

Jamaica

Jamaica is a small island nation in the Caribbean of around 2.8 million people. The country obtained its independence from the UK in 1962. It remains a Commonwealth realm with the Queen of England acting as head of state and a Governor General.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>Preferential treatment is given to a religion or religion in general</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>	<u>There is state funding of at least some religious schools</u> <u>Religious schools have powers to discriminate in admissions or employment</u> <u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in at least some public schools (without secular or humanist alternatives)</u>	<u>Some religious courts rule in civil or family matters on a coercive or discriminatory basis</u> <u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u> <u>Religious groups control some public or social services</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is somewhat restricted</u> <u>Criticism of religion is restricted in law or a de facto 'blasphemy' law is in effect</u>
<u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u> <u>Anomalous discrimination by local or provincial authorities, or overseas territories</u>		<u>Religious courts or tribunals rule directly on some family or 'moral' matters; it is legally an opt-in system, but the possibility of social coercion is very clear</u>	<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u> <u>Concerns that secular or religious authorities interfere in specifically religious freedoms</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The constitution protects freedom of religion and conscience, and the government generally respects this. There is no designated state religion, and people in the country are free to publicly and privately worship in any religion of their choosing, although some African-based religious practices (obeah) are outlawed, even though in practice this is difficult to enforce. It is not necessary for religious groups to register with the government, however if they do they receive special privileges – including tax exemptions, and the right for members of the clergy to visit worshippers of their religion while incarcerated.

Education and children's rights

A significant number of public schools in Jamaica are owned and/or operated by churches. The default position under education legislation is that public schools have the right to require all students to engage in worship, although parents/guardians can opt their children out of this. However in practice opt outs are exceedingly rare, and the usual practice is for most, if not all, children in public schools to participate in routine worship. No secular or humanist alternative is

taught or recognized in the schools.

Family, community and society

In the past, Jamaica's Christians represented as much as 98% of the population. There has been a recent fall in the number of Christians who now represent about 68% of the population. There are significant populations of religious minorities, most notably Rastafarians, and an increasing population of Muslims. Those who identify as having no religion have increased in recent decades and now represent about 22% of the population. In this regard, while there is no formal organization that publicly represents the interests of non-believers, there is a Jamaican Secular Humanist community on social media.

Christianity in Politics and Public Life

While there is no single established church or state religion, the Jamaican State formally recognizes some churches through legislation. For example the Moravian Church in Jamaica is formally established under an Act of Parliament; and in 2013 another Act of Parliament was passed to formally establish the Church of Haile Selassie I. There is also official symbolic deference to religion, for example the Jamaican National Anthem contains explicit Christian references - despite the significant non-Christian and non-believer communities identified above.

Christianity is further systematically privileged in public life, with Jamaican leaders openly affirming their belief in the Christian god in their public capacity. For example there is the annual National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, which is usually attended by both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition as well as several Members of Parliament. This public affirmation of Christianity is institutional and occurs at all levels of government. For example it is the usual practice at many government departments and agencies to open important meetings and other proceedings with prayer. No other religion enjoys these privileges in Jamaica.

The dominant influence of Christianity in public life is often keenly felt on human rights issues. Jamaica still outlaws consensual, adult same-sex sexual activity, with anal intercourse being punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment at hard labour. The Churches oppose any attempt to repeal the law or otherwise to recognize the human rights of sexual minorities. In June 2014 a senior clergyman publicly stated that any political party which pursues decriminalization of homosexuality will be punished at the next general election by voters who are also church-goers. The Government has made no move to decriminalize same-sex sexual activity or to otherwise grant legal recognition of the human rights of sexual minorities.

Finally, the security forces of the State, which includes the Jamaica Constabulary Force and the Jamaica Defence Force, maintain chaplains, and Christian ethics and worship are integral to the training of members of both forces.

Religious Minorities

Members of the Rastafarian religion have in the past been subject to discrimination due to societal prejudices but attitudes towards them have changed. They have continued to claim unfair treatment by the police but currently much of this appears to be linked to their sacramental use of marijuana and not necessarily their religious beliefs. Recreational use of marijuana is illegal in Jamaica.

Homosexuality

Jamaica still outlaws sex between men, punishable by up to 10 years hard labour. Some analysts

consider Jamaica one of the most homophobic countries on earth. Church groups, including representatives from the largest denomination “the Church of God”, have organised rallies against attempts at decriminalising homosexuality, although the current government have made no attempts to repeal the anti-LGBT laws.

[<jamaicahumanistsociety.org/jamaicans-for-secular-humanism-responds-to-christian-protest-against-equality/>](http://jamaicahumanistsociety.org/jamaicans-for-secular-humanism-responds-to-christian-protest-against-equality/)

Currently Jamaica does not recognise rape within marriage though there have been moves to widen the definition to protect women within marriage. Religious groups have been at the forefront of protests against any change to the law.

[<jamaicahumanistsociety.org/a-secular-humanist-take-on-the-marital-rape-law/>](http://jamaicahumanistsociety.org/a-secular-humanist-take-on-the-marital-rape-law/)