

Name: _____ Date: _____ Grade: _____

Social Studies

Topic: General Elections

Brief Notes

ELECTING GOVERNMENT LEADERS

In democracies, like the Bahamas, government leaders are “of the people, by the people, for the people”. This means persons elected first must be a Bahamian citizen (of the people), elected by the people (by the people) to serve the people (for the people). Citizens elect MPs from a list of candidates during a general election.

Who can be a candidate in an election?

A candidate is someone who decides to run for a publicly elected office. Before running for a seat in parliament a candidate is nominated by his political party to run in a constituency. A person can also nominate himself as an independent candidate. Independent candidates do not belong to a political party. Any person that is a Bahamian citizen, 21 years or older, with a clean police record, sound mind, and is a registered voter can be a candidate. On Nomination Day all candidates pay a deposit of \$400. If a candidate wins 1/6th of the votes in their constituency during the election their deposit is returned to them.

Who has the right to vote?

The people elect MPs to serve as their representative in the government. Each eligible voter votes once. To be eligible to vote a person must be a Bahamian citizen, 18 years or older and have a sound mind. If eligible the persons registers with the Registrar Generals Office.

Once registered their names is placed on an official voters list and they are given a voters card as proof of registry. A voter must vote in the constituency he is registered in. The Parliamentary Registration Department in Nassau is responsible for the registration of voters and the conduct of election in the country.

What is a Constituency?

A constituency is a portion of a country which is entitled to elect one candidate to Parliament. The amount of constituencies and the boundary lines of a constituency is decided by the boundaries commission. There are presently thirty-nine (39) seats in the Bahamian Parliament. This number changes from time to time. Boundaries Commission meets every five years and it makes recommendations to the Governor General as to how many seats should be in the assembly. In the past governing parties have been accused of placing the boundary lines in a way to give their party the advantage in winning. This is known as gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is illegal.

When are elections held?

There are two types of elections held in The Bahamas – general elections and bye-elections. In general election all constituencies are contested or are competed for. These elections are held every five years. The day of the General Elections is announced by the Prime Minister.

When an election is called the Parliament in session is dissolved by Proclamation of the Governor General. Political parties begin campaigning. Election must be held 30-35 days after the House of Assembly is dissolved. A bye-election is held only if MP dies or resigns from office. In bye- election only the people in the constituency that has lost its MP vote to get a new representative.

What is a polling station?

A polling station or division is a place voters go to vote. The Parliamentary Registrar Office chooses polling stations. They are usually government buildings such as a school, post office or a community centre. On Election Day persons are given three hours off to vote. All bars are closed. They go to the polling station written on their voters' card. At polling station their name is checked against the voters list, and then they secretly vote. Polling stations close at 6pm. The only reasons persons are allowed to vote outside their polling division if they are unable to get to their polling division before the polls close at six.

Counting the Ballots

At 6pm polling stations are closed the Presiding Officers and poll workers at each station opens the ballot box and counts the votes. The votes are tallied and a report of the number of ballots cast for each candidate is taken. The ballots are returned to the box, it's resealed and transported to the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer in counts the ballots from all polling stations in his constituency. When all the votes have been counted the official results are sent to the Registrar General, who announces the winner. If a candidate feels he has been cheated or the rules of election were not followed he can take the matter to an Election Court.

Once all ballots are counted, the party with largest number of elected MPs becomes the governing party. The party with the second largest winners becomes the Official Opposition. The Opposition's job is to challenge, oppose and question the government on its policies and actions. This is done to ensure that the government is making good decisions and is accountable for it's decisions.

The Voting Process

1. The person who is voting (the voter) enters the polling station
2. At the door give your name to the Poll Clerk
3. Your name is called out and checked against the voters list.
4. If the voters name is on the list he is asked to show proof of identification. This can be voter's card, or passport.
5. The voters hand is then passed under the integrity lamp to ensure they have not voted already.
6. The Presiding Officer tears a ballot card from the ballot book. The serial number on the card is recorded on the ballot.
7. The Presiding Officer shoes the voter the card and gives instructions how to correctly fill out the card, how to fold when completed and where the ballot box is.
8. The voter goes behind a screen and marks X for the candidate of his/her choice.
9. The voter folds the card as instructed and shows the Presiding Officer that it is folded correctly.
10. The voter places the ballot in the ballot box.
11. The voters thumb, up to the first index, is then dipped in indelible ink and he leaves.

Activity Time



Instructions: Write true if the statement is true and false if the statement is false.

1. _____ - an MP are male participant in government elections.
2. _____ - a Candidate is someone who decides to run for a publicly elected office.
3. _____ - all political candidates must be elected by a political party.
4. _____ - each voter has the right to vote twice once they show up to the polling station before 6.pm
5. _____ - there are 39 seat presently, but this can change in the next election.
6. _____ - in order for a general election to happen parliament must be dissolved.
7. _____ - Election Day is announced by the Governor General.
8. _____ - There are two types of election that are help in the Bahamas.
9. _____ - the presiding officer counts the ballots.
10. _____ - the winning party is known as the Opposition.
11. _____ - Gerrymandering is illegal in the Bahamas because it can give a political party an advantage over based on where the boundary lines are place.

Activity TWO- Matching

Instructions: Drag and drop the following terms in the proper column below to identify the requirements to be a voter and a candidate in a general election.

- ☐ Bahamian citizen
- ☐ 18 years or older and
- ☐ 21 years or older
- ☐ a sound mind
- ☐ a registered voter
- ☐ clean police record
- ☐ Bahamian citizen
- ☐ pay a deposit of \$400
- ☐ a sound mind

Requirements



**Candidate In A
General Election**

**To Be A Voter In A
General Election**