

The Bahamas General Election

12 May 2026



The Commonwealth

MOUNT
MORIAH
POLLING DIVISION

The Bahamas General Election

12 May 2026



The Commonwealth

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Map of The Bahamas



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BDP	Bahamas Democratic Party
B\$	Bahamian dollar
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CET	Commonwealth Expert Team
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
COI	Coalition of Independents
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	civil society organisation
FNM	Free National Movement
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MICAL	Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay
MP	member of parliament
OAS	Organization of American States
PLP	Progressive Liberal Party
PRD	Parliamentary Registration Department
PWDs	persons with disabilities
UBP	United Bahamian Party
URCA	Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority
VAT	value added tax

Letter of Transmittal

Commonwealth Observer Group

The Bahamas General Election

12 May 2026

18 May 2026

Dear Secretary-General,

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) constituted to observe the 12 May 2026 General Election in The Bahamas, I have the honour to submit to you our Final Report.

The Group's overall assessment is that the electoral process was credible, peaceful and competitive, and that the results reflect the will of those Bahamians who participated in the poll. The 2026 election was the first conducted under a 41-seat constituency map following the creation of two new constituencies, St James, and Bimini and Berry Islands, and the first held under the legal framework for optional biometric voter cards introduced in 2025. Despite a compressed pre-election period following the dissolution of Parliament on 8 April 2026, the Parliamentary Registration Department conducted the election in an orderly and professional manner, and the people of The Bahamas exercised their franchise in a calm and dignified atmosphere.

The voting and counting processes that the Group observed were well administered and broadly transparent. We were encouraged by the professionalism of polling staff, the discipline of political party agents, the unobtrusive but effective presence of the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the orderly manner in which voters attended the polling stations to cast their ballots. The leader of the opposition Free National Movement, Michael Pintard, publicly conceded the election approximately four hours after the close of polls, and the Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Philip Davis, was confirmed in office for a second consecutive term, the first such consecutive mandate for an incumbent political party since 1997. The Group commends the contesting parties, the candidates and their supporters for accepting the outcome and for the peaceful atmosphere that ensued.

At the same time, the Group is concerned by the very low voter turnout in the 2026 election, which preliminary indications suggest set a modern low for The Bahamas. The Prime Minister himself acknowledged in his victory address that low turnout is 'not good for democracy'. The Group shares that concern and recommends a participatory review of the causes of declining participation, with particular attention to the engagement of young people, voter education and public confidence in the electoral process.

This report is informed by extensive consultations with national stakeholders, including the Government, the leadership of the three contesting parties, the Parliamentary Registration Department; the Royal Bahamas Police Force; the judiciary; the media; civil society including organisations representing youth, women, religious groups, persons with disabilities and others; academia; fellow international observers from the Organization of American States and the Caribbean Community; and diplomatic missions of the United Kingdom and the United States in Nassau, and by the Group's direct observation of election day polling and counting across New Providence and Grand Bahama.

Building on the work of the Commonwealth Observer Group that I had the privilege of chairing for the 2021 general election, the Group has structured its report to highlight where progress has been made since 2021 and where recommendations remain outstanding. In particular, the Group reiterates the long-standing call for an independent electoral management authority; for a code of conduct for political parties and the media; for the enactment of a comprehensive campaign finance framework regulating party expenditure, donations and disclosure; and for the full operationalisation of the Freedom of Information Act 2017.

The Group also encourages the government, the Parliamentary Registration Department and electoral stakeholders to consider mechanisms that strengthen civil society participation in electoral processes, including through credentialled domestic citizen observation. The Group encourages the Commonwealth Secretariat to

remain engaged with the government and key stakeholders in The Bahamas, and to continue to support domestic mechanisms and efforts to achieve electoral reform across the cycle.

In accordance with our mandate, I hereby submit our detailed findings and recommendations in the attached report. We hope that these findings and recommendations are received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I express our gratitude to the government and people of The Bahamas for the opportunity to

contribute to the country's democratic processes, and for the courtesy and openness extended to the Group throughout our deployment.

I take this opportunity to thank my fellow observers, Estelle Thadea Alaine George, Orin Gordon and Josephine Tamai, for their dedication and collegiality, and to convey the Group's appreciation to the Commonwealth Secretariat staff team, Michelle Scobie and Anita Collins, whose invaluable support enabled the mission to discharge its responsibilities effectively.

Yours sincerely,



Honourable Bruce Golding

Chairperson, Commonwealth Observer Group

Former Prime Minister of Jamaica

Observers' Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tamai' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Josephine Tamai

Chief Elections Officer at the Elections and Boundaries Department

Belize

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon' with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Orin Gordon

Journalist and broadcaster

Guyana

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'George' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Estelle Thadea Alaine George

Legal and governance professional

Saint Lucia

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group (COG; 'the Group') to observe the 12 May 2026 general election in The Bahamas, following an invitation from the Government of The Bahamas. The COG was led by the Hon. Bruce Golding, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, who also led the COG for The Bahamas' 2021 general election. The Group comprised four eminent Commonwealth citizens, supported by a staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members is at Annex I.

The Group was in The Bahamas from 4 to 18 May 2026. During this time, the COG met a broad range of stakeholders, including senior representatives of the government, the leadership of the three contesting parties (the Progressive Liberal Party, the Free National Movement and the Coalition of Independents); the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD); the Royal Bahamas Police Force; the judiciary; the media; civil society, including organisations representing youth, women, religious groups, persons with disabilities and others; academia; the Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission; the Caribbean Community Electoral Observation Mission; and Commonwealth diplomatic missions in Nassau.

This was the first general election conducted under the revised constituency map established by the House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Redistribution of Seats Order, 2026, which increased the number of constituencies from 39 to 41 by creating two new seats — St James, and Bimini and Berry Islands. It was also the first poll held following passage of the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 2025, which provides a legal framework for optional biometric voter cards and a biometric election register. The Group noted that the existing purple voter card remained valid and that use of the biometric card was on a voluntary basis.

The election was called about five months before the life of the Parliament would have come to an end. Parliament was dissolved on 8 April 2026, nomination day was held on 16 April 2026, and an advanced poll was conducted on 30 April 2026 for senior citizens, members of the uniformed branches, polling station workers and other prescribed categories. Overseas voting took place at 13 Bahamian missions abroad. According to the PRD, more than 209,000 voters were registered for the election.

Although the boundaries review was completed four months before the elections were held, there does not appear to have been sufficient effort made to inform the electors in their officially revised constituencies of these changes. This led to some voters on election day not knowing where to vote or turning up at the wrong polling station.

The COG observed that the electoral framework largely provided an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, building on The Bahamas' stable Westminster tradition and on the principles of the peaceful transfer of power and respected national institutions. At the same time, the Group identified a number of areas where further reform would strengthen public confidence and align with the recommendations of the 2021 COG. These include in particular the need for an independent electoral management authority, legislation on political party registration, comprehensive campaign finance legislation, an independent association for media professionals that can develop election codes for the media, operationalisation of the Freedom of Information Act 2017, transparency of the review of constituency and polling division boundaries and a written political code of conduct signed by political parties and candidates.

The campaign was competitive, vibrant and largely peaceful. Major rallies, motorcades and door-to-door canvassing by the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), the Free National Movement (FNM) and the Coalition of Independents (COI) took place across New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands. The fundamental rights to assemble, associate and campaign appeared to be observed, and the Group did not witness any significant incidents of intimidation or violence during the period of its deployment.

Police presence at polling stations was visible without being intrusive, and security forces conducted their duties professionally. The Group is satisfied that the contesting parties were able to campaign freely across constituencies.

Nonetheless, the campaign environment was not free of concerns. While recognising the authority of the government to implement policy measures and public programmes in the exercise of its democratic mandate, the Group heard multiple credible stakeholder concerns regarding the timing and presentation of certain government initiatives and public benefits announced or distributed during the election period. These included the removal of value added tax on unprepared grocery items on 1 April 2026, the same day the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Parliament and the election date, and the writing-off of Bahamas Power and Light electricity arrears for qualifying residents on Grand Cay and Moore's Island. The COG also heard allegations regarding the distribution of 'Dorian relief' gift cards in Abaco, the source and signatories of which became contested in the closing weeks of the campaign. Although no definitive evidence was presented to the Group that these measures breached the law, stakeholders expressed concern that, in the absence of clearer regulatory guidance and transparency mechanisms, such actions may contribute to perceptions of an uneven playing field between incumbency and electoral competition. These episodes further underscore the long-standing need for a campaign finance framework and a clearer separation between government communication and partisan campaign activity.

The cost of living; jobs and the economy; crime and public safety; immigration; housing and land access; health care; and governance, transparency and accountability emerged as the principal campaign issues. The PLP campaigned on its 'Blueprint for Progress', presenting continuity and delivery on its 2021 commitments. The FNM campaigned on a 'reset' message, including a commitment to integrity and transparency and a pledge to fully implement the Freedom of Information Act within 90 days of taking office. The COI sought to consolidate its position as a credible third-party alternative.

Polling on 12 May 2026 was, in the Group's overall assessment, peaceful, orderly and well administered at the stations observed. The voting and counting processes proceeded broadly in accordance with the law and the PRD's procedures. The Group commends the people of The Bahamas, the PRD and its polling staff, political party agents, the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the media and civil society for the conduct of the poll.

Preliminary results indicate that the incumbent PLP, led by Prime Minister Philip Davis, was re-elected with 33 of the 41 seats in the House of Assembly. The FNM, led by Michael Pintard, won eight seats. The COI did not win any seats, although it improved on its previous performance in several constituencies. Michael Pintard conceded defeat approximately four hours after the close of polls. The Group noted that nine women were elected to the new House of Assembly — seven from the PLP and two from the FNM — in an outcome broadly comparable to that of 2021.

The Prime Minister himself acknowledged that voter turnout was low and 'not good for democracy', calling for renewed efforts to ensure every voter felt their ballot mattered. The Group shares that concern. While final disaggregated turnout figures were not available at the time of writing, indications are that turnout in 2026 was significantly below the 64.91 per cent recorded in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic and set a modern low for the country. The COG recommends a participatory review of the causes of declining turnout, with particular attention to youth participation, voter education and confidence in the electoral process.

Reflecting the above, this report offers a series of recommendations — some new, others reiterated from the 2021 COG — for the consideration of key stakeholders. These recommendations are offered in a constructive spirit and are tracked in Annex VII. They include, in particular, establishing an independent authority for the administration of voter registration and elections; enacting a comprehensive campaign finance framework; fully operationalising the Freedom of Information Act 2017; establishing clearer separation between government communication and partisan messaging in pre-election periods; supporting the adoption of a written code of conduct ahead of the next general election; the creation of an independent media association that can develop and administer a media professional electoral code of conduct; and continuing the modernisation of the voter register, including disaggregation by age and sex.

Overall, the Group's assessment is that the 12 May 2026 general election in The Bahamas was credible, peaceful and competitive, and that the results reflect the will of those Bahamians who participated. The COG congratulates the Prime Minister-elect and the new House of Assembly, and thanks the people of The Bahamas for the courtesy and openness extended to the Group throughout its deployment.

Figure ES1 COG Chair the Hon Bruce Golding speaks with polling station officials at a polling station in Bain and Grants Town



Recommendations

1. An independent body needs to be established by legislation, to be responsible for the control and management of the voter registration process and the conduct of elections.
2. Legislation should be enacted to regulate campaign financing, including the registration of political parties, contributions, expenditure and reporting requirements.
3. A code of political conduct should be established, to which all political parties and candidates would be invited to subscribe to establish campaign norms and provide a mechanism for resolving campaign disputes.
4. The Freedom of Information Act 2017 should be fully operationalised and implemented, including through the development of regulations and the adequate resourcing of the Office of the Information Commissioner. This is with a view to strengthening public access to official information and democratic accountability.
5. Future boundary delimitation exercises should incorporate broader public consultation, the timely publication of proposals and clearer public explanations of delimitation criteria.
6. A complete enumeration exercise, including measures to verify the addresses of voters, should be conducted across all The Bahamas islands to refresh the current voters list, having regard to the fact that the last such exercise was carried out more than 10 years ago.

7. Prior to its certification, a preliminary register of voters should be published, including posting on the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD) website to enable registered voters to verify that their names appear on the register and are placed in the correct constituency with sufficient time and appropriate arrangements for discrepancies to be rectified.
8. Robust public voter education campaign utilising traditional and social media should be conducted by the PRD periodically and well in advance of any election period to encourage and facilitate voter registration and participation. The PRD should also intensify its engagement with civil society organisations in order to facilitate continuous voter education, awareness-raising and inclusion advocacy throughout the electoral cycle. The public should have access to the relevant electoral laws and regulations in physical and digital formats.
9. The paper voter card should be retired and the biometric voter card, which is far more secure, efficient and durable, should be made a requirement for future elections.
10. Future boundary delimitation exercises should incorporate broader public consultation, the timely publication of proposals and clearer public explanations of delimitation criteria.
11. The PRD should maintain and annually update lists of putative and reserve polling staff, and recruitment procedures should be transparent and merit-based, with explicit consideration of a gender and regional balance, supported by consistent training of polling officials, including reserves.
12. Political parties should be provided with the list of polling officials and the location of polling stations as early as possible before the day of the election.
13. All political parties and, where applicable, independent candidates should be afforded access to electoral information, briefings on procedure and any pre-election fora convened for contesting candidates.
14. The PRD should collaborate with disabled persons' organisations on the development of a standardised assistive voting protocol, accessible voter education materials in multiple formats and clear instructions in polling manuals.
15. In keeping with international good practice, the PRD should utilise translucent ballot boxes and uniquely numbered security seals.
16. Additional time should be allocated for the pre-opening checks where advance and overseas ballots are to be accounted for in the same polling division, with a view to ensuring that polling stations open promptly at 8:00 a.m.
17. Custody arrangements for advance and overseas ballot boxes should be reviewed so that no single agency outside the PRD holds duplicate keys or secondary access to ballot storage facilities, in order to preserve the perception, as well as the substance, of strict independent electoral custody.
18. The 100-yard limit prescribed by Section 98 of the Parliamentary Elections Act should be clearly delineated at every polling station with a view to avoiding uncertainty among voters, political agents and the police, and to facilitate the consistent enforcement of the prohibition on campaign activity within the limit.
19. The government should ensure the PRD is provided with adequate resources and support to fully discharge its statutory mandate throughout the election cycle.
20. Government, political parties, civil society organisations and the media should proactively engage with youth, including through partnerships with schools and tertiary institutions, with a view to expanding civic education, supporting youth leadership and candidacy, and creating meaningful pathways for substantive youth participation in policy development, party governance and electoral reform beyond campaign mobilisation.

21. Civil society, academia, the media and the contesting political parties should facilitate the organisation of structured leaders' debates ahead of future general elections on the principal issues of public interest, with a view to enabling voters to make a more informed choice.
22. Appropriate regulations should be established to ensure equitable access to the media, including state media, for all political parties and candidates, including independent candidates, during election periods. This pertains to campaign coverage, interviews and advertisements.
23. Media professionals should consider establishing an independent media association and developing a media code of conduct for election coverage, in order to complement the existing regulatory framework administered by the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority and strengthen self-regulation and professional standards across the sector.
24. Civil society and non-partisan stakeholders should seek to develop a credible domestic citizen election observation mechanism for future elections.
25. Political parties should take active steps to increase the recruitment, support and promotion of women candidates and their inclusion in leadership positions, including by establishing minimum targets for women's representation as candidates and party executives.
26. The government should ensure a clear and visible separation between the office of the Director of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister and any equivalent role within a political party.
27. As soon as possible after a general election has been held, the PRD should undertake a comprehensive review of the preparation for and execution of the election procedures to identify errors that may have been made, and weaknesses that might have negatively impacted its conduct, and to determine appropriate corrective actions for future elections.
28. The government should establish an appropriate mechanism to systematically review and take such action as it deems appropriate with regard to the recommendations of Commonwealth and other international observer missions across the electoral cycle. Political parties, the media and civil society organisations are urged to carefully review these recommendations and to determine their response.

1. Introduction

With a view to providing important background information on the context in which Commonwealth Observer Groups (COGs) and Commonwealth Expert Teams (CETs) operate, this introductory chapter begins with a summary of the COG methodology. It concludes with an overview of this methodology as applied to the 2026 general election in The Bahamas.

1.1 International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed more than 200 elections in 40 countries. International election observation serves governments several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral best practices.

1.2 The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following:

1. *Commonwealth Observer Groups and Expert Teams (COGs and CETs) are independent, including of the Secretariat*
 - 'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General... in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. *Observers, not monitors*
 - Unlike some citizen observer groups and expert teams (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers — as with all international observers — cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. *Taking forward COG recommendations*
 - The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms', such as multi-stakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.
4. *Whole-of-election-cycle approach*
 - Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff, the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and, crucially, bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

1.3 The strength of COGs and CETs

While all international election observer and expert team missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics:

1. *Eminent observers*

- . While COGs and CETs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts.

2. *Diversity and peer-to-peer learning*

- . COGs and CETs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers generally selected from different countries and in some cases from each of the world's five continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.

3. *Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices*

- . COGs and CETs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 *Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation*. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website.

1.4 Deployment of a COG to the 2026 general election in The Bahamas

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a COG for the 12 May 2026 general election, following an invitation from the Government of The Bahamas by letter of 13 April 2026.

The Group, comprising a small team of distinguished experts drawn from across the region, was led by Hon. Bruce Golding, former Prime Minister of Jamaica. It included experts bringing experience in electoral administration, law, politics, and media supported by a small staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A full list of members can be found in Annex I.

1.5 Mandate of the COG and terms of reference

The mandate and agreed terms of reference for the Group are as follows:

- . *'The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Government of The Bahamas.*
- . *'The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.*
- . *'The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation as well as to relevant Commonwealth, regional and other international norms and commitments.*

'The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role: its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It is also free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as would assist the holding of such elections.'

'The Group is to submit a report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of the Bahamas, the Parliamentary Registration Department, the Opposition Leader and other political party leaders, and thereafter all Commonwealth member governments.'

Figure 1.1 Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group and the Commonwealth Secretariat Staff Team in Nassau



1.6 Activities

The Group was in The Bahamas from 4 to 18 May 2026. The announcement of the COG was made prior to the Group's arrival on 30 April 2026 (Annex II).

