



OVERVIEW

This newsletter provides an overview of the key findings from the latest Opinion Leaders' Panel research. A fresh Panel was recruited for this latest wave, wave 15, which was conducted during the period 10th December 2009 to 9th February 2010. In total 2,987 respondents were interviewed face-to-face in their homes. All these respondents are now members of the Opinion Leaders' Panel.

This edition updates regular trend questions on issues such as satisfaction with the Government, key national and local issues, the performance of government on a range of themes, and satisfaction with different types of public services. There are also a number of specific policy and delivery issues covered in the survey, for example attitudes to local government reform, displaying public signs in both Spanish and English and whether the Central Bank is doing enough about inflation.

DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Nearly two in three people (64%) think the country is going in the wrong direction, which represents no change in attitudes from the previous year where 64% of the public also thought that the country was going in the wrong direction.

HAPPINESS

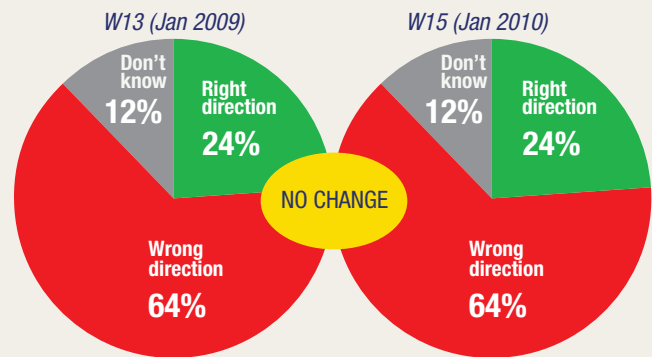
Almost eight in ten (78%) people are happy with their lives, which is similar to the levels of happiness recorded in 2007 (81%), though down from 87% happy in 2005. Only 14% of the public express that they are unhappy with their lives.

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Chart 1: No change in direction of the country

Q Do you think things in Trinidad & Tobago are going in the right direction these days, or do you think things are going in the wrong direction?



2,987 TT adults, 11 December 2009 – 9 February 2010

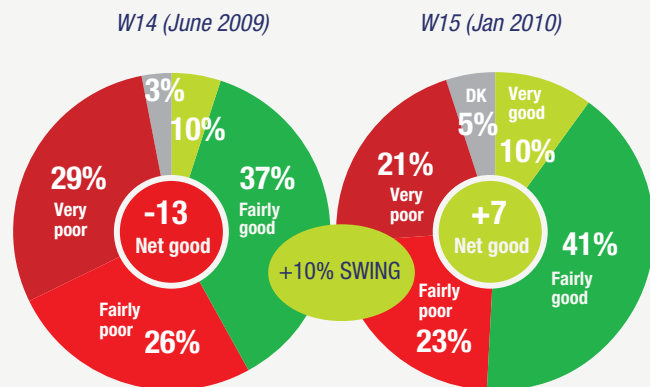
THE ECONOMY

There has been a significant increase in the number of people who now describe the state of the economy as “good” (51%), than when it was last measured in June 2009, when 42% described it as such. This represents a nine point increase.

More people now describe the state of the economy as “good” (51%) than “poor” (44%), a ‘net’ +7, whereas in June 2009 the ‘net’ figure was –13. This represents a ‘swing’ of plus 10.

Chart 2: Sharp improvement in state of the economy

Q How would you describe the current state of the Trinidad and Tobago economy?



1,514 TT adults, 11 December 2009 – 9 February 2010

Reflecting the greater proportion of people describing the current state of the economy as “good”, there is also a higher level of optimism about the general economic conditions of the country, and people’s future personal economic conditions, than was the case in June 2009.

More people expect that their personal financial situation will “improve” (42%) than “get worse” (24%) over the next 12 months, giving a personal “Economic Optimism Index” (EOI) of plus 18. This EOI was minus 7 in June 2009.

More people believe the general economic condition of the country will “get worse” (40%) than “improve” (31%) over the next 12 months, giving a general EOI of minus 9. Nevertheless, this is a substantial improvement from the public’s perception in June 2009 when general EOI was minus 31.

