



**Local Council and Women's
Development Committee Elections 2020**
Election Observation Report

Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. All information was believed to be correct as of 15th June 2021. Nevertheless, Transparency Maldives cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or in other contexts.

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Transparency Maldives (TM), the national chapter of Transparency International (TI), is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization that promotes collaboration, awareness, and undertakes other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption in the Maldives. Transparency Maldives views corruption as a systemic issue and advocates for institutional changes that will punish and prevent corruption.

TM has been working in the area of electoral integrity since its inception in 2008. The objective of this work is to advance the values of transparency and integrity in electoral processes by ensuring civil society participation, and monitoring the pre-election, election day, and post-election period, whilst empowering the electorate to make well-informed decisions and vote responsibly.

With the exception of the 2014 Local Council Elections, TM has observed all general elections (presidential, parliamentary, and local council elections) held in the country since the Maldives became a multi-party democracy in 2008.

Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

- ACC** - Anti-Corruption Commission
- AGO** - Attorney General's Office
- AP** - Adhaalath Party
- CBO** - Community-Based Organisations
- CSO** - Civil Society Organisations
- DRP** - Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party
- EC** - Elections Commission of Maldives
- EDR** - Electoral Dispute Resolution
- HPA** - Health Protection Agency
- HRCM** - Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
- JP** - Jumhooree Party
- LCE** - Local Council Elections
- LGA** - Local Government Authority
- MBC** - Maldives Broadcasting Commission
- MDA** - Maldives Development Alliance
- MDP** - Maldivian Democratic Party
- MLS DP** - Maldives Labour and Social Democratic Party
- MMC** - Maldives Media Council
- MPS** - Maldives Police Service
- MRM** - Maldives Reform Movement
- MTWD** - Maldives Third Way Democrats
- NAC** - National Advisory Committee
- NECB** - National Elections Complaints Bureau
- NGO** - Non-Governmental Organisation
- PG** - Prosecutor General
- PNC** - People's National Congress
- PPM** - Progressive Party of Maldives
- PSM** - Public Service Media
- PWD** - People With Disabilities
- SOE** - State-owned Enterprises
- TM** - Transparency Maldives
- TVM** - Television Maldives
- WDC** - Women's Development Committee

Executive Summary

On 10th April 2021, the Maldives held the country's fourth Local Council Elections. On the same day, the first Women's Development Committee elections with universal suffrage was also held. The elections, initially scheduled for April 2020, were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transparency Maldives conducted the Long Term Observations of the electoral period and election day observations. Long Term Observations consisted of observing the general environment, monitoring electoral events, and conducting interviews with candidates. Transparency Maldives deployed 40 trained and accredited observers to monitor the election day process of 34 polling centres. The observers were equipped with standardised checklists that included questions about preparation, opening, voting, closing and counting.

A total of 3,814 candidates competed in the elections. This included 2,234 (1,401 men and 833 women) candidates that competed for Local Council seats and 1,580 candidates that competed for Women's Development Committees.

A total of 273,128 citizens were eligible to vote in the polls, out of which 5,134 were first-time voters. This is the highest number of new voters to participate in an election so far.

Legal Context

The election was the first of its kind, conducted after major changes were brought to the electoral framework, term and constitution of the Local Councils and Women's Development Committees.

The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution that came into effect in December 2019 increased the term of the local councils from three to five years, and provided for the direct election of Mayors of City Councils and Presidents of Atoll and Island Councils.

The Eighth Amendment to the Decentralisation Act that also came into effect in December 2019 introduced a gender quota that reserved 33 percent of seats in Island and City Councils for women.

The Eighth Amendment also changed the election process for members of the women's development committees, who serve in an advisory capacity to the Island and Atoll Councils. For the first time, the Women's Development Committee elections were held in tandem with the Local Council Elections, with both men and women casting ballots for women's development committee candidates. Previously, members of the Women's Development Committee were elected through a separate election administered by the Local Government Authority in coordination with Island Councils, with only female voters eligible to vote from their respective islands.

COVID-19 Impact

When the decision was made to move forward with the elections in 2021, many of the restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 across the country were still in place. To ensure safety during the pandemic, the Health Protection Agency issued guidelines that had to be followed by all stakeholders. The key provisions included adjustments to electoral campaign activities, including restrictions to traveling between islands, door to door campaigning and public gatherings. Specific guidelines for voting processes and operation of polling stations were established. Guidelines were also provided for recruitment, training, and handling of election materials. Due to these restrictions, the Elections Commission faced many challenges in administering the election, while candidates faced challenges in campaigning.

Women's Participation

The Local Council Election 2020, reserved 33 percent of seats for women, a total of 384 seats (370 Island Council seats and 14 City Councils seats). A total of 802 women competed for Quota Seats and 31 for general seats. Only one female candidate contested for an Atoll president seat, whilst 44 male candidates contested for the same seats. There were only three female candidates who ran for council president seats, while the number of male candidates were 414. None of the female candidates who contested for leadership roles in the 2020 Local Council Election was elected.

Abuse of State Resources

From the observations, media reports and candidate survey findings, the most common forms of abuse identified include the inauguration or completion of government projects in time for elections and usage of government vehicles and civil servants and/or employees of state-owned enterprises for campaign activities. From the survey conducted among 107 candidates, 27 candidates stated that civil servants and/or employees of state-owned enterprises were used by their competitors for campaign activities during office hours.

General Lack of Voter Education

Due to COVID-19 related restrictions, voter education activities were limited compared to past elections. However, similar to previous elections, in addition to the Elections Commission of Maldives, the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives and civil society organisations carried out voter education activities. TM observers reported a total of 32 voter education activities that were carried out through social media and general media.

Election Day

The election day processes were transparent, peaceful and well implemented. Political party representatives were present as observers in a majority of observed polling places, further contributing to transparency. However, at the later stages of voting, the Elections Commission of Maldives allowed all voters the right to vote at a time period which was initially exclusively allocated for COVID-19 patients and those who were in quarantine, which resulted in general confusion between polling station officials and citizens.

1 Observation Methodology

Transparency Maldives (TM) has been observing Local Council Elections (LCE) since the first LCE in 2011. However, TM's observation of the 2020 elections was conducted at a more comprehensive scale as there were major changes to the electoral framework including the direct appointment of mayoral and council presidents' seats and introduction of quota seats for women. In addition, this was the first time the LCE and Women's Development Committee (WDC) elections were held together.

TM's observation consisted of both Long Term Observation (LTO) and election day Short Term Observation (STO). LTO consisted of observing the general environment, monitoring electoral events and conducting interviews with candidates. The major themes that TM observed were Equal Opportunity, Abuse of State Resources, Systematic Violence and Intimidation, Vote Buying and Quota/Gender-specific issues. Election day observation was focused on the process inside polling stations from opening until counting. TM conducted training for all observers before commencing observations. Observers used unified checklists which were collected via online tools.

1.1 Long Term Observation

During the electoral period, TM deployed 34 observers from 17th March 2021 to 9th April 2021 to conduct LTO on issues in the electoral environment and proceedings leading up to the elections. TM deployed four from the capital Greater Malé region, seven from three other cities, and 23 from 23 islands. The observers were tasked to observe the campaign environment through a checklist designed by TM. This checklist included questions on abuse of state resources, vote buying, systematic violence and intimidation (especially against women candidates); equal implementation of COVID-19 restrictions; and readiness of the Elections Commission of Maldives (EC). The observers conducted general observation; attended regular events; and reported any critical incidents which may arise in their place of observation.

1.2 Candidate Interview

In addition to the field work, TM conducted phone interviews with 107 LCE candidates. To maintain a gender balance, 54 female candidates and 53 male candidates were interviewed. Interviewed candidates included candidates from 19 atolls. (the only atoll that was not included is Vaavu atoll). Candidates from eight political parties contested and interviewees included political parties (except for Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party - DRP, which fielded only one candidate) and independent candidates. To provide a fair representation, the number of candidates to be interviewed from each party was chosen based on the total numbers of candidates representing a political party.

1.3 Short Term Observation

Similar to previous LCE's, only domestic observers monitored the 2020 elections. Election day observation was carried out with a total of 40 trained and accredited observers: 28 observers from the islands and 12 from Male'. The observation was carried out in 19 atolls and Capital Greater Male' area (Vaavu Atoll being the only administrative atoll where a TM observer was not fielded). Observers were trained and deployed to monitor the whole election day process including setting up, opening, voting, closing, and counting. Questions into the different phases were divided on two forms that observers filled and reported on election day. This observation lasted close to 24 hours as the counting process of both LCE and WDC ballot boxes were prolonged beyond expectation. Even with the lengthy observation, observers were able to successfully report both the forms within the allocated time. TM established a call center and online platform to maintain contact with the observers in the field, and received real-time updates.

2 Political Context

The fourth LCE and WDC election initially scheduled to be held on 4th April 2020 was postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (see Section 3 below for more details). In January 2021, the government authorized the EC and other relevant authorities to move forward with the election. Subsequently, on 10th April 2021, Maldives held its fourth LCE and WDC election. The elections took place after electoral reforms that introduced a gender quota for women in Local Councils and an election process for members of WDC where both men and women cast ballots for WDC candidates.

The 2020 LCE and WDC election saw candidates from all major parties competing together with a significant number of independent candidates. All major elections after 2014 have been won by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). MDP won 332 of the contested positions (43.40%) in the 2017 LCE. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, MDP's candidate, defeated the incumbent Abdulla Yamin Abdul Gayoom of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) at the 2018 Presidential Elections, and MDP secured 65 out of 87 seats (75.86%) in the Parliamentary Elections of 2019.

After PPM lost heavily in the Parliamentary Elections of 2019, PPM and People's National Congress (PNC) formed an opposition alliance called the Progressive Congress Coalition. Abdullah Yameen Abdul Gayoom, former president and the head of the largest opposition party PPM, was convicted in November 2019 for money laundering and remained in custody during the campaign period.

