Paramilitary Policing in Jamaica
Jamaican Lives Matter

Consequences, causes and alternatives

CLS Monthly Meeting – 5 July 2026

Not formally paramilitary…

- Jamaica does not have a formal standalone paramilitary police force, though its primary law enforcement agency, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), operates with a distinct military structure and frequently employs specialized paramilitary-style squads for high-threat crime-fighting operations supported by Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) soldiers.
- Because of its founding in 1867, the JCF is modeled on the Royal Irish Constabulary and is historically structured with a military-style rank system rather than operating purely as a civilian policing body.
- But as we shall see, formal or not, the Jamaican police specialise in suppression, making sure our inner city youth are kept in their place as were their forebears on the plantations – some of the time.
- Steve Cushion will examine the history of colonial policing in detail after I have finished my presentation.

Public safety and social justice are twinned

- In our conditions, public safety and social justice are twinned. When there is equality of opportunity and people are treated fairly and believe that they are treated fairly, they tend to comply with the rules that guarantee them fair treatment, and support the institutions that enforce these rules. When they are treated unfairly there is alienation from rules, law and institutions. Law and law enforcement become and are seen as oppressive tools.
- In most societies, the law and law enforcement tend to be downward directed. This was certainly true of Jamaica. The vagrancy laws were seen as such. And I believe that the ganja laws and laws regulating vending are also regarded by many as anti-poor and oppressive. These, we suspect, are not consensus laws.

- Anthony Harriot t– 2009 Grace Kennedy Lecture

Anti-Gang efforts a distraction

- The increasing number of police killings in Jamaica is a human rights problem in itself. But the ruthless iron-fist policing of which it is a part hides the underlying driving force - a divisive, unjust, unequal and moribund economic model that requires ever more force to delay its ultimate collapse. It is an ideal tool – it not only suppresses dissent whether political or criminal, but it creates an enemy, the gangs / 'marauding criminals', to justify the repressive apparatus in the minds of the majority. It divides us as immigrants are used in other places. The quote is below from a 2015 paper by Horace Levy surely also applies to Jamaica:

> Many Central American governments appear to be using their highly publicized crackdowns on gangs to avoid taking action on key issues such as exclusion, inequality, and the lack of job creation. In other words, gangs have become convenient scapegoats on which to blame the region's problems and through which those in power attempt to maintain a particular status quo.

Uniforms and guns tells it all

Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF- the police) and Jamaica Defence Force (JDF – the armed forces)

The police red-stripe uniform was replaced with a blue military-type uniform from 2022

The police primarily carry a Glock 9mm pistol. But now they are usually seen with MP5 submachine guns, M16 assault rifles and 5.56 carbines

No military fatigues for community police

The traditional police uniform—once an unmistakable symbol of law, order, and public service—has increasingly been replaced by military-style fatigues. The traditional uniform, with its distinctive red seam, has long symbolised authority, professionalism, visibility, and accountability. It should be brought back for community police.

Dave. O Allen June 2026

Latoya Bulgin – 17 May 2026

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2054570625944545

The video footage of the sad shooting and killing of Latoya Bulgin aka Buju who was seated in the Voxy seen in the video

The gruesome killing of Latoya Bulgin (1)

The CCTV video clip shows a policeman, armed with a high-powered rifle, standing at the driver's door of a black Voxy van , speaking with the driver. The policeman then stands in front of the vehicle, to the left. The left front wheel of the car turns away from him to the right, and the car moves slightly forward.

The cop fires one shot from a handgun directly at the driver, through the windshield. He then walks over to the right side while aiming his weapon at her.

Less than a minute later, the unresponsive woman is pulled out of the vehicle by another cop, also with a high-powered rifle, and placed initially on the road. The officer who shot her then grasps her arms and the other holds her legs, and they swing her body unto the back of a police pickup (beside some tyres) and the back door (tailgate) of the pickup is slammed shut, after eight attempts, against her body. As it is driving away, the tailgate falls open, exposing her.
Michael Abrahams – gynacologist / columnist

The unconvincing excuse given for throwing her into the back of the pick-up was to get her quickly to hospital.

The gruesome killing of Latoya Bulgin (2)

Footage circulating on social media shows a police officer firing at a vehicle during a protest on Sunday in Granville, in Jamaica's north-western parish of St James. The bullet hit Latoya Bulgin, 45, affectionately known as "Buju", was a mother of two and a businesswoman who was behind the wheel of the vehicle.

