



2023 Presidential Election Observation Report

Transparency Maldives, the National Chapter of Transparency International in The Maldives, is a non-partisan organization that promotes collaboration, awareness and undertakes other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption from the daily lives of people. Transparency Maldives views corruption as a systemic issue and advocates for institutional changes that will punish and prevent corruption.



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Executive Summary

On 9th September 2023, the Maldives held the country's fourth multi-party Presidential Election. In comparison to previous presidential terms, President Solih's term, which began in 2018, has seen relative political calm compared to previous presidential terms. Former President Yameen, the leader of the main opposition coalition was unable to contest in the elections after being convicted of corruption and money laundering charges. The ruling Maldivian Democratic Party, also had a supermajority in the parliament, therefore having control of both the executive and legislative branches of the government.

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

A record high of 8 candidates competed in the elections. Over 282,000 citizens were eligible to vote across both rounds of polls, including over 21,000 first-time voters. This is the highest number of new voters eligible to participate in an election so far. No candidate received the minimum required number of votes to win the election in the first round. This resulted in a run-off round between President Solih and Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, the main opposition candidate. Dr. Muizzu won the elections with 54 per cent of the vote.

The Election Commission has proven to be technically capable of conducting transparent and credible elections with processes on the Election Day being transparent and robust enough to prevent systemic voter fraud. Similar to other recent elections, no serious systemic issues were observed regarding the secrecy of ballot. However, concerns regarding the Commission's impartiality have been voiced by various stakeholders. The vagueness of certain provisions in the Commissioners' code of conduct, as outlined in the Elections Commission Act, coupled with the EC members' potential dismissal by a parliamentary majority, creates a perceived risk of undue influence.

While the minimum standards provided in the electoral legal framework allow for free and fair elections to be conducted in the country, drastic changes need to

occur to strengthen the electoral system and bring it in-line with internationally accepted best practices. These include changes to law to close any loopholes in campaign expenditure and increase transparency in campaign finance. As with previous elections, the lack of comprehensive rules and procedures for electoral dispute resolution remains a key challenge to resolve major electoral issues. As a result, no allegations of vote buying, bribery and abuse of state resources were successfully investigated or prosecuted.

From the observations of Long-Term Observers and media reports, 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. Social media of some SOEs during the election period were observed to have been publishing a large volume of content promoting the incumbent President and government.

On the surface, a robust and plural media landscape exists in the Maldives. The Constitution provides for media freedom. There are also active newspapers and broadcasters aligned with different political sides which led to elements of anti-campaigning and misinformation. Social media is widely popular and a source of information for a large part of the population. However, with most mainstream media being funded through sponsorship of the SOE, they are unable hold the government to account.

While providing adequate education of and awareness on the electoral process and its purpose among the public is the mandate of the EC under the Article 170 of the Constitution and Section 21 (g) of the Elections Commission Act, voter education activities by the EC was limited and there was not enough time to disseminate last minute changes to critical voter information effectively.

The election day processes were transparent, peaceful, and well implemented. Political party representatives were present as observers in many observed polling places, further contributing to transparency.

Observation Methodology

Transparency Maldives (TM) has observed all Presidential Elections in the Maldives since the first democratic multi-party Presidential Election held in 2008. TM followed the methodology used in previous Presidential Election observations to observe the 2023 Presidential Election. TM's methodology consisted of conducting a pre-election assessment, followed by a long-term observation of the electoral and political environment, and then observing election day processes or short-term observation.

The fieldwork for the Pre-Election Assessment took place in May and June 2023. The pre-election assessment used a qualitative approach, using desk research, interviews with key electoral stakeholders, and two Focus Group Discussions. The aim of the Pre-Election Assessment was to assess the political and electoral environments and the preparations for the 2023 Presidential Election, and to understand the emerging challenges for holding a free and fair election. The pre-election assessment has also investigated the broader legal framework to identify concerns and limitations to the constitutional rights and freedoms.

Long-term observation consisted of observing the general political and electoral environments leading up to the election day, monitoring election related events held across the country, and reporting on any other significant incidents related to campaigning or the election. TM trained and mobilised 31 Long-Term Observers (LTOs) across the country. 22 LTOs were active and reported observations until the end of the electoral period. LTOs were recruited from 19 atolls to observe the political landscape and developments in the respective atolls that they were based in. The major themes that TM observed were Abuse of State Resources, Electoral Administration, Role of money in Politics, and issues pertaining to the political participation of youth, women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).

LTOs collected relevant information and reported back to TM using three forms; one form with general updates of the political and electoral landscape, submitted every other week; events form to report on any political events held by a party or a candidate; a critical incident form to report on any significant events or incidents related to the election or campaigns. TM's LTOs had submitted a total of 115 bi-weekly forms and 74 event forms from July to end of September. The information collected was usually limited to the island of the atoll the LTO was primarily based in as they did not travel within the atoll and information about electoral developments within the atoll were mostly collected using secondary sources. Majority of the events observed by the LTOs were organized by MDP (35) and PPM/PNC (28).

Election day short-term observation focused on electoral processes at polling stations. TM observers observed the process from the opening of the polling stations until preliminary results were announced at the stations. TM coordinated the training and mobilisation of over 500 Short-Term Observers (STOs) for election day observations nationwide. Over 300 STOs reported their findings to TM and atoll coordinators using a unified observation checklist. STOs were deployed to specific ballot boxes chosen randomly as part of the election observation initiative. Data collected by observers were collected via an online web application.

The 2023 Presidential Election Observation by TM was conducted based on a systematic election observation methodology using the Quick Count methodology, which is a form of Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) based on a random sample of ballot boxes. The approach taken for the quick count follows the random sampling method outlined in "The Quick Count and Election Observation" handbook published by the National Democratic Institute.



31

**Long Term Observers
trained and mobilised
across 19 atolls**

109

**bi-weekly forms received
from observers, and 74
campaign events
observed in 19 atolls**

Over 500

**Short Term Observers
trained and mobilised
across the country**

Political Context

The 2023 Presidential Election was the fourth presidential election since the country adopted a multiparty political system under the 2008 constitution. The 2023 Presidential Election, and the lead up to the election proved to be significant to the Maldivian democracy. Compared to previous presidential terms, President Solih's term, which started in 2018, had seen relative political calm. The ruling party, MDP, also had a supermajority in the parliament during President Solih's term, therefore having control of both the executive and legislative branches of the government. This election was the 4th multi-party election since the system was implemented in 2008 and an opportunity for the Maldives to solidify its democratic system.

The lead up to the 2018 Presidential Election saw the imprisonment of major political leaders on various charges, including terrorism and corruption related cases. President Solih contested in the election as the united opposition candidate in 2018 and won against then President Yameen Abdul Gayyoom, the only other candidate in the election.

In comparison to the 2018 Presidential Election, the only major political figure who was not able to run in the 2023 Presidential Election was former President Yameen, who was charged with an 11 year in prison sentence on corruption related charges in December 2022. President Yameen was given the PPM presidential ticket in August 2022 without internal party elections. The PPM-PNC coalition at the time had also called to postpone the election until President Yameen's appeal hearings at the High Court were completed, as they believed that a presidential election in which President Yameen cannot run would not be fair. Due to the charges against him, the EC announced that President Yameen would not be eligible to run in the 2023 Presidential Election, a decision that was later upheld by the Supreme Court when it was appealed on behalf of President Yameen.

In August 2023, following the Supreme Court decision, the PPM-PNC coalition decided to field a candidate from PNC on behalf of the coalition. Dr Mohammed Muizzu, former housing minister during President Yameen's administration and the Mayor of Male' City at the time, was named as the official candidate after a vote within the senate. PNC's Parliamentary group leader Adam Shareef was the other contender for the PNC presidential ticket. Muizzu was the Vice President of PPM before quitting and joining PNC before the internal nomination deadline. PNC amended its regulations to transfer the power to nominate a presidential candidate from a primary election to the senate to meet the nomination deadline set by Election Commission.

This election also saw the greatest number of candidates contesting in a Presidential Election in Maldives. A total of eight candidates ran in the election, where three of them were independent candidates. No women candidates contested in the election.

The months preceding the 2023 Presidential Election saw continued protests from the opposition. One of the main issues surrounding President Solih's presidency and the 2023 Presidential Election in general was the Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives, and the maritime border issue concerning the Chagos Atoll. All of this took place in the backdrop of a wider geopolitical rift between India and China that the Maldives finds itself in. While the Solih administration was seen as being more favourable towards India, the Yameen administration had closer ties to China. PPM-PNC protestors gathered in the capital city Male' in the months preceding the election under an 'India Out' banner – which was also a major campaign rhetoric during the election.

There were some instances of excessive force used by the Police to disperse these protests. On the evening of 20 July 2023, members of PPM/PNC coalition were arrested from the Republic Square in Male' while they were raising concerns regarding former President Yameen's trials. It was also reported that the police used excessive force against journalists covering the sit-in at the Republic Square. Several PPM-PNC supporters were also arrested from a rally held on 22 July 2023 calling to free President Yameen.

Candidacy of President Yameen Abdul Gayoom

On 25 December 2022, the Criminal Court sentenced Former President Yameen Abdul Gayoom to 11 years in prison and fined him \$5 million as he was found guilty of corruption and money laundering charges related to receiving bribes in the sale of V. Aarah resort development. Yameen appealed the case at High Court in February 2023, and the hearings of the appeal case began in June 2023.

On 1 August 2023, the application for the Progressive Party of Maldives-People's National Congress (PPM-PNC) coalition's presidential candidate President Yameen was submitted and accepted by the Elections Commission. The law gives the Commission 48 hours to decide whether to accept or reject a candidacy.

On the same day, Elections Commission informed the PPM-PNC coalition of the decision to not to accept the candidacy, citing that Yameen did not meet the requirements for candidacy due to his 11-year prison sentence for bribery and money laundering and an unpaid fine of \$5 million.

