



CENTRE FOR VOTERS INITIATIVE & ACTION

Jamaica

NGO Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

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Contributor contact: Simay Özgentürk
Contributor email: sozgenturk@cvia.ch
Website: www.cvia.ch

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Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action presents this report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee ahead of the 146th Session for the review of Jamaica. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus. The Centre acknowledges there can be no secure tomorrow without ensuring civil societies have knowledge to vote, participate, and engage with democratic processes.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Human Rights Committee, to promote civil society participation in the public affairs process.
3. The Centre submits this report ahead of the fifth periodic review of Jamaica under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Recognising the complex nature of the challenges affecting political participation in Jamaica, the Centre hopes to provide valuable information to the Committee regarding the State's compliance with Article 25 of the Covenant. Indeed, this report is focused on the scope of Article 25, and we encourage Committee members to consider the practical accessibility of electoral participation, the equal participation of women in public and political life, declining electoral engagement, and civic education as interconnected elements of the effective exercise of political participation rights.
4. The Centre has submitted this report to the Committee to focus on four specific issues: (1) accessibility to elections and alternative voting methods; (2) participation of women in the public and political sphere; (3) low and declining electoral participation; and (4) systemic barriers to civic education and participatory access.

Accessibility to Elections and Alternative Voting Methods

Administrative Barriers to Registration

5. Jamaica operates a system of continuous voter registration, but registration requires an in-person application at a constituency office, the collection of fingerprints and a photograph, and subsequent verification of the applicant's residence by Electoral Office of Jamaica personnel and political-party scrutineers.¹ Registration is not completed until residence verification has taken place, after which the elector is added to one of the twice-yearly voters' lists.²

¹ ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF JAMAICA, *Registration Procedures*, <https://www.ecj.com.jm/voters/voter-information/registration-procedures/>.

² Ibid.

6. The integrity objectives served by residence verification are legitimate; however, recent evidence shows that dependence on the participation of party scrutineers can itself impede registration transfers. In August 2026, the Director of Elections confirmed that in one St Mary constituency, some transfers could not be completed because a required scrutineer was not attending residence-verification exercises.³
7. The ECJ stressed that the difficulty was not widespread and that transfers elsewhere were proceeding normally.⁴ Nevertheless, affected electors reported having to return to their former constituencies to vote despite repeated attempts to transfer their registration, in one documented case spanning several elections.⁵ Where an elector's ability to update registration depends upon the attendance of political-party representatives over whom the elector has no control, prolonged failure of that mechanism risks becoming the kind of practical obstacle to the effective exercise of voting rights contemplated by Article 25.

Insufficient E-Voting Procedures

8. In 2025, Jamaica primarily used an Electronic Voter Identification System (EVIS) rather than electronic ballot casting.⁶ The updated biometric system was deployed in only seven of Jamaica's 63 constituencies, covering approximately 10 per cent of the Voters' List.⁷ The OAS (Organization of American States) Electoral Observation Mission recorded instances in which fingerprint readers failed to identify electors, requiring officials to revert to manual verification.⁸
9. In some cases, voters whose photographs matched both their identification card and the electoral records were nevertheless required to answer security questions and swear or affirm an oath, contributing to delays and overcrowding.⁹ The ECJ temporarily suspended use of the handheld devices during the morning, but the OAS found that this instruction was not implemented uniformly across polling stations.¹⁰
10. These findings should be considered against the CARICOM (Communauté caribéenne) Election Observation Mission's conclusion: EVIS generally operated effectively where deployed and that manual contingency procedures allowed voting

³ VIRTUE Erica, « Vote transfer troubles - ECJ to probe claims that scrutineer absences blocking some electors' from going to polls where they now reside », *Jamaica Gleaner*, (31 August 2026), <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20260831/vote-transfer-troubles-ecj-probe-claims-scrutineer-absences-blocking-some>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION OF THE ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES IN JAMAICA, *Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Jamaica for the 2025 General Elections*, (4 September 2025), p. 8, https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/Preliminary-Report_Jamaica-2025.pdf.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ See *supra* note 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. Specifically, at about 10:30 a.m., technicians at polling stations were instructed to pause use of the handheld devices until further notice, but that the instruction "was not implemented uniformly".

to continue when technical problems arose. Nevertheless, CARICOM found elderly voters experienced disproportionate difficulty with fingerprint recognition; they recommended updated equipment and improved training.

