

LAPOP's
AmericasBarometer
takes the

Pulse of Democracy in Jamaica

REPORT EDITORS

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20
23



AmericasBarometer
Barómetro de las Américas

Our Mission

LAPOP Lab is a center for excellence in international survey research. Located at Vanderbilt University, our mission is to:

- Produce high-quality public opinion data
- Develop and implement cutting-edge methods
- Build capacity in survey research and analysis
- Generate and disseminate policy-relevant research

The lab is run by experts in survey methodology who innovate approaches to public opinion research. The team is dedicated to collaboration and pedagogy. The lab's work facilitates evidence-based dialogue and policy decisions about a broad range of issues related to democratic governance.

A Letter from USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is a proud supporter of the AmericasBarometer, an award-winning project that captures the voice of the people of the Americas. Drawing upon survey data from over 34 nations from North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean, the AmericasBarometer informs discussions over the quality and strength of democracy in the region.

Since 2004, the AmericasBarometer measures attitudes, evaluations, experiences, and behavior in the Americas using national probability samples of voting-age adults. Survey topics include the economy, rule of law, state capacity, trust in institutions, individual values, corruption, security, and more.

USAID relies on the AmericasBarometer to inform strategy development, guide program design, and evaluate the contexts in which we work. The AmericasBarometer alerts policymakers and international assistance agencies to key challenges. Importantly, the project provides citizens with information about democratic values and experiences in their country, over time, and in comparison to other countries.

Chantal Agarwal
Agreement Officer's Representative
Democracy Human Rights and Governance Team
Office of Regional Sustainable Development
Bureau for Latin America & the Caribbean
United States Agency for International Development

While the AmericasBarometer is coordinated by LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University, it is a collaborative international project. LAPOP consults with researchers across the Americas, local survey teams, USAID, and other project supporters at each stage. These rich discussions increase the relevance and validity of questionnaires; improve sample designs; build and maintain state-of-the-art quality control protocols; and support the development and dissemination of data and reports. As a collaborative project, the AmericasBarometer also builds capacity in public opinion research via knowledge transfers to local teams, student participation in the project, and frequent workshops.

USAID has been the largest supporter of the surveys that form the core of the AmericasBarometer. In addition, each round of the project is supported by individuals and institutions. USAID is grateful to that network of supporters, the LAPOP team, their outstanding former and current students, the many experts and institutions across the region that contribute to and engage with the project, the local fieldwork teams, and all those who took the time to respond to the survey.



LAPOP

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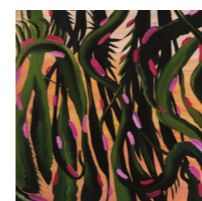
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UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

AmericasBarometer data are based on national samples of respondents drawn from each country; naturally, all samples produce results that contain a margin of error. It is important for the reader to understand that each data point (for example, a country's proportion of citizens who support democracy) has a confidence interval, expressed in terms of a range surrounding that point. Many graphs in this study show a 95% confidence interval that takes into account this sampling variability. When two estimated points have confidence intervals that overlap to a large degree, the difference between the two values is typically not statistically significant; conversely, where two confidence intervals do not overlap, the reader can be confident that those differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Estimates for the 2023 AmericasBarometer are based on weighted data where applicable. Due to sampling discrepancies, calibration weights are generated for national surveys in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil by strata based on population distributions for urban/rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (telephone surveys) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the distributions of gender, education, age, and region in the most recent previous face-to-face AmericasBarometer country surveys. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size. Data for this report are based on the pre-release dataset; analysts may find small differences in point estimates when using publicly released datasets due to ongoing data cleaning and quality control.



COVER ART
'Plagas de jardín' [Garden plagues]
50 x 52 cm, oil on paper, 2020, by Sylvia Fernández

Sylvia Fernández (Lima, 1978) graduated with a gold medal in Fine Arts from Corriente Alterna, in Lima, Peru, in 2002. Her painting explores the abstract boundaries of the mind and body and its relationship with nature, time and memory. <https://www.sylvia-fernandez.com>

Sylvia is represented by **Galería del Paseo** Founded in 1998 in Montevideo, Uruguay—and present as well in Lima, Peru, since 2003—Galería del Paseo promotes young Latin-American artists in the field of contemporary arts. <https://www.galeriadelpaseo.com>

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Introduction

Balford Lewis¹

In Jamaica, as elsewhere in the Caribbean and the wider Americas, democracy prevails in public opinion as the preferred political system, presumably on its promise of liberty, broad participation, citizen security, human rights, and inclusive development and change.²

However, in many countries across the region, disturbing trends in some key “good governance” indicators have elicited heightened skepticism amongst the citizenry about the capacity of the democratic system of government to deliver on many of these promises. Purportedly, levels of support for the values and institutions at the core of a democracy hinges, in great part, on citizens belief that their government can and does succeed in fulfilling their basic individual and societal needs and expectations. In keeping tabs on the pulse of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), therefore, the AmericasBarometer tracks citizens’ opinions and evaluations about the workings of the democratic governance apparatus in countries of the region.

As in the previous rounds of this series of biennial cross-national surveys, the AmericasBarometer 2023 examines citizens attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and evaluations of democratic governance,

using a common core questionnaire and a standardized research design. This report presents the results for Jamaica.

In this survey round, data was collected from a nationally representative sample of adult Jamaicans using enumerator-administered in-person interviews, conducted between July 7 and September 5, 2023. The merging of the data of this round with the pool of AmericasBarometer data for prior periods and from other LAC countries permits the analysis of reported experiences and evaluations in comparative perspective across population subgroups, subnational regions, countries, and over time. In addition to facilitating a better understanding of the dynamics of democracy in Jamaica and the Americas, these results provide actionable, policy-relevant information on a range of societal conditions and concerns, thus providing a tool to meaningfully address the array of democracy and governance-related problems facing the country.

Democratic governance, defined as a “political system which is representative of the will and interests of the people”,³ is typified particularly by the active and inclusive participation of citizens in political and governmental affairs. Given the importance of elections and the vote to this process, the perennial low voter turnout in Jamaica, and evidence of declining trust in elections among the citizenry raise questions about the presumed vibrancy of the country’s “Westminster-style” representative parliamentary democracy.

In the most recent national elections (2020), voter turnout was only 37%, the lowest in a national election since 1983 when the main opposition party boycotted the polls, and significantly lower than the 87% reported in the 1980 general elections. The result was a landslide victory for the incumbent Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). With the support of only 21% of eligible electors, the party received 57% of the votes casted, winning 49 of the 63 seats in the Parliament. The leader of the winning party and current Prime Minister, Mr. Andrew Holness, acknowledged after the polls, that “there are many Jamaicans who did not participate, ... for fear of the virus (Covid), ... others for other reasons – apathy, frustrations.”⁴

Attributing the lack of voter enthusiasm partially to “frustration” is instructive. These AmericasBarometer 2023 results reveal nuances of heightening frustration among the populace. Reported mistrust in and dissatisfaction with key national institutions is fueled not only by concerns about problems such as a worsening crime and insecurity situation, but more so, by an underlying lack of confidence in the capabilities and integrity of the public officials with the authority to address the causes of citizens’ concerns.

The Jamaican economy has shown remarkable resilience as it weathers challenges linked to the global pandemic-related supply

¹ Balford Lewis is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Liberal Studies at the University of Technology in Jamaica.

² Castorena and Zechmeister 2023.

³ See https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Nigeria_CDCS_2015-2020.pdf

⁴ See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/jamaica-election-jlp-holness-1.5712045>

chain disruptions, widening geopolitical conflicts, and much more frequent weather events fueled by climate change. However, despite the relative stability in interest and exchange rates, and a return to pre-pandemic levels in GDP growth in 2023, most Jamaicans report a worsening national economy, particularly as it relates to the rising costs of basic goods and services. It is notable though, that it is the longstanding problem of crime and insecurity, and not economic hard times, about which people express greater concern. In this survey, for example, two in three cite security-related concerns as the most troubling national problem, an appreciable increase when compared to the one in two who had similar concerns in the 2021 survey round.

In general, trends in these AmericasBarometer 2023 results suggest that Jamaicans want more democratic and accountable governance than currently exists. They want safer neighborhoods and greater citizen security; more integrity in public administration; an overall improvement in the quality of publicly provided utilities and services; and importantly, more trustworthy public officials and institutions. Evidently, citizens’ evaluation of the efforts of government to address these desires and concerns has factored prominently in explaining the overall decline in public trust and the reported fall off in support for and levels of engagement in the institutions and processes of democracy in Jamaica.

In this report, Chapter 1 examines the problem of crime, the issue identified by most Jamaicans as the major challenge facing the country. Chapter 2 then turns the attention to politics, with an assessment of experiences with and attitudes about corruption. Finally, Chapter 3 explores public opinion regarding governing institutions more broadly and the overall democratic system of government.

BY THE NUMBERS

1,100
interviewers

2023
AMERICASBAROMETER

41,524
interviews

180
core questions included in
most countries

415
country-specific questions

26
COUNTRIES

Argentina
Belize
Bolivia
Brazil
Canada
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Grenada
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Jamaica
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Suriname
The Bahamas
Trinidad & Tobago
United States
Uruguay

INTERVIEWER TRAINING

24
local firm
trainings

420
training
hours

CAPACITY BUILDING IN SURVEY RESEARCH IN 2023

33 events

600+ hours

1,390 attendees

THE AMERICASBAROMETER SERIES

10 waves of
surveys across
20 years

34 countries

385,000+
interviews

Crime and Security

Luke Plutowski¹

Crime remains a pressing issue in Jamaica, with the island's homicide rate reaching approximately 53 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022.² Recently ranked 10th on a list of countries with the highest crime rates,³ Jamaica's violence problem prompted Prime Minister Andrew Holness to declare a state of emergency in December 2022 across 9 of Jamaica's 14 parishes.⁴ The U.S. State Department issued a warning that advised citizens to "reconsider travel" to Jamaica due to security concerns, dealing a blow to a country where tourism accounts for 30% of the GDP.⁵ However, the situation saw an improvement in early 2023, as major crimes decreased by over 20% and a dozen

high-profile gang members were arrested.⁶ In 2023 as a whole, murders declined 7.8%.⁷

Insecurity can have profound consequences beyond its physical and psychological effects. It can take a severe economic toll⁸ and erode trust in institutions, fostering dissatisfaction with democracy and fueling support for authoritarian leadership.⁹

The AmericasBarometer plays a crucial role in measuring experiences with and perceptions of crime, providing valuable data for law enforcement and lawmakers to understand public sentiment, identify community concerns, and evaluate potential solutions.

MAIN FINDINGS

- Crime victimization nearly doubled from 2021 to 2023, with 13% of Jamaicans reporting being victims of crime in the past year.
- Feelings of insecurity are rising, with 23% of Jamaicans feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods, though still relatively low compared to other countries in the LAC region.
- Crime and insecurity have significant political implications, with those feeling unsafe being less satisfied with democracy and less trusting of government.
- Jamaicans overwhelmingly disapprove of intimate partner violence, though some would understand in certain scenarios.
- The share of Jamaicans who approve of intimate partner violence significantly decreased from 2014 to 2023, indicating a shift in cultural attitudes.

CRIME IS A MAJOR CONCERN FOR JAMAICANS

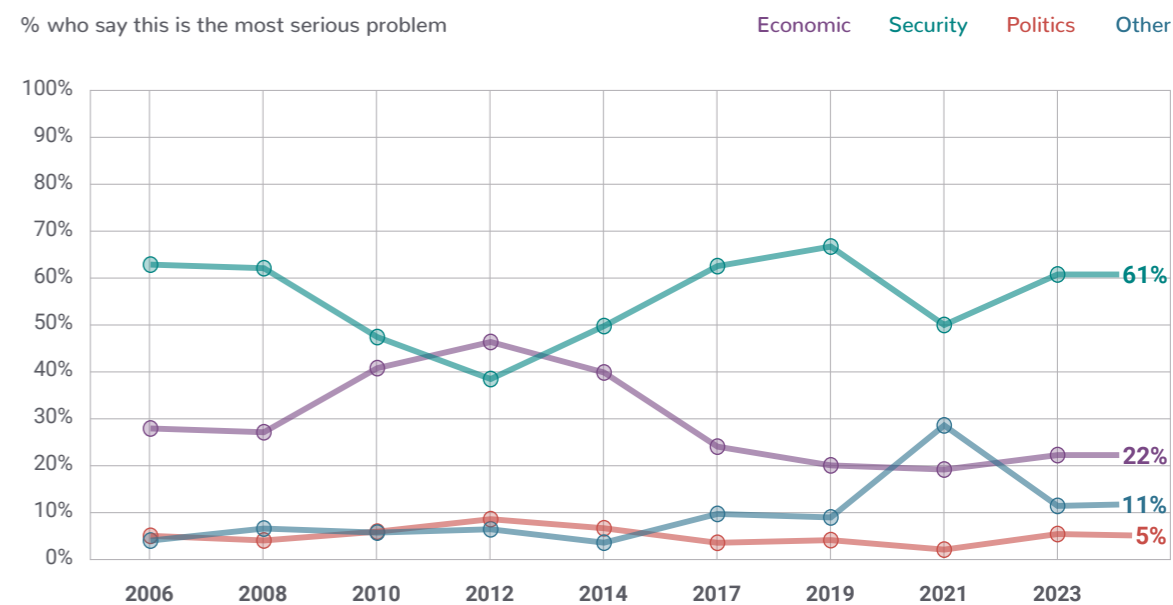
The standard opening question on the AmericasBarometer asks respondents to name their main issue of concern. Responses are open-ended, and then re-coded into one of nine categories by the interviewer.

In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?

Figure 1.1 shows the results of this item across time. For analytical purposes, responses are grouped into

four categories: economic issues (e.g., economy, inflation, unemployment), security issues (e.g., crime, violence, security), governance (e.g., politicians, corruption, human rights), and other (e.g., basic services, food insecurity, drugs, etc.). The figure reveals that security issues continue to be at the top of mind for most Jamaicans. For the fifth survey round in a row, a majority say that security is the top issue facing the country today. The proportion of Jamaicans who point to security as the top issue increased by 11 percentage points in 2023 after a brief decline in 2021 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1.1 Security is a top concern for most Jamaicans for the fifth consecutive survey round



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

13% CRIME VICTIMIZATION HAS INCREASED BUT REMAINS LOW COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES

of Jamaicans were victims of a crime in the 12 months prior to the survey.

CRIME VICTIMIZATION HAS INCREASED BUT REMAINS LOW COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES

As a matter of central importance to the lives of ordinary citizens, security issues form a core part of the AmericasBarometer. It measures crime victimization with the following question:

Now, changing the subject, have you been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, have you been a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats, or any other type of crime in the past 12 months?

Figure 1.2 shows the percentage who say they have been a victim of a crime over the past year. Crime victimization

nearly doubled between 2021 and 2023, reaching a new high in the history of the AmericasBarometer series (13%). This victimization returned to a level of over one in eight after a drop in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A new question on this year's AmericasBarometer follows up on this question by asking respondents whether they know of others in their community who have been victims of a crime:

Do you know or have you heard of anyone in your community who has been a victim of any type of crime in the past 12 months? That is, a victim of robbery, burglary, assault, fraud, blackmail, extortion, violent threats, or any other type of crime in the past 12 months? Yes/No

As illustrated by Figure 1.3, over one in three (36%) say they know or have heard of someone in their neighborhood being a victim of crime over the previous year. Further, those with higher socioeconomic status are especially likely to know a crime victim. About half (49%) of those with post-secondary education say that they have heard of someone in their community falling victim to a crime, compared to just 26% of those with no or only primary education.