According to the Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM), the police officers were "conducting crowd control duties" during a protest against a previous police shooting, in which 17-year-old Tjey Edwardson was killed on 12 May.

In the video, Bulgin's minivan is seen stationary at the side of the road as several people climb out. Police officers can be seen standing nearby. With one of the side doors still open, the vehicle starts to pull back out into the road.

Apparently without warning, an officer standing a few feet in front of the vehicle pulls a handgun and shoots at the driver, amid screams and cries from people nearby. Some people are seen running.

Police officers are then seen dragging Bulgin's limp body out of the car and on to the ground before putting her in the back of a police pickup truck. The officers do not appear to make any attempt to offer first aid to the injured woman.

Bulgin was taken to hospital where she was pronounced dead. The Guardian

Extensive comment and coverage

Gleaner Search for Latoya Bulgin

Cop claims self-defence as bail bid fails in Bulgin murder case | News

4 Jun 2026 ... WESTERN BUREAU:The lawyers representing Constable Andrew Wilson, the policeman charged with murder in connection with the killing of **Latoya** ...

Michael Abrahams | The gruesome killing of Latoya Bulgin

26 May 2026 ... While watching the TVJ Prime Time News on Sunday, May 17, I saw a report that covered a fatal police shooting in the community of Granville ...

Latoya Bulgin incident calls for urgent need to train police officers

9 Jun 2026 ... THE EDITOR, Madam:The unfortunate, fatal shooting of **Latoya Bulgin** in Montego Bay last week has sparked a lot of public outrage, ...

A watershed moment for policing in Jamaica | Letters

4 Jun 2026 ... While the people of Granville welcome the Director of Public Prosecutions' ruling that the police officer involved in the shooting death of ...

Imani Tafari-Ama | The State cannot continue to 'Serve and Protect ...

14 Jun 2026 ... The public killing of **Latoya Bulgin** in Granville, St James, was a chilling reflection of the deep contradictions embedded within Jamaica's ...

INDECOM appeals for witnesses in fatal police shooting of woman ...

18 May 2026 ... The Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) is

A watershed moment for policing in Jamaica?

- While the people of Granville welcome the Director of Public Prosecutions' ruling that the police officer involved in the shooting death of Latoya "Buju" Bulgin should be charged with murder, this moment marks a watershed day for policing, accountability, and the use of force in Jamaica.
- Since January 2025, more than 450 people have reportedly died in encounters involving the security forces. The public receive a familiar narrative — armed civilians / criminals confronted the police, officers responded, and lethal force was deemed necessary. The video evidence of the daylight shooting of Latoya Bulgin challenged that narrative.

O. DAVE ALLEN

- Latoya Bulgin was not a criminal of course. The police had threatened to impound her car because she presented an overseas driving licence instead of a local one. She was part of a peaceful protest concerning the police killing of her nephew in the same community just one week before. She had had an argument at that time with the same officer who shot her.

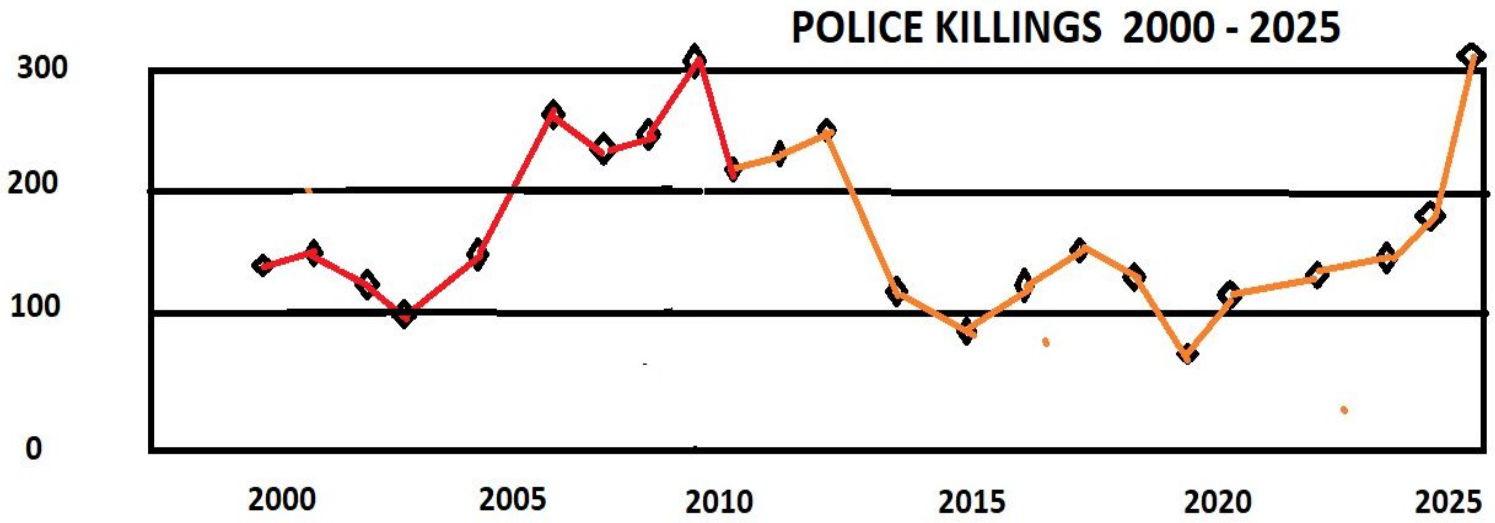
A watershed moment in 1999?