11. Alternative voting arrangements are also narrow: advance voting in 2025 was exclusively provided to military, police, and poll workers.¹¹ CARICOM argued that nationwide overseas voting remained under discussion because of cost, capacity and fraud-prevention; however, note that Jamaica's diaspora is significant: around 36% to over 40% of people born in Jamaica currently live outside the country.¹²

Election Day Identification Stagnation

12. Jamaica provides an alternative procedure for voters who arrive without their voter identification card. During the 2025 general election, such voters were permitted to establish their identity through verification of personal information followed by an oath or affirmation.¹³ Thus, the OAS did not find that absence of an identification card automatically disenfranchised an elector; but, they reported the procedure lengthened processing times, contributing to queues in which voters (including elderly persons) waited for extended periods in heat.¹⁴
13. CARICOM independently noted that a number of elderly voters lacked identification cards; the resulting oath procedure was time-consuming.¹⁵ It also found that older electors were more likely to encounter difficulty with biometric identification under EVIS, sometimes undergoing multiple fingerprint attempts before officials switched to manual verification.¹⁶

Ballot Secrecy Concerns

14. Indeed, General Comment No. 25 further enshrines the need for States to guarantee secrecy throughout the voting process and to protect electors from being compelled to disclose how they intend to vote or how they have voted.¹⁷ Although the OAS concluded that ballot secrecy was maintained *per se* during the 2025 election, it recorded complaints that “the side walls of the voting booths were not sufficiently high to guarantee the secrecy of their vote”.¹⁸

¹¹ ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF JAMAICA, *Police, Military and Election Day Workers to Vote on August 29*, (24 August 2025), <https://www.ecj.com.jm/police-military-and-election-day-workers-to-vote-on-august-29/>.

¹² INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION, *Migration in Jamaica: A Country Profile 2018*, (2018), <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-jamaica-country-profile-2018>.

¹³ See *supra* note 6, p. 4.

¹⁴ See *supra* note 3.

¹⁵ NARCIS Fern, *General Parliamentary Elections of Jamaica Report*, Caricom Election Observation Mission, (3 September 2025), <https://caricom.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-Report-of-the-CEOM-to-Jamaica-2025-1.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, *General Comment 25: The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service*, (27 August 1996), U.N. Doc. [CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/43c3b339.html), ¶20.

¹⁸ See *supra* note 6, p. 4.

15. More serious concerns arise in relation to visually impaired electors: CARICOM documented an instance in which a visually impaired voter was assisted in marking the ballot and the voter's choice was announced audibly to those present.¹⁹ More broadly, its final report concluded that Jamaica's existing procedure for visually impaired electors does not ensure ballot secrecy, because an elector requiring assistance may have their ballot marked with the assistance of a companion or Presiding Officer in the presence of election personnel and candidate agents.

Inaccessible Procedures for Voters with Disabilities

16. Physical disability is not a reasonable ground for restricting the right to vote and requires effective measures to enable entitled voters to exercise the franchise. OAS in 2025 found that though accommodations were provided in some locations, voters with disabilities and elderly electors were not consistently prioritised.²⁰ In fact, some were required to stand for extended periods or navigate steep staircases even where ground-floor spaces were available. They further noted there was no specific data on the number of voters with disabilities contained in the Voters' List and recommended greater consultation on accessibility measures.²¹
17. Taken as a whole, the observations of the OAS and CARICOM do not suggest that Jamaica's 2025 general election was generally inaccessible or that electors were broadly prevented from voting. However, they do identify specific procedural shortcomings capable of interfering with the equal and effective exercise of the rights guaranteed by Article 25, particularly for elderly voters, persons with disabilities and electors dependent upon alternative identification or registration procedures.

We urge the Committee to seek information on concrete measures being adopted to guarantee the secrecy and accessibility of the ballot for persons with disabilities, including the introduction of accessible ballot formats for visually impaired electors and uniform physical-accessibility standards for polling stations.

Participation of Women in the Public and Political Sphere

Disproportionate Representation in Government

18. Jamaica reported that women held 29% of seats in the House of Representatives during the 2020-25 Parliament, compared with 12.7% in 2015, alongside 38% of Senate seats and approximately 40% of membership on Joint Select Committees.²²

¹⁹ See *supra* note 15, p. 29. In particular, CARICOM says an observer witnessed a visually impaired elector being assisted by the Presiding Officer; the prescribed oaths were not administered, and the officer "announced the voter's selected candidate audibly to those present," which CARICOM described as contrary to best-practice procedures protecting ballot secrecy.

