

The Bahamas



Key Facts

POPULATION (2010 Census)¹: 353,658
AREA²: 13,943 sq km
CAPITAL: Nassau
CURRENCY: Bahamian dollar (BSD)
HEAD OF STATE: HM Queen Elizabeth II
GOVERNOR-GENERAL:
 Dame Marguerite Pindling
HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:
 Prime Minister Perry Christie
FORM OF GOVERNMENT:
 constitutional monarchy
PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM: bicameral
STATE STRUCTURE: unitary
LANGUAGES: English (official)
NATIONAL ELECTIONS:
 last: 2012 turnout: na next: 2017
LOCAL ELECTIONS:
 last: June 2014 turnout: na next: 2017
WOMEN CHIEF COUNCILLORS: 6.3% (2014)
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE
 as a percentage of total government
 expenditure 2013/14³:** na

SUMMARY

The Bahamas is a constitutional monarchy with two spheres of government: central and local. There is no constitutional provision for local government and the main empowering legislation is the Local Government Act 1996. Local government policy is overseen by the Ministry of Local Government. There are a total of 32 local government districts: 13 two-schedule districts, which are further sub-divided into town areas, and 19 unitary districts. Local government is not empowered to raise revenue itself and funding for all local government expenditure is provided through transfers from central government. Town committees are responsible for general health and sanitation while district councils are responsible for hospitals and clinics, supply of public potable water by standpipes and the upkeep of public school buildings and other government-owned buildings, parks, grounds, beaches, settlement roads and bridges.

1. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The Bahamas is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament. The head of state is HM Queen Elizabeth II who appoints, and is represented by, a governor-general. Parliament comprises a directly elected 41-member House of Assembly and a 16-member appointed senate. Both houses have five-year terms. Elections to the House of Assembly are from single-member constituencies and are held by popular vote using the first-past-the-post system. There is universal suffrage at age 18.

Table 1. Distribution of councils and population

Island	Second-schedule	Third-schedule	Town	Population (2010 Census)
New Providence	0	0	-	248,948
Abaco Islands	3	3	na	16,692
Acklins	1	0	na	560
Andros	1	3	na	7,386
Berry Islands	1	0	na	798
Bimini	1	0	na	2,008
Cat Island	0	1	-	1,503
Crooked Island	1	0	na	323
Grand Bahama	1	2	na	51,756
Harbour Island	1	0	na	1,702
Eleuthera	1	2	na	7,826
Exuma & Cays	1	1	na	7,314
Inagua	1	0	na	911
Long Island	0	1	-	3,024
Mayaguana	1	0	na	271
Ragged Island	1	0	na	70
Rum Cay	1	0	na	99
San Salvador	1	0	na	930
Spanish Wells	1	0	na	1,537
Total	18	13	na	353,658

Source: Bahamas Department of Statistics

All 16 senate members are appointed by the governor-general: nine on the advice of the prime minister, four on the advice of the leader of the opposition and three on the advice of the prime minister after consultation with the leader of the opposition. The governor-general also appoints the cabinet on the recommendation of the prime minister.

2. LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

2.1 Constitutional provisions

There is no constitutional provisions^{3a} for local government.

2.2 Main legislative texts

The main legislative texts are the Local Government Act 1996^{3b} and the Local Government Amendment Act 2014.

Bahamian district councils are empowered under this legislation to regulate activities in their district through five statutory boards, and to act as first-line regulators, working in conjunction with national regulators, for infrastructure development. There are 26 further Acts and regulations that directly impact the work of councils.

2.3 Proposed legislative changes

No current legislative changes are proposed.

3. STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The island of New Providence, where the capital Nassau is located, is administered directly by central government. The other inhabited islands of the Bahamas are administered through the local government system.

3.1 Local government within the state

There are two types of local councils in the Bahamas: second-schedule and third-schedule district councils. There are a total of 31 local government districts: 13 second-schedule districts, which are further sub-divided into town areas, and 18 third-schedule districts, which are all unitary authorities. The second and third schedules together make up the first schedule.

3.2 Ministerial oversight

Local government policy falls to the Minister of Local Government, who is also empowered to create new local government areas from time to time based on demographics. The administrative and financial management of local government is overseen by the ministry's permanent secretary and the district administrator.

3.3 Council types

All councils are classed as first-schedule councils and are sub-divided into two types: second-schedule councils that have town committees within their jurisdiction, and unitary third-schedule councils. Councils and town committees have discretionary powers to decide on the award and duration of contracts and the appointment of boards and committees.