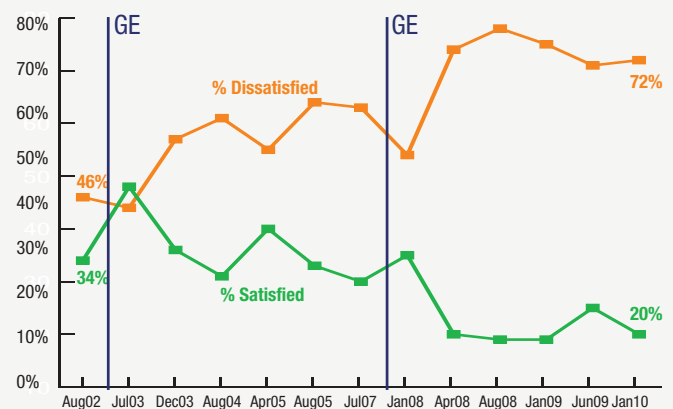
GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

The chart below shows the proportion of the public who have indicated their level of satisfaction with the way the ‘Government is running the country’ for each of the Waves since this question was asked in 2002.

In the latest survey one in five people (20%) is satisfied with the Government’s performance and more than seven in ten (72%) are dissatisfied. These findings are broadly consistent with approval ratings measured since early 2008. However the long term trend shows a clear increase in dissatisfaction with the Government, with two clear “jumps” in disapproval – the first in 2003 and the second in 2008, both after General Elections.

Chart 3: Government performance

Q Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the Government is running the country?



Source: Opinion Leaders’ Panel

FEELING INFORMED

One in ten people (10%) feel “very well informed” about the services and benefits provided by the Government and another third (34%) of the population feel “fairly well informed”. This means that less than half of the public feel informed (44%) and more than half do not feel informed (55%). These findings are similar to that of previous surveys conducted in 2008 and 2009 as part of MORI Caribbean’s Advertising Impact research for the Government Information Services Limited (GISL). The latest findings also represent a slight improvement in how many people feel informed compared to when the question was last asked on the Opinion Leaders’ Panel in April 2008 (40% informed), but it is somewhat lower than an August 2005 survey (54% informed). This means that between August 2005 and January 2010 there has been a 10% swing from being informed to not informed – in other words 10 people in 100 have moved from feeling informed about Government services and benefits to not feeling informed.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE BY THEME

The chart on the following page shows the areas of Government performance that are most highly rated by the public, in terms of the percentage of people saying the Government is doing a “good job”. The chart also shows the proportion of the public who said “good job” when asked about the same themes in January 2009 and January 2008.

The key strengths in terms of government performance are:

- *Education* is seen as the highest performing area of Government activity, with 73% of the public being positive about the Government’s performance here, which is in line with views expressed in 2009 (71%) and 2008 (70%).
- *Transportation* is the second highest rated area with just over three in five believing the Government is doing a “good job” (63%). While this is down from the rating given in 2009 (71%) it is still higher than

in 2008 (57%). The large increase in public approval between 2008 and 2009 could have been as a result of the introduction of the Water Taxi Service and more PTSC buses during that time.

- There are then three other areas of Government performance where approximately three in five people believe the Government is doing a good job: *Sport* (60%), which is consistent with findings in 2009 (61%); *International Relations* (58%), which is up eight points since the previous year; and *Culture* (58%), which was not asked about in previous surveys.

Overall, for eight of the 37 themes covered in the survey, half or more of the public rate the Government’s performance as “good”. For 15 of the themes however, half or more of the public rate the Government’s performance as “poor”. The areas where most people are critical of the Government’s performance are *Drainage* (82% “bad” job), *Wages* (79%), *Roads* (77%), *Food Security* (75%) and *Health* (74%).

