

Transparency Maldives' 2015 Maldives Democracy Survey points to a troubled future for democracy in the Maldives.

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A nationwide survey published by Transparency Maldives points to a continuing crisis of public confidence in key state institutions. Citizens are cynical about politics. They are also dissatisfied with the prevailing political and social order. The survey report, titled, A Troubled Future for Democracy, however, shows that a majority of Maldivians support democracy.

“The survey shows that citizens are less likely to meaningfully participate in public matters and protect democratic institutions as they have no faith in them. If so, it should not be surprising to see democratic declines and increase in impunity and corruption,” Mariyam Shiuna, Executive Director of Transparency Maldives said.

Crisis of confidence in key institutions

Most citizens lack confidence in key state institutions including the parliament and the courts. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents say they have no confidence at all in the parliament. This is, however, an improvement of five percentage points compared to 2013.

Courts saw a drop of confidence level by five percentage points, compared to 2013. Over a majority (51%) of Maldivians now say they have no confidence at all in courts compared to 46% in 2013.

Strikingly, there was a major decrease of confidence level in the Elections Commission, with a drop of 17 percentage points compared to 2013. A majority (56%) still have confidence in the the Elections Commission.

Political parties saw an improvement of nine percentage points, although almost half (49%) still have no confidence at all in them.

The report argued that if public lack confidence in institutions, citizens are unlikely to defend those institutions and institutions are unlikely to be effective links between citizens and the state.

Cynical, critical and dissatisfied citizens

Maldivians continue to be highly cynical of politics. Seventy-one percent of Maldivians say that the government does not care about ordinary people and 94% of Maldivians believe that politicians are “ready to lie to get elected”.

Citizens continue to be critical of the social order: 80% think that power is concentrated in the hands of too few people. The good news is that 97% of the public believe dialogue is the way to solve the country’s problem. The bad news is that 1 in 3 think that violence is sometimes a necessary response to injustice.

Only 32% of Maldivians say that the country is headed in the “right direction”. While 59% of the population believe that Maldives is a democracy, only 45% of them are satisfied with the way democracy works in the Maldives. Seventy-two percent of Maldivians believe that level of corruption in the country has increased over the past year.

While membership in political parties is high among Maldivians, only 22% of Maldivians believe that parties serve the interest of the Maldivian people.

Support for democracy and gender equality

The most significant positive developments since 2013 concern citizens' support for democracy. Most Maldivians prefer democracy as a form of government. A solid majority of 63% people believe that despite its problems democracy is still the best system compared to 59% in 2013. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents also think a democratic form of government is good for the country.

Such a straightforward positive conclusion is hard to be made about attitudes towards gender equality. Fifty-four percent of Maldivians now agree with the statement that men make better leaders than women, compared to 61% who agreed with the statement, indicating that despite the slight improvement support for gender equality is still worryingly low.

However, Maldivians are supportive of women being in some leadership positions. Eighty-four percent of respondents support women being elected to the parliament and 79% of Maldivians support the idea of women working as cabinet ministers. Unfortunately these trends do not hold for the position of a judge, the Vice President of the country or the President of the Country. Only 39% of Maldivians support a woman being elected as the President of the country.

A troubled future for democracy

“Democratic institutions and politicians must take extraordinary measures to regain public trust. Citizens, in their part, must step up to hold public officials to account,” said Shiuna.

“Political parties play a crucial role in democracies as they organise politics for citizens. The survey clearly shows the need for parties to reconnect with the people to achieve genuine democratic reforms,” she added.

The report concludes that unless these challenges are addressed, democracy has a “troubled future” in the Maldives.

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

The survey, which was conducted with the technical assistance from International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) aims to encourage informed debate of democratic norms and about the performance of democratic institutions.

This is the second survey that TM has conducted to gauge public attitudes on various aspects of democracy. A benchmark survey was conducted in 2013, just before the presidential election.

The random sample of approximately 1,000 citizens provides a margin of error of +/- 2.95% and the findings are generalisable to the entire country. Most of the questions asked come from surveys that have been repeatedly used and tested around the world.

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