²⁰ See *supra* note 6, p. 4.

²¹ See *supra* note 6, p. 7.

²² GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA, *State Party Fifth Periodic Report*, (5 May 2026), [U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/JAM/5](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/jamaica/doc/CCPR/C/JAM/5), ¶138.

19. Following the September 2025 general election, this representation increased further: nineteen women were elected to the 63-member House of Representatives, representing 30.2% of elected members and the highest number of women elected to the House to date.²³ This progress should be recognised. Nevertheless, women constitute approximately 50.5% of Jamaica's population, and their participation in elected political office remains substantially below their share of the population.²⁴ During the 2025 election, women comprised approximately 30% of Jamaica Labour Party candidates and 35% of People's National Party candidates.²⁵
20. The disparity is greater at the local level: UN Women data based on Jamaica's 2024 local-government election results records only 45 women among 229 elected representatives, or 19.65%.²⁶ This suggests that progress at the national parliamentary level has not been replicated evenly across political decision-making structures. The concern is whether women enjoy the right and opportunity to participate on equal terms, read together with Article 3 of the Covenant.
21. The State party points to the National Policy for Gender Equality, which contemplates temporary special measures and recommends a minimum 30% representation of women among Senate appointments and public-body boards.²⁷ The 2021 regulations cited by the State impose such a minimum for public-body boards.²⁸ However, post-LOIPR consideration indicates that comparable measures have not yet ensured equitable representation throughout Jamaica's elected political institutions. The 2025 OAS Electoral Observation Mission consequently recommended a national discussion on measures capable of promoting the "full and equal participation of women in political structures".²⁹

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²³ See *supra* note 22.

²⁴ WORLD BANK GROUP DATA, *Population, female (% of total population)*, (2022), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>. Data derived in coordination with United Nations Population Division World Population Prospects.

²⁵ See *supra* note 6, p. 15. See also « Women to watch: Female candidates contesting Jamaica's 2025 general election » in *Caribbean National Weekly* (14 August 2025) at <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/posts/women-to-watch-female-candidates-contesting-jamaica-election>.

²⁶ UN WOMEN, *Women in Local Government*, SDG indicator 5.5.1(b), Jamaica, (2025), <https://localgov.unwomen.org/key-statistics>.

²⁷ See *supra* note 22, ¶140. See the policy directly, also, titled « National Policy for Gender Equality » by *The Bureau of Women's Affairs* (Gender Affairs) in Kingston, Jamaica, with support from The Gender Advisory Committee in March 2011 at <https://jis.gov.jm/media/NPGE-JA-FINALwCover213111.pdf>.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Also, Regulation 13(4) of the *Public Bodies Management and Accountability (Nomination, Selection and Appointment to Boards) Regulations, 2021* provides that the membership of a public-body board must consist of at least 30% males and 30% females. Specifically, in Jamaica Gazette, Vol. CXLV, No. 24, (21 March 2022), reg. 13(4), p. 376, <https://www.mof.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/Gazette-for-NSAB-Regs.pdf>.

²⁹ See *supra* note 6, p. 16.

Continuing Barriers to Women in Leadership

22. The 2025 OAS Electoral Observation Mission identified continuing structural barriers affecting women's ability to enter and advance within Jamaican politics.³⁰ Although women increasingly contest elections and occupy senior public positions, the Mission reported that women remain less likely to attain political leadership positions and identified continued disparities in access to some traditionally male-dominated portfolios. It therefore recommended strengthening leadership programmes for women and considering public funding to support such initiatives.
23. Further, Jamaica's existing campaign-finance framework provides no reserved financing or incentives specifically intended to promote women's political participation. The OAS Mission reported that stakeholders considered access to campaign funding an ongoing challenge for women and a potential deterrent for prospective candidates without private wealth or private access to campaign resources.³¹
24. The Mission also received repeated reports of gender stereotyping and gender-based political violence.³² Threats, intimidation and other forms of gender-based violence were identified as continuing obstacles to women's participation, including for prominent women in Jamaican political life. The OAS therefore recommended the codification of specific offences addressing gender-based political violence against women, including female candidates.³³ These barriers are significant when Article 25 is read in tandem with Article 3: formal eligibility to stand for election does not *ipso facto* guarantee equal political participation where unequal access to campaign resources, political leadership structures and protection from gender-based intimidation affects women's ability to exercise political authority.
25. The Centre recognises the substantial progress Jamaica has made in increasing the number of women occupying elected and senior public positions. Nevertheless, the evidence following the 2023 LOIPR indicates that important barriers remain between women's formal political rights and their equal participation in practice.