Compared with a year ago, the largest positive shifts in ratings on performance are on:

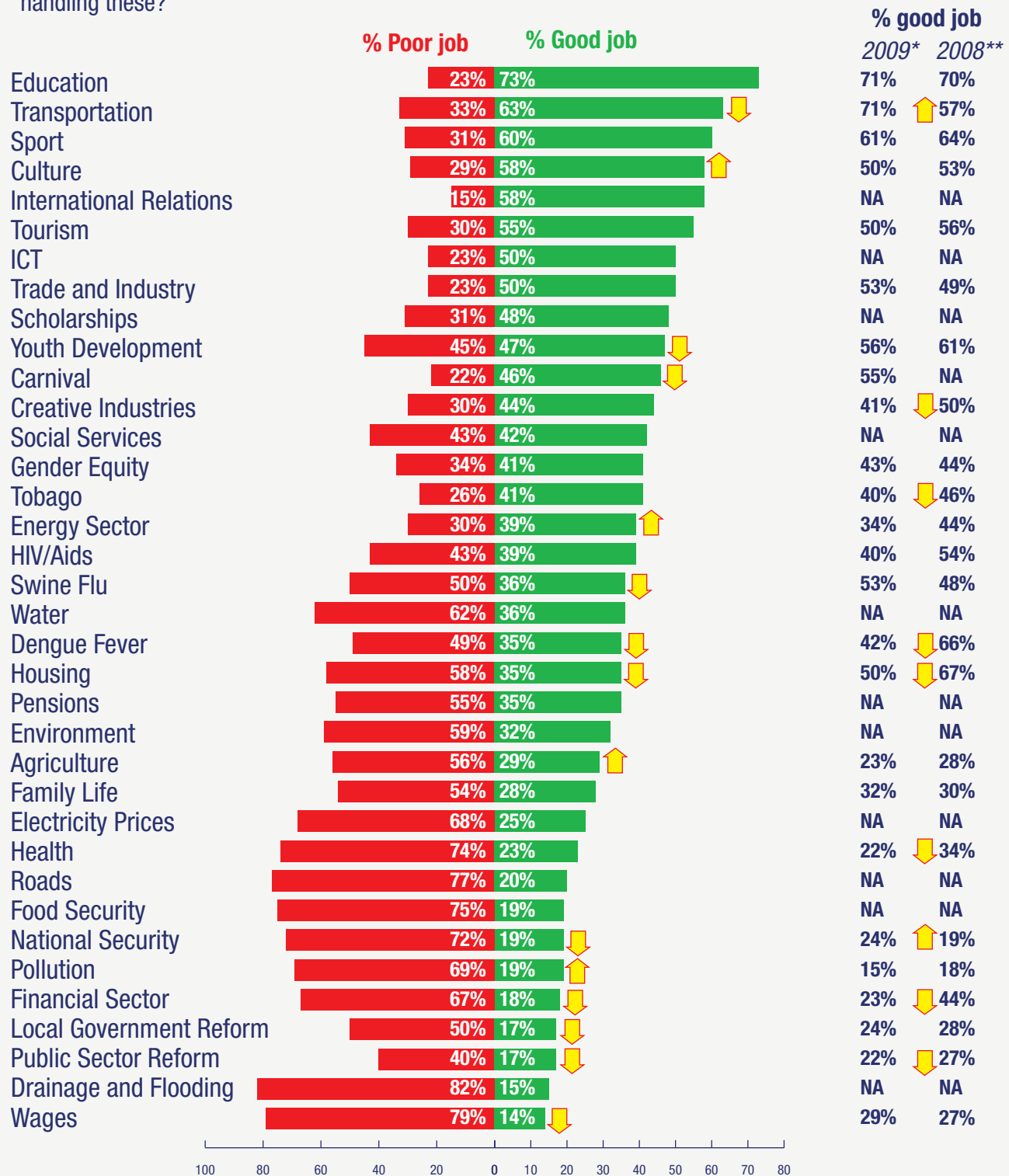
- *International relations* (+8)
- *Agriculture* (+6)
- *HIV/Aids* (+5)
- *Food Security* (+4)

The largest declines in perceptions of performance are with:

- *Water* (-17)
- *Housing* (-15)
- *Wages* (-15)
- *Transportation* (-8)
- *Pensions* (-7).

