



INTRODUCTION

This newsletter provides an overview of the key findings from the latest Opinion Leaders' Panel research. This edition updates you with public opinion from Wave 9 of the Opinion Leaders' Panel, conducted during the period 16th December 2007 – 21st January 2008. The survey covered a wide range of issues including the management of the country's affairs, citizen's attitudes to the 2007 general elections, views on constitutional reform, confidence in key institutions of the state and the latest public attitudes to Vision 2020.

HAPPINESS

Eight in ten people in Trinidad and Tobago (81%) say that they are happy with their lives at the moment, including two in five (38%) who say that they are very happy. One in eight people (12%) claim to be unhappy. These findings are similar to results from December 2003 when the same question was asked; 86% of the public at that time said that they were happy with their lives.

SATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Following the General Elections on 5th November 2007, the proportion of the public that is satisfied with the way the Government is running the country has marginally increased from 30% when last measured in June-July 2007 to 35% at the start of 2008. Over the same time period, the proportion of the public that is *dissatisfied* with the performance of the Government has decreased from 63% to 54%.

Although these findings show an improvement in public ratings of the Government when compared to earlier in 2007, more people remain dissatisfied (54%) than satisfied (35%) overall.

CONTENTS

- 1 **Happiness**
Satisfaction with the Government
- 2 **Government Performance**
- 3 **Who Voted in 2007**
Image of the Campaign
- 4 **Information During the Campaign**
Why People Chose to Vote or Not
- 5 **Ideas for Increasing Turnout**
Confidence in Key Institutions
- 6 **Interests of MPs**
Interests of Senior Public Officials
Advice to Ministers
Promotion in the Senior Public Service
- 7 **Fair and Equal Justice**
Confidence in Judges
Image of Judges
- 8 **Constitutional Reform**
Vision 2020
Methodology

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

The public was asked to state whether they think the Government is doing a good job or a poor job for each of 28 different areas of activity which have an impact on people's quality of life.

Chart 1 shows the results from the survey. The green bars represent the proportion of the public saying the Government is doing a good job and the red bars show how many people think the Government is doing a poor job on each of the areas.

Overall there are eleven areas where at least half the public says the Government is doing a good job. These range from 50% saying this about Government's performance on *creative industries* to almost four in five who believe Government is doing a good job on *electricity* (78%).

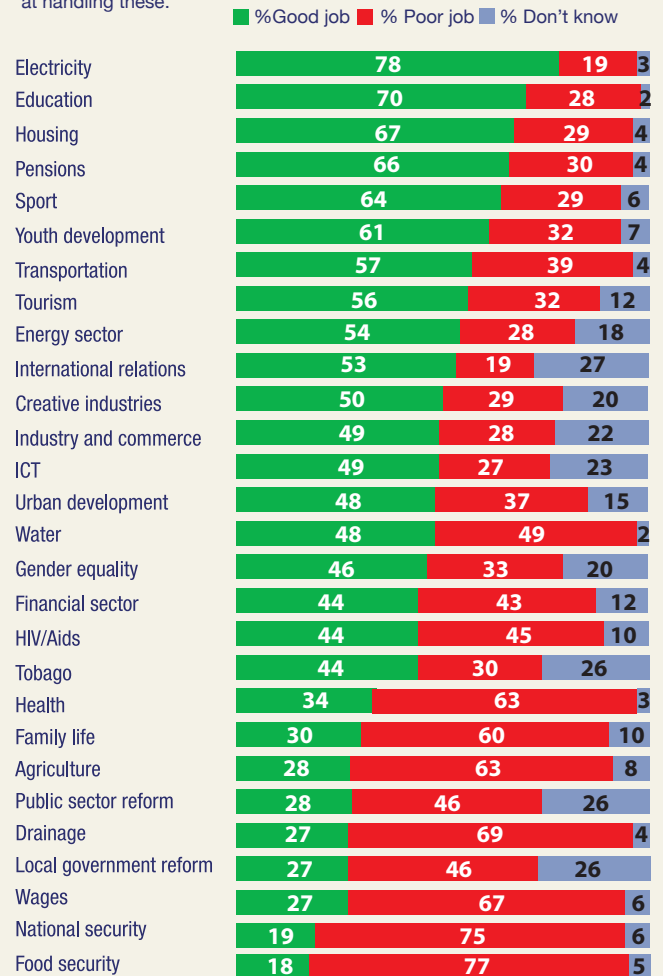
Education, housing, pensions and sport are also seen as strong areas for the Government, as around two thirds or more people believe its performance is good in these areas.

