

Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections

28 April 2025



The Commonwealth

Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections

28 APRIL 2025



The Commonwealth

© Commonwealth Secretariat 2025

Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

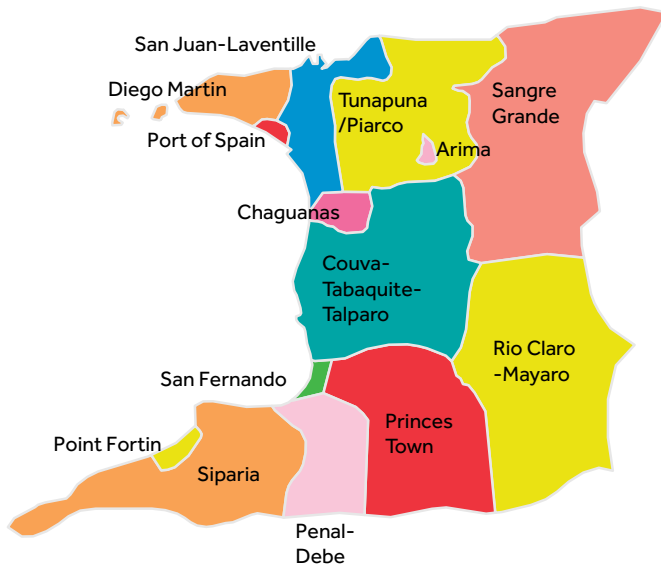
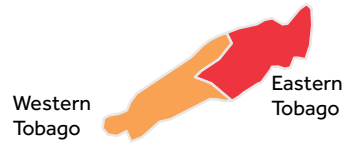
www.thecommonwealth.org

All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise provided it is used only for educational purposes and is not for resale, and provided full acknowledgement is given to the Commonwealth Secretariat as the original publisher. Views and opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the author and should in no way be attributed to the institutions to which they are affiliated or to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Wherever possible, the Commonwealth Secretariat uses paper sourced from responsible forests or from sources that minimise a destructive impact on the environment.

Published by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Map of Trinidad and Tobago



Contents

Map of Trinidad and Tobago	iii
Acronyms and Abbreviations	ix
Letter of Transmittal	xi
Executive Summary	xiii
1. Introduction	1
International election observation methodology	1
The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions	1
The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups	1
Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2025 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections	2
Terms of reference	2
Activities	3
2. Political Background	5
Introduction	5
Past political history	5
Recent political history	5
Political environment and key issues for 2025 election	7
Candidates and their political manifestos	9
Election outcomes and its implications	11
3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration	12
System of government	12
Legislative framework	12
Executive (the President)	13
Parliament	13
Judiciary	13
Complaints and election disputes	14
Electoral offences	14
The Elections and Boundaries Commission	15
Boundary delimitation	16

Voter registration	17
Candidate eligibility and nomination	19
Voter education	20
Recruitment and training of election staff	20
4. Participation and Inclusion	21
The legal framework for political inclusion and participation	21
Political inclusion and participation	21
Women's political inclusion	21
Persons with disabilities	23
Youth	24
Civil society organisations	25
Declining political participation	25
5. The Campaign and the Media	27
The campaign	27
Campaign strategies	28
Campaign financing	29
The media	30
Legal framework	30
Media bodies	31
Media coverage of the elections campaign	31
Media coverage of the election day	32
6. Voting, Counting and Results Transmission	33
Opening of the poll	33
The voting process	34
Polling day	37
Identification of electors	39
Security	41
Closing and counting	41
Summary	43
Election results	43

Annex I. Composition of COG and biographies of members	44
Annex II. Announcement of COG	47
Annex III. Interim Statement	49
Annex IV. Deployment Plan	52
Annex V. List of political parties	53
Annex VI. Constituencies won by political parties (UNC, PNM and TPP)	55
Annex VII. Preliminary results	56
Annex VIII. Recommendations tracker	58

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APP	All People's Party
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CODO	Consortium of Disability Organisations
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
COP	Congress of the People
CRPB	Council for Responsible Political Behaviour
CSO	civil society organisation
EBC	Elections and Boundaries Commission
MP	Member of Parliament
PEP	Progressive Empowerment Party
PF	Patriotic Front
PNM	People's National Movement
PWD	person with a disability
ROPA	Representative of the People's Act
MND	Movement for National Development
NACCR	National Advisory Committee on Constitutional Reform
NAR	National Alliance for Reconstruction
NCT	National Coalition for Transformation
THA	Tobago House of Assembly
TPP	Tobago People's Party
TTPS	Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
TT\$	Trinidad and Tobago dollar
UNC	United National Congress

Letter of Transmittal

Commonwealth Observer Group
Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections
28 April 2025

03 May 2025

Dear Secretary-General,

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) to the 28 April 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Trinidad and Tobago, I am pleased to submit to you our Final Report.

The Group's overall assessment is that the electoral process was credible, and the results reflect the will of the people who voted. Although the turnout was 54 per cent, the lowest in the last 20 years, we were encouraged by the patience of the voters who came out to exercise their civic rights at early hours of the election day. We were also pleased and encouraged by the calm, orderly and peaceful atmosphere in which polling took place and the professionalism of polling officials and political party agents.

This report is informed by extensive consultations with national stakeholders, other observers, and our observation of all aspects of the electoral process during the period of our deployment. The Group's report welcomed calls by various stakeholders to legislate and implement an

effective campaign financing framework, as has been recommended by this and previous COGs to strengthen the electoral and governance processes in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Group encourages the Government and key electoral stakeholders to consider mechanisms that strengthen civil society participation in electoral processes, including as citizen observers. The Group encourages the Commonwealth Secretariat to remain engaged with Government and key stakeholders and to continue to support domestic mechanisms and efforts to achieve aspects of electoral reforms.

In accordance with our mandate, I hereby submit our detailed findings and recommendations in the attached report. We hope that these findings and recommendations are received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered.

On behalf of the COG, and in my own name, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to democratic consolidation processes in Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the observers and convey the Group's appreciation to the Commonwealth Secretariat staff, who provided invaluable support to the COG mission.


Honourable Evarist Bartolo
Chairperson

Observers' Signatures



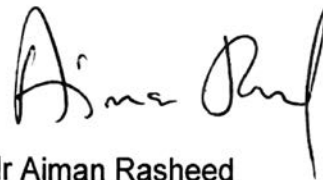
Mr Ian-Michael Anthony
Former Chief Elections Officer
Dominica



Ms Nazima Raghbir
Journalist
Guyana



Mr Orrette Tyndale Fisher
Election Management Expert
Jamaica



Mr Aiman Rasheed
Deputy Program Director
International Republican Institute,
Maldives



HE Ms Winnie Anna Kiap CBE
Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation
Papua New Guinea

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Secretary-General constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group (COG; 'the Group') to observe the 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Trinidad and Tobago. The COG comprised eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth. They are diplomats, and experts in elections management, law, civil society and inclusion, as well as the media.

The COG was present in Trinidad and Tobago from 19 April to 5 May 2025. In carrying out its Terms of Reference, the COG met a broad range of stakeholders, including the Prime Minister, representatives of political parties, candidates, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC), the Police, the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB), the media, civil society, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) observers, and Commonwealth diplomatic missions in Port of Spain. The COG observed the special voting¹, which took place from 21 to 27 April 2025.

Trinidad and Tobago has come a long way in its democratic journey since its first election, which was held in 1925, when only 6 per cent of the population was permitted to vote. Since then, Trinidad and Tobago has held several elections. This was the 13th Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections. The elections were held against the backdrop of rising violence, which led to a state of emergency being declared in December 2024. However, the COG's observation was that the 2025 elections were conducted in a peaceful and safe environment, despite concerns about safety and security in the pre-election period.

The COG notes different political parties' manifestos, which converged on issues of an inclusive and diversified economy, foreign exchange availability, sustainable energy and climate resilience, public safety and security, public sector governance, criminal and civil justice reform, education, youth, and social policy. These issues formed part of the context within which the elections took place.

The COG noted that this was a snap election, which meant that the Elections and Boundaries Commission had to conduct the elections within a short period. However, the COG noted the commitment and professionalism demonstrated by the officials within a highly contested environment. The COG received reports that the EBC had inadequate resources, which at times affected its ability to meet its statutory obligations, including post-election reporting and data disaggregation. In its Interim Statement, issued on 29 April 2025, the COG urged the state to provide adequate resources and support to enable the EBC to discharge its constitutional duty.

The core legislative and regulatory framework applicable to the 2025 Parliamentary Elections comprised both domestic law and international conventions, charters and agreements that Trinidad and Tobago has committed itself to. While the electoral framework largely provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, the COG has proposed a number of recommendations for electoral reforms for consideration by various stakeholders. These include a regulatory framework for political party campaign finance.

While the Representation of the People Act limits campaign spending of a candidate to 50,000 Trinidad and Tobago dollars (TT\$; US\$7,269), no such restriction exists for political parties, and there is no legislation for the regulation or disclosure of political party campaign financing. The COG recommended Parliament to pass the Representation of the People's (Amendment) Bill 2020, which was first introduced in 2015 and includes provisions to regulate campaign finance. This recommendation was made by the previous Commonwealth Observer Group that observed the 2015 Parliamentary Elections.

¹ An elector is eligible to be a special elector if: serving in the protective services (the police, defence force, prison service); an official of the Elections and Boundaries Commission; an election officer (returning officer, presiding officer, poll clerk or polling agent); a candidate or their spouse voting outside their district; someone unable to reach their polling station (including travellers between islands, hospital patients, inmates or prisoners); or if they are a flight crew member, an offshore worker or any person designated by the Commission.

Although the electoral environment was conducive to political activity and largely viewed by various stakeholders as favourable for the inclusion and participation of citizens, the representation of women in elected positions has shown a decline since 2015 Parliamentary Elections. The COG noted that the representation of women in the Trinidad and Tobago House of Representatives and Senate is below the average of 41 per cent in the Caribbean. However, the positions of President, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago will, in a historic first, be served by women. The COG noted that more needs to be done to address women's representation in Parliament and encouraged the Parliament to consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of women in electoral processes.

Regarding youth participation in political and electoral processes, youth groups met by the COG expressed a lack of meaningful inclusion and engagement. The COG encouraged the Government and political parties to proactively engage with youth groups to address youth issues and build their interest in politics and electoral participation.

The COG also noted the low visibility of civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in voter education, mobilisation of citizens for voting and in civic matters, as well as the absence of citizen election observers in Trinidad and Tobago. The COG urged the Government to consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of civil society organisations in electoral processes.

To ensure the participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs), and to enable them to vote independently and in dignity, the EBC implemented several measures. These included improving accessibility of polling stations and providing a template to allow voters with visual impairment. Assistance was also provided to persons with disabilities and elderly people during polling. The COG commends the partnership between the EBC and the Consortium of Disability Organisations (CODO) in improving accessibility for persons with disabilities on election day.

The political parties held peaceful and colourful rallies, echoing the true colours of the country's carnival spirit. The COG noted that the freedoms of assembly and association appeared to have been observed and upheld during the campaign period. Some of the campaigns were covered by electronic and print media.

The media in Trinidad and Tobago is vibrant and free across traditional and digital platforms. The press is widely respected by the public, and journalists can access the government and other political officials. The COG commended the media, including radio, TV and print, for providing coverage of the elections and related issues. However, concerns were raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media. The COG recommended legislation to enforce equitable access for all candidates and political parties.

The COG's overall assessment is that the electoral process as a whole was credible. The voting process was well-managed and transparent at the polling stations observed. The voting was conducted in a peaceful environment and polling officials conducted their duties with professionalism and transparency. Party agents and the police were present and able to perform their duties professionally and were not intrusive. The COG applauded the people of Trinidad and Tobago for turning out in an orderly manner to exercise their franchise, and for demonstrating patience and commitment to their country's democratic process.

The COG noted a clear trend of declining political participation in voting during the past three Parliamentary Elections. The voter turnout has decreased significantly from 66.84 per cent and 58.0 per cent to 54 per cent in 2015, 2020 and 2025 respectively. This declining voter turnout in elections corresponds with an increasing sense of apathy, as heard by the COG, among the citizenry in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly among the youth. The COG also heard that there was limited engagement with key stakeholders in the electoral process.

A declining voter turnout, coupled with low youth participation in voting, is a concern. The COG recommends that EBC takes measures to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by allowing longer periods for voter education and awareness raising. The COG further recommends that the Elections and Boundaries Commission ('the Commission') adopts a more proactive and structured approach to stakeholder engagement, ensuring regular, inclusive and transparent dialogue with all key actors in the electoral process.

This report offers several recommendations for consideration by key stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago. These recommendations are offered in a positive spirit of contributing to the deepening of democracy and strengthening of institutions and electoral processes.

Recommendations

Legal framework and electoral administration

- To uphold the credibility of the democratic process and ensure access to justice, it is recommended that all stages of election petitions, including the determination of costs, be concluded in a timely and efficient manner to protect electoral integrity and maintain trust in the judicial process.
- The Group noted reports of electoral offences, including allegations of bribery on election day. It strongly recommends that reported offences be promptly investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated to ensure accountability, deter future violations, and safeguard the integrity of the electoral process in Trinidad and Tobago.
- The Group encourages the Commission to adopt a more proactive and structured approach to stakeholder engagement, ensuring regular, inclusive and transparent dialogue with all key actors in the electoral process. These actors include political parties, civil society organisations, the law association, the media, and other relevant institutions.
- The state is urged to ensure that the Commission is provided with adequate resources and support to fully discharge its constitutional mandate.
- The EBC is encouraged to engage in broad consultations, to enhance the transparency of the boundary review process, and ensure that information is shared as widely and promptly as possible. The Group recommends that the designated minister should promptly lay the Commission's recommendations before the House of Representatives for approval.
- The COG recommends the implementation of more effective public education campaigns to emphasise the importance of regularly updating voter information. Additionally, it is recommended that steps be taken to streamline the voter registration process, ensuring greater accuracy and efficiency.
- The Representation of the People Act (ROPA) outlines the process for candidate nominations (Election Rule 7) but it does not create a centralised system for political parties to nominate candidates. The Group highlights the limited regulatory framework governing political party registration and campaign finance. We reaffirm the 2015 Commonwealth Observer Group's statement that 'the EBC is considering proposals to regulate the registration and campaign financing of political parties. A decade ago, the Group recommended that 'the incoming Parliament, political parties, and all relevant stakeholders prioritize this process'. This has become increasingly urgent.
- The COG strongly encourages the Commission to continuously engage with all stakeholders, including civil society, to develop programmes and enhance voter education.

Participation and inclusion

- The Parliament should consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of women in electoral processes.
- The Government should facilitate the adoption and implementation of the National Policy on Gender and Development, with a view to promoting 'the full participation of women, men and girls', to guarantee 'equal access to progress for all'.
- The EBC should continue building on the engagement with the CODO to advance the inclusion and participation of PWDs in civic and political life.
- The Parliament should consider passing the Persons with Disabilities Bill.

- The Government and political parties should proactively engage with youth groups, including the youth councils, in Trinidad and Tobago to address youth issues and build their interest in politics and electoral participation.
- The EBC should strengthen its engagement with civil society groups to facilitate continuous voter education and awareness raising.
- The Government should consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of civil society organisations in electoral processes, including in the implementation of civic and voter education programmes.
- The Government and EBC should proactively engage with a broad cross-section of CSOs working across democracy, human rights, good governance and civic engagement, in the administration of elections, to ensure their concerns are addressed.
- The Government and EBC should strengthen the legal framework to incentivise civil society to function as accredited citizen election observers. This could include detailing the procedural provisions and roles and responsibilities of citizen election observers.
- The CSOs should consider fielding domestic election observation efforts to improve citizen participation, as well as the integrity of and trust in elections.
- The Government and political parties should support the EBC to implement systems to collect and publish disaggregated data on elections.

