

Lesson 8

Our Government since Independence

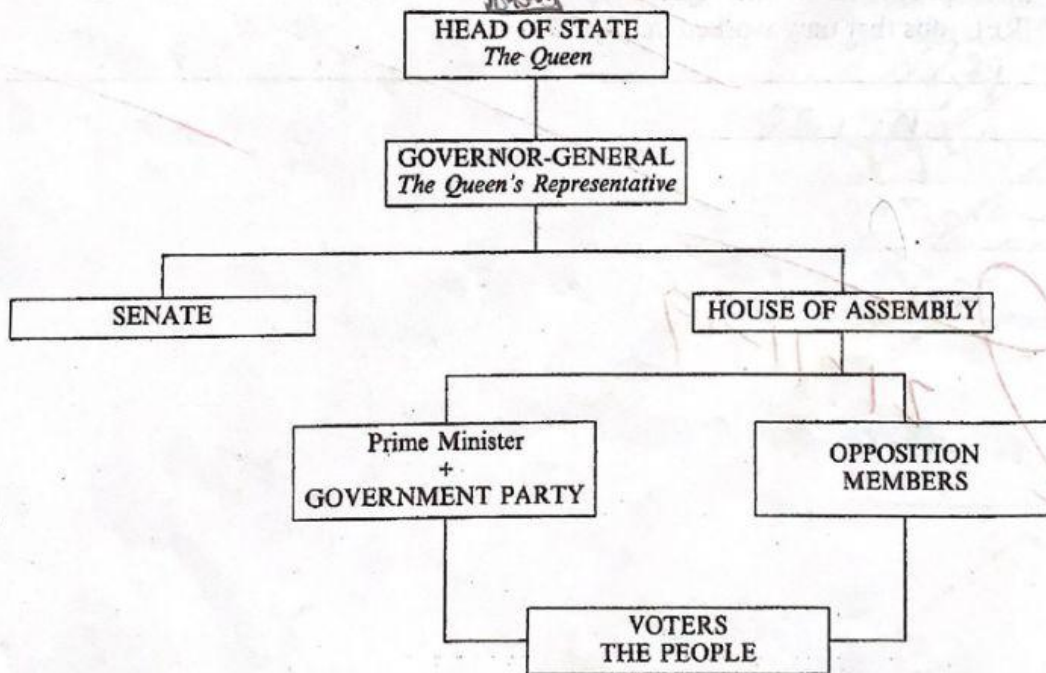
The Bahamas had a Parliament since 1729. For centuries, The Bahamas was a British colony, and although the House of Assembly could suggest how the country should be run, all laws had to be approved by Britain.

The Bahamas finally became independent on **10th July 1973**. Now, as an independent nation, the people of the Bahamas make their own laws.



Today everyone in the Bahamas over the age of 18 has the right to vote. We vote to elect people who will represent us in the House of Assembly. Until 1958, however, voters had to own property, be the age at least 21-and male. Women did not win the right to vote until 1962, after a long, hard struggle for equality with the men.

The diagram below shows the structure of our Parliament today:



From: Primary Social Studies and Tourism Education for The Bahamas, Book 5.

Although the Bahamas is an independent country, Queen Elizabeth is still our **Head of State**. Her representative in The Bahamas is called the **Governor**

General. The Queen no longer has the power to make laws in The Bahamas, but she or the Governor General- still signs every law that is passed in our Parliament.

There are two houses or chambers of parliament. Currently, there are **38** members of the **House of Assembly** who are the **Members of Parliament (MPs)**, elected by the people in a general election. You will learn more about the election in book 6.

The other chamber of Parliament is the **Senate**. The members of the Senate – **Senators** are appointed by the Governor-General, on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.



A general election is held every **five** years. In an election, people choose their representative from different political parties. Each party has its own ideas about how the country should be run. The party that wins the most seats in the House of Assembly forms the Government. The Leader of the winning party becomes the **Prime Minister**. The party with fewer seats is the **Opposition Party**, headed by the leader of the Opposition. This form of government is called a **democracy**. The way our country is to run is set out in a special document called the **Constitution**.

The main purpose of government is to pass laws so that the country can function well. The wording of any law is discussed first in the House of Assembly and then in the Senate. Each law is looked at in detail by two sets of people. This ensures that the law is **flawless** as it can be and that it is stated as clearly as possible. Only when both chambers have discussed and agreed on the new law, and the Governor-General has signed it, does it come into **effect**.

It is through the laws of the land that the rights of all citizens are protected. Our laws are enforced by the **police** and the **law courts**.



The House of Assembly and the Senate

1. When was the first parliament in The Bahamas started? [1]

2. What were TWO requirements for people to be able to vote?

3. When did women win the right to vote in The Bahamas? [1]

4. Who is the head of state of The Bahamas? Who is the representative for the head of state? [2]

5. Name the TWO chambers of The Bahamas' Parliament. [2]

6. How is the prime minister of The Bahamas chosen? [1]

7. What type of government does The Bahamas have? [1]

8. Explain what a constitution is. [1]

9. Explain the purpose of the government of The Bahamas. [2]

10. Who signs the bills so that they can be laws in The Bahamas? [1]

11. Who enforces the laws in The Bahamas? [1]