The Group met with the Honourable Prime Minister; the Leader of the Opposition; and leaders and representatives of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), the Free National Movement (FNM) and the Coalition of Independents (COI). It also met with the Parliamentary Commissioner, and senior officers of the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD); representatives of civil society, including of organisations around women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and human rights; members of the religious community; the private sector; the media; academia; and counterparts from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Electoral Observation Mission and the Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observation Mission. The Group also engaged with the Commissioner of Police and were briefed on the security arrangements for the campaign period as well as election day.

On 26 April, members of the Group were deployed across New Providence and Grand Bahama. In addition, the Group obtained briefings on arrangements in the Family Islands, including Abaco, Eleuthera and Andros, from the PRD, returning officers, party representatives and other observer missions. In these locations, the Group engaged with election officials, party agents, police officers and voters to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process and the pre-election environment.

On 14 May 2026, the COG Chair issued an Interim Statement (Annex III), highlighting the Group's preliminary findings and observations. The Chair thanked the people of The Bahamas, and commended the PRD, polling staff, political parties, the police, civil society and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections. He also highlighted areas that required improvement. These included recommendations related to the need for an independent election management body, the registration of political parties, campaign finance legislation, an independent association for media professionals and greater civic participation in the electoral process.

Figure 1.2 COG Chair the Hon Bruce Golding delivers an interim statement on behalf of the Group



The Group's final report was completed in Nassau before its departure on 18 May 2026, for transmission to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

1.7 Recommendations

- The government should establish an appropriate mechanism to systematically review and take such action as it deems appropriate with regard to the recommendations of Commonwealth and other international observer missions across the electoral cycle. Political parties, the media and civil society organisations are urged to carefully review these recommendations and to determine their response.

2. Political Background

This chapter provides the political context for the 2026 general election in The Bahamas. In assessing the election and offering recommendations, which appear in subsequent chapters, the COG considered the country's political landscape and the factors that had shaped its 53 years of independence and the political processes leading to the general election held on 12 May 2026.

The Bahamas' political and parliamentary history is divided into two main periods: the late-colonial era leading to majority rule and independence (1956–1973), and the post-independence period (1973–present). These are detailed below.

2.1 Past political history

The Bahamas was a British colony from the 17th century until its independence in 1973. The franchise was progressively expanded across the 20th century, with universal adult suffrage achieved in 1962. The modern political landscape of The Bahamas was shaped during the period of constitutional advance. The PLP was founded in 1953 and is the country's oldest party, while the United Bahamian Party (UBP) — associated with the commercial and political establishment as it was then — emerged as its principal opponent. After a sustained campaign for majority rule, the PLP formed the government under the leadership of Sir Lynden Pindling, following the 1967 general election. This marked the first time that a party representing the country's Black majority had held office.

The Bahamas gained internal self-government in 1964 and full independence within the Commonwealth on 10 July 1973, with Sir Lynden Pindling as Prime Minister. Following independence, the principal opposition party gradually consolidated around the FNM, formed in 1971 from elements of the UBP and PLP dissidents. Since 1973, electoral competition in The Bahamas has been dominated by the PLP and the FNM, with elections held under a Westminster-style first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies. Other parties have contested general elections from time to time but have not, with one exception in 1977, secured significant representation in the House of Assembly.

2.2 Recent political history

The PLP under Sir Lynden Pindling won successive general elections in 1972, 1977, 1982 and 1987, remaining in office from the period before independence until 1992. In 1992, the FNM, led by Hubert Ingraham, won 33 of 49 seats and formed a government, ending 25 years of PLP rule. The FNM was returned in 1997 with an increased majority before losing power to the PLP under Perry Christie in 2002, who won 29 seats. Mr Christie was defeated in 2007 by Mr Ingraham, who returned to office with 23 seats. Mr Christie regained office in 2012, again winning 29 seats. Mr Ingraham retired from active politics after the defeat.

In 2017, the FNM under Hubert Minnis won a landslide 35 of 39 seats – the largest majority in Bahamian electoral history. The PLP was reduced to four seats, and Mr Christie was personally defeated in his Centreville constituency. The Freedom of Information Act 2017 was enacted shortly before the 2017 general election; under the Minnis Administration, parts of the Act were brought into operation. The Minnis Administration also oversaw the response to Hurricane Dorian, which devastated parts of Abaco and Grand Bahama in 2019, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the September 2021 general election, the PLP under Philip Davis defeated the Minnis Government, winning 32 of 39 seats. Dr Minnis conceded on election night and Mr Davis was sworn in as Prime Minister on 17 September 2021. Turnout in 2021 was approximately 65 per cent, then considered low by historical standards. This was attributed by some to Covid-19 and the dislocation of voters in Abaco caused by Hurricane Dorian. Following the defeat, the FNM held a one-day leadership convention in November 2021 and elected Marco City MP Michael Pintard as leader. Mr Pintard retained the leadership at the FNM's June 2024 convention, defeating a challenge from Dr Minnis by 486 votes to 163. The COI, led by Lincoln Bain, also contested the 2021 election, as a third-party alternative.

During the 2021–2026 parliamentary term, two House of Assembly seats fell vacant following the deaths of sitting PLP MPs; these were filled at by-elections. On 25 September 2023, Minister of Social Services, Information and Broadcasting Obediah Wilchcombe died in office; PLP candidate Kingsley Smith won the resulting West Grand Bahama and Bimini by-election on 22 November 2023. On 2 April 2025, Iram Lewis (Central Grand Bahama) resigned from the FNM and joined the COI, becoming the COI's first sitting representative in Parliament. On 28 September 2025, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Vaughn Miller died in office; PLP candidate Darron Pickstock won the resulting Golden Isles by-election on 24 November 2025. At the time of dissolution in April 2026, the PLP held 32 seats, the FNM six and the COI one.

2.3 Political environment and key issues for the 2026 election

2.3.1 Early election call and the new electoral map

On 1 April 2026, Prime Minister Philip Davis announced that he would advise the Governor-General to dissolve Parliament on 8 April 2026, that the writs of election would be issued on 9 April 2026 and that polling day would be held on 12 May 2026. The election was therefore called five months earlier than constitutionally required; the next general election had not been due until October 2026. The Prime Minister indicated that the early date was chosen to avoid disruption during the Atlantic hurricane season. The FNM and other commentators characterised the early call as politically motivated.

The 2026 election was the first conducted under a new constituency map. The House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Redistribution of Seats Order 2026 (S.I. No. 5 of 2026), tabled in Parliament in January 2026, divided The Bahamas into 41 constituencies — 25 in New Providence, five in Grand Bahama and 11 in the Family Islands — by creating two new constituencies (St James, and Bimini and Berry Islands) and revising several existing boundaries. The Parliamentary Elections (Polling Divisions) Order 2026 followed in March 2026. The Constituencies Commission cited the size of several existing electorates, including reports that Killarney had more than 7,000 registered voters and West Grand Bahama and Bimini 6,070, as the basis for the new seats. The Group heard concerns about the timing of the boundary review relative to the dissolution of Parliament and heard that public understanding of the changes — particularly in newly created or significantly redrawn constituencies — was uneven.

2.3.2 Cost of living and affordability

The cost of living dominated the campaign debate. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), consumer price inflation in The Bahamas fell sharply to around 0.6 per cent in 2025 and is projected at roughly 1–2 per cent in 2026. The IMF has nonetheless observed that the cost of living remains high, given the country's heavy reliance on imports and earlier price shocks. The governing PLP emphasised external drivers of inflation and promoted measures such as value added tax (VAT) adjustments, targeted subsidies and food price interventions; the FNM argued that domestic policy failures had entrenched high household costs and pledged stronger consumer protection and tax relief; the COI advanced a 'Bahamian-first' economic agenda. In an announcement made on the same day the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Parliament, the government implemented removal of VAT on unprepared grocery items from 1 April 2026. The government framed the measure as cost-of-living relief; opposition figures raised concerns about the proximity of the announcement to the calling of the election.

2.3.3 Governance, transparency and use of state resources

Governance and accountability were prominent campaign themes. The FNM placed full implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2017 at the centre of its manifesto, pledging to operationalise the Act within the first 90 days of an FNM administration. The party also criticised the government on the use of no-bid contracts under the Public Procurement Act 2023, which permits direct award of contracts below a B\$100,000 threshold or where only a limited number of suppliers are available. The PLP defended its procurement record and emphasised delivery on its 2021 commitments. The COI made anti-corruption central to its platform.

In the closing weeks of the campaign, the Opposition raised concerns about the timing and source of certain government disbursements. The FNM alleged that 'Dorian relief' gift cards valued between B\$200 and B\$500 had been distributed in Abaco by a PLP candidate, funded through the Ministry of Finance, more

than six years after the hurricane. On 29 April 2026, the Prime Minister announced that the electricity bills of qualifying residents on Grand Cay and Moore's Island, Abaco, would be paid by the government, citing long-standing billing issues dating from Hurricane Dorian. The FNM characterised the announcement as politically motivated; the government defended it as the resolution of a long-standing entitlement. The Bahamas has no comprehensive campaign finance legislation regulating party expenditure, donations or the use of state resources for campaign activity, and the 2021 COG, among others, recommended legislative action.

2.3.4 Crime and public safety

Crime and public safety were recurring campaign issues. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, The Bahamas has one of the higher homicide rates in the Caribbean, with recent estimates placing it above 30 per 100,000 in 2023–2024. The Group heard particular concern about urban crime in Nassau, the trafficking of illegal firearms and the resultant challenges to the criminal justice system. The PLP pledged additional policing resources, investment in surveillance technology and community-based prevention initiatives. The FNM argued that current policies had failed to reverse crime trends and pledged tougher sentencing and reforms to improve conviction rates. Campaign messaging also extended to allegations of document fraud raised against an employee of the PRD during the campaign period.

2.4 Candidates and their political manifestos

The three political parties and a number of independent candidates contested the 2026 general election, with approximately 130 nominations across the 41 constituencies on nomination day, 16 April 2026. The principal national competitors were the governing PLP and the opposition FNM, both contesting all 41 seats. The COI contested 40 of 41 constituencies, having not nominated a candidate in MICAL (Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay).

Party manifestos diverged on tone and emphasis but converged on a number of issues: the cost of living; the economy and jobs; crime and public safety; health care; housing; immigration management; education; and governance and transparency. The PLP campaigned around its 'Blueprint for Progress', emphasising continuity and delivery on its 2021 commitments. The FNM campaigned on a 'reset' message, prioritising health care, immigration control, implementation of the Freedom of Information Act, reform of the National Lottery and broader economic reform. The COI focused on immigration, anti-corruption and 'Bahamian-first' economic policy. Despite the presence of three parties and several independents, the 2026 election was widely regarded as a two-party contest between the PLP and the FNM.

Figure 2.1 COG Chair the Hon Bruce Golding meets with the Rt Hon Philip Davis, Prime Minister of the Bahamas and Party Leader of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)



2.4.1 Independent candidacies

A distinctive feature of the 2026 campaign was the independent candidacy of former Prime Minister Hubert Minnis in Killarney, the constituency he had held since 2007. Dr Minnis, who led the FNM into government in 2017 and into opposition in 2021, severed ties with the party after the FNM's National Council ratified Michela Barnett-Ellis as the party's standard-bearer for Killarney. Mr Minnis told the press that he had been 'abandoned' by the FNM and noted that no former Prime Minister had previously broken with the party they had once led to contest as an independent in The Bahamas. Two further independent candidates of note contested specific constituencies: former MP Frederick McAlpine in Pineridge and MP Leroy Major in Southern Shores. The Group was informed that these candidacies were viewed across the political spectrum as a test of the wider direction of the FNM and of personal loyalty in Bahamian politics.

2.5 Political code of conduct

There is no established practice in The Bahamas of a written political code of conduct being signed by political parties or candidates ahead of a general election. Expected conduct is instead embedded in the statutory framework, including the Parliamentary Elections Act and its subsidiary instruments, which prohibit bribery, treating, undue influence, intimidation, improper campaign materials, impersonation, interference with ballot papers and breaches of ballot secrecy. The Parliamentary Elections Act 1992 (as consolidated) further provides for election petitions and allows an election to be challenged where bribery, treating, intimidation, misconduct or non-compliance with electoral law may have affected the result.

The Group noted that the absence of a written code of conduct meant there was no agreed framework for the public expression of campaign norms, no formal mechanism for the resolution of campaign disputes outside the courts and no agreed pre-poll commitment to accept results. The Group urges the contesting parties, civil society and the media to facilitate the development and signing of such a code ahead of the next general election.

Table 2.1. Results of key elections, 1972–2026

Year	Turnout	PLP (seats / % / Prime Minister candidate)	FNM (seats / % / Prime Minister candidate)	Third parties (seats / %)
2026	TBC	33 / Philip Davis	8 / Michael Pintard	-
2021	64.91%	32 / 52.59% / Philip Davis	7 / 36.45% / Hubert Minnis	-
2017	88.35%	4 / 36.94% / Perry Christie	35 / 56.99% / Hubert Minnis	-
2012	90.78%	29 / 48.62% / Perry Christie	9 / 42.09% / Hubert Ingraham	-
2007	92.11%	18 / 46.96% / Perry Christie	23 / 49.85% / Hubert Ingraham	-
2002	90.18%	29 / 51.78% / Perry Christie	7 / 40.87% / Tommy Turnquest	Ind. 4 / 4.85%
1997	93.17%	6 / 41.90% / Perry Christie	34 / 57.70% / Hubert Ingraham	-
1992	91.14%	16 / 44.85% / Lynden Pindling	33 / 55.15% / Hubert Ingraham	-
1987	87.89%	31 / 53.54% / Lynden Pindling	16 / 43.21% / Kendal Isaacs	Ind. 2 / 3.12%
1982	89.75%	32 / 56.86% / Lynden Pindling	11 / 41.13% / Kendal Isaacs	-
1977	88.6%	30 / 54.74% / Lynden Pindling	2 / 15.59% / C. Wallace-Whitfield	BDP 6 / 26.9% Ind. 0 / 2.7%
1972	87.98%	29 / 59.00% / Lynden Pindling	9 / 39.30% / C. Wallace-Whitfield	-

BDP = Bahamas Democratic Party.

Note: The highlighted row indicates the 2026 general election. Seats won, popular vote share and Prime Minister candidate are shown where data is available at the time of the writing of this Report. Final certified turnout for the 2026 election will be issued by the PRD.

2.6 Election outcomes and implications

The COG noted that, in his victory address at Clifford Park on the night of 12 May 2026, Prime Minister Philip Davis described the result as a mandate to continue the PLP's programme of government, with a particular emphasis on housing, public safety, energy and the cost of living. The Prime Minister explicitly acknowledged the low voter turnout in the election, stating that it was 'not good for democracy' and pledging that more must be done to ensure every Bahamian felt their ballot mattered.

The COG further noted FNM leader Michael Pintard's concession address from FNM headquarters in Freeport, delivered approximately four hours after the close of polls, in which he accepted the result and indicated that future leadership questions would be considered through the party's convention process. The COG observed that the FNM secured one additional seat compared to 2021, but that its Chair, Dr Duane Sands, lost in Bamboo Town, and its Deputy Leader, Shanendon Cartwright, lost the newly created St James constituency. Former Prime Minister Hubert Minnis was decisively defeated in Killarney by FNM candidate Michela Barnett-Ellis. The COI did not win any seats, although its leader Lincoln Bain ran a competitive race in Pinewood. Nine women were elected to the new 41-member House of Assembly — seven from the PLP and two from the FNM — an increase on the 2021 outcome. Prime Minister Davis is the first incumbent Bahamian Prime Minister to lead his party to a second consecutive term since 1997.

2.7 Recommendations

- A code of political conduct should be established, to which all political parties and candidates would be invited to subscribe to establish campaign norms and provide a mechanism for resolving campaign disputes.

3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration

3.1 System of government

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democratic system of government modelled on the Westminster system, with His Majesty King Charles III as Head of State, represented in The Bahamas by the Governor-General, and the Prime Minister as Head of Government. The 1973 Constitution (as amended) is the supreme law of the land and establishes The Bahamas as a sovereign democratic state in which sovereignty is vested in the people, who exercise their power of choice of government during general elections to the House of Assembly. These elections are an expression of the will of the people. The Prime Minister may advise the Governor-General to dissolve Parliament and call general elections within the constitutional framework, and elections are not therefore conducted on fixed dates.

3.2 Legislative framework

The core legislative and regulatory framework applicable to the 2026 general election comprises both domestic law and international conventions, charters and agreements that The Bahamas has ratified or consented to.

Domestic laws are as follows.

- Constitution of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas (Bahamas Independence Order 1973, as amended);
- Parliamentary Elections Act, Ch. 7 (as amended), including Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 2025, which introduced the legal framework for biometric voter cards;
- Parliamentary Elections Rules;
- Parliamentary Elections (Polling Divisions) Order 2026;
- House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Redistribution of Seats Order 2026 (S.I. No. 5 of 2026);
- Supreme Court Act;
- Broadcasting Act and the Communications Act;
- Data Protection (Privacy of Personal Information) Act, Ch. 324A, and, where in force, Data Protection Act 2025;
- Freedom of Information Act 2017;
- Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act 2014.

The Bahamas has committed itself to several international principles and has ratified treaties and conventions that set out standards for democratic elections. These include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD);

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Inter-American Democratic Charter;
- CARICOM Charter of Civil Society;
- Commonwealth Charter (2012) and Commonwealth Harare Declaration (1991);
- United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

The Parliamentary Elections Act, Ch. 7, is the principal legislative instrument governing general elections. It includes subsidiary instruments dealing with registration, polling, counting and election petitions. The most significant recent legislative development is the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 2025, which introduced the legal framework for biometric voter cards and a biometric elections register, on an optional basis alongside the existing paper voter card. The Group also notes the House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Redistribution of Seats Order 2026 (S.I. No. 5 of 2026), which increased the number of constituencies from 39 to 41 and revised several existing boundaries.

The Group considers that the constitutional and legislative framework generally provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections. Stakeholders consulted by the Group generally regarded the framework as stable and sufficiently clear, and indicated that fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, movement and association were respected during the 2026 electoral process. However, several stakeholders observed that the framework remained fragmented across multiple statutes and subsidiary instruments and would benefit from consolidation and modernisation, and that electoral laws and procedural guidance were not always readily accessible to ordinary voters in user-friendly formats. As previous COGs have noted, a number of structural and legislative gaps remain unresolved, including the absence of a fully independent election management body, of statutory regulation and registration of political parties and of campaign finance legislation.