Campaign and the media

Campaign

- Political parties should develop and communicate clear and practical solutions to pressing issues, complemented by youth-focused policies and initiatives that drive engagement and inspire participation.
- The EBC should be empowered by Parliament to establish clear and enforceable spending limits to ensure a level playing field and to monitor and enforce campaign finance regulations for both individual candidates and political parties.
- There should be establishment of a mechanism to monitor candidate spend, including a declaration by both parties and candidates of source of funds.
- The Parliament should pass the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2020, which was first introduced in 2015 and includes provisions to regulate campaign finance.

The media

- The COG recommends wider consultation between the Telecommunication Authority with the media to introduce a code to guide professional, fair and equitable coverage of elections.
- Media professionals should work towards reviving the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago and consider a media code for elections coverage.
- The EBC could improve its reach to the public by doing more media engagements with the press. These can include training for media professionals, as well as regular press briefings on its work throughout the election cycle.
- There should be legislation to promote equitable access to the state media for all political parties and independent candidates in terms of their campaigns, interviews and advertisements.
- Media houses should prioritise training for media professionals to increase the quality of coverage through internal and external training opportunities.

- Parliament should consider legislation on campaign financing, which should include a specific declaration of funds used for political media advertisements and sponsoring of favourable campaigns.

Voting, counting and results process

- The process of removing ineligible names from the voters' register should include a house-to-house campaign to identify and remove individuals not recorded as deceased.
- The list should be disaggregated by gender and age and made accessible to the public.
- Clear guidelines should be established on the qualifications and criteria necessary to work as a returning officer, election clerk and poll day staff.
- Additional ballots should be provided to special polling officials to enable special voters to have a second chance to mark their ballots in case the initial one is spoiled.
- Larger ballot boxes, which can accommodate envelopes, should be used for special voting. These boxes should also be a different colour from the regular ballot boxes.
- The centres designated for advanced voters to collect their ballots should be converted into special polling stations, allowing voters to cast their ballots immediately upon collection. This would eliminate the need to travel to a separate location for voting.
- Enhanced training for polling officials is necessary to ensure consistent application of the rules by presiding officers regarding cellular phones and voting procedures.
- Electors aged 75 years and older, as well as individuals with physical disabilities, should be provided with the opportunity to apply for special voter status.
- A statutory timeline should be established for the EBC to mail out polling cards, along with increased voter education informing voters that they can vote without a polling card.
- The Group recommends that the EBC should take measures to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by allowing longer periods for voter education and awareness raising.
- The design of the current voting booth should be revised to ensure easier access for individuals using wheelchairs.
- Police training should be extended to limit their involvement in the voting process to assisting voters by directing them to the nearest polling official when approached.
- Consideration should be given to simplifying the intermixing process for special votes by standardising how the information on the envelopes is written.
- Statistics on voter turnout should be broken down by gender and age, and made accessible to the public within six months following any election.

1. Introduction

With a view to providing readers with important background information on the context in which Commonwealth Observer Groups (COGs) operate, this introductory chapter begins with a summary of the COG methodology. It concludes with an overview of this methodology as applied to the 2025 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections.

International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed more than 200 elections in 39 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral best practices.

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following.

1. COGs are independent, including of the Secretariat
'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General ... in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. Observers, not monitors
Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. Taking forward COG recommendations
The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms', such as multi-stakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.
4. Whole-of-election-cycle approach
Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff, the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and, crucially, through bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics.

1. Eminent observers
While COGs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts. The biographies of all the observers can be found in Annex I.
2. Diversity and peer-to-peer learning
COGs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's five continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.
3. Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices
COGs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 *Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation*. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2025 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, constituted an Observer Group for the 28 April 2025 Parliamentary Elections, following an invitation from the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Group, comprising six eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth, was led by Hon. Evarist Bartolo, former Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Malta. It included experts drawn from the political, diplomacy, legal, media, civil society and electoral fields. A five-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the Group. A full list of members can be found in Annex I.

Terms of reference

The mandate and agreed terms of reference for the Group were as follows.

- *The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.*
- *The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.*
- *The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the member state has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth, including its Charter, and other international commitments.*
- *The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It would also be free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.*
- *The Group is to submit a report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Elections and Boundaries Commission, political parties, all Commonwealth member governments, and thereafter it will be made public.*



Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group and the Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team

Front row (left to right): Lindiwe Maleleka (staff team leader), Hon Evarist Bartolo (COG Chair, Malta), Nazima Raghubir (Guyana), H.E Winnie Kiap (Papua New Guinea). Back row (left to right): Ian-Michael Anthony (Dominica), Madonna Lynch (staff), Aiman Rasheed (Maldives), Latoya McDowald-Hurley (staff), Orrette Fisher (Jamaica), Abdullahi Abubakar (staff)

Activities

The Group was in Trinidad and Tobago from 19 April to 5 May 2025. The announcement of the COG was made prior to the Group's arrival on 17 April 2025 (Annex II).

The Group met with the Prime Minister, representatives of political parties, candidates, the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the police, the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB), the media, civil society, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) observers, and Commonwealth diplomatic missions in Port of Spain.

On 26 April, members of the Group were deployed to four areas across the country, including: Port of Spain and East-West corridor; San Fernando East and West; and Eastern Trinidad and Tobago. On deployment, members received further briefings from election officials, political parties, the media and the police. The Chair visited Tobago, where he observed special voting and met with election officials and the police to gain a deeper understanding of the electoral process and the pre-election environment. The Group also observed special voting, which was held from 21 to 27 April 2025.

On 29 April 2025, the COG Chair issued an Interim Statement (Annex III), highlighting the Group's preliminary findings and observations. The Chair thanked the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and commended the Elections and Boundaries Commission, polling staff, political parties, the police, civil society, and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections. He also highlighted areas that require improvement. These included the need for a regulatory framework for political party campaign finance, and the importance of promoting greater civic participation in the electoral process.



COG Chair delivers an interim statement on behalf of the Group

The Group's final report was completed in Port of Spain before its departure on 5 May 2025, for transmission to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

2. Political Background

Introduction

This chapter provides the political context for the 2025 parliamentary election in Trinidad and Tobago. In assessing the election and offering recommendations that appear in subsequent chapters, the COG considered the country's political landscape and factors that have shaped its 63 years of independence and the political processes leading to the 13th republican Parliamentary Elections held on 28 April 2025. Trinidad and Tobago's political and parliamentary history is divided into two main periods: the pre-republican era (1962–1976) and the republican era (1976–present). These are outlined below.

Past political history

The British captured Trinidad in 1797 and made it a Crown Colony in 1802. Tobago, which had been fought over by the Europeans since 1626, was claimed by the British in 1814. The two islands were joined together administratively in 1889 and politically in 1898. Following the abolition of slavery in 1834, the sugar plantations faced a significant labour shortage, and the colonial authorities brought workers from Asia (primarily India, but also China) under a voluntary system of indentured labour. Many indentured workers chose to remain in the islands, and the current composition of Trinidad and Tobago reflects this ethnic makeup: of the 1.5 million population, Indo-Trinidadians number 35.4 per cent, Afro-Trinidadians number 34.2 per cent, mixed 23 per cent, and other or unspecified 7.3 per cent.

In the 1920s, pressure increased for greater local democracy and then independence. In 1925, a new Constitution brought a limited form of electoral representation to Trinidad for the first time (Tobago had had elections before), but only 6 of the 25 members were elected as high property and language qualifications limited the vote. This did not satisfy the growing demand for political expression, which led to the 1937 labour disturbances and an increase in the number of elected members in 1941. The British Government introduced the adult franchise in 1946. In 1950, the Constitution was redrawn. It now provided for a Legislative Council of 26 members, 18 of them elected; a policy-making Executive Council of 9 (5 elected by the Legislative Council); and a rudimentary ministerial system.

Further constitutional changes followed, and by 1959, the Legislative Council had more elected members and an elected Speaker, while the ministerial system had developed into a Cabinet elected from the Legislative Council. The Governor's powers were circumscribed. He did not normally chair Cabinet meetings and had to act in accordance with the Cabinet's advice. These changes led to the creation of mass-based parties, most notably the People's National Movement (PNM). The party espoused a populist agenda of nationalism and economic pragmatism and secured a majority at the 1956 elections to the Legislative Council. Its leader, Dr Eric Williams, became the colony's first Chief Minister in October 1956.

In 1958, Trinidad and Tobago became a co-founder of the Federation of the West Indies, but when Jamaica withdrew in 1961, Trinidad and Tobago decided to seek its independence. Constitutional talks with the United Kingdom began in 1959–60, resulting in full internal self-government and a bicameral legislature (with a nominated Senate and an elected House of Representatives). The general election of 1961 was won by the PNM, which implemented the new Constitution. Trinidad and Tobago became independent in August 1962. At the general election of 1971, the PNM won all 36 seats in the House of Representatives.

Recent political history

In 1976, the country adopted a republican constitution, replacing HM Queen Elizabeth II as the Head of State with a President. The PNM under Dr Williams (and after his death in March 1981, George Chambers) had a long run of electoral successes. Economic conditions worsened in the early 1980s, and the PNM was ousted at the December 1986 elections by a coalition of opposition parties, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) led by Arthur Robinson.

Drawing support from all ethnic and socio-economic groups, NAR captured 33 of the 36 seats in the House of Representatives. The NAR also won 11 of the 12 seats in the Tobago House of Assembly. However, the NAR Government was unable to retain its popularity for long. In April 1989, Basdeo Panday, leader of the United Labour Front, along with other dissidents, formed a new party, the United National Congress (UNC). In July 1990, UNC elected Mr Panday as its President. The UNC (with six seats in the House of Representatives) replaced the PNM (with only three) as the principal opposition party.

In July 1990, an attempted coup was staged by Jamaat al Muslimeen, a militant Muslim faction, which took the then-Prime Minister Arthur Robinson and five ministers' hostage for five days, provoking an outbreak of rioting and looting in the capital. The hostages were released on the promise of an amnesty. The PNM, under Patrick Manning, won the general election in December 1991 with 21 seats. The UNC came in second place with 13 seats, while the NAR won 2 seats in its Tobago stronghold.

In November 1995, Mr Manning called an early general election. The results gave PNM and UNC 17 seats each, while NAR retained the 2 seats in Tobago. The UNC and NAR formed a coalition government and PNM became the official opposition. In February 1997, UNC's position was further strengthened by the decision of two PNM members to sit as independents. At the general election of 2000, the UNC won 19 seats in the House of Representatives, with the PNM receiving 16 seats and NAR only 1 seat. Prime Minister Panday was sworn in again as Prime Minister. One week later, the opposition PNM asked the High Court to overturn the election to Parliament of two of the successful UNC candidates on the grounds that they had illegally filed nomination papers while holding dual citizenship in contravention of the Representation of the People's Act.

On 2 January 2001, President Arthur Robinson refused to swear in seven Cabinet members appointed by the Prime Minister, deepening a political rift, as he said they had been defeated in the elections. On 7 February 2001, the appointed ministers filed a constitutional motion in the courts as they were seeking the court's intervention on the continuing refusal of the President to appoint them as government senators. The impasse ended one week later, when President Arthur Robinson agreed to appoint the seven ministers.

On 10 October 2001, Prime Minister Basdeo Panday announced that he had asked President Arthur Robinson to dissolve the legislature in preparation for the holding of an early general election on 10 December 2001, exactly one year after the last general election. The Prime Minister was obliged to call elections when, in early October 2001, three UNC ministers voted against their Government's bills in the House of Representatives, thereby causing a legislative crisis. The incumbent UNC and the opposition PNM each won 18 seats after the general election, posing a constitutional debate about which party should form the Government. Opposition Leader Patrick Manning rejected a proposal from Prime Minister Panday to share power in a government of national unity to break the deadlock. Both met with President Robinson, and agreed, as provided under the Constitution, to authorise him to appoint a new Prime Minister.

On 24 December 2001, President Robinson chose Mr Manning to be the next Prime Minister, and he was sworn in on the same day. Two days later, the opposition UNC pulled out of the political pact that had resolved the elections tie, threatening the Parliament's ability to pass any legislation since the UNC refused to allow a new 7th Parliament to be convened. The UNC party announced that it would no longer honour the agreement Mr Panday had struck with the Prime Minister and called for new elections. Voters went to the polls on 7 October 2002, the third general election in less than two years. On polling day, security was tightened in the districts where the contest was expected to be close and either party could win the parliamentary seats at stake. Nevertheless, there were no reports of serious violence.

The ruling PNM won 20 of the 36 parliamentary seats at stake, with the opposition UNC picking up the remaining 16 seats. On 9 October 2002, Mr Manning was sworn in as the new Prime Minister. On 28 September 2007, Prime Minister Manning called elections to the House of Representatives for 5 November. The 2007 elections followed a heated debate on constitutional reforms proposed by the Prime Minister's PNM. The opposition UNC argued the proposals would give too much power to the Prime Minister. The PNM won 26 of the 41 seats, just short of the two-thirds majority required to revise the Constitution. The UNC

took the remainder of the seats. The Congress of the People (COP) failed to win a seat, although it took over 22 per cent of the vote.

On 7 November 2007 Mr Manning took the oath of office and formed a new government that included 11 women, making it the second ever government made up mostly of women. On the following day, ministers were sworn in alongside new senators. On 8 April 2010, Prime Minister Manning asked President George Maxwell Richards to dissolve Parliament one day before it was scheduled to examine a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister. The motion had been filed in March by the Leader of the Opposition (UNC), Mrs Kamla Persad-Bissessar. She had accused the Government of a lack of oversight over corruption scandals involving a government urban development corporation. She criticised the Prime Minister's decision to dissolve Parliament as an act of cowardice.

The elections to the House of Representatives were subsequently set for 24 May, two and a half years earlier than they were constitutionally due. The results gave 29 seats to the People's Partnership which was a coalition of five political parties led by the UNC. The PNM took the remaining 12 seats. In all, 12 women were elected. On 26 May, Mrs Persad-Bissessar took the oath of office as Prime Minister, thereby becoming the first woman to assume the premiership in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2015, PNM returned to power after five years in opposition, ending the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led People's Partnership Government. PNM won 23 seats while UNC won 18 seats. The 2020 election, which was held amid strict health protocols due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reflected continued but reduced confidence in the PNM, with voter turnout falling and margins tightening – especially in battleground constituencies. Both elections reinforced ethnic and regional voting patterns, with the East-West corridor remaining PNM a stronghold and Central/South Trinidad largely backing UNC.

Political environment and key issues for 2025 election

Appointment of Prime Minister Stuart Young

On 3 January 2025, Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley announced his intention to resign. On 17 March 2025, Hon. Stuart Young, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, was appointed Prime Minister following Rowley's resignation. The Group was informed that the then-Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, condemned in the strongest terms Young's appointment, describing it as 'an assault on our democracy' and 'a blatant disregard for the Constitution'. The former Opposition Leader further claimed, 'appointment of Stuart Young as Prime Minister, without the mandate of the people through a general election, is an unlawful act of desperation' and argued that the retention of party leadership by Dr Rowley indicated that the PNM lacked an undisputed leader in the House of Representatives, making Young's appointment invalid.

The Group noted that Section 76(1) of the Constitution mandates the President to appoint as Prime Minister a member of the House of Representatives 'who is the leader in that House of the party commanding the majority's support, or, if such a leader is not evident, someone who, in the President's judgment, is most likely to command that support and is willing to accept the office'. Young was elected by the People's National Movement (PNM) parliamentary caucus. President Christine Kangaloo thus defended her decision, stating that Young's appointment was constitutional. The Group further noted that in the few days after the 2025 election, both former Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley and former Prime Minister Stuart Young resigned their positions as leader and Chairperson of the PNM respectively.