The two areas of activity where most people think the Government is doing a poor job are *national security* (75% say "Poor Job") and *food security* (77% say "Poor Job"). In a further five areas, three in five people or more rate the Government's performance as poor. These are *family life* (60%), *agriculture* and *health* (both 63%), *wages* (67%) and *drainage* (69%).

For some areas there are relatively high proportions of the public expressing "no opinion" on Government performance, including around a quarter that say this about *international relations, Tobago, local government reform* and *public service reform*.

Chart 1: Government Performance

Q The present government has promised to improve the quality of people's lives by addressing a number of areas. 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.



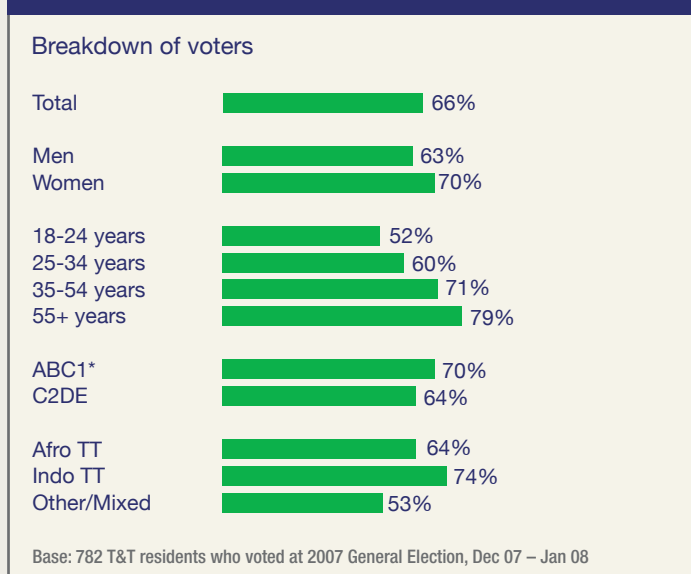
Base: 983 T&T residents, 16 Dec 07-21 Jan 08

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO THE 2007 GENERAL ELECTIONS

WHO VOTED?

Overall, 66% of adults in Trinidad and Tobago voted in the General Elections on 5th November 2007. Based on sub-group analysis of whether people said they voted in the election or not, this survey suggests that there were big differences in turnout by sub-groups of the population as shown in the following chart.

Chart 2: Who Voted



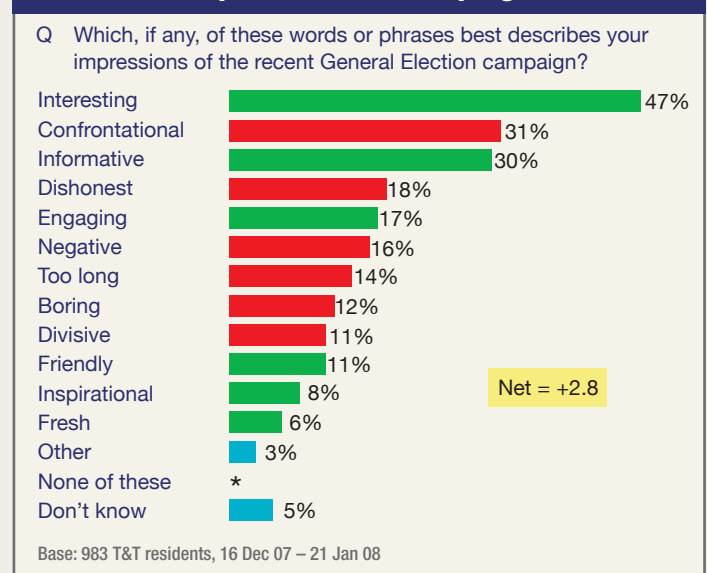
More women said they voted than men, and more Indo-Trinidadians did than Afro-Trinidadians or people of mixed/other ethnicity. The big differences in turnout by age, with just over half of 18-24 year olds (52%) voting compared to four in five over 55 years olds (79%), is a common pattern in many other countries.