Figure 3.1 The COG speaks with security personnel on election day



3.3 Executive

The Governor-General is the representative of His Majesty the King in The Bahamas. The current Governor-General, the Most Hon. Dame Cynthia A. Pratt, was appointed in 2023. The Governor-General appoints as Prime Minister the member of the House of Assembly who, in the Governor-General's judgement, commands the support of the largest group of members of the House. The Governor-General also formally dissolves Parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister, issues the writs of election, gives assent to bills, appoints the members of the Cabinet on the advice of the Prime Minister and appoints the Leader of the Opposition. The Governor-General further appoints, on the advice of the Public Service Commission, the Parliamentary Commissioner, who heads the PRD.

3.4 Parliament

The Bahamas has a bicameral legislature consisting of the directly elected House of Assembly (the lower house) and the 16-member appointed Senate (the upper house). Both chambers sit for five-year terms.

3.4.1 House of Assembly

Following the boundary revision of January 2026, the House of Assembly comprises 41 members elected from single-member constituencies through the first-past-the-post electoral system, increased from 39 seats at the dissolution of the previous Parliament. The leader of the party commanding the highest number of seats is appointed Prime Minister by the Governor-General and forms a government. To be eligible to stand as a candidate, a person must be a citizen of The Bahamas of at least 21 years of age and must have ordinarily resided in The Bahamas for a period of not less than one year immediately preceding nomination, subject to the constitutional disqualifications set out in Article 48 of the Constitution. Voters in each constituency elect one representative, with the candidate receiving the highest number of valid votes declared elected.

3.4.2 Senate

The 16-member Senate is appointed by the Governor-General: nine senators 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. Senators must be at least 30 years of age and meet the same citizenship and residency requirements as members of the House of Assembly. The Senate is the upper chamber and reviews legislation passed by the House of Assembly. 'Money bills' may originate only in the House of Assembly. The President of the Senate is elected by senators.

3.5 Judiciary

The basis of the Bahamian legal system is the English common law tradition. The judiciary is led by the Chief Justice, who is appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The judicial system comprises the Supreme Court (which sits as the High Court for first-instance matters), the Court of Appeal and the Magistracy. The Judicial and Legal Service Commission, chaired by the Chief Justice, advises on judicial appointments. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London serves as the final appellate court for civil and criminal matters. An Election Court, comprising Supreme Court judges, is convened as required to hear election petitions, in accordance with Part VII of the Parliamentary Elections Act. The Group noted that stakeholders generally expressed confidence in the professionalism and independence of the judiciary.

3.6 Election architecture

3.6.1 Complaints and election disputes

The Constitution and the Parliamentary Elections Act establish detailed mechanisms for the resolution of electoral disputes. Article 51 of the Constitution provides for an Election Court with jurisdiction to determine questions concerning the validity of elections to, and membership of, the House of Assembly. Part VII of the Parliamentary Elections Act governs the qualifications, grounds and procedures for election petitions, including standing, timelines, evidentiary requirements and appeals.

Election petitions may be brought by voters and by candidates within a prescribed period after the declaration of results. Grounds include bribery, treating, undue influence, intimidation, misconduct on the part of an election officer and any breach of the electoral law affecting the result. Stakeholders generally indicated confidence in the judiciary, but raised concerns about the practical accessibility, cost and timeliness of election litigation. The Group noted positively that pre-election legal disputes were addressed through constitutional and judicial mechanisms rather than extra-legal means. In *Bahamas Constitution Party et al. v The Hon. Philip Edward Davis et al.* (Supreme Court, 6 May 2026), the applicants sought emergency injunctive relief concerning allegations of irregularities in the voter register. The Court declined to grant the relief sought, reiterating that disputes concerning the validity of elections were ordinarily determined through the specialised election petition process after the conduct of the election. The ruling reinforced the constitutional architecture for electoral adjudication and the judiciary's role in preserving procedural safeguards. The Group also notes that some stakeholders cautioned that heightened pre-election rhetoric about voter fraud and citizenship documentation, if not addressed responsibly, risked undermining public confidence.

Section 80 of the Parliamentary Elections Act establishes the Election Court and provides that its President must be either the Chief Justice or another Justice of the Supreme Court. The Election Court enjoys the same powers, jurisdiction and authority as the Supreme Court, including the power to subpoena witnesses and to punish those found guilty of offences before it. Sections 81 and 82 of the Act stipulate who is eligible to present a petition — voters and candidates in the constituency concerned — and the types of relief that may be claimed, including a declaration that the election of a returned member is void.

Every election petition must be presented within 21 days of the date of the declaration of results. The Election Court may, on application, grant leave to amend a petition within a further 28 days of its presentation. Petitions are determined by the Election Court at first instance, with appeals available on points of law. There is no separate constitutional court for election matters; the Election Court is composed of judges of the Supreme Court sitting in their judicial capacity. As at the cut-off of this report, no election petition had been filed in relation to the 12 May 2026 General Election; the 21-day window for filing remained open.

3.6.2 Electoral offences

Electoral offences are set out in the Parliamentary Elections Act and include bribery, treating, undue influence, intimidation, personation, printing or distributing campaign materials without the prescribed imprint, knowingly making false statements about the personal character or conduct of a candidate, interference with ballot papers, breaches of ballot secrecy and offences by election officials including failure to follow prescribed procedures. The Act further prohibits the setting-up of campaign tents or activity within 100 yards of any building in which a polling station is situated on election day.

During the campaign period, the Group heard allegations of vote-related inducements in some constituencies, including reports of the distribution of 'Dorian relief' vouchers and other government payments to specific communities in close proximity to election day. While the Group was not in a position to verify these allegations, the Group noted the long-standing recommendation — reiterated by the 2026 COG in its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026 — for the enactment of campaign finance legislation. The Group also notes that the Royal Bahamas Police Force was visible at polling stations and acted professionally and unobtrusively. The Group did not receive credible reports of intimidation or violence directed at candidates, party workers, electors or media during the period of its deployment.

3.6.3 Parliamentary Registration Department

The PRD is responsible for voter registration and the administration of elections in The Bahamas. It is a central government department under the portfolio responsibility of the Minister of National Security. It is headed by the Parliamentary Commissioner, who is appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Public Service Commission. The Parliamentary Elections Act provides that the Parliamentary Commissioner and every deputy commissioner shall be public officers and sets out the Department's core responsibilities, including maintenance of the voter register and the conduct of elections. The 2026 elections were administered by the substantive Parliamentary Commissioner appointed ahead of the cycle, addressing the immediate concern raised by previous COGs about acting commissioners shortly before polling.

In its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026, the COG reiterated long-standing concerns about the absence of an independent body to control and manage the electoral system. The Group noted that, on every election observer mission conducted in The Bahamas, strident allegations had been made, primarily but not only by opposition parties, of partisan bias in the management of the electoral process. While the Group has not been able to validate these allegations, it is firmly of the view that the independent and impartial control and management of the electoral system would play a significant role in strengthening and fostering public confidence in the democratic process. Almost a quarter century has passed since the last referendum on the question of an independent electoral commission. The 2026 COG considers that sufficient time has passed for this issue to be revisited and reiterates the 2017 and 2021 recommendations for the establishment of an independent election management body. The Commonwealth Secretariat has indicated that it stands ready to provide technical support to this end.

Stakeholders consulted by the Group generally acknowledged the professionalism of polling staff but reiterated concerns regarding the institutional independence of the PRD and the need for transparent appointment procedures and security of tenure for the Parliamentary Commissioner. Stakeholders also expressed concern about limited engagement with political parties, civil society and the media on key operational decisions, particularly in the lead-up to and during the advanced poll on 30 April 2026.

Figure 3.2 Members of the COG meet with Parliamentary Registration Department officials while on deployment in Grand Bahama



3.6.4 Boundary delimitation

Article 70 of the Constitution provides for the review of constituency boundaries at intervals of not more than five years, by a Constituencies Commission established under Article 69. The Commission is chaired by the Speaker of the House of Assembly and includes a Supreme Court justice, two members of the House of Assembly appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister and one member appointed on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. The Commission is required to take into account the number of registered voters, geographical considerations and the needs of sparsely populated areas.

In January 2026, the House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Redistribution of Seats Order 2026 (S.I. No. 5 of 2026) divided The Bahamas into 41 constituencies — 25 in New Providence, five in Grand Bahama and 11 in the Family Islands — by creating two new constituencies (St James, and Bimini and Berry Islands) and revising several existing boundaries. The Parliamentary Elections (Polling Divisions) Order 2026 followed in March 2026. The Constituencies Commission cited the size of several existing electorates, including Killarney, and West Grand Bahama, and Bimini, as the basis for the new seats. The report of the Constituencies Commission was signed by all members of the Commission and tabled and debated in Parliament.

Notwithstanding the constitutional framework, the COG in its 14 May 2026 Interim Statement noted that the composition of the Constituencies Commission, responsible for the delimitation, was tilted in favour of the ruling party, and that the delimitation of constituencies under this arrangement had the potential to confer an unfair advantage in election outcomes. The Group further notes that, under Article 70, the Prime Minister retains the authority to modify or amend the draft boundaries order before it is laid before Parliament, raising additional questions about insulation from political influence. The Group also heard concerns from stakeholders that public understanding of the boundary changes was uneven, particularly in newly created or significantly redrawn constituencies, and that the timing of the boundaries order in close proximity to the election affected voter familiarity.

The Group noted that the report of the Constituencies Commission was signed by all members of the Commission and subsequently tabled and debated in Parliament. However, some stakeholders raised concerns regarding the independence of the Commission given that the composition was tilted in favour of the government of the day.

3.6.5 Voter registration

Under Article 71 of the Constitution, a person is qualified to be registered as a voter if they are a citizen of The Bahamas of at least 18 years of age, are not subject to any legal incapacity and have ordinarily resided in The Bahamas for at least one year immediately preceding the date of registration or have had a place of residence in the constituency for at least three months. Registration is carried out by the PRD in accordance with the Parliamentary Elections Act, which has provided since the 2020 amendment for a continuous voter register. Sections 21 to 25 of the Act set out procedures for claims, objections and corrections, supported by prescribed forms (including Form E and Form F).

The Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 2025 introduced the legal framework for an optional biometric voter card and a biometric elections register, alongside the existing paper voter card. As at April 2026, the PRD reported that more than 209,000 voters were registered for the election. The COG commended the PRD in its Interim Statement for work undertaken to remove the names of deceased persons from the register and to introduce the biometric voter card. The Group noted, however, that several stakeholders had raised concerns regarding ambiguities surrounding the transition between the paper and biometric voter cards, and that the Group had also received complaints of alleged omissions from the register and the misplacement of voters in constituencies. The pre-election period also saw litigation, in *Bahamas Constitution Party et al. v The Hon. Philip Edward Davis et al.* (Supreme Court, 6 May 2026), in which the applicants raised allegations relating to the integrity of the register. The Court declined the emergency relief sought on the basis that questions concerning the validity of elections fall to be determined through the election petition process.

Section 26 of the Parliamentary Elections Act stipulates that it is the duty of the Parliamentary Commissioner to keep at all times, and make open for inspection, a copy of the register, with alterations to be made within seven days (or 14 days for alterations to Family Island registrations).

The Group understands that the public was not provided with a copy of the certified register until close to the eve of polling. This had the practical effect of limiting any systematic or actionable review of the list by political parties, civil society or individual voters in advance of polling day. The Group was told by the FNM that the names of as many as 15,000 persons who had registered were omitted from the voters

list. The Group was unable to verify this claim but wishes to underscore the importance of preparedness, transparency and scrutiny regarding the voter register, and the need to avoid any perception — justified or otherwise — of impropriety or maladministration. The 2026 general election was the second conducted under the continuous voter register introduced by the 2020 amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act.

3.6.6 Candidate eligibility and nomination

Article 48 of the Constitution sets out the criteria for eligibility and disqualification for election to the House of Assembly. A candidate must be a citizen of The Bahamas of at least 21 years of age and must have ordinarily resided in The Bahamas for a period of not less than one year immediately before nomination. Disqualifications include voluntary citizenship of, or allegiance to, a foreign power; bankruptcy or unsoundness of mind; service as a senator, a member of the armed forces or police; awaiting capital punishment or serving a custodial sentence longer than one year; responsibility for any aspect of the conduct or administration of the election in which the person is standing; and undeclared interests in a government contract.

Nominations for the 2026 general election were received on 16 April 2026. Aspiring candidates were required to complete the prescribed nomination form, lodge a statutory declaration of qualifications and pay the prescribed deposit, with their nomination supported by the prescribed number of registered voters in the relevant constituency. More than 130 candidates were nominated to contest the 41 constituencies. The Group noted that there is no statutory framework for the registration of political parties in The Bahamas; parties function as voluntary associations and are recognised through their nomination of candidates.

3.6.7 Voter education

The PRD has primary responsibility for voter and civic education. Ahead of the 2026 general election, the PRD provided information regarding voter registration, advanced polling, election day procedures and polling station locations through its website (elections.gov.bs), traditional broadcast and print media, and social media. The Group commends the deployment of clearer signage and information desk officers at a number of polling locations on election day, which assisted voters in identifying their correct polling division.

Nonetheless, stakeholders consulted by the Group consistently highlighted the need for enhanced voter and civic education. Concerns were raised that official educational materials were not always accessible, particularly for first-time voters, PWDs and residents in the more remote Family Islands. Stakeholders also indicated that greater use could be made of digital platforms, simplified explanatory materials and sustained public outreach programmes outside of election periods, and that the continued non-operationalisation of the Freedom of Information Act 2017 limited public access to official information.

3.6.8 Advanced polling

The Bahamas has a longstanding provision for an advanced poll, set out in Section 54 of the Parliamentary Elections Act, which enables senior citizens, members of the uniformed services, election officials, special voters, the judiciary, students abroad, persons travelling abroad on election day and Bahamians on diplomatic postings overseas to exercise their franchise ahead of election day. The advanced poll for the 2026 general election was held on 30 April 2026. Overseas voting took place at 13 Bahamian missions abroad. The Group commends The Bahamas for the long-standing provision of an advanced poll and notes with appreciation the high level of voter participation, which the PRD has described as unprecedented.

However, the Group is concerned about the operational and logistical challenges that were widely reported during the advanced poll, including insufficient polling stations; extended waiting times at several stations, requiring them to remain open well beyond the scheduled close; instances in which elderly voters were subject to prolonged exposure to the elements; and confusion regarding voter assignment. The Group also took note of reports of some confrontational incidents at advanced polling locations.

3.6.9 Recruitment and training of election staff

The recruitment of polling staff is the responsibility of returning officers in each constituency. Section 48(3) of the Parliamentary Elections Act provides that polling clerks shall, so far as is practicable, be public officers and shall not in any event be persons who have been employed by or on behalf of a candidate. Returning officers are drawn from the senior ranks of the public service. The PRD conducted training of polling staff ahead of the 2026 general election, both in person and through training manuals. The Group commends polling officials for the professionalism and courtesy with which they discharged their duties on election day. Where minor procedural inconsistencies were observed, these did not, in the view of the Group, materially affect the integrity of the process. Inconsistencies were observed in the sealing of envelopes and ballot boxes, including the application of stickers, zip ties and wax.

Concerns were raised by some stakeholders about the appointment of political activists as polling officials. The Group noted with appreciation that a high proportion of polling officials and party agents observed on election day were women.

3.7 Recommendations

- An independent body needs to be established by legislation, to be responsible for the control and management of the voter registration process and the conduct of elections
- Future boundary delimitation exercises should incorporate broader public consultation, the timely publication of proposals and clearer public explanations of delimitation criteria.
- A complete enumeration exercise, including measures to verify the addresses of voters, should be conducted across all The Bahamas islands to refresh the current voters list, having regard to the fact that the last such exercise was carried out more than 10 years ago.
- Prior to its certification, a preliminary register of voters should be published, including posting on the Parliamentary Registration Department (PRD) website to enable registered voters to verify that their names appear on the register and are placed in the correct constituency with sufficient time and appropriate arrangements for discrepancies to be rectified.
- The paper voter card should be retired and the biometric voter card, which is far more secure, efficient and durable, should be made a requirement for future elections.
- The PRD should maintain and annually update lists of putative and reserve polling staff, and recruitment procedures should be transparent and merit-based, with explicit consideration of a gender and regional balance, supported by consistent training of polling officials, including reserves.
- Political parties should be provided with the list of polling officials and the location of polling stations as early as possible before the day of the election.
- The government should ensure the PRD is provided with adequate resources and support to fully discharge its statutory mandate throughout the election cycle.
- As soon as possible after a general election has been held, the PRD should undertake a comprehensive review of the preparation for and execution of the election procedures to identify errors that may have been made, and weaknesses that might have negatively impacted its conduct, and to determine appropriate corrective actions for future elections.

4. Participation and Inclusion

This chapter summarises the observations of the COG with respect to citizen participation and inclusion in the 2026 general election, and the opportunities and challenges for citizens, civil society, women, youth and PWDs. Along with the legal framework, the socio-political context in The Bahamas requires examination, to enable an understanding of the participation and inclusion of citizens in elections.

4.1 Legal framework for political inclusion and participation

The legal framework for political participation in The Bahamas is grounded principally in the Constitution and the Parliamentary Elections Act. The Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms essential for political participation, including freedoms of expression, assembly, movement and association, and the right to vote. The Parliamentary Elections Act regulates voter registration, candidacy, polling, counting and election petitions. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act 2014 provides specific protections for political participation by PWDs, in line with The Bahamas' obligations under the CRPD.

The Bahamas is also party to the ICCPR, CEDAW, ICERD, the CRPD and the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society, all of which set out commitments relevant to inclusive political participation. The Group observed that the legal framework generally allowed political parties, candidates and civil society organisations to participate freely in the electoral process. The Bahamas does not currently employ legislated gender quotas, reserved seats or affirmative action measures for women, youth or other groups in Parliament or local government, and there is no formal regime for the protection of national minorities in elected political life.

4.2 Political inclusion and participation

The Group met with and heard from civil society, including women's and youth groups, human rights groups, PWD and disability advocacy organisations, religious groups, academia, the media, the PRD, the Royal Bahamas Police Force and political parties. The general prevailing consensus among Bahamians, and as observed by the Group, is that the electoral environment was conducive to political activity. This was also evidenced by energetic campaigning by all three parties — the PLP, the FNM and the COI — as well as by independent candidates including former Prime Minister Hubert Minnis in Killarney. Notwithstanding complaints by the opposition about aspects of pre-election administration, the political environment was largely viewed by stakeholders as favourable for the inclusion and participation of citizens. The Group did not observe or receive credible reports of barriers to political participation based on ethnicity or religion.