Tobago Self-Government Bill

The issue of self-government and autonomy for Tobago was one of the emotionally charged political matters for the 2025 election and a central campaign issue for the Tobago-based political parties. Autonomy was a key campaign issue for the Tobago People's Party (TPP), which now holds a majority in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). It was also a campaign issue for the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP), which previously held a majority in the THA. The governing PNM and opposition UNC also contributed

to the autonomy debates from a more cautious and centralised approach. The following key issues are being pushed by the Tobago political leadership.

- A constitutional referendum on self-determination;
- A reworking of fiscal arrangements with Trinidad; and
- A more transparent and equitable budget allocations.

In December 2024, the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament debated a revised version of the Tobago Self-Government Bill. The bill, which sought to provide increased legislative and financial autonomy for Tobago, failed to pass in Parliament, reigniting tensions. The outcome of the parliamentary session was reportedly met with strong opposition from Tobago's political leadership, particularly from Chief Secretary Farley Augustine, who threatened to appeal to international bodies such as the United Nations or pursue a status of 'free association' – a semi-independent arrangement where Tobago would retain its governance structure while remaining formally linked to Trinidad.

Tobago, the smaller of the two islands in the twin-island republic, has long harboured aspirations for greater self-governance. While it operates under its own House of Assembly, it was reported to the Group that many Tobagonians believe that the current arrangement still leaves the island overly dependent on decisions made by the Central Government in Trinidad. Many Tobagonians hold the issue of autonomy as part of a longer-term goal to reshape the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago — either through federalisation, enhanced devolution or even a symbolic push for independence.

Constitutional reforms

The issue of constitutional reform has been on the front burner of political discourse in Trinidad and Tobago and became prominent in the lead up to the 2025 election. In January 2024, Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley constituted a seven-member National Advisory Committee on Constitutional Reform (NACCR), chaired by former House Speaker Barendra Sinanan. The NACCR had mandate to engage with citizens both domestically and within the diaspora to inform its recommendations. NACCR submitted its report titled '*We The People*' to Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley on 2 August 2024.

The report highlighted that 'the current governance and institutional setting of the country does not correspond with the needs of a contemporary democratic republic, emphasising a need for change'. The NACCR's report recommends several significant reforms, including:

- Implementing a two-term limit for the Prime Minister to promote leadership renewal.
- Establishing fixed dates for general elections to enhance electoral predictability.
- Improving the efficiency of the criminal justice system, aiming for swifter and more effective trials.
- Enhancing accountability mechanisms for public officials and commissions, addressing concerns over delays in disciplinary actions.
- Strengthening anti-corruption measures to bolster public trust in governance.

The Group was informed that in the pre-election period, opposition and political critics had questioned the independence of the NACCR and the breadth of its consultation, suggesting that the process may not have fully captured the views of the public. The Group noted that the NACCR reported receiving 816 submissions from individuals, conducting 14 town hall meetings with 381 attendees and organising 3 youth events attended by 70 participants. Additionally, it reported that 32 submissions came from civil society organisations, 3 from political parties and 11 from constitutional offices. The Group was informed of a broader consultation initiated by the Prime Minister Keith Rowley in November 2024 and the extension of time for NACCR, which allowed for more public education on the proposed reforms.²

² Final report from the National Advisory Committee on Constitutional Reform (NACCR), titled *We The People*.

Security and state of emergency

In December 2024, following a surge in violence, including over five murders committed in 48 hours, President Christina Carla Kangaloo declared a state of emergency on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, in response to rising gang violence across the country. Trinidad and Tobago saw 624 murders in 2024, a new high for the country, and one of the highest figures in the Caribbean region. On 13 January 2025, the Government extended the nationwide state of emergency for a further three months, which ended on 13 April 2025.

In the weeks leading to the elections, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) reported that gun violence accounted for almost 75 per cent murders in 2025. The murder of 3 people on 5 April 2025 pushed the country's murder toll to 100 within 95 days of the state of emergency. The police reportedly seized 165 guns during the state of emergency and instituted a campaign that rewarded citizens with \$5,000 for every handgun recovered, and \$7,000 for automatic rifles.

The COG met with the TTPS and was briefed about the police commitment in ensuring Trinbagonians exercise their right to vote in a peaceful manner. In the days leading to the election, the TTPS alerted the public of intelligence suggesting plans to disrupt the electoral process.

The COG observed that despite concerns in the pre-election period about safety and security, the 2025 elections were conducted in a peaceful, safe and orderly manner, allowing the people of Trinidad and Tobago to exercise their franchise and with few reported cases of electoral offences. The Group noted that police arrested a man allegedly found to be in possession of \$30,000 on election day, after reports that he was offering money for votes.

Candidates and their political manifestos

It was reported to the COG that 17 political parties and a total of 161 candidates contested the Parliamentary Elections, including three independent candidates (Annex V). The COG noted that nominations were held on 4 April 2025. Political parties had divergent manifestos, but these converged on issues of the need for an inclusive and diversified economy, foreign exchange availability, sustainable energy and climate resilience, public safety and security, public sector governance, criminal and civil justice reform, education, and a youth and social policy. Despite the number of political parties and independent candidates, the 2025 election was largely regarded as a 'two-horse race' between the two main political parties, the governing PNM and the opposition UNC.

Coalition of interest

The UNC formed a 'Coalition of Interest' with four political parties and five trade unions, namely: the Progressive Empowerment Party (PEP), Laventille Outreach for Vertical Enrichment (LOVE), the Movement for National Development (MND) and the Congress of the People (COP). The trade unions in the coalition were the Oilfields Workers Trade Union (OWTU), the Public Services Association (PSA), the Transport and Industrial Workers Union (TIWU), the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Workers Union (TTPWU), and the Fire Services Association (FSA). The COG was informed that the 'coalition of interest' presented a strategy of combining resources and co-ordinating candidate placements across the 41 constituencies.

The COG noted that while some candidates ran under the UNC banner, other parties fielded candidates that represented their respective parties within the coalition framework. According to the official report of the EBC after recounts of votes in three constituencies, the UNC won 26 seats and the PNM won 13, while the TPP won 2 seats. As indicated in Table 2.1, 26 seats won by UNC was the largest the party has ever won. The COG observed that none of the other 14 political parties or independent candidates won electoral seats.

Political code of conduct

The Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB or 'the Council') was formed in 2014 to maintain a Code of Ethics in politics. The code, drafted in 2014 and developed by Roman Catholic Archbishop Joseph Harris, was designed to encourage political parties to observe civilised, integrity-filled conduct during their

Table 2.1 Result of elections (1995–2025)

Year	PNM	UNC	TPP	Turnout
2025	13 seats Stewart Young	26 seats Kamla Persad-Bissessar	2 seats	54.00%
2020	22 Seats 49.05% Keith Rowley	19 seats 47.14% Kamla Persad-Bissessar		58.08%
2015	23 Seats 51.68% Keith Rowley	17 seats 39.61% Kamla Persad-Bissessar		66.84%
2010	12 Seats 29.30% Patrick Manning	21 Seats 51.20% Kamla Persad-Bissessar		69.88%
2007	26 Seats 45.99% Patrick Manning	15 seats 29.85% Basdeo Panday		66.22%
2002	20 Seats 50.90% Patrick Manning	16 seats 46.90% Basdeo Panday		69.60%
2001	18 Seats 46.50% Patrick Manning	18 seats 49.90% Basdeo Panday		66.10%
2000	16 Seats 46.50% Patrick Manning	19 seats 51.70% Basdeo Panday		63.10%
1995	17 Seats 48.76% Patrick Manning	17 seats 45.76% Basdeo Panday		63.30%

campaigning. It was later endorsed in 2015 by five political parties, namely the Congress of the People, the People's National Movement, the Independent Liberal Party, the United National Congress and the Movement for Social Justice.

In January 2025, the main opposition party, the UNC, withdrew from the CRPB giving no reasons for its decision, saying it 'remains committed to upholding the Constitution and the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago'. For the 2025 election, it was reported to the COG that 16 political parties made a voluntary commitment to abide by the code, including the Tobago-based political parties. The COG met with the Council, which informed it that 'The code becomes operational only three months to elections which is considered inadequate.' For the 2025 election, the code became operational on the day the snap election was announced.

The CRPB monitors signatories' adherence to the code during national and local elections. Prohibited conduct under the code includes offering financial inducements, abusing a position of power, and making false or defamatory allegations against a party, candidates, representatives or members. The Group observed that while the CRPB has secured commitments from the main political parties, the code remains unenforceable under law, and the Council relies on moral suasion – although the code had been recommended for legislation in 2016.

The COG was informed by the CRPB that the code had made the campaigning more civil while not impacting its vibrancy. The CRPB encouraged political parties to script their campaign messages on political platforms, and it was reported to the COG that leading political parties scripted their campaign messages to promote adherence to the code.

Although there were instances of inflammatory statements when the code was not adhered to, the COG observed and commended the co-operation on election day between party agents, electoral officials and the police. The media reported occasions where rival candidates publicly embraced each other.

Election outcomes and its implications

The COG noted that in her inaugural speech, the Prime Minister outlined her plan to invest in economic development, public safety, security and social prosperity, and that resources would be used to build the infrastructure and the institutions that Trinidad and Tobago needs. The COG noted the appointment of Hon. Beckles-Robinson as PNM's first female Opposition Leader and her acceptance speech, which stressed that PNM 'intends to be an effective and responsible opposition'. The COG further observed that TPP's victory represents the first time in 15 years that a party has unseated PNM in Tobago. The political leader of the TPP indicated that the two seats won by the party in the House of Representatives afforded the 'people of Tobago some greater privilege in advancing the Island's democracy'.

3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration

System of government

Trinidad and Tobago has a parliamentary democratic system of government, with the President as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and the Prime Minister as the Head of Government. The 1976 Constitution (as amended) is the supreme law of the land and establishes Trinidad and Tobago as a republic and a sovereign democratic state. Sovereignty is vested in the people, who exercise their power of choice of government during parliamentary and municipal elections. These elections are an expression of the will of the people.

Legislative framework

The core legislative and regulatory framework applicable to the 2025 Parliamentary Elections comprised both domestic law and international conventions, charters and agreements that Trinidad and Tobago has ratified or consented to.

Domestic laws are as follows.

- The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (1976)
- The Representation of The People Act (1946, amended 2000)
- The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act (1967)
- The Municipal Corporations Act (1990)
- The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly Act) No.40 (1996)

Trinidad and Tobago has committed itself to several international principles, and ratified international treaties and conventions that set out standards for democratic elections. These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The Inter-American Democratic Charter
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- The Commonwealth Charter

The Representation of the People Act (ROPA) (as amended) is the relevant legislation for Parliamentary Elections and includes the following subsidiary legislation:

- Registration Rules
- Election Rules
- Election Proceedings Rules
- Prescribed Forms Rules

Parliament sought to modernise the country's electoral framework by introducing regulations on campaign financing to improve transparency and accountability with the introduction of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2020. The bill proposed measures such as mandatory disclosure of political donations and campaign expenditure, limits on contributions from individuals and entities, and compulsory submission of audited financial statements by political parties. It also introduced provisions for the formal registration and regulation of political parties, requiring them to register with the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) in order to contest elections and access benefits such as state funding or media time. Additionally, the bill sought to ensure equitable access to both the state and non-state media during election campaigns, promoting fairness in political advertising and coverage. As of the time of writing, it has not been enacted into law.

Executive (the President)

The President is the Head of State and is elected by the Electoral College, a unicameral body consisting of all the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Section 33 of the Constitution provides for a five-year term.

The President must be over 35 years old, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, and must have at the time of nomination been resident in the country for an unbroken period of ten years.

The primary role of the President is to give assent to bills and sign them into law. In addition, the President is responsible for inter alia: appointing the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition; appointing the Attorney General, ministers and parliamentary secretaries on the advice of the Prime Minister; appointing Senators; the proclamation of public emergencies; and for appointing members of commissions and boards following consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

Parliament

Trinidad and Tobago has a bicameral legislature, consisting of the 41-member House of Representatives (the lower house) and the 31-member Senate (the upper house). In addition, the 15-member Tobago House of Assembly has limited devolved responsibilities and is elected separately.

House of Representatives

The 41-member directly elected House of Representatives ('the House') is the lower house of Parliament, with Members of Parliament (MPs) representing single-seat constituencies from across the country. Based on a five-year parliamentary term, MPs are elected using the first-past-the-post electoral system. The leader of the party commanding the highest number of MPs within the House is appointed Prime Minister by the President and forms a government.

To be eligible to stand as a candidate for election, one must be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago above the age of 18 and must have resided in Trinidad and Tobago for at least two years prior to nomination or be domiciled and resident in Trinidad and Tobago on that date.

Senate

The 31-member Senate is appointed by the President, provided Senators are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and over the age of 25. Sixteen Senators are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, six on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and nine by the President to represent civil society.

The President of the Senate is elected by Senators who are not otherwise ministers or parliamentary secretaries. The Senate has equal power in proposing laws/bills, with the noted exception of 'money bills' (any bill involving monetary provisions, such as appropriation or taxation). The Senate can, however, amend money bills.

Judiciary

The judiciary is led by the Chief Justice, who is appointed by the President after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. It consists of the Supreme Court of Judicature and the magistracy.

The Supreme Court of Judicature includes the Court of Appeal and the High Court. Judges serving on the Court of Appeal and the High Court are appointed by the President, acting on the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission (JLSC). The JLSC is composed of five members: the Chief Justice (as Chairman), the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, and three other members appointed by the President following consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The Magistracy, headed by the Chief Magistrate, oversees the Courts of Summary Criminal Jurisdiction and the Petty Civil Courts. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council serves as the final appellate court for both civil and criminal matters. Additionally, the Caribbean Court of Justice, located in Port of Spain, has original jurisdiction in interpreting the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the legal framework for economic integration and co-operation among CARICOM member countries through the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Complaints and election disputes

Trinidad and Tobago has an established mechanism for dealing with election disputes during the electoral period. Candidates or their agents may request a general or limited recount of the announced results, before 12:00 noon the day following the poll.

Candidates and their agents can also, within four days of the announcement of the result, apply to the Chief Election Officer to check the results of that district. This would pertain only to questioned ballots (marked at the preliminary count with a 'Q' by the presiding officer).

A voter or a candidate may also question the validity of the election of a member of the House of Representatives in the High Court, as outlined in Section 106 of the ROPA. The petition may also be brought in respect of the conduct of a returning officer or election clerk (ROPA, Section 107). The requirements include that:

- the petitioner must be a person who had a right to vote at the election, or a person validly nominated as a candidate at the election (Section 107(1)(b));
- the petition shall be in the prescribed form, state the prescribed matters and be signed by the petitioner, or all the petitioners if more than one (Section 107(3); and
- the petition must be filed with the Registrar within eight days after the return of the member to whose election the petition relates.

Representation petitions are determined by the High Court, with appeals to the Court of Appeal. The decision of the Court of Appeal is final. There appears to be public confidence in the judiciary to determine election petitions. The High Court and Court of Appeal have passed important judgements on election petitions.

For example, in *Barry Sinanan & Others v The Returning Officer for the Constituency of San Fernando West & Others* (2015 Election Petition Cases), although the substantive question of whether the extension of polling hours invalidated the elections was ultimately resolved, the issue of legal costs remains pending.

The Group notes that although procedural safeguards are in place to ensure fair adjudication of election petitions in Trinidad and Tobago, delays at any stage of the process, including the resolution of costs, have the potential to erode public confidence in the integrity of the electoral system.