3.3.1 Second-schedule districts have the following statutory boards and committees:

- road traffic licensing authority
- port and harbour authority
- hotel licensing board
- liquor and shop licensing
- town planning committee

3.3.2 Town committees are sub-structures of the second-schedule district councils, but are also corporate bodies themselves. They share responsibility with the second-schedule district councils for a number of scheduled local government functions. They have statutory responsibility for local regulation and licensing within their jurisdiction.

Table 2. Aggregate income and expenditure for local government 2013/14

Income	BSD	Expenditure	BSD
Centre-local transfers		Administration	
restricted	na	staff	na
unrestricted	na	property	na
		other	na
Locally raised revenue		Services	
property taxes	na	water	na
licences and fees	na	road maintenance	na
other	na	other	na
TOTAL INCOME	na	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	na

3.3.3 Third-schedule districts combine the responsibilities of the second-schedule districts and of the town committees. Both second- and third-schedule district councils carry out a building control function. The City of Freeport Council can appoint various statutory boards, with the exception of town planning and port authority boards.

4. ELECTIONS

4.1 Recent local elections

The most recent local elections were held in 2014; by-elections are held whenever the need arises. A councillor is deemed to have resigned if they are absent for three consecutive meetings. The next elections will be held in 2017.

4.2 Voting system

Both councillors of third-schedule district councils and members of town committees are directly elected, while members of second-schedule councils are indirectly elected from the membership of the town committees.

Elections are held every three years using the first-past-the-post system. Third-schedule district councils have between five and nine members, whereas the size of councils in both second-schedule and town councils varies according to population size.

4.3 Elected representatives

For both types of district council the chief councillors and their deputies are indirectly elected from amongst the elected officials. They serve for the lifetime of the council and the minister determines their stipend. Second-schedule district councils' statutory boards also elect chairpersons and their deputies from amongst their members.

4.4 Women's representation

In 2011 there were 45 elected female councillors. At the end of 2014, two of the 32 chief councillors were women.

5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

5.1 Legal requirement

The Local Government Act 1996 makes provision for community involvement at various stages of the local decision-making process. The Act further stipulates that at least once a year a public meeting must be held where authorities must discuss their plans and budgets with the local community.

5.2 Implementation

The public meeting criteria referred to in 5.1 above are entrenched at the town committee and council levels. Town committees and councils must further meet once per month, and meetings must be held in a public place. District councils are also empowered to appoint statutory boards to regulate local activities such as licensing, town planning, port operation, etc. Members of the local community are appointed to these groups. They are also empowered to sit in on public meetings before decisions are made.

5.3 E-government

There is no e-government strategy for local authorities.

6. ORGANISED LOCAL GOVERNMENT

6.1 National local government association

The Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities (BALGA) is a national, voluntary organisation. The aim is to foster the growth and development of local government and to exchange views, opinions and experiences. BALGA is not recognised by law or by the constitution, is funded by membership contributions, and is affiliated with international organisations via the Caribbean Association of Local Government Authorities.

7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Bahamas is an archipelagic state, which means that intra-government interaction is crucial to successful governance. In each of the 32 local government jurisdictions, government agencies consult with local authorities on all matters that will have a direct impact on citizens and their way of life. The local government administrator (see section 9.3 below) is the principal link between the two spheres of government, serving as the chief representative of the central government in the district. Local authorities have the capacity to engage the services of, and to create agency arrangements with, any central government authority in the execution of any project. The Family (Outer) Islands administrator facilitates this process. Where central government is executing any major project in a particular district, the relevant investment authority will seek input from the local authority before final decisions are made. Non-governmental agencies, technical organisations and statutory national environmental groups also liaise with local authorities on matters affecting their districts. These groups also offer their technical services to authorities when projects are under consideration.

8. MONITORING SYSTEMS

The Local Government Act 1996 mandates that the budgetary processes of councils and town committees be monitored by the minister with responsibility for local government. The minister is required by law to meet with councils in budget defence meetings before submission to the Ministry of Finance. In January 2009 the Minister of Local Government established within the ministry a monitoring unit to oversee the financial and administrative processes of local districts. The accounts of all districts are monitored for compliance with standard financial practices; additionally administrative systems are reviewed and recommendations made for improvement in practices.

The central government has two agencies with monitoring oversight over local government: the Public Treasury and the Office of the Auditor General. Each agency has specific responsibility regarding the financial management of districts under the Local Government Act 1996. The minister with responsibility for local government may also appoint independent auditors to provide financial and management audits.