Turning back to the measure of personal crime victimization, Figure 1.4 shows that the likelihood of experiencing a crime varies with gender and education level. Women (16%) are 4-percentage points more likely than men (12%) to report being a victim of a crime in Jamaica in 2023.¹⁰ Also, those with superior educational

attainment are twice as likely to report crime victimization as those with no or only primary education (20% vs. 9%). These results are statistically significant, even when controlling for each other variable and household wealth, age, and region of residence (none of which were found to be associated with crime victimhood).¹¹

Because crime victimization is part of the core of the AmericasBarometer questionnaire, it is possible to compare how Jamaica scores on this measure compared to all other countries included in the 2023 round. Figure 1.5 shows the percentage of people in each country who were crime victims over the previous year. As the data reveal, Jamaica is doing relatively well compared to its peers, despite the recent increase. Only in El

Figure 1.2 Crime victimization in Jamaica returned to its pre-pandemic level in 2023



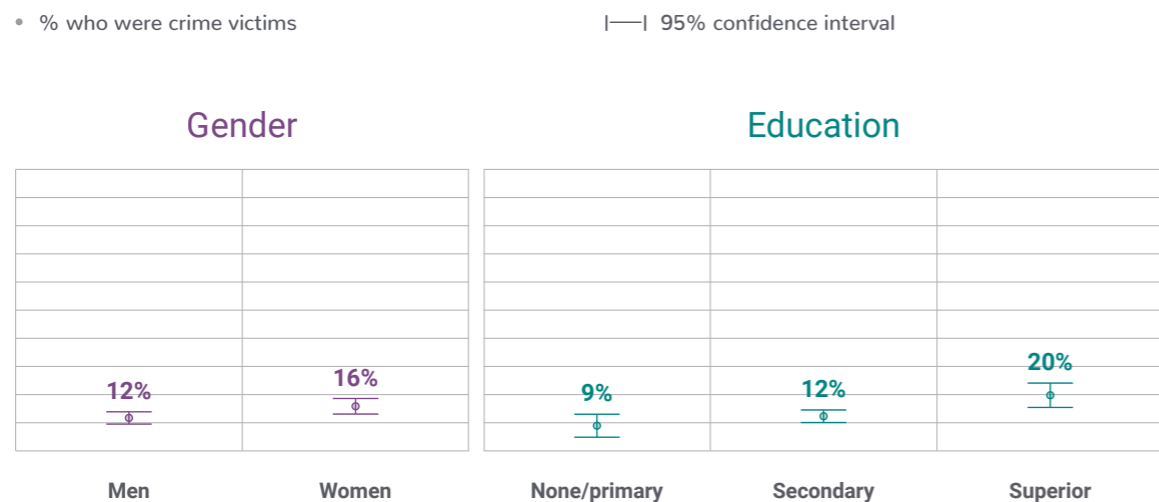
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2010-2023

Figure 1.3 Over one third of Jamaicans know of a crime victim in their neighborhood



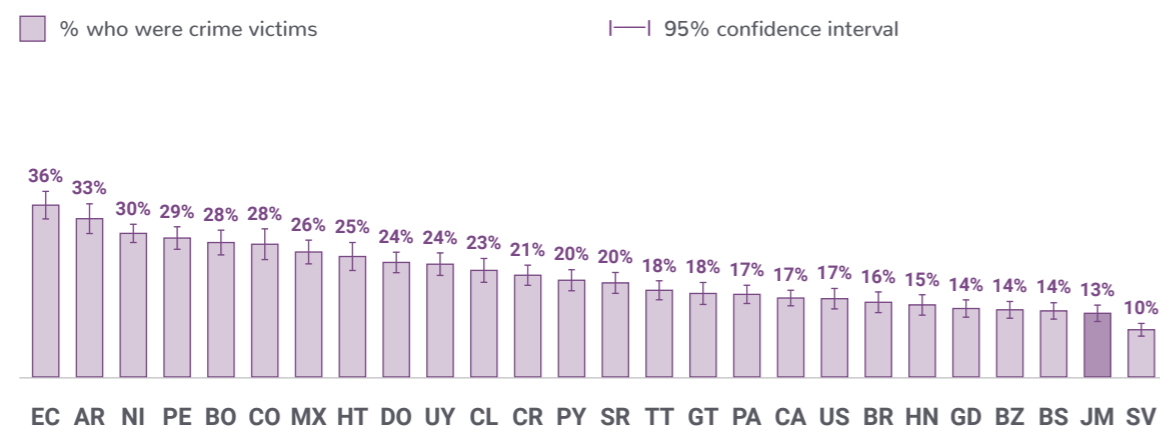
Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Figure 1.4 Women and Jamaicans with higher educational attainment are more likely to report having been victims of crime



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Figure 1.5 Jamaicans report nearly the lowest level of crime victimization in the region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Salvador do fewer people report crime victimization. On the other end of the spectrum, 36% of Ecuadorians have been a victim of a crime, almost three times the rate of Jamaica.

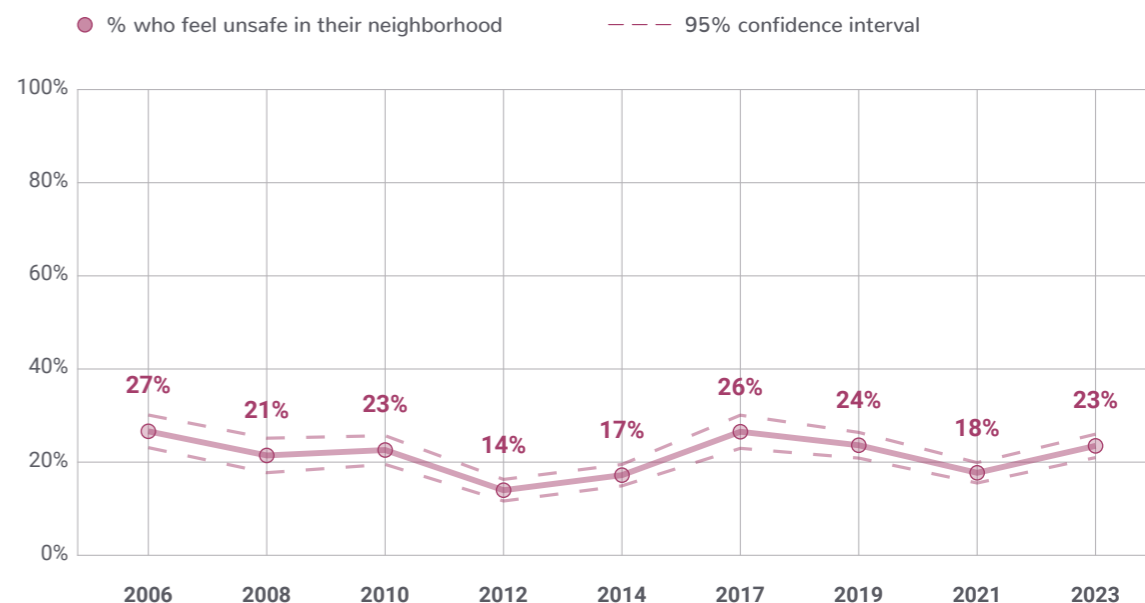
Speaking of the neighborhood where you live and thinking of the possibility of being assaulted or robbed, do you feel very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

FEELINGS OF INSECURITY ARE RISING, BUT STILL RELATIVELY LOW COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Actual experience with crime does not encapsulate the entire security issue; even those who have not been personally victimized may experience negative repercussions from fear of crime alone. Therefore, the AmericasBarometer asks respondents how safe they feel in their neighborhood:

Figure 1.6 shows the percentage of Jamaicans who feel “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe” since 2006. In line with the time-series findings for crime victimization, there is a significant increase in feelings of insecurity in 2023. 23% feel unsafe in their neighborhood, a 5-percentage point increase from last round. Despite this increase, the current rate is lower than its series high of 26% in 2017. Again, it seems that there was a temporary dip in fear of crime during the pandemic period.

Figure 1.6 Almost one in four feels insecure in their neighborhood, a significant increase since 2021



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

23%
of Jamaicans feel unsafe in their neighborhood, the fourth-lowest rate in the region.

There is significant variation in feelings of insecurity across demographic profiles. Women are more likely to report feeling unsafe, at 26%, compared to men, at 21%. Household wealth is also tied to feelings of insecurity, as 30% of the least wealthy Jamaicans say they feel insecure in their neighborhood, compared to 18% in the wealthiest category. Note that this finding runs counter to the findings related to socioeconomic status and crime victimization in **Figure 1.4**, where the most educated reported the highest level of victimization.

There is also regional variation. People who live in Cornwall County feel the most insecure, at 30%, while just 22% of those in the Kingston Metropolitan

Region (KMR) and Middlesex feel unsafe. Cornwall, which includes the parish of Saint James, is recognized as a hub of criminal activity including lottery scams and gang violence.¹² In March 2023, a few months before data collection, five murders took place within the span of 48 hours in separate gun and machete attacks.¹³

Turning to cross-country analysis, **Figure 1.8** reveals that Jamaicans actually feel quite safe relative to other countries in the LAC region. The median level of insecurity is 43% (Mexico), almost double the rate in Jamaica. In six countries, more than half feel unsafe in their own neighborhood. Only in El Salvador, Grenada, and The Bahamas do fewer people feel insecure in their own neighborhoods compared to Jamaica.

FEELINGS OF INSECURITY CAN GENERATE NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT

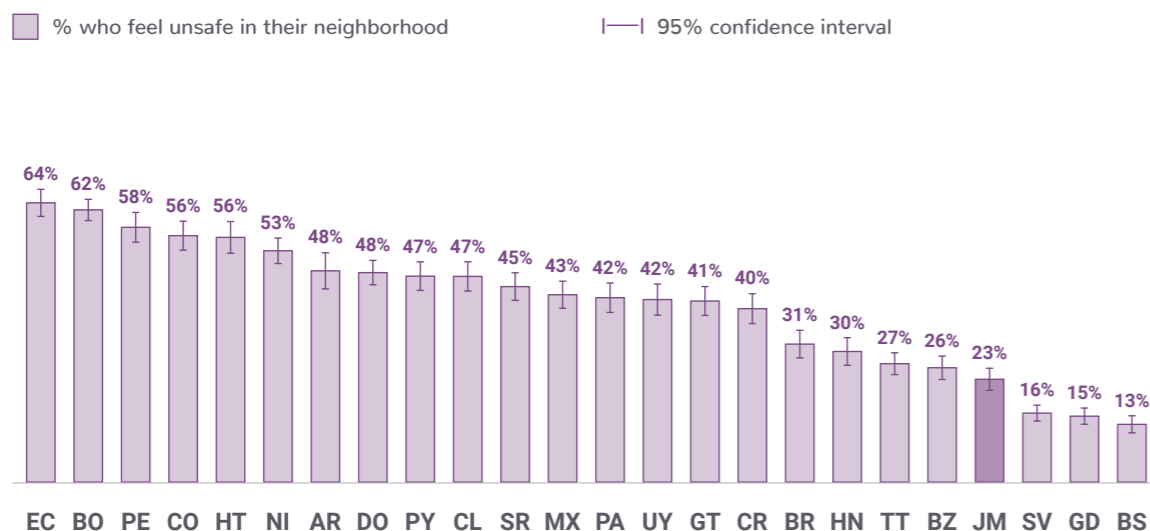
What are the consequences of crime and insecurity? Safety is of course a fundamental need for all humans, but the data reveal that feelings of insecurity can have far-reaching implications when it comes to politics. As **Figure 1.1** demonstrated, Jamaicans identify security as the top issue facing the country, which makes crime a perennial point of emphasis for political leadership. Those who have been victimized by criminal acts or feel unsafe may become dissatisfied with the incumbent government or even the system of government as a whole.

Figure 1.9 shows the percentage of people who trust the government to do “what is right” either “a lot” or “somewhat” (full question wording below), broken down by victimization status and feelings of (in)security.

How much do you trust the national government to do what is right? A lot, somewhat, a little, not at all

Crime victims trust the government at a lower rate than non-victims (39% vs. 45%). However, the difference is not statistically significant. Levels of trust among those who feel secure (46%) and insecure (38%) in their neighborhood are remarkably similar to crime victims and non-victims.

Figure 1.8 Compared to other citizens from other countries in the region, Jamaicans feel relatively safe



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

The data reveal that feelings of insecurity can have far-reaching implications when it comes to politics. Those who feel unsafe in their neighborhood are significantly less trusting of government and less satisfied with democracy.

This 8-percentage point difference is statistically significant, and it holds after controlling for several demographic variables.

To further assess the impact of insecurity, the next section examines satisfaction with democracy across the same categories. Satisfaction with democracy is measured with the following question:

In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Jamaica?

Figure 1.10 shows the breakdown of satisfaction with democracy by crime victimization and security in one’s neighborhood. Crime victimization is not related to satisfaction. However, there is a stark difference between those who feel secure and insecure in their neighborhood. While 31% of those who feel secure are satisfied with democracy, 21% who feel unsafe are satisfied. The results from **Figures 1.9** and **1.10** suggest that perceptions of security (feelings of safety) matter more for political beliefs than lived experiences (crime victimization).

21%
of people who feel unsafe in their neighborhood are satisfied with democracy.

There is no notable relationship between these security items and support for democracy. This is reassuring for observers of democracy; insecurity may lead Jamaicans to demand changes from government, but not to abandon the system of government all together.

JAMAICANS REJECT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, THOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES MATTER

Security is not only an issue that affects Jamaicans when they are walking around their neighborhoods; some may feel

unsafe in their own home due to intimate partner violence. The World Bank estimates that four in ten women experience some form of intimate partner violence.¹⁴ This problem only accelerated when women were forced to “lock down” at home with their abusers during the pandemic. Gender stereotypes and norms can allow society to accept or overlook this problem, either explicitly or subconsciously.¹⁵

To explore acceptance of gender-based violence in Jamaica, the AmericasBarometer asks the following questions about hypothetical gender-based violence scenarios:

Figure 1.9 Jamaicans who feel insecure are less trusting of the government



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Figure 1.10 Jamaicans who feel insecure are less satisfied with democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

28%

of Jamaicans would understand if a husband hit his wife if she was unfaithful.

Now I am going to read some situations in which some people think that it is justified that the husband hits his wife/ partner, and I will ask your opinion...

His wife neglects the household chores. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, or would you not approve but understand, or would you neither approve nor understand?

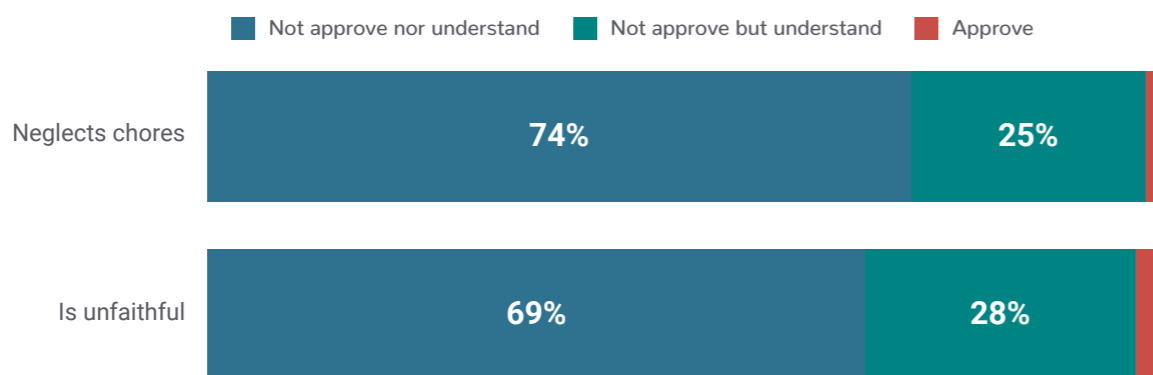
His wife is unfaithful. Would you approve of the husband hitting his wife, or would you not approve but understand, or would you neither approve nor understand?

Figure 1.11 shows the distribution of responses for each question. Very few say they would approve of intimate partner violence if the wife were to neglect chores (2%) or was unfaithful (3%). In both cases, a minority say they would not approve, but would understand (25% for neglecting chores, 28% for being unfaithful). The share who say that they would “not approve nor understand” has a modest but statistically significant difference of 5 percentage points across the two conditions. The AmericasBarometer also included these questions in 2014. The share who say they would approve significantly decreased under both conditions, from 3% to 2% for “neglects chores” and 6% to 3% for “is unfaithful”, pointing to a shift in cultural attitudes about gender-based violence.

Crime victimization in Jamaica reached its highest rate yet, and feelings of insecurity rose as well. Yet, when placed in a cross-national context, Jamaica scores quite favorably on crime and security measures. Though this provides some reassurance, it is important that Jamaican leadership treat the crime issue with utmost importance given the political effects of insecurity.

Figure 1.11 Jamaicans overwhelmingly disapprove of intimate partner violence, though some would understand

Approval of husband hitting wife when she...



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Conclusion: a Paradoxical Result?

The results presented in this chapter suggest that, after a brief respite during the pandemic, crime and security have returned to center stage as a social and political issue in Jamaica. Crime victimization reaches its highest rate recorded in the AmericasBarometer series, and feelings of insecurity rises significantly. Most Jamaicans identify crime and security as the top issue facing the country. This concern has political effects; those who feel unsafe are less satisfied with democracy and less trusting of government in general.

When comparing these results to other countries in the region, though, the data reveal that Jamaica scores quite favorably on the crime and security measures. Only El Salvador, which underwent a heavy-handed authoritarian crackdown on crime, has a lower reported crime victimization rate. Further, El Salvador, along with Grenada and The Bahamas, two of the more developed countries in the region, are the only countries to score lower on the measure of neighborhood security.

What explains the difference between the overwhelming concern about crime and the seemingly low rates of insecurity relative to other countries? For one, Jamaicans may be concerned about the direction that the security issue is headed, rather than its absolute rate. Crime victimization nearly doubled from 2021 to 2023, and Jamaicans may worry this could only get worse. There may also be differences in the types of crime that occur across different countries. Jamaica has a notoriously high murder rate and significant gang presence,¹⁶ but that may not imply frequent exposure to everyday crime. In contrast, citizens of other countries may fear petty crime when walking around their neighborhood but not feel that violent and organized crime are particularly threatening to them. Gang-related crime tends to be centralized in certain areas, such as in the Zones of Special Operations in Jamaica,¹⁷ which may further contribute to the feeling that crime is a national problem rather than a local or individual one.

Nevertheless, the findings point to a need for continued focus on the crime issue, as it is an overwhelming concern. As the analyses demonstrate, merely the perception of insecurity can damage confidence in government. That could, in turn, make combating crime even harder. Policymakers and activists ought to be aware of the changing trends regarding crime victimization and feelings of insecurity, and, in addition to the actual crimefighting efforts already in place, improve communication about security and safety between police and citizens. They would also be wise to address the disparities in security issues across demographic groups.