4.2.1 Women's political inclusion

Women participated actively in the 2026 general election as voters, candidates, campaign organisers, polling officials, party agents, journalists and civil society advocates. The Group observed that a high proportion of polling officials and party agents at the polling stations visited were women, and that women were highly visible in community-level political mobilisation.

Nonetheless, stakeholders and women's advocacy groups remain underrepresented in elected office. Nine women were returned to the new 41-member House of Assembly — seven from the PLP and two from the FNM — representing approximately 22 per cent of the House. This is broadly comparable to the 2021 outcome, when seven of the 32 PLP MPs (18 per cent of the House) were women, and is below the one-third of women in elected positions that is considered by organisations such as UN Women to be a minimum threshold for critical mass and meaningful influence. The representation of women is also below the Caribbean average. The Group noted that, of the three party leaders, none was a woman, and that women remain underrepresented in leadership and senior decision-making positions within political party hierarchies.

Stakeholders and women's advocacy groups highlighted persistent barriers affecting women's political participation, including unequal access to campaign financing and donor networks, online harassment and misogynistic rhetoric, disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, limited institutional support within

political parties and the placement of women candidates in constituencies perceived as unwinnable rather than in competitive seats. Stakeholders further noted that women candidates were frequently subjected to heightened scrutiny regarding family life and personal conduct in ways not similarly applied to male candidates. The COG in its 14 May 2026 Interim Statement noted the continuing under-representation of women among candidates contesting the election for two of the three political parties and encouraged all political parties to take deliberate steps to advance women's political participation, in line with the country's national and international commitments.

4.2.2 Persons with disabilities

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act 2014 and The Bahamas' commitments under the CRPD provide a legal and normative framework for the protection of the rights of PWDs, including the right to political participation. Section 26 of the 2014 Act provides for assisted voting and other accommodations. The Parliamentary Elections Act provides for assistance to be given to voters with physical incapacity, including blindness, and the 2020 amendments to the Act expanded eligibility for the advanced poll to include PWDs and persons aged 65 years or older.

The Group observed that PWDs, elderly voters and pregnant women were given priority at some of the polling stations observed, including through designated seating outside polling stations and fast-tracked access. The Group commends polling officials for the willingness they generally demonstrated to assist voters requiring accommodation. However, the Group also noted that such accommodations were not uniformly applied across polling stations, that some polling locations presented accessibility challenges for persons with mobility impairments and that assistive voting tools — such as tactile ballot templates for visually impaired voters — were not consistently available. Stakeholders representing PWDs indicated that consultation with disability advocacy organisations on electoral planning could be strengthened.

4.2.3 Youth

Young people were visible throughout the 2026 electoral process as voters, campaign volunteers, digital organisers, polling staff and civil society participants. The Group observed that political parties made extensive use of social media to engage younger voters.

However, the Group heard from stakeholders — including young persons themselves — that youth participation often remained concentrated at the level of campaign mobilisation rather than at the level of substantive decision-making and candidacy. Stakeholders noted that younger persons continued to face challenges accessing leadership opportunities within established political structures, and that political advancement was perceived as being heavily dependent on partisan networks. Stakeholders emphasised the need for sustained civic education, youth leadership development and meaningful pathways for youth engagement beyond campaign mobilisation and election cycles. The COG in its 14 May 2026 Interim Statement referenced the need to deepen youth confidence and participation in democratic and electoral institutions and processes, and recommended that measures be considered to promote greater civic participation, including through partnerships with civil society, schools and tertiary institutions, and through sustained voter education between elections.

4.2.4 Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations in The Bahamas continue to play an important role in promoting democratic participation, civic awareness, inclusion and public accountability. Stakeholders reported that civil society organisations, faith-based groups, community organisations, women's groups and advocacy networks were generally able to operate freely and engage in public discourse. The Group did not observe or receive credible reports of interference with or intimidation of journalists or civil society representatives during the period of its deployment.

Several civil society organisations nonetheless reported challenges relating to limited funding, capacity constraints and restricted opportunities to engage formally with electoral authorities and political actors. Some stakeholders expressed concern that public discourse during the campaign was at times dominated by partisan

Figure 4.1 The COG meets with stakeholders pre-election



political messaging and by perceptions of close ties between the owners of certain private media houses and the main political parties, making it more difficult for civil society voices to receive equivalent visibility. The Group heard concerns about misinformation on social media and the tone of online discourse, and encourages continued dialogue among media stakeholders, regulators and civil society on responsible online engagement.

4.3 Recommendations

- Robust public voter education campaign utilising traditional and social media should be conducted by the PRD periodically and well in advance of any election period to encourage and facilitate voter registration and participation. The PRD should also intensify its engagement with civil society organisations in order to facilitate continuous voter education, awareness-raising and inclusion advocacy throughout the electoral cycle. The public should have access to the relevant electoral laws and regulations in physical and digital formats.
- All political parties and, where applicable, independent candidates should be afforded access to electoral information, briefings on procedure and any pre-election fora convened for contesting candidates.
- The PRD should collaborate with disabled persons' organisations on the development of a standardised assistive voting protocol, accessible voter education materials in multiple formats and clear instructions in polling manuals.
- Government, political parties, civil society organisations and the media should proactively engage with youth, including through partnerships with schools and tertiary institutions, with a view to expanding civic education, supporting youth leadership and candidacy, and creating meaningful pathways for substantive youth participation in policy development, party governance and electoral reform beyond campaign mobilisation.
- Political parties should take active steps to increase the recruitment, support and promotion of women candidates and their inclusion in leadership positions, including by establishing minimum targets for women's representation as candidates and party executives.

5. The Campaign and the Media

5.1 The campaign

Election campaigns in The Bahamas are governed by the Parliamentary Elections Act 1992 (as amended). Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the election date on 1 April 2026, the campaign for the 2026 general election ran for approximately six weeks. The key dates were as follows.

Table 5.1. Key dates of the 2026 campaign

Activity	Date
Announcement of election date	1 April 2026
Dissolution of Parliament	8 April 2026
Issuance of writs of election	9 April 2026
Nomination day	16 April 2026
Advanced poll	30 April 2026
Election day	12 May 2026

The Group observed that campaigning proceeded smoothly, was largely incident-free and took place without apparent restrictions. In the closing days, rallies and motorcades, accompanied by music and entertainment, were prevalent. The PLP held a mass rally at Clifford Park in Nassau on 9 May, and closed its campaign with a final rally at Montagu Park on 11 May, the eve of the election. The FNM closed its campaign at Savannah Sound Park in Eleuthera on 8 May. The COI campaigned across New Providence in the closing days. The rallies were generally vibrant and well attended. Party supporters assembled and conveyed their messages without hindrance, and the Group received no reports of clashes between supporters of rival parties.

The principal contesting parties were the governing PLP, led by Prime Minister Philip Davis; the opposition FNM, led by Michael Pintard; and the COI, led by Lincoln Bain. The PLP and FNM contested all 41 constituencies. The COI contested 40, having not fielded a candidate in MICAL. A small number of independent candidates contested specific seats.

The Group did, however, hear concerns about perceived use of state resources to influence the vote. The opposition specifically raised concerns about the removal of VAT on grocery items on 1 April, the distribution of 'Dorian relief' vouchers in Abaco valued at between B\$200 and B\$500 in the weeks preceding the election, the state's settlement of electricity bills for qualifying residents on Grand Cay and Moore's Island, and a 37 per cent reduction of electricity bills for residents of Grand Bahama. These concerns are addressed further in Section 5.1.2.

Parties also made extensive use of the media platforms available to them, with a marked increase in social media activity compared with previous cycles. Media consumption habits have trended towards social media and away from print sales and appointment-style broadcast viewing, and party messaging reflected that shift. Social media allowed parties to disseminate content directly without paying for placement; nonetheless, some opposition figures reported difficulty in accessing newspaper advertising. The visibility of large billboards carrying the photographs, messages and colours of all three parties was particularly striking, especially in densely populated constituencies, suggesting substantial campaign spending.

Figure 5.1 Campaign lawn banners for competing parties



5.1.1 Campaign strategies

The manifestos of the three contesting parties converged on a number of issues but diverged in tone and emphasis. The principal policy areas debated on the campaign trail were:

- Cost of living and affordability;
- Crime and public safety;
- Housing and land access;
- Healthcare, including National Health Insurance and Family Island access;
- Jobs, training and economic diversification;
- Immigration and border management;
- Governance, transparency and the Freedom of Information Act 2017;
- Education and youth opportunities.

The PLP launched its campaign in April 2026 at the University of The Bahamas around its 'Blueprint for Progress' platform, presenting the election as a choice for continuity and delivery. The party emphasised that 325 of the 387 commitments made in its 2021 'Blueprint for Change' had been completed or commenced and pointed to a public commitments tracker. The platform set out proposals on immigration enforcement, expanded worker protections, artificial intelligence and digital government, housing, health care, agriculture and Family Island development.

The FNM ran on a 'reset' message, releasing a 54-page manifesto titled 'We Work For You'. The party pledged to remove VAT from everyday essentials, medical costs and educational supplies; introduce a national lottery; build at least 5,000 homes; fully implement the Freedom of Information Act within 90 days of taking office; and recruit 100 doctors and 200 nurses. At its closing rally in Eleuthera, the FNM leader sharpened criticisms of the governing party on national sovereignty, immigration and procurement.

The COI sought to consolidate its position as a credible third-party alternative, focusing on anti-corruption, immigration enforcement and a 'Bahamian-first' economic agenda. The party made gains in candidate visibility compared with 2021. Despite the presence of the COI and a number of independent candidates, the 2026 general election was widely regarded as a contest between the two main parties.

The Group noted that there were no structured debates between the leaders of the parties on the key campaign issues, a practice that allows the population to make a more informed choice.

Figure 5.2 Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) presence and campaign activities



Figure 5.3 Free National Movement (FNM) presence and campaign activities



5.1.2 Campaign financing

The Bahamas does not have a comprehensive campaign finance law. The Parliamentary Elections Act 1992 (as amended) does not regulate political party fundraising, expenditure or disclosure. There are no statutory limits on campaign contributions, no bars on the source of contributions and no requirement for public audits of campaign income and expenditure.

The Public Disclosure Act 1976 (as amended) requires senators and members of the House of Assembly to file annual declarations of assets, income and liabilities with the Public Disclosure Commission. Public reporting indicated that several sitting members were called upon to submit declarations in the period preceding the 2026 general election. Disclosures filed by candidates were published by media houses, with 54 of the more than 130 candidates contesting the election reporting personal net worth above B\$1 million. The most striking declaration was that of a candidate who declared a net worth of B\$469 million — by some distance the largest single declaration of the cycle. The size of that financial position relative to a constituency electorate of approximately 5,300 voters illustrates how rapidly money can out-scale electoral demand in The Bahamas' small-constituency system, and the need for transparency surrounding campaign financing.

That illustration also raises the related question of foreign influence, which may accompany unregulated campaign financing. The relatively small electorate in each constituency creates particular vulnerabilities: a number of constituencies have fewer than 2,000 and on average about 5,000 registered voters, skewing the money-to-voter ratio. New Providence, the most populous island and home to the capital Nassau, holds the largest share of seats and was the centre of the most visible campaign spending. A 'billboard blitz' was evident in many constituencies. The risks of unregulated spending, however, extend to all constituencies.

The absence of a statutory framework was compounded during the 2026 campaign by concerns about state spending, which, the opposition argued, advantaged the governing party. The source and signatories of the 'Dorian relief' vouchers distributed in Abaco became contested in the closing weeks of the campaign. The Group noted that these allegations speak to the long-standing need for a campaign finance framework and a clearer separation between government communication and partisan campaign activity in the pre-election period. In its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026, the COG observed that, 10 years after the recommendation was first made by a COG, its implementation had become more urgent.

5.2 The media landscape

The Bahamian media landscape is shaped by the country's geography, in which Inagua, the southernmost island, is 815 km from Grand Bahama, the most northerly. Inagua is closer to Turks and Caicos, Cuba and Haiti than to Nassau, and Bimini is closer to Florida than to the capital. ZNS — operated by the state-owned Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas — is the only outlet with national reach, providing a vital public service.

The hundreds of islands and cays are covered by more than 30 radio stations, mainly on FM, which carry a more local character. Three privately owned television stations — Our News, Eyewitness News and Jones Communications Network — operate alongside ZNS, which comprises one television and four radio stations. Multichannel cable is also widely available. The principal media houses active in coverage of the 2026 general election are listed below.

Table 5.2. Main media houses, 2026 election

Outlet	Ownership	Primary medium
ZNS / Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas	State	Television, radio, online
The Nassau Guardian	Private	Newspaper, online
The Tribune	Private	Newspaper, online
Eyewitness News Bahamas	Private	Television, online
Our News Bahamas	Private	Television, online
The Bahama Journal	Private	Newspaper, online
Jones Communications Network (JCN)	Private	Television, radio, online

Social media continued its steady growth in the 2026 cycle, with all media houses improving their digital offerings. News is now delivered to consumers instantly and on demand, rather than primarily at appointment viewing times, such as for the evening news bulletin. Digital platforms also serve Bahamians abroad, bringing them into the national conversation in ways not previously available.

Internet penetration is high. According to DataReportal's Digital 2026 report, The Bahamas had approximately 383,000 internet users and 273,000 active social media user identities in late 2025. Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp, TikTok and X were the most widely used platforms for campaign communication, public commentary and mobilisation. The three main parties used these platforms extensively for candidate promotion, issue messaging and rally amplification, alongside door-to-door canvassing, motorcades, town hall meetings and constituency-level events. The Group also noted that political commentary podcasters and social media commentators were active throughout the campaign, with clear indications in many cases as to which party or candidate they supported.

Freedom of the press is respected. Reporters Without Borders' 2026 World Press Freedom Index continued to rank The Bahamas in the upper category of countries for press freedom, although the Index also documented a deteriorating global average score. The Group did not observe or receive credible reports of physical attacks on, or intimidation of, journalists during the campaign or on election day.

Figure 5.4 Members of the media gather for the delivery of the COG's interim statement



5.2.1 Laws governing media operations

Media operations in The Bahamas are governed by constitutional provisions, statutory laws and codes of practice. Content standards are under the oversight of the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA).

Freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, is protected under Article 23(1) of the Constitution. Bahamians have the constitutional right to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. The Communications Act 2009 is the primary statute regulating broadcasting, telecommunications and carriage services; it sets the framework for content regulation, licensing and competition. The Broadcasting Act 1956 governs the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas. The Penal Code (Article 498) creates a misdemeanour offence of publishing false news with intent to cause public disturbance. The Data Protection (Privacy of Personal Information) Act 2003 sets the regulations for handling

of personal data, and the Computer Misuse Act 2003 addresses cybercrime, including unauthorised access to or modification of computer data. The Freedom of Information Act 2017 provides the public with a legal right to request access to records held by public authorities, although the Act's public access provisions remain pending full operationalisation. There is currently no legislation specifically regulating artificial intelligence.

Election period broadcast content is regulated principally through the Code of Practice for Content Regulation — ECS 78/2024 — published by URCA in December 2024. Part 6 of the revised Code sets the standards applicable to political broadcasts and political advertisements before and during a general election. The election period for these purposes begins with the dissolution of Parliament and ends at the close of poll. During the election period, political broadcasts and political advertisements are permitted only up to midnight on the day before polling day. On polling day, paid political advertisements, paid political programmes and guest appearances by political candidates or party representatives are restricted.

A notable change introduced by the revised Code is the relaxation of the previous 'election silence' rule to permit broadcast discussion and analysis of election and referendum issues on polling days, subject to principles of accuracy, balance and impartiality — a change URCA introduced on the basis that licensed media being silent while social media remained unregulated risked allowing online disinformation to go rebutted. The revised Code also strengthens provisions on the protection of young audiences, on synthetic and artificial intelligence-generated content and on accessibility. On 9 April 2026, URCA issued a Public Notice reminding broadcast licensees of their Part 6 obligations in preparation for the advanced poll and election day.

5.2.2 Media bodies

The Bahamas does not currently have an active, comprehensive professional self-regulatory body for the media equipped with an enforceable code for the coverage of elections. The closest equivalent is the Bahamas Press Club, but this does not function as a comprehensive protector of journalists' interests — particularly for those in the state sector, who operate under perceptions of pro-government bias and concerns about job security if their coverage is perceived as unfavourable to the government of the day. In the Group's view, the establishment of such a body is overdue. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of journalists working in the Government Information Services in any future professional framework. This may be a productive area for technical co-operation from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The 2021 COG recommended the creation of an independent media association supported by a media code of conduct for election coverage. This recommendation remains outstanding. The 2026 COG in its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026 reiterated it, encouraging private media to consider the creation of such an association and the development of a media code of conduct that would foster greater accountability, fair election coverage and protections for vulnerable journalists at state media entities.

Comparatively modest pay in the profession also leaves journalists vulnerable to recruitment into well-remunerated political communications roles in the public sector, an avenue that both main parties have used over the years. The Group also notes that the Director of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister concurrently holds the equivalent role for the governing PLP — an arrangement that, in the Group's view, undermines public confidence in the separation of party and state. In the absence of a comprehensive professional association, URCA remains the principal body to which compliance complaints regarding licensed broadcasters can be directed, under Part 10 of the Code of Practice for Content Regulation. The appointment, subsequent to the 2026 election, of the General Manager of the Broadcasting Corporation as a government senator, without his relinquishing his post, is likely to undermine any claim by the corporation to transparency and impartiality.

5.2.3 Media coverage of the elections campaign

In the Group's overall assessment, media coverage of the 2026 general election campaign generally reflected a politically diverse range of views. From the broadcasts the Group was able to follow during its observation period, news packages featured contributors from across the contesting parties, alongside voices representing youth, PWDs, first-time voters and others.

The media provided coverage of party manifestos, candidate ratifications and pledges, debates on social and economic issues, allegations made among parties, and the launches and closing events of the campaigns. The PRD used radio, television, print media and online platforms to disseminate voter information, including registration deadlines, polling station details and the conduct of the advanced poll.

As in 2017 and 2021, perceptions of imbalance in state broadcaster coverage persisted. Several interlocutors indicated to the Group that pro-government stories tended to dominate ZNS news cycles, although the broadcasts the Group followed in the days immediately preceding the election appeared more balanced than the perception suggested. The 2026 COG in its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026 took note of some disquiet surrounding governance arrangements at the Broadcasting Corporation in the period leading up to the election and reiterated the 2021 recommendation that the state broadcaster ensure equitable access and balanced coverage of all political parties and candidates during an election period. The Group encourages the development of a clear and enforceable regulatory framework to this end.