The main opposition PPM-PNC coalition held demonstrations in Malé in February and March 2021 mainly in protest of the government's housing policies. These protests were held despite the Health Protection Agency (HPA) banning public gatherings of more than five people given the COVID-19 situation. In March, the EC imposed a fine of MVR 75,000 (US\$ 4,864) on PPM stating that the protests violated the laws relating to political parties. During weekends the police began blocking the roads leading to the PPM headquarters to prevent gatherings. PPM complained to EC that the blockade restricted the party from properly campaigning for the elections.

Since 2020, the ruling party MDP has been going through disagreements and conflicts both internally and with its coalition partners. Although officially denied by the Party, there was widespread talk of disagreements between President Solih and MDP leader and Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Nasheed.

3 Legal Framework

The electoral legal framework provides the minimum standards necessary for democratic elections.¹ Since the LCE of 2017, significant changes have been brought to the laws governing LCEs.

On 8th December 2019, four months prior to the initially planned date for elections, the President enacted the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution. The term of the local council was amended from three to five years and Mayors of City Councils and Presidents of Atoll and Island Councils were to be elected directly by the constituents of the respective councils. Prior to the amendment, the Mayors and Presidents were elected amongst and by the members of the respective councils. Also all members of the Atoll Councils were elected directly by the constituents of the atoll. In addition to the President of the Atoll Councils, the rest of the Atoll Council will now consist of the Presidents of the Island Councils of all the islands belonging to the atoll and Mayors of any City Councils in the atoll.

In the same month, the Parliament enacted the Eighth Amendment to the Decentralisation Act which resulted in 33% of the local council seats being reserved for women along with more fiscal and legal autonomy. Furthermore, elections for WDCs, who serve in an advisory capacity to the Atoll and Island Councils were to be held alongside the LCE. The term of the WDCs was also changed from three to five years and the process amended such that the candidates would be elected by universal suffrage. Prior to the amendment, elections for WDCs were held separately and administered by the Local Government Authority (LGA) in coordination with Island Councils, with only women having the right to vote in these elections.

On 29th April 2020, the parliament passed the Local Council Elections Special Provision Act 2020.² This Act stipulated that the LCE and WDC elections would be postponed until the public health emergency due to COVID-19 pandemic was lifted and it was deemed safe to hold nationwide elections, but the act also stated that the elections must be held before 6th January 2021. As the public health emergency was not lifted by January 2021, the EC sought clarification from parliament, which passed the first amendment to the Local Council Elections Special Provision Act 2020 in an extraordinary sitting, allowing the election to proceed during the public health emergency.

¹ In addition to the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Local Council Elections are governed by the Decentralisation Act 2010, General Elections Act 2008, Local Council Elections Act 2010, Constituencies Act 2009, Political Parties Act 2013, Political Parties Regulations 2013.

² <https://www.mvlaw.gov.mv/pdf/ganoon/chapter1/3-2020.pdf>

4 Electoral System

The Maldives adopted a multiparty system in 2008 with the passing of the new Constitution. The Decentralization Act of 2010 introduced the formation of Local Councils and states the roles and responsibilities of atoll, island and city councils. The members of the council are elected through a first-past-the-post system.

4.1 Electoral Administration: Procedure and Practice

4.1.1. Elections Commission of Maldives

The EC, established in 2008 under Chapter 7.2 of the Constitution and administered under the Elections Commission Act, is an independent and impartial body tasked with the administration of all elections and public referendums in a way that ensures the free and fair exercise of the right to vote, without intimidation, aggression, undue influence, or corruption. The Commission consists of five members, who are nominated by the President and approved by the Parliament. To date, all members appointed to the EC by the parliament have been men.

Prior to the 2020 LCE, EC had conducted three Local Council Elections: in 2011, 2014 and 2017. Past elections were observed by TM and other local observers to be well administered. The processes and procedures involved in the election were managed and administered by EC appointed focal points in the respective cities and islands, except in Male' City where it was managed by the respective sections of the EC.

4.1.2. National Advisory Committee

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) is formed by the EC prior to every election. The NAC for LCE and WDC of 2020 was formed on 10th December 2019 and comprised representatives from political parties, independent commissions, government departments and Civil Society Organizations (See Annex C for the full list). TM was invited to sit in the NAC as a representative of the civil society. The mandate of NAC is to provide advice to the EC while increasing transparency and inclusivity in the electoral process.

4.1.3. Candidate Registration

To be eligible as a candidate, a person must be a Maldivian citizen of at least 18 years of age. The candidate may be a naturalised citizen, provided they have had citizenship and have been living in Maldives for at least five years. However, the person cannot hold citizenship of any other country. The candidates must be Sunni Muslim and be of "sound mind." A person is not eligible if they have been convicted of a criminal offence, or sentenced to a term of one year or longer, unless pardoned at least three years prior to registration as a candidate. Also, candidates should be free of certain offences that violate Islamic law, including corruption, fraud, bribery, drug-related offences, or crimes against children. In addition, a candidate should not have any outstanding debt.

Candidates can be sponsored by a registered political party or contest independently. Civil servants may contest as candidates, but must resign their positions as civil servants if elected as council members. In addition, the civil servant is suspended from his/her job from the moment his/her candidacy is accepted by EC.

As the LCE and WDC election was initially scheduled to be held on 4th April 2020, the EC opened applications for local council election registration from 4th February 2020 and WDC from 24th February 2020. After the election was postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, EC did not reopen the registration of candidates. Article 3 of Local Council Elections Special Provision Bill (2020), states that, despite the yearlong delay in holding the LCE due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EC shall not accept new candidacy applications and will regard the list of registered candidates published by EC on 6th March 2020 as final. The stance drew criticism from the public and a member of the Jumhooree Party (JP) filed a case citing a potential infringement on an individual's right to contest, particularly for newly eligible candidates. However, the case was not accepted by the High Court stating that the matter was not within their jurisdiction. EC maintained that re-opening candidacy applications was not feasible and would delay the electoral timeline.

Candidates were allowed to withdraw their candidacy between 23rd June 2020 and 11th February 2021. EC disclosed that a total of 308 candidates (169 LCE and 139 WDC) withdrew their names while five (four LCE and one WDC) candidates' applications were rejected.

The decision to not accept new candidacy while allowing for withdrawals increased the chances of a single candidate standing for the default election. EC disclosed that 30 candidates (21 MDP candidates and nine independent candidates) were automatically elected to seats in the local councils, and 90 candidates were automatically elected to WDCs while some seats remained uncontested.

A total of 2,234 candidates ultimately competed in the LCE and a total 1,580 candidates competed in the WDC election. See figure 1 below for LCE candidates breakdown by party and figure 2 for WDC candidates breakdown.

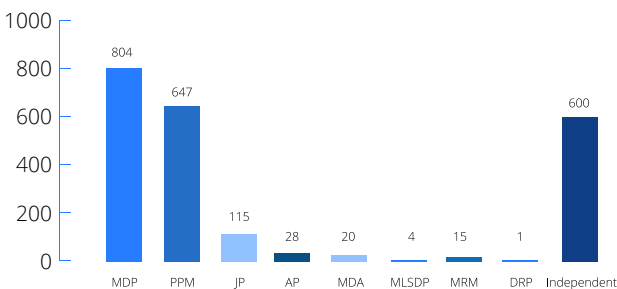


Figure 1 - LCE candidates (breakdown by party)

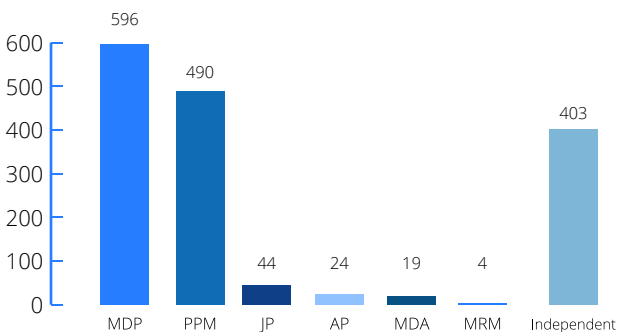


Figure 2 - WDC candidates (breakdown by party)

4.1.4. Voter Registration

All Maldivian citizens turning 18 by 10th April 2021 were eligible to vote, bringing the total number of eligible voters to 273,128. According to the Elections General Act, the EC is tasked with preparing and maintaining a register of electors and the list must be made public. The final voters list was published on 3rd April 2021.

A person is only eligible to vote at the delegated ballot box of the constituency where his permanent address is registered. If the person is non-resident at the permanent address at the time of election, they can re-register to vote for their constituency through a different polling station. Before the decision was taken to postpone elections, the re-registration process was opened on 16 February 2020. On 2nd March 2021, the re-registration process was reopened until 11th March. The second re-registration opportunity was opened only for voters who wish to vote from a different location or island other than the one they registered to vote for before the election was postponed.

4.1.5. Complaints Mechanism

Section 62 of the General Elections Act mandates that the EC must establish a convenient, efficient, and effective mechanism for addressing electoral complaints. Under the electoral legal framework, the EC is the primary authority to investigate electoral complaints. However, under the 2018 amendments to the General Elections Act, the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) is now mandated to investigate complaints pertaining to broadcasters, and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is mandated to investigate matters related to corruption (including abuse of state resources and vote buying). As per legislative mandates, the EC convened a five-member National Elections Complaints Bureau (NECB). Additionally, 10 days before the election, the EC established atoll and cities complaint bureaus consisting of three members each.

The NECB has functional independence from the EC members in practice. However, the final say in adjudication lies with the EC, as the EC can overturn decisions of the NECB. The law provides for a speedy resolution of complaints. Any complaints filed with the bureaus, the units, or the focal points should be resolved within two days.³

According to the relevant elections laws, any eligible voter, contesting candidate, political party, approved election observer or monitor, or election official may file a complaint. Only EC can lodge a case at the High Court through the Prosecutor General (PG) if a person conducts a criminal offence in contravention of laws and regulations of elections. The period for lodging electoral complaints begins when the EC announces an election and ends 14 days after official election results are announced.