Notes

- 1 Luke Plutowski is a Senior Statistician with LAPOP Lab.
- 2 See <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims>
- 3 Kumarb 2023.
- 4 Rebane 2022.
- 5 Silvera 2023.
- 6 Murphy 2023; Doherty 2023.
- 7 Williams 2024.
- 8 Bailey 2017; Ferugson 2022; Raj and Kalluru 2023.
- 9 Fernandez and Kuenzi 2010; Merolla, Mezini, and Zechmeister 2013; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009; Pérez 2003; Roccato, Vieno, and Russo 2014.
- 10 There were no cases of respondents selecting “neither man nor woman” on the gender question. There were 10 cases of “don’t know” (0.6%) and 37 cases of “no answer” (2.4%). These are excluded from the analysis.
- 11 Statistical significance in this report is determined by linear regression models with significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. In simple terms, these means the observed outcome is unlikely to have occurred by chance.
- 12 See <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/State-of-Emergency-in-St.-James-Jamaica-Due-to-Crime-20231109-0011.html>
- 13 See <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20230311/st-james-rocked-five-murders-48-hours>
- 14 See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2023/07/26/brief-country-profile-gender-based-violence-in-jamaica>
- 15 John et al. 2020; Leon and Aizpurua 2023; Vinagre-González et al. 2023.
- 16 Blake 2022.
- 17 See <https://jis.gov.jm/information/get-the-facts/law-reform-zones-special-operations-special-security-community-development-measures-law/>

Many Jamaicans believe that community boards or associations are the most effective way to influence change in their country.

Civic participation is a fundamental pillar of democracies. It allows a country's public to actively influence decision-making that advances the welfare of the collective. Studies have shown that robust civic engagement is positively associated with improvements in outcomes for health, child welfare, and economic well-being.² Although there is currently no consensus on what activities constitute civic and political engagement, they typically include—but are not limited to—voting, running for public office, volunteering, or participating in social movements.³

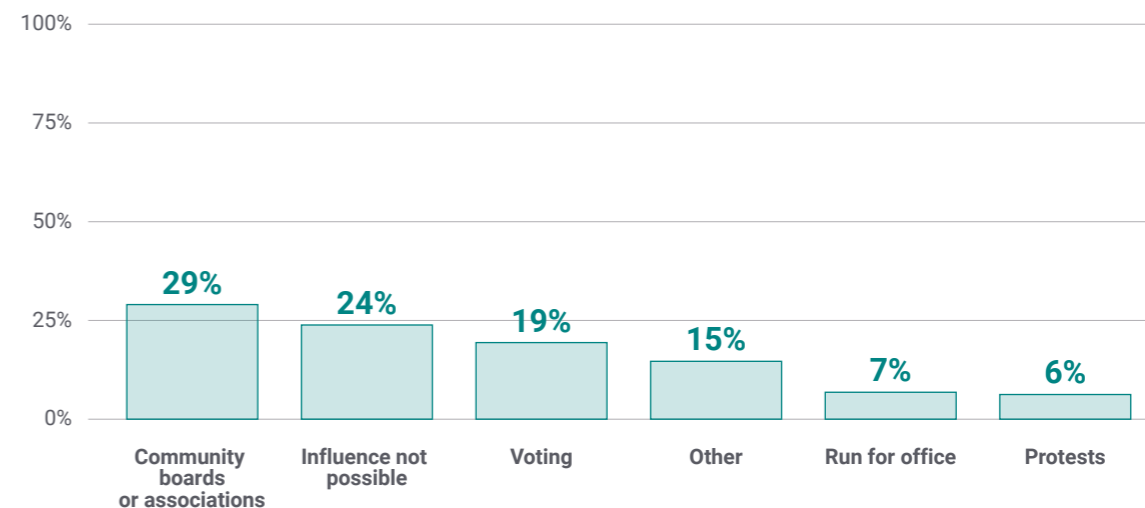
In 2023, the AmericasBarometer measured Jamaicans' preferred method of civic engagement by asking the following question:

In what way do you believe you can have the most influence to change things in the country?

Over one in four adults in Jamaica (29%) believe that participating in their local community board or association is the most impactful way to affect change in the country. Other Jamaicans believe that voting (19%), running for elected office (7%), or participating in protests (6%) are the most influential, while 15% cite other methods for promoting change. However, almost one in four Jamaicans (24%) believe that it is not possible to influence change.

Over a quarter of Jamaicans believe that participating in community boards or associations has the most influence to change things in Jamaica

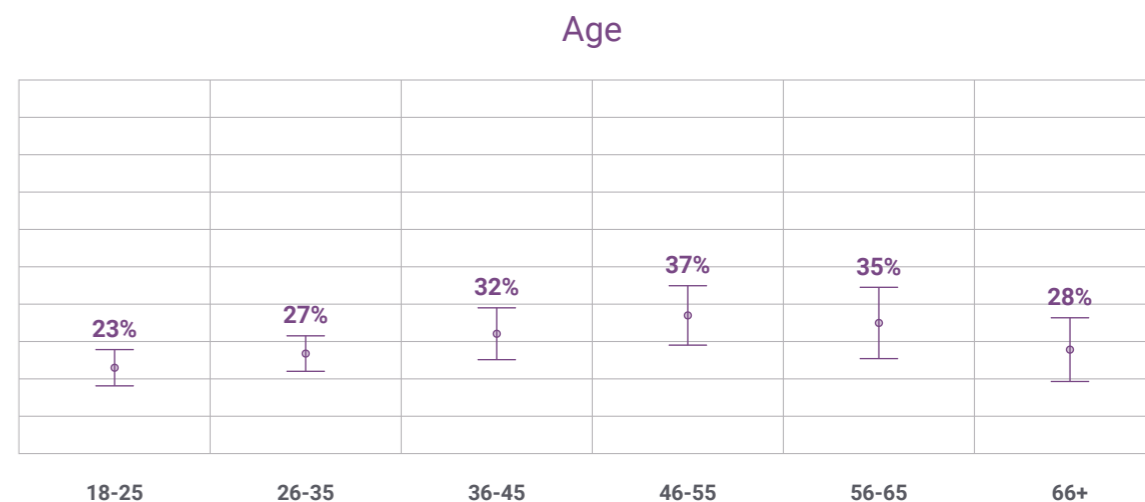
In what way do you believe you can have the most influence to change things in the country?



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Middle-age adults are more likely to view community boards and associations as the most effective way to exert influence to change things in Jamaica

• % who believe community associations are the best way to change things |—| 95% confidence interval



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

29%

of Jamaicans say that community associations are the best way to bring about change.

What sociodemographic and economic characteristics are associated with believing that participation in community boards and associations is the most influential method in promoting change? On average, adults between the ages of 46 and 55 are most likely to view community groups as the most influential. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 are least likely to adopt this view (23%). Gender, education, wealth, and place of residence are not significant predictors of the view that community boards and associations have the most influence to change things in Jamaica.

Overall, most people in Jamaica believe that some type of civic participation is influential for change in their communities. Over a quarter of Jamaicans highlight the potential of community-based associations and boards as the most influential contributor to change, while other people indicate alternative approaches, such as voting, protesting, or running for elected office. However, another quarter of Jamaicans do not believe that citizens can have an influence, suggesting that more research is needed to explore the factors that cultivate confidence in civic activities' ability to influence change.

Most people in Jamaica believe that some type of civic participation can create change. Over one in four say that community associations can achieve this, and that belief is especially common among middle-age people. Nevertheless, another quarter of Jamaican adults see no way to influence things in the country.

Notes

- 1 Stanley Zhao is a fourth-year undergraduate student at Vanderbilt University studying economics and public policy. He was an undergraduate research assistant in 2023 with LAPOP Lab.
- 2 Prewitt and Mackie 2014.
- 3 Adler and Goggin 2005.
- 4 I performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent believes that their community boards and associations have the most influence to change things in Jamaica and 0 if the respondent believes that another approach is most influential. I include sociodemographic predictors in the model: gender (women or men), age, wealth, place of residence (urban or rural), and education (none, primary, secondary, and superior).

Corruption

Luke Plutowski

Corruption is a longstanding concern for Jamaicans. A 2007 study showed that all government institutions were perceived as corrupt, and 85% of the public believed it was easy to corrupt officials.¹ Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Jamaica 69th out of 180 countries, and a 2019 report found that 49% believed corruption had increased, with 17% of public service users having paid a bribe.²

COVID-19 exacerbated opportunities for corruption amidst crisis and uncertainty.³ Vulnerability to fraud and scams increased due to the adoption of large aid programs and the limited availability of treatment options and vaccines.⁴

Corruption undermines democratic governance by impeding economic growth, eroding regime legitimacy, weakening voter-government links, and diminishing trust.⁵ A recent study also found a link between corruption and national security in Jamaica.⁶ The AmericasBarometer examines corruption's prevalence and societal perceptions as part of its democracy evaluation.

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Personal experiences with corruption are low, but bribe victimization by police significantly increased to 7% in 2023.**
- **More than four out of every five Jamaicans (86%) say that corruption is common among politicians, the highest rate in the LAC region.**
- **Personal experience with COVID-related corruption was uncommon (<5%), but most Jamaicans (59%) believe it was common.**
- **In 2023, there were significant declines in trust in the judiciary (46%), belief that basic rights are protected (24%), and trust in the police (25%).**
- **Perceptions of corruption, but not actual experiences with corruption, are tied to lower confidence in the judiciary.**

7% of Jamaicans were asked to pay a bribe by police in the 12 months prior to the survey.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH CORRUPTION ARE UNCOMMON, THOUGH MORE ARE REPORTING VICTIMIZATION BY POLICE

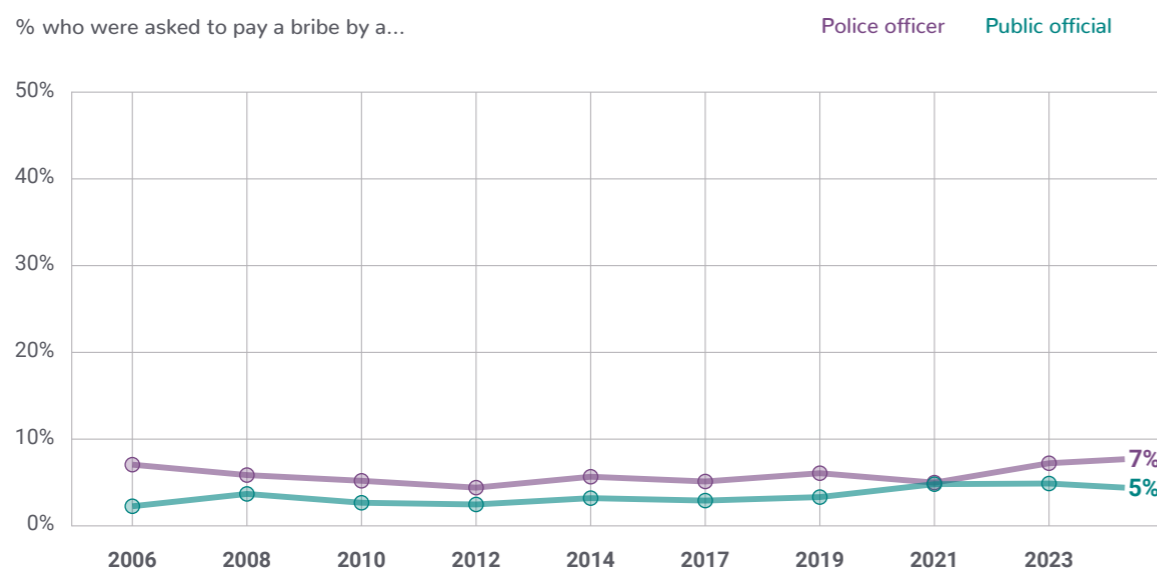
The AmericasBarometer typically includes several questions aimed at assessing corruption victimization. That is, it asks whether someone has been asked to pay a bribe in various settings. Two key questions probe victimization by police and public officials with the following questions:

Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last 12 months?

In the last 12 months, did any government employee ask you for a bribe?

Figure 2.1 shows the percentage of Jamaicans who report they were asked to pay a bribe by police or by any government employee over the previous 12 months. Both values have been consistently below 10% since 2006. Corruption victimization by police increased significantly from 5% in 2021 to 7% in 2023. This value measured at 7% in 2006, and reached a low of 4% in 2012 before increasing again. With respect to government employees, only one in twenty (5%) report corruption victimization. That rate has not changed since 2021. Compared to other countries, Jamaica is near the middle on both measures. Corruption by police ranged from 2% in Chile and 27% in Bolivia (regional median rate of 9%), while between 1% (Uruguay) and 18% (Nicaragua) were asked to pay a bribe by a government employee (regional median of 6%).

Figure 2.1 Jamaicans report a significant increase in corruption victimization by police officers



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

In 2023, the AmericasBarometer questionnaire delved deeper into the corruption issue by asking about victimization in the courts, at local government, and at hospitals. Full question wordings are below. These questions are asked only to those who say they had official dealings with these institutions.

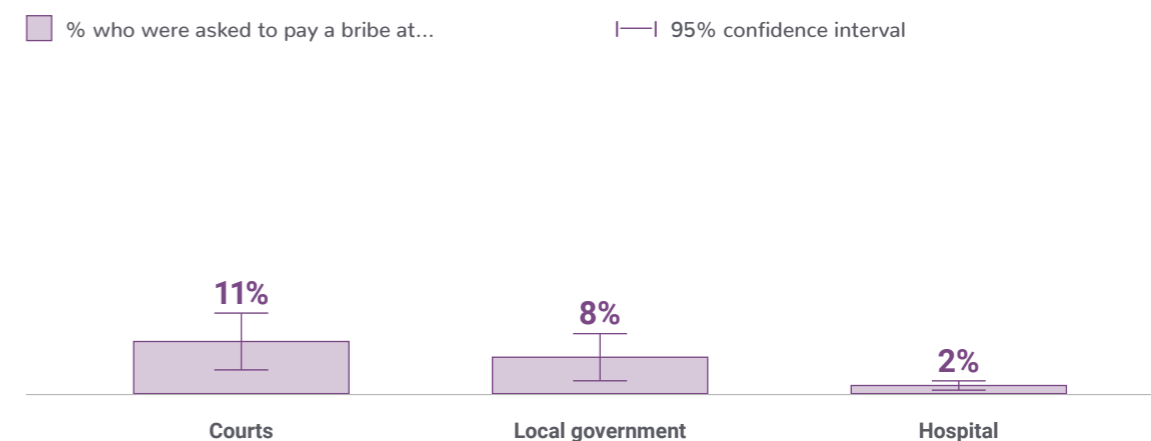
In the last 12 months, to process any kind of document in your local government, like a permit for example, did you have to pay any money above that required by law?

Did you have to pay a bribe to the courts in the last 12 months?

In order to be seen in a hospital or a clinic in the last 12 months, did you have to pay a bribe?

Figure 2.2 shows the percentage of Jamaicans who report that they have had to pay a bribe at the courts, in order to process a document in local government, or in order to be seen at a hospital. The data reveal that corruption at hospitals is exceedingly uncommon at 2%. Meanwhile, 11% report that they had to pay a bribe at the courts and 8% within local government. However, it is important to note that very few have had official dealings with courts and local government over the previous year (8% each). Since the corruption question was asked to only these people, the confidence intervals are quite large. It also means that, overall, less than 1% of Jamaicans report corruption at the courts or at local government in the last 12 months.

Figure 2.2 Corruption is less common at hospitals than in other settings



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

JAMAICANS BELIEVE CORRUPTION IS WIDESPREAD AMONG PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Though corruption victimization seems to be relatively rare, it could still be a general problem in society and government. As the previous chapter on crime and security demonstrated, perceptions can sometimes be more meaningful than personal experiences. The AmericasBarometer measures perceptions of corruption among elected officials with two related questions, which have been asked intermittently since 2006:

Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is: Very common, common, uncommon, very uncommon?

Thinking of the politicians of Jamaica... how many of them do you believe are involved in corruption? None, less than half of them, half of them, more than half of them, all

Figure 2.3 shows the percentage who say that corruption is “common” or “very common” among public officials, as well as the percentage who say “more than half” or “all” politicians are corrupt. As the results show, Jamaicans have a quite negative view of those in government. In 2023, 86% say that corruption is common among public officials, and 66% think that more than half of all politicians in Jamaica are corrupt. The latter is an all-time high and an 11-percentage point jump since 2021.

86%

of Jamaicans say that corruption is common among public officials.

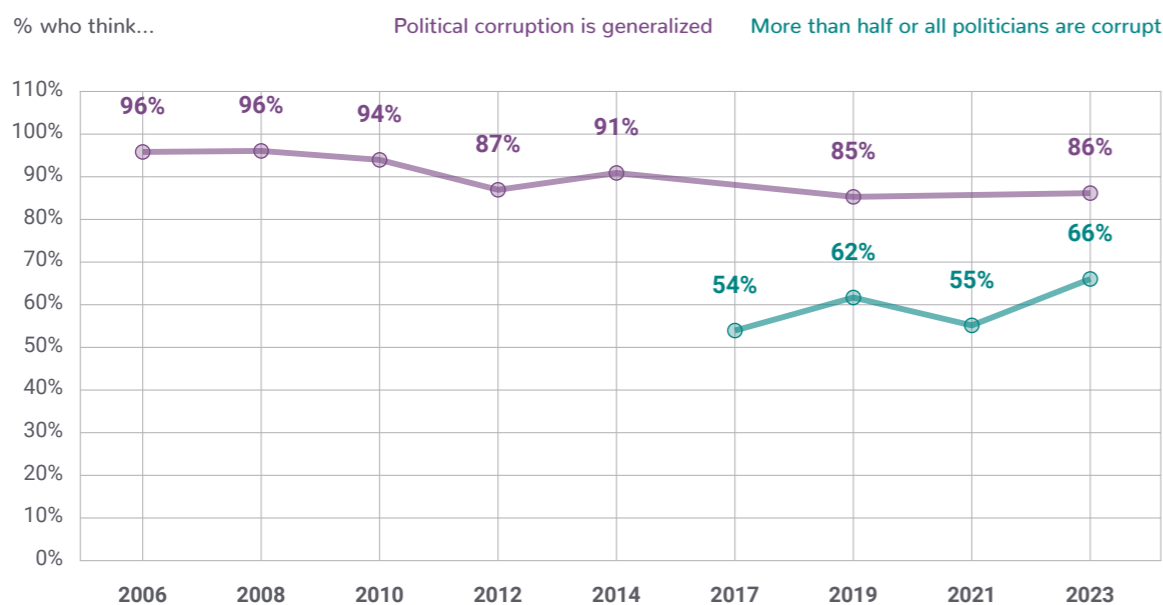
Jamaicans’ negative perceptions of government officials are particularly pessimistic relative to other LAC countries. As Figure 2.4 demonstrates, the proportion of Jamaicans who say that corruption among public officials is common is significantly higher than any other country where the question was asked. The median value is 69%, 17 percentage points lower than Jamaica’s. Further, Jamaica’s current rate of 86% is still significantly lower than its high of 96% in 2006 and 2008.