According to the Maldivian Constitution, Article 109 on the qualifications for election as President, the person should:

- (e) not have an undischarged decreed debt;
- (f) not have been convicted of a criminal offence and sentenced to a term of more than twelve months, unless a period of three years has elapsed since his release, or pardon for the offence for which he was sentenced;

The PPM-PNC coalition filed a case in the Supreme Court, on 2 August 2023, following Elections Commission (EC)'s decision to reject President Yameen's candidacy.

The case was heard on 4 August 2023, by the full bench of seven judges of the Supreme Court, as is required for candidacy appeal cases. The Attorney General's office was asked by the Supreme court to intervene in the case, and the Progressive Party of Maldives also intervened in the case given their stake in the issue.

In a unanimous ruling on 6 August 2023, the full bench of seven judges of the Supreme Court ruled that the Elections Commission's (EC) decision to reject former President Abdulla Yameen's presidential candidacy was correct.

The court rejected Yameen's arguments that his conviction cannot be deemed as conclusive as Yameen is yet to exhaust his appeal. It also sided with the EC in declaring that the \$5 million fine could be deemed as declared debt, as the six-month period given by the Criminal Court for payment had expired. The Supreme Court also did not grant Yameen's request to allow to extend the nomination deadline, so that PPM can field an alternate candidate in case Yameen loses his motion. The EC had previously stated that extending the nomination deadline as requested by PPM would infringe on the rights of other candidates as it would result in a period of less than 30 days for campaigning as stipulated in the constitution.

Following the MDP presidential primary held in January 2023 in which Speaker of the Parliament Mohamed Nasheed lost to the incumbent President Ibrahim Solih, there was a major split within the party, resulting in a breakaway faction. Supporters of former President Nasheed, registered a new political party called ‘The Democrats.’

Formation of The Democrats

On 21 May 2023, the Democrats submitted an application form to the EC to form a new political party. The Democrats was granted approval to gather 3,000 signatures in support for the foundation of the political party on 24 May 2023. ‘The Democrats’ filed for registration with the Elections Commission (EC) with 3,560 membership forms on June 1. Commission members voted to deny the request for registration on 19 June, citing issues that need to be looked into further.

In a video footage taken during the Democrats protest following the decision inside the Elections Commission, Elections Commissioner Fuad Thaufeeq is seen stating that two members of the commission had voted to grant permission to register ‘The Democrats’ with two voting against it. Fuad also noted that some members had questioned his work and decided not to give the green light for the time being, as it should be passed by a majority.

The Democrats filed a lawsuit at the Civil Court on 26 June 2023 alleging that EC was withholding permission to register the party despite fulfilling all requirements and submitting the required number of membership forms. On 2 July the formulation of the party was approved by EC.

Party Primaries

Maldivian Democratic Party

The Maldivian Democratic Party's (MDP) presidential primary election was held on 29 January 2023. The contenders for the party ticket were incumbent President Ibrahim Mohammed Solih and former President Mohamed Nasheed. President Solih won the presidential primary election, securing 61% of the vote with 24,566 ballots, beating former President Nasheed who got 15,641 votes.

Following the results, President Nasheed's supporters and representatives alleged voter fraud and vote rigging in the contentious election, leading to a split in the party. 13 members of Parliament, including President Nasheed, left MDP.

President Solih kicked off his campaign with official backing by coalition partners Adhaalath Party and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA). His running mate was Mohamed Aslam, the leader of the MDP parliamentary group and the longest-serving lawmaker within the party's parliamentary group.

Progressive Party of Maldives –Peoples National Congress

Dr. Mohamed Muizzu had been the housing minister during President Yameen's administration, and in 2021, was elected as the mayor of Male' City - the first time MDP's stronghold on Male' City Council was lost. He served as the Vice-President of the PPM, before leaving the party to join PNC to contest in the PNC primary to nominate a PPM-PNC coalition candidate. Muizzu secured the PNC presidential ticket in a vote taken within the PNC senate, running against MP Adam Shareef.

Muizzu chose parliament member Hussain Mohamed Latheef as his running mate. PNC President Abdullah Abdul Raheem had said that should President Yameen win the case at the Supreme Court regarding his candidacy issue, PNC would not run in the presidential election. After the Supreme Court upheld EC's decision to reject former President Yameen's candidacy, Yameen had requested the PPM-PNC senate to boycott the presidential election, however, the senate majority voted against it. One of the pledges of the PPM-PNC coalition included freeing President Yameen from jail.

The Democrats

The Democrats held their presidential primary election on 28 July 2023. The Democrats parliament member Ilyas Labeeb was the only candidate who ran in the primary. A referendum was taken as per the party's Articles of Association to give approval to the presidential candidate. In the primary referendum election, 94.4% of the 3,203 voters voted in approval of Ilyas Labeeb, making him the presidential candidate of The Democrats.

Members also had the opportunity to vote online in this primary, a first for an election held by a political party in Maldives.

Hussain Amr, former Managing Director of State Trade Organization was appointed as his running-mate. Amr was dismissed as MD of State Trade Organization by President Solih in March 2023 after he publicly supported former President Mohamed Nasheed in the MDP Presidential primary in January 2023.

Maldives Reform Movement / Faris Maumoon

In May 2023, EC decided to dissolve Maldives Reform Movement (MRM) since their membership was less than the minimum required number of 3,000 members. MRM appealed the decision to dissolve the party at Civil Court and an injunction to freeze the dissolution was granted. Faris Maumoon, president of MRM and son of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom, was the only candidate who ran in the party primary election.

The Executive Committee of the party had decided that they will not form a coalition in the first round of elections, as declared in a statement responding to President Solih's invitation letter to MRM to form a coalition. During this time, Faris began collecting the 1,500 signatures necessary for independent candidates to contest in the Presidential Election and submitted his application to run as an independent candidate after securing the required number of signatures. Faris appointed Dr Abdul Sattar Yousuf, a veteran public health official and expert as his running mate.

Maldives National Party

MNP opened for its primary candidacy for the 2023 presidential elections on December 1, 2022. The Party's leader, parliament member Colonel (Retired) Mohamed Nazim, applied and was awarded the party's ticket on May 26, 2023, without undergoing a primary, as he was the sole applicant for the party's presidential candidacy. Nazim decided to name Dr. Mohamed Adil Naseer, a prominent figure in the education sector as his running mate.

Jumhooree Party

Jumhooree Party opened the opportunity for those interested in contesting in the party's presidential primary to submit their applications in March 2023. The party's leader, Qasim Ibrahim, was the only applicant by the May 30 deadline, thereby securing the presidential ticket by default. The ticket was officially handed over at a special rally at Male' Carnival Area on 9 June 2023. Despite being part of the ruling coalition in President Solih's administration, Jumhooree Party decided to field its own candidate for the presidential election, rejecting President Solih's invitation to form a coalition. Qasim's running mate was Dr. Ameen Ibrahim, former Transport Minister and the deputy leader of the party.

Umar Naseer

Former Home Minister during President Yameen's administration, Umar Naseer launched his presidential campaign on 3 February 2023. By 29 July 2023, he had successfully collected and submitted the 1500 signatures required for independent candidates to contest in the election. Umar Naseer selected former Deputy Home Minister Ahmed Saleem (Maaz Saleem) as his running mate.

Hassan Zameel

Independent candidate Hassan Zameel had served in various government positions, including as deputy director general at the Tourism Ministry. Prior to the election, he was most recently the Deputy Minister of Defence, before leaving his position, with the intention of running for the election. Zameel appointed his wife, Mariyam Aleem, as his running mate.

Dr. Mohammed Munavvar

Former Attorney General and former president of MDP, Dr. Mohammed Munavvar officially announced his bid to run for the presidency on 13 March 2023. He had started the work of collecting the 1,500 signatures necessary for independent candidates to compete in the election. However, Dr. Munavvar later announced that he will not be running in the 2023 Presidential Election.

Discussions of Potential Coalitions

President Solih extended invitation to parties to form a coalition in the run up to the election. However, only Adhaalath Party and MDA accepted the invitation, and other coalition parties who had been in the administration, namely JP and MRM, decided to field their own candidates in the first round. MDA later joined the PPM/PNC coalition after the first-round results, in which President Solih was unable to secure a majority of the votes.

Jumhooree Party and MNP met in July to discuss the possibility of a coalition. The meeting, initiated by Jumhooree Party, was based around ways in which the two parties can work together during the election. Both parties had announced their presidential candidates when these discussions were held.

Jumhooree Party and MNP was also joined by The Democrats in a press conference held in July in which they announced that they are willing to put forward a single coalition candidate if PPM and MRM can agree to it. This was followed by a statement from PPM in which they said that they can get behind a single candidate if that candidate is President Yameen. MRM and JP also met separately to discuss fielding a single presidential candidate.

None of these discussions resulted in a coalition candidate in the first round of the election.

Electoral Administration

The Elections Commission of Maldives

The Elections Commission of Maldives (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 have been men.

The EC has, in the past, proved to be technically capable of conducting generally transparent and credible elections. Most of the stakeholders interviewed for TM's 2023 Pre-Election Assessment ahead of the Presidential Election also agreed that the technical aspects and processes on the Election Day are transparent and robust enough to prevent systemic voter fraud. Furthermore, no serious systemic issues were found regarding the secrecy of ballot.

Concerns regarding the EC's impartiality have been voiced by various stakeholders, notably by a majority of political parties interviewed during the pre-election assessment. These concerns centre around perceived political influence on the EC, with allegations of government interference.

The vagueness of certain provisions in the Commissioners' code of conduct, as outlined in the Elections Commission Act (Article 17), coupled with the EC members' potential dismissal by a parliamentary majority, creates a perceived risk of undue influence. Notably, the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), under President Solih's administration, held a majority in the People's Majlis.