*ABC1 is a social classification system representing middle class people and C2DE represents working class

IMAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN

When shown a list of different words or phrases to describe the election campaign, the public was most likely to select “interesting” (47%). The next two most commonly selected descriptions of the campaign were “confrontational” (31%) and “informative” (30%). “Friendly” (11%), inspirational” (8%) or “fresh” (6%) were the least likely phrases used to describe the campaign. Nevertheless, the net image score for the campaign was positive at +2.8.

Chart 3: Perceptions of the Campaign



In a separate question regarding perceptions of whether the campaign was fought in a positive or negative manner by candidates and parties, the majority of people believe the election was fought by the parties “attacking the policies and candidates of the other parties” (56%) rather than by them “putting forward their own policies and candidates” (16%). To provide some comparison, MORI’s research after the 2001 UK General Election showed that twice as many people in the UK felt that the campaign was fought by positive promotion by the political parties (31%) than was the case in Trinidad and Tobago in 2007

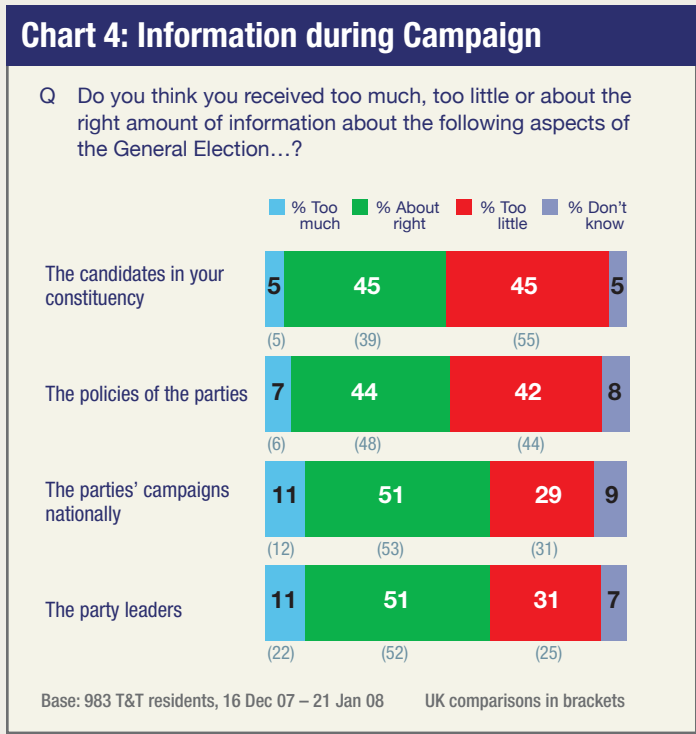
INFORMATION DURING THE CAMPAIGN

The survey asked the public whether they feel they received too much, about the right amount or too little information during the campaign on various aspects of the campaign. The results are shown in Chart 4.

For all four areas, only a small proportion of people believe they received too much information, for example one in nine people (11%) say they received too much information on the campaigns nationally and on the party leaders.

Information was most lacking about “candidates in people’s own constituency” and the “policies of the parties” as over two in five people say they received too little information about these.

The figures in the brackets on the chart below show the proportion of British people answering each of these questions in relation to the 2001 UK General Election. Compared to people in Trinidad, British people were twice as likely to think they received too much information about “party leaders” and more likely to say they did not receive enough about the “candidates in their own constituency”.



In terms of election coverage in the media, few people (just 5%) feel there was too little coverage in the newspapers, television or on radio.

Instead, the public is divided between whether there was too much or about the right amount of coverage, as shown in the table below

	% saying too much coverage	% saying about right amount
Newspapers	44	44
Television	47	43
Radio	42	46

WHY PEOPLE CHOSE TO VOTE OR NOT

The three top reasons voters gave for voting are:

- Civic right / duty to vote (29%)
- Wanted a change of government (24%)
- To improve the country (17%)

When asked why non-voters did not vote at the election, no one explanation is dominant. In fact, a third of non-voters say they did not know or did not have a specific reason for not voting. Among those that do give a reason the top answers are:

- Voting makes no difference (12%)
- Don't usually vote/not interested (9%)
- Did not get there in time (7%)

