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Summary Article: **Bahamas**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Country comprising a group of about 700 islands and about 2,400 uninhabited islets and cays in the Caribbean, 80 km/50 mi from the southeast coast of Florida. They extend for about 1,223 km/760 mi from northwest to southeast, but only 22 of the islands are inhabited.

Government The Bahamas are an independent sovereign nation within the Commonwealth, with a multiparty parliamentary democracy but with the British monarch as head of state and represented by an appointed, resident governor general. The constitution, effective since independence in 1973, provides for a two-chamber parliament with a Senate and House of Assembly. The governor general appoints a prime minister selected by the majority party in to the legislature. The governor general appoints 16 Senate members: 9 on the advice of the prime minister, 4 on the advice of the leader of the opposition, and 3 on the advice of the prime minister after consultation with the prime minister. The House of Assembly has 39 members, popularly elected in single-member constituencies using the first-past-the-post system. Parliament has a maximum life of five years and may be dissolved within that period.

History The Bahamas were reached in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, who first landed at San Salvador. The British established a permanent settlement in 1656, and in 1670 the Bahamas were given to the duke of Albemarle as a proprietary colony. The islands were a pirate area in the early 18th century and reverted to the British crown in 1717 (although they were disputed by the Carolina colony until 1787). During the American Revolution, Spanish forces captured the Bahamas in 1782, but the islands were given back to Britain the following year.

Internal self-government The first political parties were formed in the Bahamas in the 1950s and Britain allowed it internal self-government in 1964, with Roland Symonette, leader of the European-dominated United Bahamian Party (UBP) becoming prime minister. The first elections for the national assembly on a full voting register were held in 1967. The Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), formed in 1953 and drawing its support mainly from voters of African origin, won the same number of seats as the UBP. Lynden Pindling became the Bahamas' first black prime minister, with support from outside his party. In the 1968 elections the PLP scored a resounding victory, repeated in 1972.

Independence In 1973 Pindling led the Bahamas to full independence within the Commonwealth and the country prospered. The economy became based on tourism – which came to employ over half the country's workforce – and offshore financial services, which was encouraged by the Bahamas having no income tax, corporation, tax, capital gains tax, or wealth tax. However, wealth has been unevenly distributed: whites make up only 10–15% of the population but control 90% of the country's wealth.

In the 1977 general election the centre-left PLP increased its majority for the PLP and it was successful again in 1982 and 1987, but with a reduced majority.

Ingraham leads centre-right FNM to power Pindling's 25 years in office came to an end in August 1992, when the centre-right Free National Movement (FNM), led by the 45-year-old Hubert Ingraham,

won a landslide victory on an anti-corruption programme. The FNM repeated this victory in 1997.

Pindling died in August 2000 and under the leadership of Perry Christie the PLP returned to power. It won a clear victory in the 2002 general election, defeating an FNM, which was led by 'Tommy' Turnquest, after Ingraham had stepped aside.

Ingraham returned as FNM leader in 2005 and led the party to a narrow victory in the May 2007 general election. The new government embarked on a privatization programme.

Power rotates between PLP and FNM Perry Christie and the PLP returned to government after the May 2012 general election and Ingraham stood down from parliament and as FNM leader. He was replaced by Hubert Minnis. The new government supported oil exploration off the Bahamas, but critics expressed fears that this might harm the crucial tourism sector.

The FNM and Minnis returned to power after the May 2017 general election. With 57% of the vote, the FNM won 35 of the 39 seats and the PLP fared so badly that its leader Christie lost his seat.

Hurricanes Hurricane Floyd, one of the strongest and largest storms ever seen in the Atlantic, ripped through the Bahamas in September 1999, causing massive damage on several islands. In September–October 2004 hurricanes Frances and Jeanne, in October 2005 hurricane Wilma, and in 2017 hurricane Irma caused further damage.

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