

The local government system in

# Trinidad and Tobago



## Key facts

**POPULATION (Census 2000):** 1,262,366

**AREA:** 5,130 sq km

**CAPITAL:** Port of Spain

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP:** -

**CURRENCY:** Trinidad and Tobago dollar (TTD)

**HEAD OF STATE:** President Maxwell Richards

**HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:**

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar

**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** parliamentary republic

**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** bicameral

**STATE STRUCTURE:** unitary

**LANGUAGES:** English (official)

**NATIONAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2010; **turnout:** 69.5%;

**next:** 2015

**LOCAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2010; **turnout:** 39%;

**next:** 2013

### SUMMARY

Trinidad and Tobago is a unitary republic with two levels of government: central and local. There is no specific constitutional provision for local government, the Tobago House of Assembly however is enshrined within the constitution. The Municipal Corporations Act 1990 and the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996 comprise the principal legislation governing local government. The Ministry of Local Government oversees local authorities on Trinidad whilst the Tobago House of Assembly reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister. There is only one level of local government: a single authority in Tobago and

14 municipal corporations in Trinidad, comprising two city corporations, three borough corporations and nine regional corporations. All cities and boroughs will regain revenue-raising power, when the repeal of the current legislation is finalised. Central government makes significant contributions, especially to the Tobago authority. The local authorities have developed responsibility for a wide range of functions from policing to primary health and education.

### 1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Trinidad and Tobago is a unitary republic with a bicameral parliament. The head of state is the

non-executive president who is elected by the members of both houses for a five-year term. Parliament comprises an elected House of Representatives and an appointed Senate. The 41 members of the House of Representatives are directly elected for a five-year term by the first-past-the-post system. The president appoints the 31 senators: 16 on the advice of the prime minister, six on the advice of the leader of the opposition and another nine at the president's own discretion. The prime minister is appointed by the president and is usually the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives. The prime minister appoints a cabinet from the members of both houses.

**Table 1.** Distribution of councils and population (Census 2000)

Municipal corporation/ parish (Tobago)	Local areas (electoral wards)	Population	Approx. Area sq km
Arima	7	32,278	11
Chaguanas	8	67,433	60
Couva-Tabaquite-Talparo	13	162,779	720
Diego Martin	10	105,720	11
Penal-Debe	9	83,609	247
Point Fortin	6	19,056	24
Port of Spain City	12	49,031	13
Princes Town	9	91,947	621
Mayaro/Rio Claro	6	33,480	852
San Fernando City	9	55,419	19
San Juan-Laventille	13	157,295	220
Sangre Grande	8	64,343	899
Siparia	9	81,917	510
Tunapuna-Piarco	15	203,975	527
14 TRINIDAD	134	1,208,282	4,734
St George	n/a	5,364	n/a
St Mary	n/a	2,965	n/a
St Andrew	n/a	15,830	n/a
St Patrick	n/a	14,011	n/a
St David	n/a	7,504	n/a
St Paul	n/a	5,412	n/a
St John	n/a	2,998	n/a
7 TOBAGO	12	54,084	300
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>1,262,366</b>	<b>5,130</b>

Source: Elections and Boundaries Commission and was used for the 2010 local government elections. Population shown is the number of the electorate in each area ie those eligible to vote<sup>1</sup>

## 2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 2.1 Constitutional provisions:

Local government is not enshrined in the constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, but, the Tobago House of Assembly is enshrined in Chapter 11A of the constitution.

### 2.2 Main legislative texts:

The Municipal Corporations Act 1990 is the principal legislation governing local government in Trinidad, whilst Tobago is principally governed by the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996.

## 3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 3.1 Local government within the state:

Local government is single-tiered in both Trinidad and Tobago, with Trinidad divided into 14 municipalities/regional corporations and Tobago with a single House of Assembly.

### 3.2 Ministerial oversight:

The Ministry of Local Government is headed by a cabinet minister who responsible for the policy directives of the ministry. The minister is assisted by a Permanent Secretary (PS) who is the chief accounting officer and general supervisor of staff as well as responsible for the PS coordination of the day-to-day work of the department. There are also two deputy permanent secretaries

overseeing corporate services and implementation. There are several divisions, including human resources, general administration, technical services, planning, finance and accounts, communications and international cooperation and internal audit.