The Group also received reports about close relationships between the owners of some private media houses and the main political parties, and about perceptions of biased reporting that those relationships created. In October 2025, the publisher of *The Tribune*, Robert Dupuch-Carron, publicly sought the PLP's nomination for the MICAL constituency before subsequently withdrawing in January 2026, citing potential conflicts of interest with a company he had founded. The Group noted that the day before the election Mr Carron had published an op-ed with the title, 'Why the PLP deserves your vote and a second term'. The Group does not draw any conclusion on the editorial conduct of *The Tribune* in that period, but notes that the episode illustrates the wider stakeholder concern about the proximity of media ownership to partisan politics. The Group encourages continued dialogue among media owners, journalists, regulators and civil society on editorial transparency, particularly during election periods.

Concerns were also raised by stakeholders about misinformation on social media, the absence of editorial filters on much online content, the tone of online discourse and the artificial amplification of partisan material. URCA's revised Code applies to online content under the editorial control of licensed broadcasters, but a substantial volume of social media activity — including content originated by independent commentators, party supporters and overseas-based accounts — falls outside formal broadcast regulation. The increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence-generated content, including the potential for deepfake images and videos depicting candidates in compromising scenarios, presents an emerging challenge for which social media is a poor editorial filter. The Group encourages continued dialogue among media stakeholders, regulators and civil society on responsible online engagement, and underscores the importance of digital and civic literacy, particularly for young and first-time voters.

5.2.4 Media coverage of election day

Across the principal broadcast and print outlets, election day coverage provided a comprehensive picture of voting across the archipelago, capturing supporters of all three parties as well as special groups, including youth, first-time voters and PWDs. Television and radio stations provided live coverage from polling stations, captured a cross-section of voter sentiment, and reported on the opening of stations, voter turnout, party agents' reports, the close of polls and the unofficial tabulation of results. Print and digital outlets — including *The Nassau Guardian*, *The Tribune*, *Eyewitness News Bahamas* and *Our News* — provided rolling online coverage and constituency-by-constituency results as returning officers reported. On election night, ZNS and *Our News* carried rolling coverage with in-studio analysts.

The citizens of The Bahamas are to be commended for respecting the work of the media and journalists. The Group received no reports of attacks on, or intimidation of, the media on polling day. Where party agents, voters or party officials sought to raise concerns — including in relation to the advanced poll — they generally did so through the media or directly with the PRD.

The Group does note one significant shortcoming in official communications. The PRD informed the Group that it retained the services of two professional public relations firms, but the Group's observation, supported by feedback from media practitioners, is that this has not been reflected in the quality or

timeliness of the Department's communications. Three days after the close of polls, the PRD website continued to display results from the 2021 general election rather than the preliminary 2026 results. While awaiting the issuance of certified results, the Department should have published the preliminary results promptly; by the time the website was updated, the public, the parties and the candidates had long since moved on.

5.3 Recommendations

- Legislation should be enacted to regulate campaign financing, including the registration of political parties, contributions, expenditure and reporting requirements.
- The Freedom of Information Act 2017 should be fully operationalised and implemented, including through the development of regulations and the adequate resourcing of the Office of the Information Commissioner. This is with a view to strengthening public access to official information and democratic accountability.
- Civil society, academia, the media and the contesting political parties should facilitate the organisation of structured leaders' debates ahead of future general elections on the principal issues of public interest, with a view to enabling voters to make a more informed choice.
- Appropriate regulations should be established to ensure equitable access to the media, including state media, for all political parties and candidates, including independent candidates, during election periods. This pertains to campaign coverage, interviews and advertisements.
- Media professionals should consider establishing an independent media association and developing a media code of conduct for election coverage, in order to complement the existing regulatory framework administered by the Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority and strengthen self-regulation and professional standards across the sector.
- The government should ensure a clear and visible separation between the office of the Director of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister and any equivalent role within a political party.

6. Voting, Counting and Results Transmission

The 12 May 2026 general election was conducted using the certified voter register issued by the PRD, which had recorded more than 209,000 registered electors as at April 2026. The poll was held in 41 newly delineated constituencies comprising 501 polling divisions in total — a number unchanged from the previous Order but reallocated between constituencies under the 2026 boundary revision. Members of the Group were deployed to polling locations in New Providence and Grand Bahama, and obtained briefings on the conduct of the poll in the Family Islands from the PRD, returning officers, party representatives and fellow international observers. The Group observed the opening of the poll, voting throughout the day, closing procedures, the count, the transmission of results and the recount on the day following polling.

6.1 Opening of the poll

The polls were scheduled to open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 6:00 p.m., in accordance with the Parliamentary Elections Act. At polling locations observed by the Group, long lines were already in place ahead of opening, with voters appearing anxious to cast their ballots early. Presiding officers closed the doors of polling stations at 7:30 a.m., as required, to check ballot books and election materials; verify serial numbers; account for advance and overseas ballots received from the PRD; and show the empty ballot box to those present before it was locked, sealed and placed in full view.

The Group observed the following at the polling stations visited:

- Election materials arrived on time at all polling divisions observed.
- All polling divisions observed were fully staffed, with six poll workers in each division and information clerks stationed at each polling station to direct voters to the correct polling division.
- Opening procedures, including the checking of ballot papers and the demonstration of the empty ballot box before sealing, were observed and adhered to.
- Political agents from the PLP, the FNM and the COI as well as for independent candidates were observed in most polling stations and were able to verify the quantity and serial numbers of ballots issued to the presiding officer.
- Most polling stations observed opened at the stipulated time of 8:00 a.m. A small number opened later than the scheduled time because the 30 minutes allocated was insufficient for verification of advanced ballots and election day materials.
- Presiding officers were also required to account for ballots cast in the advanced poll and overseas voting before opening the ballot box.
- Voters who were in the queue at close of polls at 6:00 p.m. were permitted to cast their ballots in accordance with the Act.

6.2 The advanced poll

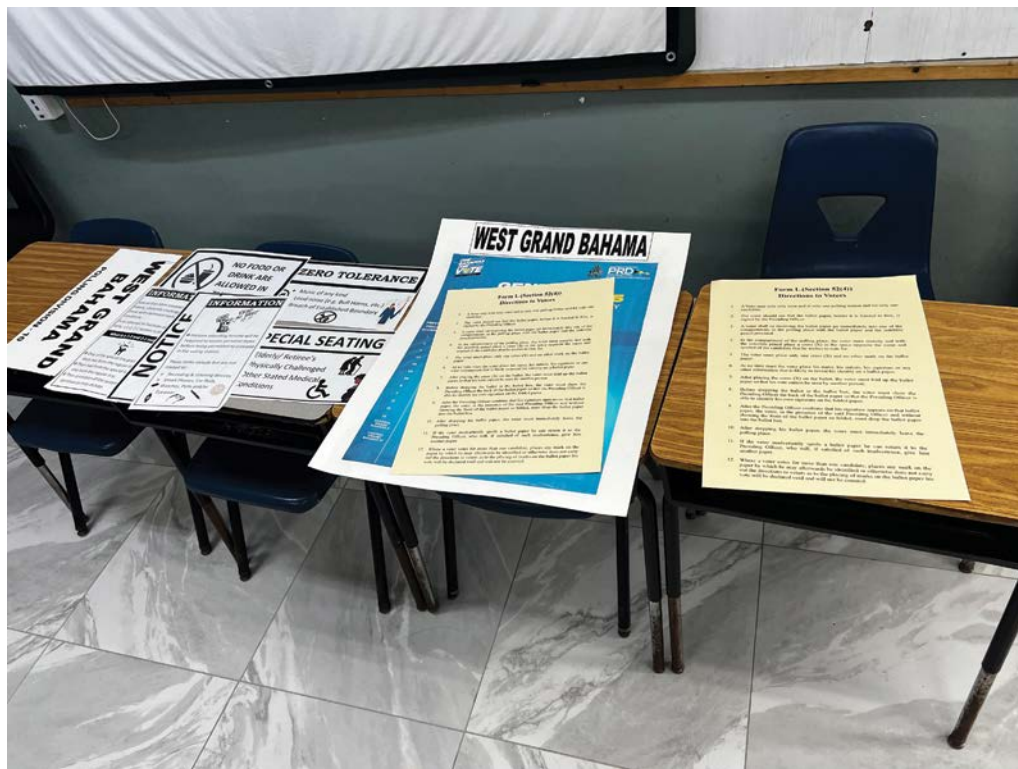
In accordance with Section 54 of the Parliamentary Elections Act (as amended), an advanced poll held on 30 April 2026 included, according to the PRD:

Special voters

- **Seniors:** Any citizen aged 65 years or older;
- **PWDs:** Individuals with physical or permanent disabilities;

- **Medical patients:** Anyone likely to be a patient in a hospital, nursing home or home for the aged on election day;
- **Those with an infirmity or in pregnancy:** Individuals unable to travel to their constituency polling place owing to illness, pregnancy or recent childbirth;
- **Short-term travellers:** Registered voters who did not qualify as permanent overseas voters but explicitly expected to be outside the country on general election day (required proof of paid travel itinerary);
- **Political participants:** Nominated electoral candidates and their spouses, and appointed election agents;
- **Law enforcement and military:** Officers belonging to the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force and the Department of Correctional Services;
- **Election workers:** PRD employees, election day officials and field workers.

Figure 6.1 Signage and voter information provided to a polling station in West Grand Bahama



Overseas voters

- **Students:** Bahamians actively pursuing a bona fide programme of study outside the country, along with their accompanying spouse;
- **Foreign mission staff:** Employees posted overseas at a Bahamian embassy, high commission or consulate, including their spouse and immediate family members living in the same household;
- **State agency personnel:** Government personnel working abroad for entities like the Ministry of Tourism or the Bahamas Maritime Authority, plus their immediate household families;
- **Public officers on duty:** Public servants or official delegation members on active duty overseas, including their accompanying spouse and immediate household.

Figure 6.2 Polling station officials prepare the wax seal at a polling station in Central Grand Bahama



Overseas voting took place at 13 Bahamian missions abroad. The 2026 advanced poll was the first in which the judiciary was eligible to vote in this manner. The PRD described turnout in the advanced poll as unprecedented.

The Group commends The Bahamas for the longstanding provision of an advanced poll, which enables a wide cross-section of citizens to exercise their franchise. However, the Group noted concerns about the operational and logistical challenges that were widely reported during the advanced poll, including the following:

- There were reports from some constituencies that approved voters — including senior citizens, poll workers and individuals with confirmed travel itineraries — were not listed on the final advanced poll register despite holding valid authorisation certificates.
- There were reports of voters being assigned to the wrong constituency.

- Insufficient polling divisions to accommodate the unprecedented turnout resulted in prolonged waiting times, including for elderly voters, voters with disabilities and voters with medical conditions, in some cases in intense heat.
- In some cases the polls closed late, in some cases at 10.00 p.m.
- Concerns were expressed by some political parties and candidates regarding the handling, transportation and security of the advanced poll ballot boxes, including disputes about chain of custody between political parties and the PRD.
- According to information received by the COG, it appears that the vault at the police headquarters is one of the most secure locations on the islands for the storage of the sensitive materials and cast ballots. However, possession of one of the secondary keys by the police raises concerns that such possession compromised perceptions of strict independent electoral custody.
- Some candidates were reportedly not informed when ballot boxes from the advanced poll were being transported from the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner to the police headquarters for safekeeping.

The Group noted that, on the day of the advanced poll, the PRD issued a public statement acknowledging the operational challenges that contributed to extended waiting times and long lines. In its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026, the COG commended the PRD for its work and the unprecedented turnout, while urging it to draw fully on the lessons of the advanced poll in the conduct of any future electoral exercise.

6.3 Polling day

Voting at the polling stations observed by the Group was conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner. Polling officials, working over a long and demanding day, generally adhered to the prescribed procedures. The Group observed that PRD had substantially absorbed the lessons of the advanced poll, with voter assignment, signage and crowd management visibly improved on 12 May.

Voters were admitted to polling stations and processed individually. Each voter was required to present a voter's identification card. Voters who were unable to present the card were permitted, in accordance with the law, to present an alternative form of photo identification. Presiding officers gave clear and consistent instructions to voters on how to fold the ballot paper to preserve the secrecy of the vote. To further protect ballot secrecy, voters were required to leave bags, hats, cell phones and other personal items at the entrance of the polling station and to retrieve them after voting. Party agents from the three contesting parties were able to observe the process throughout the day, including the issuing of 'protest ballots' where the eligibility of a voter was challenged.

Voting booths were laid out to ensure secrecy and were positioned, in the cases observed, to prevent overlooking from outside. Polling locations observed were on the ground floor, with ramps in place to accommodate voters using wheelchairs at most locations. Medical facilities and personnel were also stationed at several polling locations in the event of a medical emergency. At most polling stations visited, political party tents were set up outside the 100-yard limit prescribed by Section 98 of the Parliamentary Elections Act. A small number of supporters were observed within the 100-yard line wearing party-coloured t-shirts and caps; police officers were vigilant in requesting that they vacate the area, and party officials and supporters complied.

6.4 Identification of electors

Identification of voters was carried out manually. Each voter's purple paper voter's card, with photograph affixed, or, where issued, the new polycarbonate biometric voter card, was checked against the counterfoil held by the polling clerk and against the voter's name on the register. The rollout of the biometric voter card commenced in late 2025 under the framework introduced by the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 2025 and continued through to election day; the card was not, however, mandatory for the 2026 general election, and a significant proportion of voters presented the existing paper voter card.

Figure 6.3 Polling officials show members of the COG voter signage at a polling station in Yamacraw



Voters who could not present a voter's card were permitted, in accordance with the law, to present an alternative form of photo identification, including a passport, driver's licence or national insurance card. The Group noted, however, that the checking of voters' fingers for indelible ink prior to issuing a ballot paper was not consistently applied across all polling stations observed. Party agents were generally satisfied with the eligibility of each voter and were able to scrutinise the process; in a small number of instances, where an agent objected to the eligibility of a voter, a 'protest ballot' was issued in accordance with the procedure provided in the Act.

Figure 6.4 A Polling official at an information desk assists a voter in Central Grand Bahama



Figure 6.5 A voter's thumb is dipped in indelible ink after casting their vote



6.5 Assisted voting and accessibility

The Group observed that, unlike at the advanced poll, PWDs, elderly voters and pregnant women were given priority at most polling stations on election day. They were either escorted to the front of the queue or, where several such voters were waiting, accommodated in designated cool areas or seating. The relevant oaths of incapacity and secrecy were administered to incapacitated voters who were unable to mark the ballot themselves, and to the persons of their choice assisting them. While the administration of the oaths contributed to some delay in processing those voters, the procedure was carried out in accordance with the law. The Group commends polling officials for the initiative they took in implementing these accommodations.

Nonetheless, the Group noted that not all polling locations offered uniform accessibility, that tactile ballot templates for visually impaired voters were not available and that the assisted voting protocol was not yet fully standardised in written polling manuals – a matter discussed further in Chapter 4.

Figure 6.6 Signage identifying seating areas for people with mobility difficulties at a polling station



6.6 Security

Adequate police presence was provided at all polling stations observed by the Group, and voters were not observed to be subject to intimidation. The Royal Bahamas Police Force was able to control crowds inside and outside the 100-yard line in a professional and unobtrusive manner. The Group noted that in some cases there was no clear delineation of the 100-yard limit, which may have produced uncertainty as to the correct location of the political party tents observed outside the polling station.

The Group further observed the following:

- Police officers provided adequate security for the transportation of ballot boxes to polling stations prior to the opening of the poll.
- Police officers were respected by voters, candidates, party agents and polling officials throughout the polling and counting process.

- Adequate security was provided for the transportation of ballot boxes by returning officers to police stations for overnight storage.
- Adequate security was provided for the transportation of ballot boxes to and from recount locations.

The Group commends the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force and other security agencies for their disciplined and professional conduct on election day. The Group did not witness or receive credible reports of any election day disruption or localised intimidation at the polling stations it observed.

Figure 6.7 Members of the COG meet with Officers from the Royal Bahamas Police Force on election day



6.7 Closing and counting

All polling stations observed by the Group closed at 6:00 p.m., or up to half an hour thereafter in cases where polls opened late. Voters in the queue at the time of closing were allowed to cast their ballots. The closing procedures in the polling stations observed were carried out in accordance with the legal requirements, and the preliminary count was conducted in full view of polling officials, party agents and observers. Polling stations were rearranged after closing to enable a clear view of the count.

The Group observed that ballot papers issued to the presiding officers were reconciled with the number of unused, spoilt, rejected, counted, overseas and protest ballots. The Group observed the following:

- The counting process was conducted in full view of all present, with each ballot paper shown to party agents and observers and then placed in candidate piles for tallying.
- An official tally was recorded by polling staff while party agents also kept independent tallies.
- The presiding officer prepared the ballot paper account (Form Q), recording the number of valid votes for each candidate, unused and spoilt ballot papers, rejected ballot papers, counted ballot papers, overseas ballots and ballots cast under protest and sealed the relevant election materials in separate packets inside the ballot box.
- Where a candidate or election agent requested a signed copy of the ballot paper account (Form Q), a copy was supplied on payment of the prescribed fee of B\$1.50, for which an official receipt was issued.

- The locked and sealed ballot box, together with a signed copy of the ballot paper account, was delivered to the returning officer for the constituency. One representative per candidate was permitted to accompany the delivery.
- The unofficial preliminary results for most constituencies were known by approximately 10:00 p.m. on election night.

The Group noted that use of stickers, zip ties and sealing wax to seal envelopes and ballot boxes was not always efficient or consistent across the stations observed. In some cases, envelopes provided for the sealing of ballots and documents were not tamper-proof, and the stickers used to seal envelopes were not particularly adhesive. The Group also notes that the use of open flames to melt sealing wax may present health and safety risks. These observations echo concerns expressed by the 2021 COG, which remain outstanding.

The transmission of preliminary results to the PRD was carried out manually, with returning officers communicating polling station tallies to the PRD by phone and in writing as polling stations reported. The Group noted that, in line with public scrutiny over the transportation of ballot boxes and demands for heightened transparency in the transmission of results, electoral stakeholders may wish to consider modernised arrangements for results transmission.

6.8 The recount

Sections 66 and 67 of the Parliamentary Elections Act require the returning officer to recount the regular ballots cast in each polling division in the constituency, and to account separately for any 'protest' ballots, in the presence of candidates or their election agents, as soon as practicable after receiving the ballot boxes and ballot paper accounts. The recount is the principal mechanism by which the official result for each constituency is ascertained. The returning officer is required to provide candidates and agents with all reasonable facilities and information, to enable them to oversee the process. The recount proceeds box by box, with the returning officer checking the accuracy of the ballot paper account against the contents and either endorsing the account as correct or noting any corrections made.