9. FINANCE, STAFFING AND RESOURCES

9.1 Locally raised revenue

Although revenue is collected in local government districts for deposit into the central government's consolidated fund account, no local government body is presently empowered to engage in revenue-generating schemes. Funding for all local government expenditure is provided by central government via transfer payments, which are based on a proportional distribution system managed by the Ministry of Finance.

9.2 Transfers

The Local Government Act 1996 ensures a percentage of taxes and fees levied by central government within the district is passed on to local authorities by means of transfer.

9.3 Local authority staff

The appointed local government administrator is the executive secretary and financial officer for all local government bodies, financial officer for all central government agencies in the district, where there is no public treasury department, and coordinator of all governmental official functions in the district as well as carrying other functions including magisterial duties. Notably, some administrators may be at times responsible for more than one district.

10. DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY RESPONSIBILITY

Town committees' responsibilities under the Local Government Act 1996 are: to provide for general health and sanitation, including street cleaning, verges, drains and ditches; the collection and removal of all refuse from any private or public place; to provide for the upkeep and maintenance of public wells, water tanks, road signs and markings; and to manage the naming and renaming of streets.

District councils' responsibilities under the same Act are: maintenance and upkeep of public buildings, government-owned airports and terminal buildings, hospitals, clinics and their environs; boat registration; supply of public potable water by standpipes; and upkeep of public school buildings and other government-owned buildings, parks, grounds, beaches, settlement roads and bridges. District councils also hold joint responsibility with the relevant authority for Crown land regulations, tourism, the regulation of building construction, town planning, road traffic self-drive franchises, and hotel and business licensing. Councils also hear appeals concerning decisions made by statutory boards.

References and useful websites

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2. UN statistics <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2008/Table03.pdf>
- 3a. Constitution of the Bahamas www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/SubmitCustomerService?1dm y&urile=wcm%3Apath%3A/MOF_Content/internet/The+Government/Government/About+The+Bahamas/Constitution
- b. Local Government Act 1996 <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/bha93781.pdf>
4. Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resources and Local Government www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/wcm/connect/mof_content/internet/all+contacts/agencies/government+departments/department+of+cooperatives+development
5. Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner [www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/contacts/Agencies/Government Departments/Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner](http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/wps/portal/public/gov/government/contacts/Agencies/Government+Departments/Office+of+the+Parliamentary+Commissioner)
6. National government portal <http://bahamas.gov.bs>
7. Bahamas Association of Local Government Authorities (BALGA) <http://calga.org/balga>
8. Commonwealth of the Bahamas Public Administration Country Profile 2006 <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan023302.pdf>
9. UNDP HDR The Bahamas country profile <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BHS>

Annex A. Summary of service provision by different spheres of government in The Bahamas

Services	Delivering authority				Remarks
	Central	2 nd schedule	Town	3 rd schedule	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION					
Police	■				
Fire protection	■	■			
Civil protection	■	■			
Criminal justice	■				
Civil status register	■	■	■	■	
Statistical office	■				
Electoral register	■				
EDUCATION					
Pre-school (kindergarten & nursery)		■			
Primary	■				
Secondary	■				
Vocational & technical	■	■			
Higher education	■				
Adult education	■	■			
SOCIAL WELFARE					
Family welfare services	■				
Welfare homes	■				
Social security	■				
PUBLIC HEALTH					
Primary care	■	■			
Hospitals	■	■			
Health protection	■				
HOUSING & TOWN PLANNING					
Housing	■			■	
Town planning	■	■	■	■	
Regional planning	■	■			
TRANSPORT					
Roads	■	■	■	■	
Transport	■	■			
Urban roads	■		■	■	
Urban rail					
Ports	■	■	■	■	
Airports	■	■		■	
ENVIRONMENT & PUBLIC SANITATION					
Water & sanitation	■		■	■	
Refuse collection & disposal	■		■	■	
Cemeteries & crematoria	■		■	■	
Slaughterhouses	■				
Environmental protection	■	■			
Consumer protection	■	■			
CULTURE, LEISURE & SPORTS					
Theatre & concerts	■	■			
Museums & libraries	■	■			
Parks & open spaces	■		■	■	
Sports & leisure	■		■	■	
Religious facilities	■	■			
UTILITIES					
Gas services	■	■			
District heating					
Water supply	■	■	■	■	
Electricity	■	■		■	
ECONOMIC					
Agriculture, forests & fisheries	■				
Local economic development/promotion	■				
Trade & industry	■	■		■	
Tourism	■	■		■	

- KEY**
- Sole responsibility service
 - Joint responsibility service
 - Discretionary service