VALUES PORTRAIT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Selwyn Ryan

Introduction

Economics has been termed the “dismal science”. The term is attributed to the English commentator, Thomas Carlyle, who in 1849, argued that “economics is not a gay science. It is a dreary, desolate and indeed quite a distressing one, what we might call... the dismal science”. In recent times, political science came to rival economics in that characterization. What began as a discipline which sought to determine what institutional arrangements best conduced toward good government, over the years focused more on factors which led to the decline and collapse of the state. This was particularly so in the decades following the decline of empire and the achievement of independence in the post-colonial world.

In the 1980s political scientists and economists began to focus once more on the positive dimensions of their craft, and sought to identify reforms which might help to secure and consolidate democracy and which might lead to the achievement of “good governance”. That term, which became one of the most loosely used among political reformers, stressed the importance of creating the right institutional and macroeconomic arrangements without which unscrupulous, ambitious, and politically aggressive individuals would overwhelm political systems. Well structured and well engineered minimalist institutions were expected to serve as the channels and firewalls which facilitated the achievement of good governance.

The institutional school was challenged by political sociologists who insisted that political culture and social capital were equally important, if not more so than were institutions to making political systems work. What was the point of designing elaborate constitutions and formal power sharing arrangements if these had to be operated by those who had brought the state to grief in the decades immediately following independence? The argument was that equal attention had to be paid to the social and cultural environment, the “software” which provided the lubrication which animated and gave life and meaning to the constitutional institutions and foundational documents being generated in countries “transitioning” to or “consolidating” democracy.

In recent years, a number of research institutions have undertaken cross national barometer surveys to determine what factors help to determine sustainable democratic political success. As was the case with 19th century utilitarians such as Bentham and John Stuart Mill, they began to explore the relationship between individual liberty and social good. Was there any relationship between widespread perceptions of pleasure, happiness, and well being, and preference for liberal democracy? Was there any link between material poverty and perceptions of “unhappiness”? Could perceptions of “unhappiness” and disquiet (what Robert Merton [1938] called “anomie”) co-exist
with or even increase with material prosperity? Is there any link between subjective perceptions of “happiness” and the way citizens of a given society evaluate the performance and legitimacy of national political institutions and the leaders thereof?

Many analysts believe that there is some such link. Some have however challenged one of the basic assumptions of the “happiness” school viz., that more prosperity would yield more happiness. They argue that “rising prosperity may lift all yachts but not necessarily all spirits.” Studies have in fact shown that more prosperity can in fact lead to more discontent and perceptions of underdevelopment. Richard Layard (2005) of the London School of Economics has argued that what some societies need is not more employment but more enjoyment! Layard argued that the rich are not generally happier than the poor. He claims, for example, that the percentage of the Japanese who say they are “very happy” is not greater than was the case in 1950 when Japan was less prosperous. The same is said to be true of Great Britain which ranked 21st in the Happy Planet Index produced in 2006 by Trucost, an economics foundation that focuses on the environment. Iceland topped the Index. According to the Report, “the material standard of living in Europe was already very good in the 60’s, by comparison with the rest of the world. Such gains as have been made represent the ‘icing on the cake’ rather than fundamental increases in welfare and have come at an unsustainably high environmental price”.

People either get used to having more and thus take certain things as being their prescriptive right, or believe they have to keep up with others who are seen to be doing as well as they are. In short, prosperity can give rise to perceptions of underdevelopment and anxiety. Much of course depends on what is meant by happiness and whether the term means the same in all cultures or subcultures. Material happiness and spiritual happiness may well be alternatives, but both might count as “happiness”.

According to the most recent World Values Survey conducted by the United States National Science Foundation, Denmark was the happiest country in the World. Denmark was followed by Colombia. Zimbabwe was found to be the least happy. Russia and Iraq were also in the bottom ten. The study again confirmed that financial prosperity was not the only reason for happiness (Trinidad Guardian, 4 July 2008).

Happiness studies have churned up a variety of other hypotheses about the relationship between lifestyle and life satisfaction. Some analysts believe that individuals who are deeply religious have higher levels of “life satisfaction” than non-believers. Religion, they argue, provides “buffers” which protect individuals from life’s disappointments. Yet others argue that atheism has precisely that effect on peoples’ dispositions. Atheists are said to be less authoritarian, less suggestible, less dogmatic, less prejudiced, more tolerant of others, more law abiding, compassionate, and conscientious than religious fundamentalists.

Other surveys suggest that persons who give generously to charities and various social causes have higher levels of personal satisfaction. The studies suggest that the amount of money one spends is less important than the purposes for which the money is spent. Higher pro-social spending seems to increase personal happiness (cf. Trinidad Express, 21 March 2008). Yet other studies indicate that excessive leisure can be unhealthy, especially among persons who are workaholics or perfectionists (Trinidad Express, 21 March 2008; 29 December 2007).
Also indicated was that age seems to affect perceptions of well being. A recent study by Prof. Yang Yang of Chicago University found that life gets better in one's perception as one ages. As Yang argued: “a certain amount of distress in old age is inevitable, including aches, ... but older people generally have learned to be more content with what they have than younger adults.... In general, the odds of being happy increased by 5% with every 10 years of age.” (http://www.msnbc.com/id/24201693/ GTI=43001).

People who are “moderately happy” also seem to be healthier and to live longer than persons who are “extremely happy.” According to Dr. Edward Deiner of the University of Illinois, “extremely happy” persons may be less likely to pay attention to health concerns. They may also not pursue educational or job market opportunities as persistently as the “moderately happy.” Being in an “aroused” state may also take a toll on their cardiovascular system. “Extremely happy” persons may also be risk takers and thrill seekers and may incur costs pursuing their fantasies. Dr. Diener opines that “we are not built to be ecstatic all the time. Maybe, we need some negative emotions” (cited in Trinidad Express, 30 January 2008).

Happiness and Attitudes in Trinidad & Tobago

Similar studies have been replicated in Trinidad and Tobago by MORI Caribbean using some of the same questions which were asked in the worldwide surveys and three countries with which some of the data were compared. MORI Caribbean interviewed a random sample of 1002 adults aged 18+ living in Trinidad and Tobago. Fieldwork was conducted between 14 September and 8 November 2006 using trained interviewers. Figures based on the full sample have a confidence interval of approximately ± 3%. What follows is an analysis of some of the main findings of these studies. Taking responses to the main questions into account, and assuming that the answers given are in the main indicative of how people genuinely feel, what we find in Trinidad is that notwithstanding all the expressions of dissatisfaction with the society, and the disposition to migrate that one hears from time to time, Trinidadians are far more positive about their personal and social circumstances and their environment than media headlines and opposition statements would lead one to believe. "Headline discontent" is apparently much higher than objective discontent. Citizens gripe and grumble more than perceptions of their objective circumstances seem to warrant. If their declared opinions are to be taken at face value, or even with a dash of salt, they seem to be as “happy as pappy,” to use a colloquial expression.

Family Work and Leisure

Trinidadians and Tobagonians were asked to indicate how important a number of values or activities were to them. Almost all, 96% indicated that family was “very important” to them. Roughly the same percentages felt this way in two of our comparator countries, Britain and New Zealand, 94% and 93%, respectively. These percentages were considerably lower in Hong Kong, our third comparator country, where only 56% considered family to be “very important.” An additional 42% however, deemed family to be “rather important”. Given what has been said about the importance of the extended family and about filial obligations in Chinese society, one would have expected more to say that family was “very important” to them.

When Trinidadians were asked about the importance of friends, 40% said that they were “very important”, while 33% deemed them “rather important”. Twenty four percent considered them to be “unimportant”. Taking
the two categories together, we find that 63% considered friends to be “very” or “rather” important, compared to 26% who thought otherwise.

The response of the populations of our comparator countries varied significantly. Ninety seven percent of the British felt that friends were “very” or “rather” important, 95% of the New Zealanders, and 96% of the Hong Kong Chinese. One was surprised to find that in a culture which has a reputation for social and communal as opposed to individual activity, as much as a quarter of the population would report that friends were not very important to them.

Eighty three percent of Trinidadians considered leisure time to be “very” (52%) or “rather” (31%) important. Surprisingly, more Britishers (88%), New Zealanders (87%), and Hong Kong Chinese (87%) deemed leisure time “very” or “rather” important than was the case with Trinidadians (83%), who have a reputation for knowing how to have a good time. Seventeen percent deemed leisure time to be “unimportant” compared to 8%, 10% and 13% of the New Zealanders, British and Hong Kong Chinese, respectively.

It is often said Trinidadians have a “relaxed” attitude towards work, are “lazy”, and do only as much as is needed to get by. Not many are said to believe the German adage that “work makes life sweet” or the Calvinist dictum that “laborare est orare”. How true is this stereotype? When asked whether they believe that “work is a duty towards society”, as many as 31% “strongly agreed”, with another 56% “agreeing” that this was the case. Only 6% disagreed, with a mere 1% disagreeing strongly. In sum, 87% believed that one had a duty to work, other things being equal. Five percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

It is also widely felt that if one did not work, one became lazy. Thirty eight percent believed “strongly” that this was so, with another 41% nodding assent. The aggregate here was 79%. Only 13% “disagreed”, with another 2% “disagreeing strongly.” Six percent neither agreed nor disagreed. One not only had an obligation to work, but work should come first and at the expense of free time. Seventy three percent were of this view, with 29% “strongly” believing that this should be so. Only 19% “disagreed”, with a further 3% disagreeing “strongly.”

Significant minorities did not agree that one needed to have a job in order to develop one’s talents, or that it was humiliating to receive money without working for it. Thirty five percent “disagreed” with the first proposition and 42% with the second. Fifty eight percent agreed with the former assertion, and 49% with the latter. There are a number of possible ways of interpreting these responses. One is to say that many people believe that they could develop their talents by working for themselves or just doing what they enjoyed without treating it as a “job” for which they received “income.” One’s work could be one’s hobby.

Of interest was the finding that as many as 49% “agreed” or “agreed strongly” that it was humiliating to receive money without working for it. Perhaps of greater interest was that 42% “disagreed” or “disagreeing strongly” that there was anything wrong with doing so. One assumes that this latter figure includes people who believe that the state or some other person or institution owes them a living by way of benefits or a pension which they have earned or to which they are entitled for one reason or another. It may also include people who believe that they have a “right” to free goods or money provided for by the state, and that only “fools” work when
money and services could be secured without one having to exert oneself in a “job.”

The responses of the Chinese to this question are interesting. Seventy-six percent agreed that work was a duty one had towards society, a lower percentage than obtained with respect to Trinidadians who had a reputation of being “work shy”. Only 5% “disagreed”, while 18% were ambivalent. It is also interesting to note that whereas 49% of the Trinidadians felt it was humiliating to receive money without working, only 36% of the Chinese felt this way.