Members of the Group observed the recount in several constituencies on 13 May 2026. The returning officers carried out their duties with care and professionalism, ensuring the process was transparent and orderly for the benefit of the candidates and party agents in attendance. The Group commends returning officers for their conduct of the recount.

The Group observed one instance in which, by agreement between the party agents present, the recount was discontinued after the losing candidates' agents conceded. This is contrary to Sections 66 and 67 of the Parliamentary Elections Act, 2025.

The Group observed that the returning officer completed the relevant form, signed it and submitted the official result for the constituency to the Parliamentary Commissioner. The Group noted that the locations of recounts in some constituencies were communicated to political party representatives at relatively short notice and encourages the PRD to ensure that recount locations are notified to candidates and party agents in good time, in line with the recommendation of the 2021 COG.

6.9 Election observation

The 2026 general election was observed by the COG, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission led by Sherry Tross and the CARICOM Electoral Observation Mission led by Herman St Helen, alongside accredited diplomatic observers. The Group acknowledges the close engagement and information-sharing between the international observation missions and notes the openness of the Government of The Bahamas, the PRD and electoral stakeholders to international election observation. The Commonwealth has now observed three consecutive Bahamian general elections, in 2017, 2021 and 2026, providing continuity in assessment and recommendations across the electoral cycle.

The Group, however, notes the absence of a sustained citizen-based domestic election observation mechanism in The Bahamas. The development of credible domestic citizen observation would further

strengthen public confidence in the electoral process, complement international observation and contribute to broader civic engagement. The Group also encourages the government to give serious consideration to the establishment of an appropriate domestic mechanism to systematically review and act upon recommendations made by international observer missions, including those of the 2017, 2021 and 2026 COGs.

Figure 6.8 The COG meets with the CARICOM Election Observation Mission



6.10 Election results

According to the preliminary results announced by returning officers and reported by the PRD in the hours following the close of polls and through 13 May 2026, the PLP led by Prime Minister Philip Davis was returned to office with 33 of the 41 seats in the House of Assembly. The FNM led by Michael Pintard won eight seats. The COI and independent candidates did not win any seats. Mr Pintard publicly conceded the election from FNM headquarters in Freeport approximately four hours after the close of polls. Prime Minister Davis is the first incumbent Bahamian Prime Minister to win a second consecutive term since 1997.

The new House of Assembly will include nine women — seven from the PLP and two from the FNM — representing approximately 22 per cent of members, broadly comparable to the 2021 outcome. A full constituency-by-constituency listing of elected Members of the House of Assembly appears at Annex V. The preliminary results are summarised at Annex VI. Final certified vote totals and turnout figures will be published by the PRD in due course.

Preliminary indications are that voter turnout in the 2026 general election was, at writing, below the 64.91 per cent recorded in 2021, and is likely to set a modern low for the country (see Annex VI for Preliminary Result). In his victory address at Clifford Park on the night of 12 May, Prime Minister Davis explicitly acknowledged the low turnout as 'not good for democracy' and pledged that more must be done to ensure every Bahamian felt their ballot mattered. The Group shares the Prime Minister's concern and addresses this matter in the recommendations set out at the start of this document.

6.11 Overview

The voting, counting and recount processes for the 12 May 2026 general election were, in the Group's overall assessment, conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner. All electors who arrived at the polling stations within the designated voting period were able to cast their votes, and the ballot counting was executed in accordance with the established procedures. The Group acknowledges that minor procedural inconsistencies were observed across polling stations, including in the application of sealing procedures, the checking of electoral ink and the administration of the advanced poll, but considers that these did not materially affect the integrity of the process. The Group commends the PRD, polling staff, returning officers, the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the political parties and their agents for their professionalism.

The Group noted that, despite the operational difficulties experienced during the advanced poll on 30 April 2026, the PRD made the necessary administrative adjustments to ensure those issues did not recur on election day on 12 May 2026. The Group encourages the PRD, the Government of The Bahamas and other electoral stakeholders to draw on the experience and lessons learnt from the 2026 election cycle as part of any future review of policies, procedures and capacity, with a view to strengthening the conduct of future elections.

Figure 6.9 Voters queue outside a polling station before opening time



6.12 Recommendations

- In keeping with international good practice, the PRD should utilise translucent ballot boxes and uniquely numbered security seals.
- Additional time should be allocated for the pre-opening checks where advance and overseas ballots are to be accounted for in the same polling division, with a view to ensuring that polling stations open promptly at 8:00 a.m.
- Custody arrangements for advance and overseas ballot boxes should be reviewed so that no single agency outside the PRD holds duplicate keys or secondary access to ballot storage facilities, in order to preserve the perception, as well as the substance, of strict independent electoral custody.
- The 100-yard limit prescribed by Section 98 of the Parliamentary Elections Act should be clearly delineated at every polling station with a view to avoiding uncertainty among voters, political agents and the police, and to facilitate the consistent enforcement of the prohibition on campaign activity within the limit.
- Civil society and non-partisan stakeholders should seek to develop a credible domestic citizen election observation mechanism for future elections.

Annex I. Composition of COG and Biographies of Members

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted the Commonwealth Observer Group for The Bahamas general election of 12 May 2026, following an invitation from the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Most Hon. Philip Davis. The Group arrived in Nassau on 4 May 2026 and remained in country until 18 May 2026. A staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Electoral Support Section supported the Group in-country and from Commonwealth Headquarters in London.

Table I.1 Members of Commonwealth Observer Group, The Bahamas 2026 general election

Role	Name	Background
Chairperson	Hon. Bruce Golding	Former Prime Minister of Jamaica
Member	Ms Josephine Tamai	Chief Elections Officer, Belize
Member	Mr Orin Gordon	Journalist and media expert, Guyana
Member	Ms Estelle Thadea Alaine George	Legal and electoral expert, Saint Lucia

Biographies of members

Hon. Bruce Golding — Chairperson

The Hon. Bruce Golding served as the eighth Prime Minister of Jamaica from 2007 to 2011 and is a senior statesperson of the Commonwealth Caribbean. A founding member of the National Democratic Movement and a former leader of the Jamaica Labour Party, he has spent a career in public service that spans more than five decades, including service as Member of Parliament, Cabinet Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Since leaving office, he has been a frequent contributor to Commonwealth and regional democratic governance initiatives, including chairing the COG for The Bahamas 2021 general election. The continuity provided by his return is intended to support an assessment of progress since the 2021 election cycle.

Josephine Tamai — Member

Josephine Tamai is the Chief Elections Officer of the Elections and Boundaries Department of Belize, where she has overseen multiple general and municipal elections, voter registration cycles and boundary reviews. She brings deep technical expertise in electoral administration in a comparable Caribbean Westminster context, including experience of first-past-the-post systems, voter list management, polling day procedures and the co-ordination of international election observation missions.

Orin Gordon — Member

Orin Gordon is a Guyanese journalist and media commentator with extensive experience across the Commonwealth Caribbean media landscape, including senior editorial roles in broadcast and digital journalism. He brings expertise on media freedom, equitable access to airtime, election coverage standards and the role of social media in political campaigns — all of which are increasingly relevant in The Bahamas’ hybrid media environment.

Estelle Thadea Alaine George — Member

Estelle Thadea Alaine George is a legal and electoral expert from Saint Lucia, with experience in the conduct of elections, election dispute resolution and the broader legal framework underpinning democratic processes in small island states. She has trained extensively on election preparation and served in advisory roles on electoral reform and brings to the Group particular expertise on the integrity of voter registers and on candidate nomination procedures.

Annex II. Announcement of the COG

Former Jamaican Prime Minister Bruce Golding to lead Commonwealth Observation Group for Bahamas polls

30 April 2026

Former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Hon Bruce Golding, has been appointed to lead a Commonwealth Observer Group for The Bahamas' General Election scheduled for 12 May.

The appointment was made by Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon Shirley Botchwey, following an invitation from the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Most Honourable Philip Davis. Secretary-General Botchwey also confirmed the composition of the Observer Group, which will be deployed to assess the electoral process.

Announcing the appointment, the Secretary-General expressed her appreciation to Prime Minister Golding for accepting the role and acknowledged the commitment of members of the observer group. She said:

'Credible and transparent elections are fundamental to democratic governance. The Commonwealth Observer Group plays an important role in reinforcing public confidence in electoral processes and supporting member countries in upholding their democratic commitments.'

The observer group will be supported by a team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Professor Michelle Scobie, Head and Adviser for Good Offices and the Caribbean and Americas Section.

During their time in-country, the observer group will observe all aspects of the electoral process and assess whether the elections are conducted in line with the democratic standards and commitments upheld by the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Group is expected to arrive on 4 May and will issue an Arrival Statement shortly after, outlining its mandate and methodology for the observation mission.

Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Chairperson: Hon Bruce Golding, former Prime Minister of **Jamaica**

The Commonwealth Observer Group members, in alphabetical order by country name, are:

Josephine Tamai, Chief Elections Officer, **Belize**

Orin Gordon, Journalist, **Guyana**

Estelle Thadea Alaine George, Legal and Electoral Expert, **Saint Lucia**

Annex III. Interim Statement

Interim Statement by

The Honourable Bruce Golding

Former Prime Minister of Jamaica

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG)

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

14 May 2026

The people of The Bahamas, Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, the media, fellow observers, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for honouring our invitation to this Commonwealth Observer Group press conference.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited to observe the 2026 General Election in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Following an invitation from the Governor-General, the Most Honourable Dame Cynthia A. Pratt, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Honourable Shirley Botchwey, constituted our Group to observe these elections, the third occasion on which the Commonwealth has been invited to observe a general election in The Bahamas, following similar missions in 2017 and 2021.

Our team arrived in Nassau on 4 May 2026, and the Group will depart on 18 May 2026. As Chair, I am honoured to lead a small Group of eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth, bringing experience in electoral administration, law, politics, and the media. The Group is independent of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and we serve in our personal capacities. We are supported in our work by a team from the Commonwealth Secretariat led by Professor Michelle Scobie, Head and Adviser for Good Offices and the Caribbean and Americas Section.

It is a particular honour for me to return, having chaired the Commonwealth Observer Group for the 2021 General Election. This continuity has enabled the Group to assess not only the integrity of the current process, but also the progress made by The Bahamas in implementing recommendations from previous Commonwealth missions.

Our role is to offer an independent, informed, and impartial assessment of the electoral process, in accordance with the country's laws and Commonwealth values, considering all factors which may impact the overall credibility of the election.

I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings, which are based on our engagement with a cross-section of stakeholders and on our observations since arrival.

Our final report, with key recommendations, will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General and thereafter shared with the Government of The Bahamas, the Parliamentary Registration Department, political parties, and other key stakeholders, as well as the wider public.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

For a contextual understanding and assessment of the pre-election environment, the Group met with the Honourable Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, leaders and representatives of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), the Free National Movement (FNM), and the Coalition of Independents (COI). We also met with the Parliamentary Commissioner, and senior officers of the Parliamentary Registration Department, civil society organisations involving women and youth groups, persons with disabilities, human rights groups, members of the religious community, the private sector, the media, as well as academia and with our counterparts from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Electoral Observation Mission and the

Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observation Mission. The Group also engaged with the Commissioner of Police and was briefed on the security arrangements for the campaign period as well as election day.

Legal and institutional framework

The Group noted that, in accordance with the recommendations of the Constituencies Commission, the House of Assembly Revision of Boundaries and Re-distribution of Seats Order, 2026 (S.I. No. 5 of 2026) created two additional constituencies, increasing the total from 39 to 41. The Group noted that the composition of the Constituencies Commission, responsible for this delimitation, is tilted in favour of the ruling party. The delimitation of constituencies under this arrangement has the potential to confer an unfair advantage in election outcomes.

We acknowledge the steps taken by the Government through the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 2025 to modernise election administration, including the issuing of biometric voter cards.

On every election observer mission we have conducted in the Bahamas, strident allegations were made, primarily but not only by opposition parties, of partisan bias in the management of the electoral process including the registration of voters and the conduct of elections. While we have not been able to validate these allegations, we are firmly of the view that the independent and impartial control and management of the electoral system would play a significant role in strengthening and fostering public confidence in the democratic process. Accordingly, in our reports following the elections both in 2017 and 2021 we recommended the establishment of such an independent body.

Almost a quarter century has passed since the last referendum on the matter. This is sufficient time, we believe, for this issue to be revisited. The compelling value of independent control and management of the electoral system warrants it. In our final report we will put forward more detailed recommendations as to how this could be pursued to further consolidate the democratic credentials of The Bahamas and bring its electoral administration into closer alignment with international good practice. The Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to provide technical support to this end.

Voter register and voter education

The Group commends the Parliamentary Registration Department for the work undertaken to remove the names of deceased persons from the voters' register and for the introduction of the biometric voter card. We note that, by April 2026, the electoral register comprised more than 209,000 voters. Several stakeholders, however, raised concerns regarding ambiguities surrounding the transition between the existing paper voter card and the new biometric card. We were made to understand that in its initial rollout registration for the biometric card was optional. It is far more secure, efficient, and durable than the paper card and we recommend that the paper card be retired and the biometric card be made a requirement for future elections.

The Group also received complaints of alleged omissions from the register and the misplacement of voters in constituencies. We recommend that before the list is certified, a preliminary list should be made available by website so that voters would be able to verify that their name is on the list and assigned to the correct constituency. Adequate time and arrangements should be made for discrepancies to be rectified.

We also recommend that a robust public voter education campaign utilizing traditional as well as social media be conducted periodically and well in advance of an election period to encourage and facilitate voter registration and participation.

Campaign and media

The Group observed a number of campaign activities in the closing days of the campaign in New Providence and Grand Bahama, including the final rallies of the major political parties. The rallies were generally peaceful, vibrant, and well attended, and reflected the energetic character of Bahamian political life. The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and supporters to assemble, to campaign and to communicate were respected.

Code of conduct

The Group reiterates the recommendation of the 2017 and 2021 Commonwealth Observer Groups and urges the political parties in consultation with civil society to develop a Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates. Such a Code should address the manner in which campaigns are conducted, standards of civility in public discourse and personal attacks on opponents on social media.

Campaign finance

As in 2017 and 2021, the Group noted the continuing absence of a statutory framework governing the registration of political parties and the regulation of political contributions and campaign expenditure. This gap continues to undermine accountability and contributes to public cynicism regarding the influence of money in politics. The relatively small size of the Bahamian electorate in each constituency makes it especially vulnerable in this regard. We strongly reiterate the call of previous Commonwealth Observer Groups for the enactment of comprehensive campaign finance legislation. Ten years after this recommendation was first made by a Commonwealth Observer Group, its implementation has become more urgent.

Media environment

The Group noted that press freedom is generally respected, as provided by the Constitution, and that the Bahamian media, across television, radio, print and digital platforms, actively covered the campaign and election-related issues. The vibrancy of private broadcasters and the country's print media is commendable.

The Group took note of the public disquiet surrounding governance arrangements at the Broadcasting Corporation in the period leading up to the election. We reiterate the recommendation of the 2021 Commonwealth Observer Group that the state broadcaster ensure equitable access and balanced coverage of all political parties and candidates during an election period, and we encourage the development of a clear and enforceable regulatory framework to this end.

The Group also received reports of the close relationship between the owners of private media houses and the main political parties and perceptions of biased reporting that this created. The Group also noted the extensive use of social media platforms by political parties, candidates, and citizens. While social media has expanded the space for political expression, stakeholders raised concerns about misinformation and the tone of online discourse. We encourage continued dialogue among media stakeholders, regulators, and civil society on responsible online engagement.

The Group reiterates its earlier recommendations that private media consider the creation of an independent media association to support and regulate media professionals as well as the development of a media Code of Conduct that would foster greater accountability and fair coverage of election campaigns.

Deployment

Members of the Group were deployed across New Providence and Grand Bahama. In addition, the Group obtained briefings on arrangements in the Family Islands, including Abaco, Eleuthera and Andros, from the Parliamentary Registration Department, Returning Officers, party representatives, and other observer missions. In these locations, the Group engaged with election officials, party agents, police officers and voters to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process and the pre-election environment.

Advanced poll

The Group commends The Bahamas for the longstanding provision of an advanced poll, which enables senior citizens, members of the uniformed services, election officials, special voters, the judiciary, students abroad, those who plan to travel abroad and Bahamians on diplomatic postings overseas to exercise their franchise.

The Group noted with appreciation the high level of voter participation in the advanced poll, which the Parliamentary Registration Department has described as unprecedented. However, the Group is concerned about the operational and logistical challenges that were widely reported during the advanced poll, including insufficient polling stations, extended waiting times at several stations requiring them to remain open well beyond the scheduled close, instances in which elderly voters were subject to prolonged exposure to the elements and confusion regarding voter assignment. The Group also took note of reports of some confrontational incidents at advanced polling locations.

We urge the Parliamentary Registration Department to draw fully on the lessons of the advanced poll in the conduct of any future electoral exercise, particularly with respect to the number of voters assigned to each polling station, crowd management, the deployment of polling staff, signage, the timely availability of certified voter lists to political parties and Returning Officers, and clear communication with the public and with political parties on operational decisions.

Election day

On 12 May 2026, our teams were deployed to polling stations across New Providence and Grand Bahama and remained engaged with Returning Officers and observer counterparts in the Family Islands. We observed the opening of polls, the conduct of voting, closing procedures, the count, and the preliminary transmission of results.

Opening of polls and signage

Polling officials at the stations observed by the Group generally adhered to prescribed opening procedures. The Group commends the Parliamentary Registration Department for the deployment of clearer signage and the presence of information desk officers at a number of polling locations which assisted voters in identifying their correct polling division. This practice is commendable and should be standardised across all polling locations in future elections.

Conduct of the poll

Voting at polling stations observed by the Group was conducted in a peaceful, orderly, and transparent manner. Voters lists were available for consultation at information desks located at each polling centre. Polling officials are to be commended for the efficiency and professionalism with which they discharged their duties, often over a long and demanding day. Where minor procedural inconsistencies were observed, these did not, in the view of the Group, materially affect the integrity of the process.

The Group noted that voters were permitted to use alternative forms of photo identification, including passports and driver's licenses, in the absence of their voter identification cards, in accordance with the law.