Moreover, surveys indicate a consistent decline in public confidence in the EC since 2013. Confidence stood at 74% in 2013, declined to 56% in 2015, and further **dropped to 43% by 2022, according to an IRI survey***.

The term of one of the members of EC, Ali Nashaath, came to an end on 24 July 2023 during the preparations for the election. Nashaath's name was sent to the Parliament by President's Office for

reappointment on 29th May, however, no decisions were made by the People's Majlis before it went to recess. Transparency Maldives noted with concern the delays in appointment of a member and called on the Parliament to expedite the appointment process to ensure that the Commission can function without any hindrance and is able to make decisions in a timely manner in the lead up to the Presidential Election.

On 18 July 2023, three out of five EC members voted yes in a no confidence vote of EC President Fuad Thaufeeq. The vote came after weeks of speculation with regards to infighting in the Commission and political influence over the Commission. However, Fuad had said that the vote does not hold any legal weight, and that he will not resign. The three members who voted yes decided that they will not participate in any meetings chaired by Fuad. The meetings were then chaired by EC vice-president Ismail Habeeb.

On 20 November, Fuad gave an interview to local media stating that all issues within the members of the commission have been resolved and members would be working together.

*www.iri.org/resources/national-survey-of-residents-of-the-republic-of-maldives-august-september-2022/

Recommendations

- Revise the legal framework to fortify the statutory authority of the Elections Commission of Maldives, enhancing its autonomy to conduct elections independently and free from political influence. The expanded mandate should confer upon the Elections Commission the power to exercise thorough supervision over the entire electoral process, including the enforcement of electoral laws.
- To bolster the integrity of the electoral process, empower the electoral commission with the authority and responsibility to meticulously regulate, oversee, and execute all aspects of the electoral process, thereby reinforcing the integrity of democratic elections.
- Evaluate the current electoral calendar to assess the feasibility of consolidating Presidential, Parliamentary, Local Council, and WDC elections into a single cycle. The 3 elections are conducted separately, and this results in a lot of repetitive, extra work and stress for the Election Commission and the political parties as well.
- To enhance the integrity of the electoral process, it is imperative to comprehensively develop the electoral legal framework, ideally enacting it well in advance of elections. Proposed amendments, intended for improvement and mutually agreed upon by all stakeholders, should be exceptional. Strict adherence to the election timeline is essential to prevent last-minute decisions that may cause voter confusion and erode confidence in the electoral process.
- The Parliament to ensure timeliness in appointment of members to independent institutions to ensure they do not impede on the works of the commission, and the independent institutions can fulfil their mandate effectively.

The Elections Commission of Maldives

The National Advisory Council (NAC) is formed by the EC before every election. The NAC for the 2023 Presidential Election was first convened on 5 July 2023, and comprised of representatives from political parties, independent commissions, government departments, and Civil Society Organizations. TM was invited to sit in the NAC as a representative of the civil society. A total of 8 NAC meetings were held, with the last two meetings held on the day of the second round of the election.

The NAC's mandate is to offer advice to the EC, enhancing transparency and inclusivity in the electoral process. Serving as a crucial platform, the NAC allowed political parties and stakeholders to present issues for EC consideration, discuss concerns, seek clarifications, and propose recommendations. However, the efficacy of the NAC could be enhanced through the implementation of detailed rules of procedure, particularly in matters related to convening regular meetings and decision-making within the NAC and ensuring sufficient time for members to deliberate key issues and present recommendations.

Recommendations

- Ensure the scheduling of more frequent meetings, adopting a weekly format with twice-weekly meetings in the last month leading up to the election.
- Refining the decision-making process within NAC meetings to ensure a more structured and effective operation.
- Continue NAC meetings beyond the election period, especially to support electoral reform in between electoral cycles.

The Complaints Mechanism

EC established a 'National Complaints Bureau' at the Elections Headquarters on 22 July 2023. Elections related complaints could be filed by submitting a form directly at the Bureau or via email. Two hotlines for the Bureau were also allocated.

The structure of the complaints mechanisms for elections has remained largely unchanged since 2008. The 2023 Presidential Elections Regulation provides for a multi-level dispute resolution mechanism with options to submit complaints at island/atoll/city level, or to the National Complaints Bureau established by the EC, or directly to the EC. Any violation of the electoral legal framework by any person has to be submitted within five days following the election day.

However, the regulation does not provide clear and detailed responsibilities of the complaints mechanism and a detailed procedure to adjudicate complaints. Furthermore, the General Elections Act mandates the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to investigate electoral corruption cases, and the Maldives Broadcasting Commission to investigate complaints related to broadcasters. This adds to the already complicated nature of this multi-level mechanism, creating confusion among voters as to which institution to lodge complaints to.

The proposed timeframes of the complaint's mechanism also limits the voters ability to lodge complaints and receive redress. For instance, while complaints must be filed within five days following an election day, candidates are given 60 days to submit their audited financial report within 60 days following the election, and the final election results are announced within seven days following the election. This challenges the possibility to hold candidates accountable for financial misconduct in a timely manner.

Additionally, information about the complaint's mechanism is not adequately provided to the public. While most of the complaints lodged and resolved are administrative in nature (for example, related to voter registry), issues of vote buying, or misuse of state resources are reported less and almost never prosecuted.

Anti-Corruption Commission Portal

On August 10, the ACC introduced an online portal for the public to report election related bribery and vote buying issues. The portal lists offenses which can be reported such as:

- Providing any goods or benefits or services requesting to vote or not vote for a particular candidate.
- Giving any goods or benefits or services for voting for a particular candidate.
- Providing any goods or benefits or services for nominating a particular candidate or deciding not to contest in the election.

The portal ensures the confidentiality of the complainant, however, updates regarding the complaint is provided for those who submit the complaint in an identifiable manner. Other forms of corruption in the electoral environment can only be reported through the ACC's reporting forms.

Recommendations

- The EC and other relevant actors should review and amend the electoral legal framework to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of the complaints mechanism to ensure effective coordination among stakeholders, and make the mechanism accessible to the public.
- Conduct targeted public awareness on the complaints mechanisms to promote reporting.

Voter Registration

All Maldivian citizens are automatically eligible to vote at the age of 18 years. 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. 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. The voter lists are published by EC and opened for public complaints and shared with political parties. After the complaint period, all revisions are also published. No major issues have been observed or raised by political parties. The final list of voters is signed and approved by all candidates before the election.

First Round

The EC opened the voter re-registration for the first round from 16 July 2023 to 5 August 2023 for those who want to cast their vote in a different location than their permanent address. Deadline for accepting online forms via the re-registration portal was 31 July, which was later extended to 2 August. EC announced that they would accept voter re-registration forms from those who are living abroad in nine different locations in eight countries.

EC initially opened for re-registration for 13 boxes in eight countries for voters abroad. More than 150 voters re-registered to eight of these boxes, which was the minimum number of re-registrations required by the EC for a ballot box to be stationed abroad. These include three boxes in Malaysia, two boxes in Sri Lanka, and one box in the UK, India, and UAE each.

According to the EC, a total of 42,867 forms were received for re-registration and a total of 35,849 forms were accepted and re-registered as requested. EC announced that 282,395 voters were eligible to vote in the first round of the presidential election, of which 20,260 were first time voters. It also announced that 574 boxes will be placed for the first round of the presidential elections.

The 574 polling stations were distributed as follows:

- 176 polling stations in the Greater Malé Area (Malé, Hulhumalé, and Villingili)
- 319 polling stations in other islands/cities
- 5 polling station in jails, 1 polling station in an Industrial Zone (Hulhule')
- 65 polling stations in resort islands
- 8 overseas polling stations in Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates.

This election marked the use of the online registration portal for the first time for a presidential election. It should also be noted that additional time was given by the EC for registration beyond the allocated period in the electoral legal framework.

Second Round

Re-registration for the second round was opened from 15 September to 17 September. As previously, voters could re-register via the online portal, or by submitting a physical form. A total of 50,047 re-registration applications were made, and 38,763 voters were re-registered.

There were some concerns from the opposition over the high number of re-registrations during the two-day period. However, the number of re-registrations for the second round was comparable to previous re-registration numbers in elections. A total of 282,804 voters were eligible to vote in the second round, including 409 first-time voters.

Recommendations

- The online re-registration portal should be made more accessible to persons living abroad and PwDs

Candidate Registration

Article 109 of the Maldivian Constitution set out the conditions that a Presidential candidate must fulfil to be eligible. Candidates can be nominated by a registered political party or run independently. Applications for candidates were open from 23 July to 7 August. By the end of August 7, a total of eight candidates submitted their applications to contest in the Presidential Election 2023 – five candidates representing political parties and three independent candidates. All eight candidates' applications were accepted and confirmed by EC. This was a record number of candidates contesting in a Presidential Election in Maldives.

On August 9, the EC conducted the draw for the ballot order of candidates. The list of candidates as per the ballot order are provided below.

1. Umar Naseer – Independent
2. Hassan Zameel – Independent
3. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih – Maldives Democratic Party (MDP), Incumbent, in a coalition with AP and MDA
4. Dr. Mohamed Muizzu – People's National Congress (PNC), backed by PPM
5. Qasim Ibrahim – Jumhooree Party (JP)
6. Faris Maumoon – Independent
7. Ilyas Labeeb – The Democrats
8. Mohamed Nazim – Maldives National Party (MNP)

Campaign Period

The General Election Act 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 misinformation information.

The official campaign period for the first round started on 10 August, ending at 6 pm on 8 September. The electoral environment was generally calm, with isolated incidents of campaign violations and instances of violence during campaign efforts by the candidates. Some of these incidents were observed and reported by TM's LTOs and are described in detail in the section on Key Electoral Issues. In 5 out of the 74 events observed by TM's LTOs, the candidate or another official speaker at the event was observed to have used hate speech, derogatory language or intimidation. In addition, LTOs also reported misinformation or disinformation being circulated in their community groups with regards to the elections or any presidential candidate in 29 out of 109 (27%) of bi-weekly observation reports.