When we disaggregate the Trinidad data by ethnicity, we find the differences to be somewhat sharp. Eight percentage points separate Afro and Indo Trinidadians in terms of whether it is humiliating to receive money without working (italics added). Forty-four percent of the former disagreed compared to 36% of the latter. Again, 46% of the Afro-Trinidadians agreed that it was humiliating compared to 56% of the Indo-Trinidadians who believed that it was humiliating. When we asked whether work was a duty that citizens owe to a society, the gap between the two ethnic clusters was narrower. Eighty-six percent of the Afro-Trinidadians “agreed” or “strongly agreed”, compared with 91% of the Indo-Trinidadians, a gap of 5%.

Having regard to what is said about the Trinidadian attitude to work, one was surprised to find that work was deemed very important by a majority, - 83% - of Trinidadians. While 10% deemed it “rather important”. Only 7% thought it to be “not very important” or “not important at all”. Surprisingly, the British who are regarded as being very disciplined, score lower on this question than Trinidadians. Seventy one percent of them consider work to be “very” or “rather” important, whereas 21% of them do not. In Hong Kong, only 26% felt that work was “very important” while 56% considered it “rather important”. Given what is said about “Asian values”, such as postponed gratification and commitment to hard work, one would have expected a higher percentage to claim that work was “very important”. It has been argued that the essential component of Asian values is the belief in the virtue of hard work and the postponement of gratification.

New Zealanders were closer to the British in their responses. Thirty-five percent felt that work was “very important” while 48% considered it “rather important”, a total of 83%. Eleven percent felt differently and 6% gave no answer.

All national clusters regarded “leisure time” as being of high value. In Trinidad, 50% said it was “very important” while 31% said it was “rather important”, an aggregate of 83%. In Hong Kong, at the other extreme, 24% found it “very important” while 63% regarded it as “rather important”, an aggregate of 87%.

Priests, Pundits and Good Governance

There has been a great deal of controversy as to whether Trinidad & Tobago is a Christian state, a multi-religious state, a multi-cultural state, or a secular state. Many Christians insist that Trinidad & Tobago is a Christian state by reason of its history and its ethnic composition (some 64% profess Christianity) and that Christians should be given a privileged place in the making of any public policy which impacts on the broad values of the society.

Non-Christians challenge these assertions, and either insist that no faith based organisation should be formally and officially recognised or that the multi-culturalism which is enshrined in the Constitution and proclaimed in the national anthem - every creed and race find an equal place.
place—should be given full effect in the management and cultural arrangements of the society. The controversy is fuelled by the fact the current Prime Minister is a ‘born again Christian,’ and makes no secret of the fact that he believes that he is a child of God and one of “God’s chosen instruments”. Cabinet meetings are reportedly preceded by prayer which has a Christian flavour. It is also fuelled by the fact that some members of the Indian community and Hindus in particular believe that they are discriminated against by the state and its agents (Ryan 1999).

Whatever their denominational differences, a substantial majority of Trinidadians deem God and religion as being “very” or “rather important” in their lives and claim that they regularly take moments to pray, meditate or contemplate God, life, and its meanings. A whopping 90% make such claims, notwithstanding reports that the number attending the established Christian churches and Hindu temples are in sharp decline. The deficit appears to be made up by the increasing numbers who flock to the evangelical churches (Ryan 1999).

Organized religion is far less important to people in Britain. Only twenty one and 19% considered it “very important” or “rather important”. The same held for the people of New Zealand where the numbers deeming it “very” or “rather important” were 17% and 18% respectively, and in Hong Kong where only 5% considered it “very important” and 22% “rather important.” As many as 60% regarded religion as being “not very important.” It is however a fact that evangelical manifestations of Christianity are flourishing in several parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia, including Singapore and South Korea.

What the data indicate is that Trinidadians are the most religiously conscious of the four national groups, at least formally so and the Chinese the least religiously conscious or preoccupied. It is also worthwhile to compare the responses given to this particular question in the USA, and in other countries in Europe. Six out of every ten Americans say that religion is very important in their lives. The picture is very different in most of Europe. In Italy, the figure is 27%, in France, Germany and the Czech Republic, the figure is 11%, in Russia, the figure is 14%, and in Poland, the figure is 36%. Europe is more secular and clearly out of step with the rest of the world.

Most Trinidadians hold that a belief in God is a criterion for holding public office and that politicians who are atheists are ipso facto “unfit for public office”. As many as 36% “strongly agree” with this view while another 31% “agree”, an aggregate of 67%. Twenty percent “disagree”, 3% “strongly”, and 9% “neither agree nor disagree”. Clearly, atheists are a suspect group in Trinidad and Tobago.

Most Trinidadians believe that if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office, the quality of governance would improve. Twenty three percent felt “strongly” that there would be improvement, while 40% “agreed,” an aggregate of 63%. Nineteen percent saw no reason to believe that there would be any improvement, while 2% strongly “disagreed,” an aggregate of 21%. Fifteen percent neither agreed nor disagreed or were unwilling to venture an unequivocal opinion.

Trinidadians do not believe that religious leaders should seek to influence the way people vote in elections. Twenty five percent “strongly agree” that they should not do so, while another 45% “agree”, an aggregate of 70%! Nineteen percent “disagree” with this assertion, with 2% “disagreeing strongly,” an aggregate of 21%. Seven percent “neither agree nor disagree”. A
majority of Trinidadians also believe that religious leaders should not seek to influence the decisions which governments make. Sixteen percent “strongly agreed” that they should not do so while 37% “agreed”, an aggregate of 53%. Thirty-four percent believed that they should.

When we compare the Trinidad data with that of New Zealand, we find that few New Zealanders subscribe to the view that politicians who were non-believers were unfit for public office. Only 8% of them do while 58% do not. Twenty-seven percent neither agree nor disagree. A majority (72%) also believed that religious leaders should not seek to influence how people vote. Similarly, 64% of them are of the view that religious leaders should not seek to influence government policies.

What the Trinidad figures indicate is that a substantial majority of the Trinidad and Tobago population believe that notwithstanding the claim that Trinidad is a secular state, religion cannot be separated from politics. Also important is the finding that contrary to what is assumed by some “humanists”, two thirds of the population believe that Trinidad and Tobago would be better, and not worse off, if persons of strong religious beliefs were elected to office. What the figures also suggest is that a large majority of Trinidad’s population believe in God and the importance of religious values and certain policies and practices, but do not want religious leaders to campaign openly on behalf of political parties or political leaders as they once did and currently do surreptitiously.

**Perceptions of Happiness**

Trinidadians characterize themselves as a “happy-go-lucky” hedonistic people, who, as the calypsonian asserts, could not care “whether Good Friday fell on Ash Wednesday.” Many agree with the comment made by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore that they have a “carnival mentality”. What do the figures say? When asked whether they consider themselves to be “very happy”, “rather happy” or “not very” or “not at all” happy, 51% report that they were “very happy”, 35% that they were “rather happy”, an aggregate of 86%. Twelve percent were however “not very happy” and 2% “not at all happy”, giving a net positive happy disposition of 73%.

Surprisingly, the British, who are regarded by many as being a dour people with a stiff upper lip, emerge with an even more positive attitude to life. Fifty-one percent said that they were “very happy”, while 43% that they were “rather happy”. When the figures are aggregated, we find 94% of the British claiming to be “happy” or “rather happy.” Only 5% claim to be “not very happy”. The net positive is 89%. It would seem that contrary to what has been said about Brits becoming more unhappy even as prosperity increases, rising tides are lifting yachts as well as spirits.

When we compare the disposition of New Zealanders, we find that as many as 38% also claim to be “very happy” and 58% claim to be “rather happy”. The Chinese responses were somewhat different from the other three. Only 7% considered themselves to be “very happy.” Seventy-seven percent however say that they were “rather happy”, an aggregate of 84%. As many as 15% said that they were “not very happy” - the highest unhappiness rate of all four groups. Looked at comparatively, however, one finds the happiness rate of the Chinese to be close to that of the “happy” Trinidadians and Tobagonians. This comes as a surprise and raises questions as to just what the two groups deem happiness, and how the commodity is conceptualized and measured. Are the same things being measured?
Trinidadians also generally feel positive about the state of their physical health. Seventy-three percent of them describe it as being “very good” (35%) or “generally good” (38%). Twenty-three percent describe their health as “fair”. Only 4% deem it to be “poor”. The Chinese are a lot less positive about the state of their health. Only 5% say their health is “very good” while 58% deemed it to be “fair”, an aggregate of 63%. The aggregate positive figure for Britain was 74% and for New Zealand, 81%. The latter were the most satisfied with the state of their health. Britishers and Trinidadians were close to each other in the rankings.

**Purpose in Life and Involvement in Religious Activity**

Trinidadians seem to be far more introspective and religiously conscious than people in our comparator countries. Seventy-nine percent of them reported that they often thought of the meaning and purpose of life, while another 17% did so sometimes. Three percent however rarely did so, if ever. In Britain and New Zealand, only 38% and 40% often thought of the purpose and meaning of life. In Hong Kong, the percentage was even less, 13%. When the distributions for those who question life’s meaning often are aggregated, the patterns were still widely differentiated for Trinidad (96%), Britain (74%), Hong Kong (61%) and New Zealand (40%) respectively.

Most Trinidadians (92%), formally belong to some religious denomination or another. According to our data, the largest organized group in Trinidad were the Protestants (44%). The Hindus are the next largest group (23%), followed by the Catholics (20%), and the Muslims (5%). Christians together account for as much as 64% of the population. When the figures are disaggregated in terms of racial affiliation, we find some interesting distributions. Fifty-two percent of the Indians are Hindus, 9% are Muslim, 8% are Catholics and 27% are other Christians.

Trinidadians attend religious services, other than for weddings and funerals, far more frequently than people in our comparator countries. Eighteen percent attend more than once a week, 25% once a week, 15% once a month, 14% on special holy days only, and 6% once a year. Twelve percent attend less than once a year and 7% never or practically never. The figures for non-attendance in Britain, New Zealand and Hong Kong are 46%, 53% and 48%, respectively.

A majority of Trinidadians (83%) consider themselves to be religious persons, while 15% do not. Forty-seven percent of the British, 45% of the New Zealanders, and 27% of the Chinese deem themselves religious, whether they attend religious service or not. Atheists in Trinidad are few and far between and even fewer advertise themselves as non-believers. Ten percent of the British declare themselves as atheists, 6% of the New Zealanders and 5% of the Chinese.

Notwithstanding their belief in God, and in the importance of religion, most of the established religious organizations, whether Christian or non-Christian, are strongly criticized and deemed to be largely irrelevant given some of the social problems that are currently facing the country such as high crime rates, corruption, child and spousal abuse, male marginalisation, etc. Most are losing memberships to the evangelical churches which seem more sensitive to the quotidian needs of their flocks. When asked whether the religious authorities in the country give adequate answers to the moral and spiritual problems and needs of the individuals and families in the society, a majority (55%)
answer in the negative. Forty-four percent however answer yes, but this group includes evangelicals, more of whom are broadly satisfied with what their pastors do and preach.

