

The local government system in

# Jamaica



## Key facts

**POPULATION (Census 2000):** 2,607,632

**AREA:** 10,991 sq km

**CAPITAL:** Kingston

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP:** -

**CURRENCY:** Jamaican dollar (JMD)

**HEAD OF STATE:** HM Queen Elizabeth II

**GOVERNOR-GENERAL:** Sir Patrick Allen

**HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:**

Prime Minister Bruce Golding

**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy

**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** bicameral

**STATE STRUCTURE:** unitary

**LANGUAGES:** English (official), Jamaican patois (recognised).

**NATIONAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2007; **turnout:** 61.5%;

**next:** 2012

**LOCAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2007; **turnout:** -

**next:** 2011

## SUMMARY

Jamaica is a constitutional monarchy with two spheres of government, national and local. There is no constitutional provision for local government and the main governing legislation for local authorities is the Parish Councils Act 1887, the Kingston City Corporation Act 1923 and the Municipalities Act 2003. The Department of Local Government in the Office of the Prime Minister provides oversight for the 14 local authorities 12 parish councils, of which 11 are single-tier, the single-tier Kingston and St Andrew Corporation and the second-tier Portmore Municipal Council within the parish of St Catherine. Local authorities are empowered to raise revenue via user fees, by-law penalties, trade licences and property taxes; they also benefit from ad hoc, conditional transfers from central government. Local government is responsible for parochial infrastructure and poor relief and shares responsibility with central government for a range of services including water supply, environmental health and development control.

## 1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Jamaica is a unitary constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament. The head of state is HM Queen Elizabeth II represented by a governor-general. The legislature is based in the capital Kingston and comprises the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives is made up of 60 members elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage for terms of up to five years. The Senate is an appointed body of 21 members appointed by the governor-general; 13 on the advice of the prime minister and eight on the advice of the leader of the opposition. The head of government is the prime minister who appoints a cabinet from the members of either house.

## 2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 2.1 Constitutional provisions:

There is no constitutional provision for local government.

### 2.2 Main legislative texts:

The main pieces of legislation pertaining to local government in Jamaica are as follows:

- Parish Councils Act 1887
- Parochial Rates and Finance Act 1900
- Kingston City Corporation Act 1923
- Municipalities Act 2003.

## 3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 3.1 Local government within the state:

Jamaica has had a formal system of local government since 1663 when a Vestry system which was patterned on the form of local government that existed in England at that time, was established. The Vestry system lasted for 200 years and was abolished in 1865. It was replaced by a system of Parochial Boards (later re-named Parish Councils), with passage of the Parochial Boards Act 1887. The number of parishes (local government jurisdictions) were reduced from 22 which existed under the Vestries to 14. In 1923 the parishes of Kingston, the capital city, and St. Andrew were amalgamated to form a single municipality called the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KASC). In 2003, passage of the Municipalities Act facilitated a new innovation by enabling the creation of the Portmore Municipal

Council, which is a second-tier local government jurisdiction within one of the existing local authorities - the St. Catherine Parish Council. The present configuration of local authorities in Jamaica consists of 12 parish councils, one municipal corporation and a second-tier municipal council.

### 3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The local government portfolio falls within the remit of the Office of the Prime Minister. The minister of state for local government heads the Department of Local Government and provides oversight for the laws governing the organisation, structure, powers, administration and financing of local authorities. The department also plays a coordinating role between all local and central government programmes to ensure the achievement of objectives and common standards, and also provides technical advice and guidance on local government-related issues and activities. The Department has four agencies which assist local governments in discharging their various responsibilities. These are the Jamaica Fire Brigade (fire prevention and control); the National Solid Waste Management Authority (solid waste collection and disposal); the Board of Supervision (poor relief/welfare services); and the Vineyard Town Golden Age Home.

### 3.3. Council types:

Jamaica has 14 local authorities made up of 12 parish councils, the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation and the Portmore Municipal Council, a second-tier council within the parish of St Catherine. There are a total of 227 councillors serving the 14 councils, each headed by a mayor who acts as the chairperson of the council.

