

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Polity5 regime codes:

fac	scode	polity	pers	bmon	bday	byear	emon	eday	eyear	exec	exconst	polcomp
0a	TRI	4	19	8	31	1962	3	29	1981	7	5	5
0b	TRI	7	6	3	30	1981	12	15	1986	8	6	8
0c	TRI	8	9	12	16	1986	11	8	1995	8	7	8
0d	TRI	9	23	11	9	1995	99	99	9999	8	7	9

PITF Problem Events: none

0a) August 31, 1962 (independence) – The British government established the West Indies Federation on January 3, 1958, as an institutional framework for granting independence to its Caribbean dependencies, including the ten island colonies of Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitt-Nevis & Anguilla, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and Trinidad & Tobago. However, the federation could not overcome its parochial differences. The largest and most populous island, Jamaica, held a successful referendum for secession on September 19, 1961, and the federation soon dissolved. Trinidad & Tobago gained independence on August 31, 1962. The early politics on the main island of Trinidad, where 95% of the population resided, was divided by two main ethnic groupings: the larger group (about 43%) comprised Afro-Trinidadians and the other group comprised Indo-Trinidadians (about 36%); persons of mixed heritage comprised 16% of the island population. In preparation for independence, political parties were established in the mid-1950s; primary among these was the People’s National Movement (PNM) led by Eric Williams. The PNM won a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats in the 1961 general elections and used that advantage to dominate the drafting of the country’s constitution and, consequently, maintain its control of the government over a weak and disorganized opposition supported mainly by Indo-Trinidadians. Although unchallenged within the ruling party, William’s leadership was seriously challenged in the late 1960s by trade union agitation culminating in the several weeks of violent demonstrations by the “Black Power” movement and an army mutiny; a state of emergency was declared on April 21, 1970. Williams continued to control successive PNM governments until he died suddenly on March 29, 1981.

0b) March 30, 1981 (new leadership) – Eric Williams’ death on March 29, 1981, left the ruling party with no clear successor for leadership. George Chambers was appointed Prime Minister upon William’s death and was subsequently named party leader. The PNM again won the general election held on November 9, 1981; however, the passing of Williams allowed dissent to emerge within the PNM and encouraged the emergence of new leadership in Trinidadian politics. Although the newly formed Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR) failed to win any seats in the 1981 general election, it made a very strong showing and became the nucleus for a growing opposition challenge to the PNM. PNM dominance began to unravel with major gains by the opposition in August 1983 local elections and by late 1984 the opposition parties, including the ONR, United Labour Front, Democratic Action Congress, and the Tapia House Movement, had formed an umbrella alliance in the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR).

0c) December 16, 1986 (new government) – Widespread dissatisfaction with the PNM government led to its crushing defeat in the general election held on December 15, 1986. The National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) won 33 of the 36 seats in Parliament, sweeping the PNM out of office after 30 years in power. Arthur Robinson was sworn in as Prime Minister on December 16 and a new NAR government was formed. The NAR began to fracture with

Robinson's dismissal from his cabinet of three of his most vocal ULF critics in February 1988. A period of serious economic decline that began in 1982 continued through 1990, despite the implementation of an austerity program in 1987. On July 27, 1990, a militant Black Muslim group, *Jamaat al Muslimeen*, stormed the legislative building and other key sites and captured the Prime Minister and several ministers. The rebel group demanded that the Robinson government resign and that the rebel leaders be allowed to head an interim government. The country's police and armed forces managed to regain control after a six-day siege amid widespread disorder and looting in the capital. Parliament was not reopened until July 27, 1991. The NAR was soundly defeated by the PNM in the general election held on December 16, 1991; Patrick Manning was sworn in as Prime Minister on December 17. All members of the rebel group were released from prison on July 1, 1992, after the High Court ruled that an amnesty granted to them by the then acting head of state in order to end the standoff was valid.

0d) November 9, 1995 (new government) – The general election held on November 6, 1995, resulted in an equal number of seats (17) for both the PNM and the United National Congress (UNC). The UNC was able to form a coalition government with the NAR, which held the remaining two seats, and the UNC leader Basdeo Panday was sworn in as Prime Minister on November 9, 1995, to become the first Indo-Trinidadian to lead a government. This also marked the emergence of a fairly stable, two-party system and a reduction in the general levels of coercion and corruption in governance. Rivalry between the largely Afro-Trinidadian PNM and Indo-Trinidadian UNC continues to characterize the political process and the country remains plagued by coercion and corruption, albeit at lower levels than in earlier periods. The election held on December 10, 2001, resulted in an unbreakable deadlock when both the PNM and UNC won half the parliamentary seats. Parliament had to be prorogued by the president and new elections were held on October 7, 2002, resulting in a clear majority for the PNM. The number of parliamentary seats was expanded to 41 in order to prevent another deadlock. The Commonwealth Privy Council has been particularly active as the court of last resort in settling the country's many political controversies.