Violence and Intimidation during the campaign period

During the campaign period, there were several campaign related incidents. Independent candidate Umar Naseer was attacked on 19th August while on a campaign road rally. A metal object was thrown at Naseer's face, but no injuries were sustained. Naseer said that the alleged perpetrator fled the scene after the attack, but that the police have been informed along with a picture of the alleged perpetrator. Two MDP campaign offices were also vandalised during the election period.

MDP and PPM supporters clashed on 19th August in K. Guraidhoo, resulting in multiple injuries. The incident took place ahead of PNC-PPM candidate Mohamed Muizzu's visit to the island for campaign. The confrontation was controlled before Muizzu arrived at the island in the evening to hold a campaign event.

On August 28th, a video was posted on social media showing an individual being restrained by two police officers. According to the caption on the post and media reports, the Vice President of Th. Gaadhiffushi Council was arrested for protesting during President Solih's campaign trip to the island. The individual was allegedly kept under arrest until the President left the island. Media Reports indicated that there was heavy police presence during campaign events by incumbent.

Key Electoral Issues Observed

Abuse of State Resources

Allegations of misuse of state resources have been rife in previous elections across multiple governments. Historically, the most observed allegation is the inauguration or completion of government projects in time for elections. This is often used as a campaign tool for incumbent parties. In addition, the State's use of its vehicles and human resources for campaign activities has been a common occurrence during election cycles.

Currently the electoral legal framework of the Maldives is ineffective in addressing the problem of abuse of state resources during political campaigns. State officials often exploit a loophole by categorizing campaign trips as official trips, which allows them to evade accountability for their actions.

ACC Advisory on reducing corruption risks related to elections.

The purpose of the advisory is to prevent indulging in corrupt practices in elections and providing instructions on how to ensure integrity at all election-related stages. It also provides advice to reduce the risk of corruption by encouraging state agencies, candidates, and political parties to conduct all election-related activities in a transparent manner.

The advisory covers a wide range of topics commonly discussed during election cycles such as campaign financing by candidates and political parties, involvement of staff of the state and use of state resources in campaign activities, vote buying and bribery, and ensuring transparency of the elections.

State-owned Enterprises

State owned enterprises (SOEs) form one of the largest sectors of the economy. SOEs account for more than 50% of the GDP and provide employment for over 25,000 people. This is twice the figure reported in 2021 and represents over 18% of the workforce. Majority of these new jobs are created based on projects that are implemented by SOEs and for their local branches, which are spread across the country.

However, TM has previously identified governance risks around Appointment of SOE boards, which allows undue political influence over SOEs. Through a policy issued by Privatization and Corporatization Board (PCB), the President submits nominees to the PCB, which allows the President to nominate his or party loyalists. Additionally, SOE recruitment of jobs throughout the country, which could be politically motivated or used for political gain and loyalty given the close links between SOE leadership and politicians/incumbent parties. The hiring processes across SOEs are inconsistent. SOEs are also largely free to spend their budget for activities across the country under the pretext of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) without a robust, transparent, and consistently applied policy framework.

In the first 10 days of campaigning

32

project related ceremonies were attended by the incumbent during campaign trips.

In the first 11 days of the official campaign period,

MVR 1 BILLION

worth of projects was awarded to two SOEs

Moreover, the existing state oversight mechanisms and bodies are weak in effectively monitoring and executing their oversight functions. The PCB, and the ACC has resource constraints, including technical and human resources and does not have financial independence as they must fully rely on the State for their budget. With a supermajority of the previous government, the Parliamentary SOE committee was predominantly represented by incumbent party members. During the pre-election assessment some stakeholders also raised concerns that the Auditor General's Office has not adequately focused on SOEs, with some suggesting there is real or internalized undue political influence over the Auditor General's Office.

During the first ten days on campaigning for the 2023 Presidential Election starting on 10 August 2023, official media reports and official social media account of government agencies reported ceremonies related to the inauguration and completion of 32 projects in 16 islands were attended by the incumbent. 14 new projects approximately worth over MVR 1 billion were awarded by the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to two SOEs in the first eleven days (10 – 20 August 2023) of the official campaign period. In comparison, during the entire month of August last year, 5 projects worth approximately MVR 261 million were awarded by the Ministry.

Coinciding these ceremonies with the official election campaigning period raises grave concerns regarding the level playing field for presidential candidates. Moreover, carrying out official responsibilities while on campaign trips is an abuse of office and related powers, which blurs the line between the official responsibilities of the incumbent and the candidate's campaign.

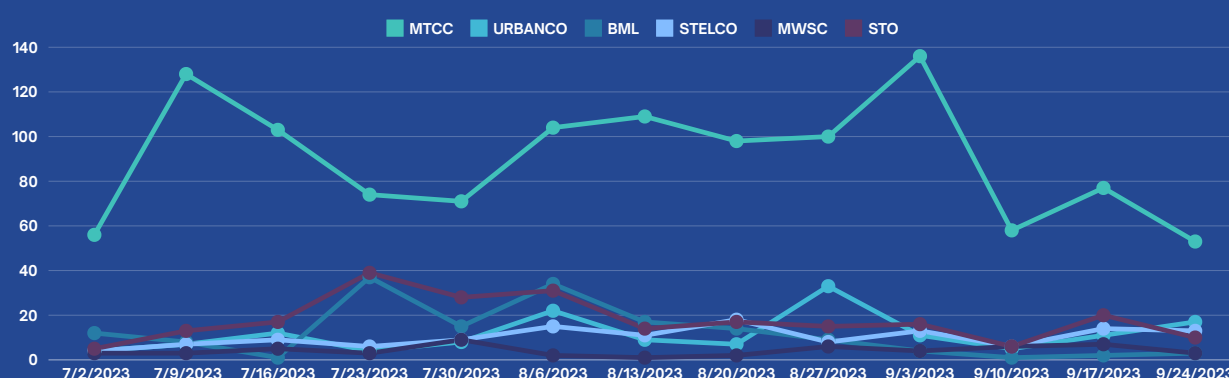


Figure 1: Number of social media posts per week by selected SOEs from July to October

Compared to all other major SOEs both in terms of followers and usage among the public, MTCC had a significantly higher level of activity over this period.

MTCC was the SOE with most activity on social media. During the first round of elections, MTCC was averaging over 100 posts per week. This number decreased by half during the period preceding the 2nd round of elections.

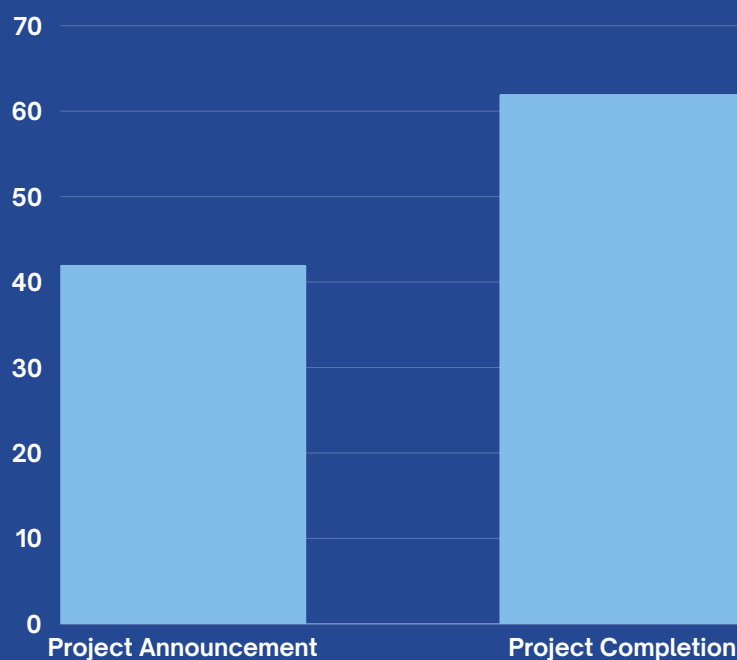


Figure 2: Announcement of new projects and project completion posts on social media by MTCC observed by TM during the election period

Majority of the content uploaded and shared by MTCC during this period revolved around promoting the success of infrastructure and development projects completed by the company. In addition, at least 42 new projects were announced and 62 posts regarding projects that had been completed. Some of these projects were completed during 2021-2022 but formally inaugurated upon the arrival of the incumbent to the project location. Based on the information available on these posts, the total value of new projects contracted to MTCC is expected exceed beyond MVR2.2 billion.

TM submitted a right to information request to Ministry of Housing Land and Urban Development requesting for details of all projects contracted by the Ministry to SOEs starting from June 2022 to the end of September 2023. A response was provided by Ministry of Construction and Infrastructure after the new government and its ministries were established. According to the response, a total of 147 projects with a total value of MVR 8.6 billion were directly awarded to Fenaka, MTCC, RDC and STELCO during this period. Since the response received did not include the date of awarding, it was not possible to determine which projects were awarded during the official campaign period. The scope of these projects ranged from basic infrastructure development such as harbour development to shoreline protection and development of water and sewerage networks. Among these 147 projects, 120 projects (MVR 6,583,435,398.32) were awarded to MTCC, 21 projects (MVR 1,771,258,273.55) to RDC, 5 projects (MVR 194,664,875.17) to Fenaka and 1 project (MVR 10,911,998.40) to STELCO.

LTO Observations on Abuse of State Resources

Potential cases of abuse of state resources were reported by LTOs in the biweekly forms and event monitoring forms. According to 39% of the biweekly reports (42 out of 109), a project had been announced, inaugurated, completed or had campaign events related to new or ongoing projects in the atolls they were based in. These projects varied from infrastructural development to provide essential services to development of recreational areas for the community.

