

# Voters oust prime minister in Bahamas

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NASSAU, Bahamas --

A former prime minister led his opposition party to victory in the Bahamas on Wednesday, returning to power in elections dominated by questions about the direction of the tourism-driven economy.

Hubert Ingraham's Free National Movement won 23 seats in the 41-seat legislature, while Prime Minister Perry Christie's Progressive Liberal Party claimed the other 18, according to the government-owned Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas.

"The people of the Bahamas have spoken," Ingraham said in a victory speech interrupted several times by cheers from thousands of supporters dressed in the party's signature red shirts. He told them Christie had called him to concede defeat.

Ingraham, who led the Atlantic archipelago nation from 1992 until 2002, seized on scandals involving Christie's Cabinet, including the resignation of the immigration minister over claims he fast-tracked the residency application of the late Playboy Playmate Anna Nicole Smith.

He also warned that the government had gone too far in accommodating a second-home industry and tourist developments, arguing the country of 700 islands should lease rather than sell land to non-Bahamians.

"They simply sign on to just about any outrageous proposal that winds up in the inbox on their desks," Ingraham said at a recent rally. "Once the land is sold, it's gone."

Christie, who was Ingraham's law partner early in their careers, is the only prime minister to serve just one term since the Bahamas won independence from Britain in 1973.

He campaigned for a second 5-year term by highlighting the \$20 billion in new foreign investment and resort projects since he took office.

"We've taken the Bahamian economy to new heights of prosperity," he said in a televised address Monday. "The economy is booming as never before. Tourism is vibrant and strong."

Both parties called for new strategies to curb illegal immigration, fight crime by expanding community policing and devote more resources to diplomatic missions overseas.

About half the population of 300,000 was eligible to vote, and islanders formed orderly lines outside schools and other voting places.

Among the governing party's slate was Shane Gibson, the former immigration minister who was accused of showing preferential treatment to Smith.

Ingraham said the Bahamas should consider abolishing the law that allows foreigners to qualify for residency by purchasing a house in the country.

Officials with the Free National Movement, which held only eight seats in the outgoing parliament, said they intend to contest some of the seats that apparently went to the governing party.