Political party agents

Political party agents were present at the polling stations observed by the Group and generally conducted themselves professionally. They were engaged and were able to raise questions and challenges throughout the voting process as well as at the recount. The cooperation between agents of different parties at most polling stations is commendable and reflects the maturity of Bahamian electoral culture.

Security

Police officers were present at the polling stations observed by the Group and conducted themselves in a professional and unobtrusive manner. The Group commends the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force and other security agencies for their disciplined contribution to a peaceful election day.

Participation and inclusion

The Group commends the voters for the discipline and patience they displayed at the polling stations observed. A high proportion of polling officials and party agents were women. We note, however, the continuing under-representation of women among candidates contesting the election for two of the three political parties and encourage all political parties to take deliberate steps to advance the political participation of women, in line with the country's national and international commitments.

We observed that persons with disabilities, elderly voters and pregnant women were given priority at some of the polling stations observed. This practice is commendable and should be standardised across all polling locations in future elections. The Group further encourages the Parliamentary Registration Department to collaborate with disabled persons' organisations to develop a standardised assistive voting protocol for future elections.

The Group heard from various stakeholders of the need to deepen youth confidence and participation in democratic and electoral institutions and processes. We recommend that measures be considered to promote greater civic participation, including through partnerships with civil society, schools, and tertiary institutions, and through sustained voter education between elections.

Election observation

The Group interacted closely with the CARICOM Electoral Observation Mission led by Mr. Herman St. Helen, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission led by Ms. Sherry Tross, and with accredited diplomatic observers. The Group noted the absence of a sustained citizen-based domestic election observation mechanism in The Bahamas and encourages key electoral stakeholders to work toward the development of credible domestic observation, which would further strengthen public confidence in the electoral process.

Presence of party agents

The Group observed several party agents, especially from the two largest parties, at all polling stations, and in tents outside the polling stations. They were professional in the conduct of their duties and there was close cooperation among the agents of different parties. They assisted polling officials to find names in the register and the level of maturity and positive engagement by party agents, which we had also seen in 2021 is to be commended.

The Group noted that many political party supporters were gathered beyond the one hundred yards limit as outlined in Section 98 of the Parliamentary Elections Act. However, some did not always adhere to this provision.

Close and count

At polling stations observed, closing procedures were conducted broadly in accordance with the law and in the presence of party agents and observers. However, the use of stickers, zip ties and wax to seal envelopes and ballot boxes was not always efficiently or consistently applied across the stations observed by the Group. The Group will consider recommendations on such security features in its final report. The Group noted some inconsistencies in the sealing of ballot boxes and in the application of certain reconciliation procedures, on which we will provide detailed recommendations in our final report. The preliminary count was conducted in a transparent manner, with party agents and observers given the opportunity to witness the process.

Conclusion and post-election period

We applaud the people of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas for once again exercising their franchise in a peaceful and orderly manner. The Bahamas has a proud democratic tradition, and that tradition has once again been affirmed.

We commend the Parliamentary Registration Department, polling staff, the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force, political parties, candidates, civil society, and the media for their respective contributions to the conduct of these elections.

We urge the Department, and the wider Government of The Bahamas, to strengthen engagement with all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and the media, to address the operational shortcomings identified, particularly those associated with the advanced poll.

This is the first election since 1997 in which an incumbent government of the Bahamas has been re-elected. We commend the Leader of the Opposition and leader of the Free National Movement, Mr. Michael Pintard, for his gracious concession and the Prime Minister and leader of the Progressive Liberal Party, the Hon. Phillip Davis, for his magnanimity in victory – both in the finest traditions of the parliamentary system that the Bahamas has practiced for more than 50 years.

Our final report will set out our findings and recommendations in greater detail. We encourage the Government of The Bahamas to give serious consideration to the establishment of an appropriate domestic mechanism to systematically review and act upon recommendations made by international observer missions, including those made by the Commonwealth in 2017, 2021 and in our forthcoming 2026 report.

I wish to take this opportunity once again to thank the people of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas for the warm hospitality extended to me and to members of the Group throughout our stay, and for the access and cooperation provided for our observation processes.

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, I wish the people of The Bahamas every success as they enter this next chapter in their journey as a stable democracy.

I thank you.

Issued on 14 May 2026

British Colonial Hotel

Nassau, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Annex IV. Deployment Plan

Commonwealth Observer Group
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas General Election
Deployment Plan, 12 May 2026

Island	City/ town	Constituencies	Observers
New Providence	Nassau	Bain and Grants Town, Bamboo Town, Centreville, Englerston, Fox Hill, Golden Gates, Killarney Marathon, Montagu, Mount Moriah, Nassau Village, Pinewood, St Anne's, St Barnabas, St James, Tall Pines, Yamacraw, Elizabeth, Carmichael	Hon. Bruce Golding and Michelle Scobie Josephine Tamai and Ms Anita Collins
Grand Bahama	Freeport	East Grand Bahama, Central Grand Bahama, West Grand Bahama, Pineridge, Marco City	Estelle George and Orin Gordon

Annex V. List of Political Parties

The 12 May 2026 general election was contested by three registered political parties — the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), the Free National Movement (FNM) and the Coalition of Independents (COI) — together with a small number of independent candidates. The Democratic National Alliance, which had contested previous general elections, did not field candidates in 2026 and publicly called for electoral reform ahead of the election.

Table V.1 Three registered political parties, The Bahamas 2026 general election

Party	Acronym	Leader	Slate / Scope	Symbol
Progressive Liberal Party	PLP	Philip Davis	Contested all 41 constituencies	
Free National Movement	FNM	Michael Pintard	Contested all 41 constituencies	
Coalition of Independents	COI	Lincoln Bain	Contested 40 of 41 constituencies (did not field a candidate in MICAL)	

Table V.2 Candidates, The Bahamas 2026 general election

Constituency	Candidate	Party
Bains Town and Grants Town	BAIN, Antonio	COI
Bains Town and Grants Town	PHILLIPPE, Jay	FNM
Bains Town and Grants Town	HARRIS-PINDER, Brenda Teresa	IND
Bains Town and Grants Town	WATSON, Wayde	PLP
Bamboo Town	DAXON, Maria Vernitta	COI
Bamboo Town	SANDS, Duane	FMN
Bamboo Town	DEVEAUX, Patricia Ann	PLP
Bimini and Berry Islands	ROLLE, Hiram V.	COI
Bimini and Berry Islands	BOWLEG, Carlton	FNM
Bimini and Berry Islands	ROLLE, Paul Michael	IND
Bimini and Berry Islands	ROLLE, Randy Emmue	PLP
Carmichael	GREEN, Charlotte Nakeshia	COI
Carmichael	KOMOLAFE, Arinthia Santina	FNM
Carmichael	KNOWLES, O'Brien	IND
Carmichael	BELL, Keith Ricardo	PLP
Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador	McKAY, Donna M.	COI
Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador	HOLMES, Mike F.	FNM
Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador	DAVIS, Philip E.	PLP
Central and South Abaco	WILLIAMS, Crystal S.	COI
Central and South Abaco	SWEETING, Jeremy J.	FNM
Central and South Abaco	FOX JR., Bradley R.	PLP
Central and South Eleuthera	GRANT-TAYLOR, Bekera E.	COI
Central and South Eleuthera	KELLY, Phillippa F.	FNM
Central and South Eleuthera	SWEETING, Clay G.	PLP
Central Grand Bahama	LEWIS, Iram D.	COI
Central Grand Bahama	GIBSON, Franzette Isadora	FNM
Central Grand Bahama	DEAL, Parko Roberto	PLP
Central, Mangrove Cay and South Andros	CLEARE, Carlton G.	COI
Central, Mangrove Cay and South Andros	GIBSON, Julian G.	FNM
Central, Mangrove Cay and South Andros	LUNDY, Leon E.	PLP
Centreville	WOODSIDE, Jamaal	COI
Centreville	RUSSELL, Darvin	FMN
Centreville	CAMPBELL, Jomo C.	PLP
East Grand Bahama	EDWARDS, Dexter Cedric	COI
East Grand Bahama	THOMPSON, James Kwasi	FNM
East Grand Bahama	PRATT, Monique N.	PLP
Elizabeth	MAJOR, Donna Dorsett	COI
Elizabeth	HUNT, Heather Watkins	FNM
Elizabeth	COLEBY-DAVIS, JoBeth Lillian	PLP

(Continued)

Table V.2 (Continued)

Constituency	Candidate	Party
Englerston	PERCENTIE, Faith	COI
Englerston	McDONALD, Heather	FNM
Englerston	HANNA-MARTIN, Glenys	PLP
Exuma and Ragged Island	SMITH, Byron	COI
Exuma and Ragged Island	MOXEY-ROLLE, Debra	FNM
Exuma and Ragged Island	TAYLOR, Deidre Ann	IND
Exuma and Ragged Island	COOPER, I Chester	PLP
Fort Charlotte	JOHNSON, Daphaney	COI
Fort Charlotte	ROBINSON, Travis	FNM
Fort Charlotte	BASTIAN, Sebastian	PLP
Fox Hill	BROWN, Bobby Robert	COI
Fox Hill	FOX, Nicholas	FNM
Fox Hill	MITCHELL, Frederick Audley	PLP
Freetown	INGRAHAM-GRIFFIN, Olivia	COI
Freetown	DEAL, Lincoln	FNM
Freetown	HANNA CAREY, Patrice	IND
Freetown	JOHNSON, Andrew	IND
Freetown	MUNROE, Wayne	PLP
Garden Hills	CLEARE, Shantiqua Ayesha	COI
Garden Hills	FOX, ULRICH A.	FNM
Garden Hills	BOWLEG, Mario Keith	PLP
Golden Gates	ADDERLEY, Sharmaine Natasha	COI
Golden Gates	FOULKES, Michael A.	FNM
Golden Gates	RAHMING, Anthony	IND
Golden Gates	GLOVER-ROLLE, Pia T.	PLP
Golden Isles	ROLLE, Brian T.	COI
Golden Isles	BROWN, Brian B.	FNM
Golden Isles	BUTLER, Karen K.	IND
Golden Isles	PICKSTOCK, Darron	PLP
Killarney	MCIVER, Veronica	COI
Killarney	BARNETT-ELLIS, Michela Elaine	FNM
Killarney	MINNIS, Hubert A.	IND
Killarney	LYNES, Robyn D.	PLP
Long Island	PRATT, Shura S.	COI
Long Island	ROLLINS, Sylvester A.	FNM
Long Island	TURNQUEST, Natasha S.	IND
Long Island	KNOWLES, Reneika D.	PLP
Marathon	GREENE, Tyrone M.	COI
Marathon	PENN-KNOWLES, Jacqueline	FNM

(Continued)

Table V.2 (Continued)

Constituency	Candidate	Party
Marathon	RAHMING, Lisa Tammy	PLP
Marco City	BARTLETT, Jillian	COI
Marco City	PINTARD, Michael	FNM
Marco City	WHAM II, Edward E.	PLP
Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay	FERGUSON, James	FNM
Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay	WILLIAMSON, Kate	IND
Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay	AMBRISTER, Ronnell	PLP
Mount Moriah	STUBBS, Linda Christina	COI
Mount Moriah	DAMES, Marvin H.	FNM
Mount Moriah	BONABY, McKell D.	PLP
Nassau Village	McQUEEN, Stephen	COI
Nassau Village	McDONALD, Gadville	FNM
Nassau Village	STRACHAN, Jamahl	PLP
North Abaco	MILLS, Cay	COI
North Abaco	BOOTLE, Terrece I.	FNM
North Abaco	FORBES, Ryan O.	IND
North Abaco	CORNISH, Kirk D.	PLP
North Andros	LAING, Indera	COI
North Andros	OLIVER, Janice	FNM
North Andros	LIGHTBOURNE, Leonardo	PLP
North Eleuthera	MITCHELL, Natasha	COI
North Eleuthera	MACKEY, Howard R.	FNM
North Eleuthera	PETTY, Sylvanus C.E.	PLP
Pineridge	MITCHELL, Daniel	COI
Pineridge	REID, Charlene Reid	FNM
Pineridge	McALPINE, Frederick A.	IND
Pineridge	MOXEY, Ginger M.	PLP
Pinewood	BAIN, Lincoln M.	COI
Pinewood	ROLLE, Denarii	FNM
Pinewood	LARODA, Myles K.	PLP
Saint Anne's	WEATHERFORD, Graham I.	COI
Saint Anne's	WHITE, Adrian R.	FNM
Saint Anne's	FORBES, Otis M.	IND
Saint Anne's	WONG, Keno R.	PLP
Saint Barnabas	Butler, Karen	COI
Saint Barnabas	MOSS, Jamal	FNM
Saint Barnabas	HALKITS, Michael B.	PLP

(Continued)

Table V.2 (Continued)

Constituency	Candidate	Party
Saint James	BAIN, Latoya M.	COI
Saint James	CARTWRIGHT, Shanendon E.	FMN
Saint James	POWELL, Craig Wayne	IND
Saint James	SUTHERLAND, Elkin B.	IND
Saint James	WELLS, Owen C.B.	PLP
Sea Breeze	KNOWLES, William R.	COI
Sea Breeze	CLARKE-HALL, Trevania	FNM
Sea Breeze	MILLER-BRICE, Leslia	PLP
South Beach	FARRINGTON, Karon	COI
South Beach	HENFIELD, Darren	FNM
South Beach	ROLLE, Bacchus	PLP
Southern Shores	FARRINGTON, Kirk	COI
Southern Shores	PENN-MACKEY, Denalee	FNM
Southern Shores	MAJOR, Leroy N.	IND
Southern Shores	ROBERTS, Sean	PLP
Tall Pines	Greene, Trevor	COI
Tall Pines	ROLLE, Serfent	FNM
Tall Pines	DARVILLE, Michael R.	PLP
West Grand Bahama	STUBBS-ALBURY, Toni	COI
West Grand Bahama	ISAACS, Omar	FNM
West Grand Bahama	SMITH JR., Kingsley V.	PLP
Yamacraw	PRINCE, Yvette	COI
Yamacraw	JOHNSON, Elsworth	FNM
Yamacraw	LIGHTBOURNE, Zane E.	PLP

Source: PRD.

In addition to the three parties listed above, several independent candidates contested specific constituencies.

Table V.3 Independent candidates, The Bahamas 2026 general election

Constituency	Name
Bains Town and Grants Town	Harris-Pinder, Brenda Teresa
Carmichael	Knowles, O'Brien
Freetown	Hanna Carey, Patrice
Freetown	Johnson, Andrew
Golden Gates	Rahming, Anthony
Golden Isles	Butler, Karen K.
Saint Anne's	Forbes, Otis M.
Saint James	Powell, Craig Wayne
Saint James	Sutherland, Elkin B.
Pineridge	McAlpine, Frederick A.
Bimini and Berry Islands	Rolle, Paul Michael
North Abaco	Forbes, Ryan O.
Exuma and Ragged Island	Taylor, Deidre Ann
Long Island	Turnquest, Natasha S.
Mayaguana, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins and Long Cay	Williamson, Kate
Killarney	Minnis, Hubert A.
Southern Shores	Major, Leroy N.

None of the independent candidates was successful. The Coalition of Independents likewise did not win any seats, although it received a higher number of votes than it did in 2021.

Annex VI. Preliminary Results

This Annex sets out the preliminary results of the 12 May 2026 general election as compiled by the Commonwealth Observer Group in the immediate aftermath of polling, drawing on reporting by The Nassau Guardian, The Tribune, ZNS Bahamas, Our News, Associated Press, Reuters and the Office of the Prime Minister. Final certified results are subject to confirmation by the Parliamentary Registration Department. The PRD reported a registered electorate of over 209,000 voters.

Headline outcome

The Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), led by Prime Minister Philip Davis, was re-elected with 33 of the 41 seats in the House of Assembly. The Free National Movement (FNM), led by Michael Pintard, won eight seats. The Coalition of Independents (COI), led by Lincoln Bain, did not win any seats. No independent candidate was returned. FNM leader Michael Pintard publicly conceded the election approximately four hours after polls closed. Prime Minister Davis is the first incumbent Bahamian Prime Minister to win a second consecutive term since 1997.

Table VI.1 Preliminary results, The Bahamas 2026 general election: seat totals

Party	Seats won	Party leader
Progressive Liberal Party (PLP)	33	Philip Davis
Free National Movement (FNM)	8	Michael Pintard
Coalition of Independents (COI)	0	Lincoln Bain
Independents	0	-
Total	41	

The following tables presents the constituencies won by political parties in the 12 May 2026 general election, based on preliminary results reported by the PRD, and Bahamian media outlets including The Nassau Guardian, The Tribune, ZNS Bahamas and Our News on the night of 12 May 2026 and the morning of 13 May 2026.

Table VI.2 Constituencies won by the PLP, The Bahamas 2026 general election (33 seats)

Constituency	Elected member	Party
Bain Town and Grants Town	Wayde Watson	PLP
Bamboo Town	Patricia Deveaux	PLP
Bimini and Berry Islands	Randy Rolle	PLP
Carmichael	Keith Bell	PLP
Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador	Philip Davis	PLP
Central and South Abaco	Bradley Fox	PLP
Central and South Eleuthera	Clay Sweeting	PLP
Centreville	Jomo Campbell	PLP
Elizabeth	JoBeth Coleby-Davis	PLP
Englerston	Glenys Hanna-Martin	PLP
Exumas and Ragged Island	Chester Cooper	PLP
Fort Charlotte	Sebastian Bastian	PLP

(Continued)

Table VI.2 (Continued)

Constituency	Elected member	Party
Fox Hill	Fred Mitchell	PLP
Garden Hills	Mario Bowleg	PLP
Golden Gates	Pia Glover-Rolle	PLP
Golden Isles	Darron Pickstock	PLP
Mangrove Cay and South Andros	Leon Lundy	PLP
Marathon	Lisa Rahming	PLP
Mount Moriah	McKell Bonaby	PLP
Nassau Village	Jamahl Strachan	PLP
North Abaco	Kirk Cornish	PLP
North Andros	Leonardo Lightbourne	PLP
North Eleuthera	Sylvanus Petty	PLP
Pineridge	Ginger Moxey	PLP
Pinewood	Myles Laroda	PLP
Saint Barnabas	Michael Halkitis	PLP
Sea Breeze	Leslia Miller-Brice	PLP
South Beach	Bacchus Rolle	PLP
Southern Shores	Obie Roberts	PLP
St. James	Owen Wells	PLP
Tall Pines	Michael Darville	PLP
West Grand Bahama	Kingsley Smith	PLP
Yamacraw	Zane Lightbourne	PLP

Table VI.3 Constituencies won by the FNM, The Bahamas 2026 general election (8 seats)

Constituency	Elected member	Party
Central Grand Bahama	Frazette Gibson	FNM
East Grand Bahama	Kwasi Thompson	FNM
Freetown	Lincoln Deal II	FNM
Killarney	Michela Barnett-Ellis	FNM
Long Island	Andre Rollins	FNM
Marco City	Michael Pintard	FNM
MICAL	Leo Ferguson	FNM
Saint Anne's	Adrian White	FNM

Voter turnout

Preliminary indications are that voter turnout in the 2026 general election was a modern low for The Bahamas, significantly below the 64.91 per cent recorded in 2021. The Parliamentary Registration Department had not, at the time of writing, published an official certified turnout figure. Prime Minister Davis acknowledged in his victory address at Clifford Park that the low turnout was 'not good for democracy' and pledged that more must be done to ensure every voter felt that their ballot mattered. The COG concurs and addresses this in its recommendations at Annex VII.