Furthermore, 17% of the reports indicated that a political party or candidate used government or SOEs vehicles or vessels to conduct rallies, meetings or partisan electoral activities. State owned Equipment and materials and equipment belonging to SOEs being used to conduct rallies, meetings or electoral activities were sporadically reported. Civil service employees campaigning for a political party or candidate during working hours were observed in 10% of reports (11 out of 109) and the number was at 11% (13 out of 109) for employees of SOEs campaigning for a political party or candidate during working hours. While most of these instances were related to the incumbent, there were instances which involved other political parties and candidates.

Across the political and campaign events observed by the LTOs, in 27 out of 74 events, government or municipal equipment, vehicles, resources, or staff were used to organize the event and in 29 out of 74 events SOE vehicles, resources, or staff were used to organize the event. Additionally in at least 11 out of the 74 events, a new public project was announced by one of the speakers

Public Service Media

PSM online news was monitored during this time frame. More than 50 development project events attended by the incumbent were held from the beginning of campaign period to the end of the of the elections. 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.

103 cases were submitted to ACC during the election period however only 58 of cases were registered at the commission. these include **39 cases of bribery related to elections, 11 cases of undue influence and 8 cases of abuse of state resources**

Recommendations

- Establish a collaborative mechanism involving stakeholders including the EC, ACC, Maldives Police Services (MPS), and Prosecutor General's Office to monitor, investigate, and prosecute instances of vote buying and misuse of state resources. This effort should focus on the effective implementation of existing laws and, where necessary, consider amendments for enhanced legal measures.
- The ACC and the Auditor General's Office to develop and disseminate explicit guidelines on the use of state resources by the incumbent during election periods, including penalties and provisions that will facilitate enforcement of compliance with these guidelines.
- All relevant actors, including the Parliament, must conduct a thorough review and expeditiously reinforce the governance of SOEs. This review should address governance risks comprehensively, aiming to prevent the potential entrenchment of a patronage and clientelist system in the Maldives that could unduly favour the incumbent in elections.

Media landscape

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 rarely used in urban communities. Most printed newspapers have moved to online mediums.

The Maldivian Media Council, which is a statutory body, is mandated to promote and protect media freedom and independence. The Maldives Journalists Association(MJA) also acts as a bulwark for media freedom.

The state media does not monopolize the media landscape and there are over two hundred registered newspapers/magazines. There are also active newspapers and broadcasters aligned with different political sides. Social media is widely popular; a December 2022 survey shows 53% of Maldivians rely on social media as a source of political news and information. According to datareportal, data published in Meta's advertising resources indicates that Facebook had 296,200 users in the Maldives in early 2023. There were 448,4000 internet users in the Maldives in January 2023 and internet penetration rate stood at 85.8 percent of the total population at the start of 2023. Clubhouse is also another platform for political discussions.

There have been attacks and threats against local media workers in recent months. Journalists and media personnel covering opposition protests have been assaulted and detained by police on multiple occasions. Some others have received death threats from non-state actors after reporting on areas such as corruption, gang and criminal activities and religious extremism. Such threats and intimidation could lead to self-censorship in reporting sensitive topics.

There are also legislative challenges. The Evidence Act, effective from January 2023, compels journalists and media outlets to reveal their sources. A failure to comply could result in prison sentences of up to three months. This is inadvertently intimidating investigative journalism to speak truth to the power.

During the election period various media was accused by the major political parties for spreading misinformation and attempting to negatively impact the campaign environment. Some of the alleged cases of misinformation, especially relating to the influence of foreign powers and military during the election period could have been subverted by the government with timely proactive disclosure of accurate information.

There also appears to be a subtle yet significant influence on the mainstream media (especially newspaper) landscape by the government. Stakeholders interviewed by TM for the Pre-Election Assessment raised concerns that dominant mainstream media has an explicit or internalized/subtle bias in favour of the incumbent, which is secured through two ways, taking place in tandem; The sponsorship funding for media through SOEs and the 'Public Relations' ('PR') efforts by the government and/or government affiliated private actors. As a result, while the government is not openly suppressing the media, most mainstream media outlets are unable to hold the government to account. In other words, while there is media freedom and plurality in a narrow sense, the overall mainstream media appears to be biased in favour of the government.

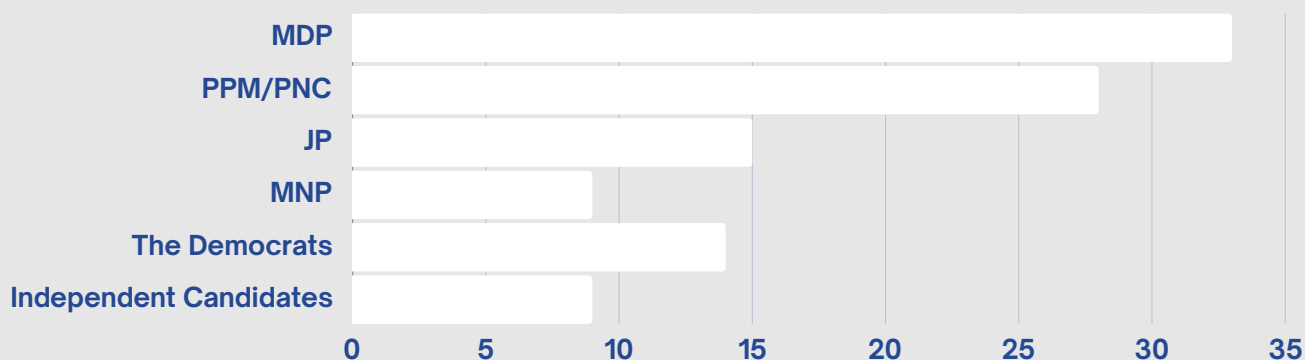


Figure 3: instances of hate speech used in media against candidates observed by LTOs by party

49% of all LTO reports (53 out of 109) reported instances of hate speech or inflammatory language being used against candidates in the media, both by opposing political parties and their supporters as well as members of the media. 33 of these 109 were observed against MDP while a further 28 out of these 109 cases were targeted towards PPM/PNC. 27% (29 out of 109) of the LTO reports also indicated witnessing misinformation or disinformation being circulated in their community groups with regards to the elections or a presidential candidate.

Recommendations

- Enhance the legal framework to safeguard media freedom, incorporating amendments to the Evidence Act.
- Institute a transparent mechanism for the proactive disclosure of funding and sponsorship received by media outlets.
- Implement media literacy programs through collaboration with relevant government institutions, aimed at educating the public on discerning disinformation and misinformation.
- Expand the scope of media monitoring, particularly by MBC, to ensure that PSM or the state media remains impartial and is not biased in favour of the incumbent president.

Campaign Financing

The General Elections Act permits a candidate to spend up to MVR 2,000 per eligible elector. The estimated 280,000 eligible voters for the 2023 presidential election will allow a presidential candidate to spend MVR 560 million. Although candidates are prohibited from accepting donations from anonymous sources, political parties are permitted to receive such contributions rendering the ban on candidates irrelevant.

Political parties are not required to report campaign finances leaving party spending for a candidate unaccounted for in reporting. In-kind donations are also not included in donations reported by candidates. The campaign spending outside the official campaign period is not accounted for in bookkeeping. Candidates are required to submit audited campaign finance reports to the EC within 60 days after the election.

Government funding for political parties are proportioned based on party membership as per the Political Parties Act. Naturally the larger parties receive more funding from the government which can be used for campaigning as well other administrative costs of the parties. While crowdfunding is not common for Presidential Elections in Maldives, some candidates opened up publicly for donations.

Recommendations

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the existing candidate spending ceiling, ensuring periodic assessments linked to economic factors such as inflation, voting population size, and the nature of the election.
- Review and propose amendments to campaign financing laws to address loopholes, enhance reporting requirements, and strengthen the enforcement of campaign finance regulations.
- Introduce provisions for political parties to report campaign expenses, including a specified spending limit during the election period.
- Incorporate provisions to account for all spending in reporting, encompassing in-kind donations and third-party expenditures on behalf of candidates.
- Mandate the EC to proactively disclose, within a defined timeframe, the names of candidates who have submitted their reports.
- Direct the EC to publish reports in a user-friendly format, facilitating thorough review and scrutiny to enhance transparency and electoral integrity.

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.

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.

Interviews conducted for TMs pre-election assessment raised concerns over the prevalence of vote buying. Money is a key method of vote buying. However, other forms of vote buying include exploiting vulnerable groups were also identified during the interviews.

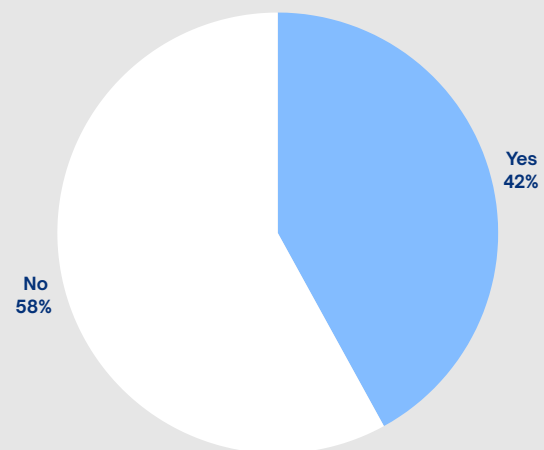


Figure 4: Witnessed or heard of any voter asking for money or personal favours in return for their or their families' vote - from LTO reports.

During the observation period, 10% (11 out of 109) of LTO reports observed alleged cases of political party or candidate offering donations to NGOs, CBOs, sports clubs, or other groups during the observation period. In addition, 37% (40 out of 109) reported a political party or candidate offering donations / money to voters in return for their vote, and another 31% (34 out of 109) reported instances of a political party or candidate offering non-monetary personal favours if they get elected.