There are no clear and detailed rules on the powers and authority of the NECB and other complaints bureaus. Their powers of investigation, including powers to summon, are neither clear nor detailed in the electoral laws. The general lack of coherent, rationalized law on electoral infractions, timeframes, and punishments, also posed challenges especially in addressing any dispute of a criminal nature. For instance, the current time limitation of completing and submitting cases 14 days after official results means that any violation of campaign finance by candidates could not be prosecuted as candidates are only required to file an audit 30 days after elections. These legal limitations are in practice exacerbated by the lack of coordination between other relevant institutions with investigative powers and capacity, including the Maldives Police Service (MPS), the MBC, and the ACC. Because of NECB's temporary nature, there was also no institutionalization as a robust Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) body. As of 20th April 2021, the NECB received a total of 363 complaints, as detailed below.

Nature of Complaint	Quantity
Registration	43
Campaign	21
Election Day	109
Post-election	190
Total	363

4.1.5.1 Recommendation

- The EC should improve the electoral complaints mechanism to address election-related complaints in a timely and effective manner by enforcing coordination in awareness, investigation, and prosecution of electoral offences.

³ Local Council Elections Regulation, s58(d)

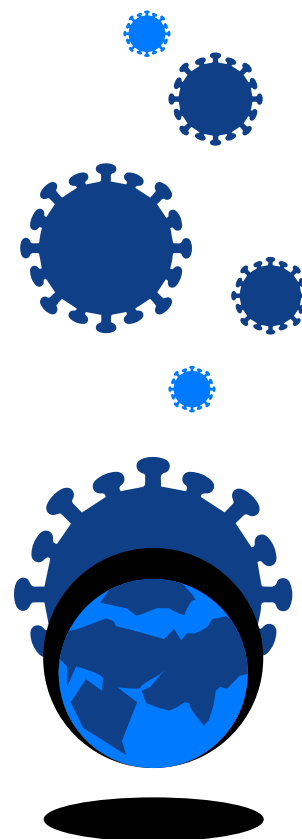
5 COVID-19 Impact

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a nationwide Public Health Emergency status was declared in March 2020 and the LCE and WDC elections scheduled for April 2020 were postponed.

When the first amendment to the Special Provisions Act was enacted on 21st January 2021, calling for relevant authorities to move forward with the elections, many of the restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 across the country were still in place. To ensure the safety of all stakeholders during an ongoing pandemic, on 4th February 2021, HPA issued guidelines that must be adhered to by the EC, voters and other stakeholders.

The key provisions included adjustments to electoral campaign activities, including restrictions to travelling between islands, door to door campaigning and public gatherings. Election day-specific guidelines for the voting process, polling station operations, and the vote-counting process were also provided.

In addition, guidelines were provided for recruitment and training of poll workers and handling of ballots and other election materials. EC was tasked with COVID-19 related voter education. According to EC, travel limitations and restrictions brought about some challenges in conducting training for officials, which negatively impacted the overall quality of training. However, due to disputes and poor coordination between EC and HPA, last minute changes were brought to the voting process for quarantined and COVID-19 positive people. These changes were not communicated uniformly to polling stations officials and voters.



6 Women's Participation

The political history of Maldives has seen an extremely low level of women's political participation, at the decision-making level, and the number of women contesting in elections compared to their involvement in grassroots level activities. Key challenges that prevent women from entering political life include the lack of financial and technical support, negative portrayal of women candidates in the media, and socio-cultural beliefs about gender roles that limit women's agency and autonomy.⁴

Over the years multiple attempts to introduce temporary special measures, such as women's quotas, to increase women's representation in decision-making have been unsuccessful, indicating a lack of political will to ensure gender equality in political representation. However, in December 2019, the gender quota which was introduced reserved 33 percent of seats for women in Local Councils.

There is no evidence of major problems with regard to women exercising autonomy in their right to vote. Similar to previous years there was a high female voter turnout on election day. The total number of female voters were 92,217 while male voters were at 94,306.⁵

6.1 Findings

In the 2020 LCE, 384 seats (370 Island Council seats and 14 City Council seats) were reserved for women. A total of 833 female candidates competed in the 2020 LCE. This includes 802 quota seat candidacies and 31 normal seat candidacies. A total of 389 (384 quota seats and five normal seats) female members were elected as council members. This is marked as an increase compared to 2017 LCE, where only a total of 127 female candidates contested for the 653 councilors seats and only 39 women were elected as members.⁶

Statistics also show only a few women contest in leadership roles and this could indicate that political parties give less priority and support to women members. In 2020 LCE, only one female candidate contested for an Atoll president seat while there were 44 male candidates. Additionally, there were only three female candidates who ran for council president seats, while the number of male candidates were 414. It is important to note that none of the female candidates who contested for leadership roles in 2020 LCE were elected.

It is a significant indication that less women are running for office in the first place. Barriers arise before and during the contesting stage. Many can be found in the nominations, party selection, and party primaries levels. However, the usual situation remains the same whereas men and male decision-makers dominate these procedures in all parties.

From the 107 candidates interviewed, 54 were women candidates. Seven candidates highlighted that they faced challenges based on gender. Out of the 107 candidates, 28 identified lack of funding as a challenge and 17 of them were female candidates (see section below 7.1.1 findings on campaign activities for more information on challenges). Fourteen candidates claimed that their campaign materials were vandalized or attacked during the campaign period.

Quota specific questions were asked from the 50 interviewees who were contesting on quota seats.⁷ Out of 49 candidates, 30 candidates claimed that they would contest in the election even if there were no quota seats allocated and 17 candidates claimed they were persuaded to run for a quota seat. A total of nine candidates claimed they were portrayed in a negative light due to quota seats.

⁴ https://transparency.mv/v16/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Election-Observation-Report_-3.pdf

⁵ <https://raajje.mv/98871>

⁶ <https://www.elections.gov.mv/core/downloads/LCE%202017%20Statistics%20Report.pdf>

⁷ One candidate did not answer the quota specific questions

From the 39 events that were reported by TM's observers during the campaign period, 14 events were organised by male candidates whilst none of the events were organised by a female candidate. However, more than half (56.4%) of these campaign events had a positive attendance of women. See figure 3 below for details on women attendance in campaign events.

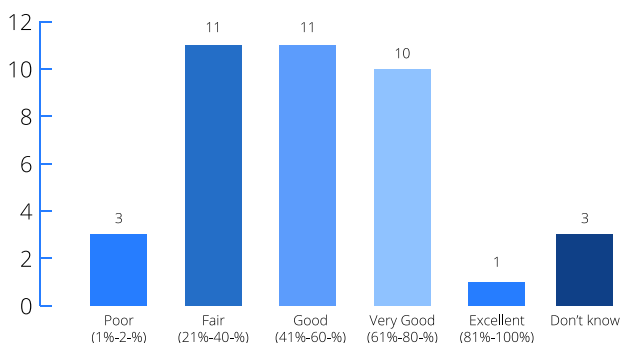
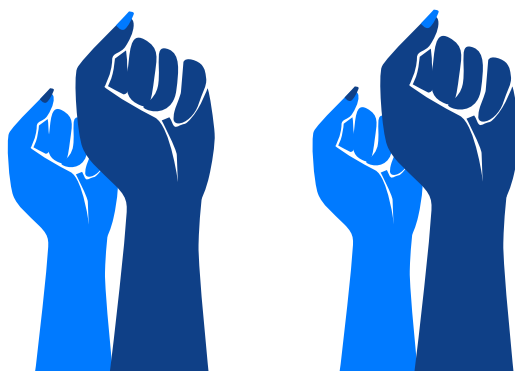


Figure 3: Women attendance in campaign events

The Observers reported three incidents concerning attacks against female candidates on social media. Additionally, six incidents where religious and ideological narrative were used to justify violence and discrimination against women on social media were also reported.

6.2 Recommendations

- Political parties must establish temporary special measures to ensure that women's representation in party decision-making bodies are proportional. Political parties could also adopt voluntary quotas to increase women's representation in party decision making and focus on women in fielding candidates.
- Political parties must conduct sensitisation for national/atoll/city/island level party leadership to increase recruitment of women for party activities.
- Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM), Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should conduct gender sensitisation programs for journalists and media organisations.
- CSOs and political parties should incorporate women's empowerment and political representation in all voter education efforts.
- CSOs and political parties should lobby for the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in educational curriculum to improve awareness and understanding about the limitations to women's political participation.



7 Campaign Period

The General Election Act 2008 stipulates that every candidate has the right to campaign and allows the use of media, advertisements, and peaceful assemblies during the campaign period. Candidates can also meet and speak, send letters, distribute photos, stickers, writings and display such items with the electorate of the electoral constituency. In addition, candidates can use emblems, and carry or use items with emblems on them. The rights granted to the candidate can also be exercised through their supporters. The General Election Act 2008 prohibits candidates from encroaching on the rights of any other candidates including the use of untruthful information.

The campaigning period starts from when the EC officially announces the names of the candidates standing for election, till 6:00pm of the day before the date designated for voting. No active campaigning by candidates is allowed after 6:00pm of the day before the voting date (campaign silence period).

Under the Act, use of broadcasting stations outside the Maldives is prohibited and all the broadcasters in the Maldives are required to provide broadcasting time to all candidates on an equitable basis through advertising or other programs. Broadcasters are also required to announce the allotment of time and charges, if any, that are to be levied for the service.

The use of media and social media is prevalent in the Maldives. TV is the most popular form of media with multiple TV channels, some of which have an alignment to different political parties. Although radio is still used in the islands, the number of radio channels has decreased over the years and is almost non-existent in urban areas. Many of the printed newspapers have moved to online medium making Mihaaru News the only printed newspaper currently in circulation. The most commonly used social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook and social messaging groups. Over 70% use social media in the Maldives.⁸ The regulatory bodies for media include MBC and Maldives Media Council (MMC). Currently, there are no regulations or guidelines for online campaigning.

