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EDITORIAL: The gangs of Gordon House sap support for democracy

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Jamaicans know instinctively that democracy, when it works, is the best form of [government](#).

But the gangs of Gordon House, the [political parties](#) that have alternated in office for more than half a century - with relatively little to show for their efforts - make it difficult for people to hold faith with democracy's ideals and the legitimacy of its institutions.

Or, as a recent study by researchers at the Mona campus of the University of the [West Indies](#) revealed, support among Jamaicans has been on a steady downward drift.

Four years ago, for example, 77 per cent of Jamaicans - measured by people's embrace of the idea on a scale of one to seven - held that democracy was a good ideal. In the recent survey, it is 70 per cent.

Significantly, too, there is a wide gap between people's support for democracy and how they perceive it to be working to the benefit of the country and themselves.

For instance, only 44 per cent of the people in this survey, which was part of a wider study of attitudes towards democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, were satisfied with its performance in [Jamaica](#). In 2006, that number was nearly 52 per cent.

On the other hand, 56 per cent of Jamaicans were dissatisfied with the country's democracy. Bluntly, Jamaica was sixth from the bottom among 25 Latin American and Caribbean states studied as part of the survey coordinated by Vanderbilt University of the [United States](#).

What ought to be especially worrying to people who want democracy's survival in Jamaica is the erosion of trust, after upward movements in 2008, for many of the institutions that underpin it.

ratings dip

Rated on a 100-point scale, belief among Jamaicans that elections are worthy dipped four and a half points to 43.2, while that trust in the Parliament fell seven points to 40.2.

It may not be surprising, given recent events, including his personal role in the Christopher Coke extradition scandal and the state of national affairs, that trust for Prime Minister Bruce Golding and in his office plummeted nearly 15 points to 38.8 per cent.

Yet, the political parties have a greater trust deficit with the Jamaican people than the prime minister. Their credibility rating on the scale was 33.5, down from 41.4 in 2008.

Few, if anyone, would be surprised by these results and the fact that the army (the media and the Electoral Office apart) has emerged with greater credibility. In the chaos of Jamaica, the army represents a sense of order and discipline.

This atrophying of Jamaica's democracy is primarily the blame of the political parties, whose crude pursuit of power has run roughshod over national priorities.

The upshot: Little or no economic growth for more than a quarter century; high unemployment; high crime; a tribalised political culture with its garrison communities; and diminished faith in Jamaica's future by the country's population.

If the parties want to regain their relevance and have a role in the rescue of Jamaica's democracy, they must undertake urgent reform, including:

Eschewing the culture of violence and breaking their links with criminal gangs and organised crime;

Bringing transparency to their operations, including their financing;

Recruiting competent managers to the ranks;

Establishing credible succession schemes that reward talent and competence, instead of long service.

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