While corruption perceptions have been quite historically high among Jamaicans, reported (personal) experience with bribery has invariably been among the lowest in the region over the years.

These results demonstrate a strong tension between personal experiences with and perceptions of corruption. While fewer than one in ten were asked to pay a bribe (just below average in the LAC region), more than four in five say that corruption among politicians is common (highest in region). This gap has been consistent for several rounds of the AmericasBarometer. This chapter’s conclusion discusses possible explanations for the pessimism of Jamaicans toward politicians.

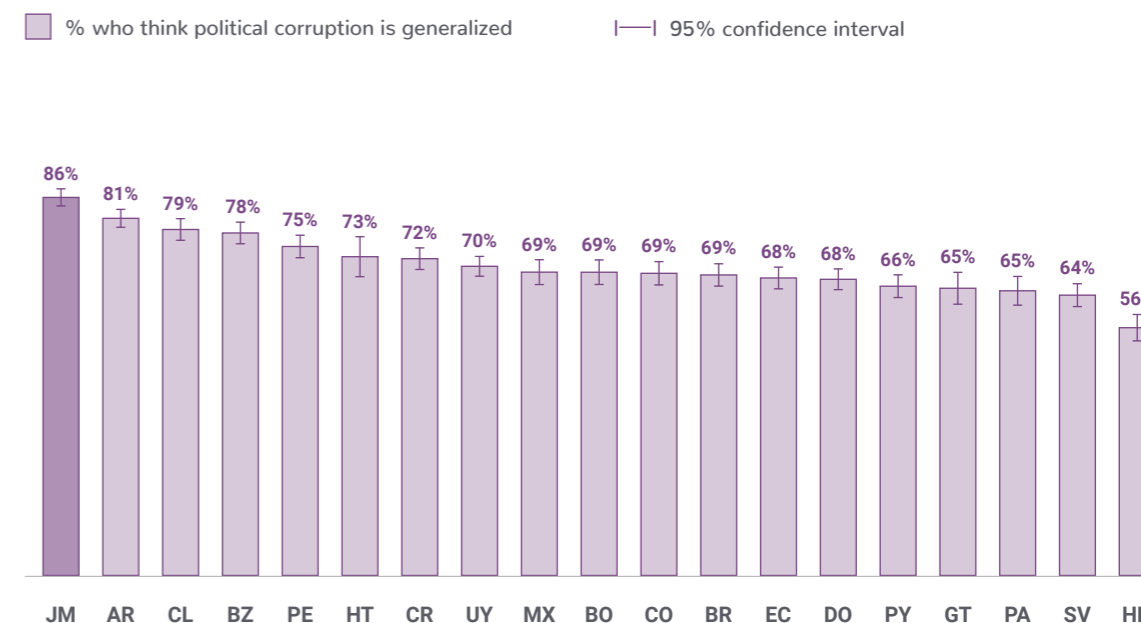
Given this gap between the relative rarity of personal experiences with corruption and the widespread belief in generalized corruption, it is natural to wonder where Jamaicans see corruption as most

Figure 2.3 Jamaicans continue to believe corruption among public officials is widespread



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

Figure 2.4 Jamaicans have the most pessimistic view of corruption among public officials in the LAC region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

prevalent. The AmericasBarometer asked the following question to assess which policy area is perceived to be most fraught with corruption:

And thinking now about corruption, in which of these areas do you think there is the most corruption? Education, Health, Water, Electricity, Transportation and roads, Social assistance/welfare, The environment [order randomized]

Responses are mixed (see **Figure 2.5**). Jamaicans are most likely to say transportation and roads are the most rife with corruption, though only slightly above one in four gave this response. Electricity

is seen as the next-most corrupt at 21%. Even in the least-selected category, water, 7% of Jamaicans say it is the area with the most corruption, indicating that Jamaicans do not see corruption as centralized in one area of government.

REPORTED PANDEMIC-RELATED CORRUPTION WAS NOT COMMON, THOUGH MANY THINK IT WAS

The COVID-19 pandemic created new opportunities for corruption.⁷ The 2023 AmericasBarometer in Jamaica included a module of questions on corruption related to the pandemic. These questions mirror

those in the core questionnaire described in the previous sections of this chapter. As with the items about courts, local government, and hospitals, the survey asked respondents whether they had been asked for a bribe to receive COVID-related medical treatment, access vaccines, or to receive pandemic relief program benefits. The survey assigned questions with slightly different wordings, varying whether the respondent was asked for a bribe by “anyone” or “any government employee.”

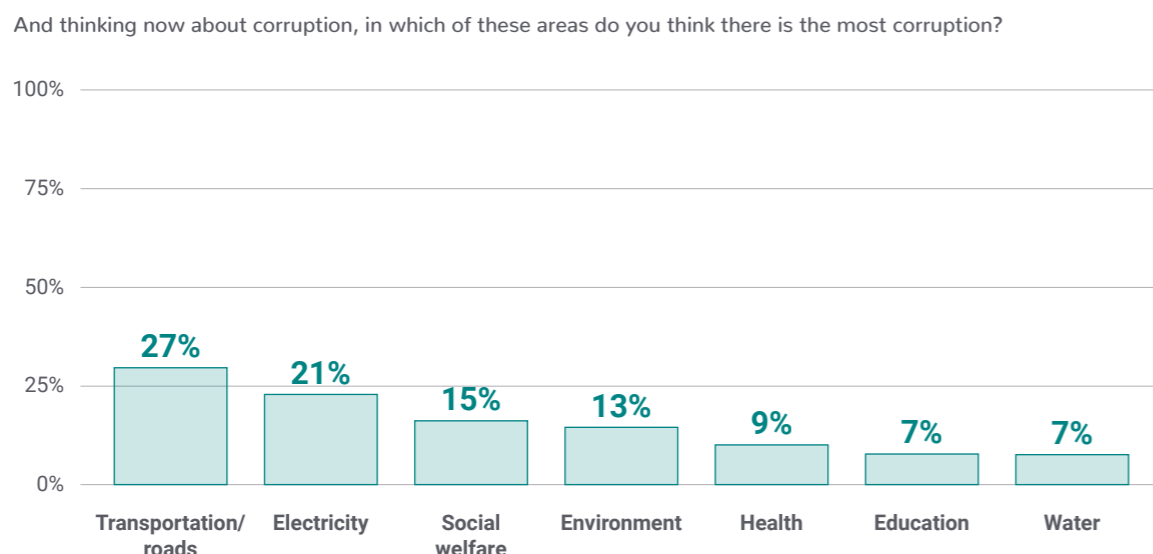
Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, this is, since early 2020, did [anyone / any government employee] ask

you or anyone living in your household for a bribe to...

...receive medical treatment for COVID-19? / ...access anti-COVID vaccines? / ...access pandemic-relief programs such as subsidies, food stamps, care packages, or cash transfers?

Then, mirroring the generalized corruption items shown in **Figure 2.4**, the AmericasBarometer asked respondents about perceptions of corruption:

Figure 2.5 Jamaicans say that corruption is most common in the transportation sector



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Experiences with pandemic-related corruption were infrequent. Despite the rarity of personal victimization, Jamaicans think that COVID-related corruption was common. This mirrors the large gap in general perceptions of corruption among public officials in Jamaican society versus actual corruption victimization.

4%

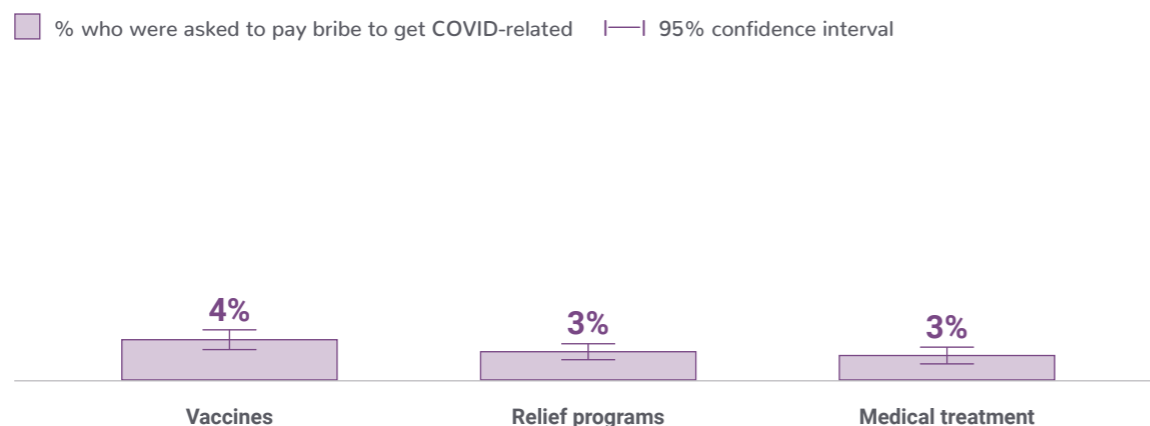
of Jamaicans say they were asked to pay a bribe in order to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption during the coronavirus pandemic among public officials was: *Very common, common, uncommon, very uncommon*

Figure 2.6 reveals that experiences with pandemic-related corruption were infrequent. Fewer than one in twenty Jamaicans report having paid a bribe to access vaccines (4%), relief programs (3%), or medical treatment (3%). It is important to recall that less than 1% said they had to pay a bribe to be seen at a hospital or clinic for any reason (Figure 2.2).

Despite the rarity of personal victimization, Jamaicans think that COVID-related corruption was common. Nearly three in five (59%) say that corruption among public officials during the pandemic was either “common” or “very common.” Although this represents a majority of the public, this rate is much lower than the percentage who said that corruption, in general, is common among public officials (86%, see Figure 2.4). Further, the share saying “very common” for the COVID question (21%) is less than half of what it is for the general corruption question (51%). Thus, when placed in the context of similar survey items, the prevalence of COVID-related corruption does not seem as acute as Figure 2.7 might suggest.

Figure 2.6 Personal experiences with COVID-related corruption were uncommon



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

TRUST IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM IS LOW

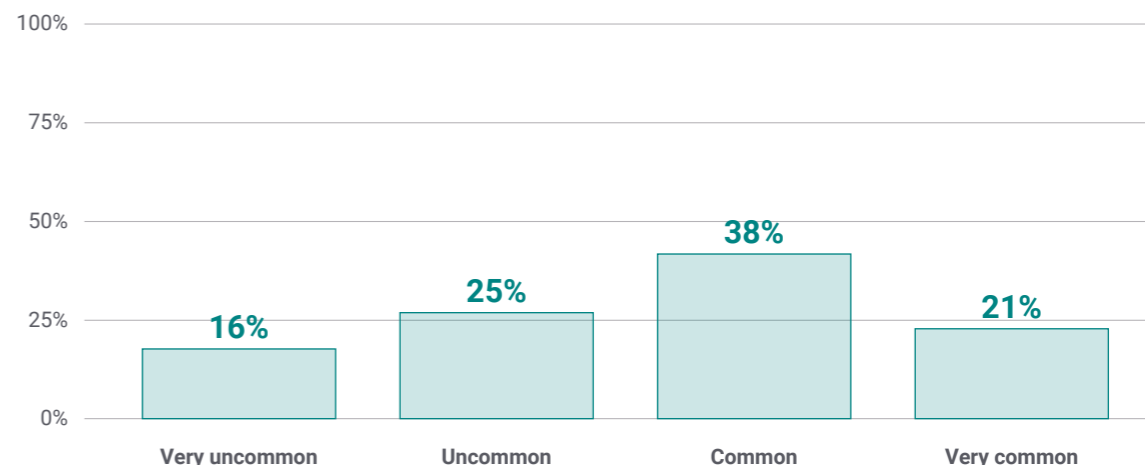
Corruption often goes hand-in-hand with decreased trust in institutions.⁸ People who feel or see that institutions are corrupt may lose faith in those institutions’ ability to function in a fair and effective manner. Does the staggeringly high rate of belief in corruption also mean that Jamaicans distrust institutions? The AmericasBarometer includes several items to gauge trust in the institutions in charge of upholding the law. One such question asks respondents how likely it would be for a perpetrator of a crime to face consequences:

If you were a victim of a robbery or assault how much faith do you have that the judicial system would punish the guilty? A lot, some, little, or none

Examining the results of this item across time, the percentage of Jamaicans who think the judicial system would punish the guilty (“a lot” or “some”) declined to a record low in 2023 (Figure 2.8). For the first time, less than half (46%) think that criminals are likely to face consequences. This is a substantial drop from a high of 64% in 2012.

Figure 2.7 Jamaicans think that COVID-related corruption was common

Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption during the coronavirus pandemic among public officials was:



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Figure 2.8 A record-low number of Jamaicans think the judiciary would punish a criminal



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

46%
of Jamaicans trust the judiciary to punish the guilty.

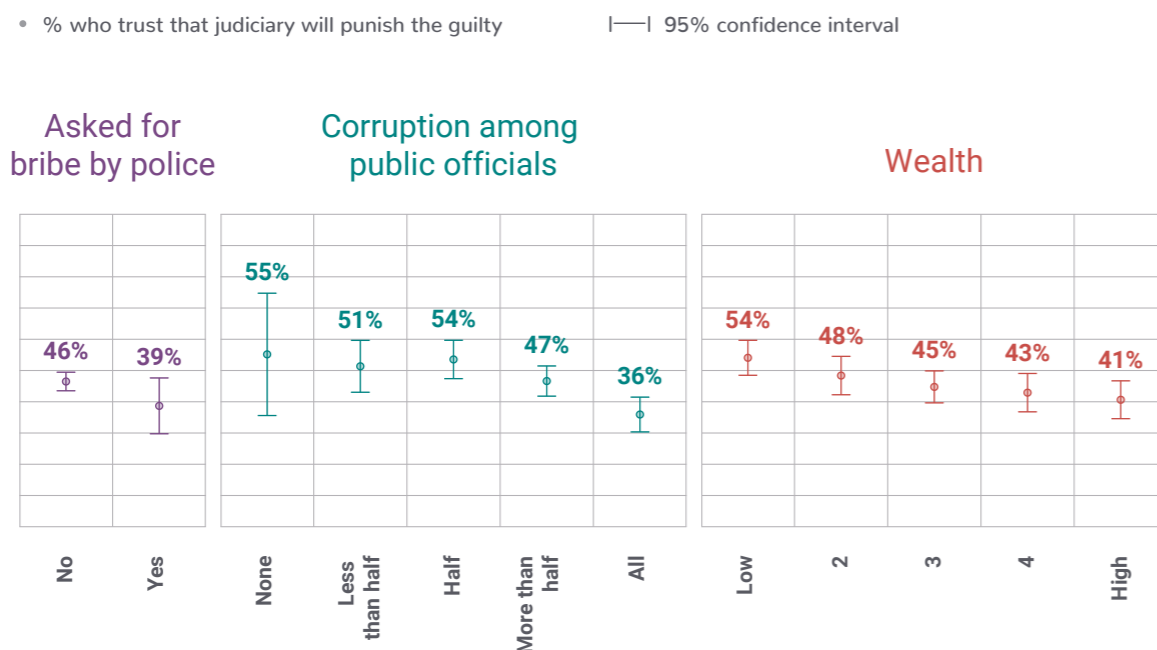
Is corruption associated with decreased trust in the judiciary? This section assesses the relationship between confidence that a perpetrator would face consequences, on the one hand, and corruption victimization and corruption perceptions on the other.

would punish the guilty party, compared to 51% of those who say “less than half” are corrupt. Wealth is also associated with views of the judiciary, with more wealthy people exhibiting lower levels of trust. Gender, age, region, and education did not have a significant relationship with the variable of interest.