- On April 20, 1999, Brenda Duncan was controversially killed in Grants Pen, Kingston. Police said she was among a group of persons who attempted to loot a store. It has never been confirmed who fired the shot that killed Duncan, a 25-year-old mother of two children, who was three months pregnant.
- This occurred during the ‘Gas Riots, a three-day protest in which the police used excessive force. Along with the Michael Gayle* case (below) it lead to the formation of **Jamaicans for Justice** a support and advocacy group that has been very active and prominent in Jamaica ever since.

* Police beating death of twenty-six-year-old **Michael Gayle.** Gayle, who was mentally ill, died on 23 August 1999 of injuries he sustained after attempting to pass through a police and army road block two days earlier. He was subjected to such a severe beating by police and army officers that he suffered a traumatic rupture of his stomach lining

The extent of police killings in Jamaica

- **Police killings increased in 2025 to 311, a 65% increase over 2024, and in the first six months of 2026 another 159 such killings . Over 3,000 recorded since 2000.** In a 24-hour period, 9-10 June 2026, 11 persons were killed by the police**.** Most are targeted at poor, inner-city youth whose deaths go un-noticed.



Killing the vulnerable

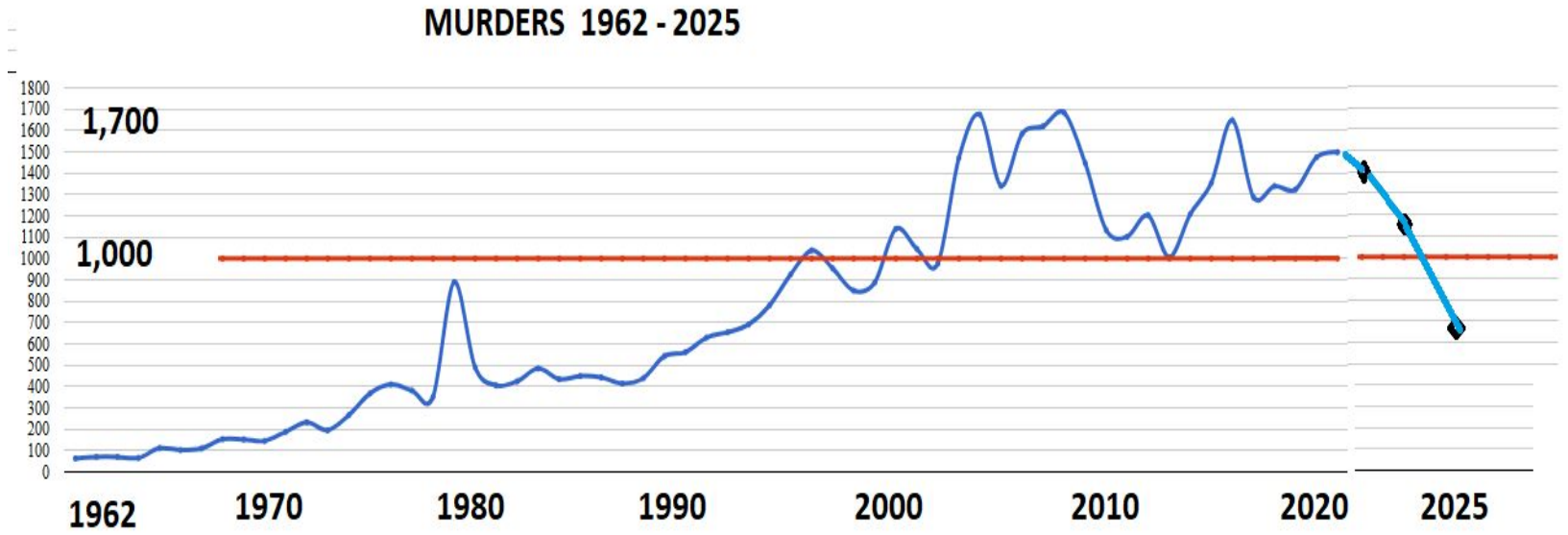
- There is a growing number of persons identified as mentally ill or in crisis who are among those killed.