In light of this information, we urge the Committee to press Jamaica on the concrete measures being taken to increase women's representation in elected political office, particularly at the local level, and on whether temporary special measures contemplated under the National Policy for Gender Equality will be extended or strengthened in relation to electoral politics.

The Committee should further enquire into the implementation of the OAS recommendations concerning women's access to campaign financing, leadership development and sex-disaggregated electoral data.

³⁰ See *supra* note 6, pp. 15-16.

³¹ *Ibid.*

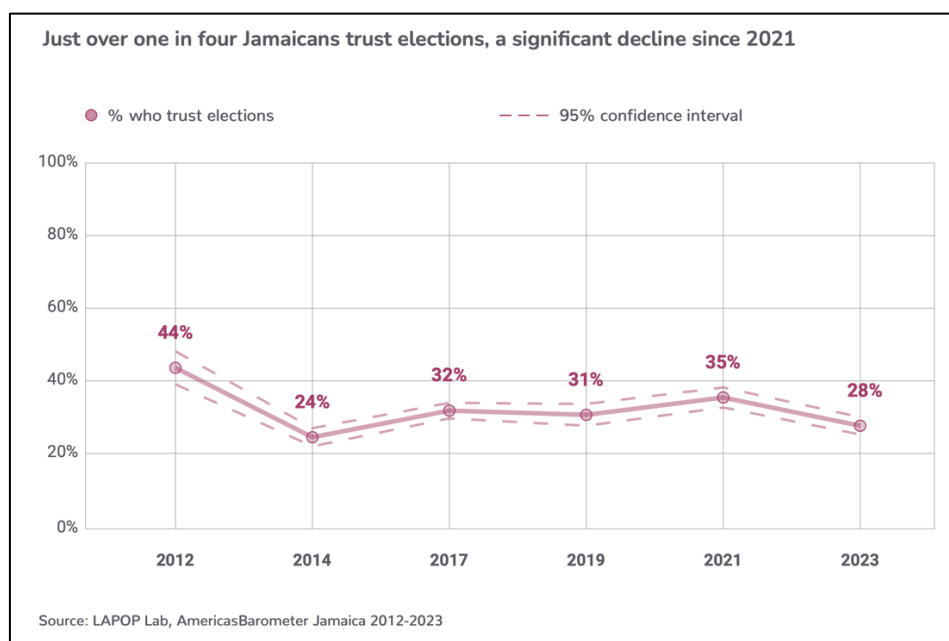
³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Low and Declining Electoral Participation

Perception of Institutional Trust Eroded

26. Public confidence in Jamaica's democratic institutions remains a significant concern despite the strength of the country's formal electoral institutions. The 2023 *AmericasBarometer* country study, published in July 2024, found that support for democracy had declined to 53%, compared with 79% in 2006, whilst satisfaction with the functioning of democracy fell from 45% in 2021 to 28% in 2023, the lowest level recorded in the Jamaican survey series.³⁴



27. These findings should also be considered alongside evidence pointing in the opposite direction. During the 2025 general election, stakeholders interviewed by the OAS Electoral Observation Mission expressed very high levels of confidence and trust in the professionalism of the Electoral Commission of Jamaica and Electoral Office of Jamaica, and both the OAS and CARICOM observed a generally peaceful and professionally administered electoral process.
28. The OAS nevertheless specifically noted that confidence in electoral administration had not translated into higher citizen participation. Certainly, Jamaica possesses electoral institutions that command substantial professional confidence, yet broader public perceptions of democracy, political parties and political integrity remain weak.

³⁴ LEWIS Balford, PLUTOWSKI Luke & RODRÍGUEZ Mariana, « Pulse of Democracy in Jamaica », *LAPOP Lab AmericasBarometer*, (2023), pp. 50-51, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/cgd/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/lapop/jamaica/ABJAM2023-Pulse-of-democracy-final-20240703.pdf>.