**Membership in Voluntary Organisations**

Few are currently members of voluntary associations other than those that are faith based or sports related. Whereas 43% of them belong to a church or some other religious association, only 4% claim to be an active member of a political party. The percentages saying they are active members of other voluntary organizations, in descending order, are sport and recreational organisations (19%), art, music or educational organizations (17%), humanitarian or charitable organizations (14%), professional associations (8%) and labour unions (7%).

Significant minorities claim to be inactive members of organizations with which they were once associated. One-third (33%) claim to be “inactive” members of religious organizations. The percentages of other selected organizations are sport and recreational (14%), political parties (14%), labour unions (13%), art, music or educational organizations (14%). In terms of those who either do not now or never belonged to any organization, 24% reported that they do not belong to any religious organization, while 83% did not belong to any political party, professional body, or environmental association.

Fewer Britishers (19%) were active members of religious organizations. Another 17% claimed to be inactive members, while as many as 63% did not belong to any. More Britishers were active members of sport or recreational organizations (30%), art, music, charitable or educational organizations (21%) or labour unions (17%). Only 3% claim to be active members of political parties. A majority of New Zealanders (51%) are very active in sport or recreational associations. More of them (40%) are active members of religious organizations than is the case with Britishers (19%), while as many as 15% say they are active members of a political party, a trade union (17%), charitable association (34%) or professional association (29%). The cumulative figures seem to show that more New Zealanders are “joiners” than is the case with either Trinidadians or the British.

**Trust and Confidence in National Public Institutions**

“Trust” is a vital commodity in the construction and functioning of organizations and societies (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000). Without it, economic and social transaction costs increase and societies and organizations are forced to invest more when contracting business or making other social or economic arrangements. Trust lubricates the clashing gears of individual and group interests and helps to take the civil war potential out of organizational and social life. Trust also helps to augment the stock of social capital or to replenish it if it has been leached.

Trinidadians generally do not believe that people can be trusted. Only 4% believe this, while as many as 96% feel that one ought to be careful when dealing with other people. The data indicates that Trinidad is a “low trust” society. New Zealanders are much more inclined to believe that people can be trusted. Close to half of them (49%) believe so, while 46% are distrustful. A substantial percentage of Britishers are also distrustful. Sixty-eight percent of them feel this way compared to only 30% who feel otherwise. The figures for the Chinese are 40% and 58%, respectively.
Given the generally low levels of interpersonal trust which obtain among Trinidadians, one is not surprised to find that institutions do not work very well, that society is very litigious, and that opposition political parties are so fractious. One of the frequently heard complaints in Trinidad & Tobago is that its national political institutions have become dysfunctional. This is said to be true of institutions in the public as well as in the private sector. To what extent is this true? To what extent do Trinidadians have confidence in the integrity and viability of these institutions?

Political Parties

Looking first at political parties, we find very low levels of confidence in them. Only 1% of the population had a “great deal of confidence” in them. Another 8% claimed to have “quite a lot” of confidence in them, a positive aggregate of just 9%. Fifty-seven percent report that they do not have very much confidence in them at all, with another 21% saying that they have “no confidence” in them, a negative aggregate of 88%! In sum, the attitude towards political parties is substantially negative.

Parliament

Given the negative attitudes towards political parties, it is not at all surprising to find that attitudes to Parliament are also not positive. Only 3% of the adult population claim to have “a great deal” of confidence in the country’s national legislative body, while another 13% indicate that they have “quite a lot” of confidence. The aggregate here is 16%. These are however, contradicted by those who either do not have “very much confidence” in Parliament (57%) or “none at all” (24%). The aggregated figure is 81%. The net positive figure is 65%.

The Judiciary

The Judiciary does not fare much better. Only 7% say they have “a great deal” of confidence in the courts, while 25% said they had “quite a lot”. Close to half (49%), however confess to having little confidence in the judicial branch with another 20% having “none at all” - a negative aggregate of 37%. In sum, a whopping two thirds of the population does not have much or any confidence in the courts of the land. If anything, the latter percentages may have become much higher as a result of the many crises which have developed around the Chief Justice and the Chief Magistrate in 2007. Both officials have been formally accused of public misbehaviour and have been the subject of major official investigations which project them in an unfavourable light.

Police Service

Much the same applies to the Police Service which is highly criticized by civil society. Only 5% of the population has “a great deal” of confidence in the constabulary, with another 23% reporting that they had “quite a lot” of confidence - an aggregate of 28%. A majority (51%), however do not have “very much” confidence in policemen while another 20% have “none whatever” - an aggregate of 71%. The inability of the Police to stem the rising tide of criminal behaviour and the alleged involvement of some police officers in drug trafficking and kidnapping for ransom have served to increase feelings of distrust and disgust.

Public Service

Similar levels of disenchantment were evident when we looked at the public service - the spinal cord of the state system. A mere 7% thought highly of it, while another 20% were
also positive, though a bit less so. Fifty-one percent do not have very much confidence in the public service, while another 14% have none at all, an aggregate of 65% or two thirds.

There have been continuous complaints by both the Government and the general public that the service is slow, inefficient and unproductive, and in need of drastic reconstruction. The Government has thrown up its hands in despair and has created specialized bodies within the Service to get high priority projects completed, or have created new bodies altogether. These agencies however cannibalise the civil service, the members of which often take their attitudes and work practices with them. Many have become laws unto themselves and are said to have become riddled with corruption.

The Defence Force

The Armed Forces do slightly better than the Police Service. The Police are on the front line of crime prevention and are widely seen as being corrupt and ineffective in dealing with the problem of law and order. The army, which is less directly involved in the on going war against crime and thus less visible, attracts less criticism, but not much less. Eleven percent of the population says they have a great deal of confidence in the armed forces, and these views are supported by another 28%. Forty-seven percent are however less enthusiastic, while 13% have very negative views, an aggregate of 60%. Having regard to the positive role played by the army in the crises of 1990 when an unsuccessful attempt was made to overthrow the Government (Ryan 1991) and in the fight against the kidnapping and drug trade, one was somewhat surprised that a more positive attitude was not in evidence.

The Executive

Turning next to the President and the political executive as a whole, views are very mixed. The President does best among the various national bodies. Twelve percent of the population expressed “a great deal” of confidence in the office, while another 24% claimed that they have “quite a lot” of confidence. Thirty-eight percent however do not have very much confidence in the office and 12% have no confidence in it at all, an aggregate of 50%. In sum, as much as half the population held negative views about the Head of State. This may be due to the manner in which the previous incumbent, Mr. ANR Robinson, dealt with the “hung” (18-18) Parliament which emerged after the general elections of 2000. We note that the net (negative) for the Indo-Trinidadians was 10% compared to 4% for the Afro-Trinidadians who were the beneficiaries of what the previous incumbent did to break the tie.

The antipathy of the public was however much stronger towards the popularly elected executive. Only 6% expressed “a great deal” of confidence in it while another 20% had “quite a lot” of confidence in it. This 26% might be said to constitute the ruling party’s “hard core” supporters. Fifty-one percent did not have very much confidence in the Government and may be deemed to be ambivalent, though seemingly negative overall. Another 21% were however flatly opposed to the executive. They constituted the irreducible opposition “hard core”. The aggregated opposed element was 72%. The net negative balance was 46%.

When we look at the data on this question through an ethnic lens, we find that 28% of the
Afro-Trinidadians had much or some confidence in the political executive while only 24% of the Indo-Trinidadians did. Seventy-two percent of the former and 75% of the latter had no confidence in the executive. The net (negative) was 44% in the case of Afro-Trinidadians, 50% in the case of the Indo-Trinidadians, and 41% in the case of the mixed ethnic group.

It should be noted that studies done in some of the world’s established democracies almost invariably reveal similar levels of disenchantment with politicians and political institutions. As the author of a recent comparative study of democratic performance observes, “in a vibrant democracy, we should expect citizens to be critical of those who rule and therefore award them no more than optimal confidence. In today’s democratic world, however, confidence and trust is very thin... Even in those populations in which levels of confidence is very high, none are uncritical” (Ringen 2007).

Civil Society Institutions

There is a widely held view that groups or individuals representing “civil society” are better intentioned, better managed, less corrupt, more accountable and thus more legitimate than institutions in the state sector. This view is however not as widely held. Twenty-two percent expressed “a great deal” of confidence in religious institutions while 28% had “quite a lot” – an aggregate of 50%. Forty-one percent however confessed to not having very much confidence in the clerics, 8% had “no confidence at all” in them, an aggregate of 49%. The sacral elite generated only a bit more acceptability than their secular counterparts. They however fared less well in the public’s estimation than charitable and humanitarian organizations, and only a little better than women’s organizations.

Looking at the latter, we find that 47% had “a great deal” (11%) or “quite a lot” of confidence in women’s organizations, 38% did not have “very much” confidence, 6% had no confidence at all and 9% could not decide. Interestingly, men had more confidence in these organizations (49%) than women (43%)

Charitable and other humanitarian organizations attracted more popular endorsement. Fifty-five percent reported having “a great deal” (15%) of confidence, or “quite a lot” (40%) of confidence. Somewhat surprisingly, considering what they do, 35% did not have “very much” confidence in them and 6% had “none at all”.

Labour Unions

The heyday of labour unions is clearly a thing of the past as is the case in the United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and elsewhere. Indeed, unions seem to be regarded now as having more of a nuisance value than one that is positive. Only 6% had a “great deal” of confidence in them, while 20% had “quite a lot”, an aggregate of only 26%. Forty-eight percent had “little confidence” in them and 20% none at all.

Corporate Business

The corporate business sector did a bit better than the unions, but only marginally so. Thirty percent gave them a vote of confidence, but 52% were not very warm in their endorsement. Thirteen percent had “no confidence” in them at all, while 4% could not say. Clearly the loss of confidence registered by the unions has not been invested in the corporate private sector which is still regarded as being primarily concerned about its own bottom line.
The Media

The media also received a vote of no confidence. Only 4% and 5% of the print and electronic media respectively received a strong endorsement, while 17% and 18% received less enthusiastic applause for the job which they are doing. Sixty one and 62% of the sample reported having little confidence in the two media types, while 18% and 14% were entirely negative. In sum, only 21% and 23% respectively expressed confidence in newspapers and television, while 79% and 76% reacted negatively.

Environmental Organisations

Environmental organizations have grown in prominence the world over in response to concerns about pollution, the damage done by global warming, declining bio-diversity, and the attainability and sustainability of a certain quality and standard of life now deemed to be the right of all humans. Many ruling elites, including those in Trinidad & Tobago, have complained that these organisations seem to privilege future generations rather than those now alive. Trinidadians seem to be ambivalent about environmental organizations. Forty-one percent have “a great deal” (11%) or “quite a lot” of confidence (30%) in them, while another 42% do not have very much confidence in them. Twelve percent do not have any confidence in them at all, a negative aggregate of 54%. The government of Trinidad and Tobago also has little confidence in what it dismissively calls the “environmental lobby”, claiming that it is seeking to thwart their efforts to industrialise the country and transform it into a developed state by the year 2020.