Recommendation

- To uphold the credibility of the democratic process and ensure access to justice, it is recommended that all stages of election petitions, including the determination of costs, be concluded in a timely and efficient manner to protect electoral integrity and maintain trust in the judicial process.

Electoral offences

Electoral offences are outlined under Part V of the ROP Act in Sections 60 to 105. These include:

- offences by registration, assistant registration and election officers;

- illegal registration, selling or purchasing of identification cards or poll cards;
- forgery of registration records and identification cards, failure to make return or declaration of expenses, and making of false declarations; and
- influencing electors to vote for any candidate, illegal voting, bribery, undue influence and personation.

Recommendation

- The Group noted reports of electoral offences, including allegations of bribery on election day. It strongly recommends that reported offences be promptly investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated to ensure accountability, deter future violations, and safeguard the integrity of the electoral process in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission

Section 71 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of the Elections and Boundaries Commission ('the Commission'). The Commission comprises a Chairman and up to four other members. The Chairman and other members of the Commission are appointed by the President, after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. The term of office for members of the Commission is five years with the eligibility for reappointment.



COG Members with EBC Chairman and EBC Chief Election Officer

Front row (from left to right): Mr Mark Ramkerrysingh (EBC Chairman), Hon. Evarist Bartolo (COG Chair), Ms Fern Narcis (EBC CEO).
 Back row (from left to right): Orrette Fisher, Aiman Rasheed, Abdullahi Abubakar, Madonna Lynch, Lindiwe Maleleka, Latoya McDowald-Hurley, Nazima Raghubir, H.E. Winnie Kiap.

The Commission is an independent body responsible for registering voters and conducting elections, and it operates free from the direction or control of any individual or authority. The Constitution states that the Commission must be provided with sufficient staff to effectively carry out its responsibilities.

The Commission manages a Central Electoral Office in Port of Spain, along with 14 registration area offices and four sub-offices across Trinidad and Tobago. Individuals may visit these offices to register for their national identification cards and to have their names included on the voters list.

The COG acknowledges the short timeframe within which the EBC was required to conduct this election and commends the dedication demonstrated by its officials in a highly contested environment.

However, the Group received reports indicating that the Commission lacked necessary resources, which at times hindered its ability to meet its statutory obligations, including post-election reporting and data disaggregation. The Group also heard that there was limited engagement with key stakeholders in the electoral process. In that regard, the UNC made a formal request for an independent enquiry into the operations of the Commission.

Recommendations

- The Group encourages the Commission to adopt a more proactive and structured approach to stakeholder engagement, ensuring regular, inclusive and transparent dialogue with all key actors in the electoral process. These actors include political parties, civil society organisations, the law association, the media and other relevant institutions.
- The state is urged to ensure that the Commission is provided with adequate resources and support to fully discharge its constitutional mandate.

Boundary delimitation

Trinidad and Tobago is divided into 41 constituencies (39 in Trinidad and 2 in Tobago). Under Section 72 and Schedule 2 of the Constitution, the Elections and Boundaries Commission determines the number and boundaries of constituencies. The Commission determines the constituency boundaries based on the population, the use of natural boundaries such as major highways and rivers (wherever possible), and with special attention paid to the needs of sparsely populated areas that on account of size, isolation or inadequacy of communications cannot adequately be represented by a single Member of Parliament.

Table 3.1 New constituencies

New constituencies
Arima
Caroni Central
Cumuto/Manzanilla
La Horquetta/Talparo
Laventille East/Morvant
Laventille West
Oropouche East
Port of Spain North/St Ann's West
Port of Spain South
San Fernando East
San Fernando West
Tabaquite
Toco/Sangre Grande

Table 3.2 Renamed constituencies

Renamed constituencies
Malabar/Mausica (name and boundary change, formerly D'abadie/O'meara)
Claxton Bay (name and boundary change, formerly Pointe-a-Pierre)
Trincity/Maloney (name and boundary change, formerly Arouca/Maloney)
Aranguez/St Joseph (name change, formerly St Joseph)
Arouca/Lopinot (formerly Lopinot/Bon Air West)

The last boundary demarcation was approved by a resolution of the House of Representatives in December 2024, when the boundaries of 16 constituencies were redrawn and 5 constituencies were renamed in accordance with Section 72 of the Constitution. The Commission divided every constituency into polling divisions and determined the number of polling stations within each division.

The COG heard concerns regarding allegations of gerrymandering to favour the governing party in the upcoming election.

The COG noted the complaints by the UNC on election day, which alleged that the venue changes and merging of two polling stations in the Tunapuna constituency 'negatively impacted voting process and affected the ease and accessibility of voting for many electors'. The Group encourages the EBC to consult widely and improve the transparency of the constituency delimitation process in the future.

Recommendation

- The EBC is encouraged to engage in broad consultations, to enhance the transparency of the boundary review process, and ensure that information is shared as widely and promptly as possible. The Group recommends that the designated minister should promptly lay the Commission's recommendations before the House of Representatives for approval.

Voter registration

Section 51 of the Constitution prescribes the qualification for a person to vote at an election. This is being a Commonwealth citizen of 18 years and above and having such other qualifications regarding residence or registration as may be prescribed. Under Section 12(1) of the ROPA, the prescribed residency period for a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago is two months preceding the qualifying date. For a Commonwealth citizen, the requirement is at least one year's residency immediately preceding the qualifying date and within the meaning of Section 5(1) of the Immigration Act.

Registration is carried out using Registration Rules made under the ROPA. This procedure involves making an in-person application at the registration area office for the district where the applicant resides. Information such as name, date of birth, residential address and occupation is to be provided. A photograph and thumb print are also required. Once registered, the person's name will appear on the list of electors, which is published annually on 1 July. Objections can be raised regarding the eligibility of registered persons. These will be heard by the registration officer, who may allow or disallow the objection. Where a registration is disallowed, an appeal lies with the Chief Election Officer and the Court of Appeal accordingly.

Under Section 30 of the ROPA, the President issued a Proclamation directing the conduct of electoral registration in all 41 electoral districts. The period declared was 20 March 2025 to 28 March 2025. The purpose of the exercise was to facilitate those persons who:

- have attained the age of 18 years and over, but who had not been registered as electors;
- have been registered as electors, but changed address and had not yet advised of this change (of address);

- have been registered as electors and had changed their name because of marriage, or otherwise, but their previous name appeared on the preliminary list of electors; and
- have been registered as electors but their names did not appear on the preliminary list of electors.

On commencement of the electoral registration, the annual list published on 1 July 2024, became the preliminary list of electors pursuant to an order made by the President (Section 29(5) of the ROPA). The Commission then published a revised list notifying persons that the deadline for making objections to the names appearing on that list for the first time was 15 April 2025.

Part IV of the Election Rules (Sections 59–99) provide for special voting procedures for special electors. An elector is eligible to be a special elector if: serving in the protective services (police, defence force, prison service); an official of the Elections and Boundaries Commission; an election officer (returning



Special ballot boxes

officer, presiding officer, poll clerk or polling agent); a candidate or their spouse voting outside their district; someone unable to reach their polling station (including travellers between islands, hospital patients, inmates or prisoners); a flight crew member; an offshore worker; or any person designated by the Commission.

Applications to be treated as a special elector must be submitted to the returning officer between the publication of the election notice and nomination day and are approved upon satisfaction of eligibility. The registration officer compiles approved applicants into a separate register of special electors, and these electors are not permitted to vote at polling stations on election day, but instead must vote via special voting procedures.

A total of 1,153,850 persons were registered to vote in the 2025 Parliamentary Elections, of which 16,748 applicants were approved as special electors.



The COG observing the procedure for the sorting of special ballot envelopes.

The Group notes concerns about the voter registration process, particularly the delay in the removal of deceased individuals and persons no longer resident in Trinidad and Tobago from the voters list. The Group heard about steps taken to ensure that persons who died after 2006 were removed from the register and encourage periodic audits of the voter registry to identify and remove ineligible voters.

Recommendation

- The COG recommends the implementation of more effective public education campaigns to emphasise the importance of regularly updating voter information. Additionally, it is recommended that steps be taken to streamline the voter registration process, ensuring greater accuracy and efficiency.

Candidate eligibility and nomination

The closing date for nominations was 4 April 2025. Under the ROPA, candidates must be nominated by six or more proposers whose names appear on the electoral register. The nomination paper shall contain the full names and addresses of the candidates and his or her proposers, the candidate's occupation, and the registration or file numbers of his or her proposers. A nominee claiming party affiliation must produce evidence of this affiliation, make a declaration of the electoral district to be contested and, among other clauses, declare that they are not under allegiance, obedience or adherence to any foreign power or state.

Candidates or their authorised agents are required to deliver to the returning officer a statutory declaration of their qualifications. A deposit of 5,000 Trinidad and Tobago dollars (TT\$) is required, which is forfeited if they receive less than one-eighth of the total votes cast for all the candidates in the electoral district.

Once a candidate has submitted the relevant nomination papers and statutory declarations, has met the aforementioned criteria and paid the deposit, they stand nominated. The returning officer assigns a symbol to be affixed to every ballot paper opposite the name of each candidate.

The invalidity of a nomination paper by the returning officer is final and can only be challenged on a representation petition. The returning officer shall cause the nomination papers and statutory declarations to be posted at the place where they were delivered.

At the close of nominations, 161 candidates were nominated to contest the 2025 Parliamentary Elections.

Recommendation

- The ROPA outlines the process for candidate nominations (Election Rule 7) but it does not create a centralised system for political parties to nominate candidates. The Group highlights the limited regulatory framework governing political party registration and campaign finance. It reaffirms the 2015 Commonwealth Observer Group's statement that 'the EBC is considering proposals to regulate the registration and campaign financing of political parties'. A decade ago, the Group recommended that 'the incoming Parliament, political parties, and all relevant stakeholders prioritise this process'. This has become increasingly urgent.

Voter education

The Elections and Boundaries Commission provided information about voting rights, the voting process, the location of polling stations and election offences, among other things through extensive media coverage. This included through its website, Facebook page, as well as via the traditional media.

During the consultations with electoral stakeholders, the Group noted that voter education was generally low. Some stakeholders were of the view that the Commission did not adequately discharge its duty to educate voters, specifically first-time voters, on the process. In addition, the lack of disaggregated voter information prevented the Commission from identifying specific groups of voters and tailoring voter education programmes to them.

Recommendation

- The COG strongly encourages the Commission to continuously engage with all stakeholders, including civil society, to develop programmes and enhance voter education.

Recruitment and training of election staff

The Commission trained 16,000 election officials and polling day staff and employed more than 13,000 for the 2025 Parliamentary Elections. This included presiding officers, deputy presiding officers, ballot box officers and poll clerks. The Group notes the engagement of information officers, who were useful in assisting voters with finding their names on the lists and directing them to the correct polling stations. The Group was informed that training was conducted for each category of officials.

4. Participation and Inclusion

This chapter summarises the observations of the Commonwealth Observer Group with respect to citizen participation and inclusion in the electoral process and the opportunities and challenges for citizens, civil society, youth and women during the conduct of the 13th Republican Parliamentary Elections. The electoral legal framework has a profound impact on the participation, inclusion and conduct of civil society, women, young people and persons with disabilities in elections. Along with the legal framework, the socio-political context in Trinidad and Tobago requires examination to understand the participation and inclusion of citizens in elections.

The legal framework for political inclusion and participation

The legal framework for political participation in Trinidad and Tobago is primarily based on the following: the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Representative of the People's Act (ROPA). Other legislation, including laws relating to the governance of political parties and the media, also affects the inclusivity and conduct of elections. The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago forms the foundation of elections, establishing the fundamental principles of the electoral system. The Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to vote, freedom of association, freedom of expression, all freedoms essential for political participation. The ROPA covers the conduct of elections, including making adequate allowances for employees to vote, arrangements for special voting to expand the franchise, as well as provisions on allowing election observation by political parties.

Trinidad and Tobago is also party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and the CARICOM Charter on Civil Society.

Political inclusion and participation

The Group met with and heard from youth and women's groups, the EBC, the police, CSOs, the media, political parties and independent candidates. The general prevailing consensus among citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and as observed by the Group, is that the electoral environment was conducive to political activity. This was also evidenced by the energetic campaigning by political parties and candidates. Notwithstanding complaints of bias regarding the EBC by the then main opposition, and of favouring the ruling party by the state media, the political environment was largely viewed by actors as favourable for the inclusion and participation of citizens.

Women's political inclusion

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a third of the House of Representatives (26.8 per cent) and the Senate (30.5 per cent) of Trinidad and Tobago combined comprised women in the 12th Parliament. However, the women's representation in elected positions has decreased from 30 per cent in 2015 to 28.6 per cent in 2020, and 24.3 per cent in 2025, showing stagnation or a slight decline in representation of women in Parliament. This is below the third of women in elected positions that is considered a minimum threshold for critical mass and meaningful influence by organisations such as UN Women and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CiWIL). This decrease in female representation in Parliament occurred despite an increase in female candidates from 2015 (40 candidates) to 2020 (45 candidates) and 2025 (56 candidates). The representation of women in the Trinidad and Tobago House of Representatives and Senate is, therefore, below the average of 41 per cent in the lower and upper chambers of the Caribbean.



Some of the women CSOs met by the COG



The Group was informed that women are less likely to be nominated by political parties as candidates for 'winnable' constituencies. The Group heard that while female candidates face unique challenges, such as financial and political disparities, Trinidad and Tobago has made progress in advancing women's political participation. Four (4) of the 17 political parties were female led: the United National Congress (UNC), the Patriotic Front (PF), the All-People's Party (APP) and the National Coalition for Transformation (NCT). The positions of President, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago will, in a historic first for the Caribbean, be served by women following the 2025 elections. The Group observed that while

women are active supporters, organisers and administrators in politics and elections at the grassroots level, more needs to be done to address women's representation in Parliament.

Recommendations

- The Parliament should consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of women in electoral processes.
- The Government should facilitate the adoption and implementation of the National Policy on Gender and Development, with a view to promoting 'the full participation of women, men and girls' and to guarantee 'equal access to progress for all'.

Persons with disabilities

In addition to the ROPA, regulations and procedures by the EBC facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities in the country's electoral processes. The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2018), while not specific to elections, is the overarching policy framework that seeks to eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including their participation in political and public life. To ensure the participation of people with disabilities, and to protect their franchise, the EBC has made arrangements to improve accessibility of polling stations.

The EBC continues to implement measures aimed at independent polling by people with disabilities, including the use of a template to allow blind voters to cast their ballots unassisted. The Group observed the accommodations and assistance provided to persons with disabilities and elderly people during polling. The Group notes and commends the partnership between the EBC and the Consortium of Disability Organisations (CODO) in improving accessibility for persons with disabilities on election day. The Group notes that polling stations were generally accessible, as they were placed on the ground floor and ramps were installed to improve accessibility in most locations observed. These actions are consistent with Trinidad and Tobago's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



Persons with disabilities being given priority at a polling station

Recommendations

- The EBC should continue building on the engagement with the CODO to advance the inclusion and participation of PWDs in civic and political life.
- The Parliament should consider passing the Persons with Disabilities Bill³.

Youth

The participation of the youth demographic in the electoral process is crucial, as they represent a substantial portion of the population of Trinidad and Tobago.⁴ Their active participation can influence policy decisions, especially on issues directly affecting them, such as education, employment and climate change. The Group observed that the UNC's manifesto pledges the establishment of a National Youth Cabinet to facilitate 'direct involvement in policy making across ministries. The manifesto also pledges the formation of a Youth Senate Advisory Committee to gather 'formal legislative input from youth'.