- Over the three-year period, from 2023 to 2025, at least 60 such individuals were fatally shot by the security forces — 16 in 2023, 21 in 2024, 23 up to April 2025

- Michael Gayle in 1999 was not the only one.

Conversely, the murder rate has dropped

- **Jamaica's murder rate plummeted to 673 in 2025, a 40% reduction on 2024 and the lowest level since 1991 (now 24 per 100,000, global average is 7.4)**
- 2026 (half) 265 2025: 673 2024: 1,141 2023: 1,393 2022:



Categories of murder in Jamaica

- **60% Organized Gang Violence:** These groups use firearms to exert territorial control over communities, protect illicit operations, and enforce extortion rackets.
- **10% Reprisals and Retaliation:** Cycles of revenge between rival factions or families
- **20% Interpersonal Disputes:** within neighborhoods or among individuals who know each other stemming from domestic violence, escalating altercations, and arguments over resources or personal matters.
- **5% Acquisitive Crimes & Hard Criminality:**committed during the course of a robbery and contract killings.

The experience of the Peace Management Initiative, intervening in gang disputes before deaths occur, showed that gang-related murders are sometimes little different from interpersonal murders, arising over disputes about control, property, etc. Disillusioned youngsters can be diverted from joining gangs. There is a difference between criminal violence and community violence.

Official reasons for Jamaica's lower murder rate

- **Intelligence-Led Policing -** data-driven and intelligence-gathering operations.
- **Enhanced Capacity - Institutional and Technological Transformation.** The Holness administration has tripled funding for National Security, from $26bn between 2008-2015 to $87 billion 2016-2024, approximately 1.4% of GDP - Caribbean average is about 0.9% .
- **Legislation:** stronger anti-gang legislation to better prosecute organized crime.
- **Crime Stop Jamaica** saw a massive 66% increase in tips over a two-year period, demonstrating a positive shift toward citizens speaking out.
- **Targetted, Aggressive Anti-Gang Operations** focus on dismantling criminal syndicates, intercepting criminals, and recovering illegally trafficked firearms.
- **States of Public Emergency (SOEs):** still used in high-risk areas to temporarily disrupt gang activities and reduce the daily national murder rate.
- **Community and Social Interventions -** Beyond law enforcement, leaders emphasize community development and youth-focused skills training helping reduce the underlying risk factors that fuel gang recruitment.
- **Social Cohesion:** Strengthening trust between communities and law enforcement have helped to sustain long-term violence reduction.

Or is it the increased willingness of the police to shoot and kill suspects that has reduced the murder rate?

- Is the murder rate down because the police are killing suspects in greater numbers, acting as judge, jury and executioner, with impunity provided from the top?
- Public opinion is divided.
- Some would say, quietly, it is a bargain worth having.
- Others believe it creates resentment, anger and anti-social behaviour that only adds to the problem.

Official reasons for increased police killings

- Addressing concerns about the increasing number of killings by police, Prime Minister Holness said "Obviously, the JCF's increased activities in interdicting criminals and in dealing with the gangs would have caused a significant increase in the loss of life of those who challenged them. But I think the country should also understand that the gang warfare is at a level where we must respond and respond decisively."

- Officials suggest a shifting criminal landscape in which gunmen are more coordinated and increasingly willing to engage security forces.

- Some senior investigators suggest that amendments to the Firearms Act — which introduced mandatory minimum sentences for possession of prohibited weapons — may be influencing the behaviour of armed offenders. "Since the amendment to the Firearms Act, more criminals choose to confront the police. More confrontations will lead to more fatal shootings," the sources stated.