Looking at the figures collectively, what emerges is a population that does not have a great deal of confidence in the para-statal, statal, or non-statal institutions that are in place to regulate and enhance their lives, whether now or in the future. Disenchantment is pervasive. The responses support and reinforce those given when the issue was “trust”.

Regional and International Organisations

Interestingly, regional and international organizations did not fare much better than national organizations. CARICOM attracted high levels of confidence from only 8% of those interviewed and “quite a lot” of it from another 30%. Strong confidence was expressed by 45%, while 10% had no confidence at all in the regional body. Clearly, after more than thirty years of trying to do so, CARICOM has not earned a secure place in the hearts of Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

The United Nations did not fare much better than CARICOM. Indeed, the figures closely resembled those given for CARICOM. Ten percent had a great deal of confidence and 29% had “quite a lot”, a positive aggregate of 39%. Forty-one percent had little confidence in the international organization and 13% had no confidence whatever in it. The reasons for this level of disenchantment with the UN are unclear. Perhaps a more accurate word to describe the disposition is “disinterest.” One suspects that there is a general disenchantment in all types of institutions the world over, and that the disposition is not peculiar to Trinidad & Tobago or the Caribbean at large.

Trust in People and Government Organisations

Are Trinidadians xenophobic or inclusive in their attitudes towards neighbours, coreligionists, and peoples of other nationalities?
Not surprisingly, a clear majority, (95%), trusted their families completely (73%), or somewhat (22%). Only 5% do not trust their families very much or at all. Twenty percent say they would trust people whom they know personally, while 60% would only trust them “somewhat.” Another 20% would not extend trust even to people whom they knew personally. One assumes that it would depend on how they evaluated or adjudged such persons. The fact that one knew someone personally need not mean that one would approve of them without reservations.

Respondents were of the view that people from their neighbourhood also had to be evaluated before they could be trusted. Only 10% said they would trust neighbours completely, while 51% would only trust them “somewhat.” Thirty-nine percent would not trust them “very much” (26%) or “at all” (13%). Clearly, neighbours may be trusted or distrusted depending on several factors. Knowing them as neighbours may, in fact, lead one to distrust them.

Trinidadians rarely trust people completely whom they have met only once. Only 1% said that they would do so. Twenty percent however report that they do so to a certain extent. Forty percent say they would not trust such persons “very much” while another 38% would not trust them “at all.”

Interestingly, a majority of Trinidadians say they would trust persons belonging to other religions or nationalities. One is not clear whether nationality was treated as a euphemism for ethnicity. Six and 4% respectively reported that they trust people of other religious affiliations completely, while 55% and 52% said they would trust them somewhat! More significantly perhaps, 26% do not trust people belonging to other religions very much, and 10% do not trust these persons “at all”. Clearly, a significant degree of xenophobia obtains despite the rhetorical comment of Trinidadians that “all ah we is one”. Interestingly, however, most Trinidadians believe that ethnic diversity enriched the country’s life. Thirty-six percent circled 10 on this question. Seventy percent scored between six and ten. Only 6% agreed unequivocally with the view that ethnic diversity eroded national unity.

When comparisons are made with Britain and New Zealand, we find that more respondents from these two countries trust their families completely – 95% and 96%, respectively, compared to the 73% from Trinidad & Tobago who reported thusly. The British do not seem to differ significantly from Trinidadians in their attitudes to persons who are not their co-religionists or who belong to other nationalities. Fifty six and 57% say they would trust them “somewhat” while 9% say they would trust them “completely.” The aggregate on the issue is 65% and 66% for Britain compared to 61% and 56% for Trinidadians. In sum, Britshers seems to have higher trust thresholds than Trinidadians.

Research carried out recently in the United States by Robert Putnam raises questions about the relationship between trust and demography. Putnam’s study, which was based on a survey of 30,000 Americans, found that there is a strong positive relationship between inter-ethnic trust and the ethnic homogeneity of a community. “The less diverse the community, the more likely one was to trust people who are different from you...the more ethnically diverse the people you have around, the less you trust them”. The study also revealed that Americans who live in diversified communities tend to distrust every-one, those who looked like them as well
as those who did not. To quote Putnam, (as cited by Rodriguez):

Residents of diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbours, regardless of the color of their skin, to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worse from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and work on community projects less often, to register to vote less, and to spend more time sitting in front of the television. (Rodriguez, Washington Post, 17 August 2007).

In sum, community diversity increases distrust of the other rather than the other way around, especially in poorer communities.

In an attempt to probe more fully the question of the extent to which Trinidad is a “low trust” society, respondents were asked whether generally speaking, most people can be trusted, or whether “one should be very careful in dealing with other people.” Fully 96% asserted that one does in fact need to be very careful in one’s dealings with people. The British were much less distrustful (68%), followed by the people of Hong Kong (58%) and New Zealanders (46%).

When we look at the data using another lens, i.e. those who find that most people could be trusted, we find that only 4% of Trinidadians believe that people could be trusted, compared to 49% for New Zealanders, 40% of the people from Hong Kong, and 30% of those from Great Britain. Seemingly, Trinidadians seem to believe in the reality of “smart man” and “anansi”, the West African mythical spider who is the trickster par excellence. One notes that Trinidadians have a reputation in the Caribbean for being “tricky”, and that many Trinidadians believe that there is some truth to the characterisation.

Trust can also be indicated by assumptions as to whether, generally speaking, people would take advantage of you or try to be fair. The data indicate that the British are somewhat more optimistic about human propensity to be fair as opposed to taking advantage of others. On a scale from 1 to 10, the British mean was 5.87 while the Trinidad & Tobago mean was 4.62.

**Attitudes toward Democracy, the Political System and its processes**

Trinidadians are not very interested in politics. Only 8% of them reported that they were “very interested”. Having regard to how much they gossip about politics and the antics of the party leaders, one would have expected a higher proportion of them to say they were interested in politics. Twenty-seven percent claim to be only “somewhat interested”, giving an aggregate of 3%. As many as 31% claim to be “not very interested” at all.

Afro-Trinidadians appeared to be a bit more interested than Indo-Trinidadians. Thirty-seven percent said they were “very” or “quite interested” while 33% of the Indo-Trinidadians claimed to be “interested.” Sixty-three percent of the latter said they were only “moderately” or “not at all” interested compared to 33% and 34% for the Afro-Trinidadians and the mixed element, respectively. The net (negative) interest of the Afro-Trinidadians was 26% and that of the Indo-Trinidadians was (negative) 34%.

The people of Hong Kong were even less interested in politics than their Trinidadian counterparts. Only 2% claim to be “very interested” while another 12% claim they were “somewhat interested”. As many as 54% assert that they were not “very” or “at all” interested. The British and the New Zealanders show more interest: 44% and 55% respectively were very
or somewhat interested. The aggregated figures for those not very or at all interested were 56% and 43%, respectively.

The constitution of Trinidad & Tobago is currently (2007) being revised, and various views are being expressed as to whether the existing political architecture should be retained or modified, and if the latter, in what way. The responses given indicate that an overwhelming majority of the population favours a democratic political system, whatever form it takes institutionally. Fifty-eighth percent think that democracy is the preferred way of governing while another 29% regarded it as being only a fairly good system, an aggregate of 87%. Only 4% think that the system is “fairly bad”, while another 6% think it is a “very bad” system. Three percent would or could not say. The net balance (positive) was 77%.

There was however disagreement as to how this preferred democracy should be structured in terms of leadership. Should one have a strong leader assisted by technocrats and pay less attention to elections and Parliament, or should one emphasise the latter? Fifteen percent believed that the preferred way to go is to have a strong leader who does not bother too much with Parliament and elections. Another 18% believe it is a “fairly good” way to govern, giving an aggregate of 33% or one third of the population. Seventeen percent however consider political authoritarianism to be a “fairly bad” way to govern the country, while 47% believe it to be a “very bad” system – an aggregate of 64%. A clear majority favours participatory government.

The population seems evenly split on the question of the role of technocrats and the people in policy making. Close to half (48%) believe that policy decisions should be made by experts as opposed to the elected minister according to what they, the experts, think is best for the country. Nineteen percent think doing so is a “good idea” while another 29% think it is a “fairly good” idea. Thirty percent however deem it a “bad idea”, while another 18% regard it as being a “fairly bad” idea.

Surprisingly, as many as 17% believe that having the army rule the country is either a “very good” or a “fairly good” idea. Seventy-eight percent however, “disagree” (18%), or “disagree strongly” (60%) that this is an acceptable form of governance.

The picture which emerges when the data is parsed is that while there is a broad based commitment to participatory democracy, there are strong under-currents of discontent about the manner in which the system works in Trinidad & Tobago, and a feeling by at least half of the population that better governance might be achieved if experts and technocrats are given a freer hand to make policy decisions which they believe to be in the public interest.

Attitudes Toward Politics and Democracy

What does political democracy mean to Trinidadians? How important do people consider politics to be? Only 11% deemed it “very important” while another 16% considered it “rather important”. As many as 42% regarded it as “not very important”, with another 29% seeing it as not being important at all. If we aggregated the responses, we find that only 27% considered politics to be “important” while as many as 71% considered it to be not important at all. These findings come as a bit of a surprise since there is a lot of gossip among the citizenry about what political leaders and personalities say or do, especially if sleaze is suggested. Perhaps interest in politics does not
mean that politics are deemed to be important to people's daily routines. Politics may in fact be regarded as good theatre and little else.

These figures are not very different from what obtains in the three comparator countries. In Britain, only 40% of the sample considered politics to be "important". In New Zealand 38% did, while as little as 4 percent of those in Hong Kong found it "very important". Twenty-four percent found it to be "rather important", while 63% considered it to be "not very important". What is evident here is that the populations of these four countries seem to be part of a prevailing global consensus that politics is irrelevant to the daily routines of the average man in the street. The population in fact does not seem to grasp how seriously these seemingly irrelevant political activities impact on their lives. Either that, or they despair about what politicians do or fail to do.

Democracy may now be "the only game in town", but there is no agreement as to what is essential to the concept. Some definitions emphasize "process", things like free and fair elections and a free press, unrestricted elite competition (Schumpeter 1942) while others privilege social content. How do Trinidadians see the matter? Asked whether an essential meaning of democracy is that government should tax the rich and subsidize the poor, 24% indicated that they believed this to be absolutely essential to democracy. Eleven percent indicated a view that was diametrically opposed. If we consolidate all the responses coded 6 and above, we find 59% "agreeing strongly" or "somewhat strongly" that these transfers were essential to democracy. The 25% who coded 1 to 4 believed otherwise. Fifteen percent of our respondents coded 5. (The mean score was 6.37).

