

JAMAICA

Date of Elections: 15 December 1983

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Representatives following the premature dissolution of this body. General elections had previously taken place on 30 October 1980.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Jamaica comprises a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The Senate consists of 21 members appointed by the Governor-General: 13 on the advice of the Prime Minister and 8 on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition.

The House of Representatives is composed of 60 members elected for 5 years.

Electoral System

All citizens of Jamaica residing in the country on the date of the compilation of the register of electors, as well as citizens of the British Commonwealth who are resident in Jamaica on the said date and have so been for at least 12 months immediately preceding it, and who are 21 years of age or more may vote for members of Parliament. The insane, persons under a sentence of death or who serve or are under a sentence of imprisonment of or exceeding six months, persons convicted of electoral fraud and persons holding certain offices connected with the elections may not be registered as electors.

Electoral registers are normally revised before each election. Voting is not compulsory.

A candidate for election as member of the House of Representatives or appointment to the Senate must be a Commonwealth citizen of the age of 21 years or upwards who has been ordinarily resident in Jamaica for the 12 months immediately preceding the date of his nomination or appointment and who is not insane, bankrupt, owing allegiance to a foreign State, under a sentence of death or serving or under a sentence of imprisonment of or exceeding six months. Disqualified for nomination or appointment are public officers, judges of the highest courts, certain persons linked to government contracts, members of the defence force (unless excepted) and (for nomination) persons holding an office connected with elections.

For the purpose of electing members of the House of Representatives, Jamaica is divided into 60 constituencies. Each returns one member by simple majority vote.

Vacant seats in the House of Representatives are filled through by-elections. Vacancies in the Senate are filled by appointment made by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 25 November 1983, Prime Minister Edward Seaga (Jamaica Labour Party - JLP) called for general elections to be held three weeks later, two years before schedule. The grounds were that former Prime Minister Michael Manley, leader of the opposition People's National Party (PNP) had asked for Mr. Seaga to resign his portfolio as Finance Minister and the latter sought a vote of confidence for his austerity programme, which was linked with aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Economic issues dominated the campaign. On Nomination Day (29 November), 54 House of Representatives seats went to JLP candidates since they were unopposed. The PNP boycotted the elections, accusing the Government of breaking an agreement not to call a poll until compilation of a new electoral register. On election day, the conservative JLP, opposed by minor parties and independents in only six constituencies (in which there was an estimated 55% turnout), won all 60 House seats and formed a one-party legislature. On 19 December, a new Cabinet headed by Mr. Seaga was sworn in.

Statistics

1. *Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives*

Political Group	Number of Seats
Jamaica Labour Party (JLP)	60