Other reasons for increased police killings

- **The "Short-Circuit" Strategy:** Witnesses and advocacy groups frequently report that extrajudicial killings are used as an unofficial alternative to arrest and lengthy criminal trials, in a heavily back-logged and inefficient court system . The phrase **"informa fi dead"** (informer must die) refers to a pervasive subculture in Jamaica where citizens are violently intimidated by criminals to stay silent.
- **A culture of police impunity:** police are rarely held accountable or convicted, with systematic issues such as tampering with evidence . Official data suggests that about 1% to 2% of on-duty fatal shooting investigations result in criminal charges, and convictions remain extremely rare. Between January 2024 and September 2025, 13 police officers were charged with murder
- **Oversight and Accountability:** INEDECOM which investigates all police killings regularly reports high caseloads, and rare convictions of police officers due to forensic delays and collusion.
- **Legal Use of Force:** State representatives, including deputy Prime Minister and Minsiter of National Security Horace Chang, argue that the law grants police officers the authority to use deadly force to apprehend even fleeing (suspected) felons.

Police Killing v. gang member arrests

Are police killing suspects rather than arresting them?

Between the start of 2025 and April 2026, the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) **arrested 159 known gang members**. More than 15 specific gang-related cases are active before the courts

For the same period, the police have **killed over 400 persons**

Charges and convictions

- **Convictions:** From 2011 to 2023, there were 118 concluded cases investigated by INDECOM, resulting in 15 convictions for offences including murder, manslaughter, or, in some cases, wounding.
- **Charges:** As of early 2024, 101 agents of the State have been charged for murder or manslaughter arising from INDECOM investigations.
- **Recent Activity:** In 2024, INDECOM received 24 rulings for charges from the Director of Public Prosecutions, nine of which were for fatal shootings.
- The low number of convictions compared to the number of charged officers is often cited by INDECOM as being due to lengthy, slow judicial processes, with some trials taking years to conclude.

Body-worn cameras- the major call right now

- Approximately half of the fatal police encounters in 2026 have occurred during planned police operations with no body-worn cameras.
- **Minister of National Security, Dr. Horace Chang**, has asserted that police body-worn cameras are not top resource priorities . He said that continuous body camera usage is difficult or unsuitable during certain armed raids, pointing out that the current JCF uniforms are not inherently designed for body-worn cameras.
- **Backlash:** Civil society organizations, along with **Opposition Leader Mark Golding,** strongly urged that police must wear cameras during major operations to ensure transparency and accountability. “The JCF will benefit from the enhanced confidence this will bring among the population that they are there to serve and protect,” said Golding. **Prime Minister Holness** later weighed in, reportedly indicating that body-worn cameras are *not* optional for police and should be standard issue across the force.

Body-worn cameras

- **INDECOM Commissioner Hugh Faulkner** noted that 1,500 body-worn cameras are deployed daily but most within the Public Safety and Traffic Enforcement Branch, whose officers patrol commercial districts.
- Between January and April this year there were five shooting incidents in which body-worn cameras were acknowledged as being issued to the cops involved. **No footage was recorded** with the reasons given as follows:

  1. The camera was not on because the officer did not have a clip to wear it on his uniform. 2. two indicated that the camera was not activated. 3. another didn't get a chance to turn it on. 4. another stated it was in buffer mode, but he didn't get a chance to put it in record mode. 5. The other indicated that he was instructed by another officer to turn it on but no footage arose from that camera.

INDECOM cannot prosecute

- INDECOM does not have general prosecutorial powers because the original legislation only granted them authority to **investigate** incidents. Under Jamaican law, the prosecutorial function is constitutionally assigned to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The separation of these powers has been reinforced by several legal developments:

- **Court Rulings:** The UK Privy Council (still Jamaica's highest court of appeal) ruled that the INDECOM Act does not grant the commission the legal authority to arrest, charge, or prosecute members of the security forces.
- **Government Policy:** The Holness government officially decided not to amend the INDECOM Act to add prosecutorial powers, relying instead on increasing the staff capacity at the DPP to handle these cases.

INDECOM not supported by government

- The Jamaican government has historically criticized the Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM), with some officials arguing that the agency's investigative approach is overzealous and causes security forces to be fearful and demoralized in the execution of their duties.
- **Prime Minister Andrew Holness:** Publicly expressed concern that INDECOM's actions and public handling of police encounters were causing officers to retreat from their duties and demoralizing the police force.
- **National Security Minister Dr. Horace Chang:** Stated that certain citizens are inappropriately using INDECOM's oversight powers as a shield to heap abuse on JCF members.

SOEs and ZOSOs

States of Emergency (SOEs) and Zones of Special Operations (ZOSOs) are targeted security measures to suppress violent crime. While SOEs grant broad temporary powers to security forces, ZOSOs are medium- to long-term initiatives that combine enhanced policing with community develop.