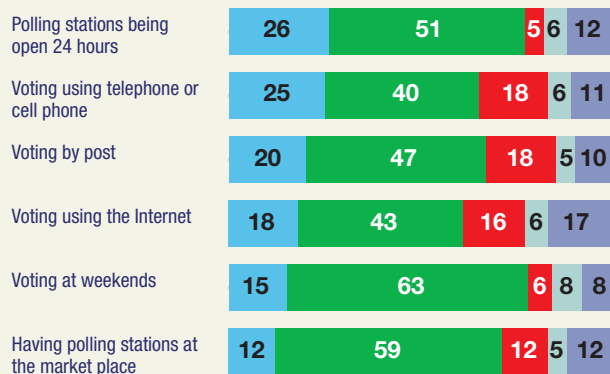
IDEAS FOR INCREASING TURNOUT

The survey asked those people who did not vote whether changing a range of different mechanisms for voting would have any impact on their likelihood of voting at a General Election. The most popular response for all six options is that they would not make any difference, ranging from 40% of non-voters saying this about “voting by telephone or cell phone” to 63% if “voting at weekends” were available.

Chart 5: Increasing Turnout (1)

Q I am going to read out a number of suggestions that have been made for encouraging people to vote at General Elections. For each one, assuming it had been available at the General Election, would it have made you more likely to vote, less likely to vote or would it have made no difference to whether or not you voted?

■ % More likely ■ % No difference ■ % Less likely ■ % Depends ■ % DK/NS



Base: 201 T&T residents who did not vote in 2007 General Election, Dec 07 – Jan 08

A quarter of non-voters say that allowing “polling stations to open 24 hours” would make them more likely to vote (26%) and a similar proportion say the same about “voting by telephone or cell phone” (25%).

It is interesting that for four of the six options almost as many non-voters say that these would make them less likely to vote, as say it would make them more likely to vote. Only with “polling stations being open 24 hours” (26% more likely vs. 5% less likely) and “voting at weekends” (15% more likely vs. 6% less likely) do we find a large difference in this regard. And given the higher proportions who say none of these would make any difference these findings suggest that changing the mechanisms of voting would potentially only have a marginal impact on the level of turnout at General Elections.

CONFIDENCE IN KEY INSTITUTIONS

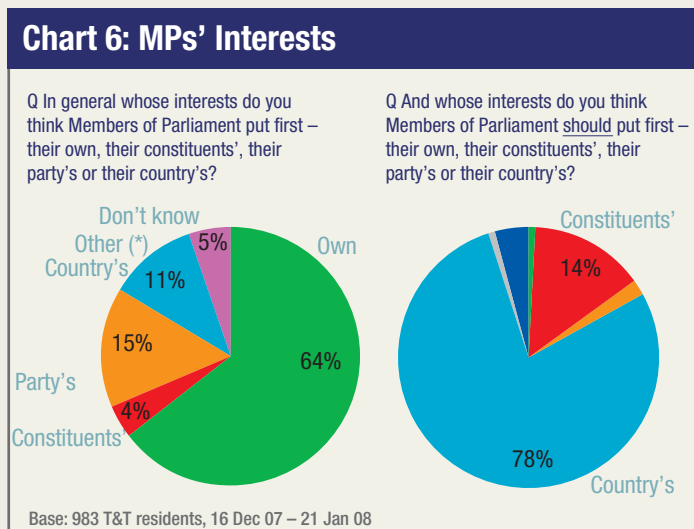
The institutions enjoying the highest levels of public confidence are the *Church* (79% of the public have a great deal or some confidence) and media institutions: *Radio* (74%), *Television* (71%) and *Newspapers* (65%). *Banks* are also highly regarded (69%). The institutions with the lowest levels of public confidence include *Parliament* (41%), the *Police* (40%) and *Political Parties* (36%).

Public confidence in institutions in Trinidad & Tobago is generally similar to the average confidence compared with six other Caribbean nations where the same question was asked in 2007. For three institutions, public confidence is higher in Trinidad & Tobago than the average of the other Caribbean nations. These are *Radio*, *Newspapers* and the *Prime Minister*. In contrast, fewer people have confidence in the *Police* in Trinidad & Tobago compared with public confidence in the *Police* in the other Caribbean nations.

INTERESTS OF MPS

There is wide scepticism among the public about whose interests Members of Parliament and Senior Public Officials put first when making decisions, as shown in the following two charts.

Two-thirds of public (64%) think that MPs put their own interests first, ahead of their party's (15%), the country's (11%) or their constituents' (4%). The vast majority of people want MPs to put the interests of the country first (78%).