42% (46 out of 109) of all LTO reports indicated that they had witnessed or heard of voters asking for money or personal favours in return of their individual or family's vote. While these reports indicate that money/cash was the main offer in exchange for votes, other favours such as the promise of jobs, promotions and in some cases the pardon of relatives serving a jail sentence. There were allegations that a single vote was offered from MVR 1,000 per vote up to MVR 20,000 per vote.

Recommendations

- State authorities including the ACC, MPS, Attorney General's Office, and EC must coordinate to implement the electoral legal framework to hold to account instances of vote buying.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate voters about the negative consequences of vote buying on the democratic process.

Voter Education

While providing adequate education of and awareness on the electoral process and its purpose among the public is the mandate of the EC under the Article 170 of the Constitution and Section 21 (g) of the Elections Commission Act, voter education activities by the EC was limited and there was not enough time to disseminate last minute changes to critical voter information effectively.

The EC introduced a key change to assisted voting whereby visually impaired voters can opt to use a stencil instead of bringing an assister to complete their ballot. While this is a welcome change, limited outreach was conducted to educate visually impaired voters on the availability and usage of this method. Another key change brought to the Election Day processes was the change in stipulations for invalid ballots whereby, if the ballot paper is marked with more than one tick or has tracings on top of the initial tick, it would be considered invalid. This change was brought with less than a week to go for the Election Day and therefore, the EC was unable to disseminate adequate information regarding the change.

In 59 out of 109 LTOs reports, a total of 113 programs of voter information and education activities in their constituency was observed within the total 13 weeks of observation (10 weeks prior to the first round and 3 weeks prior to second round). As opposed to previous years, this year, LTOs reported many of the activities being carried out by political parties (31); mainstream media (25) and social media (24). Observers reported voter information and education activities by the EC in 24 instances and 9 instances of voter education activities by CSO actors. The EC's dissemination of voter information and voter education was heavily reliant on social media and lacked in personal approaches among the public.

TM conducted civic voter education sessions across the country, travelling to a total of 17 atolls. These voter education sessions targeted first time voters and the youth population in the communities. In addition to this, TM conducted door to door information sharing activities in some of these locations whereby TM was able to explore key grievances of the public, as well as provide information and disseminate voter information handouts.

Recommendations

- Ensure voter information and education programs and materials are targeted for and accessible to disabled people.
- Introduce facilitative tools or technologies to ensure disabled voters can vote independently.
- Parliament to bring amendments to enable voting by the blind community adults without assistance by another to ensure ballot secrecy.
- Political parties and other institutions, including the EC, should ensure that PWDs are represented in policy- and decision-making platforms. This also includes their inclusion in electoral advisory platforms
- Collaborate with Youth and PWD organisations across the Maldives to develop and implement targeted voter education content and materials
- Create an easily accessible digital archive of voter information and education materials that is updated in a timely manner reflecting changes to the electoral processes whereby civil society, political parties and media can refer to in their voter education programmes

Inclusivity and Participation

The General Elections Act provides for assisted voting for physically challenged voters (section 45). However, there are gaps and weaknesses in electoral laws. One of the key gaps include the narrow scope of disabilities defined in the legal framework, leading to those who may be intellectually impaired not being covered as disabled. Additionally, there are no provisions to ensure secrecy of assisted voting, including for those who have visual impairments.

Concerns were raised by some stakeholders that PWDs faced undue influence to vote one way or another. Another key concern was the limited voter information, especially voter education programmes catering for different groups of PWDs. Overall lack of political participation opportunities for PWDs was also identified, including representation in the NAC.

There is no national disability register that is available to the Election Commission. This meant that assisted voters were identified at the polling stations after administering a test by a polling station official at the polling station.

The lack of political participation by women is another key area that has been identified in previous election cycles. Attendance of women at campaign events were described as “excellent” at 24 events and “Good” at 30 events with the remaining 20 events having poor to unconfirmed levels of women in attendance. However, the primary role of women during these events were to serve as the master of ceremony of the event or engaged in serving refreshments after the event. Women were official speakers at only 38% (out of) of these events with the remaining 62% (out of) of events being fully dominated by men.

Recommendations

- EC should consider provisions in the voter registration/re-registration forms to capture disabilities of voters to the extent provided for in the relevant laws.
- Ensure voter information and education programs and materials are targeted for and accessible to disabled people.
- Introduce facilitative tools or technologies to ensure disabled voters can vote independently.
- Parliament to bring amendments to enable voting by the blind community adults without assistance by another in order to ensure ballot secrecy.
- Political parties and other institutions, including the EC, should ensure that PWDs are represented in policy- and decision-making platforms. This also includes their inclusion in electoral advisory platforms.

Election Day Observation

The 2023 Presidential Election Observation by TM was conducted based on a systematic election observation methodology using the Quick Count methodology, which is a form of Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) based on a random sample of ballot boxes. The approach taken for the quick count follows the random sampling method outlined in “The Quick Count and Election Observation” handbook published by the National Democratic Institute.

TM drew a sample of 56% ballot boxes using a computer-generated random selection. This gave a sample size of 161,481 voters. The selection also considered distribution over cities, atolls and other locations. EC initially announced that a total of 604 ballot boxes will be placed, however after re-registration of voters 574 ballot boxes were placed in the first round and 586 boxes were placed in the second round. 21 boxes from the initial list that was cancelled was included in the original random sample drawn for this observation. After removing these 21 boxes, the total targeted sample was to observe 318 ballot boxes for both rounds.

For the first round, 302 observers reported F1 (the form with data reporting on opening of ballot boxes), and 311 observers reported F2 (the form with data reporting on election day process, closing and counting of ballot boxes). 297 observers reported F1 and 302 observers reported F2 for the second round. The margin of error from TM’s sample was +/- 1% for both rounds.

Quick Count Results

First Round

From TM's quick count, no candidate secured the required 50% plus one vote and hence had no outright winner. The quick count results showed that President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and the main opposition candidate Dr. Mohamed Muizzu as the top two candidates and would be moving to a runoff election on 30th September.

Quick Count Results

| Canidates | Votes | % |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Candidate 4 - Mohamed Muizzu | 57,253 | 46.58% |
| Candidate 3 - Ibrahim M. Solih | 47,738 | 38.84% |
| Candidate 7 - Ilyas Labeeb | 8,405 | 6.84% |
| Candidate 1 - Umar Naseer | 3,607 | 2.93% |
| Candidate 5 - Qasim Ibrahim | 3,040 | 2.47% |
| Candidate 6 - Faris Maumoon | 1,586 | 1.29% |
| Candidate 8 - Mohamed Nazim | 1,102 | 0.90% |
| Candidate 2 - Hassan Zameel | 183 | 0.15% |

Second Round

Similar to the official results announced by the EC, TM's quick count also indicated that the opposition candidate Dr. Mohamed Muizzu won the election with an indisputable margin. The margin of error was +/- 1%.

Quick Count Results

| Canidates | Votes | % |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Candidate 4 - Mohamed Muizzu | 71,088 | 54.04% |
| Candidate 3 - Ibrahim M. Solih | 60,455 | 45.96% |

TM's systematic observation found the polls to have been well administered by the EC for the 2023 Presidential Election. The election day processes were transparent. However, during the first round, TM observers noted that these rules were not consistently upheld across polling stations which led to the secrecy of votes being violated at some polling stations. While the layout of the polling stations was uniform, the difference in the size of spaces used as polling centres meant that some polling stations were arranged closer together, with observers, monitors, candidate representatives and other voters were able to see the ballots being marked at the voting booth and this may have impacted the secrecy of the vote.

The EC brought changes to the polling stations after issues of voter secrecy and layout were raised by TM, HRCM and other international observer groups. An additional 12 polling stations were added, and 99 polling stations were changed to two set ups to address issues of overcrowding. Additional officials were also recruited to improve efficiency of polling stations that had long waiting times during the first round.

Findings at the opening of polls

Opening Time

1st Round: The logistical arrangements were observed to be well-administered. The opening procedure went well, with all polling stations open by 9:00 am, and 85.8% of polling stations open within the first 10 minutes of the required opening time (8:00AM). Nearly all polling station officials were in place at all polling stations.

2nd Round: The opening procedure went well, with all polling stations open by 9:00 am. 94.3% of polling stations opened within the first 10 minutes of the required opening time, and 5.4% of the polling stations opened between 8:10 – 8:30 am.

Polling materials

The materials required for voting were present, the ballot papers were counted and reconciled at all polling stations, and all ballot boxes were verified as empty at the start of the voting process during both rounds without any notable issues.

Polling Stations

1st Round: Majority (96%) of the ballot boxes were placed in the location already announced by the EC prior to election day.

Nearly all polling station officials were in place at all polling stations. However, the official tasked with managing the outer areas of a polling station was absent at 14% of polling stations. This might be because the number of station officials vary depending on the number of registered voters to the polling station. The queue controller was absent at 5% of polling stations.

While it was observed that 92% of polling stations were set up in a way that upholds the secrecy of the ballot, the layout set-up of 8% of polling stations might have affected ballot secrecy.

2nd Round: All ballot boxes that were being observed were reported to be placed in the location as announced

Similar to the first round, nearly all polling station officials were in place at all polling stations with more officials observed at boxes with higher number of registered voters.

Observers concluded that the polling stations were set up to ensure a secret vote in most cases (96%). This was less clear in about 4% of all cases observed.

Candidate Representation

1st Round: Candidates were well represented at polling stations. Three or more candidate/party observers were present at 89.5% of all observed polling stations. All polling stations observed had at least 1 candidate/party observer present and 7.2% of polling stations had 5 or more party/candidate observers at the polling station.