SOE: A short-term, aggressive measure utilized in response to rampant criminality, gang warfare, and escalating violence in specific police divisions. Grants the security forces enhanced authorities, including the ability to conduct warrantless searches, establish curfews, and detain individuals on reasonable suspicion.

The Holness government began using SOEs to excess starting in 2018 but they require a two-thirds majority in the Senate for an extension beyond two weeks. This requires an Opposition member to cross the aisle which the PNP did not do on principle. Holness then took to starting a new SOE each two weeks which was eventually ruled unconstitutional. Many abuses took place during SOEs with some victims awarded damages for mistreatment especially long confinement without charge.

ZOSO: aim to dismantle gangs while bringing civic stability through social and human development. Two phases: "Clear and Hold" (where security forces stabilize the area) followed by "Build and Develop" (where agencies implement social interventions). ZOSOs Includes strict human rights safeguards, requiring detainees to be brought before a Justice of the Peace within 24 hours. ZOSOs are operational in several communities, including Mount Salem, Denham Town, and August Town.

Notorious police officers and special squads

Keith "Trinity" Gardner (noted for shooting several members of the Stone Crusher gang) and **Cornwall "Bigga" Ford** (who was on the scene at the killing of seven 15–20-year-old youths in Braeton in 2001) became folk heroes.

In 2003 the **Crime Management Unit** (CMU), headed by the controversial **Reneto Adams**, was disbanded in 2002 following allegations that it was operating outside of police guidelines. Adams was eventually acquitted of shooting four people in an alleged extrajudicial execution in Crawle, Clarendon. He was a hero for some people.

- **Mobile Reserve:** Historically the primary tactical and riot-control arm. Disbanded and restructured in 2019, replaced with the **Specialized Operations Branch** In 2002 to target gang violence, high-risk individuals, and hot-spot areas across the island.

Area Fugitive Apprehension Teams - a new special squad from Feb. 2022

- JFJ is particularly concerned about the escalating role of Area Fugitive Apprehension Teams (AFAT).
- In 2022, AFATs were involved in only 5 per cent of PPO deployments and 3 per cent of related fatalities; by the first half of 2025, they accounted for 51 per cent of deployments and 47 per cent of fatalities.
- Three senior AFAT officers were collectively linked to 64 prior fatal shootings prior to their elevation senior command rank, 18 of which INDECOM deemed suspicious, alongside 11 additional suspicious PPOs under their command in 2024–2025.

Tivoli Gardens invasion - 2010

- When the security forces went into Tivoli Gardens in May 2010 with US support, it wasn't so much to capture Christopher Coke (Dudus) but to take control of an almost-autonomous community through terror and killing.
- Yet why did the community want to protect Coke?

- Like Zekes a few years before, Coke was a benefactor providing the support and even security that the state was not doing. So again the problem was not a super-gang but a neglect of the people themselves, leading to the mother of all paramilitary operations.

- Many people thought that the Tivoli people had themselves to blame. The onslaught was a warning to others and a distraction from more fundamental state failings.

Any comparison with Haiti?

Added after the presentation in response to a question - I have put this slide after the one on Tivoli because that is where there is some comparison.

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In Haiti the problem is the business and politician-backed gangs fighting for control against each other and the state security forces, especially that of Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier leader of several gangs and groups. He poses as a saviour of the people fighting a "revolution" against corrupt politicians, oligarchs, and foreign intervention but he uses brutal methods even if that is the case. Christopher Coke (Dudus) in Tivoli didn't claim any such Robin Hood project but was more of a harsh community provider (resources and security) also defending Tivoli from neigbouring 'forces'. He controlled Tivoli to the extent that state policing did not operate there. Overwhelming force, over 70 deaths and much abuse ended this. But is the government's intention to similarly destroy all other gangs in Jamaica which are much more fragmented? Or is there still some collaboration and purpose served by the gangs for the political class, especially in garrison communities and to justify the paramilitary policing? Does the quote below (on Haiti) also apply to Jamaica?

From what I can tell Barbeque is a pawn of the ruling class who are orchestrating the destabilization of the country and a distraction for international media to latch onto. Western media has made him the face of the problem because having one bad guy (or anti-hero to some) with a funny nickname as the top gang leader in power is an easier narrative to sell.