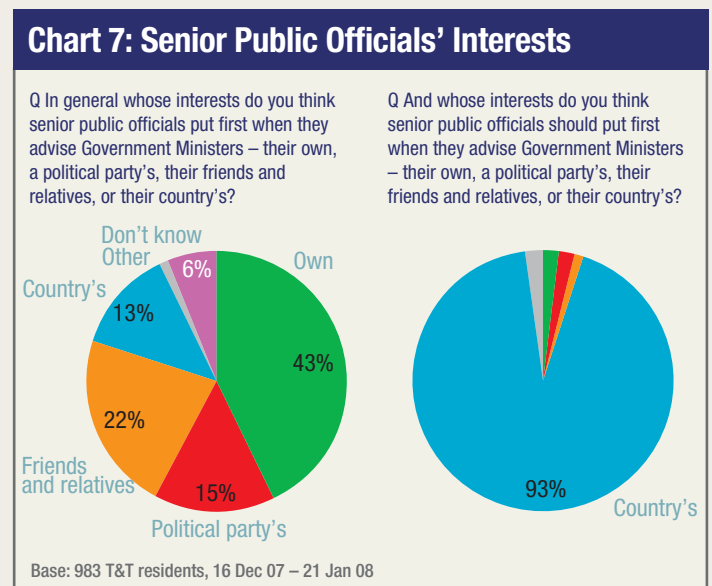


ADVICE TO MINISTERS

There is wide agreement among the public (67% agree) that officials should be able to give advice to Ministers without fear that it will become public knowledge. More people agree that the Minister should decide whether advice received from officials should be given to the media (51%) than agree that the decision should be taken by the official (36%).

INTERESTS OF SENIOR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Two thirds of the public think that Senior Public Officials put their “own” interests first (43%) or that of their “friends and relatives” (23%) when advising Government Ministers. Just 13% of the public think officials put the “country’s” interests first, while almost everyone (93%) says that officials should put the “country’s” interest first.



PROMOTION IN THE SENIOR PUBLIC SERVICE

The public thinks that promotion in the Public Service should be based mainly on how well an individual can do the job (67% select this). Only six percent (6%) think promotion should be based mainly on length of service. A further quarter of the public (24%) believe that length of service and how well an individual can do his/her job are equally important in deciding on promotion.

FAIR AND EQUAL JUSTICE

One of the goals in the “Governance” section of the Vision 2020 Operational Plan is that “all citizens will be assured of fair and equal justice in Trinidad and Tobago”. At present, by a ratio of almost two to one, the public does not think this is true.

Almost three in five people (57%) disagree that all citizens will be assured of fair and equal justice in the country, including one in three (33%) who *strongly* disagree. In contrast three in ten (31%) believe fair and equal justice will be assured.

CONFIDENCE IN JUDGES

Half the public (51%) have a great deal or some confidence in Judges. This places them mid-point when compared with 22 different institutions of state as measured by levels of public confidence in each of them.

Public confidence in Judges in Trinidad and Tobago is consistent with public confidence across the average of six other English-speaking Caribbean nations. In these countries, confidence in Judges is highest in St Vincent (63%) and lowest in St Lucia (46%), with the average being 52% – statistically the same as in Trinidad and Tobago (51%).

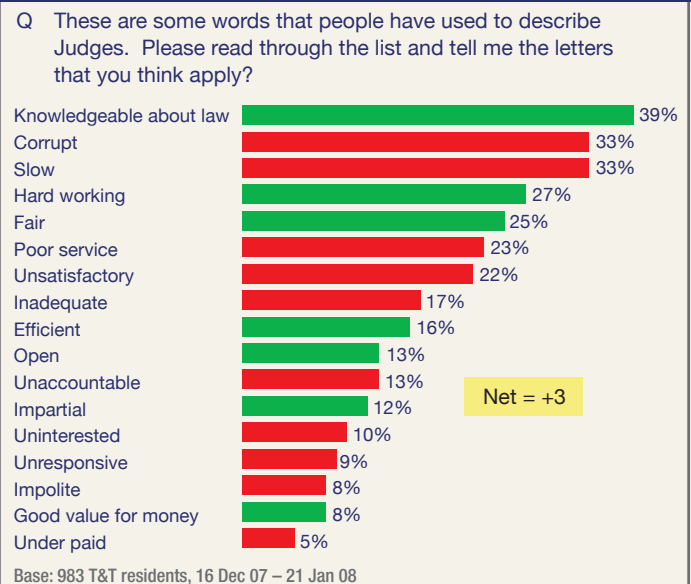
IMAGE OF JUDGES

Respondents were provided with a list of 17 characteristics and asked to select those that they thought were most applicable to Judges. The most popular selection pertained to Judges being “knowledgeable about the law” (39%), but the next two most frequently selected characteristics were both negative: “corrupt” and “slow” (both 33%).