Under section 269 of the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 the minister can give general or specific directions to municipal councils in relation to government policy on any matter. The minister is also tasked with promoting an effective and equitable partnership between central and local government in the development of socioeconomic growth, balanced sustainable development and social welfare. The ministry also manages the communication strategy for the sector as well as acting as adjudicator in cases of disputes between municipal corporations.

**3.2.1 Trinidad municipal corporations:** The 14 municipal corporations are of three types: two city corporations, three borough corporations and nine regional corporations. All have the same powers and responsibilities, and are empowered to make policies and by-laws in relation to its functions for the local area. The council is headed by a mayor in a city or borough, the head of in a regional corporation is called chairperson; each council also has a deputy mayor/vice chairperson.

Municipalities must set up committees for finance, personnel, public health and infrastructure. Each of these four committees must have a minimum membership of 51% of the council. Each committee is headed by a committee chairperson who maintains close contact with officers of the corporation in supervising the administration of services by the respective departments. Statutory meetings are held towards the end of each month to ratify the business of the committees, making their recommendations binding. Decisions made by these committees are reported to the council for ratification.

Further discretionary committees can include leisure, civic amenities, planning development and security. Committees can set up and appoint sub-committees. The mayor or chairperson can form an executive committee or cabinet and appoint members of the council to it. The council's instructions on its policies and programmes are formally received by the chief executive officer (CEO) at council meetings. The day-to-day work of the council is carried out by its administrative arm which consists of the CEO, supported by administrative, technical and skilled employees and by labourers.

### 3.2.2 Tobago House of Assembly: An

executive council is responsible for carrying out the functions of the assembly. It comprises the chief secretary, deputy chief secretary and up to five secretaries drawn from amongst the assembly members and appointed by the president on the advice of the chief secretary. The assembly can also set up committees; it decides their composition and terms of reference. The responsibilities of the assembly are carried out through eight divisions, each under the direction of one of the secretaries. These 12 divisions are: agriculture, marine affairs and the environment; community development and culture; education; youth affairs, sport and energy; finance and planning; health, infrastructure and public utilities; tourism; transportation; enterprise and settlement.

### 3.3 Traditional leadership:

A range of traditional leaders, including leaders of various religious institutions, community groups, village councils and other special interest groups can be called upon by corporations to sit on various committees on issues that relate to their specific areas of interest.

## 4. ELECTIONS

### 4.1 Recent local elections:

The latest elections for municipal corporations on Trinidad were held in July 2010, with a 39.5% turnout. The most recent elections for the Tobago House of Assembly were held in January 2009, with a 66% turnout.

### 4.2 Voting system:

On both Trinidad and Tobago local government elections use the first-past-the-post system. Councillors in Trinidad are elected for a three-year term, whilst in Tobago it is for a four-year term.

### 4.3 Elected representatives:

#### 4.3.1 Trinidad's municipal corporation

**councillors** are elected for each municipality using the first-past-the-post system, followed by a secondary election where councillors elect aldermen from a pool of candidates who have 'demonstrated knowledge, expertise or experience in professional or vocational occupations suited to the development focus of the municipality'. The number of aldermen varies depending on the size of the council. Mayors and chairmen are indirectly elected from among the aldermen and councillors for a three-year term. A total of 134 councillors and 31 aldermen were elected in the 14 municipal councils, including five mayors in the cities and boroughs and nine chairperson in the regional corporations.

#### 4.3.2 Tobago House of Assembly members:

There are 12 elected assemblymen plus four appointed councillors (three are appointed by the chief secretary, one by the leader of the opposition). The assemblymen elect a chief secretary, who is leader of the assembly, and a deputy chief secretary.

### 4.4 Women's representation:

Following the 2010 Trinidad local election, women accounted for 30% of councillors, 21% of mayors or chairmen, 7% of deputy mayors or chairmen and 38% of aldermen. This represents an increase on the 27% of councillors and 5% of mayors in the 2003 elections.

## 5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Legal requirement:

Provisions are made in the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 for the appointment of sub-committees, as well as advisory committees of persons who are not members of a council. These provisions could be used to promote community involvement in decision-making at the local government level. There is no specific provision regarding legal requirements for community

involvement in the decisions of the Tobago House of Assembly. Consultation with the citizens however, is normally held for major development matters including budgets.

