

## T&T goes to the polls

Over one million electors eligible to vote today

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TODAY is V day. 'V' for voting which approximately 1,154,708 electors are eligible to do. And 'V' for victory, which only one political party will celebrate later tonight. The magic number is 21, there being 41 seats up for grabs in this electoral contest.

Voting starts at 6 a.m. sharp and ends at 6 p.m. All persons who are in line at the polling stations by 6 p.m. will be able to cast their ballots at over 1,600 polling divisions in the country.

There are several contenders in this race-17 political parties and 161 candidates, three of which are Independents. The ruling People's National Movement (PNM) and the Opposition United National Congress (UNC) are the main contenders. For the last ten years they have held between them all the seats in the Parliament-which at the dissolution of the Parliament stood at 22 for the PNM and 19 for the UNC. The UNC is part of a Coalition of Interests fighting in this election, while the PNM goes solo, as is its tradition. Other notable parties are the Patriotic Front headed by Mickela Panday, which is contesting 37 seats; while in Tobago there is a fourway battle between the PNM, the Tobago People's Party headed by Farley Augustine, Progressive Democratic Patriots led by Watson Duke and the Innovative Democratic Alliance headed by Dr Denise Tsoiafatt Angus for the two Tobago seats.

Over the last five weeks, the parties mainly the PNM and the UNC have been working the ground in all 41 constituencies, holding public meetings, motorcades and rallies. The notable feature in this election has been the intensity of the campaign on social media, with parties spending on social media ads, social media influencers and social media coverage of public meetings as well candidates making snapshot appearances.

A recurring feature, as with all other recent elections, is the importance of the marginal seats. Much of the electioneering has targeted the keenly contested marginal seats of Aranjuez/St Joseph, Toco/Sangre Grande, Tunapuna and San Fernando West, where the PNM and UNC have remained locked in a battle that could well determine the difference between government and opposition. Eyes will also be focused on the other critical marginal seats of Moruga/ Tableland, La Horquetta/ Talparo and Tobago East. On Saturday, the campaigns reached a crescendo with the rallies of the UNC and PNM and yesterday the parties were merely covering their bases at all corners of the constituencies and preparing their election day operations.

### Election day prohibitions

Today no canvassing and campaigning are allowed and party symbols cannot be displayed within 100 yards of any polling station. Other prohibitions include the playing of loud music and loudspeakers broadcasting political propaganda; the wearing of party emblems; Impersonation (which is voting for a person, living, dead or fictitious); and bribery or treating of electors to food, drink or entertainment in order to influence their vote. The sale and consumption of liquor is prohibited at any premises licensed under the Liquor Licences Act during the hours of voting. All the prohibitions carry fines or periods of imprisonment in the event of a breach of the law.

There are two observer teams in the country-one from the Commonwealth and the other from Caricom. The UNC has had a litany of complaints about the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) and last Friday the party reiterated its call for the EBC to be placed under closer scrutiny and for a commission of enquiry into it. The EBC has rejected claims that it is colluding with the PNM in any way.

EBC Chief Election Officer Fern Narcis- Scope has said that she is confident that the EBC was 'well prepared to administer the election and the EBC had aimed to train 16,000 to 17,000 persons to work on election day to ensure the smooth running of operations.

### Boundary changes

Population shifts have resulted in boundary and name changes in five constituencies: Malabar/Mausica, formerly D'Abadie/O'Meara; Claxton Bay, formerly Pointe-a-Pierre; Trincity/Maloney, formerly Arouca/Maloney; Aranjuez/St Joseph, formerly St Joseph, and Arouca/Lopinot, formerly Lopinot/Bon Air West.

By the end of this day, the population will know the outcome of the elections, who the successful candidates are and which party has emerged victorious as a result of capturing the majority of seats in the next Parliament.

It's now over to the people.