Relatively few people would say Judges are “impartial” (12%) and the lowest chosen positive attribute is “good value for money”, with 8% of the public selecting this.

Overall, the net image rating of Judges is positive with a net rating of +3. This means that the image of Judges is not as favourable as that of Teachers (net rating of +14.9), but is better than that of the Police (-19.5), Doctors (-0.1) and Nurses (-3.8).

Chart 8: Image of Judges

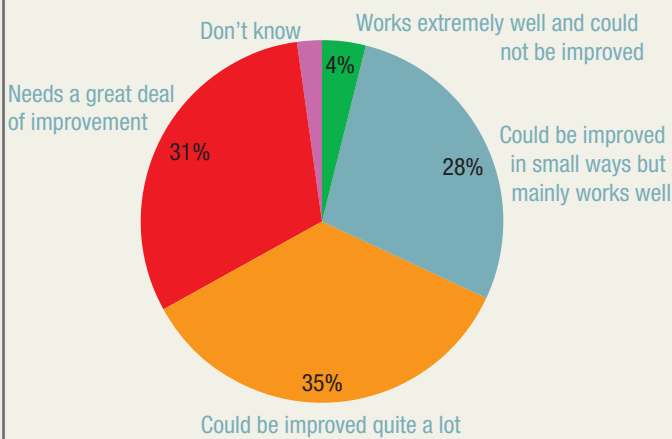


CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Only one in twenty-five people (4%) say that the system of governing Trinidad and Tobago “works extremely well and could not be improved”, as shown in the following chart. Most people think the system needs either “a great deal of improvement” (31%) or “could be improved quite a lot” (35%).

Chart 9: System of governing T&T

Q Which of the statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Trinidad & Tobago?



Base: 983 T&T residents, 16 Dec 07 – 21 Jan 08

Half of the public (51%) have heard at least a fair amount about discussions to change the country’s Constitution. On balance, people support the need to change the Constitution. This includes 27% of people who *strongly support* the need to change the Constitution and a further 25% who say they are *generally in favour* but could be persuaded against if they thought it was bad for the country.

Opposing the need to change the constitution are 7% of the public who are strongly against any changes and 20% who say they are *generally opposed* but say they could be persuaded in favour if they thought it was good for the country. The remainder of the public say they either do not care (6%) or don’t know (15%).

VISION 2020

More people have heard about Vision 2020 than ever before. Three in every four (75%) persons say they have heard a fair amount or a great deal about the Vision.

Since the last wave of the Panel, in August 2007, there has been no change in the level of public confidence that Vision 2020 will be achieved: half the public (51%) thinks it is likely or certain that Trinidad and Tobago will become a fully developed nation by the year 2020, and two in five people (42%) think it is unlikely or certain not to happen. In the first half of 2003, when the confidence question was first asked, twice as many people were confident about the country achieving Vision 2020 than not confident (63% vs. 30%). There has therefore been a 12 point drop in public confidence on achievement of the Vision since that 2003 period.

METHODOLOGY

In total 983 adults living in Trinidad and Tobago were interviewed for Wave 9 of the Opinion Leaders’ Panel. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in home, between 16 December and 21 January 2008.

As with all waves of the Panel, after fieldwork was completed, the data was checked and weighted to the latest available census information to ensure that the results are representative of all adults. Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding or the exclusion of cases indicating “don’t know/not stated”.

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 to make 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

For more information contact: David Bazil
 Ministry of Public Administration
 National Library Building
 Corner Hart & Abercromby Streets,
 Port of Spain, Trinidad
 Phone: (868) 623-8578
 Fax: (868) 623 6027
 Or visit the Opinion Leaders’ Panel
 website: www.opinionleaders.gov.tt