Peace Management Initiative (PMI)

- The PMI s a Jamaican violence-interruption and mediation organization established in 2002 by a PNP administration. Operating primarily in 40 volatile inner-city communities the PMI deploys community mediators and peace advocates to de-escalate gang conflicts. The organization was created as an alternative approach to traditional armed force to address community and gang violence.
- **Violence Interruption:** PMI defuses tension before it erupts into retaliation by brokering and maintaining peace truces between rival gangs.
- **PMI draws a strict distinction between criminal violence and community violence**, focussing on the latter.
- **Rehabilitation:** It provides educational rehabilitation, vocational training, and life-skills training to at-risk youth and ex-offenders.
- **Organization and Funding** The organization has heavily relied on government which was withdrawn in late 2019 driven by a shift in government policy. National Security Minister Horace Chang stated that engaging and negotiating with active violence producers was "not working".

Planned Police Operations (OPP) irregularities

- JFJ also highlights warrant irregularities
- In 29 per cent of 108 fatal PPOs (2022–2024), none were obtained (often as ‘snap raids’ violating policy and constitutional rights); 23 per cent used obsolete legislation with issues like untimed authorizations.
- Among 108 PPOs, 31 per cent had conflicting civilian accounts; 46 per cent involved unfired recovered weapons despite claims suspects reached for them. Body cams were absent/unactivated in nearly all cases, with CCTV damaged/removed in five instances.

Repressive policing by the PNP in the 1970s

- Manley's Peoples National Party (PNP) government, elected in 1972, passed the Suppression of Crime Act and the Gun Court Act in 1974 these gave the policing forces extensive powers for intervention and detainment. They were inspired by the counter-insurgency practices used in Malaysia during British occupation and were designed to legalise military methods on the streets.

- The Gun Court Act trials were to be conducted in camera, without a jury, closed to the public and the press. Most offences carried a single, mandatory sentence: indefinite imprisonment with hard labour.

The PNP approach - 2024

- The People's National Party (PNP) emphasizes transforming the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) from a **"force"** into a community-oriented **"service“** in line with the mission to “**serve, protect and reassure”.**
- **Preventive Social Intervention:** The party approaches crime and violence as a public health issue, combining proactive law enforcement with broad-based social and educational programs to address the root causes of anti-social behavior.
- **Public Accountability & Human Rights:** The party strongly advocates for strict oversight mechanisms, particularly regarding police use of force.
- **Community Policing:** A core PNP policy is shifting away from "hard policing" and routine reliance on military-led States of Emergency (SOEs), advocating instead for localized "Clear, Hold, and Build" strategies that foster trust and cooperation (Zones of Special Operations – ZOSOs)
- **Officer Welfare & Incentives:** To attract and retain high-quality personnel, the PNP has proposed initiatives tailored to security forces

PNP policies on crime and policing

- The Peace Management Initiative (PMI) will be revitalised, rolling out restorative justice, mediation and other conflict resolution techniques at the community level. Also train and empower 500 violence interrupters across Jamaica;
- expand Project Star including access to training, mentorship, remedial education and job placements for youths at risk;
- reform the prison system to reduce the high level of recidivism by rehabilitating offenders to become productive citizens
- build out the Jamaica Eye system of cameras
- provide mental health support, including adequate rest, to law enforcement officers, to help them cope with their work
- partner with NGOs to focus on anger-management, parenting skills, conflict resolution substantially increase the number of social workers.

Police reform reports

- Reforms to the Jamaica Constabulary Force revolve around a shift from traditional, reactive armed tactics to community-oriented models, as outlined in landmark government inquiries like the 1993 Wolfe Report and the 1991 Hirst Report. These reports emphasize intelligence-led policing, human rights training, enhanced civilian oversight and rehabilitative, restorative justice .
- **The Wolfe Report (1993):** Chaired by former Chief Justice Edward Zacca/Wolfe, this National Task Force inquiry is the cornerstone of modern police reform.
- **Hirst Report (1991):** Recommended establishing a clear mission for the JCF to "serve, protect and reassure," alongside shifts toward community policing and reducing the use of heavy-handed specialized squads.

Public opinion on police killings

- **Support for Lethal Force:** Some Jamaicans and government officials, including PM Holness, view the killings as a necessary consequence of aggressively confronting violent gang members. Police Commissioner Dr. Kevin Blake has stated that the high number of shootings is the fault of criminals who choose to challenge the police.

- **Calls for Accountability:** Many citizens and advocacy groups express discomfort and anger over deaths that happen in disputed circumstances or when there are no civilian witnesses. There is a strong call for the use of body-worn cameras. Opposition Leader Mark Golding has also voiced concerns about the high death toll during lethal police encounters.