As **Figure 2.9** demonstrates, actual experiences related to corruption do not emerge as significant predictors of faith in the judiciary; though those who have been asked for a bribe by police have slightly lower trust, the difference is not statistically significant. However, perceptions of corruption are significantly related. Only 36% of those who say “all” politicians are involved in corruption think the judiciary

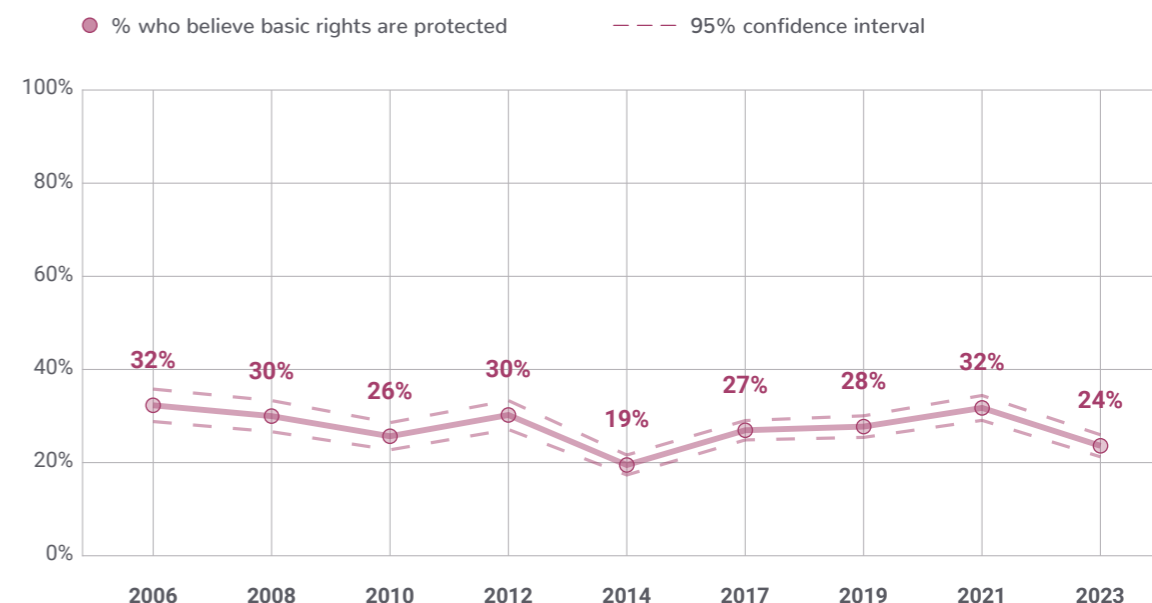
Another item on the survey asks respondents to what extent they think “citizens’ basic rights are well protected by the political system of Jamaica” on a 1-7 scale. **Figure 2.10** shows the percentage who gave a response between 5 and 7 (7 being “a lot”). After a few years of rising confidence, belief in the protection of basic

Figure 2.9 Perceptions of corruption, rather than corruption victimization, lessen confidence in the judiciary



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Figure 2.10 Belief that citizens’ basic rights are protected fell in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

rights fell significantly to one in four (24%) in 2023. Compared to other countries in the region, Jamaica ranks below the median on this measure (26%), though it outscores its Caribbean counterparts in Haiti (19%), Trinidad & Tobago (20%) and Suriname (23%).

The data indicate that corruption victimization by police rose in 2023. Has trust in the police suffered as a consequence? **Figure 2.11** shows the percentage who say they trust the national police (an answer of 5-7 on a 1-7 scale). After a slight increase in 2021, trust in the police declined significantly to one in four (25%) in 2023. This is the lowest level of

trust since 2010 (20%). The direction of this measure has flipped every round going back to 2008, so it remains to be seen whether the recent decline in trust is here to stay.

The Jamaica Constabulary Force has made a deliberate effort to focus on “community policing” since the early 2010s.⁹ This style of policing focuses on establishing ties with local communities to more effectively leverage the public to prevent crime. Jamaicans may feel that, while they have misgivings about policing in the country in general, they have a positive relationship with the police force in their community. To examine this possibility, the

The Jamaica Constabulary Force has made greater effort to focus on “community policing”, but half of Jamaicans distrust police.

AmericasBarometer also asked respondents to what extent they trust “police in their neighborhood” again on a scale of 1-7.

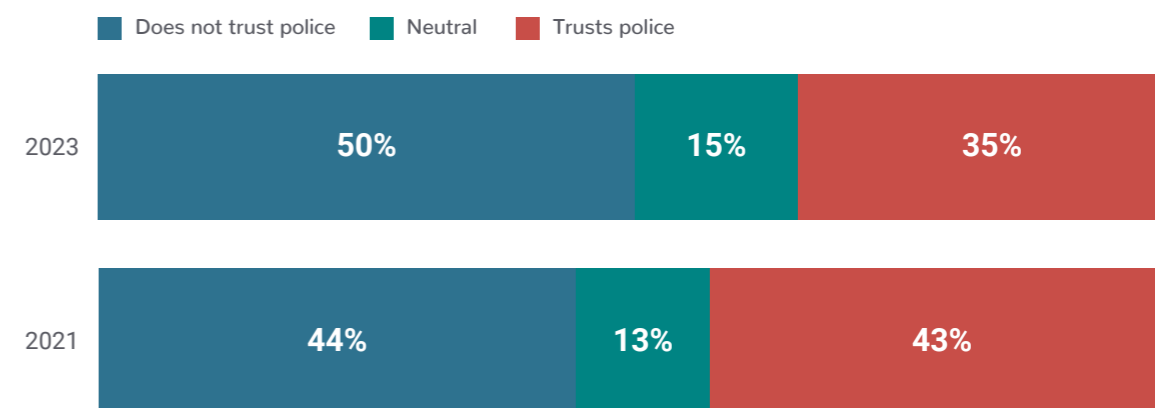
Figure 2.12 shows the breakdown of responses to this question in 2021 and 2023. When combining the bottom three responses (1-3), half (50%) of Jamaicans distrust the police in their neighborhood, compared to around one in three (35%) who are trusting. In 2021, 43% said that neighborhood police are trustworthy. Thus, there was an 8-percentage point drop in trust, the same decline as for the national police. However, in both years, trust in neighborhood police is higher than it is for the national police.

Figure 2.11 Jamaicans’ trust in the police declined to one in four



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

Figure 2.12 Trust in neighborhood police is higher than trust in national police, but it also declined in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2021-2023

Conclusion: Generating More Trust in Public Institutions

Findings from the 2023 AmericasBarometer reveal a complicated reality of corruption in Jamaica today. On the one hand, Jamaicans do not report extremely high levels of corruption in their day-to-day lives, including in interactions with police or government officials, at courts and hospitals, or in any way related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Jamaicans feel that corruption is rampant in society, more so than citizens in any LAC country. Attitudes toward the legal system have also soured across a number of dimensions.

That so many people believe corruption is common among public officials in Jamaica poses a significant threat to rule of law. As the results show, those who think that corruption is quite common among public officials have much lower levels of trust in the judicial system.

This could in turn undermine the effectiveness of police and the legal system through lack of compliance, reduced cooperation, and direct conflict between citizens and those in power. Disillusionment with the political class could also have consequences for democracy by creating a chilling effect on participation.¹⁰

The cynicism that Jamaicans hold toward institutions today could be driven in part by a recent spate of high-profile corruption allegations. Hopefully, the misgivings that the Jamaican public hold will dissipate as the investigations are resolved. Further, unhappiness about a variety of kitchen table issues including security and inflation may have spilled over into mistrust in all aspects of governance. This would imply that tackling the issues of the day could inspire more confidence in institutions generally. Nevertheless, it is important for leadership to take the concerns about corruption seriously and confront them directly. This could be done through establishing clear accountability mechanisms for corruption cases, delivering additional resources for investigation into corruption allegations, improving transparency in court proceedings, and creating public awareness campaigns about the judicial system.

Recent allegations of corruption may have soured Jamaicans' views of government. Stronger anti-corruption efforts including increased legal resources for investigation, stronger accountability mechanisms, and greater financial transparency could help restore faith in government.

Notes

- 1 Waller et al. 2007.
- 2 See <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/jamaica>
- 3 Zhang et al. 2022.
- 4 See Teremetskyi et. al 2021 and <https://www.transparency.org/en/citizens-report-covid-19-corruption> as well as https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/COVID-19/Policy_paper_on_COVID-19_vaccines_and_corruption_risks.pdf
- 5 Mauro 1995; Seligson 2002; Warren 2004; Anderson and Tverdova 2003; You 2018.
- 6 Spence et al. 2021.
- 7 Teremetskyi et al. 2021.
- 8 Morris and Klesner 2010; You 2018.
- 9 See <https://jcf.gov.jm/community-policing-in-action/>
- 10 Francis 2022.

Stanley Zhao

Two in three Jamaicans believe that most politicians in their country are corrupt.

The role of ethics and rule of law in governmental institutions continues to be a prevailing issue in the LAC region. Scholarship demonstrates that corruption can be costly to the welfare and livelihood of people in the Caribbean, including impediments to gender equality, youth development, and level of security.¹

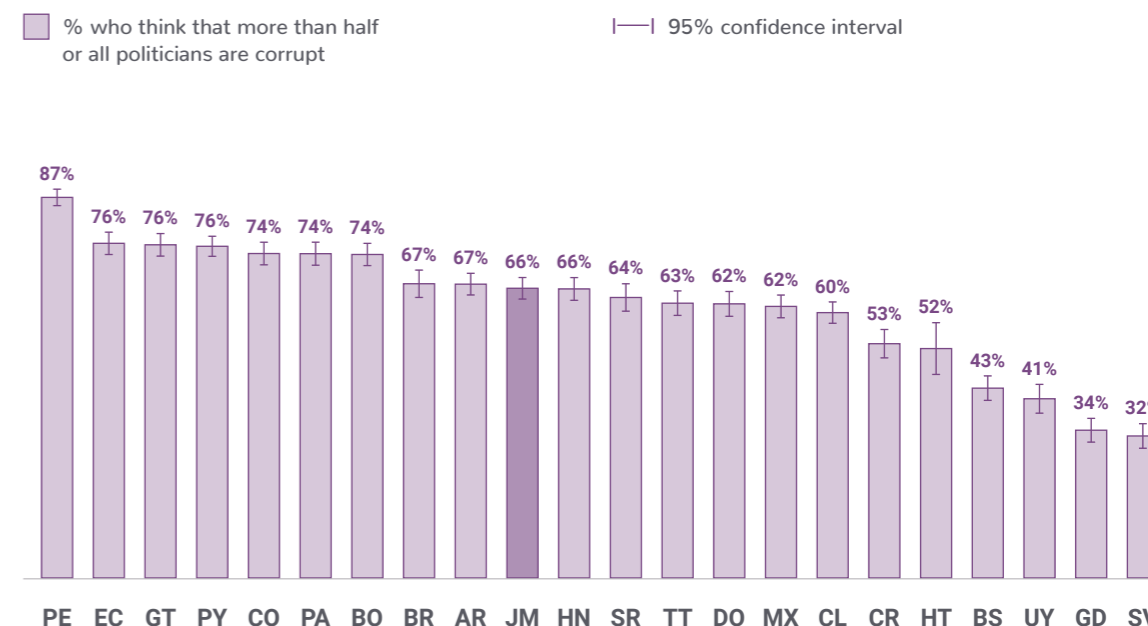
Quantifying the consequences of corruption is difficult, but some academics have attributed the Caribbean's stagnant economic development to the region's inability to check political abuse and misuse of power.² Jamaica is no exception. The country lacks robust enforcement of accountability among officials and government employees, which has resulted in corruption at various levels of government that have contributed to human rights violations in the country.³

The AmericasBarometer measured the perception of corruption among politicians with the following question:

*Thinking of the politicians in Jamaica... how many of them do you believe are involved in corruption?*⁴

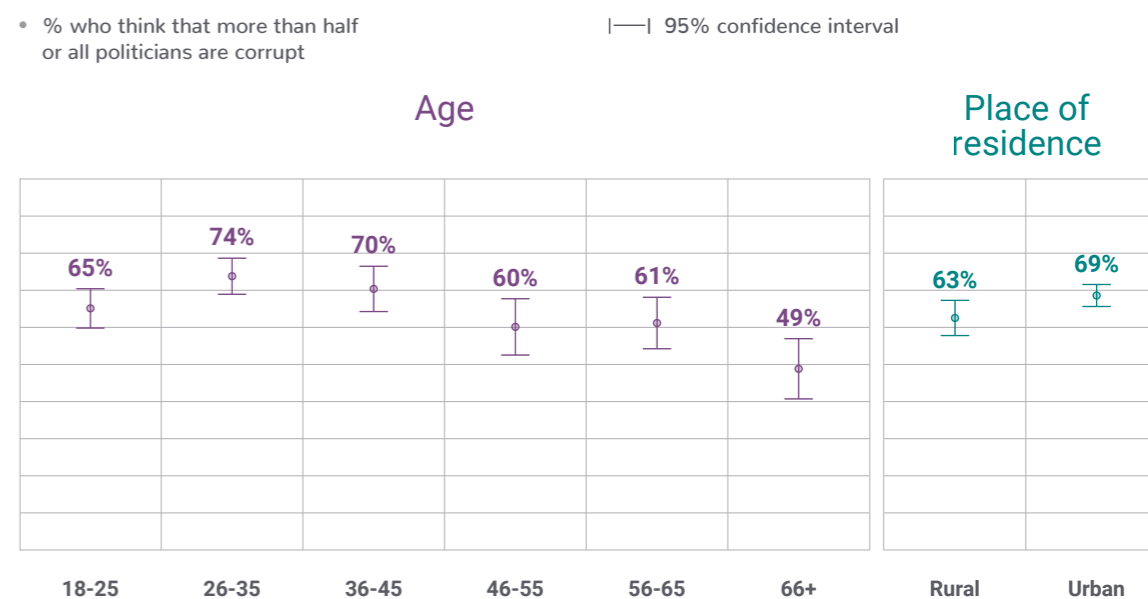
As Chapter 2 shows, the number of Jamaicans who say that more than half of politicians are corrupt significantly increased to 66% in 2023. This is slightly above the regional median of 64% (Suriname). In 7 out of 23 LAC countries surveyed, more than 7 in 10 adults believe that most politicians are involved in some form of corruption. Peruvians have the highest level of corruption perceptions (87%), while Salvadorans have the lowest (32%).

As in most countries in the region, a large majority of Jamaicans believe most politicians in their country are corrupt



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Jamaicans between the ages of 26 and 45 as well as urban residents are more likely to perceive most politicians as corrupt



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Despite recent efforts to strengthen anti-corruption policy, around two-thirds of Jamaicans say that corruption is common among public officials. That view is especially common among young people and those living in urban areas. These perceptions may negatively impact the ability to govern effectively.

What sociodemographic and economic characteristics are associated with perceiving most politicians as corrupt in Jamaica? On average, people between the ages of 26 and 45 perceive higher levels of corruption in government compared to younger and older age groups.⁵ In addition, Jamaicans who live in urban areas are more likely to view most politicians as corrupt (69%) compared to those in rural areas (63%). Gender, education, and wealth do not have statistically significant relationships with the perception of corruption.

The results show that, despite efforts to strengthen anti-corruption policy in the country,⁶ most Jamaicans perceive corruption among their politicians. However, it is important to keep in mind that citizens in countries across the LAC region have similarly negative views of their politicians. Further, this pessimism is not shared equally among all Jamaicans, with those 66+ years old and residents of rural areas holding slightly more favorable views of politicians.

Notes

- 1 Duri 2020.
- 2 Collier 2002.
- 3 See U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2022.
- 4 I combined respondents who believe more than half are corrupt and all politicians are corrupt into one category.
- 5 I performed a logistic regression where the dependent variable is coded as 1 if a respondent believes that more than half of politicians in Jamaica are corrupt and 0 if they believe that half or less than half are corrupt. I include sociodemographic predictors in the model: gender (women or men), age, wealth, place of residence (urban or rural), and education (none, primary, secondary, and superior).
- 6 Brown 2018.

Democracy

Luke Plutowski

Democracy is in decline worldwide,¹ facing challenges from populist and authoritarian leaders who have undermined democratic norms and institutions in countries like Hungary, Turkey, and Nicaragua. Despite this trend, the Caribbean has largely maintained robust democratic governance.² However, in recent years, the region has seen new challenges, including political crisis in Haiti, unrest in Suriname, and election fraud allegations in Guyana.³

Jamaica is considered free and democratic.⁴ The country conducts fair and competitive elections, and citizens enjoy full rights. A proposed referendum

would end Jamaica's status as a British Commonwealth and formally make the nation a republic.⁵ Yet, challenges to democracy persist. High voter apathy marked the 2020 elections,⁶ while insecurity and corruption threaten democratic stability. Prime Minister Holness has intermittently declared regional states of emergency, granting security forces expanded authority in areas where police killings are already common.⁷

The AmericasBarometer probes Jamaicans' views on democracy. It is important to understand public opinion on questions of democracy, as public support helps the system survive.⁸

MAIN FINDINGS

- Support for democracy declined in 2023 to just over half (53%), significantly lower than the regional average.
- Satisfaction with democracy fell sharply from 45% in 2021 to 28% in 2023, the lowest point in the series and the second-largest drop of any country in the LAC region.
- Tolerance for coups has dropped in recent years.
- There is widespread distrust of elections in Jamaica, more so than any other country in the LAC region.
- A majority of Jamaicans would be willing to trade free elections for guaranteed income and services, but not so for free expression.