The COG meeting with youth groups

The National Youth Policy (2020–2025) emphasises empowerment and strategic engagement of young people as partners in the development of the country. A key aspect of these pledges and youth policy involves facilitating youth inclusion in civic and democratic life. Youth groups, however, noted a lack of meaningful inclusion and engagement with parties across the political spectrum. While a significant proportion of polling staff and polling agents were youth, and young people were highly visible in the campaign, the Group heard that politics as practised in Trinidad and Tobago do not appeal to youth in general. The Group noted that the Patriotic Front (PF) fielded more young candidates than other parties for the 2025 elections. The youth expressed interest in contributing to civic and political life, and a desire for meaningful inclusion by the Government and political parties.

³ It was reported to the Group that Persons with Disability bill is being considered in Parliament

⁴ *Trinidad and Tobago Population and Housing Census Report* (2011).

Recommendation

- The Government and political parties should proactively engage with youth groups, including the youth councils, in Trinidad and Tobago to address youth issues and build their interest in politics and electoral participation.

Civil society organisations

The Group heard about the low visibility of CSOs engaged in voter education, mobilisation of citizens for voting, and in civic matters in the Trinidad and Tobago 2025 elections. The Group noted the absence of citizen election observers in the polling stations; their absence reduces opportunities for citizens to contribute to and participate in electoral processes. Civil society organisations noted that they face challenges, such as lack of resources and platforms to meaningfully engage with the EBC, the media and political parties. The Group noted that CSOs remain willing and eager to contribute to electoral processes, including in voter education and inclusion initiatives by the EBC, political parties and the media.

Recommendations

- The EBC should strengthen its engagement with civil society groups to facilitate continuous voter education and awareness raising.
- The Government of Trinidad and Tobago should consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of civil society organisations in electoral processes, including in the implementation of civic and voter education programmes.
- The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the EBC should proactively engage with a broad cross-section of CSOs working across democracy, human rights, good governance and civic engagement, in the administration of elections, to ensure their concerns are addressed.
- The Government and the EBC should strengthen the legal framework to incentivise civil society to function as accredited citizen election observers. This could include detailing the procedural provisions and roles and responsibilities of citizen election observers.
- The CSOs should consider fielding domestic election observation efforts to improve citizen participation, as well as the integrity of and trust in elections.

Declining political participation

The Group noted a clear trend of declining political participation in voting during the past three general elections. As shown in [Table 4.1](#), turnout has decreased significantly from 66.84 per cent and 58.0 per cent to 54 per cent in 2015, 2020 and 2025 respectively. This declining voter turnout in elections corresponds with an increasing sense of apathy, as observed by the Group, among the citizenry in Trinidad and Tobago,

Table 4.1 Voter turnout

Year	Turnout (%)
2025	54
2020	58.08
2015	66.84
2010	69.88
2007	66.22
2002	69.60
2001	66.10
2000	63.10
1995	63.30

and particularly among young people. A lack of disaggregated data by gender and age limits the ability to assess the level of youth participation in voting. While youth are a key demographic, anecdotal evidence suggests their participation is low. A steadily declining voter turnout, combined with low youth participation in voting, is worrying for democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

Recommendations

- The Government and political parties should support the EBC to implement systems to collect and publish disaggregated data on elections.

5. The Campaign and the Media

The campaign

Election campaigns in Trinidad and Tobago are guided by the ROPA Chapter 2:01, with key aspects including election offences, expenses, corrupt practices, as well as penalties.

Although Trinidad and Tobago's laws do not define an official campaign period, Section 33 of the ROPA stipulates a minimum of 14 days between the issuance of the writ and Nomination Day, followed by at least 21 days between nomination day and polling day. These provisions establish minimum timeframes but allow for flexibility in their application. In practice, the overall campaign period typically spans five to six weeks from the issuance of the writ to polling day, though this can be extended depending on the election schedule.

The campaign period for the 2025 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections began after the Parliament was dissolved and writs of election were issued on 18 March 2025. During this period, various activities took place, including voter education, political campaigns, debates and opinion polls.

Candidates and supporters used branded t-shirts, banners, flags and other materials to show their support. However, according to the ROPA, displaying these items on election day in and around polling stations is strictly prohibited. Candidates and supporters are also not allowed to gather near polling stations and/or to play loud music, among other guidelines.

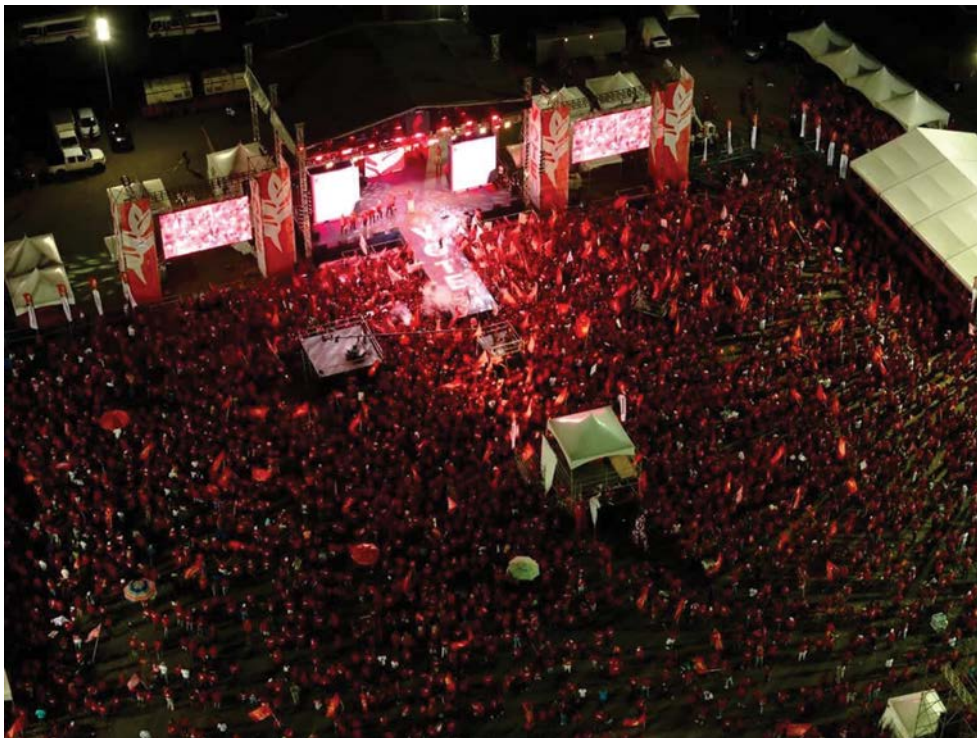
Observers noted campaign posters in public spaces in the week before the poll on 28 April 2025, and in some areas, posters of candidates were visibly displayed on roadsides.

Campaigns were also conducted through street canvassing and door-to-door visits. Large and impressive campaign rallies were mounted during the final days leading up to polling and were broadcast live on television, the radio and internet.

The Group observed final campaign rallies in Port of Spain and in Tobago. The rallies were peaceful, colourful and well attended, echoing the true colours of the country's carnival spirit. The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties and supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been observed.



United National Congress (UNC) rally in Trinidad



People's National Movement (PNM) rally in Trinidad

Timetable and schedule of 2025 Parliamentary Elections

S/N	Activity	Date
1	Dissolution of Parliament	18 March 2025
2	Issuance of writs of election	18 March 2025
3	Nomination day	4 April 2025
4	Election day	28 April 2025

Campaign strategies

In their campaign manifestos, both the PNM and UNC framed their economic messages around recent trends, including maintaining energy sector competitiveness while accelerating growth in tourism, manufacturing, financial services and renewable energy.

The following policy areas and issues featured heavily on the campaign trail.

- Increased cost of living in Trinidad and Tobago
- Autonomy and self-government for Tobago Island
- Small business and individual entrepreneurs' funding and skills training
- Property Tax reform
- Crime and community safety
- Public sector governance reforms
- Issues surrounding the construction of the Piarco international airport
- Status of Forces Agreement signed with the USA allowing for military-military collaboration.

The campaign strategies of political parties seem heavily focused on economic and infrastructural and healthcare issues, with less emphasis on social issues such as, education, and social welfare. Based on the

COG interaction with stakeholders, these areas are equally important to voters and might have influenced their decision to participate.

The COG observed that while both political parties emphasise economic growth in various sectors, there appear to be a lack of detailed plans and specific policies on how they intend to achieve these goals. Voters may have found it challenging to understand the practical steps each party will take to stimulate this growth.

The COG observed that there was little mention of targeted policies or initiatives aimed at engaging young people which may have contributed to the low voter interest as compared to previous elections.

Recommendation

- Political parties should develop and communicate clear and practical solutions to pressing issues, complemented by youth-focused policies and initiatives that drive engagement and inspire participation.

Campaign financing

Campaign funding is primarily governed by the ROPA, though Trinidad and Tobago still lacks a comprehensive campaign finance law.

While the ROPA limits campaign spending by a candidate to TT\$50,000, no such restriction exists for political parties. Nor is there any legislation for the regulation or disclosure of party campaign financing or donations.

Many stakeholders, including the opposition (now the Government), appeared concerned by the significant amount of government spending, which they claimed was designed 'to induce, relocate and/or instil fear in voters, in a concerted effort to better its chances at the polls'.

Civil society organisations and smaller parties have advocated for campaign finance legislation to ensure the integrity of elections and good ethical governance.

While a regime of accountability is outlined under Sections 44 to 49 of the ROPA regarding individual candidates' funding and expenditure, there is no similar requirement of accountability for political parties.

This gap allows political parties to potentially spend vast amounts of money on campaigns without any accountability.



COG coverage during the delivery of its interim statement

Recommendations

- The EBC should be empowered by Parliament to establish clear and enforceable spending limits to ensure a level playing field and to monitor and enforce campaign finance regulations for both individual candidates and political parties.
- A mechanism should be established to monitor candidate spend, including a declaration by both parties and candidates of source of funds.
- Parliament should pass the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2020, which was first introduced in 2015 and includes provisions to regulate campaign finance.

The media

The media in Trinidad and Tobago remains vibrant and is highly relied on by the public for information on issues of national interests, including political campaigning and elections.

There are an estimated 250 media workers across the twin island republic, with 36 FM radio broadcast frequencies, 5 free-to-air television stations and 11 cable/over-the-top service providers, and 3 daily national newspapers. There is also a smaller number of weekly and community-based publications. Additionally, there are three dedicated digital news services. There is a web presence by the traditional mass media newsrooms, and many media houses have a social media presence.⁵

More than 80 per cent of the Trinidad and Tobago population is connected to the internet. Therefore, social media, including platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X and Tik Tok, are easily accessible and active in the country. Access to these platforms has led to the emergence of influencers as well as commentators. They use social media to promote discussions on topical social and cultural issues. The Group noted that some of the commentators were involved in political commentary related to elections campaigning, with clear indications as to which party or candidate they supported.

The Group noted some misinformation and disinformation on social media about the election process, the ECB and political candidates. However, these instances had no major traction as citizens seemed to rely heavily on the mainstream media for information.

Freedom of the press is strong and respected in Trinidad and Tobago, as journalists can easily access political and civil society officials. The press is widely respected by the public. Reporters without Borders ranked Trinidad and Tobago 19/180 on its Press Freedom Index in 2025, pointing out that: 'Year after year, Trinidad and Tobago maintains its good record in terms of freedom of the press, even though there is still room for improvement.'⁶

Legal framework

Freedom of the press is enshrined in the country's Constitution, as is freedom of information legislation. This sees access to some state information on request. Other laws that impact the work of journalists include the Cybercrime Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Data Protection Act and the Broadcast Code overseen by the Telecommunications Authority. The Broadcast Code ('the Code') is not active. Under Section 6.1, broadcasters would be expected to ensure that political parties and candidates contesting elections are given a 'reasonable opportunity to express their views and opinions on broadcast platforms'.

⁵ Media Institute of the Caribbean (2022), *Through the Pandemic: State of the Caribbean Media Report*. Association of Caribbean Media Workers, www.mediainstituteofthecaribbean.com/downloads/report-through-the-pandemic-state-of-the-caribbean-2022#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20we%20celebrated%2020,the%20development%20of%20our%20region.

⁶ Reporters without Borders, 'World Press Freedom Index', <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

The Code promotes a 'fair chance' for all parties and candidates to 'participate in news and current affairs programming, ensuring balanced and impartial coverage'.⁷ In 2022, the Code was rejected by the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago, which labelled the Code as 'having a chilling effect on press freedom and free expression online'. As a result, the Code was never formally activated. However, the Telecommunications Authority monitors broadcast services for breaches of licensing provisions.

Recommendation

- The COG recommends wider consultation between the Telecommunication Authority with the media to introduce a code to guide professional, fair and equitable coverage of elections.

Media bodies

The Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT) remains defunct. This means it is not actively functioning or fulfilling its role in representing press workers, nor does it have enforceable guidelines in place for media coverage of election-related issues. However, it was active between 2022 and 2024, when it was resuscitated and was managed by a president and executive. At the time of writing, MATT represents press workers and has an interim President, whose aim is to call internal elections.⁸

Recommendation

- Media professionals should work towards reviving the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago and should consider introducing a media code for elections coverage.

Media coverage of the elections campaign

The media coverage of the 2025 elections campaign was commendable. The media provided coverage of issues related to elections, voter education and awareness of processes, as well as other issues that arose during this period. These included debates on social and economic issues affecting the country. The media also covered political rallies and promoted discussions related to issues raised during these rallies. The media captured the opinions of elderly people, youth and women on issues that included support for political parties and candidates, as well as social and other issues. The EBC used the media to promote voter education and awareness. Several advertisements were broadcast on the radio and television and appeared online and in print.

The Group noted that not all parties and independent candidates were covered equitably in the media. For instance, the state media carried the full campaigns of the incumbent party and pro-government stories dominated its news cycle. Other media houses provided fair coverage to many of the parties and candidates; however, this coverage did not include independent candidates, who only occasionally featured in the press. Many of those independent candidates and smaller parties opted for paid political advertisements in the press and used social media to promote their campaigns.

It must be noted that media houses promoted the Code of Ethical Political Conduct, which is maintained by the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB). The media reported on the code itself, as well as violations to the code. This is commendable, as it highlighted real-time elections-related issues for the public.⁹

⁷ Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (2023), 'Consultative Document on a Broadcasting Code', <https://tatt.org.tt/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/A-Broadcasting-Code-for-the-Republic-of-Trinidad-and-Tobago-August-2008.pdf#:~:text=6.1%20For%20stations%20which%20have%20news%20con%2D,to%20have%20their%20views%20and%20opinions%20aired.&text=Objective:%20To%20ensure%20that%20broadcasters%20respect%20the.connection%20with%20obtaining%20material%20included%20in%20programmes>.

⁸ Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (2025), 'January 2025 update from MATT's interim president', [mediatt.org](https://mediatt.org/2025/01/06/january-update-from-matts-interim-president/), January, <https://mediatt.org/2025/01/06/january-update-from-matts-interim-president/>

⁹ CNC3 (2025), 'Council flags campaign violations ahead of election day', 26 April, <https://www.cnc3.co.tt/council-flags-campaign-violations-ahead-of-election-day/>.

Recommendations

- The EBC could improve its reach to the public by doing more media engagements with the press. These can include training for media professionals, as well as regular press briefings on its work throughout the election cycle.
- There should be legislation to promote equitable access to the state media for all political parties and independent candidates in terms of their campaigns, interviews and advertisements.

Media coverage of the election day

The media's coverage on election day appeared to be balanced. Media coverage captured a wide cross-section of the population voting. It featured core groups including women and youth voters, as well as persons with disabilities. The media also provided timely reports on the election day processes, including the opening of polling stations, voter feedback, political parties' concerns, and the close of polls and tabulations.