7.1 Campaign Activities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, certain adjustments were brought to the electoral campaign. HPA placed restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. HPA guidelines on travel-related quarantine requirements had to be observed while travelling between islands and conducting public gatherings. Door-to-door campaigning was allowed except for islands placed under monitoring because of confirmed COVID-19 cases and conditioned on full adherence to all safety protocols including practicing physical distancing, wearing masks and regular sanitizing of hands. However, an exception to the 14 day travel related quarantine was given to government agencies providing certain services if their stay was less than five days.

7.1.1. Findings

Although COVID-19 restrictions limited the number of campaign activities, the different types of events that took place included in-person meetings, digital events, town hall meetings and rallies. Due to Male' City being the epicentre of COVID-19 cases in the country, there were more stringent restrictions and a curfew that impacted campaign activities. TM observed certain differences in campaigning in the capital Malé and islands due to the COVID-19 impact. Whilst a significant absence of physical events and door-to-door campaigning were observed in the Greater Malé area, observers did report physical events being held in islands. TM noticed that active campaigning changed in nature to activities in social media during the campaign silence period. The police fined MDP MVR 5,000 for an event held to mark the opening of the Hulhumale' candidate's campaign office for violating the HPA directive banning public gatherings of more than five people.⁹

The EC called for equal campaigning opportunities after investigations revealed discrepancies in granting travel permission that was required to travel due to the pandemic. This investigation was instigated after NECB received several complaints. The opposition alleged that the 14

⁸ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-maldives>

⁹ <https://psmnews.mv/83234>

day travel exception was used by the ruling party for campaigning purposes. TM observers reported two cases of preferential treatment provided to specific candidates/parties through amendment of COVID-19 rules. Candidate Interviews also revealed that candidates faced issues with equal campaigning opportunities and seven candidates claimed unequal enforcement of COVID-19 related restrictions. Additional contributors to unequal campaigning grounds were the general financial downturn due to COVID-19 which contributed to lack of funding and lack of party support in terms of funding. Other reasons highlighted include preferential treatment to the ruling party (see section 7.2 below Abuse of state resources for more information).

The candidate survey highlighted that out of the 107 candidates, 54 faced challenges conducting campaign activities. Among the 54 candidates, 28 identified lack of funding as the biggest challenge followed by hate speech (27 candidates). Seven candidates who claimed bias based on gender as a challenge were all female candidates. From the 28 candidates who identified lack of funding as a challenge, 17 were female candidates. See figure 4 below for details on challenges faced while conducting campaign events.

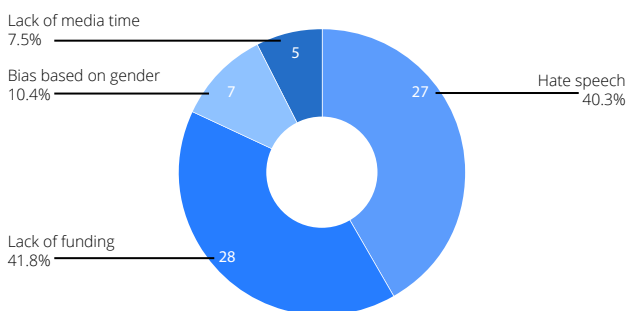


Figure 4: Challenges faced while conducting campaign events

Similarly, 35 candidates representing a party highlighted that their party faced challenges in conducting campaign activities. Of those who faced challenges, 69.8% highlighted lack of funding as the biggest challenge while 23.3% identified hate speech, 4.7% identified lack of media time and 2.3% stated bias based on gender.

In terms of funding, candidates interviewed highlighted that the main source of campaign funding was personal funds (37.6%) followed by political party funding (27.4%). Out of the 107 candidates interviewed, 40 candidates (37.4%) stated that they faced difficulties in obtaining funding. See figure 5 below for details on sources of campaign funding.

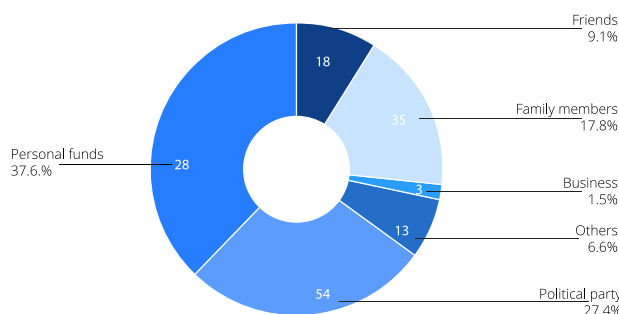


Figure 5: Sources of campaign funding.

The observers reported 44 campaign events between 17th March and 9th April, out of which 31 were conducted by political parties, six by coalitions, six by partisan candidates and one conducted by the government. 34 events observed were conducted in-person, five digital events and three TV events. Most events reported were town-hall style meetings (14) and 10 campaign rally events. The majority of events were held at candidates' respective party offices (15) and government schools and buildings (nine), which is not considered a violation in the Maldives. During the observation period TM did not come across any instances of rejections of requests to rent state land or buildings during the organising of electoral events.

Only one case of bypassing quarantine measures was reported in LTO findings. There were no reports of breaching curfew hours for campaign purposes while three cases of breaching the maximum number of people for public gatherings during campaign activities were observed.

7.1.2. Recommendation

- The EC should consider establishing a monitoring mechanism to strengthen enforcement of the campaign silent period.

7.2 Abuse of State Resources

Allegations of misuse of state resources have been rife in all previous elections across multiple governments. Historically, the most common complaints include the inauguration or completion of government projects in time for elections – which is often used as a campaign tool for incumbent parties – and the State’s use of its vehicles and human resources for campaign activities.

Although Article 14(a) of the Prevention and Prohibition of Corruption Act and Article 45 and 46 of the Political Parties Act can potentially be used to tackle the issue, no known measures were taken. The electoral legal framework is largely insufficient to tackle the issue of abuse of state resources in campaigning, and state officials can easily escape accountability by framing campaign trips as official trips.

The Elections General Act 2008 30 (c) states; *From the time allotted to candidates pursuant to subsection (a) no broadcasters shall under any circumstance give or sell more than 10% of the time allotted to one candidate, to one individual candidate or a political party or a candidate representing a political party.*

7.2.1. Findings

Practices involving abuse of state resources continued during the campaign period and various instances were observed in the run-up to the elections. The observers reported two incidents where civil servants/employees of state-owned enterprises (SOE) were involved during working hours for campaign events. Additionally two other incidents, where forceful involvement of civil servants/employees of SOEs were forced to attend campaign events outside official working hours were reported.

The candidate interview also revealed that out of the 107 candidates interviewed, 15 (14%) candidates claimed that government or SOE vehicles/vessels were used by other candidates for campaign purposes. Additionally, 27 (25.2%) candidates stated

that civil servants and/or employees of SOEs were used for campaign activities during office hours and 13 candidates claimed to have witnessed or heard of civil servants/employees of SOEs being forced by their superiors/supervisors to attend campaign events. See figure 6 below for details on alleged instances of misuse of government/SOE resources.

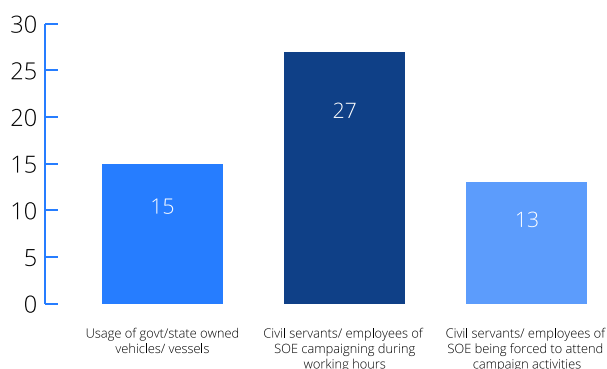


Figure 6: Alleged instances of misuse of government/SOE resources

On Thursday 8th April 2021, two days before the election day, the state TV channel Public Service Media (PSM) aired the campaign events of the ruling party MDP. According to PSM the airtime was sold to MDP. The opposition alleged that this action was a violation of S20(c) of the Elections General Act 2008 which limits selling more than 10% of the time allotted for campaign activities to one party. Such actions not only undermine the integrity of PSM but also serve to provide the ruling party with an unfair advantage and precludes a level playing field.

Additionally, more than 70 development project events were held from the beginning of March to 10th April 2021. PSM online news was monitored during this time frame. The types of events include, project handovers after completion, inaugurations of projects, announcement of new projects, signing of agreements and events to mark the start of physical works of a project. The types of projects include social housing schemes, infrastructure and utility projects and projects providing basic necessities such as healthcare and education.

7.2.2. Recommendations

- The electoral legal framework should be strengthened to include provisions whereby the incumbent government is prohibited from holding major public events related to the announcement, inauguration or completion of government projects during the campaign period.
- State authorities including the ACC, MPS, Attorney General’s Office (AGO), and EC must coordinate to implement the electoral legal framework to hold to account abusers of state resources.

7.3 Vote Buying

Election observation missions by both local and international organisations over the past decade have noted vote buying as a major issue across all elections in the country. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that vote buying and influencing votes through patronage has been seen in the country even before the democratic transition.¹⁰

Amendments to the General Elections Act in 2018 stipulate that gift giving to influence voting is an act of bribery. Additionally, from the announcement of the election until 30 days after the announcement of official results, giving gifts or providing a service to an individual or a group or a community is also an act of bribery.

Under the General Elections Act a candidate may spend a maximum of MVR 2,000 per constituent who is eligible to vote in the constituency where the candidate is running. For election expenses, a candidate is allowed to accept contributions or procure contributions through loans from individuals and legal entities excluding the persons specified in section 70 of the General Elections Act. However, individual contributions made to the candidate cannot exceed by more than 0.5% of the candidate’s specified campaign expenditures and contributions from legal entities cannot exceed by more than 2% of the campaign’s expenditures.

7.3.1. Findings

Similar to previous elections, allegations of vote buying were observed and reported during the election period. It is alleged that candidates donated gifts to schools, clubs, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), community-based organisations (CBO), and island communities during the run-up to the election without any legal ramifications. According to complaints lodged with ACC candidates allegedly offered voters land as bribes.