### 5.2 Implementation:

Municipal council statutory committee meetings are open to the public.

### 5.3 E-government:

There is no e-government strategy in place.

## 6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### 6.1 National local government association:

The Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities (TTALGA) was established by the Municipal Corporations Act 1990. Membership is automatic for municipal councillors on Trinidad and voluntary for members of the Tobago House of Assembly. The association is funded by member subscriptions and government subvention and its main activities include promoting effective and efficient management in the local government bodies, and acting as a communication link between local government bodies and the central government and its agencies. The association is also responsible for developing a code of ethics to which all members must adhere.

## 7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Direct contact between central government and the Trinidad municipal corporations is on an ad-hoc basis at the minister's discretion. Currently the minister holds regular monthly meetings with mayors and chairmen. The meetings usually focus on finance and local government terms and conditions of employment. The chief secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly may, at the invitation of the prime minister, attend meetings of the central government cabinet to provide information on decisions that have been taken by the House of Assembly or to represent Tobago on matters that affect it. Additionally, the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996 set up a dispute resolution committee to intervene in any dispute between the government and the assembly on budgetary allocations. This committee comprises two appointees from the Tobago House of Assembly, two government appointees and the ombudsman (or similarly qualified person) as chairperson.

## 8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

The Auditor General, the ombudsman and the joint select committee of parliament all have the power to call municipal corporations in to explain their actions. A Tobago unit of the Office of the Ombudsman was set up in 2002.

## 9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

### 9.1 Locally raised revenue:

Municipal corporations are responsible for assessing and collecting land and building taxes, but only the cities and boroughs have the institutional mechanism to do so. The Property Tax Act 2009, centralised the administration and collection of taxes. The present government however, has recently introduced a bill to repeal the current legislation and to revert to the former situation where the cities and boroughs collected house rates and central government collected land and building taxes from the regional corporations.

### 9.2 Transfers:

Central government provides substantial general and specific grants to municipal corporations, such as through its Public Sector Investment Programme and Road Improvement Fund. The Tobago House of Assembly receives a large part of its income from central government (4.1-6.9% of the national budget).

### 9.3 Local authority staff:

The Statutory Authority Service Commission and Public Service Commission within the central government are responsible for recruiting professional staff. Local authorities themselves recruit only the employees on daily rates.

#### 9.3.1 Trinidad municipal mayors and

chairpersons and their deputies are considered part-time salaried posts, there is also a pay structure for councillors and aldermen. The Salaries Review Commission, a central government body, determines remuneration. Staff of the regional municipalities are paid directly by central government. Municipalities must have a chief executive officer, a corporation secretary, a treasurer, an engineer and a medical officer of health. All municipalities have similar staffing structures, with the chief executive as head of paid service and a tier of chief officers reporting to him or her.

#### 9.3.2 Tobago House of Assembly members

are paid a monthly allowance to cover the costs of office facilities and staff. The Salaries Review Commission sets the level of this allowance. The chief secretary is a full-time, salaried position including allowances and other benefits, similar to that of a state government minister. It is a statutory requirement for the assembly to have a chief administrator to head the administrative set-up, and a clerk to be responsible for legislative matters. There is also provision for the secondment of staff from other statutory bodies for up to five years.

**Table 2.** Aggregate revenue and expenditure for local government (2009-2010)

Revenue	TT\$m	Expenditure	TT\$m
<b>Government transfer*</b>		<b>Admin and operational</b>	
Government transfer total	1,147.8	Personnel	710.6
		Goods and services	403.8
<b>Locally raised revenue</b>		Purchase of equipment	8.5
Property tax	2.4	Current transfers	44.7
Other locally raised income	17.5	<b>Services</b>	
		General administration	215.4
		Maintenance – cemeteries	14.2
		Maintenance – markets/abattoirs	20.8
		Maintenance – buildings/grounds	129.2
		Local public health	351.9
		Maintenance – roads	215.4
		Other	220.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,167.7</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,167.7</b>

Source: Ministry of Local Government\*

## 10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

### 10.1 Municipalities in Trinidad have statutory responsibility for:

- Policing
- Street management
- Nurseries and childcare
- Homes for the elderly
- Bus and taxi shelters
- Maintenance and management of street markets, slaughterhouses, and common and recreation grounds
- Waste removal and management
- Corporation cemeteries and crematoria.