SUPPORT FOR AND SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY DECLINED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS

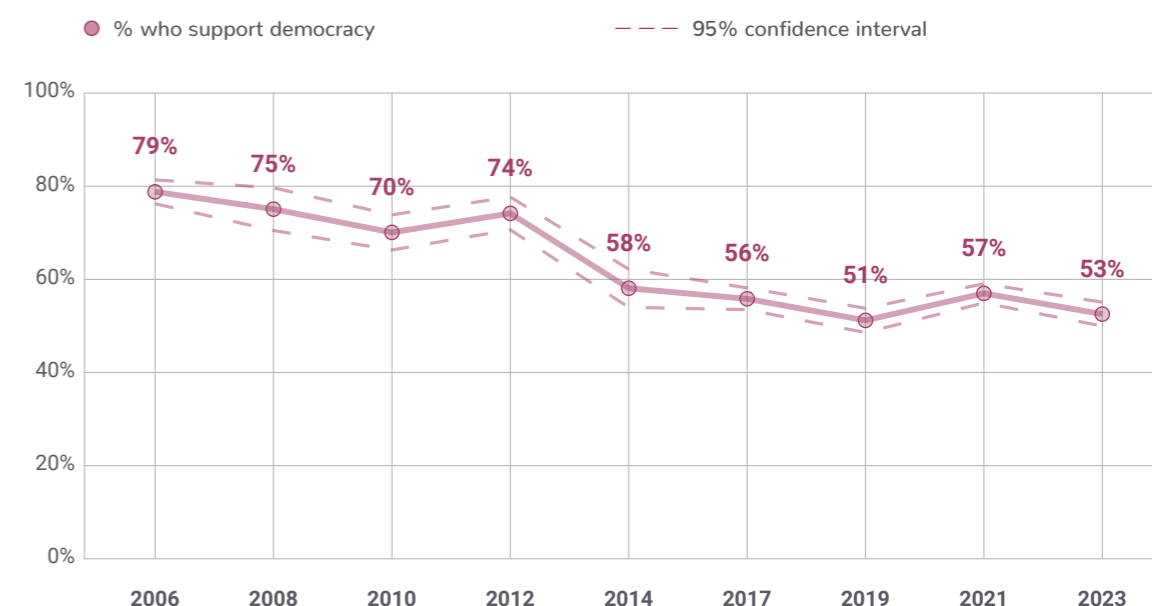
Two central questions on the AmericasBarometer survey assess the attitudes of citizens about democracy. The first asks respondents how much they support democracy in the abstract, while the second probes whether they are satisfied with how democracy is currently functioning in their country.

Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? [1-7 scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Jamaica?

Beginning with the support for democracy question, **Figure 3.1** shows the percentage who think democracy is the best form of government (an answer of 5-7 on the 1-7 scale) going back to 2006. In 2023, just above half of Jamaicans support democracy (53%). That is a small but statistically significant drop from 2021, when support recovered following a four-round skid. Support for democracy was above seven in ten between 2006 and 2012. However, there was a steep drop in 2014, and support has not recovered. This reflects a larger pattern across the LAC region.

Figure 3.1 Jamaicans’ support for democracy decreased to just over half in 2023



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

53%

of Jamaicans say that democracy is the best form of government.

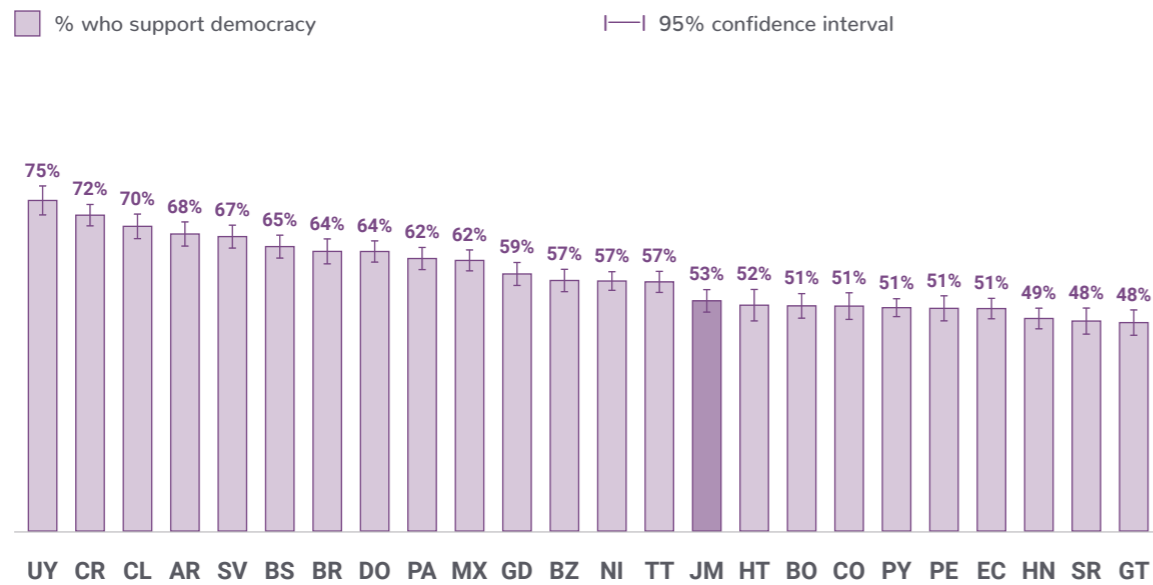
In comparison to other countries, Jamaica is below the regional average in support for democracy. **Figure 3.2** shows the percentage of the public in each country who believe democracy is the best form of government. Jamaica is 4 percentage points below the regional median of 57% (Nicaragua) and just 5 percentage points above the country with the lowest level of support for democracy (Guatemala, with 48%).

The satisfaction with democracy measure shows even more pessimism among the Jamaican public. **Figure 3.3** shows the percentage who are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” over time. Satisfaction with democracy fell from 45% in 2021 to 28% in 2023. This is the lowest level of satisfaction recorded in

the AmericasBarometer series in Jamaica. It is less than half the series-high of 59% in 2012.

This substantial decline over the past two survey rounds is extreme even relative to other LAC countries. **Figure 3.4** shows satisfaction with democracy in 2021 and in 2023 across 19 countries (5 countries shown at the bottom were included in 2023 but not 2021). The countries with the largest gains since 2021 (i.e., increased satisfaction) are shown at the top, while those with the larger drops are toward the bottom. Only in Ecuador, which has been facing an economic and political crisis since 2022, have more citizens become disenchanted with democracy. In 2023, Jamaica ranks 18 out of 24 on levels of satisfaction with democracy.

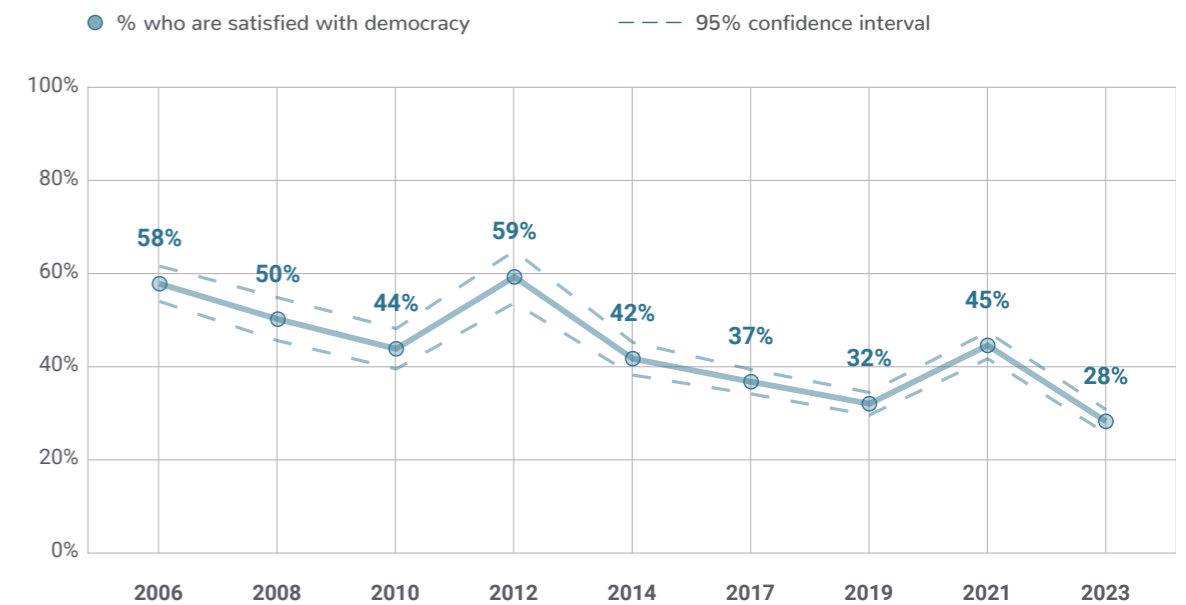
Figure 3.2 Jamaica has significantly lower support for democracy than most countries in the LAC region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Jamaicans are by and large not happy with their system of government. After a rebound in 2021, satisfaction with democracy fell sharply in 2023. Only Ecuador experienced a more extreme drop in satisfaction over the previous two years.

Figure 3.3 Jamaicans' satisfaction with democracy has fallen sharply



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

Though people may be dissatisfied or pessimistic about democracy, they may not actively embrace an alternative system of government. To engage with this idea, the AmericasBarometer asks a few questions that assess attitudes about alternatives to democracy. That is, it measures tolerance for anti-democratic coups. The full question wordings are below:

Some people say that under some circumstances it would be justified for the military of this country to take power by a coup d'état (military coup). In your opinion would a military coup be justified...

When there is a lot of crime.

When there is a lot of corruption.

Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the prime minister of the country to close the Parliament and govern without Parliament?

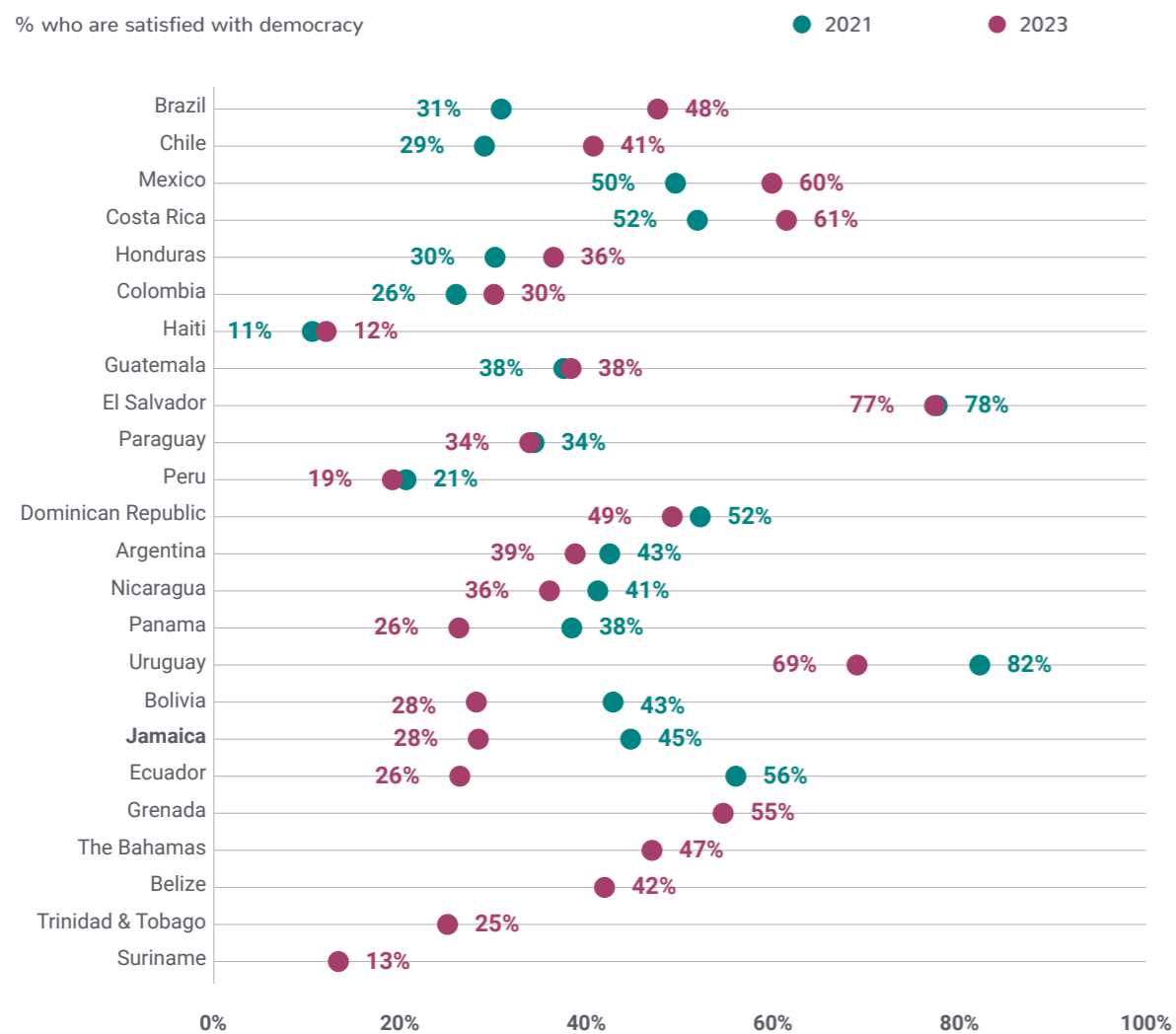
parliament during difficult times. Similar to the military coup questions, tolerance for executive coups gradually rose since 2012 but declined for the first time in 2023. These findings provide a small silver lining to the negative attitudes that Jamaicans hold about democracy today.

Figure 3.5 shows the results of these survey questions across time. The military coup questions follow a very similar pattern. Tolerance for these types of coups rose steadily until 2019, when they fell significantly. In 2023, tolerance for a military coup stands at 50% when the stated justification is corruption, whereas tolerance for a coup when there is a lot of crime is 45%. Around one quarter of Jamaicans (24%) believe that it is justifiable for the prime minister to close

JAMAICANS DISTRUST ELECTIONS

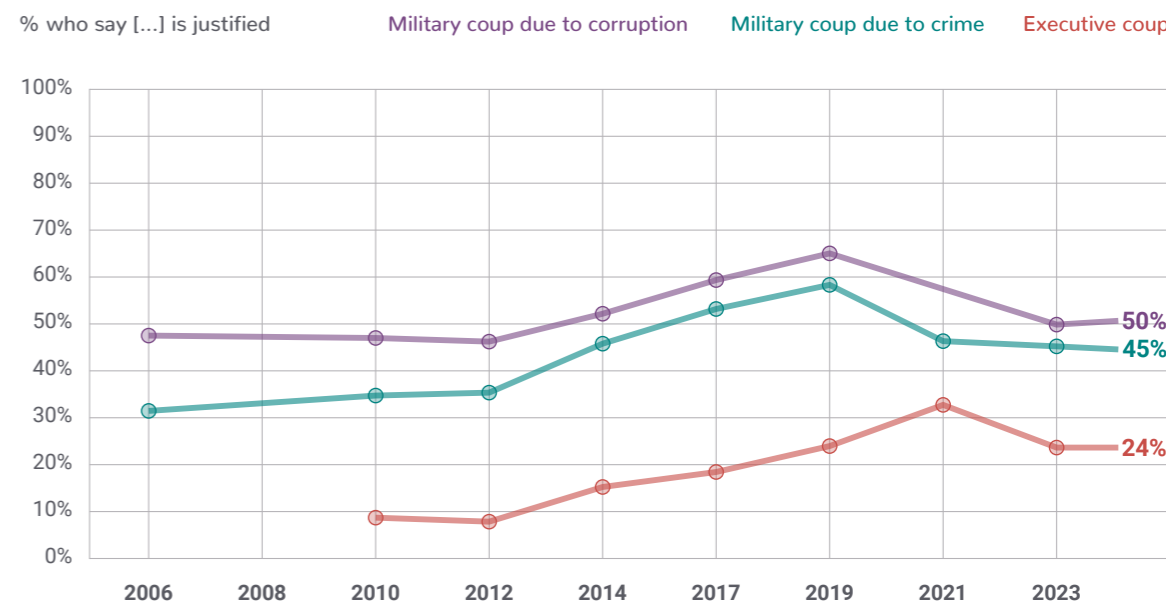
Elections are the cornerstone of democracy.⁹ Those who doubt the fairness and legitimacy of elections may lose faith in the entire system of government, leading them to demand alternatives. This section delves further into the attitudes of Jamaicans toward democracy by looking

Figure 3.4 Jamaica had the second-largest decline in satisfaction with democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2021-2023

Figure 3.5 Jamaicans' tolerance for coups has declined across a number of dimensions



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2006-2023

specifically at elections. To begin, the AmericasBarometer assesses general trust in elections with the following question:

To what extent do you trust elections in this country? [1-7 scale from “not at all” to “a lot”]

As **Figure 3.6** demonstrates, trust in elections is low among the Jamaican public. In 2023, only 28% indicate that they trust elections (an answer of 5-7). That is a significant 7-percentage point drop from 2021, when trust rebounded slightly. Trust in elections was over two in five in 2012, though it fell sharply the next round and has not recovered since.

To probe these attitudes further, the AmericasBarometer asks a set of questions which assess attitudes about specific aspects of the electoral system. In particular, these items ask respondents how often certain occurrences happen in Jamaican elections, namely votes being counted correctly and politicians finding out how people vote.

I will mention some things that can happen during elections and ask you to indicate if they happen in Jamaica...

Votes are counted correctly and fairly. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

17%
of Jamaican adults say that votes are always counted fairly and correctly.