**3.3.1 Parish councils** undertake their mandated responsibilities through a committee system. The councils are required by law to have two main committees: finance and poor relief. They have discretionary powers to establish other committees, the most common being public health, commercial services, building and town planning, and roads and works. The standing committees hold delegated decision-making powers while other committees have powers to recommend. Ad-hoc committees may also be formed to address a particular matter. Some authorities also establish executive committees to assist the leadership of the council.

### 3.3.2 The Kingston and St Andrew

**Corporation** has 40 councillors, is the largest local authority and administers the affairs of the capital city.

**3.3.3 Portmore Municipal Council** has 11 members and is presided over by a directly elected Mayor who is not a councillor.

## 4. ELECTIONS

### 4.1 Recent local elections:

The latest local elections took place in 2007. No information has been provided on turnout.

### 4.2 Voting system:

All councillors are elected using the first-past-the-post system with universal adult suffrage for a three-year term. The Municipalities Act 2003 provides for Mayors of second-tier jurisdictions to be directly elected. The other 13 mayors continue to be elected by their peers for the term of the council.

### 4.3 Elected representatives:

No information provided for this section.

### 4.4 Women's representation:

The proportion of female councillors has declined steadily over the past decade, from 27% in 2000–2003 to 23% in 2003–2007 and 18% in 2007–2010. The number of women holding the office of mayor has also reduced from three before 2007 to one at present. No more recent figures are available.

## 5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Legal requirement:

No information provided for this section.

### 5.2 Implementation:

Parish Development Committees (PDCs) representing civil society, community based organisations and the private sector, and including local and central government agencies, have been established in all local government

jurisdictions. The role of these committees is to facilitate the participation of all local stakeholders in the management of local affairs and charting the course of local development through the preparation and implementation of parish development plans. A National Association of Parish Development Committees (NAPDC) has been established to support the PDCs and monitor their progress.

### 5.3 E-government:

There is currently no e-government strategy for local government, although computerised financial management and accounting information systems are being installed in the councils. These are intended to introduce modern accounting practices consistent with government and international accounting standards, as well as to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the execution of accounting functions.

## 6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 6.1 National local government association:

The Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica (ALGAJ) is the representative organisation responsible for the interest and welfare of local government authorities. It also seeks to advance local government in general. Its membership is drawn from councillors and mayors of all 14 local authorities and it is comprised of six committees, namely: international relations; ethics, standards and discipline; economics and development; policy and reform; membership and training; and infrastructure and physical development.

### 6.2 Other local government associations:

The Jamaica Association of Local Government Officers (JALGO) is a public sector union which operates in Jamaica. The Association was

**Table 1.** Distribution of councils and population (Census 2000)

Local authority	2nd-tier authority	Population	% rural
Clarendon	0	237,024	69.7
Hanover	0	67,037	90.7
Kingston and St Andrew	0	651,880	11.2
Manchester	0	185,801	66.5
Portland	0	80,205	76.5
St Ann	0	166,762	73.2
St Catherine	1	482,308	26.2
St Elizabeth	0	146,404	85.6
St James	0	175,127	44.9
St Mary	0	111,466	79.2
St Thomas	0	91,604	71.8
Trelawny	0	73,066	80.4
Westmoreland	0	138,948	74.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2,607,632</b>	<b>48.0</b>

Source: Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN)<sup>1</sup>

Table 2. Aggregate revenue and expenditure for local authorities (2007/2008)

Revenue	JM\$bn	Expenditure	JM\$bn
<b>Government transfers</b>		<b>Administration</b>	
Government grant	1.4	Executive direction and administration (inc. pensions)	0.87
Deficit financing	2.5	Building and sub-division	0.20
<b>Locally raised revenue</b>	-	<b>Service delivery</b>	
General revenue	.9	Public water supply	0.01
Parochial Revenue Fund (PRF) including property tax and motor vehicle licences	2.6	Commercial services	0.27
		Property-tax-related services	3.74
		Road maintenance	1.13
		Poor relief services	0.36
		Minor water supplies	0.08
		Equalisation Fund	0.05
		Other	0.56
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7.27</b>

Source: Department of Local Government

formed in November 1940 and represents several categories of workers in local and central government, statutory bodies and quasi-government agencies. Its members include firefighters, officers and sub-officers, civilian staff of the Jamaica Fire Brigade, employees in the pre-supervisory and supervisory units of the National Water Commission, hospital and health service workers, and school and parish council staff.

