

## Polity IV Country Report 2007: Trinidad and Tobago

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">45</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	10	10	0	<b>Democ:</b>	10	10	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Durable:</b>	45			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			
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SCODE	TRI	CCODE	052	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	5	5																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
			31 August 1962 (Ind.)																						
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>																									
1976																									
<b>Executive(s)</b>																									
Prime Minister Patrick Manning (PNM); initially selected by President in 2001 to break a parliamentary deadlock; appointed as leader of the majority party in parliament, 7 October 2002; reappointed 7 November 2007 President George Maxwell Richards (PNM); initially elected by Parliament in 2003; reelected 11 February 2008																									
<b>Legislature</b>																									
Bicameral: House of Representatives (41 seats; directly elected; 39 for Trinidad and 2 for Tobago; most recent elections, 5 November 2007) People's National Movement (PNM): 26 United National Congress (UNC): 15 Senate (31 seats; 16 appointed by President on advice of the Prime Minister; 6 on advice of Leader of the Opposition; 9 at the discretion of the President)																									
<b>Judiciary</b>																									
Supreme Court																									

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)**

Executive power is vested in the prime minister, who is head of government. As in other parliamentary democracies, the prime minister is the leader of the majority party or coalition in the legislature. The president, who is head of state, is elected by an electoral college drawn from members of the House and

<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Senate. The election of Arthur Robinson in 1997 marked the first time that the presidency was contested; all previous presidents had been appointed by unanimous vote. Robinson had been prime minister in 1990 when members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, a militant black-Muslim sect, staged a violent coup attempt in response to deteriorating economic conditions. The People's National Movement (PNM) held power continuously for 30 years until being unseated in 1986 by Robinson's National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR).

Since 1986 executive power has been "shared" by a personalistic triumvirate including Robinson, Patrick Manning of the PNM, and Basdeo Panday of the United National Congress (UNC). Elections in 1995 resulted in an equal split between the PNM and UNC and Panday replaced Manning to become the first Indo-Trinidadian prime minister after forming a coalition with Robinson's third party NAR, which held just two seats. Huge natural gas fields were discovered off the Trinidad coast in 2000 and, since that time, politics have become much more volatile. In December 2000 elections, voters returned the Panday-led UNC to power with 19 seats in the 36-member House of Representatives. A constitutional crisis ensued when Prime Minister Panday asked President Robinson to appoint seven UNC candidates who had lost election to the House as members of the Senate. After a two-month standoff, Robinson agreed to the appointments. New elections were called in December 2001 after the UNC lost its parliamentary majority due to party in-fighting; the result of the election was a perfect 18/18 split between the PNM and UNC. President Robinson asked PNM leader Manning to form a government but parliament remained deadlocked as delegates voted along strict party lines. President Robinson's term was extended by the decree of the Prime Minister due to the legislative deadlock. New elections were held in October 2002, resulting in a PNM victory and working majority for Prime Minister Manning.

On May 31, 2005, Panday was arrested on corruption charges. In April 2006, Kamla Persad-Bissessar officially substituted Panday as leader of the opposition. In September 2006, Winston Dookeran left the UNC's leadership after a series of bitter disputes with Panday-followers and announced he was forming a new party, which then became the Congress of the People (COP). In the November 2007 elections, in which Manning retained his position as Prime Minister, the governing People's National Movement (PNM) won 26 of the 41 seats at stake, two seats short of the "super majority" required to push constitutional amendments without the support of the opposition. The United National Congress (UNC) won the remaining 15 seats while the Congress of the People (COP) was shut out. While the PNM majority is insufficient for Prime Minister Manning to push through his proposed constitutional changes, in which the parliamentary structure would be replaced by a presidential form of governance, it does provide him with a comfortable working majority.

#### **Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)**

Both executives (the president and the prime minister) in Trinidad are chosen by the legislature and therefore depend on the elected representatives' continued support in order to remain in office. The President, whose office in Trinidad is largely ceremonial, is elected by the Parliament and makes appointments of senators and justices. The Prime Minister's appointment goes to the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives following legislative elections. The judiciary is considered independent but inefficient.

#### **Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)**

General elections in Trinidad have been free and fair since independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. Competition is waged primarily between two relatively stable and enduring groups. The opposition United National Congress (UNC) party is based on a socialist platform and is supported by many voters of East Indian descent. The current ruling party, the People's National Movement (PNM), has a more conservative platform and a support base among Afro-Trinidadians. Political competition is practiced in open, conventional, and largely non-coercive forms. However, the 1990 attack on the government by the Jamaat al Muslimeen has left a strong imprint on politics, particularly as the group has remained active and has used the courts to gain release of its activists and recoup assets that were seized following the failed coup. It also uses intimidation to ensure that the government does not move against it. Competition between the two major parties, and two ethnic-communities, has been especially strong in recent years since the discovery of huge natural gas deposits off the coast. Politics appears to be moving toward greater contentiousness.