Women elected

Nine women were returned to the new 41-seat House of Assembly: seven from the PLP and two from the FNM. This represents approximately 22 per cent of the House and is broadly comparable to the 2021 outcome. The Group noted that women's representation in elected positions in The Bahamas remains below the regional Caribbean average and below the one-third threshold often cited by international institutions including UN Women.

Annex VII. Recommendations Tracker

Where the 2026 COG, in its Interim Statement of 14 May 2026 and through its consultations during the deployment, has reiterated or expanded upon a 2021 recommendation, this is noted in the status column. New recommendations arising from the 2026 mission are flagged as such within the relevant thematic group. Where a recommendation originated with the 2017 COG and was carried forward into 2021, this is also noted.

Three recommendations carry particular weight across the cycle.

1. The establishment of an independent body to control and manage the electoral system in The Bahamas – raised by the Commonwealth in both 2017 and 2021 – remains outstanding. The 2026 COG has reiterated the call and observed that ‘almost a quarter century has passed since the last referendum on the matter’.
2. There is a need to enact legislation for the registration of political parties and the regulation of campaign financing, including campaign expenditure, donations and disclosure.
3. The development of a code of conduct for political parties and candidates – also raised in 2017 and 2021 – remains outstanding. The 2026 COG reiterates the recommendation and urges political parties, in consultation with civil society, to develop such a code addressing, in particular, conduct on social media and personal attacks on opponents.

Status colour coding used in the table:

- Orange tint – OUTSTANDING / not implemented
- Yellow tint – PARTIALLY ACTIONED / limited progress
- Green tint – ACTIONED / implemented

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
Electoral Framework and Election Administration				
1	The statutory and regulatory framework of the PRD should be amended to ensure the Department's functional independence and to strengthen its operational and administrative capacity so it can fully exercise its oversight and management functions in accordance with international good practice.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	The 2026 COG reiterates this long-standing recommendation, first made by the 2017 COG and carried forward in 2021. The PRD remains a central government department under the portfolio of the Minister of National Security. Almost a quarter century has passed since the last referendum on an independent electoral commission. The 2026 COG notes that strident allegations of partisan bias in electoral management persist, and considers that establishing an independent body would significantly strengthen public confidence in the democratic process.
2	Parliament should legislate eligibility criteria and clear terms of employment, including conditions for dismissal, for the position of Parliamentary Commissioner, to help ensure transparency and independence of this key constitutional role.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	No legislative reform has been enacted. The 2026 COG notes that stakeholders continue to raise concerns about the transparency of appointment procedures and the security of tenure for the Parliamentary Commissioner. The Commissioner for the 2026 elections was a substantive appointee (addressing the concern at recommendation 3 below), but the underlying statutory framework governing eligibility criteria and conditions of dismissal remains unchanged.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
3	The Governor-General, in consultation with the Public Service Commission, should ensure that there is a substantive Parliamentary Commissioner in place before an election, and, if the need to appoint an acting commissioner arises, that the appointment of a substantive commissioner is formalised as soon as possible.	Administrative/Technical	Implemented	A substantive Parliamentary Commissioner was in place ahead of the 2026 general election, directly addressing the concern raised by the 2021 COG about the appointment of an acting commissioner with no experience. The 2026 COG notes this positively. The Commissioner oversaw voter registration, the advanced poll on 30 April 2026 and election day administration.
4	The PRD should develop and regularly deliver robust voter education and civic education materials to help ensure voters are empowered to make informed choices.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	The PRD provided information via its website (elections.gov.bs), broadcast and print media, and social media ahead of the 2026 election, and deployed clearer signage and information desk officers at polling locations. However, the 2026 COG found that stakeholders consistently highlighted the need for enhanced voter and civic education, noting that official materials were not always accessible to first-time voters, PWDs and Family Island residents. The COG recommends a more robust and sustained public voter education campaign utilising both traditional and social media, conducted periodically and well in advance of any election period.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
5	The PRD should ensure maintenance of, and annual updates to, the list of putative poll workers, including reserve poll workers, that can be drawn on to support elections and to facilitate adequate and timely training.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	The 2026 COG found no clear public evidence of an annually maintained and updated list of putative and reserve poll workers. Concerns were also raised about the appointment of political activists as polling officials. The 2026 COG recommends that the PRD maintain and annually update lists of putative and reserve polling staff, that recruitment procedures be transparent and merit-based, with explicit consideration of gender and regional balance, and that consistent training of polling officials, including reserves, be provided.
6	The PRD should review its communication strategy in advance of the next election in order to facilitate a more open, consultative and co-operative relationship with media and electoral stakeholders.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	The 2026 COG commends the deployment of clearer signage and information desk officers at polling locations. However, the COG notes significant shortcomings in PRD communications, particularly around the advanced poll, voter assignment and key operational decisions. Three days after the close of polls, the PRD website still displayed 2021 results rather than 2026 preliminary results. The 2026 COG notes that the PRD retained two professional PR firms but that their engagement was not reflected in the quality or timeliness of communications.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
7	The PRD should ensure that all official information and resources pertinent to elections are published on the official website, including processes for registration and transfer of constituencies, regulations on poll worker appointments, and regular updates.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	The PRD website carried candidate lists, advanced polling station information and other resources ahead of the 2026 election. However, the certified voters' register was not made publicly available in advance of polling day, limiting systematic review by political parties, civil society and individual voters. The 2026 COG notes that stakeholders also observed that electoral laws and procedural guidance were not always readily accessible to ordinary voters in user-friendly formats.
Participation and Inclusion				
8	CSOs should be encouraged and supported to advocate and deliver programmes on the fundamental human, civil and political rights of citizens, and the value of each vote.	Administrative/Technical	Limited Progress	The 2026 COG notes the absence of a sustained citizen-based domestic election observation mechanism. Civil society organisations continue to face challenges related to limited funding, capacity constraints and restricted opportunities to formally engage electoral authorities. The 2026 COG recommends that civil society and non-partisan stakeholders seek to develop a credible domestic citizen election observation mechanism for future elections.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
9	Political parties and candidates should subscribe to a code of conduct that condemns character assassination, cyber bullying and slander.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No code of political conduct has been established. The 2026 COG reiterates this recommendation — made by both the 2017 and 2021 COGs — and urges political parties, in consultation with civil society, to develop a written code addressing standards of civility in public discourse, personal attacks on opponents, and conduct on social media. The 2026 COG observed 'concerns about misinformation and the tone of online discourse' arising from extensive social media use during the campaign.
10	Political parties and responsible authorities should make every effort to encourage, facilitate and support greater participation of women in representational politics, political leadership and executive government, including through temporary special measures (TSMs) such as seat and cabinet quotas.	Legal/Regulatory	Limited Progress	Nine women were elected to the new 41-member House of Assembly (approx. 22%), broadly comparable to 2021. The representation remains below the Caribbean average and the one-third threshold considered by UN Women to be the minimum for meaningful influence. The 2026 COG notes the continuing underrepresentation of women among candidates for two of the three political parties and encourages all parties to take deliberate steps to advance women's political participation, including by establishing minimum targets for women's representation as candidates and party executives.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
11	All political parties should include a mandated minimum percentage of women's participation in their constitutions, and make greater efforts to ensure women are given leadership and decision-making positions in political party hierarchies.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	There is no public evidence of constitutional amendments by the PLP, FNM or COI introducing a mandated minimum percentage of women's participation. None of the three party leaders is a woman, and women remain underrepresented in party leadership. The 2026 COG recommends that political parties take active steps to increase recruitment, support and promotion of women candidates and ensure their inclusion in leadership positions.
12	Following requisite consultations, a new referendum should be held on a potential constitutional change to Article 26(3) of the Constitution (definition of discrimination), and political parties should campaign alongside CSOs and human rights groups in support of this change.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	No new referendum on gender equality has been held since the 2016 referendum. The 2026 COG notes that The Bahamas does not currently employ legislated gender quotas, reserved seats or affirmative action measures in Parliament or local government.
13	Political parties, CSOs and human rights groups should revive dialogue on the value of strengthening existing laws on cyber bullying and harassment, or the introduction of new legislation on the same.	Legal/Regulatory	Limited Progress	The 2026 COG noted concerns about misinformation and the tone of online discourse throughout the campaign, and the absence of editorial filters on much online content. The Group noted that URCA's revised Code of Practice (ECS 78/2024) applies to online content under the editorial control of licensed broadcasters, but a substantial volume of social media activity falls outside formal broadcast regulation. The 2026 COG encourages continued dialogue among media stakeholders, regulators and civil society on responsible online engagement.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
14	The government, political parties, CSOs and the media should continue finding new ways of providing civic education on Bahamian democracy and governance targeted at youth, and engaging youth further in democratic processes.	Administrative/Technical	Limited Progress	The 2026 COG heard from stakeholders that youth participation often remained concentrated at the level of campaign mobilisation rather than substantive decision-making. The 2026 COG recommends that government, political parties, CSOs and the media proactively engage with youth through partnerships with schools and tertiary institutions, to expand civic education, support youth leadership and create meaningful pathways for substantive youth participation in policy development, party governance and electoral reform.
15	The special dispensation for fast-track voting by persons with disabilities should be standardised across all polling stations, and clear instructions should be included in polling manuals.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	PWDs, elderly voters and pregnant women were given priority at most polling stations on election day; however, practice was not uniform across all stations, and tactile ballot templates for visually impaired voters were not consistently available. The assisted voting protocol was not yet fully standardised in written polling manuals. The 2026 COG recommends that the PRD collaborate with disabled persons' organisations on the development of a standardised assistive voting protocol, accessible voter education materials in multiple formats and clear instructions in polling manuals.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
Campaign and Media				
16	The PRD should consider the development of a code of conduct for political parties and candidates, in consultation with electoral stakeholders.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No code of political conduct has been developed. The 2026 COG reiterates this recommendation for the third consecutive electoral cycle (2017, 2021, 2026), noting that the campaign environment saw concerns about personal attacks, slander and misuse of social media. The COG urges political parties, in consultation with civil society, to develop such a code and provide a mechanism for resolving campaign disputes.
17	Prior to the next election, the government and the House of Assembly should initiate consultations on the development of a regulatory framework governing campaign financing in order to promote fairness, transparency and accountability.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	No campaign finance legislation has been enacted. The 2026 COG notes that, 10 years after this recommendation was first made by a COG, The Bahamas still has no statutory framework governing the regulation of political parties, or the regulation of political contributions, campaign expenditure or disclosure requirements. The 2026 COG describes this as 'increasingly urgent', given observed campaign spending including one candidate who declared a net worth of B\$469 million, and concerns about the use of state resources during the campaign period (VAT removal, electricity bill write-offs and distribution of 'Dorian relief' vouchers in Abaco).

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
18	The state-owned media and political parties should work together to ensure equitable access and coverage for all political parties during elections.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	Perceptions of pro-government bias at the state broadcaster ZNS persisted in 2026. The 2026 COG took note of public disquiet surrounding governance arrangements at the Broadcasting Corporation in the period leading up to the election and reiterated the 2021 recommendation for equitable access and balanced coverage. The Group also noted a concurrent role overlap between the Director of Communications in the Office of the Prime Minister and the equivalent role for the governing party, which it considers undermines public confidence in the separation of party and state.
19	Relevant stakeholders may wish to initiate consultations on the development of a statutory or formal self-regulatory body for the regulation of print media, as well as a formal code of conduct.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	The Bahamas does not currently have an active, comprehensive professional self-regulatory body for the media with an enforceable election code. The 2026 COG notes that the Bahamas Press Club does not function as a comprehensive protector of journalists' interests, particularly for those in the state sector. The 2026 COG recommends that media professionals consider establishing an independent media association and developing a media code of conduct for election coverage, to complement the existing URCA regulatory framework and strengthen self-regulation and professional standards.

(Continued)

#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
20	The PRD and political parties should initiate discussions on a code of ethics for political parties and candidates committing to the responsible use of social media, prohibiting defamation, slander and ad hominem attacks.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No such code has been developed. The 2026 COG noted extensive and growing use of social media by parties, candidates and citizens, and concerns about misinformation, artificial amplification of partisan content and the potential for AI-generated deepfake material. The Group encourages continued dialogue among media stakeholders, regulators and civil society on responsible online engagement.
21	The PRD and URCA may wish to consider initiating discussions with social media companies on the issue of election-related content moderation, with the Commonwealth Secretariat ready to facilitate such discussions if desired.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No clear evidence of such discussions having taken place. URCA's revised Code of Practice (ECS 78/2024) applies only to content under the editorial control of licensed broadcasters. A substantial volume of social media activity — including content from independent commentators, party supporters and overseas-based accounts — falls outside formal broadcast regulation. The 2026 COG underscores the Commonwealth Secretariat's readiness to facilitate such discussions.

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#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
22	The government should fully proclaim the Freedom of Information Act 2017, develop regulations and ensure public institutions fully implement the Act, and raise awareness of the legislation as part of civic education efforts.	Legal/Regulatory	Partially Implemented	The Freedom of Information Act 2017 was passed and the Office of the Information Commissioner was established, but the Act's public access provisions remain pending full operationalisation. The 2026 COG notes that the continued non-operationalisation limits public access to official information and democratic accountability. The FNM's 2026 manifesto pledged full implementation within 90 days of taking office; the 2026 COG recommends that the Act be fully operationalised, including through development of regulations and adequate resourcing of the Information Commissioner's Office.
Voting, Counting and the Results Process				
23	To ensure greater consistency in the application of electoral procedures, the PRD should strengthen the training of polling officials, including reserves.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	The 2026 COG commends polling officials for their professionalism and courtesy, and notes that where minor procedural inconsistencies were observed, these did not materially affect the integrity of the process. However, inconsistencies were observed in the sealing of envelopes and ballot boxes (application of stickers, zip ties and wax), in the checking of electoral ink and in the administration of assisted voting. The 2026 COG recommends that the PRD maintain and annually update lists of polling staff and ensure consistent training of polling officials, including reserves.

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#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
24	Well in advance of election day, the PRD should publish the locations of polling stations and recount locations, along with other pertinent information.	Partially Implemented	Partially Implemented	The PRD published advanced polling station information and election day polling station details via its website and broadcast media ahead of the 2026 election, representing improvement from 2021. However, recount locations were communicated to party representatives at relatively short notice in some constituencies. The 2026 COG encourages the PRD to ensure recount locations are notified to candidates and party agents in good time.
25	In accordance with international good practice, the PRD should consider using translucent ballot boxes and numbered security seals. In addition, tamper-proof bags, rather than paper envelopes, should be used to store ballot papers after counting.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	The 2026 COG observed that the use of stickers, zip ties and sealing wax to seal envelopes and ballot boxes was not always efficient or consistent across polling stations. In some cases envelopes were not tamper-proof and stickers were not sufficiently adhesive; the use of open flames to melt sealing wax may also present health and safety risks. These concerns echo those of the 2021 COG and remain outstanding. The 2026 COG recommends that the PRD utilise translucent ballot boxes and uniquely numbered security seals in keeping with international good practice.

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#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
26	The PRD should articulate and disseminate a clear process through which polling staff can provide support to illiterate persons or those requiring assistance to cast their ballots.	Administrative/Technical	Partially Implemented	Assistance was provided in practice during the 2026 poll, including for PWDs, elderly voters and voters with medical conditions. The relevant oaths of incapacity and secrecy were administered. However, tactile ballot templates for visually impaired voters were not consistently available, and the assisted voting protocol was not yet fully standardised in written polling manuals. The 2026 COG recommends that the PRD collaborate with disabled persons' organisations to develop a standardised assistive voting protocol and clear instructions in polling manuals.
27	The voter registration process should place greater emphasis on identifying voters who may potentially need assistance to vote, and give consideration to noting this on their voter's card. These persons could also be offered the opportunity to participate in the advance poll.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No clear public evidence of formal implementation of a structured identification process at registration. The 2026 expansion of the advanced poll to include senior citizens and PWDs is broadly consistent with this recommendation, but a systematic identification process at the point of voter registration is not yet in place. Advanced poll operational challenges — including insufficient polling stations and prolonged waits for elderly and disabled voters — underscore the urgency of this matter.
28	The PRD should review the official guidance it provides as to examples of good and bad ballots, to ensure it includes examples of where the voter's intention is clear. This should be complemented by robust voter education and incorporated into the training of polling staff.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	No clear public evidence of revised ballot-validity guidance or its incorporation into polling-staff training. The 2026 COG notes this recommendation remains outstanding.

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#	2021 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
29	At the conclusion of the electoral period, the PRD should undertake a review of policies, procedures and staff capacity, and identify successes, challenges and lessons learnt, including consideration of a domestic mechanism to co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate implementation of improvements.	Administrative/Technical	Not Implemented	The 2026 COG encourages the PRD and the Government of The Bahamas to draw on the experience and lessons learnt from the 2026 election cycle as part of any future review of policies, procedures and capacity. The 2026 COG further recommends that the government establish an appropriate domestic mechanism to systematically review and act upon the recommendations of Commonwealth and other international observer missions across the electoral cycle.

Implementation

The Group recommends that the Government of The Bahamas, the Parliamentary Registration Department, the contesting political parties, civil society organisations and the media work together to establish a domestic mechanism to systematically review and act upon the recommendations of Commonwealth Observer Group missions, including those of the 2017, 2021 and 2026 COGs.

Such a mechanism is consistent with the Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries, which encourage member countries to convene multi-stakeholder processes to take forward observer recommendations over the electoral cycle.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has indicated that it stands ready to provide technical support, including in relation to the design of an independent body for the control and management of the electoral system.

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