Some newspaper reports on preliminary findings of observer missions

The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago must be applauded for respecting the work of the media and journalists. There were no reports of attacks or intimidation of the media while it was covering political rallies nor on election day. Citizens and political groups even sought out the media to air their concerns or share praise.

Recommendations

- Media houses should prioritise training for media professionals to increase the quality of coverage through internal and external training opportunities.
- Parliament should consider legislation on campaign financing, which should include a specific declaration of funds used for political media advertisements and sponsoring favourable campaigns.

6. Voting, Counting and Results Transmission

The 28 April 2025 Parliamentary Elections were conducted using the voters list published on 04 April; the list contained 1,153,850 eligible voters. The COG was advised by the EBC that under the process of continuous registration, eligible voters have been added annually. The process of removing deceased voters or voters who are ineligible to appear on the register based on residency violations was not carried out with any consistency until 2006. This was when arrangements were made for the Registrar General Civil Registry to provide a list of deaths in Trinidad and Tobago on an annual basis. There appear to be electors who are still to be removed, given the population count of 1,368,333¹⁰ and the voters list of 1,153,850. This has implications for the accuracy of the percentage voter turnout nationally, down to the level of polling stations.

Recommendations

- The process of removing ineligible names from the voters register should include a house-to-house campaign to identify and remove individuals not recorded as deceased before 2006.
- The list should be disaggregated by gender and age and made accessible to the public.

There are 41 electoral districts with a total of 1,679 polling divisions. However, given the sizes of some polling divisions, voters have been divided alphabetically and extra polling stations established, bringing the total to 2,137.

Polling stations were primarily located in schools and community halls and a few public buildings.

Members of the COG visited polling stations in their assigned areas of deployment on election day. They observed the opening and closing of the polls in selected stations, as well as the voting process in several polling stations across the country. This included in Port of Spain and East-West corridor; San Fernando East and West; and Eastern Trinidad and Tobago.

Opening of the poll

The polls were scheduled to open at 6:00am and close at 6:00pm. Members of the COG were on hand to observe the process in various locations where they were deployed. The opening process requires that each polling station is staffed with a presiding officer, deputy presiding officer, two poll clerks and a ballot box clerk. In polling locations housing multiple polling stations, information desks were set up on the outside to assist voters in finding their polling stations.



Information desk set up outside a polling station to assist voters.

¹⁰ Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Development (2024), 'Mid-Year Population Estimate for 2024', <https://cso.gov.tt/subjects/population-and-vital-statistics/population/>

The following were observed.

- All polling stations observed had the required number of poll workers present.
- The polling stations observed had at least two political party/candidate agents present.
- Security in the form of the police was present at all locations.
- The agents were allowed to verify the quantity of ballots issued to the presiding officer to be used in the station, as well as the serial numbers of the ballots. These were stapled in booklets.
- Presiding officers as required displayed to the authorised persons present in the station the empty ballot box before sealing the lid and placing it in full view.
- All election supplies, including ballot papers, were available in sufficient quantities.

The polling procedures were generally observed and the polling stations opened promptly at 6:00am.

Recommendation

- Clear guidelines should be established on the qualifications and criteria necessary to work as a returning officer, election clerk and poll day staff.

The voting process

Special voting

Members of the security forces, other essential services, polling day staff, candidates and their spouses, along with other individuals¹¹ who satisfy certain criteria, were able to apply to participate in the special voting process that takes place prior to election day. Qualified voters who apply can collect their ballots and vote at either the special polling stations established by the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) or at the polling station located at the office of the returning officer in each electoral district. Voting at the EBC stations took place between 21 and 24 April 2025, and between 21 and 27 April 2025 at the offices of the returning officers.

Special voters lose their vote if their ballot is spoiled, unlike polling day voters who get two additional attempts. This policy should be reviewed to prevent disenfranchisement.

Recommendation

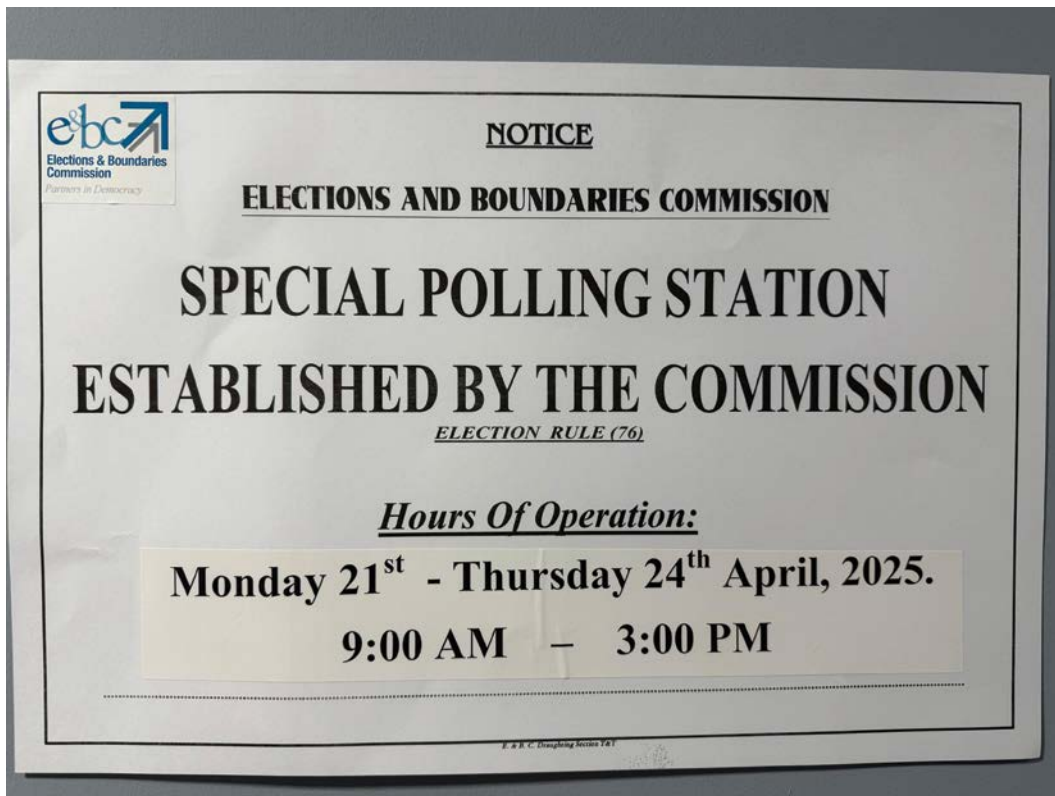
- Additional ballots should be provided to special polling officials to enable special voters to have a second chance to mark their ballots in case the initial one is spoiled.

After voting, the elector placed the ballot inside a plain inner envelope and then an outer envelope indicating the electoral district in which the ballot is to go for intermingling on election day. Ballot boxes were secured overnight by the police. Where voter turnout was very high, additional ballot boxes were required as the bulkiness of the envelopes caused the assigned ballot boxes to fill up very quickly.

Recommendation

- Larger ballot boxes, which can accommodate envelopes, should be used for special voting. These boxes should also be a different colour from regular ballot boxes.

¹¹ An elector is eligible to be a special elector if: serving in the protective services (the police, defence force, prison service); an official of the Elections and Boundaries Commission; an election officer (returning officer, presiding officer, poll clerk or polling agent); a candidate or their spouse voting outside their district; someone unable to reach their polling station (including travellers between islands, hospital patients, inmates or prisoners); or if they are a flight crew member, an offshore worker or any person designated by the Commission.



Signage for a Special Voting Station established by the Elections and Boundaries Commission



Special ballot boxes

The COG noted that several electors who applied to vote early did not turn up and so these ballots were lost to the formal system – raising queries as to whether they were unlawfully placed in ballot boxes at some point. The requirement to collect the ballots at one location and vote in another may have contributed to this issue.

Recommendation

- The centres designated for advanced voters to collect their ballots should be converted into special polling stations, allowing voters to cast their ballots immediately upon collection. This would eliminate the need for special voters to travel to a separate location for voting.



Distribution of materials ahead of polling day



Polling day



Voters queuing to exercise their franchise.

The voting procedures require that electors are admitted to the polling station one at a time. Each elector is required to present his or her voter identification (ID) and poll card. Electors who were not in possession of their voter ID or poll cards, as well as those with special needs, were processed separately using the red line, before proceeding.

Electors with ID and poll cards were processed using the green line, a very innovative idea that keeps the lines moving.



Polling station notice board with information about queues (green line & red line) and other useful information for voters.

Once identified to the satisfaction of the poll clerk, the elector's name and other particulars were marked off from the list and the elector was directed to the ballot clerk. The ballot clerk initialled the back of the ballot and explained the voting process on how to properly mark and fold the ballot issued to ensure the secrecy of the vote was not compromised. The voter then entered the voting booth, marked and folded the ballot, before presenting it to the ballot box officer who verified the initial.



A voter making their choice inside the voting booth.

The voter's fingers were checked for the presence of electoral ink; if there was none, the voter then dipped the appropriate finger into the electoral ink before depositing the ballot into the ballot box.



Voter's finger dipped in electoral ink before depositing the ballot paper.

At the start of polling, there were electors in line at the various polling stations. The queues outside some polling stations were long. The lines persisted throughout the morning and in some instances moved quite slowly. Electors, however, remained generally calm and peaceful while waiting in line.

The polling officials, for the most part, adhered to the established procedures in the execution of their duties. There were, however, instances where polling officials did not adhere to the established procedures, but the integrity of the process was not compromised.

Recommendation

- Enhanced training for polling officials is necessary to ensure consistent application of the rules by presiding officers regarding cellular phones and voting procedures.

Elderly people, voters with special needs and pregnant women were generally assisted by being permitted to go to the front of the queue. Chairs were provided for such electors to sit while waiting. All the polling stations observed were on the ground floor, though some had steps for access. Ramps were installed in most locations to assist persons with disabilities; however, steps posed difficulties where ramps were absent.

Recommendation

- Electors aged 75 years and older, as well as individuals with physical disabilities, should be provided with the opportunity to apply for special voter status.

Identification of electors

The identification of electors was carried out in keeping with the existing statute. There were several instances observed where voters indicated that they had not received their poll card. Voters without their poll cards used the copy of their card in the polling station binder. Those without electoral ID completed an identity oath form and used government-issued identification to confirm their identity before voting.

During briefings with members of the COG, some stakeholders raised a concern that some eligible voters might not turn out to vote as they were not aware that they could vote without their poll card. While the COG has not been able to verify this, it is important that the EBC and other stakeholders strengthen their voter education efforts.

Recommendations

- A statutory timeline should be established for the EBC to mail out polling cards, along with increased voter education informing voters that they can vote without a polling card.
- The Group recommends that EBC should take measures to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by allowing longer periods for voter education and awareness raising.

There were variations in how stations were laid out and how polling officials carried out the procedures, but this did not compromise the process. There was concern in a few of the larger polling stations where political agents complained of not being close enough to hear and observe the process properly. The political agents collaborated with each other, thus making the process easier. There were very few objections raised by party agents in relation to the identity of electors.

Use of cellular phones – The application of the rule of ‘no cellular phone use’ in the polling stations was generally observed, as electors were asked to surrender their cellular phones before being allowed to vote. However, polling day staff and political agents had phones clearly on display inside the stations and were seen using them on several occasions.

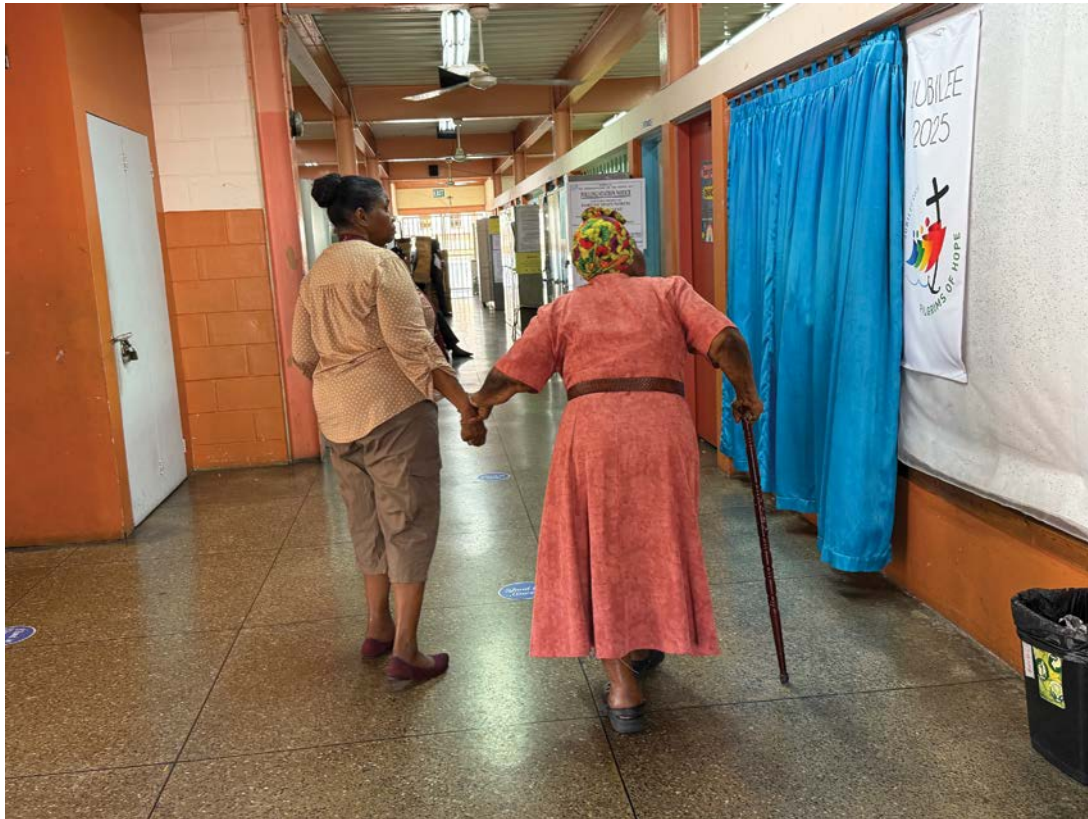


Notice for voters to leave their phones before proceeding to the voting booth.

Assisted voting – In some polling stations it was noted that several electors needed assistance to cast their votes. For some, this was because of age, while others were persons with disabilities (PWDs) suffering from physical impairment, including mobility challenges and visual impairment or a disability not obvious to an onlooker. In the instances witnessed where electors needed assistance, the proper procedures were followed.



A voter with mobility challenge being assisted to join the relevant queue.



An elderly voter being assisted to her polling station.

Recommendation:

- The design of the current voting booth should be revised to ensure easier access for individuals using wheelchairs.

Security

Police security was present at all locations and polling stations, providing reassurance without intrusiveness, and performing duties professionally. However, there were instances where the police assisted voters in finding their polling stations instead of directing them to electoral officials, which could be seen as interference in the electoral process.

Recommendation

- Police training should be extended to limit their involvement in the voting process to assisting voters by directing them to the nearest polling official when approached.

Members of the COG did not witness any incidences of unlawful gathering, campaigning at polling stations or intimidation of electors.

Closing and counting

Closing of the poll – In keeping with the law, all polling stations observed closed at 6:00pm, and voters in line at the close were allowed to vote.

The closing of the poll procedures were generally adhered to in the polling stations observed by the COG. The preliminary count was undertaken in the presence of the polling officials and the political agents.

As part of the closing and counting procedures, the ballots must be reconciled to ensure all are accounted for. This process includes verifying the number of ballot papers supplied by the returning officer against the number of spoiled ballot papers, the number of unused ballot papers, and the number of electors listed as having voted.



