



OVERVIEW

This newsletter provides an overview of the key findings from the latest Opinion Leaders Panel research. This edition focuses on public reaction to the 2008/09 Budget and public attitudes to greater co-operation and integration among Caribbean nations. The survey was conducted during the period 25th–30th September 2008. Respondents were interviewed by telephone and all respondents are members of the Opinion Leaders Panel.

AWARENESS OF THE BUDGET SPEECH

Almost all adults in Trinidad and Tobago (96%) are aware of the 2008/09 Budget Speech, with three in ten having watched or heard it live, and just over half having seen it discussed via media outlets.

ATTITUDES TO THE BUDGET OVERALL

The public is far more critical of the 2008/09 Budget than of those in previous years: a majority of 55% of respondents are negative, which is almost twice the proportion of those who were negative in 2003 (28%), 2005 (26%) and 2007 (29%).

As shown in Chart 1, approximately seven in ten respondents (69%) feel that the Budget proposals are “a bad thing for them personally”, compared with one quarter (23%) who believe the proposals are “good personally”. This provides a net personal rating of -46, which is considerably lower than the net personal rating given to the 2007/08 Budget proposals (+16) when measured in Opinion Leaders Panel Wave 8.

People are similarly critical about the impact of the Budget on the country, which receives a net rating of -37. This is an even sharper decline from the +31 rating in 2007.

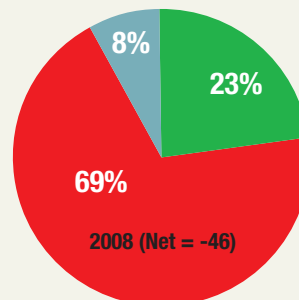
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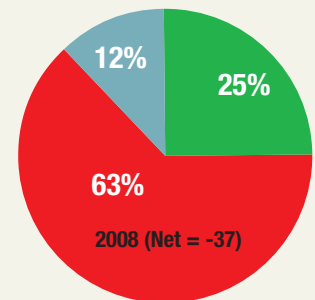
Chart 1: Budget Proposals: Good for Me? Good for the Country?

Q Do you think the Budget proposals are a good thing or a bad thing for you personally?

Legend: Good (Green), Don't know (Blue), Bad (Red)



Q Do you think the Budget proposals are a good thing or a bad thing for the country?



Base: 704 TT adults aged 18+, 25 – 30 September 2008

ATTITUDES TO SPECIFIC DETAILS IN THE BUDGET

The public believes the Government got it “about right” for three of nine Budget announcements covered in the survey. These are: increasing the number of PTSC buses (67% say “about right”), increasing the maximum allocation for post graduate study (65%), and expanding the proportion of children benefiting from the School Feeding Programme (61%).

However, the public says the Government “did not promise enough” in terms of the senior citizen’s grant (56% say “not enough”), pensions for public servants (59%), and disability grants (63%). In addition, 77% of the public believes the Government has “gone too far” in terms of the increased cost of premium gasoline (it is this proposal the public is most negative about).

The public strongly support providing PhD scholarships for T&T citizens who obtain a first class honours degree (95% say this is the right thing to do). There is also support for free ferry passes to persons aged 65 years and over (89%), encouraging greater use of cleaner fuels in public service vehicles (83%), and to a lesser extent, for the creation of the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre (55%).

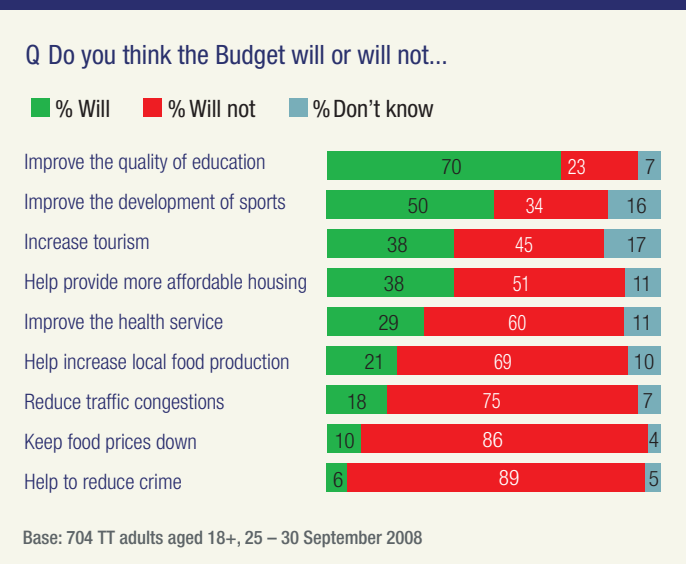
Opinion is split on closing the casino gambling industry within the next five years (48% say it is the right thing to do whilst 42% say it is the wrong thing to do), and the majority are opposed to increasing the Motor Vehicle Tax on the importation of private motor vehicles (66% say it is the wrong thing to do).

PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE BUDGET

As shown in Chart 2, the Budget is seen to have the most positive impact on the quality of education and the development of sports. For all other areas, respondents feel, on balance, that the budget will not lead to positive results.

The Budget is seen as least helpful towards improving local food production, reducing food prices, tackling traffic congestion and crime reduction.

