

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Date of Elections: 9 November 1981

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats of the House of Representatives on the normal expiry of Parliament's term. Previous general elections had taken place on 13 September 1976.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago comprises a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The Senate consists of 31 members appointed by the President of the Republic: 16 on the advice of the Prime Minister, 6 on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 9 at the President's own discretion "from outstanding persons from economic, social or community organizations and other major fields of endeavour".

The House of Representatives has 36 elected members, of whom 34 are from Trinidad and 2 from Tobago. Parliament's normal term is 5 years.

Electoral System

All citizens of Trinidad and Tobago or citizens of the British Commonwealth who have resided in the country for at least one year immediately preceding the date of the elections are entitled to vote provided they are 18 years of age or above and have lived in their electoral district for at least two months prior to the election date. Disqualified from being electors are the insane, persons convicted of an election offence, and persons under sentence of death or imprisonment in excess of 12 months.

Electoral registers are revised and published annually. Voting is not compulsory. Postal voting is allowed for certain categories of citizens.

A candidate for the House of Representatives must be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who is at least 18 years of age and who has either resided in the country for a period of two years immediately before the date of his nomination for election or is domiciled and resident in Trinidad and Tobago at that date; the minimum age for candidates for the Senate is 25. No person is qualified to be elected as a member of the House, or appointed Senator, who owes allegiance to a foreign State, is an undischarged bankrupt, is mentally ill, is under sentence of death or imprisonment exceeding 12 months or has been convicted of an offence relating to elections. Also disqualified from membership of the House are persons holding any office connected with elections.

Membership of Parliament is considered incompatible with a number of public offices and posts connected with administration of elections. The Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives may not be a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary; the same applies to the President and Deputy President of the Senate.

Every candidate for election must be nominated by six or more registered electors of his district, and deposit a sum TT\$ 250, which is reimbursed if he polls not less than one-eighth of the total vote in his district. Individual campaign expenses may not exceed TT\$ 5,000.

Representatives are elected in 36 single-member constituencies by simple-majority vote.

By-elections are held within 90 days to fill vacancies in the House which occur within the first four years of the life of the Parliament. Senate vacancies are filled through nomination.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Leading contenders for the 36 House of Representatives seats were the ruling People's National Movement (PNM) and the newly-formed National Alliance, a three-party coalition comprising the outgoing main opposition United Labour Front (ULF), the Tobago-based Democratic Action Congress (DAC) and the Tapia House Movement. The PNM was led by Prime Minister George Chambers, who succeeded Dr. Eric Williams when the latter died in office in March 1981. All in all, 157 candidates and six political parties were in the running. Mr. Chambers stated that the main election issue was the defense of the basic democratic freedoms which Mr. Williams (Prime Minister since the country's independence) had established.

On polling day, the PNM upped its House total to 26 seats while the National Alliance captured the remaining 10 (ULF 8, DAC 2). Mr. Chambers was given a full mandate as Prime Minister and named his new Cabinet on 17 November.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Representatives

	Number of registered electors			732,831
	Valid votes			399,964
Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained		Number of Seats
People's National Movement (PNM) . .	36	215,387	53.85	26 (+ 2)
Trinidad and Tobago National Alliance*	36	80,698	20.17	10
United Labour Front (ULF)	12			8 (-2)
Democratic Action Congress (DAC) . .	8			2(=)
Tapia House Movement	16			
Organization for National Reconstruction	H	89,034	22.26	
National Joint Action Committee		13,748	3.43	
Others		1,097	0.27	

36

* Formed prior to the elections in 1981.