Sorting and counting of ballots

The box containing poll cards is first emptied and counted in front of political agents to ensure the total number of poll cards is the same as the number of electors who voted. The ballot box is then emptied of its contents and counted with a tally being kept by both poll workers and political agents. During the count, each ballot is shown to the agents to verify for whom it was cast. They have the right to object to any ballot deemed rejected by the presiding officer. If an objection occurs, the ballot is marked with a 'Q'.

The intermixing process (intermixing of votes cast on polling day and special votes) is notably complex, as the presiding official must cross-reference each outer envelope containing voter information with the list provided by the EBC. This task was found to be further complicated by varying handwriting styles on the envelopes, some of which were nearly illegible. Upon completion of this verification process, the ballots are removed from the envelopes and mixed with those cast inside the intermixing station prior to the commencement of the count.

Recommendation

- Consideration should be given to simplifying the intermixing process for special votes by standardising how the information on the envelopes is written.

After the count is completed, the result in each polling station is used to complete the statement of poll. This document is signed by the presiding officer, all poll workers and political agents, with copies issued to each person. The results are not posted outside the polling station.

At the conclusion of the count, the ballots and other sensitive supplies are placed in designated envelopes inside the ballot box, which is then locked and sealed. The sealed ballot box, along with the envelope containing the statement of the poll, is escorted by the police to the returning officer. The returning officer tallies all the statements from polling stations within the electoral district, and the EBC is provided with the results. The candidate receiving the most votes is declared the winner. The office of the returning officer and the ballot boxes are placed under police guard to ensure no unauthorised access pending requests for recounts by midday on the following day, which in this case was Tuesday 29 April 2025.

Requests for recount – These can either be partial to the contested ballots only, for specific polling station(s) or for the entire constituency. Once the request is made within the statutory deadline, the returning officer is mandated by law to carry out a recount in the presence of the candidates or their agents.

The UNC requested recounts in the electoral districts of Arouca/Lopinot, Malabar/Mausica and San Fernando East. The recounts commenced at 3:00pm on Tuesday 29 April and were completed on Wednesday 30 April 2025. At the end of the recount, the results for all three constituencies remained unchanged. The result at this stage becomes final and candidates who are not satisfied with the results may seek redress through the courts.

The Group notes complaints by some political parties to the EBC about the voting process on Election Day. While the Group was unable to verify some of the complaints, we note the prompt response by the EBC to address the complaints.

Summary

The voting and counting processes were conducted smoothly, without any significant incidents. All electors who arrived at the polling stations within the designated voting period were able to cast their votes for their preferred candidates. The ballot counting was executed in accordance with established procedures.

Election results¹²

According to the official report of the EBC after recounts of votes in three constituencies, the UNC won 26 seats, and the PNM won 13, while the TPP won 2 seats (Annex VII). As indicated in Chapter 2, 26 seats won by the UNC was the largest number of seats the party had ever won. The Group observed that none of the other 14 political parties or independent candidates won seats.

The voter turnout was 54 per cent. This is significantly lower than the 2015 and 2020 Parliamentary Elections, which had turnouts of 66.84 per cent and 58.0 per cent respectively.

Recommendation

- Statistics on voter turnout should be broken down by gender and age, and made accessible to the public within six months following any election.

¹² As at the publication of this report, the final results were not yet posted on the EBC's website (only preliminary results were available).

Annex I. Composition of COG and biographies of members

Evarist Bartolo (Malta) Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Evarist Bartolo served as a Member of Parliament for 30 years from 1992 to 2022. Member of the Labour Party.

He served for 11 years as Minister for Education and Employment and then as Minister for European and Foreign Affairs. In 2017, he chaired the European Council on Education.

From 1984 to 2017, he lectured in media studies at the University of Malta. During this time, he worked as a TV journalist and as news editor.

He served as Commonwealth Election Observer in Kenya (August 2022) and has been a speaker at international conferences in several countries, including Italy, Turkey, Poland, Shanghai, France, Egypt, Rwanda, Libya and Jordan.

Evarist Bartolo campaigned successfully for the introduction of divorce and civil rights and marriage equality in Malta. In the area of good governance, he has served as Ombudsman, Freedom of Information Act, Commissioner for Standards in Public Life, and has worked for the Abolition of Censorship and Better Protection for Journalists.

He has also worked in a number of social programmes including the opening childcare centres; getting unemployed and disabled people into work; literacy programmes, life skills for disadvantaged students, and accredited work-based learning in Malta.

As Foreign and European Affairs Minister, he promoted relations between the European Union (EU) and the Mediterranean and the EU and Africa. He also promoted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and conflict resolution through the values of mediation, negotiations and peacebuilding, democracy and human rights.

Observers

Ian-Michael Anthony (Dominica)

Ian-Michael Anthony is the immediate former Chief Elections Officer of Dominica. Mr Anthony has over 35 years' experience working in the public service, the majority of which has been in tax administration. As Chief Elections Officer, Mr Anthony presided over general elections in 2019, a byelection in 2021 and general elections in 2022, as well as several local government elections. Mr Anthony is trained in electoral observation, having participated in the CARICOM-UN BRIDGE Workshop on electoral observation.

Mr Anthony is the holder of a bachelor's degree in law from the University of Huddersfield, Holborn College, in the United Kingdom, and a post-baccalaureate diploma in legislative drafting from Athabasca University, in Canada. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in electoral policy and administration (MEPA).

Nazima Raghubir (Guyana)

Nazima Raghubir is a journalist based in Guyana. Her work has been featured by regional and international news agencies. She is also a media trainer, President of the Guyana Press Association and Vice President of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers.

Orrette Fisher (Jamaica)

Orrette Fisher currently works as an Elections Management and Training Consultant. Prior to this, Mr Fisher served the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ) for 23 years (between 1995 and 2018), ten of which were spent as Director of Elections.

Mr Fisher's electoral experience spans several national elections. He has also represented Jamaica on numerous occasions as a member or head of election observer missions to countries such as Suriname, Honduras, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad and Tobago, Nigeria, and the United States Presidential Election in November 2008.

Mr Fisher is an avid cricketer who has represented Melbourne Cricket Club in competitions at all levels. He is also a past executive member of the club.

Aiman Rasheed (Maldives)

Aiman Rasheed is the Deputy Program Director of the International Republican Institute. He was formerly the Executive Director of Transparency Maldives, the local chapter of Transparency International. Aiman is a civil society leader from Maldives and led Maldives' first election observation mission in 2008. He has since led and co-ordinated seven nationwide domestic election observation efforts and represented civil society on the National Advisory Committee for elections, a statutory body formed to advise the Elections Commission of Maldives.

Aiman has experienced elections in eight countries. He has also worked as an international elections observer in Bangladesh, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Solomon Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago with the Commonwealth Observer Group and Asian Network for Free Elections.

Winnie Anna Kiap (Papua New Guinea)

Winnie Anna Kiap is a Papua New Guinean diplomat and public servant with a career spanning several decades. She attended two private schools in Sydney, Australia, before graduating from the University of Queensland.

Winnie Kiap's early career included significant roles in the Tongan civil service, where she served in various capacities in the Prime Minister's Department and two other departments before she joined the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Consulate-General in Sydney. In 1992, she returned to Papua New Guinea, taking on roles in the Department of Trade and Industry and later as Director of Corporate Services at the Investment Promotion Authority. In 1998, she made history by becoming the first woman to serve as Secretary to the National Cabinet, a position she held for over a decade.

In August 2011, Winnie Kiap was appointed Papua New Guinea's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, with concurrent accreditations to Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, South Africa and Zimbabwe. During her tenure, she also represented PNG at the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation, International Maritime Organization, International Coffee Organization and the International Cocoa Organization.

Her service was recognised in 2015 when she was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for her contributions to public service.

In December 2024, she was appointed Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation Board of Governors.

Staff Team**Lindiwe Maleleka**

Political Adviser, Electoral Support Section (Staff Team leader)

Abubakar Abdullahi

Peace and Development Officer, Good Offices Section

Temitope Kalejaiye

Public Relations and Engagement Officer, Governance and Peace Directorate

Latoya McDowald-Hurley

Legal Officer, Rule of Law Section

Madonna Lynch

Executive Officer, Electoral Support Section

Annex II. Announcement of COG

A Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) will be deployed to Trinidad and Tobago to observe its forthcoming elections scheduled for 28 April 2025.

The team, led by Hon. Evarist Bartolo, a former Foreign Affairs Minister of Malta with over 30 years of parliamentary experience, consists of six eminent persons from across the Commonwealth. They bring expertise in the media, law, electoral management and civil society.

The team will observe all aspects of the elections, offering recommendations to ensure the highest standards of electoral credibility, inclusivity and transparency as they assess the pre-election environment, the voting process and the post-election period.

Announcing the composition of the Group in London, Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, said:

'The Commonwealth is pleased to deploy an observer mission to Trinidad and Tobago's elections, demonstrating our commitment to supporting democracy and good governance in our member states.

'Our election observation work and efforts to strengthen democratic processes, culture and institutions across member states are world-leading, and we look forward to working with the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure a credible and transparent electoral process.'

Accepting the invitation, and on behalf of the Group, the Hon. Evarist Bartolo said:

'I am honoured to lead this distinguished Group for Trinidad and Tobago's Parliamentary Election, ensuring the highest standards of electoral integrity and transparency. Our team will provide an independent assessment, promoting trust and confidence in the democratic process in line with the country's laws, regional and international standards, as well as Commonwealth values.

'We'll examine not just election day but also the pre- and post-election periods to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the entire electoral process.'

Observers arrive in the country on 22 April, and they will meet key stakeholders, including the election management body, political parties, civil society groups, the media, the diplomatic community and other regional and citizen observers. From 26 April, observers will deploy in small teams to different parts of the country to observe election preparations and meet with local stakeholders in their respective locations.

On election day, the Group will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes. The COG will then issue an Interim Statement on its preliminary findings on 30 April.

The members of the COG have been mandated to observe and consider factors affecting the credibility of the electoral process as a whole and to assess whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Trinidad and Tobago has committed itself, including national legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and international commitments.

The Commonwealth Observer Group will be supported by a team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Lindiwe Maleleka, Political Adviser, Electoral Support Section.

Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Chairperson: Hon Evarist Bartolo, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Malta

The Commonwealth Observer Group members, in alphabetical order by country name, are:

- . Mr Ian Michael Anthony, former Chief Elections Officer, Dominica
- . Ms Nazima Raghubir – Journalist, Guyana
- . Mr Orrette Tyndale Fisher – Election Management Expert, Jamaica
- . Mr Aiman Rasheed – Deputy Program Director, International Republican Institute, Maldives
- . Ms Winnie Anna Kiap – Chair, Commonwealth Foundation, Papua New Guinea

Annex III. Interim Statement



**Interim Statement by
Honourable Evarist Bartolo
Former Foreign Affairs Minister of Malta
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG)
Trinidad and Tobago
29 April 2025**

The people of Trinidad and Tobago, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the media, fellow observers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for honouring our invitation to this Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) Press Conference.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited to observe Trinidad and Tobago 2025 Parliamentary Elections. Following an invitation from the government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, constituted our Group to observe the 13th Trinidad and Tobago Republican Parliamentary Elections. We note that this election also marks 100 years since the first election was held in this country.

We arrived on 19 April 2025 and will depart on 5 May 2025. As Chair, I am honoured to lead a Group of eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth. They are diplomats, and experts in elections management, law, civil society, inclusion as well as the media. The Group is independent of the Secretariat.

Our role is to offer an independent, informed and impartial assessment of the electoral process, in accordance with the country's laws, taking into account all factors which may impact on the overall credibility of the election.

I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings which are based on our engagement with a cross-section of stakeholders, and our observations since our arrival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our final report with key recommendations will be submitted to the Secretary-General and shared with the government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC), political parties as well as other key stakeholders, and to the wider public.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

Pre-Election Environment

For a contextual understanding and assessment of the pre-election environment, the COG met with the prime minister, representatives of political parties, candidates, the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB), the media and civil society.

The COG also engaged with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and was briefed about the police commitment in ensuring Trinbagonians exercise their right to vote in a peaceful manner.

The COG notes that in the lead up to the election, the Elections and Boundaries Commission redrew the boundaries of 16 constituencies and renamed 5 in accordance with section 72 of the constitution. We encourage the EBC to consult widely and to improve the transparency of the process in the future.

Campaign and the Media

The COG observed final campaign rallies in Port of Spain and in Tobago. The rallies were peaceful, colourful and well attended, echoing the true colours of the country's carnival spirit. The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been observed.

The COG notes the limited regulatory framework for campaign finance. We reiterate the 2015 COG's statement 'that the EBC is reflecting on proposals to regulate registration and campaign financing of political parties'. Ten (10) years ago, the COG recommended that, 'the incoming Parliament, political parties and all relevant stakeholders prioritise this process'. This has become more urgent.

The media in Trinidad and Tobago is free across traditional and digital platforms. We commend the media, including radio, TV and print, for providing coverage of the elections and related issues. However, concerns were raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media. We recommend legislation to enforce equitable access for all candidates and political parties.

The Group noted that political parties and independent candidates have leveraged social media platforms to share their manifestos without the cost that comes with traditional media.

We recommend that all political parties adhere to the Code of Political Conduct, which does 'not permit the use and abuse of state resources for political campaigns'.

Deployment

Our teams were deployed to four regions across the country, including: Port of Spain and East-West corridor; San Fernando and North-South corridor; Eastern Trinidad and Tobago. In these locations, we observed the pre-election preparations and engaged with district election officials, and police, to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process and the pre-election environment.

Special Voting

We observed special voting which was held from 21 to 27 April 2025. Trinidad and Tobago is to be commended for this initiative, which allows security agencies, prisoners, offshore oil workers and those performing election duty to exercise their franchise. The Group notes report of longer-than-usual wait times observed at some special voting locations and urges continuous review to improve the process.

Election Day

Signage

The Group commends the Elections and Boundaries Commission for providing clear and helpful signage in all polling stations to aid the flow and coherence of the voting process. We noticed the presence of information desk officers in each polling division, tasked with guiding voters upon arrival to their respective voting stations. This initiative is commendable.

Conduct of the Polls

The polling officials followed pre-poll and opening procedures diligently. The polling stations observed opened on time. We note that voters lists were prominently displayed at polling centres. Voting was conducted in a peaceful environment at polling stations observed. Polling officials must be commended for conducting their duties with professionalism and transparency.

Political Party Agents

Political party agents were present at most polling stations observed by the Group, and they conducted themselves professionally. The level of co-operation among political party agents is commendable.

Presence of Security

We noted the presence of police at most polling stations observed and they were unobtrusive.

Participation and Inclusion

In polling stations observed, we note commendable participation of men and women as voters. A high proportion of polling officials and party agents were women. However, the Group noted the lack

of disaggregated data on women and youth participation in the electoral process, and this would be recommended for future election.

We observed that persons with disabilities (PWDs) and elderly people were given priority at some polling stations. We note and commend the partnership between the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Consortium of Disability Organisations (CODO) in developing a guidance template enhancing assistive voting for persons with disabilities.

The Group heard from various stakeholders it met that there is a need to build youth confidence and participation in democratic and electoral institutions and processes; this might have contributed to the low voter interest as compared to previous elections.

The Group recommends that measures be considered to promote greater civic participation in the electoral process, by engaging with civil society groups and allowing continuous voter education and awareness raising.

Election Observation

We interacted with the CARICOM Observer mission and noted the absence of citizens-based election observation activities. The COG encourages the government and key electoral stakeholders to consider mechanisms that strengthen civil society participation in electoral processes, including as citizen observers.