Extraordinary Voter Apathy

29. Low electoral participation has become a persistent feature of Jamaican elections. Final Electoral Commission data recorded turnout of only 30.17% in the February 2024 local government elections.³⁵ In the September 2025 general election, approximately 39.5% of registered electors participated.³⁶ The OAS described this level of participation as evidence of “overall disengagement” from the political-electoral process, whilst CARICOM’s final report characterised it as part of a persistently declining trend in recent general elections.³⁷

30. Although turnout increased modestly from the exceptionally low 37.85% recorded in the 2020 general election, it remains substantially below the 48.37% recorded in 2016 and approximately 53% in 2011.³⁸ The longer-term pattern therefore indicates a significant contraction in electoral participation despite the slight recovery in 2025.

RESULTS OF GENERAL ELECTIONS 1944-2016																				
YEAR	NO. OF SEATS	SEATS WON								VOTES CAST				PERCENTAGE ACCEPTED BALLOTS				TOTAL ACCEPTED BALLOTS	TOTAL ELECTORS ON LIST	PERCENT- AGE VOTED
		JLP		PNP		IND		NDM		JLP	PNP	IND	NDM	JLP	PNP	IND	NDM			
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%											
1944	32	22	68.8	5	15.6	5	15.6	-	-	144,661	82,029	122,437	-	41.4	23.5	35.1	-	349,127	633,069	55.15
1949	32	17	53.1	13	40.6	2	6.3	-	-	199,538	203,048	64,593	-	42.7	43.5	13.8	-	467,179	732,217	63.80
1955	32	14	43.8	18	56.3	-	-	-	-	189,929	245,750	50,965	-	39.0	50.5	10.5	-	486,644	761,238	63.93
1959	32	16	50.0	29	90.6	-	-	-	-	247,149	305,642	5,001	-	44.3	54.8	0.9	-	557,792	853,539	65.35
1962	45	26	57.8	19	42.2	-	-	-	-	288,130	279,771	7,878	-	50.0	48.6	1.37	-	575,779	796,540	72.29
1967	53	33	62.3	20	37.7	-	-	-	-	224,180	217,207	1,185	-	50.7	49.1	0.27	-	442,572	543,307	81.46
1972	53	16	30.2	37	69.8	-	-	-	-	205,587	266,927	1,137	-	43.4	56.4	0.24	-	473,651	605,662	78.20
1976	60	13	21.7	47	78.3	-	-	-	-	318,180	417,768	-	-	43.2	56.8	0.00	-	735,948	870,972	84.50
1980	60	51	85.0	9	15.0	-	-	-	-	502,115	350,064	527	-	58.9	41.1	0.06	-	852,706	990,417	86.10
1983	60	60	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	23,363	-	2,692	-	89.7	-	10.3	-	26,055	90,019	28.94
1989	60	15	25.0	45	75.0	-	-	-	-	362,589	473,754	628	-	43.3	56.6	0.08	-	836,971	1,078,760	77.59
1993	60	8	13.3	52	86.7	-	-	-	-	254,680	409,903	3,982	-	38.1	61.3	2.00	-	668,565	1,002,600	66.68
1997	60	10	16.7	50	83.3	-	-	-	-	297,387	429,805	885	36,707	38.57	55.7	0.11	4.76	764,784	1,182,294	65.22
2002	60	26	43.3	34	56.7	-	-	-	-	360,468	396,371	1,162	2,894	47.4	52.1	0.15	0.38	760,895	1,301,334	58.47
2007	60	32	53.3	28	46.7	-	-	-	-	410,438	405,293	421	354	50.3	49.6	0.05	0.04	816,506	1,336,307	61.10
2011	63	21	33.3	42	66.7	-	-	-	-	405,920	464,064	705	263	46.6	53.3	0.08	0.03	870,952	1,648,036	52.85
2016	63	32	50.8	31	49.2	-	-	-	-	437,178	433,629	1,233	223	50.1	49.7	0.14	0.03	872,614	1,824,412	48.37
2020	63	49	77.8	14	22.2					408,376	305,950	1,185		57.07	42.8	0.17		715,511	1,913,410	37.85

Extract from p. 34 of the Director’s report on elections, issued 26 February 2024.

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³⁵ ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF JAMAICA, *Local Government Elections: Report of the Director of Elections*, (26 February 2024), p. 7, <https://www.ecj.com.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Local-Government-Elections-February-26-2024-Report-of-the-Director-of-Elections.pdf>.

³⁶ ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF JAMAICA, *Elections Preliminary Results*, (3 September 2025), <https://www.ecj.com.jm/september-3-2025-elections-preliminary-results>.