An overwhelming majority believe that an essential characteristic of democracy is that people must be free to choose their leaders in free elections. Fifty-four percent circled 10 on this question indicating complete agreement. Another 28% circled 6 to 9. In sum, 82% basically agreed with the statement and 8% disagreed. Four percent circled 5 indicating ambivalence. Gender equality is now seen by many as being essential to democracy. Sixty-four percent circled 10 on this question and another 26% circled 6 and above. Only 10% found themselves on the negative (1-4) end of the continuum.

In some countries, referenda are regarded as an essential feature of democracy. Switzerland is perhaps the classic case. Others see it as very "unBritish", though the British Government recently used it to decide whether self-government should be given to Scotland and Wales. Twenty-six percent of the Trinidadians were on the top end of the spectrum; they were joined by another 27% who basically agreed that referenda were essential to democracy. The aggregate was 53%. Twenty-two percent however disagreed while 14% were ambivalent.

In some countries, Iran for example, religious leaders interpret the laws. While such states are generally termed theocracies, some believe that the voice of the people is the voice of God, and as such, God's viceroy on earth should interpret the law. A majority (53%) of our Trinidad respondents disagreed that clerical involvement in secular decision making was essential to democracy. Surprisingly, as much as 29% agreed that it was essential. Sixteen percent were ambivalent.

Equally surprising, was the support indicated for the notion that the army should take...
over if a government was seen to be incompetent. One in five of the population (20%) agreed with this notion completely, with another 23% expressing general agreement. Twenty-seven percent were on the other extreme, with 19% disagreeing. Eleven percent were ambivalent.

Civil rights provisions are a feature of most constitutions and are seen as essential to the protection of citizens against oppression by the state or its agencies. A clear majority agreed that placing these provisions in the fundamental law was essential to democracy. Thirty-six percent circled 10 on this question and another 40% shared their view generally. Only 12% disagreed, 4% strongly. How compatible with democracy is harsh punishment of criminal elements? How essential is law and order to the maintenance of democracy? Fifty-seven percent of our respondents registered 10 on the question as to whether severe punishment of criminals was an essential characteristic of democracy. This view was also endorsed by another 29%, making an aggregate of 86%. Nine percent disagreed with 4% being ambivalent.

Some political analysts insist that democracy without the social well being of the broad masses is not the genuine commodity. They would argue, for example, that in a democratic state, the people should be given basic welfare assistance if they were poor or unemployed, and that economic growth which generated jobs and prosperity should be given priority over considerations of process (Huntington 1991). A substantial majority (81%) expressed the Aristotelian view that a prosperous economy was essential to the maintenance of democracy. Half of our respondents (42%) circled 10, indicating complete agreement (see Lipset 1960). Nine percent saw little or no connection between economic growth and democracy. Nine percent were ambivalent.

Aid for the unemployed was also deemed a democratic essential by 67% of our sample. Thirty percent circled 10 on the question. Twenty-one percent demurred, with 11% being ambivalent. What the figures indicate is that a majority have bought into the liberal narrative about what democracy ought to mean.

When asked to indicate how important it was to them to live in a democratic state, a substantial majority (90%) said that it was important to them. Fifty-eight percent circled 10 on the question, indicating that it was “absolutely important” for them to live in a democratically governed country, a percentage that exceeded that of Britain, where 54% circled 10.

Interestingly, a majority (59%) was of the view that Trinidad & Tobago was a democratically governed state. Sixteen percent circled 10, indicating a belief that it was completely democratic, while 10% circled 1, indicating that it was not democratically governed at all. If the percentages are aggregated, we find that 59% felt Trinidad & Tobago to be democratically governed, more or less, with 24% disagreeing. In Britain, 66% agreed, with 16% disagreeing with the statement that Britain was democratically governed.

Notwithstanding the majority view that Trinidad and Tobago was democratically governed, only 15% felt that there was a great deal of respect for human rights in this country. Another 29% felt that there was only a fair amount of respect for human rights. Sixty-six percent complained that there was not much or indeed no respect whatever. Interestingly enough, this negative portrait was endorsed by
both major ethnic groups almost identically. One would have surmised that Indo-Trinidadians would have been more critical.

**Things that are Important for Governments to do**

Governments undertake many tasks to satisfy the electorate, investors—both local and foreign—as well as achieve their own leadership or party agendas. What do Trinidadians want their Government to deal with most urgently at this time?

**Crime**

Crime and inflation were identified as the most important problems that needed to be fixed. A majority—51%—felt that the most pressing problem was crime while 35% saw the key problem as being the fiscal stability of the economy. Only 9% felt that progress towards a more humane society was an acute need while another 6% agreed that there was a need to move towards a society in which ideas counted for more than money. Surprisingly, many British respondents also identified crime reduction as a key need. Forty-three percent of 44% were however more exercised about the economy than they were about crime—20%.

A significant plurality—42%—want the Government to fight rising prices. Another 27% believe that the next most important thing that needs doing is giving people more say in the making of important policy decisions. Maintaining law and order was the third most cited need in the view of 21% of the population. Those who identified order as being the critical need probably had in mind the rising rate of homicide, kidnapping for ransom, banditry and robbery. Seven percent saw the need to protect free speech as being important. When the first choice answers are aggregated, we find that 58% consider better governance, broadly defined, to be the primary need, whereas 42% saw rising prices as the key problem facing the country.

The aggregated figures for Britain and New Zealand indicate that 87% and 67% respectively identify governance issues as being the most important while only 15% and 17% respectively identify rising prices. It is not surprising that rising prices was not as much of a front burner issue in these two countries as it is in Trinidad and Tobago which imports most of its food and other consumer goods from North America and from European countries.

**Qualities and Values Children should Learn**

Much of what children become in adult life is influenced by what they absorb in their homes as they grow up. There is in fact a view that the values which parents inculcate via the stories and folk narratives which they pass on to their children are largely responsible for what they do in adult life. Social capital is largely inherited from mother’s milk, so to speak (Putnam 2000).

When asked what qualities children should be encouraged to learn at home, the most frequently given responses were obedience (82%), religious faith (69%), hard work (64%), responsibility (58%) and spirit of independence (55%). When the data were disaggregated with particular reference to ethnicity, we found that Afro-Trinidadians were likely to cite "independence" more frequently than Indo-Trinidadians (61% to 48%), and determination and perseverance (29% to 22%). Indo-Trinidadians cited "hard work" more frequently (71% to 64%); the same held with respect to
feeling of responsibility (62% to 59%), thrift and savings (35% to 31%), and religious faith (72% to 63%). There were no perceptible differences in respect of tolerance, respect for other people, or obedience.

When the findings are compared to that of Britain, New Zealand and Hong Kong we find that Britishers and New Zealanders also cited tolerance and respect for other people most frequently, 85% and 82% respectively. Wildly different was Hong Kong, where adults cited this quality only 14% of the time!

Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness, Marriage and Children

Trinidadians seem willing to share their social space with other people, with the exception of drug addicts, homosexuals, heavy drinkers or persons who were HIV positive. These persons were deemed to be undesirable neighbours by 92%, 66% and 63% of our respondents respectively. There was virtually no objection to sharing neighbourhood space with people of a different race or religion (2%), or foreign workers (5%). There was however some reservation among 20% of the population about sharing space with persons who had HIV/AIDS.

When we compare the Trinidad data with that from Great Britain, New Zealand and Hong Kong, we find that the people of Hong Kong were more xenophobic than the others. Many of them were unwilling to have people of another race as neighbours (28%) and foreign workers (78%). Homosexuals were also not very welcome (49%).

Interestingly, most Hong Kong residents were willing to share space with drug addicts (90%) and heavy drinkers, the opposite of what obtains in our other comparator countries. The British and the New Zealanders (83%) were willing to have homosexuals in their neighbourhood. Most, 86% and 93% respectively, were also willing to accommodate foreign workers and immigrants.

A majority of Trinidadians (78%) believe that children who live in two parent homes were more likely to grow up happily. Twenty-one percent however disagreed. More Indo-Trinidadians agreed with the proposition than did Afro-Trinidadians (69% to 48%). The distributions in Hong Kong were 89%-10% and in New Zealand 63%-30%. In sum, more New Zealanders were tolerant of single parent families than were Trinidadians and citizens of Hong Kong.

An even larger majority of Trinidadians (87%), “disagreed” with the notion that marriage was an outdated institution; only 12% agreed. Three quarters of the people of Hong Kong and the New Zealanders also regarded marriage as being still relevant. Only 20% of the former and 13% of the latter, regarded the institution as obsolete.

Close to two thirds of Trinidadians disapproved of women who wanted to mother a child but who did not want to have a stable relationship with a man. A quarter however had no problem with those who made that choice. Britishers were equally divided (31%-32%).

Attitudes Towards Gender, Nationality and Employment

In many societies, it was deemed more important for boys to be educated and schooled than girls, particularly at the secondary and tertiary level. In part, this is because advance education invariably cost a great deal in terms
of income and services foregone, and also in terms of expenditure on tuition fees. This was once the case in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in poorer families of both Indian and African origin. To what extent do these attitudes persist?

A sizeable majority, (92%), disagree “strongly” or “disagree” with the notion that a university education is more important to a boy than it is to a girl. Interestingly, while the net figures for Britain and Trinidad are approximately the same (91% to 92%), more Trinidadians “agree strongly” (46%) than the British, 31% of whom “agree strongly” with the statement. Interestingly, one in five Hong Kong citizens (20%), still have traditional attitudes on this question. Seventy-six percent of them however, disagree.

Feminists complain that housework is not considered “work”, and is therefore not monetised and treated as income. Others complain that many fail to recognize that for some women, being a housewife was just as fulfilling as working for pay outside the home. What are the views of Trinidadians on this particular subject? Eighty-eight percent agreed with the assertion that being a housewife was fulfilling. Nine percent agreed “strongly.” Not surprisingly, women “agreed” more than men (26% to 45%) with the assertion.

Women allege that there is a glass ceiling which blocks them as they seek access to top executive offices in Trinidad and Tobago. This, they say, is a by product of a patriarchal disposition which holds that men make better executives than women. Only 16% however “agreed” that this was so; 4% “agreed strongly.” Seventy-eight percent “disagreed,” compared to 20% of women who “agreed.” Seventy-six percent of the women “disagreed” compared to 62% of the males, a difference of 14%.

What about political leaders? Do men make better political leaders than women? Women do not think so, or to be more accurate, fewer of them think so than men. Seventy-six percent “disagreed” compared to 62% of the males. More Afro-Trinidadians men were “male chauvinist” than were their Indo-Trinidadian counterparts by a margin of 5 percentage points (14%-9%). Taking the sample as a whole, 69% “disagreed” compared to 25% who agreed. Six percent could not say.

