



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Jamaica

June 2025



**JAMAICANS
FOR JUSTICE**

Context

Jamaica's enabling environment for civil society is supported by a democratic framework and protected by the [2011 Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms](#). However, it faces growing challenges, including selective government engagement, hostile rhetoric from public officials, and efforts to delegitimise civil society and anti-corruption bodies. A Joint Select Committee of Parliament is currently reviewing proposed constitutional amendments. Despite civil society organisations (CSOs) submitting written recommendations in 2024/25, they have not yet been invited to present them in person, and there is no indication that their input is meaningfully being considered.

Parliamentarians have publicly labelled CSOs as “criminal enablers” or “political”, triggering threatening online responses from supporters and contributing to a chilling effect on civic participation. With general elections expected by September 2025, political tensions are rising, and CSOs face increasing risks of intimidation, disinformation, and reputational attacks, further constraining civic space.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Jamaica's [Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, 2011](#) guarantees freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, generally upheld in practice. According to a recently released [report](#) by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Jamaica is now ranked 26th on the World Press Freedom Index, down from the 24th position held in 2024. Accordingly, there have been calls to address the underlying reasons such as fast-tracking the amendment to the Access to Information Act, as noted in [media reports](#). CSOs also face online harassment from the governing political party's supporters, with Jamaicans for Justice, a local CSO, [reporting](#) several threatening and menacing comments via social media and calls to its office following an April 2025 [protest](#) against police violence. While the protest was approved by the police, the head of the police federation labelled the organisation as a [terrorist](#), with no public sanction received from the police commissioner. As seen in other [media reports](#), there is a trend of attacks against human rights defenders and other state institutions that criticise the government and decisions.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

Jamaica's legal framework supports civil society through the 2011 Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and the [Charities Act](#), which governs CSO registration with clear but sometimes cumbersome requirements. The Charities Act's [regulations](#) were updated in 2022. The framework is conducive, allowing CSOs to operate freely, with no significant restrictive legislation introduced in 2024–2025. However, compliance with the U.S. Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), implemented in Jamaica since 2014 with requirements reflected in the 2022 Regulations, imposes administrative burdens on smaller CSOs, such as complex financial reporting requirements, which strain their limited resources. While the legal environment remains supportive, bureaucratic hurdles and FATCA-related obligations challenge smaller organisations' operational capacity. Streamlining registration processes and reducing compliance burdens would strengthen the enabling environment for civil society, particularly for grassroots groups advocating for marginalised communities. The [Jamaica Legal Information Portal \(JLIP\)](#), launched in 2024, provides opportunity to enhance access to legal resources, aiding CSO advocacy. However, it is not yet finalised.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Funding for Jamaican CSOs is moderately accessible, primarily through international donors like USAID, the European Union, and private foundations, with limited local contributions. The absence of restrictions on foreign funding supports operations, but smaller CSOs face sustainability challenges due to reliance on external sources. In 2024–2025, USAID’s foreign policy ending HIV programmes, and general international aid dwindling has reduced funding for Jamaican CSOs, [leading to the closure](#) of some smaller NGOs and financial struggles for others. Local initiatives, such as community fundraisers and faith-based partnerships, offer some support but are insufficient for long-term sustainability. Strengthening domestic funding mechanisms, such as private sector partnerships and advocating for consistent international support are critical.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Government-civil society interaction in Jamaica is limited and often lacks depth. The [Open Government Partnership \(2024–2026\)](#) includes commitments to justice and human rights, but actual implementation on agreed priorities is slow. The 2002 [Access to Information Act \(ATI Act\)](#) enables CSOs to request government data, but delays in responses and exemptions for security-related information hinder transparency. The [Data Protection Act](#) in Jamaica has been used to [circumvent](#) the ATI Act, hindering public access to information. While the Data Protection Act aims to safeguard personal information, some state agencies are reportedly using it as a tool to deny information requests, potentially undermining transparency and accountability. CSOs’ input invited by the State is sometimes tokenistic. For example, in 2024, several civil society groups made written submissions to parliament on proposed job descriptions for parliamentarians but according to [news reports](#) not a single recommendation was accepted.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Jamaica’s free press, supported by the 2013 [decriminalization of defamation](#), amplifies CSO contributions, such as campaigns for women’s rights and environmental protection. However, parliamentarians have labelled CSOs as “[criminal enablers](#)” or “[political](#)” in 2024–2025, particularly when criticising police actions or government policies, prompting menacing and threatening comments from their social media followers. These [statements](#) undermine CSO legitimacy, creating a hostile environment for advocacy. Historical accusations of CSOs collaborating with opposition groups persist in public discourse. Positive shifts include CSOs leveraging social media platforms like X to amplify their voices, as seen in environmental and gender-based violence elimination campaigns. Countering divisive rhetoric from parliamentarians and promoting inclusive narratives through public education are critical to fostering a supportive culture for civil society’s role in democratic participation. While there is freedom of assembly, government’s pronouncements can undermine civil society. For example, in April 2025, Jamaicans for Justice organised a peaceful protest against police violence and encouraged citizens to wear black in solidarity. The prime minister as head of government [wore blue](#), along with key members of the government, in support of the police which heightened tensions between online supporters and the civil society group. Media reporting on civil society is relatively objective. However, some media houses have been [accused of biased](#) reporting by civil society groups on governance and national security matters.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Jamaica's digital environment is open, with [no reported](#) internet shutdowns or censorship in 2024–2025. However, there have been increased [reports](#) of cyber-attacks. There is a [Data Protection Act of 2020 \(DPA\)](#) which regulates data handling and privacy. However, despite the DPA, the office of the information commissioner has raised [concerns](#) about several instances of data breaches, suggesting that some private companies are not adhering to the law by ensuring sufficient measures are in place to mitigate breaches or by notifying data subjects when there is a breach. In 2024, the government announced its [legislative intent](#) to introduce a misinformation law. While misinformation must be addressed, it raises concerns about potential restrictions on dissenting voices, as vague definitions could target CSO criticism. The National Identification System (NIDS) [raises privacy concerns](#) due to biometric data collection, despite government assurances. Online harassment of human rights defenders by non-state actors persists, though there has been no state-sponsored cyberattacks targeted at CSOs in the past year.

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next four months, Jamaican CSOs will face challenges such as criticism and bad publicity from supporters of parliamentarians as the general election draws near. Opportunities include the OGP commitments. CSOs need advocacy training, domestic funding, and inclusive government dialogue to leverage these opportunities and counter restrictive measures.

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