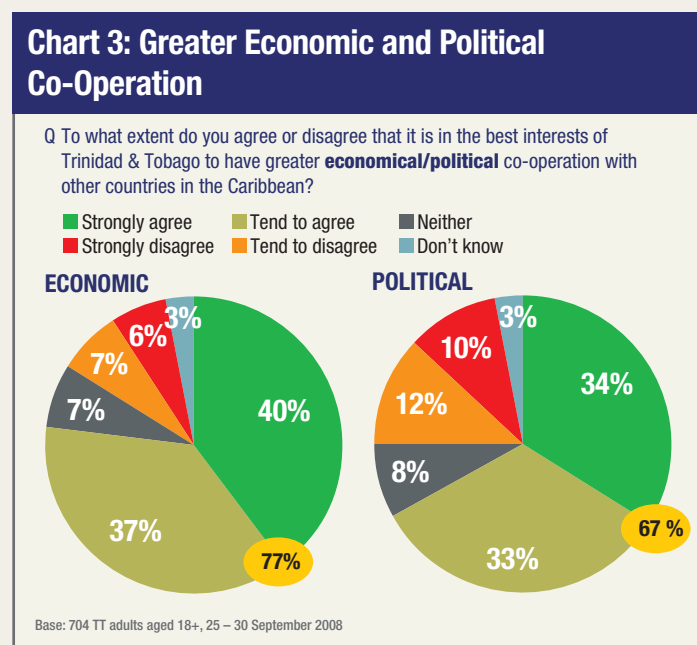
Chart 2: Impact of the Budget



ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CO-OPERATION

As shown in Chart 3, there is a great deal of public support for greater economic (77% agree) and political (67% agree) co-operation with other countries in the Caribbean.

For both these questions, many more people strongly agree than strongly disagree. For instance, almost seven times as many respondents “strongly agree” than “strongly disagree” about the need for greater economic co-operation.



RIGHTS AS A CARICOM CITIZEN

Approximately three quarters of the persons interviewed feel that Caricom citizens should be allowed to attend primary school, attend secondary school, or work part-time in any Caricom country.

More than three in five respondents also feel that Caricom citizens should be able to live in any Caricom country, work full-time, and enter as a tourist without a visa. Support is less strong in terms of conducting business in another country without a visa, but still 53% believe this should be allowed compared with 35% who think it should not be.

ROLE OF CARICOM

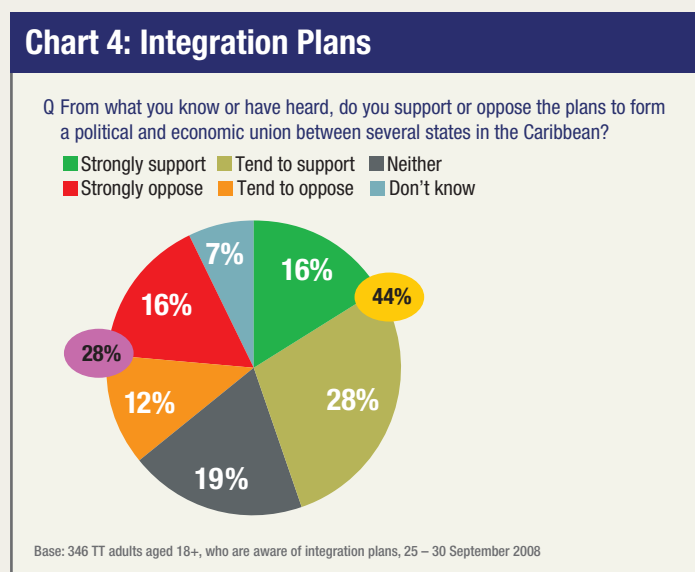
In contrast to the high levels of support for individual rights that people should have within Caricom, there is much less support for shared single bodies or institutions across the region.

Only one quarter of the respondents (24%) support a single police force, with support slightly higher for a single army (32%) and single navy/coastguard (37%). There is more support – but still less than half the public – for a single Olympic team (47%), a single currency (45%), a single football team (45%) or a single intelligence service (44%).

INTEGRATION PLANS

Most people do not feel well informed about plans for political and economic union in the Caribbean. Just six percent of respondents say they have heard a great deal about the plans and a further one quarter (23%) have heard a fair amount. A similar proportion (21%) say they have not heard very much, but the largest proportion (46%) are those who say they have not hear about the plans at all.

Among the 50% of the public who have at least heard about plans for integration, more support the plans (44%) than oppose them (28%), although exactly the same proportion (16%) say they strongly support and strongly oppose, as shown in Chart 4.



The top reasons people give for supporting the integration plans are:

- 27%: unity is a strength/ Caribbean must speak with one voice vis-à-vis large countries;
- 17%: the entire Caribbean will benefit economically; and
- 13%: just feel it is a good thing.

The main reasons given for opposing the plans are:

- 25%: just don't feel it will be a good thing/will be ineffective;
- 12%: everyone should maximise their own resources & order their own house;
- 12%: our country could suffer economically; and
- 7%: too much conflict will result / leaders will not agree.

METHODOLOGY

The Opinion Leaders Panel is a panel of approximately 2,400 Trinidad and Tobago adults, representative of the entire population. The fieldwork for Wave 12 was conducted by telephone. This was done to provide rapid feedback on the Budget proposals, and was possible because the vast majority of panel members had given their home or cell numbers. In total, 704 Panel members were interviewed for Wave 12 out of a sample of 822 who were randomly selected for contact. The response rate was 86%. This is exactly the same methodology as used for Wave 8.

As with all waves of the Panel, after fieldwork was completed, the data were checked and weighted to the latest available Census data to ensure the results are properly representative of the Trinidad and Tobago population.

Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding or the exclusion of "don't know/not stated" responses.

THANKS AND CONTACTS

Thanks again to the Panel members for their participation in the research. The Opinion Leaders' Panel is a very important tool for Government in determining ways and means of making its services more responsive and more efficient. We need your fullest support in helping us to shape our Public Services to improve service to all citizens. More updates will be provided in later issues of Opinion Leaders' News

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