When we compare the data with the people of Hong Kong, we find more of them (36%), agreeing that men make better political leaders. Just the same, as many as 61% disagreed with the view that patriarchy should prevail. The figures for Britain and New Zealand on this issue were 91% and 73%, respectively. If we took the four countries collectively, we observe that 26% agreed with the assertion that men made better political leaders, with 69% disagreeing.

There is a view that men are the principal bread winners and that they should enjoy privileged status in the job market, particularly when jobs are scarce. There is also the view that women are better and more reliable providers, and that the family’s economic well being is better secured if the woman is the privileged job holder. To what extent does the patriarchal view still hold in Trinidad and Tobago.

When asked whether men should have more right to a job when jobs are scarce, 66% “disagreed,” 25% “agreed,” and 9% opined that neither should have more right. The responses
suggest that the traditional view that women are a secondary and contingent source of labour is no longer the dominant one. The difference in the responses of males and females was not very significant, a mere 5% gap separating men from women who thought that men should have more right to jobs. Afro-Trinidadians were also a bit more inclined to disagree than were Indo-Trinidadians that men should be privileged. Sixty-six percent of them “disagreed” compared to 61% of the latter. Thirty percent of the Indos “agreed” compared to 24% of the Afro. In sum, Indo-Trinidadians were somewhat more socially conservative than Afro-Trinidadians, but not much more so.

Interestingly, Britishers were more inclined to disagree with the statement than were Trinidadians and New Zealanders. Seventy-four percent of them “disagreed” compared to 66% and 28% for Trinidadians and New Zealanders respectfully. Close to half (49%) of the latter “agreed” that men should be given preference in the job queue. Eighteen percent felt that neither should be preferred.

There is currently a great deal of debate in Trinidad and Tobago about the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and as to whether under this regime, one should not have a unified labour market rather than that which is currently in place which limits labour mobility only to persons possessing certain skills and credentials. The debate also pertains to the question as to whether persons from the Republic of China should be imported to work in the construction sector in Trinidad and Tobago as is currently the case, given the labour shortages in the construction sector which have arisen because of the Government’s accelerated development programme. The government argues that its projects are important for the country’s development and that there was need to import Chinese companies to get the projects completed in a timely and cost effective way. The government’s critics argue that it is employing cheap labour in conditions that violate ILO standards, and that it is outsourcing jobs that should be reserved for Trinidad contractors and workers in the years ahead when the existing boom tapers off.

Eighty-three percent “agreed” with the statement that when jobs were scarce, employers should give priority to Trinidadians and Tobagonians over immigrants, while 11% “disagreed.” We note, however, that these responses were directed to a statement concerning jobs in an environment of scarcity rather than in times of full employment such as currently obtains. The answers however provide some indication as to how Trinidadians feel about imported labour from other parts of the Caribbean or from China and India. We note that fewer Britishers than Trinidadians believed that scarce jobs should be reserved for nationals. Fifty percent of them felt this way compared to the 83% of Trinidadians noted above.

Trinidadians were also asked whether anyone should be allowed to enter the country to work if jobs were available, or whether strict limits should be put on foreigners whether jobs were available or not. Only 4% felt anyone should come who wanted to. Close to 31% felt that they should be allowed to enter to work once jobs were available. Fifty-four percent however felt strict limits should be imposed on foreigners while another 9% felt foreigners should be prohibited from coming to Trinidad. In sum, 63% could be described as being “xenophobic” while 35% were permissive. Indo-Trinidadians were more inclined towards complete prohibition of immigration by 5 points. New Zealanders and the people of Hong Kong were generally split on the question. Forty-five
percent and 52% respectively were “permissive” while 50% and 46% were “restrictionist.”

What do Trinidadians look for when they seek out careers or jobs? Are they more concerned with income, job satisfaction, security, working with people they like or some thing else? Human resource managers the world over disagree about what is most important, and it clearly depends on what individuals need at any point in time. Trinidadians seem to split their choices almost evenly in favour of jobs that give feelings of importance and accomplishment (35%), jobs that provide good incomes (30%), and jobs that provide security against possible loss of employment because of closure or downsizing.

Britishers and New Zealanders display similar preoccupations except that they are less exercised by fear of unemployment and somewhat more concerned about working with people whom they like. Thirty-two and 34% of the British and the New Zealanders respectively regard feelings of accomplishment as being important while 33% and 26% respectively felt that money was the thing that mattered most. Job security was important to only seventeen and 13% of the British and New Zealanders respectively, no doubt because replacement jobs were now easier to find in those jurisdictions.

Control Over Life Outcomes

“Mankind” has continuously debated the question of the extent to which people had personal control over how their life turned out or whether such outcomes are determined by “God”, “fate”, “luck” or some other factor outside of one’s agency. Some people, the more secular and the less superstitious, feel they have complete free choice and control over their lives, while others feel that what they do personally had no real effect on what happened to them.

More than people in Britain, New Zealand and Hong Kong, Tridadians seem to believe that what they do personally has a “great deal” to do with how their lives turn out. Thirty-six percent of them scored 10 when asked to indicate their views as to whether they believed that they were fully in control of their life’s fortunes. The corresponding figures for New Zealand, Great Britain and Hong Kong were 22%, 14%, and 6%, respectively. Only 2% of the Trinidadians felt that they had no control at all about what happened to them.

When the data was aggregated along a confidence continuum, we find that New Zealand, Trinidad and Britain bunching together at 84%, 83%, and 82%, respectively, with fewer Chinese, 67%, showing confidence in themselves.

Life Goals

Given what was said earlier about the importance of family, it was not surprising that many Trinidadians deemed “making their parents proud” as one of their primary goals in life. Ninety-three percent felt this way, while 8% opined that this was not important to them. Interestingly, pleasing parents was not as important to many respondents from New Zealand or our other comparator countries. The percentages were 48% for New Zealand, 66% for Hong Kong, and 74% from Britain.

Notwithstanding the importance of pleasing parents and making them proud, 82% decided on their goals for their own satisfaction rather than in order to please friends or fellow others. Ninety-six percent reported that they
sought to please themselves rather than to follow others, while only 14% agreed with the assertion that they should make great effort to live up to what their friends expect. Eighty-six percent flatly disagreed that this was desirable. What the figures suggest is that notwithstanding their felt need to please parents, people were inner directed or believed they were and responded to the beat of their own drum.

Satisfaction with Economic Circumstances of Household

There has been a great deal of media comment and grumbling about the deteriorating financial circumstances of households in Trinidad and Tobago. The rising costs of food, services and accommodation are blamed for the crisis. The figures show that there is a substantial level of dissatisfaction, but that there is also a great deal of satisfaction. At one extreme, 8% of the sample say they are “completely dissatisfied” with the financial circumstances of their household. At the other end, 12% report that they are “completely satisfied.” If we aggregate the positives i.e., all those who registered a score of six and above and four and below, we find that 21% were “dissatisfied” and 61% “satisfied.” Eighteen percent were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.” The mean was however 6.14. If we look at those on the extremes of the continuum, we find little or no significant differences in the ethnic affiliations of the respondents.

Desirable Goals for Trinidadians and Tobagonians

Most people aspire to peace and physical security, economic well being, and good governance. What they desire most would, of course, depend on the broad circumstances which their country faces and the fears which citizens have about the future. What do Trinidadians want most? A majority wish to see a high level of economic growth. Fifty-two percent named this as their first choice, while 24% chose it as their second priority. Respondents of all our comparator countries also wished to see a high level of economic growth.

Surprisingly, the next most preferred goal was to allow people to have more say about how things were done at their jobs and in their communities. Twenty-nine percent named this as their first choice, while 37% had it as their second choice. In sum, empowerment on the job and in their communities was clearly a widely perceived need. Democratic participation was also a felt need by 42% of the British, 20% of New Zealanders, but only 4% of the people of Hong Kong.

Only 9% and 22% (in their first and second choices respectively) cited the need to beautify and gentrify cities and their countryside. The need for a strong defence force was felt by 10% and 11% of Trinidadians on their first and second choices. This was surprising since Trinidad faces no threat to its national security except perhaps from drug traffickers. It may be that respondents recalled the role played by the Defence Force in putting down the coup that was attempted in 1990 (Ryan 1991).

Reflections in the Mirror

When we view others and what they do, some of us often wonder whether, consciously or unconsciously, whether we are like them or they are like us. For example, when we see someone who is creative and forever thinking up new ideas or unique ways of doing things, do we see that person as being very much like us? If so, how much like or unlike me or us that person is? In response to this particular question,
28% said that such a person was very much like me, 32% said the person was very much like me, 16% were somewhat like me, and 9% like me. The net figures for Britain were 89% and 11%.

**The Importance of Being Wealthy**

Do Trinidadians consider it important to be rich and to have a lot of money and expensive things? Only 4% regard people who value wealth and fancy expensive things to be “very much like” them. Another 12% think that such persons resemble them, while another 23%, 39% compared to 61% who believe that such persons are “not” or “not at all” like them. The pattern in the case of the British is much the same. Thirty-five percent admit that people who consider it important to be wealthy are like them while 64% felt that such persons were not like them. In sum, close to two thirds of the sample in both Trinidad and Britain deem wealth to be not as important to them as it seems to be to some others.

What about having a good time and “spoiling” oneself? Twenty-six percent collectively felt that people who enjoyed doing this were like them as opposed to 60% who felt otherwise. The comparative figures for the British were 71% and 30%, respectively. In sum, more Britons declared themselves to be hedonistic than did Trinidadians.

Thirty-six percent of our respondents were of the view that persons who were preoccupied with living in a secure environment were very much like them; another 42% regarded such persons as being like them, while another 15% were seen to be somewhat or a little like them, an aggregate of 93%. Only 6% did not see themselves reflected in the attitudes of the security conscious. The British were equally

security conscious. The comparative net figures are 92% and 17% respectively.

How caring are Trinidadians generally? Thirty-five and 42% respectively opined that persons who help people and are concerned about their well being are very much like them. Another 19% say they are like them, giving an aggregate of 96%. The cumulative comparative figure for the British is the same (96%).

Trinidadians are however more disposed to see people who are exercised about personal success and personal achievement as being like them. Sixty percent regard persons who are so preoccupied to be “very much” or “much” like them compared to 16% who see themselves as less driven by the desire to achieve or excel. The net figure for the achievement oriented is 84%.

Trinidadians seem to be ambivalent about taking risks and living an exciting life. Only 30% say that people for whom such dispositions are important are very much like them, while 44% do not find them to be so. The aggregate figure of those who are minded to be risk takers in various degrees is 55%. The figures for Britain are 57% and 43% respectively, but at the extreme end of the high risk takers, more Trinidadians consider themselves to be risk oriented than the British (30% to 25%).

