

The local government system in

# The Bahamas



## Key facts

**POPULATION (Census 2010):** 353,658  
**AREA:** 13,943 sq km  
**CAPITAL:** Nassau  
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP:** -  
**CURRENCY:** Bahamian dollar (BSD)  
**HEAD OF STATE:** HM Queen Elizabeth II  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL:** Sir Arthur Foulkes  
**HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:**  
 Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham  
**FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** constitutional monarchy  
**PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM:** bicameral  
**STATE STRUCTURE:** unitary  
**LANGUAGES:** English (official)  
**NATIONAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2007; **turnout:** -  
**next:** 2012  
**LOCAL ELECTIONS: last:** 2008; **turnout:** -  
**next:** 2011

## 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 Department of Lands and Local Government in the Office of the Prime Minister. There are a total of 32 local government districts: 13 two tier 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 whilst 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.

### 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 a first-past-the-post system. There is universal suffrage at age 18. 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 provision for local government.

#### 2.2 The Main legislative texts:

The main legislative text is The Local Government Act 1996. 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.

### 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 32 local government districts: 13 second-schedule districts, which are further sub-divided into town areas, and 19 third-schedule districts, which are all unitary authorities. The second and third schedules together make up the first schedule.

**Table 1.** Distribution of councils and population (2010 Census)

Island	2nd-tier	3rd-tier	Town	Population
New Providence	-	-	-	248,948
Abaco Islands	3	3	n/a	16,692
Acklins	1	0	n/a	560
Andros	1	3	n/a	7,386
Berry Islands	1	0	n/a	798
Bimini	1	0	n/a	2,008
Cat Island	0	1	-	1,503
Crooked Island	1	0	n/a	323
Grand Bahama	1	2	n/a	51,756
Harbour Island	1	0	n/a	1,702
Eleuthera	1	2	n/a	7,826
Exuma and Cays	1	1	n/a	7,314
Inagua	1	0	n/a	911
Long Island	0	1	-	3,024
Mayaguana	1	0	n/a	271
Ragged Island	1	0	n/a	70
Rum Cay	1	0	n/a	99
San Salvador	1	0	n/a	930
Spanish Wells	1	0	n/a	1,537
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>353,658</b>
Largest council	6,014 <sup>a</sup>	31,478 <sup>c</sup>	n/a	-
Smallest council	1,548 <sup>b</sup>	72 <sup>d</sup>	n/a	-

a) Central Abaco b) Cat Island c) City of Freeport d) Ragged Island

Source: Bahamas Department of Statistics

### 3.2 Ministerial oversight:

Local government policy is formulated and administered by the Department of Lands and Local Government through the Office of the Prime Minister. The day-to-day policy handling of the portfolio falls to the Minister of Local Government who also is empowered to create new local government areas from time to time based on demographics. The administrative and financial management is overseen by the ministry's permanent secretary.

### 3.3 Council types:

All councils are classed as first-schedule councils and are sub-divided into two types: two-tier second-schedule councils that have town committees within their jurisdiction, and unitary third-tier councils

**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 the scheduled local government functions. They have statutory responsibility for local regulation and licensing within their jurisdiction.

**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.

## 4. ELECTIONS

### 4.1 Recent local elections:

The most recent local elections were held in 2008; by-elections are held whenever the need arises. A councillor is deemed to have resigned if they are absent for three consecutive meetings.

### 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 on a 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 councils 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 2009 there were 92 elected female councillors, bringing the total number of female councillors to 222.

## 5. SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### 5.1 Legal requirement:

The Local Government Act 1996 makes provision for community involvement at various stages in 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 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, eg licensing, town planning, port operation etc. Members of the local community are appointed to these groups. The latter are 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. The Association is not recognised by law or by the constitution. It is funded by membership contributions and affiliated with international organisations via regional bodies.

