recently enacted ‘Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act, 2015’ has significantly changed the basic law’s stipulations on the use of this plant, both for recreational and medical purposes.

As illustrated by Figure 22, the overwhelming majority view lottery scamming as a serious issue in Jamaica. Three out of four Jamaicans see the problem of lottery scamming as “very serious,” whereas 2.2% of Jamaicans saw it as “not serious at all.” When examining concern of national lottery scamming by community, Cornwall shows the highest level of concern about the seriousness of the problem in Jamaica.

![Figure 22. Respondents’ Views on the Seriousness of Lottery Scamming in Jamaica](source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2017; vJAMres_1.0)

Figure 23 shows that 13.3% of respondents report knowing someone from their community who has been arrested for lottery scamming. When these results are broken down by region, residents in Cornwall report knowing or having heard of someone from their community being arrested more than respondents of any other area in the country. This finding is consistent with the level of concern for lottery scamming in Cornwall.
This next section looks at human trafficking and perceptions around such activity in Jamaica. The problem of human trafficking has emerged as an area of significant concern in Jamaica. Figure 24 shows that the majority of Jamaicans (71.5%) report human trafficking as “a serious problem” and only 3.2% report “it is not a problem.”

Marked differences are evident when levels of seriousness about human trafficking in respondents’ communities are compared with levels of concern at the national level. Of
respondents surveyed, 11.3% reported human trafficking to be a “serious” problem in their community, representing a stark difference to the reports of national concern. Figure 25 shows that a majority (68.1%) of respondents report that human trafficking is “not a problem” in their own community.

![Figure 25. Perception about the Seriousness of the Problem of Human Trafficking in Respondents' Community](image)

The media are channels through which the public gains information on many issues; through reporting of issues, the media have the ability to shape our understanding of topics such as human trafficking. Information about the problem can also be obtained through public discourse.

As shown in Figure 26, slightly more than four out of five respondents (81%) heard about human trafficking through media sources in the last 12 months. This result suggests a majority of Jamaicans are aware of the idea of human trafficking.
In terms of personal knowledge of incidence of human trafficking, Figure 27 shows that the majority of Jamaicans did not report hearing of a missing teen in the five years prior to the survey in 2017. Less than one in six Jamaicans (15%) reported such a case in their neighbourhood.

Jamaica's Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act (2015) provided a substantial decriminalization of the use of marijuana. Under the new regime, possession of less than two ounces of marijuana is
no longer a criminal offence requiring a court appearance and will not be listed on one's criminal record. Additionally, the 2015 Act approved the possession of marijuana for medicinal purposes as recommended by a medical practitioner or a Ministry of Health-approved institution, or for research by an accredited or approved institution.

Figure 28 displays the percentage of respondents agreeing with statements about marijuana. Figure 28 shows the most support for the following statement: “people should be allowed to freely smoke marijuana if they so desire,” with 54.8% of Jamaicans indicating agreement. Among Jamaicans, 40.9% agreed that legalization of marijuana would produce more crime, and 42.7% agreed marijuana use would lead to the use of harder drugs. Lastly, 47.9% of Jamaicans felt that marijuana use is unhealthy.

![Figure 28. Percentage Agreement with Selected Statements on the Impact of the Amended Dangerous Drugs Act](image-url)
The Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act (2015) provided the establishment of the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA) with a specific role to license and regulate Jamaica’s legal marijuana and hemp industry.

Figure 29 shows that a small minority (8.2%) thinks that marijuana should be prohibited. The chart also shows that 62.5% feel the state should have some role in regulating the production of marijuana. About a third (29.3%) feel that the state should not regulate marijuana production at all.

When asked about their views on the use of marijuana for medicinal and scientific purposes in Jamaica, the majority of respondents support the legalization of marijuana for these purposes. Figure 30 shows that only about 10% of respondents disagreed with this legal measure or had no strong opinion on the issue.

Figure 29. Positions on the Extent of State Regulation of Marijuana

Limits on Growing and Distribution of Marijuana for Personal Use

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2017; vJAMts_1.0
Figure 30. Level of Support for the Legalization of Marijuana for Medical and Research Endeavours

Figure 31 shows that a majority of respondents believe that marijuana use will increase at some level after the new legislation. About 28% percent feel marijuana use will remain the same and 11% felt marijuana use will decrease (a lot or somewhat) with the new legislation.

Figure 31. Effects of Amended Dangerous Drugs Act on Marijuana Smoking
As depicted in Figure 32, a total of 41.9% of Jamaican adults report having used marijuana some time in past. Of those who report that they had used marijuana, 51.8% indicated that they use it sometimes, and 23.9% used it frequently.

6. Democratic Orientations in the Americas

Over the years, LAPOP has hypothesized and found that democracy rests on firmer grounds to the extent that the following joint conditions are met: the public perceives the political system to be legitimate, and it supports the right to participate of those who may hold diverging political views. Legitimacy and tolerance are, therefore, core elements of democratic culture. These attitudes combine to make unique profiles of democratic orientations.

Figure 33 compares levels of the system support index and each of its five components in Jamaica since 2006. The index and individual component variables are scores that range from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate more positive attitudes toward the system. Support for the political system in Jamaica in 2017 was 48.4, an increase since 2014. Overall, we see increases in 2017 from 2014 for each component of system support. Larger increases were found for the following two components: respect for institutions and support for the political system.
Figure 33. System Support and Its Components in Jamaica, 2004-2016/17

Compared to other countries in the Americas, Figure 34 shows Jamaica ranking below the regional average (49.7) for support of the political system. System support is highest in Guyana (65.5 degrees) and lowest in Brazil (34.1 degrees).
High levels of support for the political system do not guarantee the quality and survival of liberal democratic institutions. Liberal democracy also requires citizens to accept the principles of open democratic competition and tolerance of dissent. In line with previous LAPOP research, political tolerance is defined as “the respect by citizens for the political rights of others, especially those with whom they may disagree.” Figure 35 displays the national means for Jamaica on the political tolerance index in each round of the AmericasBarometer since 2006. Like system support, measures for tolerance also increased in 2017. There are increases for

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**Figure 34. System Support in the Americas, 2016/17**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>System Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts &amp; Nevis</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent &amp; the Grenadines</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
overall tolerance, as well as the rights to conduct peaceful demonstrations, vote, and run for office. The largest increase is for the right to peaceful demonstrations.

![Figure 35. Political Tolerance and Its Components in Jamaica, 2004-2016/17](image)

The cross-national distribution of tolerance of political dissent in the region can be appreciated in Figure 36, which maps countries by mean score on the index from the 2016/17 AmericasBarometer. Tolerance is greatest in Canada and the United States (69.8 and 69.2 degrees on the 0-100 scale, respectively) and lowest in Peru and Colombia (47.6 and 45.4 degrees, respectively). Jamaica's position increased to third most tolerant in 2017, with 60.2 degrees.
Figure 36. Political Tolerance in the Americas, 2016/17