Close and Count

There were no queues at the close of polls at 6:00pm, at most polling stations observed. While we noted some inconsistencies in the administration of the counting process, however, we observed that polling officials followed closing and counting procedures in a transparent and professional manner.

Conclusion and Post-Election Period

We applaud the people of Trinidad and Tobago for turning out in an orderly manner to exercise their franchise. We commend the Elections and Boundaries Commission, polling staff, political parties, the police and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections.

We note the short period within which the EBC had to conduct this election and the commitment demonstrated by the officials within a highly contested environment. We urge EBC to strengthen its engagement with all stakeholders including civil society to improve the electoral process. We also urge the state to make adequate resources and support available to enable it to discharge its constitutional duty.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago have once again demonstrated patience and commitment to democracy. We will provide recommendations on how the electoral processes might be further improved in our final report, which will be made public.

The COG encourages the conduct of a post-election review and consideration for the establishment of appropriate domestic mechanisms to review all recommendations proposed by observer missions.

I want to take this opportunity to once again, thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the warm hospitality accorded to myself and the Group during our entire stay and the access offered for our observation processes.

I thank you once again.







*Issued on 29 April 2025
Port of Spain*

Annex IV. Deployment Plan

COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
28 APRIL 2025
DEPLOYMENT PLAN

REGIONS	OBSERVERS
Port of Spain and East-West corridor	Hon. Evarist Bartolo Lindiwe Maleleka Temi Kalejaiye
Port of Spain and East-West corridor	Mr Abubakar Abdullahi Madonna Lynch
San Fernando and North-South corridor	HE Winnie Kiap CBE Mr Ian-Michael Anthony
Eastern Trinidad	Mr Orrette Fisher Mrs Latoya McDowald-Hurley
Tobago	Mr Aiman Rasheed Ms Nazima Raghbir

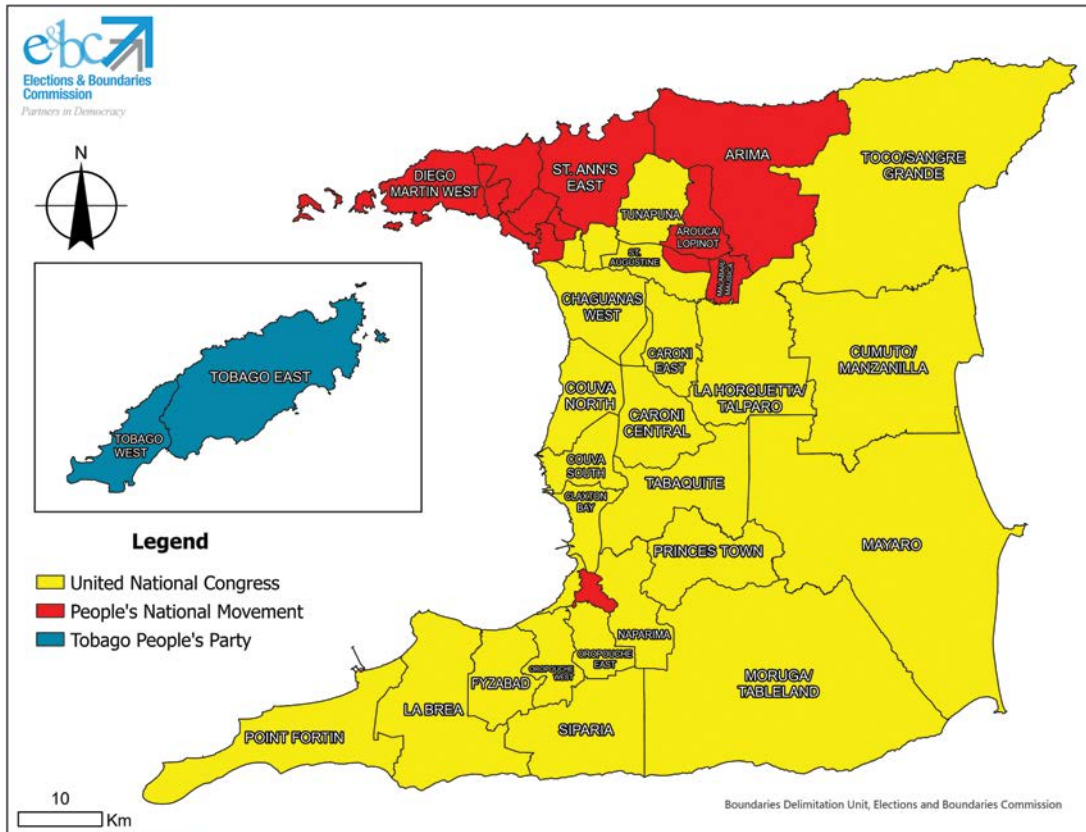
Annex V. List of political parties

Party	Number of candidates standing	Details	Symbol
All People's Party (APP)	8	#44 Park and Abercromby Street Port of Spain	
Class Action Reform Movement	1	#124 Allfields Trace Tobago	
Congress of the People (COP)	2	COP Operations Centre Corner Evans and Jackson Streets Curepe	
Innovative Democratic Alliance	2	#16 Old Providence Road Scarborough Tobago	
Movement for National Development	1	Odysseus Chambers 11 St Vincent Street Port of Spain	
National Coalition for Transformation	2	#129 La Resource Road North D'Abadie	
National Transformation Alliance	17	Corner Mt Lambert Circular and Eastern Main Road	
New National Vision	1	#10 Park Avenue Queens Park East Port of Spain	
Patriotic Front	37	Suite 5, Plaza 46, Second Floor Corner Prince and Frederick Streets Port of Spain	

(Continued)

Party	Number of candidates standing	Details	Symbol
Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP)	2	PDP Tobago Lvl 3 Port Mall Scarborough Tobago PDP Trinidad #139 2 nd Street Barataria Trinidad	
People's National Movement (PNM)	41	Balisier House 9A Victoria Avenue Port of Spain 100911	
Progressive Empowerment Party	3	14-17 Victoria Square Park Street Port of Spain	
The Hyarima Movement	1	La Laja Arima	
Tobago People's Party	2	#3 Shatoy's Lane Carnbee No 1 Tobago	
Trinidad Humanity Campaign	3	#39 Grove Road Valsayn North	
United National Congress (UNC)	34	#31 Mulchan Seuchan Road Chaguanas	
Unity of the People	1	#14A Battery Street Buccoo Point Tobago	

Annex VI. Constituencies won by political parties (UNC, PNM and TPP)¹³



¹³ UNC won 26 seats, PNM won 13 and TPP won 2.

Annex VII. Preliminary results

Elections and Boundaries Commission Parliamentary Elections 2025 Detailed Preliminary Results

CONSTITUENCY	ELECTORATE	APP	CARM	COP	HM	IDA	MND	NCT	NNV	NTA	PDP	PEP	PF	PNM	THC	TPP	UNC	UP	George	Johnson	Singh	Reject	TOTAL	TURNOUT	CANDIDATES
ARANGUEZST. JOSEPH	28,873									334			350	6,672	27		9,908					48	17,339	60.05%	5
ARIMA	28,802							38		152			520	7,055			6,356					46	14,167	49.19%	5
AROUCA/LOPINOT	28,493									146			538	7,961			7,699					37	16,381	57.49%	4
BARATARIA/SAN JUAN	25,183	37								97			365	4,742			8,887					36	14,164	56.24%	5
CARONI/CENTRAL	31,460												914	4,854			12,663					46	18,477	58.73%	3
CARONI/EAST	30,208												561	2,757			13,957					40	17,315	57.32%	3
CHAGUANAS EAST	27,728									125			487	5,317			10,097				47	37	16,110	58.10%	5
CHAGUANAS WEST	29,043												599	1,390			16,013					44	18,046	62.14%	3
CLAXTON/BAY	26,078												530	4,934			9,969					34	15,467	59.31%	3
COUVA/NORTH	30,681												1,727	3,094			13,201					42	18,064	58.88%	3
COUVA/SOUTH	30,975												955	3,763			13,122					41	17,881	57.73%	3
CUMUTO/ MANZANILLA	30,776												438	5,393			12,559					57	18,447	59.94%	3
DIEGO MARTIN CENTRAL	29,623									1,085				7,409			4,600					55	13,149	44.39%	3
DIEGO MARTIN NORTH/EAST	29,869	145								565		3,525	708	7,064								49	12,612	42.22%	6
DIEGO MARTIN WEST	29,967									1,336		3,257		7,703								62	12,358	41.24%	3
FYZABAD	27,471												539	4,454			11,396					33	16,422	59.78%	3
LA BREA	26,616	53			24								413	6,262			7,001					71	13,824	51.94%	5
LA HORQUETTA/ TALPARO	29,061									107			502	6,712			9,585					54	16,960	58.36%	4
LAVENTILLE EAST/ MORVANT	25,231	75											577	5,837			3,270					22	9,781	38.77%	4
LAVENTILLE WEST	25,147												429	6,096			2,291					36	8,852	35.20%	3

(Continued)

Annex VIII. Recommendations tracker



Trinidad and Tobago COG 2025

Status of 2015¹⁴ COG Recommendations as at April 2025

The 2015 COG Report is available on this link: <https://library.commonwealth.int/Portal/External/en-GB/RecordView/Index/44760>

• Total Recommendations	12
• Fully Implemented	1
• Mostly Implemented	5
• Partially Implemented	4
• Not Implemented	2
• Not Yet Determined or N/A	

¹⁴ The Commonwealth did not observe the 2020 Parliamentary Elections because of COVID restrictions.

No.	2020 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
Electoral Framework & Electoral Administration				
1	<p>The Group recommended that the EBC review the regulations relating to voter registration in order to ensure accuracy and to remove ambiguity regarding elector's residency and eligibility to vote. The EBC could consider developing a mechanism (including possible use of technology) to deregister electors who are deceased, have emigrated or are no longer eligible to vote. The EBC could also consider mechanisms to move voters to different districts when they acquire new residences, as per the powers vested in the Commission.</p>	Regulatory	Partially	<p>The 2025 COG noted that process of removing deceased voters or voters who are ineligible to be on the register based on residency violation had not been carried out with any consistency until 2006, when the arrangements were made for the Registrar General Civil Registry to provide annually the list of deaths in Trinidad and Tobago.</p> <p>The 2025 COG observed that there appears to be electors still to be removed given the voters list of 1,153,850.</p>
2	<p>Concerns about the risk of 'voter padding' were raised in general terms with Commonwealth observers. The Group did not observe any instances or allegations of voter padding in 2015; however, the EBC should look to ensure it has adequate measures in place to protect against this practice.</p>	Administrative/ technical	Fully	<p>The COG did not observe instances of voter padding.</p>
3	<p>The EBC should give consideration to ensuring poll cards are distributed earlier in advance of the election date. The EBC could also consider the use of other communication mechanisms, such as electronic text, to inform registered voters of their polling station.</p>	Administrative	Partially	<p>As with 2015, paper-based poll cards were mailed to eligible voters during the 2025 elections.</p> <p>The 2025 COG noted the concern raised by some stakeholders that eligible voters may not turn out to vote, as they were not aware that they could vote without their poll card.</p> <p>The COG observed instances where voters indicated that they had not received their poll card, but were allowed to vote based on information on the polling station binder and presentation of eligible ID cards.</p>

(Continued)

No.	2020 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
4	<p>Given the prominent role of political parties in Trinidad and Tobago, the regulation of parties and party campaign financing would improve the transparency and accountability of the electoral process. We are encouraged that the EBC is reflecting on proposals to regulate the registration and campaign financing of political parties. We recommend that the EBC, the incoming Parliament, political parties and all relevant stakeholders prioritise this process.</p>	Legal/Regulatory	Not implemented	<p>The Parliament should pass the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2020, which was first introduced in 2015 and includes provisions to regulate campaign finance.</p>
5	<p>We welcome the establishment of the Code of Ethical Political Conduct and commend efforts by the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour to promote adherence to the code. The Council and the EBC should work together with political parties, civil society organisations and legislators to harmonise frameworks around political party conduct.</p>		Mostly	<p>For the 2025 election, it was reported to the COG that 16 political parties made voluntary commitment to abide by the code, including the Tobago-based political parties. The COG met with the Council, which informed that, 'The code becomes operational only three months to elections which is considered inadequate.' For the 2025 election, the code became operational on the day the snap election was announced.</p>
Participation & Inclusion				
6	<p>We welcome the prominent role given to women by political parties and encourage them to continue to consider ways to ensure the election of more women candidates.</p>	Legal/Regulatory	Partially	<p>In 2025, 4 of the 17 political parties were female led: the United National Congress (UNC), the Patriotic Front (PF), All People's Party (APP) and the National Coalition for Transformation (NCT). The positions of President, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago were – in a historic first for the Caribbean – all served by women. However, the COG noted that the representation of women in elected positions decreased from 30% in 2015 to 28.6% in 2020 and 24.3% in 2025.</p>

(Continued)

No.	2020 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
7	We encourage stronger engagement between political leaders and young people, to ensure their views are taken into account in policy-making beyond the campaign and election period.		Not implemented	<p>The Government and political parties should proactively engage with youth groups, including the youth councils in Trinidad and Tobago, to address youth issues and build their interest in politics and electoral participation.</p> <p>While youth are a key demographic, anecdotal evidence suggests their participation is low. A steadily declining voter turnout combined with low youth participation in voting is worrying for democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.</p>
Campaign & the Media				
8	Consideration could be given to the establishment of an independent media monitoring mechanism to examine coverage of the campaign period, election day and post-election reports. This could be linked to an agreed code of conduct for the media in relation to election coverage. Similarly, the Media Complaints Council could be strengthened and given some authority to enhance media accountability.	Regulatory	Mostly	<p>The COG commended the media, including radio, TV and print, for providing coverage of the elections and related issues. However, concerns were raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media.</p> <p>Media professionals should work towards reviving the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago and consider a media code for elections coverage.</p>
9	Given the proliferation of social media as a tool of political campaigning and coverage, we encourage the EBC and other stakeholders to consider ways to ensure it is used in accordance with the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly by parties and candidates during elections.	Regulatory	Mostly	<p>During the 2025 election, media houses promoted the Code of Ethical Political Conduct, facilitated by the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour (CRPB). The media reported on the code itself as well as instances of violations to the code.</p>

(Continued)

No.	2020 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
Voting, Counting & Results				
10	<p>The intermixing of special ballots was conducted in a transparent manner; however, it appeared that some officials were not sufficiently familiar with the process. The EBC should ensure that adequate training is provided for polling officials who will be involved in the process of intermixing special elector ballots with ordinary ballots at the count.</p>	Administrative	Mostly	<p>The intermixing process is notably complex, as the presiding official must cross-reference each outer envelope containing voter information with the list provided by the EBC. This task is further complicated by varying handwriting styles on the envelopes, some of which are nearly illegible. Upon completion of this verification process, the ballots are removed from the envelopes and mixed with those cast inside the intermixing station prior to the commencement of the count.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to simplifying the process by standardising how the information on the envelopes is written.</p>
11	<p>The EBC could also consider increasing the number of staff to intermix and count special ballots together with the ballots cast at the polling station to speed up the process without compromising accuracy.</p>	Administrative	Mostly	<p>It was reported to the COG that the EBC trained 16,000 election officials and polling day staff and employed more than 13,000 for the 2025 elections.</p>
12	<p>A review of the special elector verification process conducted at the polling station could be considered, while maintaining the basic principles underlying the process.</p>	Administrative	Partially	<p>The same process was applied at the time of the 2025 elections. The 2025 COG noted that verification of voters at the special polling stations took longer than the usual voting times.</p> <p>However, the 2025 COG noted the introduction of additional special polling stations by the EBC, including for offshore oil workers.</p>

Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

thecommonwealth.org