- At the time of a well-supported JFJ protest against the increase in killings, for which they asked their supporters to wear black, **a counter-protest** was launched on social media, which invited people to wear blue in support of the police. Major businesses such as Jamaica's popular pharmacy chain, Fontana, supported the "blue" campaign saying that the plummeting crime rates were making people feel safer. "

Causes of crime and violence

- **Organized Criminal Gangs, Drug and Firearm Trafficking:** Jamaica serves as a prominent transit point for the illegal drug trade, which gangs use to fund illicit activities and purchase illegal firearms. Guns from the US are clearly a problem.
- **Garrison Politics:** Arising from the 1970s, political patronage led to the creation of armed, low-income "garrison" communities
- **Economic Inequality and Unemployment:** High levels of poverty, urban marginalization, and youth unemployment drive disengagement and create environments where illegal activities (such as lottery scams) become an economic survival tool.
- **Community and Domestic Violence** including localized disputes, intimate partner violence, and family quarrels.
- **Intergenerational Trauma:** The historical trauma of colonialism and chattel slavery, combined with high rates of exposure to community violence and the normalization of corporal punishment, shape the social norms and behaviors that perpetuate violence
- **Corruption and Systemic Issues** including political involvement in some gang networks, corruption and gross inequality undermine trust in civic institutions.

An Alternative to 'Íron Fist' Policing
Horace Levy 2015

- Horace Levy was instrumental in the design and success of the Peace Management Initiative. The recommendations in this report include community renewal, registering at-risk youth, educational enrichment, research on violence within families, police accountability and also those that follow here:

- **Sensitivity** on the part of any anti-gang legislation to the reality of corner crews and defence crews, perhaps *by recognition of defence crews in a formal classification of gangs.*
- An **end to state funding of criminal gangs** and organised crime through government contracts and subcontracts; and, most obviously,
- Major **improvement in the court system** to reduce the delays and poor conviction rates that frustrate the police and give impunity to criminals. This could be done by a larger budget allocation to the Ministry of Justice, which receives only just over $4 billion dollars, compared to the over $40 billion to the Ministry of National Security.

Alternatives to paramilitary policing

Longer-term alternatives to iron-fist, paramilitary policing are quite clear – deal with the societal issues that generate anti-social behaviour and crime. Clear but not easy. We live in a divided world, ever more unequal, fragmented and fragile yet advantageous to an influential political and economic elite.

Most Jamaicans do not live imminently threatened by gangs whether criminal or otherwise. Those in our inner cities do, but they fear the police just as much, for good reason. Can those areas be policed humanely rather than the threat being blown out of proportion so that the whole of Jamaica is effectively under police suppression?

Possibilities?

- The PNP programme leans in the right direction, but that is in opposition. What happens if the PNP, or any other new party, were elected and confronted with unrest whether it be sabotage or not? Past performance has been far from stellar.
- Are there measures, short of police repression, that can take effect and garner support quickly enough? And if so how do we, the people, **assuming we are a majority,** make them happen? Reactionary, right-wing politics has been making too many gains in recent years based on regressive rather than progressive solutions.
- JABBEM, the beach rights movement in Jamaica, has been having success mobilising action against injustice. And just this week there was a substantial protest in Kingston largely against accepting the third-country-national deportees. Jamaicans for Justice has been speaking out for years on police abuse, and other voices too..
- Will it come together before more damage is done? Revolutions are not easy, nor predictable…..
- As Anthony Harriott writes: 'Excessive punishment and illegal crime control methods may affirm already existing views of the unjust nature of the criminal justice system and justify non-cooperation with it as well as self-help alternatives to it'.

But to repeat… anti-Gang efforts a distraction

- The increasing number of police killings in Jamaica is a human rights problem in itself. But the ruthless iron-fist policing of which it is a part hides the underlying driving force - a divisive, unjust, unequal and moribund economic model that requires ever more force to delay its ultimate collapse. It is an ideal tool – it not only suppresses dissent whether political or criminal, but it creates an enemy, the gangs/ 'marauding criminals', to justify the repressive apparatus in the minds of the majority. It divides us as immigrants are used in other places. The quote is below from a 2015 paper by Horace Levy surely also applies to Jamaica:

> Many Central American governments appear to be using their highly publicized crackdowns on gangs to avoid taking action on key issues such as exclusion, inequality, and the lack of job creation. In other words, gangs have become convenient scapegoats on which to blame the region's problems and through which those in power attempt to maintain a particular status quo.