Chart 4: Government performance by theme

Q For each one of the following please tell me whether you think the government is doing a good job or poor job at handling these?



1,514 TT adults, 11 December 2009 – 9 February 2010

(*Wave 13 = January 2009) (**Wave 9 = January 2008)

DEFENCE FORCE & PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The public feels familiar with a range of services within the defence force and protective services, in particular the *Police* (88% know at least a fair amount), and the *Fire Service* (81%). Relatively few people feel informed about *SAUTT* (28%), *Air Guard* (25%) and *Defence Reserves* (21%). The services with the highest level of public favourability are *Fire Service* (78% favourable), *Coast Guard* (65%) and *Regiment/Army* (63%). The services with the highest levels of unfavourability are *Police* (35%), *Immigration* (23%) and *Prison Service* (20%).

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM)

A very high proportion of the public knows about the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which was held in Port of Spain in November 2009, with 94% of them being aware of it and almost three in five having “heard a fair amount” (36%) or a “great deal” (21%).

A slight majority of people (55%) feel the country has either “not benefitted at all” (32%) or “not very much” (23%) from hosting the CHOGM. Fewer than three in ten (28%) say the country has benefitted “a great deal” (6%) or a “fair amount” (22%). When asked specifically which groups have benefited the most from the country hosting the summit, people are most likely to believe it is the *government* (52%), the *hospitality/tourism sector* (34%) and *large businesses* (24%). Only 2% of respondents feel that *ordinary people* benefited.

CENTRAL BANK

More people disagree (43%) than agree (31%) that the Central Bank “really cares about keeping inflation low”. Similarly, almost half the public (48%) disagree that the Central Bank “provides me with useful information to help me understand what inflation is” and just three in ten people (30%) agree that it does.

LANGUAGES

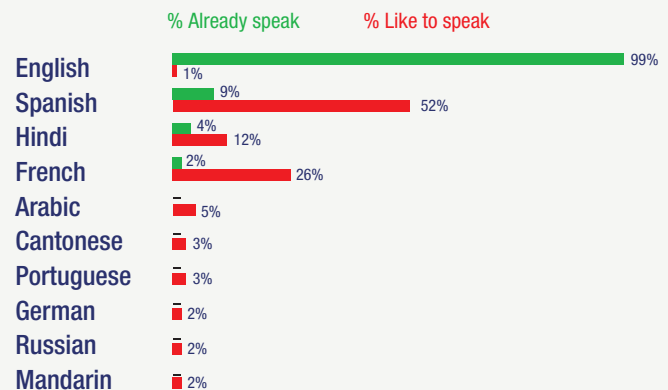
The following chart shows how many people say they can speak each of ten languages and also what proportion would like to be able to speak each of them.

One in eleven adults (9%) say they can speak Spanish, defined as being able to have a conversation in this language. Only a small proportion can speak any other language, including one in twenty-five (4%) who speak Hindi and one in fifty (2%) who speak French.

More than half the public (52%) would like to be conversant in Spanish, which is by far the most popular language that people would like to learn, ahead of French (26%) and Hindi (12%).

Chart 5: Languages

- Q Which of these languages can you speak? (i.e. You can have a conversation with someone in this language)?
- Q And which of these languages would you like to be able to speak?



1,473 TT adults 11 December 2009 – 9 February 2010

There is widespread support for the idea of producing public signs, such as road signs and notices in public offices, in Spanish as well as English. More than nine in ten people think this is a good idea (94%), including four in five (81%) saying it is a “very good idea”.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Compared with January 2009 there has been a fall in how many people have heard “at least a fair amount” about plans for Constitutional reform (45% in 2009 vs. 35% in 2010). In the latest findings just over a third of the public say they have heard “a great deal” or a “fair amount”, but three in five (61%) claim to have “heard of but don’t know much about” or have “not heard of” the plans at all.