They have discretionary powers for:

- Libraries
- Management and improvement of the physical environment, including parks, open spaces, recreation areas and monuments
- Other crematoria and burial grounds
- Development, trade fairs and events.

### 10.2 The Tobago House of Assembly:

The Tobago House of Assembly has delegated powers over finance and other responsibilities. Since the 1996 Act, the assembly has powers to take on a wide range of responsibilities including:

- Finance
- Customs and excise, licensing and valuation
- State lands, public buildings and infrastructure
- Highways and roads
- Health services and social welfare
- Agriculture, fisheries and food production
- Environment, forestry, housing and marine parks
- Sports, culture, arts and tourism
- Education, museums and libraries.

### References and useful websites

1. Central Statistics Office [www.cso.gov.tt](http://www.cso.gov.tt)  
Census 2000  
[www.cso.gov.tt/statistics/Census%202000/Distribution\\_of\\_Total\\_Population\\_2000.pdf](http://www.cso.gov.tt/statistics/Census%202000/Distribution_of_Total_Population_2000.pdf)
2. UN statistics  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2008/Table03.pdf>
3. IMF statistics [www.imf.org/external/data.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm)
4. Ministry of Local Government [www.localgov.gov.tt](http://www.localgov.gov.tt)
5. Central government [www.ttconnect.gov.tt](http://www.ttconnect.gov.tt)
6. Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago: [www.central-bank.org.tt](http://www.central-bank.org.tt)
7. Tobago House of Assembly: [www.tha.gov.tt](http://www.tha.gov.tt)
8. Law Revision Commission: [www.legalaffairs.gov.tt](http://www.legalaffairs.gov.tt)
9. Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago  
[www.ttparliament.org/documents/1048.pdf](http://www.ttparliament.org/documents/1048.pdf)
10. Elections and Boundaries Commission  
[www.ebctt.com/ourOperations.php](http://www.ebctt.com/ourOperations.php)
11. UN, Women's Watch, 2010 Advancement of Women in Trinidad and Tobago  
[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga65/Trinidad%20and%20Tobago.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga65/Trinidad%20and%20Tobago.pdf)

**Annex A.** Summary of service provision in different spheres of government

Service	Delivering authority			Remarks
	Central Government	Trinidad Municipalities	Tobago House of Assembly	
<b>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</b>				
Police	■	■	■	The municipal corporations play a coordinating role in civil protection
Fire Protection	■			
Civil protection				
Criminal justice	■			
Civil status register	■			
Statistical office	■			
Electoral register	■			
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
Pre-school	■		■	
Primary	■		■	
Secondary	■		■	
Vocational and technical	■		■	
Higher education	■		■	
Adult education				
<b>SOCIAL WELFARE</b>				
Kindergarten and nursery	■	■	■	
Family welfare services	■		■	
Welfare homes	■	■	■	
Social security	■			
<b>PUBLIC HEALTH</b>				
Primary care	■			
Hospitals	■			
Health Protection		■		
<b>HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING</b>				
Housing	■		■	Town planning is done with input from the municipal corporations
Town planning	■		■	
Regional planning	■			
<b>TRANSPORT</b>				
Roads	■	■	■	
Transport	■			
Urban roads		■	■	
Urban rail				
Ports	■		■	
Airports	■		■	
<b>ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION</b>				
Water and sanitation	■		■	Municipal corporations are responsible for trucked water where no lines exist
Refuse collection and disposal		■	■	
Cemeteries and crematoria	■	■	■	Municipal corporations are responsible for refuse collection, central government for disposal
Slaughterhouses	■	■	■	
Environmental protection		■	■	
Consumer protection	■			
<b>CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS</b>				
Theatre and concerts	■	■	■	
Museums and libraries	■		■	
Parks and open spaces	■		■	
Sports and leisure	■	■		
Religious facilities			■	
<b>UTILITIES</b>				
Gas services	■			
District heating				
Water supply	■			
Electricity	■			
<b>ECONOMIC</b>				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■		■	
Economic promotion	■		■	
Trade and industry	■			
Tourism	■		■	
Other economic services			■	

■ = discretionary service by the local authority