### 7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Minister of State with responsibility for Local Government holds regular meetings with all mayors. The Local Government Reform Unit within the department is working to promote and facilitate improved intergovernmental relations. ALGAJ is also consulted in relation to policy development and implementation, including legislative amendments.

### 8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

The Auditor General's Department conducts independent audits of council finances and performance which may lead to local authorities being required to appear before the Public Accounts Committee of parliament. The department also conducts routine audits, including the annual audit of poor relief operations in all local authorities by the Board of Supervision for Poor Relief.

The Office of the Contractor General monitors and investigates the awarding and implementation of contracts, licences, permits and concessions, as well as the divestment of local government assets.

### 9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

#### 9.1 Locally raised revenue:

Local authorities are empowered to raise revenue via user fees, by-law penalties, trade licences and property taxes. These include development approval application processing, barbers' and hairdressers' licences, motor vehicle licence fees and trade licences, markets, cemeteries, transportation centres and car parks, breaches of parking regulations and permit parking.

Local authorities do have the power to raise loans, but this power has so far been underutilised.

#### 9.2 Transfers:

Local authorities receive two types of grants from central government - specific and deficit grants. Specific grants are provided for welfare related expenses, whilst deficit grants are essentially discretionary and are not formula based.

#### 9.3 Local authority staff:

Local government personnel are recruited by a central body: for KSAC it is the Municipal Services Commission (MSC), while for all other local authorities it is the Parish Council Services Commission (PCSC). Both commissions are responsible for the recruitment, promotion, discipline and dismissal of staff on the recommendation of the individual local authority. Staff secondments from central government to local government and vice versa may occasionally take place; these are considered an important feature of personnel development.

### 10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

Local government is responsible for parochial infrastructure including roads, drains, street lights, infirmaries, parking facilities, markets, transportation centres, parks, cemeteries, pounds and slaughter-houses. The local authorities are also responsible for poor relief, and share responsibility with central government in a number of areas including water supply, public health and development control.

#### References and useful websites

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Annex A. Summary of service provision in different spheres of government

Service	Delivering authority		Remarks
	Central	Local Government	
<b>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</b>			
Police	■		Disaster management lies with central government, but is implemented with local government
Fire protection	■		
Civil protection	■	■	
Criminal justice	■		
Civil justice	■		
Civil status register	■		
Statistical office	■		
Electoral register	■		
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
Pre-school	■		
Primary	■		
Secondary	■		
Vocational and technical	■		
Higher education	■		
Adult education			
Other	■		
<b>SOCIAL WELFARE</b>			
Kindergarten and nursery	■		
Family welfare services	■	■	
Welfare homes	■	■	
Social security	■	■	
<b>PUBLIC HEALTH</b>			
Primary care	■		
Hospitals	■		
Health Protection	■	■	
<b>HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING</b>			
Housing	■		
Town planning	■		
Regional planning	■		
<b>TRANSPORT</b>			
Roads	■	■	
Transport	■		
Urban roads	■		
Urban rail			
Ports	■		
Airports	■		
<b>ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION</b>			
Water and sanitation	■	■	
Refuse collection and disposal		■	
Cemeteries and crematoria		■	
Slaughterhouses		■	
Environmental protection	■	■	
Consumer protection		■	
<b>CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS</b>			
Theatre and concerts	■		
Museums and libraries	■		
Parks and open spaces		■	
Sports and leisure	■		
Religious facilities			
<b>UTILITIES</b>			
Gas services	■		
District heating	■		
Water supply	■		
Electricity	■		
<b>ECONOMIC</b>			
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■	■	The parishes are becoming increasingly involved in matters regarding economic promotion
Economic promotion	■	■	
Trade and industry	■	■	
Tourism	■	■	

■ = Discretionary service by the local authority