Almost half the public (48%) are in favour of Constitutional change and one in five (19%) are opposed. These figures include the 20% who say they are “strongly in favour” of changing the country’s constitution compared with just 6% who say they are “strongly against” this. Twice as many people are “generally in favour but could be persuaded against” constitutional reform (28%) than are “generally opposed but could be persuaded in favour” of it (13%).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Compared with August 2008 there has been a sharp decline in the number of respondents who say they have heard of plans to reform local government; this is down from 83% aware to 68%. In the latest survey about four in ten (38%) people had heard “a fair amount” or “a great deal” about local reform plans, which is lower than the 51% who said the same in August 2008.

Among those who have heard of the plans, support remains broadly consistent with three in five (60%) supporting the government’s plans, down from 65% in 2008. There has been no significant rise in opposition (17% to 18%), instead slightly more people tend to neither support or oppose the plans now.

The change in attitude between August 2008 and January 2010 represent a swing of minus 3 percent, in other words three people in every 100 have moved from supporting local government reform plans to opposing them.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC UNION IN THE CARIBBEAN

Three in five people (59%) say they are aware of plans to form an economic union among several states in the Caribbean and slightly fewer (52%) are aware of plans to form a political union.

Across the public as a whole more people support than oppose both an economic union (41% support vs. 17% oppose) and political union (32% support vs. 23% oppose). However, it is worth highlighting that net support is lower for a political union (+9 net support) than for an economic union (+24), and for both of these, a significant proportion of the public say they “don’t know” or “neither support nor oppose” (42% for economic union and 45% for political union).

PROPERTY TAX

There is almost universal awareness of the government’s plan to introduce a new level of Property Tax in 2010 (98% of the public are aware of this). Not only is there a high level of opposition (two to one), to the introduction of the tax (53% “strongly oppose” and 12% “tend to oppose”), a similarly high level do not believe the tax will be calculated fairly (61% think it will not) or be affordable for ordinary people (65% think it will not).

PUBLIC SERVICES

The image of *Public Services* and *Public Servants* are almost identical with “poor service”, “corrupt” and “slow” being the most popular words people would choose to describe them. The hypothesis that people were critical of the public services and thought well of public servants was therefore found empirically wrong.

TTPost (82% satisfied), *Public Transport* (66%) and several of the education services are the most positively regarded by the public. *Hospitals* (65% dissatisfied), *Police* (57%), *Passport Office* (57%) and *HDC* (53%) have the highest public dissatisfaction ratings.

The largest increases in public satisfaction since July 2008 are with *UTT* (+26), *TTConnect Service Centres* (+12), *Social Welfare Services* (+8) and *Primary Schools* (+7). The largest declines in satisfaction are with *Licensing Office* (-21), *T&TEC* (-19), *Local Government Body* (-17), *WASA* (-15) and *Hospitals* (-16).

VISION 2020

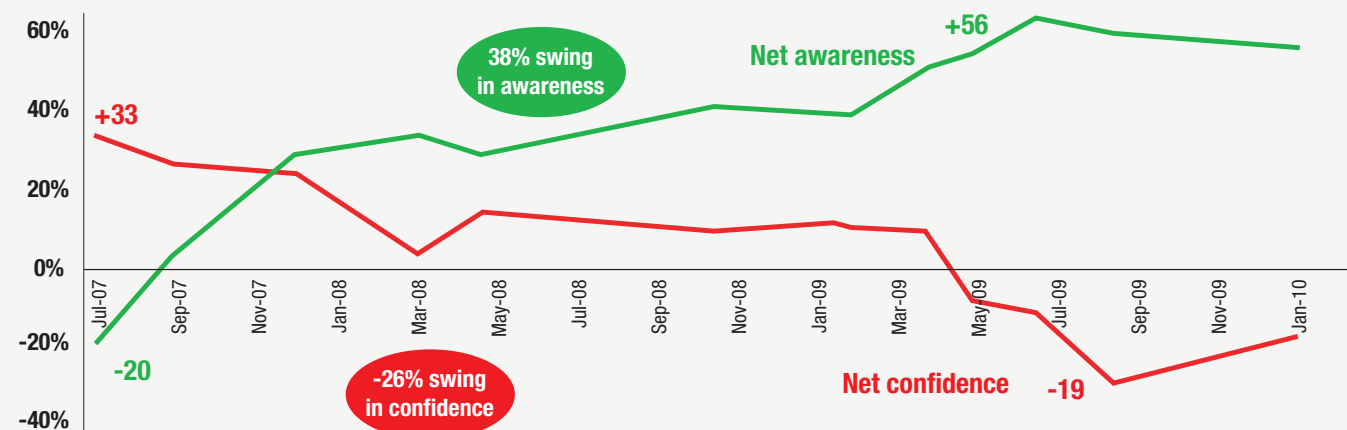
Virtually all adults in Trinidad & Tobago are aware of Vision 2020 (97% have heard of it) and a high proportion say they have heard “a great deal” (38%) or “a fair amount” (40%).