Although TM observers did not report any vote buying incidents, the candidate survey conducted highlighted allegations of vote buying. Out of the 107 candidates interviewed, 16 (15%) candidates stated that they have witnessed or heard of vote buying among NGO/CBOs. 25 (23.4%) candidates claimed that they have witnessed or heard of vote buying among constituents by offering money or donations. 21 (19.6%) candidates said they witnessed or heard of political parties or candidates promising favours if they get elected. See figure 7 below for details on alleged instances vote buying

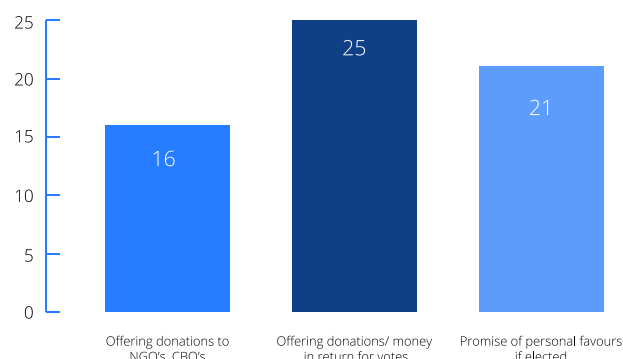


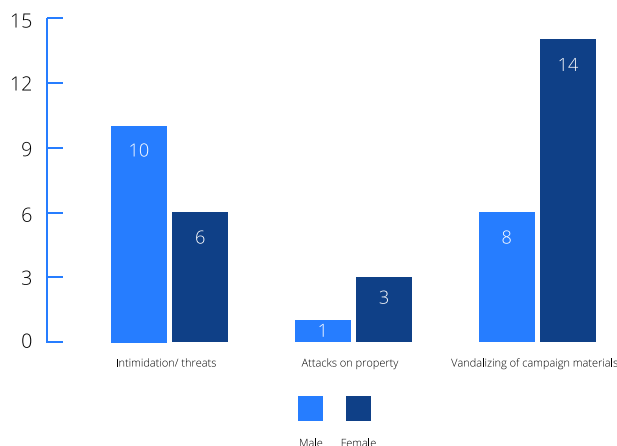
Figure 7: Alleged instances of vote buying

On the other hand, out of the 107 candidates, 44 (41.1%) candidates indicated they were asked by voters for money or personal favours in return for theirs and/or their family’s votes. Out of the 44 candidates, 12 (27.3%) candidates stated that they were asked for money or personal favours by voters very frequently.

¹⁰ Transparency Maldives Pre-Election Assessment Report 2018, page 55 <http://transparency.mv/v16/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pre-Elections-2018-PREVIEW-8-June.pdf>

7.3.2. Recommendations

- State authorities including the ACC, MPS, AGO, and EC must coordinate to implement the electoral legal framework to hold to account instances of vote buying.
- The EC should set up a system in place to monitor campaign activities in order to analyse discrepancies in the submitted candidate finance reports with campaign events and activities held during the campaign period



7.4 Violence/Intimidation/Hate Speech

Electoral Violence can be defined as the use, threat to use and/or the encouragement to use force by any party, individual or group, outside the boundaries of the laws and regulations, for electoral purposes, spanning from the pre-election period, to election day and the post-election period.

The General Elections Act prohibits candidates from encroaching on the rights of any other candidates including the use of untruthful information. Furthermore harassment is criminalised under the Penal Code.

In Maldives, violence/intimidation and hate speech are commonly observed during the lead up to the elections. Previous elections have seen several such acts, including vandalising of campaign stations and material.

7.4.1. Findings

Both LTO and candidate surveys revealed the occurrences of acts of violence, intimidation and hate speech. Out of the 107 candidates interviewed, 16 candidates have faced intimidation or have been threatened during the campaign period. Four candidates indicated that their property or property of their family or party had been attacked during the campaign period. 22 candidates claimed that their campaign materials were vandalized or attacked during the campaign period. It is important to note that 14 of the 22 instances were targeted at women candidates. See figure 8 for violence and intimidation faced by candidates.

Figure 8: Violence and intimidation faced by candidates.

Out of the 107 candidates interviewed, 13 candidates have experienced instances where the media has portrayed them in a negative image or used hate speech against them. Out of these 13 candidates, five candidates claimed that it was based on political affiliations while three candidates claimed it was based on quota seats and one candidate stated it was based on gender.

The long term observers reported four instances of attacks on candidates on social media and six instances of religion being used to justify violence and discrimination against women on social media. In addition, four instances where hate speech was used in the media against candidates were reported. Observers also reported two instances of hate speech or intimidation directed at parties or candidates on official social media accounts of other candidates/parties.

MMC, the independent authority responsible for the regulation of print and online media, had received one complaint regarding anti-campaigning against an online media.

7.4.2. Recommendations

- All political, social and administrative authorities must work together to promote civic awareness around the elections and in accordance with the law.
- Work on creating a safe environment for campaigning for all candidates.
- Parties or candidates should adopt a code of conduct that they are morally committed to.
- EC to issue code of conducts for parties and candidates to sign and adhere to. It is also preferable that the pledge happens publicly.
- EC to strengthen its monitoring capacities to detect early signs of potential electoral violence and intimidation in order to take the necessary actions to curb it.

7.5 Voter Education

EC is mandated to educate and create awareness among the general public on the electoral process and its purpose under article 170 of the Constitution and Section 21(g) of the Elections Commission Act. As the election was held during the COVID-19 pandemic, EC was tasked with voter education in relation to the changes in the election process and the guidelines to be followed during the voting process. In addition to EC, other institutions such as ACC and HRCM and civil society organisations have carried out voter education activities in previous elections.

7.5.1. Findings

The general voter education activities carried out by EC and other relevant institutions and organisations were observed to be lower compared to previous elections. This was mainly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which restricted general transportation within islands and gatherings of persons above certain numbers in Malé and many other islands.

The EC conducted limited voter education activities through mainstream media and social media. This included video clips based on the themes of COVID-19 measures in elections, assisted voting, the introduction of the gender quota and voters' roles and responsibilities which were aired on major TV channels and posted on social media. The EC also held Votah Thayyaaru ("Ready for Elections") programme series on Television Maldives (TVM) and PSM (state owned media channels) to inform the general public about the voting process and voter information. Additionally, EC distributed handbooks titled Vote lumah mageh ("Path to voting") to the public. However, it is important to note that the voter education activities were carried out very close to the election which hindered the efficacy of creating awareness.

Similar to previous elections, the HRCM and ACC also conducted voter education activities. HRCM primarily conducted their voter education activities on social media. They also made media appearances on television and radio to increase awareness of voters rights as well as updated the public on the work HRCM was doing in relation to the election. ACC conducted voter education/awareness programs targeted at SOEs. ACC's main focus was to increase awareness and minimize the abuse of state resources. Sessions conducted were targeted to SOEs and held via Zoom and in-person. Additionally, ACC carried out civic education/awareness activities targeted towards candidates by distributing leaflets in Male' and Atolls.

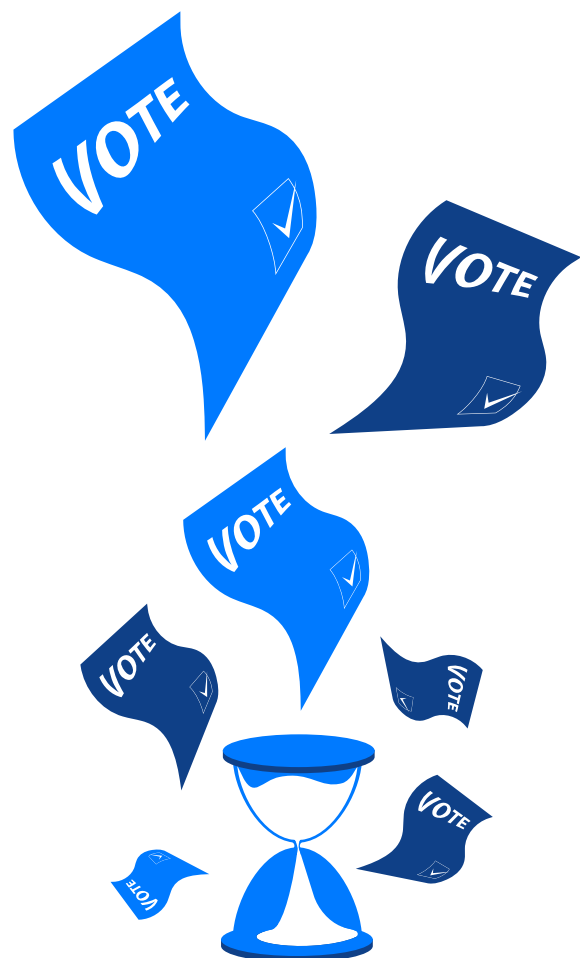
TM observers reported a total of 32 voter education activities during the observation period. Majority of activities were carried out through social media (19) and general media (13). The observers also reported 13 instances of political parties and/or candidates conducting voter education activities.

The findings also showed that the majority (63.3%) of voter education activities carried out were on general voter education and not targeted to any specific category of voters. 15.2% of voter education activities were targeted to the youth voters while 12.7% were targeted to women voters and 8.9% to people with disabilities (PWD).

TM observations of past elections have revealed that voter education programmes, activities and communications were generally inadequate. In addition to having two elections simultaneously, this election required more voter education as there were specific changes to the voting process and specific changes to the ballot paper. The EC reported that the number of invalid votes were comparatively higher, between 10% to 20%, and attributed this to a lack of voter education.¹¹

7.5.2. Recommendations

- Voter education to focus on any recent changes to the voting process and ballot paper. The reach of voter education and easy availability of the information is important.
- The EC, CSOs, political parties, and media should conduct voter education programs in a timely manner, with a focus on equal representation, vote buying, misuse of state resources, and political finance transparency.
- The EC, CSOs, political parties, and media should conduct voter education programs targeted at different segments such as youth, women, PWD and other marginalized groups.
- The EC should prominently include information about how to access the complaints mechanism in voter education and information efforts.