³⁷ See *supra* note 6, p. 16.

³⁸ See *supra* note 35, p. 34.

31. Recent polling provides some indication of the attitudes underlying this disengagement. An August 2025 RJRGLEANER-commissioned Don Anderson poll revealed 35% of respondents who said they would not vote cited a lack of confidence in either major political party, while 17.2% said neither party could help them and 15.1% reported never having voted.³⁹ Among voters who were uncertain whether they would participate, lack of confidence in the two parties was again the most frequently cited reason.⁴⁰
32. Article 25 does not impose an obligation upon citizens to vote, and low turnout alone therefore does not establish a violation of the Covenant. The relevant concern is whether persistent disengagement reflects broader conditions that weaken citizens' effective opportunity or willingness to participate in public affairs. Certainly, General Comment No. 25 requires States to take positive measures to ensure the effective exercise of Article 25 rights, including voter-registration and education programmes where necessary.⁴¹
33. CARICOM's 2026 report similarly recommended intensified and more targeted voter and civic education, particularly for young, first-time and marginalised voters, in response to Jamaica's persistently low turnout.⁴² This is especially relevant where declining participation coincides with evidence of distrust, political disillusionment and perceptions that political participation produces limited meaningful outcomes.

Campaign Finance Transparency

34. Jamaica has made significant legislative progress in regulating political financing: in its fifth periodic report, the State describes the Representation of the People Act and accompanying regulations as establishing a robust framework governing party funding and campaign finance, including the National Election Campaign Fund, financial reporting requirements and auditing arrangements.⁴³ The legislation provides contribution and expenditure limits, rules governing permissible donors, reporting obligations and penalties for non-compliance. These developments should be recognised as important safeguards for electoral integrity.

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³⁹ HINDS Lester, « Voter intent turnaround », *Jamaica Gleaner*, (20 August 2025), <https://past.jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20250820/voter-intent-turnaround>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See *supra* note 17, ¶11. In particular, the writing that “[v]oter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of Article 25 rights by an informed community”.

⁴² See *supra* note 15, p. 41.

⁴³ See *supra* note 22, ¶191-198.

35. However, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission's assessment of the 2025 election identified significant gaps between this legal framework *de iure* and its *de facto* operation. Although Jamaican law provides for a mixed public-private campaign-finance system, the OAS found that the available public reimbursement mechanisms have not been used and that campaign financing remains effectively entirely private, with candidates and parties principally dependent on their own resources, party funding and donations from individuals, companies and diaspora groups. The Mission therefore recommended considering alternative advance public-financing arrangements and improving access to existing reimbursement mechanisms.⁴⁴
36. Current rules require donor and campaign-finance reports, but the OAS found that disclosure occurs only after elections, meaning that electors have no corresponding right to review campaign-finance disclosures before casting their ballots.⁴⁵ Although submitted reports are formally public, the Mission further found that they are not consistently published in a timely or user-friendly manner. It consequently recommended proactive publication of ordinary and final disclosure reports and consideration of partial financial disclosures during the campaign itself.⁴⁶
37. The OAS reported that compliance monitoring depends heavily upon self-declarations submitted by parties, candidates and contributors, and that it could identify no clear mechanism for coordination between the ECJ, the Integrity Commission and fiscal authorities to verify the traceability of electoral resources.⁴⁷ The Mission therefore recommended greater ECJ oversight authority and regular institutional data-sharing, and should be reflected on by the Committee.⁴⁸

The Centre further urges the Committee to seek information on *de facto* implementation of Jamaica's campaign-finance framework, particularly the introduction of meaningful pre-election disclosure, the timely and accessible publication of financial reports, stronger independent verification of declarations and formal coordination between the ECJ, Integrity Commission and relevant financial authorities.

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⁴⁴ See *supra* note 6, p. 13.