More than half of the respondents (55%) are pessimistic about Vision 2020 being achieved and only just over a third (36%) are optimistic, giving a “net confident” score of -19. In addition, there are almost four times as many people who are “certain” Vision 2020 will not be achieved than are “certain” it will be (15% vs. 4%).

Chart 6: Vision 2020 - net awareness vs. net confidence

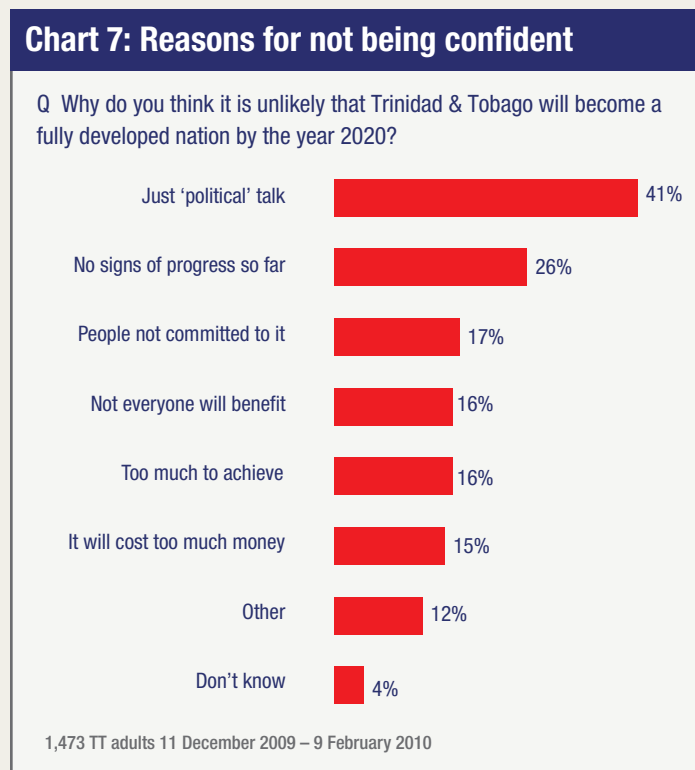
Q How much have you heard about Vision 2020?

Q Vision 2020 is the Government’s commitment to make Trinidad and Tobago a fully developed nation by 2020. How likely is it that this will be achieved?



Respondents who said they thought it was unlikely that Vision 2020 would be achieved were asked to indicate their reasons. The following chart shows the main reason these people give is that they considered Vision 2020 to be “political talk” (41%).

The second reason given for lack of confidence is “no signs of progress so far”, which is mentioned by approximately a quarter of those who were sceptical. The chart lists four additional reasons where between 15% and 17% of respondents indicate their lack of confidence.



METHODOLOGY

The Opinion Leaders' Panel (OLP) is a panel of approximately 3,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and is representative of the entire adult population. The fieldwork for Wave 15 was conducted face-to-face in respondents' own homes between 10th December 2009 and 9th February 2010. Wave 15 represents a freshly-recruited panel and therefore all respondents were recruited using a random probability selection method and none had been members of the previous OLP.

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 that the results are properly representative of all adults resident in the country.

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 for the betterment of all citizens. More updates will be provided in later issues of Opinion Leaders' News.

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