¹¹ <https://raajje.mv/98871>

8 Election Day

On 10th April 2021, Maldives held its LCE and WDC election. Polling stations opened at 7:00am and closed at 6:00pm. A total of 7,155 officials were involved and a total of 713 ballot boxes were kept across the Maldives and some overseas locations. See figure 9 below for ballot box distribution.

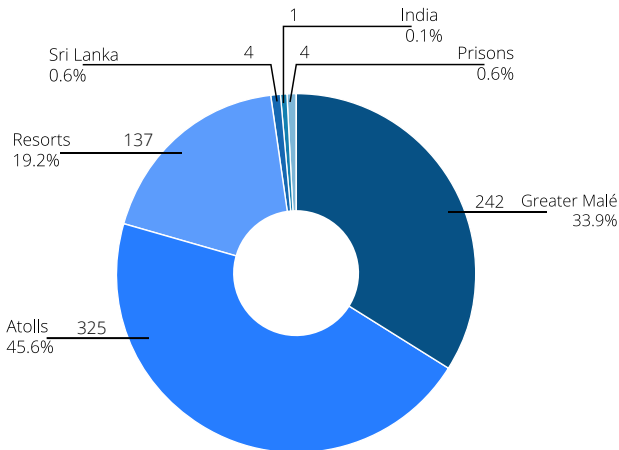


Figure 9: Ballot box distribution

Election day was observed by our trained and accredited observers in 34 polling centres in 29 islands spread out over 19 atolls and Capital Greater Male' area. TM established a call center and online platform to maintain contact with the observers in the field and receive real-time updates.

Overall, in the observed polling centres, election day was well administered with generally good administrative arrangements. According to EC there have been some differences in vote counting methods as there were challenges in providing comprehensive training to officials.

Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 limited the number of days EC master trainers could spend on training officials which negatively impacted the overall quality of training. The inadequate training resulted in differences in vote counting and treatment of invalid votes. An exception to the 14 day travel related quarantine was given to government agencies providing certain services if their stay was less than five days. EC provided training for officials using this exception.

8.1 Polling Station Opening

One of the TM observers faced minor issues in accessing the polling station in the morning. The issue was resolved promptly and access was granted to the observer. From the 34 polling stations observed by TM, 16 stations opened within the first 10 minutes of the required opening time. 27 of the observed polling stations opened before 7.30am. Seven polling stations were observed to have opened after 7:30am. See figure 10 below for opening time of polling stations.

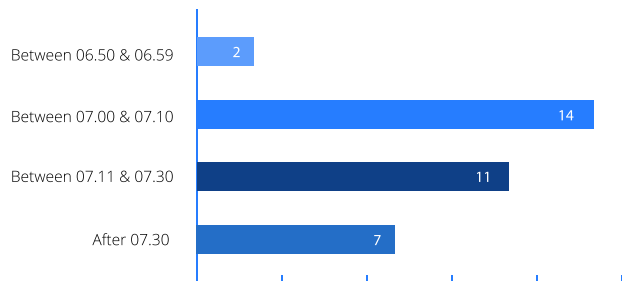


Figure 10: Opening time of polling stations

In almost all of the polling stations, officials were in place when the stations opened for voting. The queue controller was absent at one location and the polling station controller 2 was absent in four locations. All polling stations were set up in a way that upheld the secrecy of the ballot and all the materials required for voting were in place. Except for one polling station, all the ballot papers were counted and reconciled before the opening. All ballot boxes were verified as empty before voting commenced. Except for two polling stations, there were two voters present while the ballot box was shown empty and the boxes were properly sealed using four pull-tite seals.

At the opening of polls, MDP and PPM had the same presence at the observed polling station. No observers from political parties were present at three of the 34 polling stations at the opening. See figure 11 below for details of candidates/party agents present at the opening of the polling stations.

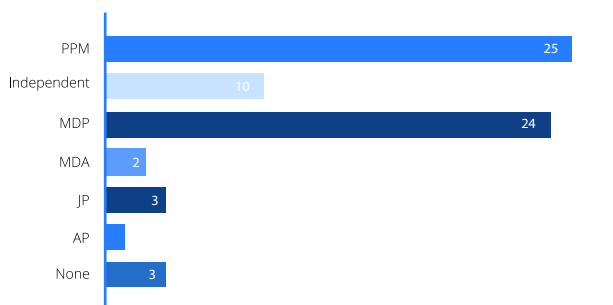


Figure 11: Candidates/party agents present at the opening of the polling stations

8.2 Voting Process

Voting procedures were properly followed and no major issues regarding voting procedures were raised at any of the 34 observed polling stations. In all 34 polling stations, voters carrying their official documents and registered at the polling station were allowed to vote. In five of the 34 polling stations, PWDs were assisted by party observers or monitors in the voting process. During the voting process, MDP observers were present at 32 of 34 observed polling stations while observers from PPM were present at 29 polling stations. See figure 12 below for details of observers/party agents present during voting.

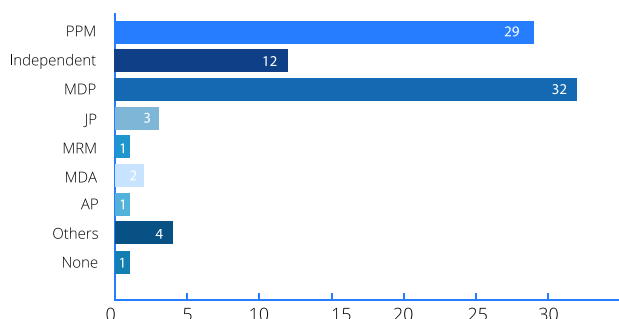


Figure 12: Observers/party/candidate agents present during voting

8.3 COVID-19 Procedures

Under HPA guidelines, election officials, observers and other attendants were required to wear protective equipment such as face masks or shields. At 25 out of the 34 polling stations, officials were always wearing masks and at eight stations the officials were wearing the mask most of the time.

The 34 observed polling stations were laid out in a manner that ensures physical distancing of all voters, poll workers and other attendants. Hand sanitizing arrangements were available in all observed polling stations. In 33 of the 34 polling stations, the temperature of the voters was taken at the entrance.

Voters were also required to wear masks. At 26 out of the 34 polling stations, voters were always wearing masks and at seven stations the voters were wearing the mask most of the time.

8.4 COVID-19 Related Impact

Special guidelines were issued to mitigate and ensure the safety of citizens on election day. From the 34 polling stations observed, 27 stations had special arrangements for COVID-19 patients and quarantined people.

Quarantined and COVID-19 positive persons were expected to vote between 5:00pm and 6:00pm. However, due to disputes and poor coordination between EC and HPA, there were no adequate mechanisms to check whether voters attending between 5:00pm to 6:00pm were in fact quarantined and COVID-19 positive.

At 11:00am on election day, EC announced that voting between 5:00pm and 6:00pm would be extended to the general public as well. This decision from EC was poorly communicated to all polling stations resulting in inconsistencies and confusion around closing hours and turning away some voters.

8.5 Polling Station Closing and Vote Counting

Due to the confusion surrounding the special arrangements for COVID-19 and quarantined people, some polling stations stayed open after the closing time. Of the 34 observed polling stations, only one station was closed before 5:50pm. 27 polling stations closed between 6:00pm and 6:30pm while six stations closed voting after 6:31pm. See figure 13 below for details on closing time of polling stations.

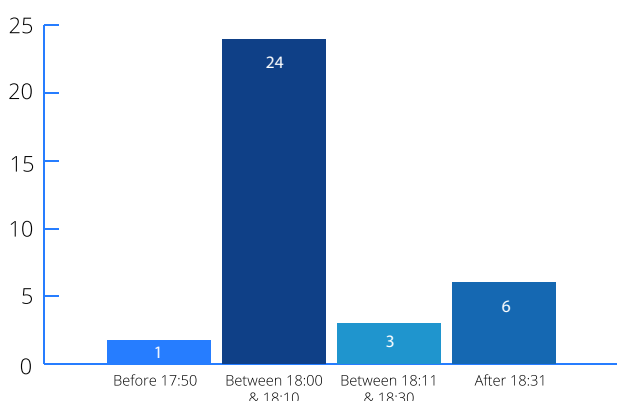


Figure 13: Closing time of polling stations

Between 5:00pm and 6:00pm, seven of the observed polling stations remained open for only COVID-19 positive/quarantined voters whilst 20 polling stations remained open for all voters. Of the eight polling stations that extended voting times beyond 6:00pm, three polling stations gave an extension for only COVID-19 positive or quarantined voters while five stations gave the extension for all voters.

Of the 34 polling stations, 18 stations reported that there was no queue at the time of closing the polling stations. In 13 polling stations, all voters standing in the queue at the time of closing were allowed to vote. However, during this time three stations reported a few cases of voters being turned away who might not have had the chance to exercise the right to vote.

Candidates were well represented by party observers during the counting and closing of the polls, adding to the credibility of the process.

During the counting process MDP was present at 33 of the 34 polling stations observed while PPM was present at 31 of polling stations. See figure 14 below for details of observers/candidates/party agents present during the counting process.

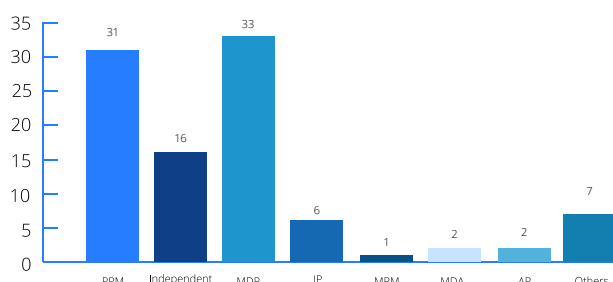


Figure 14: Observers/candidates/party agents present during the counting process

During the vote counting process the ballot reconciliation was done thoroughly and the counting process was not interrupted in all of the observed polling stations. However one polling station reported that the ballot box was not sealed thoroughly. Additionally, one polling station reported that disputes relating to the validity of the ballot papers by the candidate or party observers were contested during the counting process. Preliminary results were posted outside all 34 observed polling stations.