⁴⁵ See *supra* note 6, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Systemic Barriers to Civic Education and Participatory Access

Uneven Implementation of the National Civics Curriculum

38. Jamaica has created a Civics Education into the National Standards Curriculum.⁴⁹ However, implementation has not been uniform. Shortly after the issuance of the Committee's 2023 LOIPR, the Ministry of Education reported that Civics was being delivered in roughly 600 schools (representing approximately half of Jamaica's schools).⁵⁰ At that time, the Minister stated that the Government expected "all primary and secondary schools to have implemented Civics by the end of the academic year".⁵¹
39. However, subsequent official reporting indicates that this nationwide implementation target had not yet been fully realised. In its 2024 TREND Progress Report, the Ministry of Education and Youth assessed implementation of the recommendation to place greater emphasis on civics, history and citizenship at 52% achievement, again reporting that Civics was being taught in 584 schools.⁵² The report identified continued implementation measures, including support to increase the required focus on Civics and the communication and promotion of policies supporting implementation of the National Standards Curriculum.
40. A curriculum that is only established *de iure* but unevenly implemented *de facto* creates different levels of access to civic knowledge among students depending on the schools they attend. This is particularly relevant to Article 25 where such education is intended to equip future voters with the information and competencies necessary to participate effectively in public affairs. Available implementation data indicates a continuing need ensuring consistent access across the education system.

Insufficient Scope on Young and First-Time Voters

41. The scope of Jamaica's formal Civics programme also raises questions concerning the period immediately preceding electoral eligibility. The Ministry stratifies the programme into three stages: Grades 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9. The dedicated programme therefore concludes several years before many students become eligible to vote at age eighteen. Whilst civic learning may occur through other subjects or programmes at the upper-secondary level, the available national framework does not identify an equivalent dedicated Civics programme specifically targeted at students approaching their first opportunity to register and vote.

⁴⁹ JAMAICA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH, *National Standards Curriculum Grades 7-9 : Civic Education*, (2021), p. 3, <https://moey.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/PRINT-READY-Grade-7-9-Civics-National-Standards-Curriculum-Units-August-2022-V.9-1.pdf>.

⁵⁰ JAMAICA INFORMATION SERVICE, *Civics Education Being Taught in Approximately 600 Schools*, (14 August 2023), <https://jis.gov.jm/civics-education-being-taught-in-approximately-600-schools/>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & YOUTH, *Transforming Education for National Development: Year One Report*, (March 2024), <https://trend-ja.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/MoEYTREND-Progress-Report-Formatted-Version-13-April-22-2024-1.pdf>.

42. A UNICEF Jamaica U-Report poll conducted from 8-29 August 2025 engaged more than 500 young people aged 15-30.⁵³ 66% reported being registered to vote, yet only 30% said they were very likely to vote, whilst 36% said they were unlikely to vote, citing distrust and disillusionment with the political system.⁵⁴ Among the 19% who reported not being registered, respondents cited disinterest in voting, distrust in political parties and logistical barriers to the electoral process.⁵⁵
43. The issue is therefore not that Jamaica lacks civic education, but rather, that there remains a gap between the State's development of a national Civics programme and the consistent, targeted preparation of citizens for the actual exercise of Article 25 rights. The existing school programme represents an important foundation, but evidence of incomplete implementation, its concentration in the earlier school years, and continuing disengagement among young Jamaicans suggest a need for a more sustained approach extending into the period in which students become eligible to register and vote.

In light of this information, we respectfully urge the Committee to press Jamaica on concrete, time-bound measures to ensure the uniform implementation of the national Civics curriculum across all primary and secondary schools.

Furthermore, the Committee should clarify extending dedicated civic and voter education into the upper-secondary years to ensure that young Jamaicans approaching voting age receive practical preparation on voter registration, electoral participation, and the exercise of their Article 25 rights.

Conclusion

44. In conclusion, the issues outlined in this report raise continuing concerns regarding the effective enjoyment of political participation rights in Jamaica. Whilst important institutional and legal measures are in place, barriers relating to electoral accessibility, women's participation, declining electoral engagement, and civic education continue to affect the practical exercise of rights under Article 25.
45. The Centre therefore urges the Committee to focus its dialogue with Jamaica on ensuring accessible electoral procedures, strengthening women's equal participation in political life, addressing persistent disengagement and weaknesses in campaign-finance transparency, and expanding effective civic and voter education, particularly for young and first-time voters. These issues are closely connected to the effective exercise of Article 25 rights and should be addressed to strengthen meaningful and inclusive participation in Jamaica's democratic processes.

⁵³ UNICEF JAMAICA, « Life in Jamaica », (August 2025), <https://jamaica.ureport.in/opinion/4149/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

46. This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact:

Simay ÖZGENTÜRK / Civil Society Representative
agolatz@cvia.ch

Samad QURAISHI / Executive Director
squraishi@cvia.ch

Centre for Voters Initiative & Action Inc.
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, P.O. 294
Washington, D.C. 20004