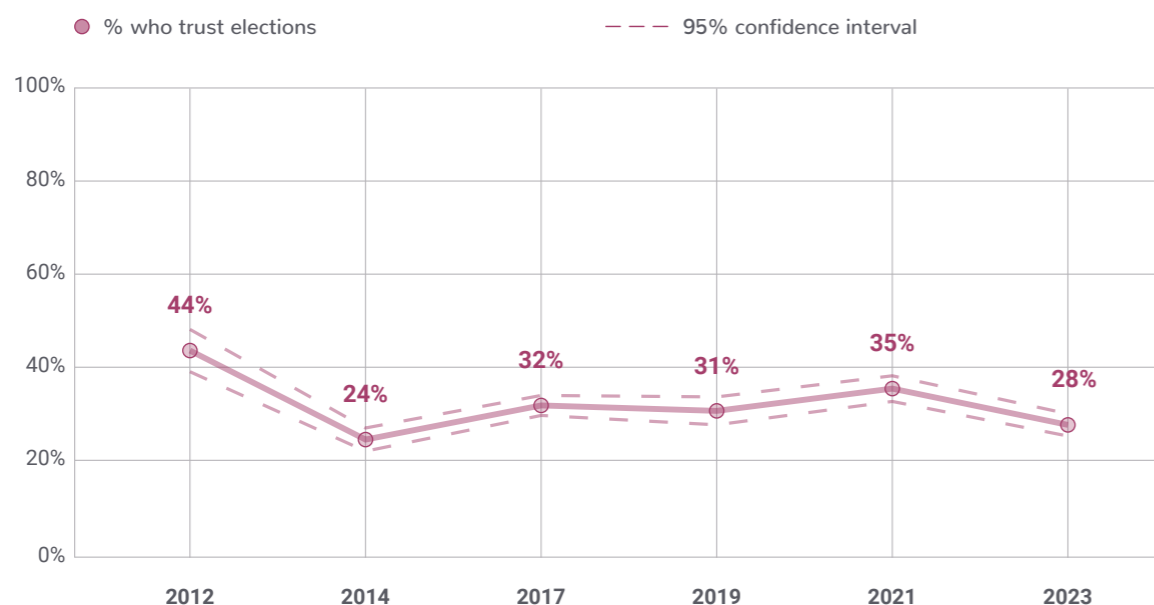
Politicians can find out who each person voted for. Would you say it happens always, sometimes or never?

Figure 3.7 shows the breakdown of responses to these two questions. The results reveal that Jamaicans have doubts about the validity and fairness of elections in the country. Fewer than one in five (17%) say that votes are “always” counted correctly and fairly, and 86% say that politicians can find out how each person voted at least sometimes. These numbers are nearly the same as in 2021, the only other time the questions were asked. The situation appears unlikely to improve in the near future, as there was significant controversy and confusion surrounding the 2024 local elections, with the two

major parties claiming victory, leading to a two-week delay in the announcement of final results.¹⁰

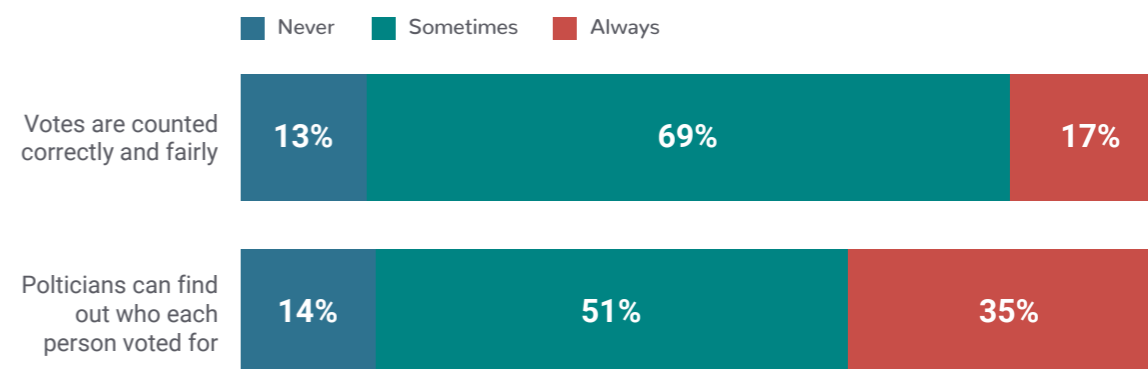
To put these findings into regional context, **Figure 3.8** displays the results across the countries surveyed in 2023. Specifically, it shows the percentage who say votes are “always” counted correctly as well as the percentage who say politicians can “always” or “sometimes” find out how each person voted. Therefore, higher numbers in purple and lower numbers in teal indicate perceptions of fairer elections. As the figure demonstrates, Jamaicans doubt electoral fairness more than citizens of any other country. On both measures, Jamaica ranks the lowest in terms of perceptions of electoral integrity.

Figure 3.6 Just over one in four Jamaicans trust elections, a significant decline since 2021



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2012-2023

Figure 3.7 Most Jamaicans discredit fair elections and the secret ballot



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

86%

of Jamaican citizens believe politicians can find out how people voted.

As with attitudes toward democracy, Jamaicans could feel frustrated with the current state of elections but still not be willing to embrace an alternative system. To test whether the public is sufficiently dissatisfied with democratic processes that they would give up their rights, the survey randomly assigned respondents to receive one of the following questions which pit democratic rights versus economic guarantees:

Which political system seems best for Jamaica: A system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all

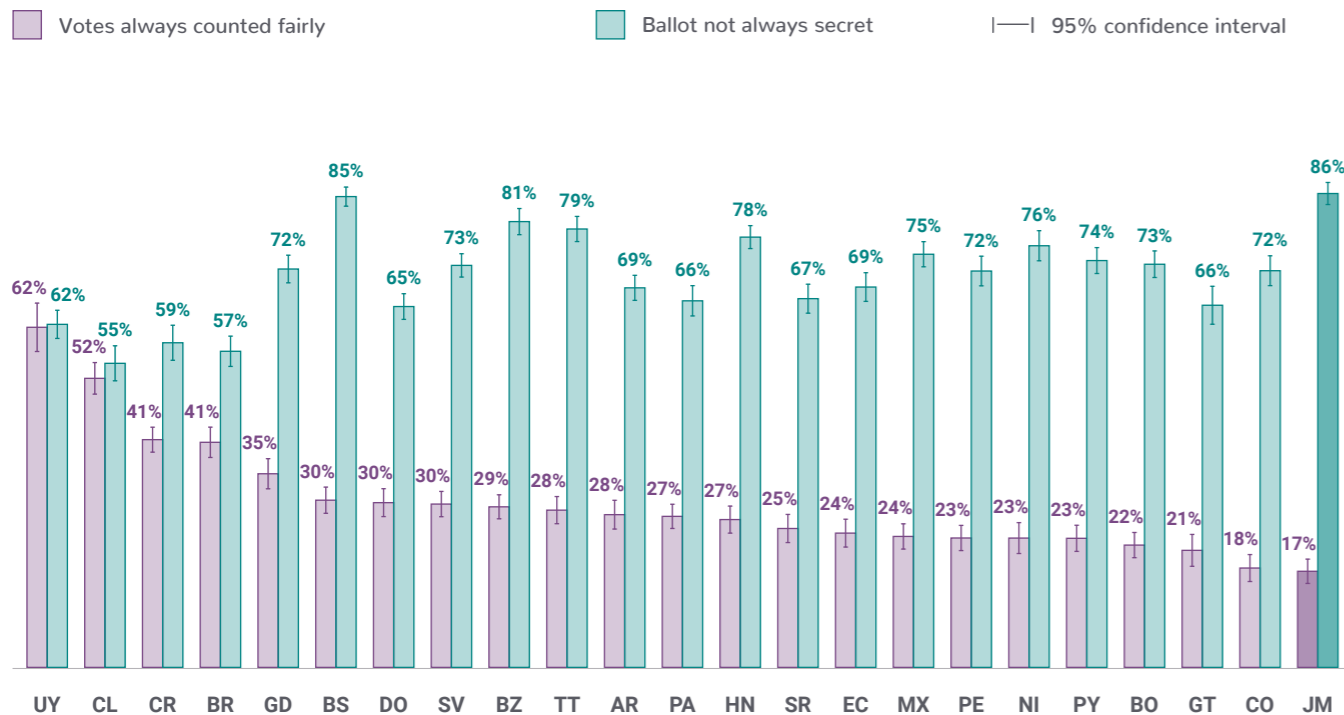
citizens, even if the authorities cannot be elected, or to be able to vote to elect the authorities, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services.

Which political system seems best for Jamaica: A system that guarantees access to a basic income and services for all citizens, even if they cannot express their political opinions without fear or censorship, or a system in which everybody can express their political opinions without fear or censorship, even if some people do not have access to a basic income and services.

Figure 3.9 shows the percentage of Jamaicans who prefer the first option, guaranteed basic income and services, in navy blue and the percentage who prefer guaranteed democratic rights (voting to elect authorities or freedom to express opinions) in teal. Three in five (60%) say they would trade elections for basic income and services for all citizens. The median value across 23 countries surveyed on this measure is 48% (Dominican Republic). Though this result indicates a somewhat weak attachment to democracy, it is actually an improvement from 2021, when 65% of Jamaicans said they preferred economic guarantees to democratic rights.

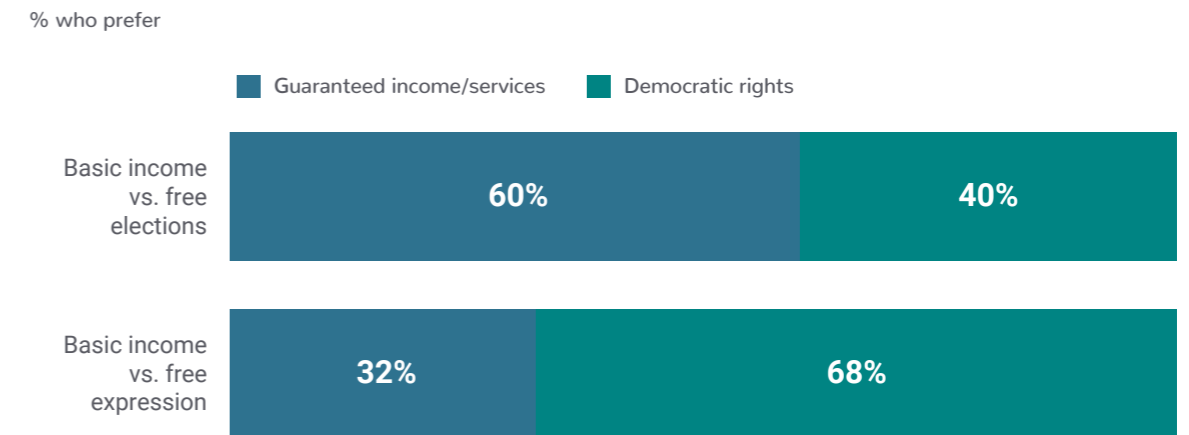
Jamaicans are relatively more attached to their freedom to express political opinions without fear or censorship. Only a third (32%) would trade this right for guaranteed income and services. Of 23 countries in which this question was asked, Jamaica has the fifth-lowest willingness to trade freedom of expression for a basic income (i.e., fifth highest attachment to democracy). Together, these results provide important insight into Jamaicans' view of elections and democracy, more broadly. The public seems to be committed to the civil rights that democracy affords, but Jamaicans are so dissatisfied with elections that they are willing to give them up for greater economic security.

Figure 3.8 Jamaicans have the poorest perceptions of electoral integrity in the region



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Figure 3.9 Jamaicans are willing to sacrifice elections, but not freedom of expression, for economic guarantees



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Conclusion: Reestablishing commitment to democracy

The findings from the 2023 AmericasBarometer present a sobering view the state of democracy in Jamaica. Support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy, and trust in elections are all down. Jamaicans, by and large, dismiss elections as unfair and corrupt, moreso than citizens of any other countries. At the same time, tolerance for authoritarian coups is down, and the public appears committed to democratic freedoms.

Though not yet at a crisis moment, it would be wise for Jamaican leadership to continue to monitor commitment to democracy among the public. Specifically, rebuilding trust in elections will be paramount for the future health of the democratic system. To build trust in elections, some substantive legislative, political, and structural changes have been pursued over the years.

The landmark 2016/2017 legislative initiatives—Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2016 and the Election Campaign Finance Regulations, 2017—sought to improve efficiency in the country’s election machinery.

However, public opinion surveys, including the AmericasBarometer, continue to report comparatively low levels of public confidence in the integrity of different aspects of the process. Confronting issues of electoral malfeasance directly, by investigating claims of vote manipulation and strengthening ballot security through biometrics, could also boost confidence in democratic institutions. Moreover, as the first two chapters of this report showed, the public feels that crime and corruption are rampant in society today. Addressing these issues could go a long way in building trust in the system of government overall.

Support for democracy, satisfaction with democracy, and trust in elections in Jamaica are all down in 2023. Political leaders can confront these issues directly by taking steps to eliminate electoral malfeasance and also by addressing ancillary issues like crime which may negatively impact attitudes about democracy.

Notes

- 1 See <https://www.politico.eu/article/democracy-decline-worldwide-new-report-says/>
- 2 Davis-Castro 2023.
- 3 See <https://www.idea.int/gsod/2023/chapters/americas/>
- 4 See <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jamaica/freedom-world/2023>
- 5 Rodríguez Mega 2023.
- 6 Virtue 2023.
- 7 See <https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latest-news/soes-declared-for-hanover-st-james-and-clarendon/>
- 8 Claassen 2020.
- 9 Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010.
- 10 Robinson 2024.
- 11 See <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202306/jamaica-invests-in-biometrics-to-fight-election-fraud>

Just over a quarter of Jamaicans are satisfied with democracy in their country.

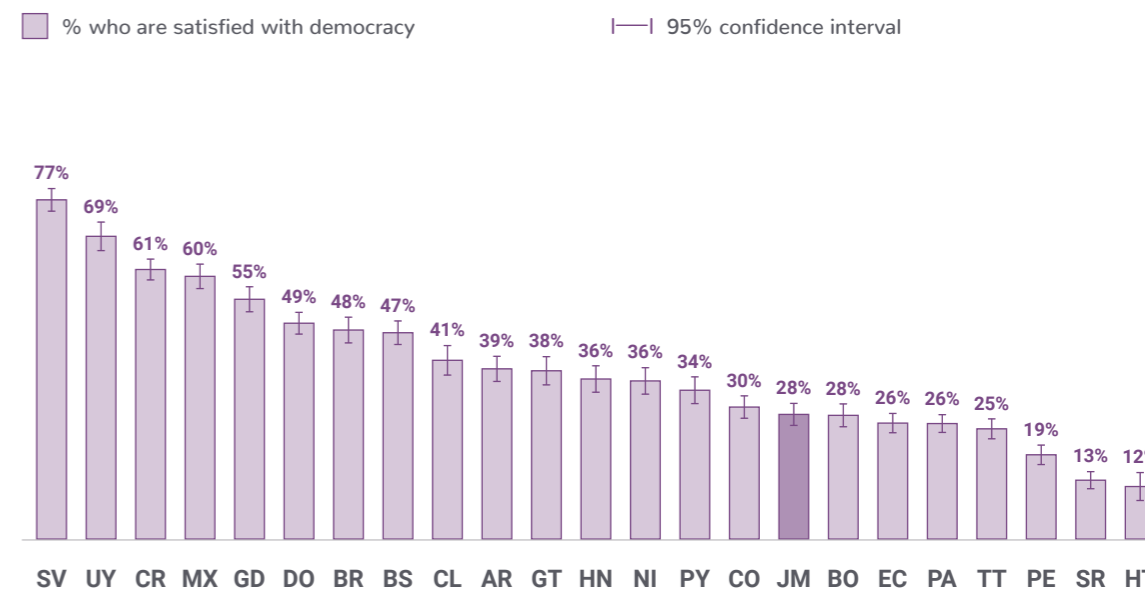
Democracy in Jamaica is still a relatively new establishment. For much of its contemporary history, the island nation was a colony of Spain and Britain; only in 1962 did Jamaica gain its independence.¹ Under the Caribbean country's constitution, democratic structures and processes like parliamentary legislatures and an independent judiciary are formally enshrined.² However, cases of government abuse of power and corruption threaten to tarnish public confidence in the ability of democracy to meet the needs of everyday Jamaicans.³

The AmericasBarometer measures satisfaction with democracy by asking the following question:

*In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Jamaica?*⁴

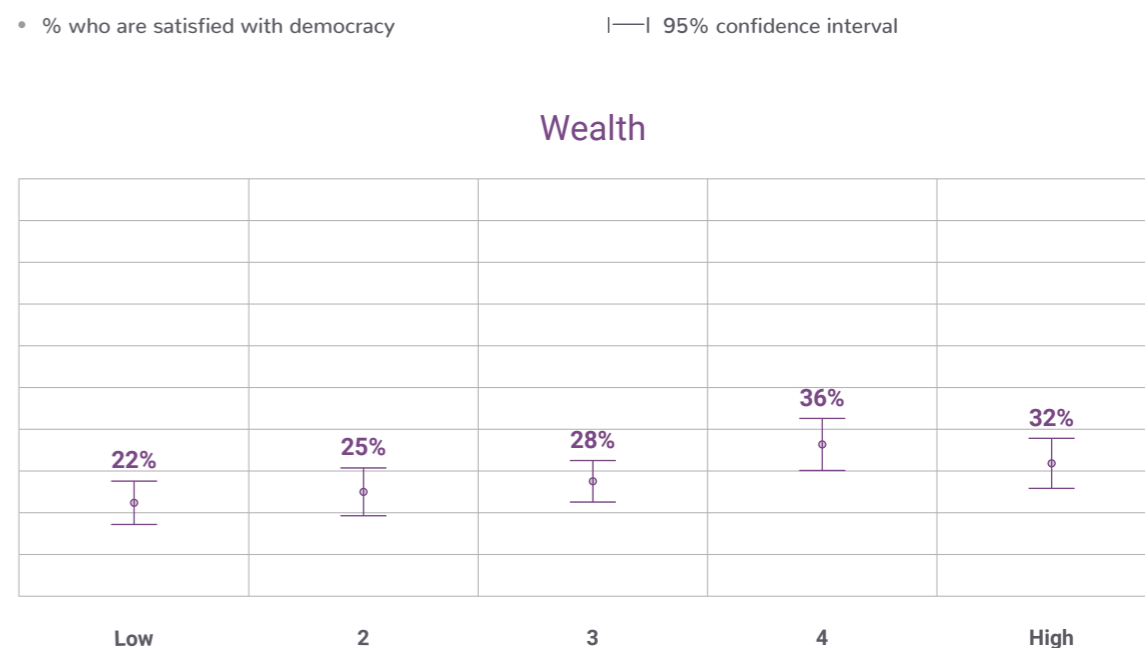
A little over one-quarter of Jamaicans are satisfied with the state of democracy in their country (28%). Compared to other LAC countries, Jamaica ranks relatively low on the measure of satisfaction with democracy. Jamaica is one of nine countries in the LAC region where less than one third of the population is satisfied with the way democracy works. In addition, Jamaica is 12 percentage points lower than the regional average of satisfaction with democracy (40%).

