

# Major Crimes Drop in Jamaica

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Above: Kingston (CJ Photo)

By the Caribbean Journal staff

The number of serious and violent crimes in Jamaica fell by 11 percent in the first six months of 2013, according to data released by the government.

The murder rate was 19.9 per 100,000 people, a 3.4 percent reduction from a 20.6 rate in the same period in 2012.

That is down significantly from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's data from 2012, which showed a murder rate of 40.9 per 100,000 in habitants in Jamaica.

Serious and violent crimes overall fell to 172 per 100,000 inhabitants in the period, a 10.6 percent drop over 2012.

"These figures continue the downward trend in crime rates that began in June of 2010, for a third consecutive year," said Richard Lumsden, programme director for the Planning Institute of Jamaica's Plan Development Unit.

Jamaica has been working to improve its security situation for years, although that has not traditionally translated into a drop in crimes like murder.

National Security Minister Peter Bunting said after taking office in 2012 that his Ministry would work toward a "major" crime reduction, including the ongoing problem of corruption.

In an interview with *Caribbean Journal* shortly after assuming his position, Bunting spoke of the need for more crime approaches at the community level — particularly among at-risk youths between the ages of 18 to 25.

A recent study by Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) found that Jamaicans were feeling "progressively less insecure" about crime, and about the role of the police. The latter has proved to be another significant issue, with a number of police-related shootings in the country.

"Police reform and related efforts in Jamaica have had significant positive effects," the authors of the LAPOP's recent topical brief on the subject, Elizabeth J Zechmeister and Mitchell A Seligson of Vanderbilt, and Anthony A Harriott and Balford A Lewis of the University of West Indies-Mona.

"Deepening the reforms in the police and judicial system in Jamaica would go a long way toward continuing to build bonds of trust between the community and the police, and, at the same time, help to decrease violence and increase citizen security," the authors wrote.