How important is “good behaviour” or what is colloquially referred to as “broughtupcy” to Trinidadians? How important is it to be seen to be doing what is right or correct? The general stereotype of the Trinidadian is that he does not consider good or correct behaviour to be as central as it is to say a Barbadian who is stereotyped as being straight laced and “proper.” The figures suggest that the stereotype and the self-image differ widely. Thirty three and 38%
respectively believe that it is “very important” or “important” to behave properly and to avoid doing anything that people would regard as behaving “wrong”. The aggregate of those who believe that good deportment is important in some degree is 90%. Only 10% regard persons who behave properly as not being like them at all. The British are also concerned about proper behaviour, but fewer of them (25% and 32%) respectively seem to regard it as being “very important” or “important.” The positive aggregate is 87% and the negative is 13%.

Nature and the Environment

Concern about nature and the environment is becoming a popular preoccupation the world over. The general view, however, is that it is a concern that is more widely shared in the so-called developed countries. The data does not, however, seem to support this presumption. Sixty-seven percent of our respondents believe that people who are concerned with the environment and with “nature” are “very much” or “like” them with another 26% saying that they are “somewhat” or “a bit” like them. Seven percent report otherwise. The figures for Britain are 60% and another 34% say it is “important;” 5% demurring.

Tradition and Custom

How important is tradition and custom as handed down by religion and family? Do Trinidadians see themselves as tradition bound or free to choose which patterns of behaviour they wish to pursue? Fifty-six percent regard individuals whose behaviour is driven by tradition and custom to be “very much like them” or “like them” with another 21% being “somewhat” or “a bit” like them. Twenty-three percent however see themselves as not being like that, or at all like that. The data seem to suggest a clear majority of our respondents (77%) see themselves as being tradition bound in the sense that they follow what is prescribed by their families and their religion, and that less than a quarter of them see themselves as free thinkers. Interestingly, the distribution in the case of Britain is substantially the same. Trinidadians are as socially conservative as are the British.

Science and Technology

Trinidadians and Tobagonians are of the view that the scientific advances currently being made would both help and harm mankind. Forty-one percent felt that the changes would help mankind and 21% felt that they could do both, depending on circumstances. Roughly a third (35%) however believe that the advances would harm mankind.

Interestingly, when we compare the responses of Trinidadians with those from Britain, New Zealand and Hong Kong, we find that more Trinidadians are pessimistic than optimistic about the consequences of those changes. Whereas the percentage for Trinidadians is 35%, the figures for Britain, Hong Kong and New Zealand are 23%, 12% and 6% respectively. The British seem to be the most optimistic. Half of them believe that the changes would have a positive effect. Trinidadians on the whole think that science and technology are making their lives healthier, easier and more comfortable.

Levels of Civic Activism

How civically active are Trinidadians? Only moderately active it would seem. Only 22% had ever signed a petition. Fifty-one percent however said they would do so in the future. A quarter of them, however, said they would never
do so. Fewer had ever taken part in a peaceful demonstration. Only 15% had ever gone that far. Fifty-one percent thought that they might one day do so, while 24% said they would never ever do so. Fewer yet (8%) had ever engaged in any sort of boycott activity. Forty-eight percent thought that they might do so in the future while as many as 4% said they could not see themselves ever taking part in a boycott.

Higher rates of civic activity were recorded by our British and New Zealand respondents. In the case of the latter, 84% had signed a petition, while in the former, 66% had done so. Sixteen percent of both had joined boycotts and taken part in demonstrations.

Environment and Economic Growth

There has been a noisy debate in Trinidad and Tobago about whether the country should privilege an economic model that stresses growth and job creation or one that gives greater priority to preserving the environment, even if doing so comes at the expense of growth or job creation. Fifty-seven percent of our respondents said that they would privilege the environment while 37% would privilege growth and jobs even if the environment suffered somewhat. The distributions in Britain were roughly the same (58%-34%), and in the case of New Zealand, somewhat similar (49%-26%) though the percentages are different. In the case of Hong Kong, more would emphasise growth and jobs at the expense of the environment. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, it may well be that the public controversy involving the government’s decision to build two aluminium smelters served to raise the level of consciousness about the need to pay attention to the environment, and to the dangers of air and water pollution, bio diversity, and global warming.

How strong are these feelings about the need to preserve the environment? What sacrifices are citizens prepared to make to protect it? How many would be prepared to give up a part of their income in order to prevent environmental pollution? Sixteen percent “strongly agree” that they would do so, while another 58% would “agree” to forego part of their income, an aggregate of 74%. Twenty-four percent “disagree” (19%) or disagree strongly (5%) with such a proposition.

A roughly similar pattern of responses was forthcoming when respondents were asked whether they would agree or disagree with a proposal to increase taxes if the proceeds of those taxes were used to prevent environmental pollution. Fifty-nine percent “agreed” or “agreed strongly”, while 39% “disagreed” or “disagreed strongly”.

There was, however, a seeming degree of inconsistency when respondents were asked how they felt about a reduction of environmental pollution if doing so would cost them money. Seventy-eight percent were of the view that efforts by the state to reduce environmental pollution should not cost them any money. The key to the inconsistency may lie in the words “prevent” and “reduce”. In the latter case, the concern was about bearing responsibility for what had gone before which seemed to be considerably more expensive. It may be that in these cases, the polluters should pay.

Looking at the data for New Zealand, we find that those who were willing to pay a personal price for preventing pollution were not in the majority as only 34% were willing to pay while 54% were not. Nor was a majority willing to have their taxes increased if those taxes were used for that purpose as 45% were willing to
pay while an equal number were opposed. Sixty-two percent of them were also unwilling to have the state reduce environmental pollution if it was going to cost them any money. As was the case with Trinidad, reducing environmental pollution was somebody else’s economic burden to bear, not theirs.

Hong Kong citizens also showed the same ambivalence and inconsistency as Trinidadians. They were willing to part with some of their income or have taxes increased (62% and 56% respectively) to pay for preventing environmental pollution, but were unwilling to have any of their money used to reduce environmental pollution.

Other Environmental Concerns

Trinidadians and Tobagonians do not seem to believe that the quality of the water which they had to consume was bad. Only 29% of them felt that their water quality was “very seriously poor.” Twenty-nine percent felt the quality was “not very poor,” while the remaining 27% opined that it was “not poor” at all. In sum, overall, 44% felt the quality of their water supply was “poor” or “very poor” while 56% disagreed.

Notwithstanding complaints from environmentalists about air quality, especially in the vicinity of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, 35% felt that air quality was “very poor” or “poor”. Sixty-five percent “disagreed strongly” or “disagreed.” The same pattern appeared with respect to sewage and sanitation. Thirty-eight percent felt that there were very serious deficiencies or delivery gaps, but 62% were of the view that these deficiencies were not very serious at all. What the figures seem to suggest is that while there are some gaps, there is overall satisfaction with the country’s basic environmental delivery systems.

World Environmental Problems

Environmentalists have expressed concerns about global warming, continuing loss of plant and animal diversity, and the pollution of major rivers, lakes and oceans. To what extent do Trinidadians share these concerns? Substantial majorities believe the problems identified to be “very” or “somewhat” serious. The greenhouse effect is seen to be a very serious one by 71% and to be somewhat serious by 15%. Only 8% “disagreed.” The same pattern more or less holds in respect of biodiversity (88% to 8%), and the pollution of rivers, lakes, and oceans (97% to 1%).

Millennium Goals

Not many Trinidadians were aware of the development goals which were set for the world in the year 2000. Only 19% had heard of them. Respondents were told what the major goals were and asked to indicate which were the most important for the world as a whole and which for Trinidad & Tobago in particular. The major goals for the world to address were seen to be poverty and need. This was cited by 71%, followed by poor sanitation, infectious diseases, environmental pollution, and education.

Turning to Trinidad in particular, the pattern was a bit different. Sixty-three percent cited poverty and need, indicating that Trinidad & Tobago was not seen to be quite as destitute as were some other countries. The other goals were broadly the same as those seen to exist in the world at large except that the elimination of infectious diseases, inadequate education, and environmental pollution were cited more frequently.

Notwithstanding the awareness that the world had problems which were worse than
those which faced Trinidad & Tobago, a clear majority (91%) felt that top priority should be given to solving Trinidad's problem. Sixty-six percent circled 10 for this question (the mean was 8.87).

Social Change and Society

Rapid social change is impacting the lives of many in various ways. Some see the changes as being, in the main, a “good thing.” Others react differently and see the changes as being responsible for much that they consider to be “wrong” with modern society. Our respondents were asked to indicate whether changes which involved “greater emphasis on family life” would be a good or a bad thing, or one that they “did not mind”. Ninety-two percent said they would not mind, while 7% said they would mind. No one saw anything wrong if this development took place.

Much the same proportions (92% and 88%) were evident in Britain and New Zealand. Fewer Hong Kong residents (75%) said they would be exercised if the changes led to greater emphasis on family life. One would have expected the reverse to be the case having regard to what is said to be the role of the family in Chinese society.

A majority (73%) also deemed it to be a good thing if there was more emphasis on the development of technology. Nine percent however regarded this as a bad development, while 16% said that they would not mind if it were to occur. There was also clear majority support (90%) for social change that led to greater respect for authority. Eight percent said they would not mind if this were to happen while 2% felt it would be an unwelcome development.

Trinidadians seem to be more concerned about a possible loss of respect for authority than were the British, New Zealanders and people of Hong Kong. In the case of the British, 76% welcomed an increase in respect for authority, whereas only 51% and 23% of the latter 2% said they would welcome such an increase. We note however, that 38% of New Zealanders and 61% of persons from Hong Kong said they would not mind if it were to happen. Trinidadians were however the most unequivocal of all the countries looked at in respect of this issue.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly perhaps, more than two out of every three persons (69%) said they would regret any change that led to a decline in the importance of work in their lives. Thirteen percent however felt that the decline in the need for one to work was a good thing, while 15% did not mind that outcome. In sum, work was seen by the majority as a positive good, one that it was hoped would survive any change that threatened to make it obsolete. The people of Hong Kong seem to be more work shy than Trinidadians. As many as 30% felt that it would be a good thing if work assumed reduced importance in their lives, while 43% would not mind if this were to occur. Only 25% saw this as a “bad” development.

The British and the New Zealanders also seemed to be more work averse. Forty and 33% respectively felt that it would be good if work became less important, while 33% and 39% respectively say they would not mind if it did become less important. As with the people of Hong Kong, just about a quarter of both felt that such a development would be bad.
Satisfaction with Life as a whole

Notwithstanding vocal complaints about how "bad" things have become, Trinidadians seem to be generally satisfied with their lives, more so than people in Great Britain and Hong Kong. When asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied they were with their lives, 22% indicated that they were "completely satisfied," twice as many as reported thus in Britain and more than 5 times as many in Hong Kong. Twenty-one percent of the New Zealanders said they were "completely satisfied." If we aggregate all these who registered a score of 6 and above and assume that these were people who, in the main, were basically satisfied, we find that 81% described themselves as being "satisfied" with their lives with 8% indicating otherwise. Eleven percent were borderline cases. Interestingly, given what one hears in popular discourse about how unhappy Indo-Trinidadians are with life in Trinidad and Tobago and their place in it, more of them indicated that they were "completely satisfied" with their lives.

