



Suite 30 Ground Floor | Bretton Hall | # 16 Victoria Avenue | Port of Spain

Blame it  
on the  
System!



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### **The Real Problem**

Escalating crime, poor health care, high food prices, flooding, traffic congestion, corruption, poverty, overdependence on the energy sector – why is it that successive administrations have been unable to solve Trinidad and Tobago’s most pressing problems?

Maybe instead of searching for the answers to our national problems in our politicians, we need to focus on our electoral system which does not give us proper representation in parliament.

Trinidad and Tobago is still using the First-Past-the-Post voting system which has been abandoned by many developed countries in favour of systems which promote more diverse and fair representation.

Simply put, under First-Past-the-Post, the candidate who gains more votes than his rivals is elected. It must be made clear, however, that a candidate does not need to get the majority of votes, just more than anyone else.

### **Strengths of First-Past-the-Post**

#### **Simplicity**

The system is simple to understand and involves just marking a cross next to the name of a candidate

#### **Speed**

It doesn't take long to count all the votes which means the results can be declared just hours after polls close.

#### **Geographical Link**

Each Member of Parliament represents a precise geographical area. If a constituent wishes to contact an MP about a problem, they know to whom to go.



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## **Weaknesses of First-Past-the-Post**

### **Artificial Majority Governments**

A party can win the majority of seats with only a minority of the votes. So representatives can get elected on tiny amounts of public support.

### **Safe Seats**

The number of seats a party wins depends not only on the number of votes it receives but on the geographical distribution of its vote. Parties whose support is geographically concentrated will gain more seats than parties whose support is more evenly spread. The proliferation of safe seats means the same party is all but guaranteed a return to office at each election.

### **Lack of Proper Representation**

The First-Past-the-Post system results in a small group deciding who is in government because election results depend on the outcome of a small number of marginal seats. The lack of competition in safe seats means incumbents do not have to work hard to represent their constituents.

### **Wasted Votes**

First-Past-The-Post wastes huge numbers of votes, as votes cast in a constituency for losing candidates count for nothing. A party which came in second or third in the constituency votes can find itself with a high percentage of the total vote but relatively few seats.

### **Tactical Voting**

First Past the Post encourages tactical voting, as voters do not vote for the candidate they most prefer, but against the candidate they most dislike. Worse, some opt not to vote at all because they think it is a waste of time.

### **Lower Voter Turnout**

When voters believe their votes do not make a difference many do not even bother to vote, particularly in the safe seats.



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### **The Verdict**

The First Past the Post system, therefore, fails to establish a legitimate majority government.

The parliament, therefore, does not represent all voters and is not accountable to the entire electorate.

It is no surprise then that more than 80 countries have opted to use voting systems that are achieve more fair and diverse representation than First Past the Post.

Fair voting systems, usually referred to as proportional representation, have many variations but the core principle is the same: political parties gaining seats in direct proportion to the number of votes they achieve at an election.