## 7. INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Bahamas is an archipelagic state, therefore 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 the citizenry and their way of life. 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 in 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 percentages of taxes and fees levied by central government with the district is granted to the local authority by means of transfer.

### 9.3 Local authority staff:

The local government administrator is an appointed public officer connected to both local and central government. This official is the principal link between the two levels of government, serving as the chief representative of the central government in the district, and carrying out multiple functions including magisterial duties. The administrator is the executive secretary and financial officer for all local government bodies, financial officer for all central government agencies in the district, and coordinator of all governmental official functions in the district. Notably, some administrators are responsible for two or three districts.

### Table 2. Aggregate revenue and expenditure for Local Government, 2009/2010

No information provided for this edition.

## 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, and 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. They also hold joint responsibility with the relevant authority, for Crown land regulations, tourism, for the regulation of building construction, town planning; road traffic self-drive franchises, and hotel and business licensing. Councils also hear appeals in decisions made by statutory boards.

Councils and town committees have discretionary powers to decide on the award and duration of contracts and the appointment of boards and committees.

## References and useful websites

1. Bahamas Department of Statistics  
<http://statistics.bahamas.gov.bs>  
<http://statistics.bahamas.gov.bs/download/095485600.pdf>
2. UN statistics  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2008/Table03.pdf>
3. IMF statistics [www.imf.org/external/data.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm)
4. Ministry of Local Government and Consumer Affairs  
[www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/21da5471bcd9a6b506256f0000703dff/75861f151775b3858525712d00516e74!OpenDocument](http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/21da5471bcd9a6b506256f0000703dff/75861f151775b3858525712d00516e74!OpenDocument)
5. National government portal  
<http://statistics.bahamas.gov.bs/download/095485600.pdf>
6. UNDP Human Development Report 2010  
[www.hdr.undp.org](http://www.hdr.undp.org)
7. Local Government Association website
8. A history of local government in the Bahamas, Hope Town Council  
[www.hopetowncouncil.com/?page\\_id=46](http://www.hopetowncouncil.com/?page_id=46)
9. Commonwealth of the Bahamas Public Administration Country Profile  
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan023302.pdf>

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

Service	Delivering authority				Remarks
	Central	Second Schedule District Councils	Town Committees	Third Schedule District Councils	
<b>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</b>					
Police	■				
Fire protection	■	■			
Civil protection	■	■			
Criminal justice	■				
Civil justice	■				
Civil status register					
Statistical office					
Electoral register	■				
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
Pre-school		■			
Primary	■				
Secondary	■				
Vocational and technical	■	■			
Higher education	■				
Adult education	■	■			
<b>SOCIAL WELFARE</b>					
Kindergarten and nursery		■			
Family welfare services	■				
Welfare homes	■				
Social security	■				
<b>PUBLIC HEALTH</b>					
Primary care	■	■			
Hospitals	■	■			
Health Protection	■				
<b>HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING</b>					
Housing	■			■	
Town planning	■	■	■	■	
Regional planning	■	■			
<b>TRANSPORT</b>					
Roads	■	■	■	■	
Transport	■	■			
Urban roads	■		■	■	
Urban rail					
Ports	■	■	■	■	
Airports	■	■		■	
Other					
<b>ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION</b>					
Water and sanitation	■		■	■	
Refuse collection and disposal	■		■	■	
Cemeteries and crematoria	■		■	■	
Slaughterhouses	■				
Environmental protection	■	■			
Consumer protection	■	■			
<b>CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS</b>					
Theatre and concerts	■	■			
Museums and libraries	■	■			
Parks and open spaces	■		■	■	
Sports and leisure	■		■	■	
Religious facilities	■	■			
<b>UTILITIES</b>					
Gas services	■	■			
District heating					
Water supply	■	■	■	■	
Electricity	■	■		■	
<b>ECONOMIC</b>					
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	■				
Economic promotion	■				
Trade and industry	■	■		■	
Tourism	■	■		■	