Levels of Morality

What, on a scale of 1 to 10, were some of the behaviours that Trinidadians believed could "always be justified," "never be justified" or something in between? The most disapproved behaviour (i.e. scoring 10) were, in descending order, wife beating (81%), suicide (76%), accepting a bribe in course of their duties (79%), homosexuality (72%), prostitution (20%), cheating on taxes if you had a chance (65%), abortion (63%), claiming benefits to which one was not entitled (58%), avoiding a fare on public transport (49%), euthanasia (56%), divorce (41%).

If we aggregate the percentages of those scoring between 6 to 10, the following picture

emerge: homosexuality (94%), prostitution and bribery (93%), suicide, abortion (92%), beating wife (91%), cheating on benefits that one is not entitled to (89%), cheating on taxes (88%), cheating on fares for public transport (83%), euthanasia (83%) and divorce (79%).

If these answers are taken at face value, Trinidadians emerge as a very moralistic bunch in terms of values deemed to be so in western cultures.

Levels of Pride and Patriotism

Trinidadians/Tobagonians are very proud of their country. When asked how proud they were of being Trinidadian/Tobagonian, 90% said they were "very proud". An additional 80% said they were "quite proud." Only 2% said they were not "very proud." Notwithstanding the grumbling heard from time to time about how "bad" things were in Trinidad and Tobago and how many were leaving the country because of crime, declining standards of conduct, and rising food and health costs, there are many who assert that Trinidad is God's most favoured piece of real estate, and that they are not leaving it to go anywhere. Given the high level of patriotism which was displayed in the survey, how many citizens were prepared to fight for their country? Sixty-four percent said they were prepared to fight, while 30% said they were not. This is to be compared to the 50% and 30% for Britain, 47% and 28% for New Zealand, and 50% and 46% for Hong Kong.

Not surprisingly, more men (67%) said they were prepared to fight than did women, 60% of whom said yes. Interestingly, far more Indo-Trinidadians (74%) said they were prepared to go to war than Afro-Trinidadians (56%). In sum, contrary to what is sometimes asserted by persons who accuse Indo-Trinidadians of splitting their loyalties between
Trinidad and Tobago and their ancestral home, Indo-Trinidadians are as patriotic and perhaps even more so than Afro-Trinidadians.

Highlights and Conclusion

- Ninety percent report that God is important in their lives and that they often took time off to pray, meditate, or contemplate God. This differs from what happens in respect to Britain where only 40% consider God important.

- Ninety-six percent of Trinidadians deem family to be very important in their lives.

- Eighty-seven percent claim that they are either happy or very happy. Only 12% defined themselves as being not at all happy.

- Eighty-seven percent consider work as a duty to society. Seventy-three percent even say that work should come first even if it means sacrificing free time.

- Forty-two percent believe that it was not humiliating to receive money without working for it.

- Thirty-six percent of the Indo-Trinidadian population and 44% of the Afro-Trinidadian population believe it is okay to receive money without working for it.

- Sixty-seven percent believed that religious leaders should not seek to influence the way people vote in elections.

- Most Trinidadians are disenchanted with the performance of the country’s political institutions. Eighty-eight percent had no confidence in political parties. Eighty-one percent had no confidence in Parliament. Sixty-nine percent had no confidence in the Judiciary. Seventy-one percent had no confidence in the Police Service. Sixty-five percent had no confidence in the Public Service. Sixty percent had no confidence in the Defence Force. Fifty percent had no confidence in the Presidency. Seventy-two percent had little or no confidence in the nationally elected political executive. Forty-six percent had no confidence in CARICOM.

- Trinidad is a low trust society. Ninety-six percent assert that one had to be very careful in dealing with other people.

- Thirty-six percent did not have much trust in people belonging to other religions.

- Fifty-eight percent believe that democracy is the preferred way to govern a country. Twenty-seven percent think democracy is a fairly bad system of governance.

- Thirty-three percent think that having a strong leader who governs the country with his technocrats, and who does not bother too much about parliament and elections is a “good” or a “fairly good” way to govern a country. Sixty-four percent however believe that this is a “very” or a “fairly” bad way to govern a country.
and that popular participation is important.

- Only 8 percent said that they were very interested in politics. Twenty-seven percent were only "somewhat interested."

- Fifty-three percent believe that referenda should be an essential feature of democracy.

- Eighty-three percent believe that their life outcomes depend more on what they themselves do than "luck" or "fate." Only 2% believe that they had no control at all over what happened to them.

- Ninety-three percent deemed "making their parents proud" one of their primary goals in life.

- Sixty-one percent report that they are basically satisfied with the financial circumstances of their household.

- Fifty-seven percent say they are more concerned with the environment than they are with economic growth; 37% would privilege economic growth.

- Fifty-six percent felt that their water supply was adequate.

- Forty-eight percent believe that policy should be made by technocrats and experts as opposed to elected ministers.

- Fifty-nine percent were of the view that Trinidad and Tobago was a democratically governed state.

- Twenty percent however believed that the army should take over the government if the latter were seen to be incompetent.

- Sixty-six percent believe that marriage is still a socially relevant institution.

- Seventy-eight percent did not agree that men made better executives.

- Seventy-six percent of females and 62% of males do not agree with the view that men make better political leaders than women.

- Twenty-nine percent wanted more say about how things were done on their job and in their communities.

- Indo-Trinidadians seem to be more patriotic than Afro-Trinidadians. Seventy-four percent of them were prepared to go to war to defend their country compared to 56% of the Afro-Trinidadians.

- Ninety-eight percent report that they are very or quite proud to be Trinidadians/Tobagonians.

- Trinidadians were divided in their knowledge of and their enthusiasm for the Government's vision to make Trinidad and Tobago a "developed country" by the year 2020. Most were aware of the vision, but only 28% had heard about it a "great deal." Forty-two percent had heard about it a fair amount, an aggregate of 70%. Opinion was however divided as to whether the goal would
be realized. Twenty-two percent believed that the vision would “very likely” be realized while another 30% felt realization was only “fairly likely.” Twenty-three percent felt that it was not at all likely that the goal would be realized. Another 20% felt it was fairly unlikely. The other 4% could not say. If we aggregate the data, we find that 52% were moderately optimistic while 43% were sceptical or pessimistic. Afro-Trinidadians were more likely to be in the optimistic group than were Indo-Trinidadians by an 8 point margin (57% to 49%).

Notwithstanding vocal complaints about how “bad” things have become, Trinidadians seem to be generally satisfied with their lives. When asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied they were with their lives, 22% indicated that they were “completely satisfied,” twice as many as reported thus in Britain and more than five times as many in Hong Kong. Twenty-one percent of the New Zealanders also said they were “completely satisfied”.

If we aggregate all those who registered a score of 6 and above and assume that these were people who, in the main, were basically satisfied, we find that 81% described themselves as being “satisfied” with their lives and 8% indicating otherwise. Eleven percent were borderline cases. The responses given by Indo-Trinidadians are also somewhat surprising. Given what one hears in popular discourse about how unhappy they are with life in Trinidad and Tobago and their place in it, one was surprised that more of them (25% to 20%) indicated that they were basically satisfied with their lives. It may well be that they are politically and not economically disenchanted. There is also the question as whether subjective judgments about satisfaction have any objective basis.

Trinidad and Tobago: A Failed State?

How does the quantitative data generated by the Survey compare with data generated by other surveys and qualitative analyses? There has been a great deal of comment in recent years that Trinidad is fast becoming a “failed” or a failing State. Such evaluations have come from occupants of the judicial bench, the President of the Republic, newspaper columnists and commentators, as well as from members of the general citizenry. In 2007, Trinidad was ranked 94th of 120 in the Global Peace Index and 98th of 140 in 2008, just behind Jamaica, which was 96th and the USA which was ranked 97th (Express, 4 June 2008). According to the Failed State Index 2007 constructed by the Global Policy Forum, Trinidad and Tobago was deemed to be one of 96 states in danger of becoming a failed state. The Forum described failed states as those that could no longer perform the basic function of providing security for its citizens or good governance because of violence, extreme poverty or loss of confidence in state institutions and their processes. Some have countered that it was not the state that was failing but the leadership (Sunday Express, 1 June 2008).

Those who make assertions about state failure point to the unacceptably high homicide rate which currently obtains, increases in the reported incidence of rapes, burglaries, and kidnapping for ransom, the fact that most homicides remain unsolved because witnesses refuse to testify on behalf of the state due to fear of being physically eliminated or because they were intimidated to deter them from testifying. The surge in the homicide rate was dramatic between 1999 and 2007. In 1999, the rate was 7 per 100,000. In 2007, it was 30.6.
In terms of kidnapping for ransom, the rate increased dramatically in 2006 when 256 persons were charged: in 2003, the figure was 229. The conventional wisdom is that many kidnappings (and “carnappings”) go unreported and that people pay protection money to avoid such occurrences. The incidence of gang membership and violent turf war among rival gangs has also increased exponentially. Officials advise that there are 85 to 90 identifiable urban gangs which compete viciously for market share in the narco-trafficking industry using handguns as their weapon of choice. Data supplied by the United Nations and the World Bank reveal that close to 75 per cent of the homicides in 2007 were committed with handguns, most of which come into the territory with the drugs from Colombia and Venezuela, bound for Europe and North America. Many executions take place in broad daylight, and sometimes within sight of police stations. Fifty-nine percent of the homicides were gang related. Only 10% of the homicides committed were prosecuted. Few were successful.

Persons or institutional spokesmen who lament the virtual collapse of the justice system also point to perceptions of increased grand corruption and white collar crimes, poor or indifferent performance on the part of the state bureaucracy and the public utilities. They also note that ethnic animosity seemed to be increasing and to be threatening the integrity of the state. The President of the Republic himself observed that, “the core problem is the failure of social cohesions in the country and the fact that the various cultures have not been able to speak to each other, to acknowledge their uniqueness, or to live together in peace despite their differences”.

The data revealed by the World Values Survey do not suggest that Trinidadians believe that their’s is a failed or failing state. As we have seen, most are very proud of being Trinidadian, most remain patriotic, and most are committed to democracy and civilian rule. Most are also satisfied with the financial circumstances of their households and are also generally satisfied with their lives as a whole. Despite having challenges and grave concerns of one sort or another, the great majority report that they are happy in their personal lives. It is true that they are very discontented with how the major state and national institutions are performing, and many seem to have become less interested in politics than they might have been before. Many are deeply cynical of parties and politicians. A majority however remain committed to ethnic unity and participatory democracy, and only a few believe that there is any reason to turn power over to a man on a white horse or the army. The majority believe that it is the politicians that have failed and not the people or the state.
References