8.6 Turnout

In the run up to the voting day there was a general expectation that voter turnout would be low due to COVID-19 pandemic. The capital city of Male', where COVID-19 cases were most prevalent, had an official voter turnout of 39.19%. However, the overall voter turnout was 68%. In comparison to the 2017 LCE turnout increased nationwide except for Lhaviyani and Gaafu Dhaalu atolls, and in Malé and Addu city. Turnout for Fuvahmulah city at 75.41% was considerably high compared to Addu city at 47.08% and Kulhudhuffushi city at 56.44%. Voter turnout for Vaavu, Dhaalu and Faafu atolls were above 80%. Total eligible voters were 273,128 and the total votes cast were 186,253 (68%). Out of the total votes cast 94,306 were male voters and 92,217 female voters.¹²

12 <https://raajje.mv/98871>

9 Post-election Environment

9.1 Elections Results

The EC announced the preliminary results through 10th April to 17th April 2021. Official results were announced on 25th April 2020. The election results shows that MDP lost its long-held majority at the Male' City council to the main opposition party PPM. MDP won a total of 400 seats from the 804 contested making it 40% of total seats. PPM won a total of 325 seats from the 647 contested making it 33% of total seats. Independent candidates won a total of 173 seats from the 600 contested making it 17% of total seats. Below chart shows a comparison between the election results in 2017 and 2020. See figure 15 below for LCE results comparison 2017 and 2020.

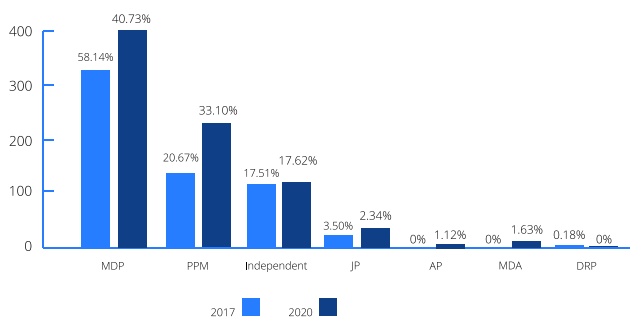


Figure 15: LCE results comparison 2017 and 2020

9.2 Political Reactions

Although the ruling party MDP gained the most number of seats in the LCE and WDC elections, the main opposition party PPM gained major inroads by winning seats in former MDP strongholds including a majority and the mayorship in the capital Malé City Council.

Protests took place outside the EC office three days after the elections. According to the EC, officials from PPM and their supporters gathered outside the EC office prior to recounting of some ballot boxes. Soon after, Speaker of Parliament and leader of MDP former President Mohamed Nasheed arrived outside the office, which resulted in increased

protests with opposition claiming MDP was trying to influence the results.¹³ The opposition coalition also protested in Malé on 16th April regarding delays in election results and questioning the validity of the recount.¹⁴ These protests took place amidst complaints filed from parties and ECs announcement of recounting ballots for certain boxes. Results for some constituencies were publicly challenged by both MDP and PPM although no parties filed any cases with the High Court.

9.3 Other Post-election Developments

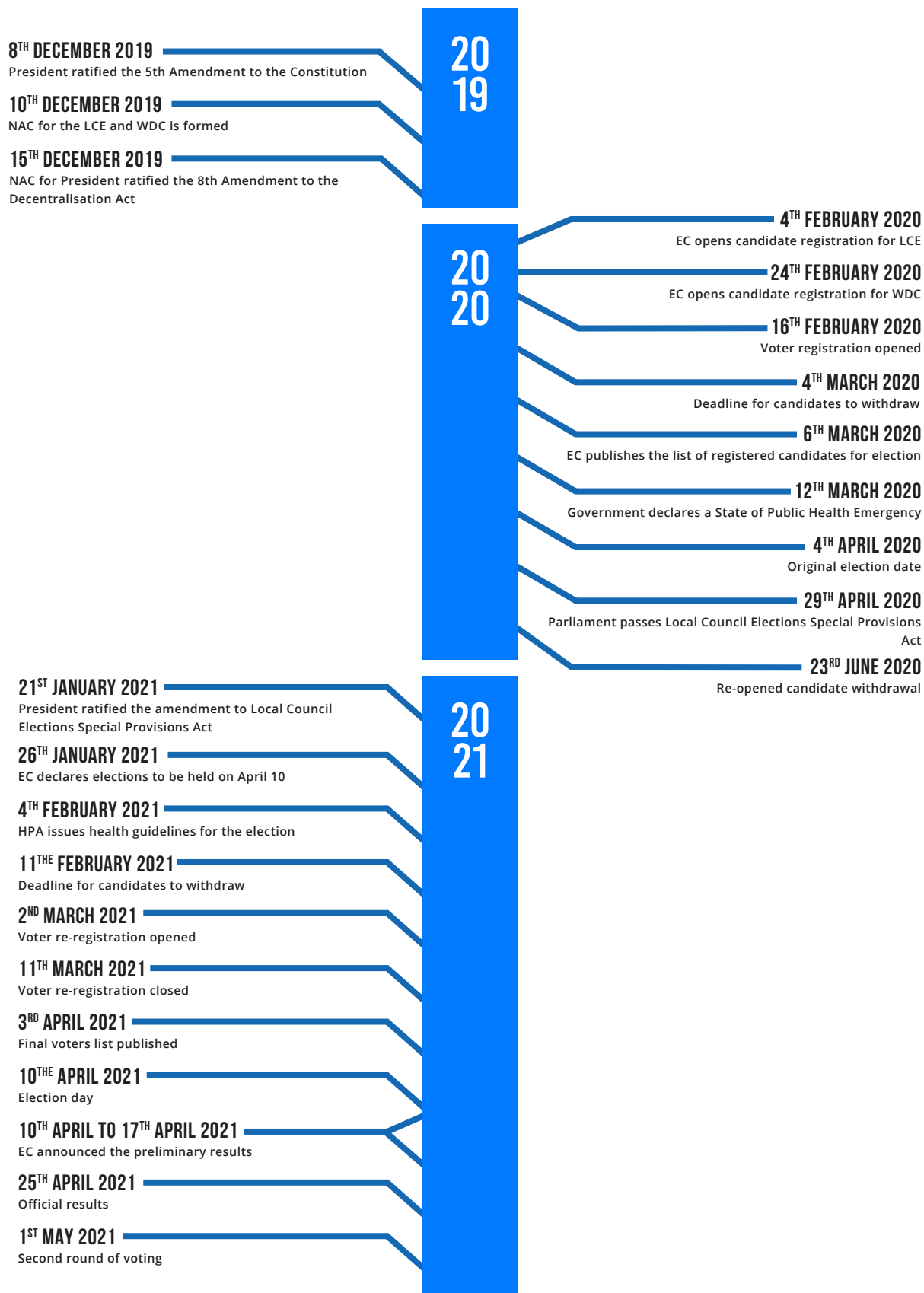
In order to address complaints submitted to the NECB and to validate the preliminary results, the EC had to open security envelopes with ballot papers of 3 ballot boxes. Following complaints and discrepancies in the results sheet for some boxes the EC decided to recount the ballots of 18 vote boxes. Following the recounts, re-run for 12 constituencies were held on 1st May 2021. Two re-runs were held as results could not be validated after recount. 10 reruns (4 LCE and 6 WDC) were due to tie-in results. The by-election for uncontested seats and tie-in seats during reruns is being planned for mid 2021.

¹³ <https://archive.mv/en/articles>

¹⁴ <https://timesofaddu.com/2021/04/17/opposition-protest-in-male-regarding-delays-in-election-results/>

10 Annexes

10.1 Annex A - Electoral Timeline



10.2 Annex B - List of Observers

- Short Term Observers
- Long Term Observers

#	Atoll	Island	Name		
1	HA	Dhidhoo	Sharumeela Mohamed	●	●
2	HA	Hoarafushi	Ali Yoosuf	●	●
3	HDH	Kulhudhuffushi	Abdulla Mohamed	●	
4	HDH	Kulhudhuffushi	Ahmed Shamsuddin		●
5	HDH	Makunudhoo	Ali Shakir	●	
6	HDH	Makunudhoo	Azleena Ibrahim		●
7	SH	Bilehfahi	Ahmed Mauroof	●	●
8	SH	Funadhoo	Mohamed Shunaan Shareef	●	●
9	N	Velidhoo	Akram Mohamed	●	●
10	N	Manadhoo	Aiminath Sheroza	●	●
11	R	Dhuvafaru	Abdulla Rifae	●	●
12	B	Fehendhoo	Mohamed Aslam	●	●
13	LH	Naifaru	Mariyam Mihdhau Mohamed	●	●
14	K	Thulusdhoo	Aishath Reena	●	●
15	AA	Thoddoo	Hassan Ishan	●	●
16	ADH	Mahibadhoo	Aminath Sazla	●	●
17	M	Muli	Ismail Rameez	●	
18	M	Muli	Saah Ahmed		●
19	F	Nilandhoo	Abdulla Asjadh	●	●
20	DH	Meedhoo	Salim Thaufeeq	●	
21	DH	Meedhoo	Raaee Zaheen		●
22	DH	Kudahuvadhoo	Hawwa Shaamila	●	●
23	TH	Veymandoo	Salih Dawood	●	●
24	TH	Thimarafushi	Mariyam Safa	●	●

