

# APPENDIX: BAHAMAS

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a population of 309,000.<sup>1</sup> 150,000 people, or 75% of the voting age population, are registered to vote.<sup>2</sup> In the last parliamentary election, 91% of registered voters turned out to vote.<sup>3</sup>

The Parliamentary Registration Department oversees all aspects of election administration at the national level. The Department, based in Nassau, is headed by the Parliamentary Commissioner and is responsible for all matters related to voter registration.<sup>4</sup>

## VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration is voluntary.<sup>5</sup> It is the responsibility of eligible individuals to initiate their own registrations and to ensure that their registration information is current.<sup>6</sup> The voter registration list expires every five years,<sup>7</sup> and it is the Parliamentary Commissioner's responsibility to prepare a new voter list to replace it.<sup>8</sup> Registration closes the day an election is called, typically one month before Election Day.<sup>9</sup>

### Adding New Voters

Voters must register in-person at their local election office after showing requisite identification.<sup>10</sup> Upon registering, each voter is provided a voter card.<sup>11</sup>

### Updating Existing Voter Entries

It is the responsibility of individual voters to ensure that their voter registration is accurate and current. When voters move, they must update their registration information by submitting a form in-person to election officials.<sup>12</sup>

Election officials obtain death information from authorities that track births and deaths.<sup>13</sup> To ensure that only deceased voters are removed from the rolls, election officials must send a notice of removal to each affected voter.<sup>14</sup>

## FILLING GAPS AND CORRECTING INACCURACIES IN THE ROLLS

Election officials continuously review the voter rolls to ensure that records remain accurate, and to remove duplicate entries.<sup>15</sup> The Parliamentary Commissioner may also authorize house-to-house inquiries to verify the accuracy of the voter rolls and to register any eligible residents whose names are not on the rolls.<sup>16</sup>

The Bahamas does not offer Election Day registration. If on Election Day a voter's name cannot be found on the voter roll, she may cast a protest vote which may be counted only in specific circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

## PRIVACY CONSIDERATIONS

The Parliamentary Commissioner is required to make the register, with alterations included if practicable to do so, available for public inspection at all times during office hours at the Parliamentary Commissioner's office.<sup>18</sup> The public may also take extracts of this copy.<sup>19</sup> Candidates for office are entitled to a copy, free of charge, of the register for their constituencies.<sup>20</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Estimated for July 2009. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook—Bahamas, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bf.html> (last updated May 14, 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Voter Turnout: Country View—Bahamas, [http://www.idea.int/vt/country\\_view.cfm?CountryCode=BS](http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=BS) (last updated May 19, 2009).
- <sup>3</sup> The last parliamentary election was held in 2007. *Id.*
- <sup>4</sup> The Commonwealth of The Bahamas Parliamentary Department, A Review of the Bahamian Electoral System (2005), <http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/vContentW/54B3E690E170C24F85256FF6005BE036> [hereinafter Review of Bahamian Electoral System]; Parliamentary Elections Act, 1992 § 22 (Bah.) (stating that the Parliamentary Commissioner shall compare and keep under review several parts of the register to ensure that no person is wrongly registered and providing appropriate procedures for those he believes are wrongly or incorrectly registered); *see generally*, The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, Parliamentary Department (2005), <http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/parliamentary>.
- <sup>5</sup> Statute Law, ch. 7, § 8 (Bah.) *available at* [http://laws.bahamas.gov.bs/statutes/statute\\_CHAPTER\\_7.html](http://laws.bahamas.gov.bs/statutes/statute_CHAPTER_7.html) [hereinafter Election Law]. Voting is also voluntary. *Id.* § 9.
- <sup>6</sup> An individual must reside in a constituency for a minimum of three months before registering to vote. *Id.* § 8.
- <sup>7</sup> The Commonwealth of The Bahamas Parliamentary Department, The Electoral Register (2005), <http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/vContentW/Parliamentary+Dept--Electoral+Structure--Parliamentary+Electoral+Register!Opendocument>.
- <sup>8</sup> The Commonwealth of The Bahamas Parliamentary Department, The Registration Process (2005), <http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/vContentW/B8EFE8236C51889485256FF6005C051C>.
- <sup>9</sup> Election Law, *supra* note 5, § 25. *See, e.g.*, Lindsay Thompson, Bahamas Information Services, Voter’s Cards Distribution April 13, <http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/bahamasweb2/home.nsf/vContentW/21E807ED0ACB3888852572B40070FCF7!OpenDocument&Highlight=0,Parliamentary%20Registration%20Department>.
- <sup>10</sup> Election Law, *supra* note 5, § 18. New registrants must show a passport or birth certificate. If an individual does not possess either, they may show a baptismal certificate or other document that election officials deems appropriate. *Id.* § 19(1)(a)(ii).
- <sup>11</sup> *Id.* § 19. The voter is required to show the voter card or another form of identification at the polls. *Id.* § 57. Any registered voter of a constituency may object to the application of another in that constituency by giving oral notice to the revising officer in the presence of the applicant at the time of the application. After hearing an objection, the local election official may determine that the objection states a *prima facie* ground for rejecting the registration application and fix a date for a hearing. *Id.* § 21(1).
- <sup>12</sup> *Id.* § 20.
- <sup>13</sup> *Id.* § 22(4).
- <sup>14</sup> *Id.* § 22(3).
- <sup>15</sup> *See id.* § 22.
- <sup>16</sup> *Id.* §§ 16-17.
- <sup>17</sup> *Id.* § 58. Protest votes are not counted in contested elections if the highest number of regular votes cast for a candidate exceeds the aggregate of regular and protest votes for any other candidate. *Id.* § 68. Protest votes are taken into account in the counting of ballots for a race where this is not the case. *See id.* § 69.
- <sup>18</sup> *Id.* § 26(1), (4).
- <sup>19</sup> *Id.* § 26(4).
- <sup>20</sup> *Id.* § 25(2)(a).