Although most citizens in the region are dissatisfied with democracy, Jamaicans express one of the lowest levels of satisfaction



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer 2023

Wealthy Jamaicans are more likely to be satisfied with democracy



Source: LAPOP Lab, AmericasBarometer Jamaica 2023

Satisfaction with democracy is a key indicator of system support. Jamaicans are relatively dissatisfied with democracy compared to other countries, and dissatisfaction is especially high among those with lower socioeconomic status.

What sociodemographic characteristics are associated with satisfaction with democracy in Jamaica? Higher rates of satisfaction with democracy in Jamaica are found in wealthier groups compared to lower wealth groups. Age, gender, education, and place of residence do not have statistically significant relationships with satisfaction with democracy.

Jamaica continues to experience political changes that make measuring satisfaction

levels uncertain. For example, the nation is considering a ballot referendum that will decide whether the country will cut ties with the British monarchy and transition from a constitutional monarchy to a republic, which further complicates the public perception of the role of democracy in Jamaican society.⁵ Nevertheless, the AmericasBarometer reveals that Jamaica still has more work to do to foster a democracy that leads to higher satisfaction among Jamaicans.

Notes

- 1 Miller 2022.
- 2 Griffith 2001.
- 3 Spence et al. 2021.
- 4 Responses are sorted into four categories: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. I coded the responses into a binary variable, which allows me to estimate the percentage of people in the country who are overall satisfied with democracy in Jamaica. Specifically, I combined “very satisfied” and “satisfied” into one category, while placing the “dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” into a baseline category.
- 5 Mega 2023.

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION FOR THE 2023 AMERICASBAROMETER IN JAMAICA

This survey was carried out between July 7 and September 5, 2023, as part of LAPOP's 2023 AmericasBarometer. It is a follow up to LAPOP's AmericasBarometer Jamaica surveys of 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2021. The 2023 survey fieldwork was carried out by the University of West Indies Center for Leadership and Governance on behalf of LAPOP. Key funding came from Vanderbilt University, USAID, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Questionnaire pretesting took place between February 28 and March 2, 2023, and interviewer training took place from June 16 to June 17, 2023. Pilot surveys were conducted June 20 to June 22, 2023. A full copy of the 2023 AmericasBarometer Jamaica questionnaire can be found at LAPOP's website at www.LapopSurveys.org.

The project used a national probability sample design of voting-age adults, with a total N of 1,521 people involving face-to-face interviews conducted in English. In the 2023 round, LAPOP used the SurveyToGo® (STG) software, running on Android tablets and phones, to conduct 100% of the interviews.

The survey used a complex sample design, including stratification and clustering. The sample was developed by LAPOP, using a multi-stage probability design, and was stratified by the four major regions of the country: Kingston Metropolitan Area, Surrey, Middlesex, and Cornwall. The sample is representative at the national level and of three regions (excluding Surrey, due to low sample size). Each stratum was further sub-stratified by size of municipality¹ and by urban and rural areas within municipalities. Respondents were selected in clusters of 6 in urban and rural areas. Reported statistics or statistical analyses should be adjusted for the design effect due to the complex design of the sample.²

The sample frame used for the sample is the 2011 Population Census. The sample is representative of voting age population at the primary stratum level, by urban/rural areas, and by size of the municipalities. No areas or regions of the country were excluded from the design. There were no substitutions of clusters or interviews during fieldwork.

The sample consists of 52 primary sampling units and 250 secondary sampling units (sampling points) across the set of all parishes in Jamaica. A total of 877 respondents were surveyed in urban areas and 644 in rural areas. The estimated margin of error for the survey is ± 2.51 . Margin of sampling errors are not adjusted for weights. The final sample achieved in the survey is self-weighted.

For more details on the methodology used in Jamaica, see the complete technical report at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/jamaica.php>.

¹ The sample design includes three different strata of municipalities classified according to their size: (1) small municipalities with less than 100,000 inhabitants, (2) medium-sized municipalities with between 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants, (3) large municipalities with more than 200,000 inhabitants.

² For more information visit <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-designs.php>

AMERICASBAROMETER DATA AND REPORTS AT A GLANCE

DATA

The AmericasBarometer datasets feature a common core set of questions that have been asked from 2004 to present day. In addition, LAPOP has datasets that date back to the 1970s. Data files are free and publicly available for download.



Users can also access AmericasBarometer data through our Data Playground. This data analysis tool is free and interactive. It is particularly useful for those individuals unfamiliar with advanced statistical software programs. Data Playground users can analyze AmericasBarometer data through tabulations of a single variable, cross-country comparisons on a map, and cross-tabulations of two variables.



REPORTS

LAPOP produces numerous reports on the AmericasBarometer and other projects. Our goal is to provide analysis and evidence for scholars and practitioners on public opinion and democratic governance.

Insights reports are short briefs produced by students, network affiliates, our researchers, and our faculty. The series is used by journalists, policymakers, and scholars.



Standard Insights engage social science research and AmericasBarometer data to develop and assess theories regarding links between public opinion and democracy.

Topical Insights use project data to provide evidence and context on a current event.

Methodological Insights offer windows into our cutting-edge approaches, report on our innovations, and engage scholars who work at the survey research frontier.

Global Insights introduce findings from LAPOP-affiliated research outside the Americas.

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Country reports are book length, contain more extensive analyses, and are organized thematically to address findings relevant to democratic governance, strengthening, and stability. They include a focus on topics that stakeholders, especially USAID Missions, identify as important in the local context.

The following AmericasBarometer datasets (■) and reports* (●) are available for free download on our website (www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop):

	2004	2006	2008	2010
Regional	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●	●	●	●
Guatemala	●	●	●	●
El Salvador	●	●	●	●
Honduras	●	●	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●
Panama	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	●	●
Ecuador	●	●	●	●
Bolivia	●	●	●	●
Peru		●	●	●
Paraguay		●	●	●
Chile		●		●
Uruguay			●	●
Brazil				●
Venezuela		●	●	
Argentina				●
Dominican Republic	●	●	●	●
Haiti		●	●	●
Jamaica		●	●	●
Guyana		●	●	
Trinidad & Tobago				●
Belize				
Suriname				
The Bahamas				
Barbados				
Grenada				
St. Lucia				
Dominica				
Antigua and Barbuda				
St. Vincent and the Grenadines				
St. Kitts and Nevis				
United States		■	■	■
Canada		■	■	■

*2023 AmericasBarometer country reports will be available in early 2024.

	2012	2014	2016/17	2018/19	2021	2023
Regional	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guatemala	●	●	●	●	●	●
El Salvador	●	●	●	●	●	●
Honduras	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●	●	●	●	●
Costa Rica	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panama	●	●	●	●	●	●
Colombia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ecuador	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bolivia	●	●	●	●	●	●
Peru	●	●	●	●	●	●
Paraguay	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chile	●	●				
Uruguay	●					
Brazil						
Venezuela						
Argentina	●					
Dominican Republic	●	●		●	●	●
Haiti	●	●				●
Jamaica	●	●	●	●	●	●
Guyana						
Trinidad & Tobago						●
Belize						●
Suriname	●					●
The Bahamas						●
Barbados						
Grenada						●
St. Lucia						
Dominica						
Antigua and Barbuda						
St. Vincent and the Grenadines						
St. Kitts and Nevis						
United States			■	■	■	■
Canada			■	■	■	■

SURVEY METHODOLOGY FOR THE 2023 AMERICASBAROMETER

The AmericasBarometer is a multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) public opinion survey of democratic values and behaviors of voting-age citizens and permanent residents in the Western Hemisphere.

Respondents are selected through national probability samples in Latin America and the Caribbean, and through nonprobability panels in the United States and Canada. The project uses a standardized core questionnaire and country-specific modules to collect data via face-to-face household surveys, except in Haiti and Nicaragua, where the project uses computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and in the United States and Canada, where the project uses self-administered Web surveys. The per-country average sample size of 1,512 respondents enables national and subnational estimations of key population variables.

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QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The AmericasBarometer survey instruments consist of a core questionnaire and country-specific modules that measure attitudes regarding, experiences with, and behaviors within political, economic, and social systems. The core questionnaire is a set of structured items that permit valid comparisons across time and space. Country-specific modules measure opinion on context-specific sociopolitical phenomena. As in every round, new questions are designed through workshops with input from country experts and leading scholars in the field. While the average face-to-face questionnaire includes 152 questions and lasts 45 minutes, the average CATI questionnaire includes 77 questions and lasts 20 minutes. The main questionnaire topics in 2023 are democratic values, system support, the rule of law, gender, and migration intentions.

COGNITIVE PRETESTS

The core questionnaire and country-specific modules are thoroughly pretested with a three-stage iterative cognitive interviewing process. First, LAPOP cognitive interviewers carry out a handful of in-depth tests of new modules to develop early drafts of questionnaire items. Second, LAPOP extensively trains research assistants and consultants to conduct cognitive interviews of the full core questionnaire in selected countries from different regions of the Americas to ensure context variation. Third, a similar process is carried out in all countries for each country-customized questionnaire. For the 2023 AmericasBarometer, local survey institutions recruited pre-test participants, and, in some cases, a small incentive was offered for their participation. Most cognitive interviews were conducted remotely using video or phone calls.

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SAMPLING

LAPOP uses a stratified, multistage, and clustered sampling strategy to draw national probability samples in countries where the survey is administered face-to-face. LAPOP-trained enumerators interview any eligible respondent available at the time of the survey. A single respondent is selected in each household and no revisits are required. In face-to-face studies, LAPOP uses “frequency matching,” a technique that ensures that the samples achieved mirror the national distributions of age and gender in the sampling frame. Frequency matching is implemented at the cluster level. In countries where the survey is conducted via CATI, LAPOP uses random-digit dialing (RDD) of mobile phones. In cases of unanswered calls, each number selected into the sample is called at least five times before it is discarded.

WEIGHTS

The 2023 AmericasBarometer sample design strategy in face-to-face studies produce self-weighted observations, with a few exceptions. Datasets in Ecuador, Trinidad & Tobago, The Bahamas, and Brazil use calibration weights to compensate for sample size deviations. LAPOP computes these weights using population distributions by strata for urban and rural population, gender, and age. Weights for Haiti and Nicaragua (CATI) are calculated by estimating baseline probabilities adjusted for eligibility and non-response, then calibrated to the 2018/19 AmericasBarometer country samples on gender, education, age, and region. Cross-time and cross-country weights are standardized so that each country/year has the same effective sample size.

INTERVIEWER, SUPERVISOR, AND AUDITOR TRAINING

In the 2023 AmericasBarometer is designed as an opportunity for fieldwork personnel to grow their knowledge base and to standardize data collection and monitoring practices. Training workshops include an in-person component, where LAPOP-trained fieldwork personnel instruct interviewers and quality control auditors on logistics, security protocols, and fieldwork monitoring; a virtual component, where LAPOP representatives review the full questionnaire and country samples with each team; a set of pre-recorded training videos that review best practices in survey research, ethical principles, and operations with the data collection platform; and a full pilot of the survey, where fieldwork personnel practice what they have learned before launching the actual survey. Training sessions typically last two full days and all trainings conclude with a learning assessment that interviewers have to pass (>80% correct answers) in order to be certified to work on the project.

QUALITY CONTROL

The 2023 AmericasBarometer uses LAPOP’s Fieldwork Algorithm for LAPOP Control over survey Operations and Norms (FALCON). FALCON collects multiple types of paradata, including voice recordings and interviewer images, question and questionnaire timing, and interviewer performance indicators. These paradata indicators are monitored daily during data collection so that any corrections or cancellations resulting from a failure to meet quality control standards are made while fieldwork is in progress. Final datasets include high-quality interviews only. Each technical report for an AmericasBarometer survey summarizes the results of this process.

Acknowledgements

The AmericasBarometer emerges from collaborations among hundreds of individuals involved in its design and implementation. We thank all the members of the public who generously shared their beliefs and experiences with our survey teams. We are also grateful to our dedicated partner survey organizations and fieldwork teams across the region.

The AmericasBarometer is made possible with support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Over the course of the 2023 round, we benefited from the thoughtful advice and leadership of USAID's Chantal Agarwal, Luis Azurduy, and Cara Thanassi. For their unflagging support for the project, we are grateful to leadership at Vanderbilt University, including John Geer, Timothy McNamara, Padma Raghavan, Alan Wiseman, and David Wright. We also thank Vanderbilt's Sponsored Programs Administration and the A&S Finance & Administration Unit for their support. We are proud to be a partner of Vanderbilt's Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies.

Implementing our project across the Western Hemisphere is possible thanks to support from additional partners, including researchers at Duke University, Environics Institute, the Inter-American Development Bank, and University of California, Berkeley. We are grateful for their collaboration.

The LAPOP Lab team devoted tens of thousands of hours to the design, implementation, and dissemination of the 2023 AmericasBarometer. For this round, these exceptional individuals are, in alphabetical order, Rubí Arana, Fernanda Boidi, Oscar Castorena, Sebastián Larrea, Boyoon Lee, Arturo Maldonado, Daniel Montalvo, Luke Plutowski, Georgina Pizzolitto, Camilo Plata, Eli Rau, Mariana Rodríguez, Valerie Schweizer-Robinson, Laura Sellers, and Carole Wilson. We are also very grateful to Laura Kramer and Mary McNamee for project administration and coordination.

One way LAPOP achieves its mission of knowledge transfer and capacity building is by involving students in all aspects of the AmericasBarometer. While they gain experience with cutting-edge survey methodologies, they also contribute to the project's success. At the graduate level, the project benefited from engaging the Vanderbilt political science comparative politics graduate student community in various discussions and activities; these students are Sofia Berrospi, Lucas Borba, Shashwat Dhar, Guilherme Fasolin, Margaret Frost, Martin Gou, Facundo Salles Kobilanski, Preeti Nambiar, Emily Noh, Mariana Ramírez, Sofía Rivera, and Alexander Tripp. This round also benefited from the involvement of undergraduate students, including Daniel Ardity, Danni Chacon, Ade Forrest, Audrey Heffernan, Jazmín Los, Adin McGurk, Marco Navarro Stanic, Tomás Majeovsky, Chase Mandell, Krishna Podishetti, Allie Rounds, William Royster, Hedid Rojas Salinas, Samuel Schulman, Carson Viggiano, Evan Wilkerson, and Stanley Zhao.

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It would not have been possible to produce the 2023 AmericasBarometer without the efforts of all these institutions and individuals, and we are deeply grateful to all of them. We also thank all those who engage with the project's data and reports for contributing to LAPOP's core objective: provide a critical and reliable tool for assessing the public's experiences with democratic governance across the hemisphere.

Noam Lupu
Liz Zechmeister
Nashville, Tennessee
November 2023

The AmericasBarometer is carried out by LAPOP Lab, a center for excellence in international survey research based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. LAPOP has deep connections to the Latin America and Caribbean region, established during more than five decades of public opinion research. The AmericasBarometer is possible due to the activities and support of a network that spans the Americas. To complete each round, LAPOP partners with individuals, survey firms, universities, development organizations, and others in up to 34 countries within the Western Hemisphere.

Project efforts are informed by LAPOP's mission: to produce objective, non-partisan, and scientifically sound studies of public opinion; to innovate improvements in survey research; to disseminate project findings; and, to build capacity.

The AmericasBarometer project receives generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vanderbilt University. Other institutions that have contributed recently to multiple rounds of the project include Environics Institute, Florida International University, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Over the years, the project has benefited from grants from the United States National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil (CNPq), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, and numerous academic institutions across the Americas.

The 2023 AmericasBarometer was carried out via face-to-face interviews in 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries, phone surveys in Haiti and Nicaragua, and online surveys in Canada and the United States.

All samples are designed to be nationally representative of voting-age adults. In all, more than 41,524 individuals were interviewed in this latest round of the survey. The complete 2004-2023 AmericasBarometer dataset contains responses from over 385,000 people across the region. Common core modules, standardized techniques, and rigorous quality control procedures permit valid comparisons across individuals, certain subnational areas, countries, regions, and time. AmericasBarometer data and reports are available for free download from the project website: www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop. Individuals can also use that website to query the data via an interactive Data Playground. Datasets from the project also can be accessed via "data repositories" and subscribing institutions across the Americas.

Through such open access practices and an extensive network of collaborators, LAPOP works to contribute to the pursuit of excellence in public opinion research and ongoing discussions over how programs and policies related to democratic governance can improve the quality of life for individuals in the Americas and beyond.

LAPOP's AmericasBarometer takes the
Pulse of Democracy in Jamaica

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23