10.2 Annex B - List of Observers

#	Atoll	Island	Name		
25	L	Fonadhoo	Ahmed Rifsan	●	●
26	GA	Villingili	Fathimath Saadha	●	●
27	GDH	Gahdhoo	Abdulla Imad Bin Mohamed Saeed	●	●
28	GDH	Thinadhoo	Mohamed Majidh	●	●
29	GN	Fuvahmulah	Ali Naaish Waseem	●	●
30	GN	Fuvahmulah	Mariyam Shiuma Shahid	●	●
31	S	Hithadhoo	Abdulla Hanoon Naeem	●	●
32	S	Maradhoo	Mariyam Ahula Adil	●	
33	S	Maradhoo	Aishath Azhy		●
34	S	Meedhoo	Mariyam Shiuna	●	
35	S	Feydhoo	Aminath Zuha	●	
36	K	Male'	Abdulla Shan		●
37	K	Male'	Moosa Ma-il Mohamed	●	
38	K	Male'	Jumana Niyaz	●	●
39	K	Male'	Mariyam Hawla		●
40	K	Male'	Fathmath Rishana		●
41	K	Male'	Shaziya Ali		●
42	K	Male'	Mariyam Ajfaan	●	●
43	K	Male'	Dhumya Ahmed		●
44	K	Male'	Thoola Rilwan		●
45	K	Male'	Sara Naseem		●
46	K	Male'	Ahid Rasheed		●
47	K	Male'	Asiath Rilweena		●
48	K	Male'	Hassan Hamoodh		●
49	K	Male'	Mariyam Nuha	●	

10.3 Annex C - NAC Members

- | | |
|---|---|
| 01 Elections Commission of Maldives | 09 The Prosecutor General's Office |
| 02 Registered political parties

MDP, JP, PPM, PNC, MDA, DRP, AP,
MRM, MLSDP and MTWD | 10 The Attorney General's Office |
| 03 The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives | 11 Health Protection Agency |
| 04 The Civil Service Commission | 12 The Maldives Police Services |
| 05 Local Government Authority | 13 The Department of National Registration |
| 06 The Maldives Broadcasting Commission | 14 Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 07 The Maldives Media Council | 15 Ministry of Tourism |
| 08 The Anti-Corruption Commission | 16 Civil Society Representatives

TM, Maldives Association of Persons with Disabilities, Hope for Women, and International Foundation of Electoral Systems |

10.4 Annex D - Press Release 1



Date: 10 April, 2021

Press Statement on the Opening of the Polling Centers

Transparency Maldives is observing the Local Council and Women's Development Committee Elections held today. Our observer network has a national coverage spanning Malé and the 19 atolls and we would like to thank the 55 observers and volunteers based across the country for their dedication in observing and assisting in the election observation processes. It is their hard work, especially with the restrictions due COVID-19 pandemic that have made this observation effort possible.

Our trained and accredited observers observed the opening of 34 polling centers in 29 islands spread out over 19 Atolls. TM has established a Call Center and online platform to maintain contact with the observers in the field and receive real time updates from them.

Based on the election observation information received from the observers, TM's preliminary findings are outlined below. All the observers deployed by TM reached their designated polling centers by 6.30 am and started to communicate information via the online reporting platform and Call Center from 7.10am onwards.

The data and percentages are only representative of the 34 polling locations observed by TM observers contacted through the online reporting platform and Call Center.

1. Opening time of the polling centers:

General statistics:

- Polling started between 6.50 am and 6.59 am in 2 polling centers (6%)
- Polling started between 7:00 am and 7:10 am in 14 polling centers (41%)
- Polling started between 7:11 am and 7:30 am in 11 polling centers (32%)
- Polling started after 7:30am in 7 polling centers (21%)
- All polling stations opened before 8:00 am

2. Presence of polling officials at polling stations:

All 34 polling stations had a complete polling committee to fulfil all roles of election officials.

3. Polling station preparations:

- In all 34 polling stations, the ballot box was shown to be empty prior to closing it in the presence of minimum two voters.
- Of the 34 observed polling stations, 4 pull-tight seals were not placed to close the ballot box at 2 polling stations.
- Of the 34 observed polling stations, ballot papers were not counted or reconciled before opening at 1 polling station.

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4. Election material in the polling centers:

Required elections materials were available at all 34 polling centers.

5. Presence of Party Observers at polling stations:

Of the 34 observed polling stations:

- Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) observers were present at 25 polling stations.
- Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) observers were present at 24 polling stations.
- Jumhooree Party (JP) observers were present at 3 of polling stations.
- Maldives Democratic Alliance (MDA) observers were present at 2 polling stations.
- Adhaalath Party (AP) observers were present at 1 polling station.
- Independent candidate observers were present at 10 polling stations.
- 3 polling stations had no observers.

6. COVID19 regulations during opening of polling stations:

- In 27 polling stations, the queue was well managed to ensure social distancing.
- In 29 polling stations, all election officials were wearing masks.
- In 31 polling stations, voters were wearing masks.
- In 31 polling stations, temperature was taken at the entrance.
- All polling stations, hand washing or sanitizing arrangements were available.

7. Police presence at polling stations:

Police presence was visible outside all observed polling stations at the time of opening of polling stations.

Based on the observations of TM observers until 8.30 am, the situation in the country is calm and the opening of the polling centers has been mostly uneventful. There haven't been major incidents reported that severely affected the election process so far.

We encourage all parties to maintain the climate of peace. We encourage the public to abide by the safety regulations set out by the Elections Commission and the Health Protection Agency as they continue to go out and vote. Our observers are working hard at polling stations and will be present at the polling stations until the polls are closed and the counting is done.

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10.5 Annex E - Press Release 2



Date: 11 April, 2021

Press Statement on the Closing of the Polling Stations for the Local Council And Women's Development Committee Elections 2020

The amendments to the Decentralisation Act in 2019 welcomed many positive changes to the decentralisation landscape in the Maldives, including ensuring the financial empowerment of local councils and Women's Development Committees and the inclusion of at least 33% women at the decision making level of the Local Councils. As the first Local Council and Women's Development Committee Elections since the amendment, this election marks a step towards the realisation of a truly decentralised system.

Election observation plays an important role in safeguarding election integrity and enhancing confidence in the electoral process. As such, Transparency Maldives trained and deployed 55 accredited observers equipped with standardized observation forms, observing 34 polling stations in 29 islands across 19 atolls. Transparency Maldives had established an Online Reporting Platform and Call Center to maintain contact with the observers in the field and receive real-time updates from them. The data and percentages are only representative of these 34 polling stations observed by the observers who reported through our online platform or was contacted through the Call Center by 05:45am on 11 April 2021.

The key findings of our observations are highlighted below.

Observation of the Voting Process:

1. General Observations

- In all 34 polling stations, voters carrying their official document and registered at the polling station were allowed to vote
- In 5 polling stations, Persons with Disabilities were assisted by party observers or monitors in the voting process.

2. Covid19 regulations during voting process

- In 25 polling stations, election officials were always wearing masks . In 8 stations, election officials were wearing masks most of the time. In one station, the election officials were sometimes wearing masks.
- Temperature of voters was always taken at 33 out of 34 polling stations.
- In all 34 polling stations, sanitizing arrangements were available.

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Observation of the closing of the election process:

- Of the 34 observed polling stations
 - One (3%) closed before 17:50pm
 - Twenty four (71%) closed between 18:00 pm and 18:10pm.
 - Three (9%) polling stations closed between 18:11 pm and 18:30 pm.
 - Six (17%) closed after 18:31pm
- Between 17:00 - 18:00pm, 7 of the observed polling stations remained open for only Covid/quarantined voters and 20 polling stations remained open for all voters. Of the 8 polling stations that extended voting times beyond 6:00pm, 3 polling stations gave an extension for only Covid positive or quarantined voters while 5 stations gave the extension for all voters. During this time 3 stations reported a few cases of turning away voters who might not have got a chance to exercise the right of vote
- In 13 polling stations, all voters standing in the queue at the time of closing were allowed to vote. In 18 polling stations, there was no queue at the time of closing the polling stations. In three polling stations, voters in queue were not allowed to vote
- In all 34 polling stations, the ballot reconciliation was done thoroughly.

Observations during the Counting Process

1. General Observations

Of the 34 observed polling stations:

- One (3%) polling station reported disputes relating to the validity of the ballot papers by candidate or party observers during the counting process
- The counting process was not interrupted in any of the polling stations

2. Presence of Party Observers at polling stations during the counting process

Of the 34 observed polling stations:

- Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) observers were present at 31 polling stations
- Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) observers were present at 33 polling stations
- Independent candidate observers were present at 16 polling stations
- Jumhoory Party (JP) observers were present at 6 polling stations
- Maldives Democratic Alliance (MDA) observers were present at 2 polling stations
- Maldives Reform Movement (MRM) observers were present at 1 polling station
- Adhaalath Party (AP) observers were present at 2 polling stations



Observed Critical Incidents:

Critical incidents were reported to the TM Call Centre throughout the day. The major categories highlighted in the reports were issues in dispensing ballot papers, assisted voting and voter registry.

Major findings

- While some of TM observers faced minor issues in accessing the polling stations in the morning, access was good in general and these issues were resolved promptly and access was granted to all the observers.
- Voting procedures were properly followed and no issues were raised at any of the 34 observed polling stations with regards to voting procedures.
- Prior arrangements made by State institutions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 were not effectively enforced across polling stations. Moreover, the inadequate coordination between the Health Protection Agency and the Elections Commission led to dropping the proposed arrangements for quarantined and Covid-19 positive persons to vote separately on Election Day, leading to confusion amongst voters and polling officials.
- The extension of voting hours for the general public till 6pm may have hindered the COVID19 mitigation efforts as COVID positive persons were expected to vote between 17:00 to 18:00 pm as well. While this decision was made public at (11:00 am) , it was poorly communicated with Elections Officials at polling stations leading to confusion around closing hours and other proceedings of the day.

During the electoral period TM also conducted Long Term Observation from 17 March 2021 to 9 April 2021, and Candidate Survey from 6 April 2021 to 8 April 2021 highlighting issues in the electoral environment and proceedings leading up to the elections. The findings of the observation and survey will be published in our Post Election Report, as well as our recommendations to strengthen the electoral regulations and framework in the country.

Transparency Maldives appreciates and thanks its observers network and volunteers across 29 islands. We believe that an independent observation effort promotes greater levels of trust in our electoral processes and our observers play a crucial role in ensuring the transparency of electoral processes in the Maldives.