Observers from PPM/PNC coalition were present at 72% of the polling stations while 71% and 34% of polling stations had observers from MDP/AP/MDA coalition and The Democrats respectively. TM also noted that police were operating outside at 96% of the observed polling stations at the opening time.

2nd Round: Candidates were well represented at polling stations. Observers from PPM/PNC coalition were present at 85% of the polling stations while 74% of polling stations had observers from MDP/AP coalition.

Security Presence

TM observed that police were operating outside at 96% of the observed polling stations at the opening time during the first round and 97% in the second round. No interference with polling was observed.

Findings of election day process

Closing Time

Initially, the closing time for voting as determined by the EC was 4pm. 4.4% of ballot boxes were closed before 4:00 pm, 91.2% of ballot boxes closed between 4:00 – 5:00 pm and 4.4% of boxes closed after 5:00pm

The closing time was extended to 5:00PM for the second round. 10.3 % of ballot boxes were closed before 5:00 pm, 89.4% of ballot boxes closed between 5:00 – 6:00 pm and 0.3% of boxes closed after 7:00pm

Voter List Issues

There were reports that people were not able to vote because their names were not on the voter registry, but this affected very few cases (less than 0.1% of all voters during both rounds)

Assisted Voters

1.8% of the total voter turnout were assisted voters spread across 78.6% of the polling stations during the first round and 1.9% of the total voter turnout were assisted voters spread across 77.5% of the polling stations during the second round.

Security, Interruptions and Violence

Voting was temporarily halted in 8% of polling stations. In 64% of these cases the interventions were at the direction of the Presiding Official.

Despite a few isolated cases of reported violence (1%) at the polling stations, this election has been relatively peaceful. While Police entered inside 18% of polling stations, in 81% of these cases interventions occurred at the invitation of the Presiding Officer in accordance with the law.

Representation During Counting

Candidate representation was highest for Dr Mohamed Muizzu and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih during the counting process. Candidate representatives for Ilyas Labeeb, Qasim Ibrahim and Mohamed Nazim were present at 37%, 22% and 22% of polling stations respectively. It was noted that candidate representatives for independent candidate Umar Naseer, Faris Maumoon and Hassan Zameel were present at 2-3% of polling stations.

Counting and Announcement of Results

The counting and announcing processes went generally smooth. Only 0.6% of ballot papers were disputed by the candidate/party observers during the counting process during the first round. No reports or complaints regarding double voting, underage voting or issues with votes cast in the names of deceased individuals were reported in any of the boxes observed. For the second round, the percentage of ballot papers disputed decreased to 0.3%

Observer Network

Recruitment and Training

For the 2023 Presidential Election, TM recruited over 400 observers through existing networks of former TM election observers and regional election coordinators, island councils, CBO/CSO partners, and by advertising on social media.

Training teams consisting of two members and led by a lead facilitator/trainer travelled to 16 atolls to train the recruited observers. Trainers consisted of TM staff and volunteer facilitators (a total of 22 trainers) who underwent a 3-day Training of Trainers program. Trainings were held at one island from each atoll. Recruited observers from the atoll travelled to the island for the day-long training. Observer trainings were also conducted in Male'. Observers who were unable to participate in the training sessions for various reasons were trained over the phone.

The trainings were conducted to ensure that observers were knowledgeable to conduct a quality observation, covering four main areas:

1. Familiarisation with concepts of free and fair election, election observation and voter information.
2. Rights and responsibilities of observers, communication limitations within the voting area, vote counting process, announcement of provisional results, elections complaints system, and communications between observers and media.
3. Observation standards, guideline, and code of conduct.
4. Data collection using F1 and F2 forms, and data reporting to TM.

Upon completion of the training, observers signed an integrity pledge to ensure that their conduct in the run-up to the election day and on election day will uphold international election observer standards and ethics. Some observers also underwent a one-day civic and voter education program, which covered the following:

1. Understanding public perception about election and the power of vote for positive change.
2. Negative impacts of vote buying and irresponsible voting.
3. Importance of democracy and civic participation in addressing issues faced by communities.
4. Democratic transition in the Maldives and the role of youth in the process.
5. Importance of human rights to be able to actively participate in the democratic process.

6. Actions to take to address, report, or create a conversation about misconduct in electoral and democratic processes.

A week prior to election day, TM conducted a simulation of election observation. All observers were provided with sample data for both F1 and F2 forms. Observers were instructed to report F1 at 8am, and F2 at 10am. Observers were also instructed to report from the actual location where their respective ballot boxes would be placed at on election day. A total of 180 observers reported both F1 and F2 on simulation day.

The simulation enabled observers to better understand what they can expect when they are deployed to polling stations on election day and provided them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the data reporting process. The simulation exercise also highlighted flaws in the process and issues with the mobile application, both of which were fixed for the actual observation on election day.

Observation Headquarters (HQ)

An election observation headquarters (HQ) was established to coordinate TM's election observation. A total of 13 TM staff and 17 volunteers worked in the HQ on specific tasks on election day. All volunteers were extensively trained to perform the tasks allocated to them.

The HQ was divided into six key functional areas:

1. Data Collection: TM used two forms, F1 and F2, to collect data on Elections Day. The F1 was used to collect data on the opening of the polls, whereas F2 was used to collect data on the voting process throughout the election day until counting and announcement of interim results at the polling stations.

For data collection from short-term observers, TM used a web based application. Majority of the observers used the application to submit the data they collected through observation. The interface of the mobile application was similar to the F1 and F2 forms used for data collection, which meant observers had no difficulty in using the application to submit the data required. Observers who did not use smartphones, or for various reasons were not able to use the application, called the data centre and reported the collected data. Each observer filled two forms: F1 and F2.

When observers made the call, the data was entered into to a web-based module of the application using a laptop. Before entering data, observers were authenticated by requesting the ballot box number they were observing, their observer code, and the phone number that the observer registered with TM.

The data entered by data entry volunteers and data submitted by observers using the mobile application were consolidated in the web-based database.

2. Recovery: Recovery volunteers were tasked with collecting missing data, correcting erroneous data that were already submitted by observers to the data centre, and to contact observers or regional coordinators to collect missing data.

The recovery team also had access to a web-based module of the application with permission to add and update data.

3. Emergency: The emergency department had five volunteers, supervised by a TM staff. Emergency volunteers were tasked with receiving emergency reports and following up on such reports. The emergency department recorded emergency reports from observers and regional coordinators. The reports were compiled and shared with communications department for further analysis.

The emergency department had three mobile phones receiving calls for the day with call forwarding activated. Once the department receives the call the volunteer/staff collects the name of the caller (unless anonymous), mobile number and the vote box number. The volunteer/staff then proceeds to collect the information regarding the issue and provides relevant information. If the emergency call is placed by a TM observer, they are instructed on next steps as well.

On round 1 of the Elections, the department received 56 calls; calls were generally related to administrative issues, voter secrecy and disruptions at the polling station.

On round 2 of the Elections, the department received 15 calls; the calls were generally related to similar issues as round 1 but can be noted to have improved in most polling stations.

4. Analysis: The analysis department hosted the data analysis consultant, who had access to a web-based module of the application which enabled the analyst to download a CSV data file for analysis. The analyst analysed data sets and provided reports and graphics to the communications team.

5. Communications: The communications department constituted of two TM project staff and the senior management comprising of the Executive Director, Advocacy and Communications Manager. The communications department was responsible for preparing press statements, media monitoring, providing interviews to local and international media, and briefing the international community.

6. Observer logistics: The observer logistics team was responsible for assigning observers to the ballot boxes selected in the sample before election day. Since TM was unable to recruit observers in all islands with a selected ballot box, backup observers in nearby islands were utilized to observe these boxes. Since the re-registration deadline had passed, in some cases TM was unable to collect data for the F1 forms from these ballot boxes.

Annex

Annex 1 - Recommendations

Electoral Administration

- Revise the legal framework to fortify the statutory authority of the Elections Commission of Maldives, enhancing its autonomy to conduct elections independently and free from political influence. The expanded mandate should confer upon the Elections Commission the power to exercise thorough supervision over the entire electoral process, including the enforcement of electoral laws.
- To bolster the integrity of the electoral process, empower the electoral commission with the authority and responsibility to meticulously regulate, oversee, and execute all aspects of the electoral process, thereby reinforcing the integrity of democratic elections.
- Evaluate the current electoral calendar to assess the feasibility of consolidating Presidential, Parliamentary, Local Council, and WDC elections into a single cycle. The 3 elections are conducted separately, and this results in a lot of repetitive, extra work and stress for the Election Commission and the political parties as well.
- To enhance the integrity of the electoral process, it is imperative to comprehensively develop the electoral legal framework, ideally enacting it well in advance of elections. Proposed amendments, intended for improvement and mutually agreed upon by all stakeholders, should be exceptional. Strict adherence to the election timeline is essential to prevent last-minute decisions that may cause voter confusion and erode confidence in the electoral process.
- The Parliament to ensure timeliness in appointment of members to independent institutions to ensure they do not impede on the works of the commission, and the independent institutions can fulfil their mandate effectively.

The National Advisory Committee

- Ensure the scheduling of more frequent meetings, adopting a weekly format with twice-weekly meetings in the last month leading up to the election.
- Refining the decision-making process within NAC meetings to ensure a more structured and effective operation.
- Continue NAC meetings beyond the election period, especially to support electoral reform in between electoral cycles.

The Complaints Mechanism

- The EC and other relevant actors should review and amend the electoral legal framework to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and procedures of the complaints mechanism to ensure effective coordination among stakeholders, and make the mechanism accessible to the public.
- Conduct targeted public awareness on the complaints mechanisms to promote reporting.

Voter Registration

- The online re-registration portal should be made more accessible to persons living abroad and Persons with Disabilities

Abuse of State Resources

- Establish a collaborative mechanism involving stakeholders including the EC, ACC, Maldives Police Services (MPS), and Prosecutor General's Office to monitor, investigate, and prosecute instances of vote buying and misuse of state resources. This effort should focus on the effective implementation of existing laws and, where necessary, consider amendments for enhanced legal measures.
- The ACC and the Auditor General's Office to develop and disseminate explicit guidelines on the use of state resources by the incumbent during election periods, including penalties and provisions that will facilitate enforcement of compliance with these guidelines.
- All relevant actors, including the Parliament, must conduct a thorough review and expeditiously reinforce the governance of SOEs. This review should address governance risks comprehensively, aiming to prevent the potential entrenchment of a patronage and clientelist system in the Maldives that could unduly favour the incumbent in elections.

Media Landscape

- Enhance the legal framework to safeguard media freedom, incorporating amendments to the Evidence Act.
- Institute a transparent mechanism for the proactive disclosure of funding and sponsorship received by media outlets.
- Implement media literacy programs through collaboration with relevant government institutions, aimed at educating the public on discerning disinformation and misinformation.
- Expand the scope of media monitoring, particularly by MBC, to ensure that PSM or the state media remains impartial and is not biased in favour of the incumbent president

Campaign Financing

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the existing candidate spending ceiling, ensuring periodic assessments linked to economic factors such as inflation, voting population size, and the nature of the election.
- Review and propose amendments to campaign financing laws to address loopholes, enhance reporting requirements, and strengthen the enforcement of campaign finance regulations.
- Introduce provisions for political parties to report campaign expenses, including a specified spending limit during the election period.
- Incorporate provisions to account for all spending in reporting, encompassing in-kind donations and third-party expenditures on behalf of candidates.
- Mandate the EC to proactively disclose, within a defined timeframe, the names of candidates who have submitted their reports.
- Direct the EC to publish reports in a user-friendly format, facilitating thorough review and scrutiny to enhance transparency and electoral integrity

Vote Buying

- State authorities including the ACC, MPS, Attorney General's Office, and EC must coordinate to implement the electoral legal framework to hold to account instances of vote buying.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate voters about the negative consequences of vote buying on the democratic process.

Voter Education

- Ensure voter information and education programs and materials are targeted for and accessible to disabled people.
- Introduce facilitative tools or technologies to ensure disabled voters can vote independently.
- Parliament to bring amendments to enable voting by the blind community adults without assistance by another to ensure ballot secrecy.
- Political parties and other institutions, including the EC, should ensure that PWDs are represented in policy- and decision-making platforms. This also includes their inclusion in electoral advisory platforms
- Collaborate with Youth and PWD organisations across the Maldives to develop and implement targeted voter education content and materials
- Create an easily accessible digital archive of voter information and education materials that is updated in a timely manner reflecting changes to the electoral processes whereby civil society, political parties and media can refer to in their voter education programmes

Inclusivity and Participation

- EC should consider provisions in the voter registration/re-registration forms to capture disabilities of voters to the extent provided for in the relevant laws.
- Ensure voter information and education programs and materials are targeted for and accessible to disabled people.
- Introduce facilitative tools or technologies to ensure disabled voters can vote independently.
- Parliament to bring amendments to enable voting by the blind community adults without assistance by another in order to ensure ballot secrecy.
- Political parties and other institutions, including the EC, should ensure that PWDs are represented in policy- and decision-making platforms. This also includes their inclusion in electoral advisory platforms.

Annex 2 - List of Long Term Observers

| # | Atoll | Island | Name |
|----|-------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1 | HA | Dhidhdhoo | Sharumeela Mohamed |
| 2 | HDH | Kulhudhuffushi | Abdulla Mohamed |
| 3 | SH | Noomara | Moosa Saneekh |
| 4 | N | Manadhoo | Aminath Sheroza |
| 5 | R | Alifushi | Hussain Abdul Rahman |
| 6 | B | Eydhafushi | Thoriq Abdul Rahman |
| 7 | K | Thulusdhoo | Aishath Reena |
| 8 | K | Male' | Mohamed Ameen |
| 9 | K | Male' | Shafra Ahmed Shafeeq |
| 10 | K | Male' | Mohamed Shiyaz |
| 11 | AA | Thoddoo | Mariyam Ramsha |
| 12 | ADH | Mahibadhoo | Mariyam Rifaah |
| 13 | F | Nilandhoo | Abdul Azeez Ahmed |
| 14 | DH | Meedhoo | Salim Thaufeeq |
| 15 | TH | Guraidhoo | Adil Ibrahim |
| 16 | L | Fonadhoo | Mohamed Raaidhu |
| 17 | GA | Gemanafushi | Abdulla Kaleem |
| 18 | GN | Fuvamulah | Aminath Shaiga |
| 19 | GN | Fuvamulah | Mariyam Shiuma Shahid |
| 20 | GN | Fuvamulah | Ali Naaish Waseem |
| 21 | S | Meedhoo | Maisoona Musthafa |
| 22 | S | Feydhoo | Fathimath Zaha Zuhuree |

Annex 3 - Press Statements



21 August 2023

Transparency Maldives condemns the continued abuse of State resources and attempts to influence voters' right to choose a candidate free from undue influence.

A free and fair election depends not only on the proceedings of the voting day, but also on the larger electoral environment and on ensuring an electoral level playing field for all candidates. The 2023 Presidential Election Pre-election Assessment published by Transparency Maldives identified the misuse of State resources and the risk of systemic and coordinated influence on voters through State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) as a major concern that has the potential to skew the level playing field in favour of the incumbent. The assessment also highlighted the electoral risks associated with ceremonies to mark the inauguration and completion of government funded projects, and their use as a campaign tool for the incumbent parties. These are concerns that have been observed and reiterated in all previous assessments and election observation efforts by Transparency Maldives.

Since the start of the official campaigning period for the 2023 Presidential Election on 10 August 2023, it is concerning that multiple projects are being announced and inaugurated back-to-back, especially during campaign visits. Official media reports and official social media accounts of government agencies report that:

- Ceremonies related to the inauguration and completion of 32 projects in 16 islands were attended by the incumbent in the first 10 days of the official campaign period (till 19 August 2023). At least 8 of the projects were already completed between 2021- 2022 as per the information available on isles.gov.mv
- 14 new projects approximately worth over **MVR 1 billion** awarded by the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to two SOEs in the first **eleven days** (10 – 20 August 2023) of the official campaign period. In comparison, during the entire month of August last year, 5 projects worth approximately MVR 261 million were awarded by the Ministry.

Coinciding these ceremonies with the official election campaigning period raises grave concerns regarding the level playing field for presidential candidates. Moreover, carrying out official responsibilities while on campaign trips is an abuse of office and related powers, which blurs the line between the official responsibilities of the incumbent and the candidate's campaign.

Additionally, it is highly concerning that the scope and scale of infrastructure projects and socio-economic policies are being modified close to the election period, without a clear and transparent long-term plan or development strategy. While it is the responsibility of the government to provide essential services such as housing, health, and education, these development projects and policy decisions should not be made or perceived to be made for short-term political gains. Instead, policy decisions should be based on the needs of the population identified through an inclusive consultation process, considering socio-economic and environmental impacts, with a clear timeframe for completion. The lack of transparency and the justifications for changes in critical policy decisions raises further concerns especially in ensuring equitable and sustainable development, in addition to how much undue influence this has on voters' right to freely choose a candidate.

To ensure a level electoral playing field, we call on:

- The incumbent administration, including elected public officials, to stop the abuse of state resources and positions of power for electoral gain;
- The Anti-Corruption Commission to proactively enforce its guidelines on the abuse of state resources; and
- Relevant authorities including Anti-Corruption Commission, the Attorney General's Office and the Parliament to work together to strengthen the legal framework to address loopholes in holding the public officials to account for the abuse of state resources, including stipulating a timeframe for announcement of new projects, and ceremonies for the completion and inauguration of projects during an electoral period.

-Ends-

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Press statement on the opening of polls for the 2023 Presidential Election

9 September 2023 - Transparency Maldives observer network has a wide national coverage spanning Malé and the atolls, resorts, industrial islands and prisons, as well as abroad in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We thank the over 400 observers and volunteers deployed across the country for their dedication in observing and assisting in the election observation processes.

In observing the 2023 Presidential Election, Transparency Maldives is assessing both the election-day proceedings and have monitored the larger electoral and political environment during the pre-election since May 2023. The observations are carried out at ballot boxes which have been selected through a random sample. The results we report from our observation are generalisable to the entire country. The following results are based on the observation at the time of opening of polls.

The opening procedure went well, with all polling stations open by 9:00 am, and 85.8% of polling stations open within the first 10 minutes of the required opening time.

Nearly all polling station officials were in place at all polling stations.

The materials required for voting were present, the ballot papers were counted and reconciled at all polling stations, and all ballot boxes were verified as empty at the start of the voting process.

Candidates were well represented at polling stations. Three or more candidate/party observers were present at 89.5% of all observed polling stations. All polling stations observed had at least 1 candidate/party observer present and 7.2% of polling stations had 5 or more party/candidate observers at the polling station.

Observers from PPM/PNC coalition were present at 72% of the polling stations while 71% and 34% of polling stations had observers from MDP/AP/MDA coalition and The Democrats respectively. Transparency Maldives also notes that police were operating outside at 96% of the observed polling stations at the opening time.

Observers concluded that the polling stations were set up to ensure a secret vote in the vast majority of cases (97%). This was less clear in about 3% of all cases observed. These polling stations will be closely watched by our observers.

We encourage all parties to maintain peace during the voting process and after the preliminary results are announced.

Transparency Maldives encourages all those eligible to exercise their right to vote. Our observers will be present at polling stations during voting, vote counting, and the announcement of preliminary results.

ENDS

For all media queries, please contact Advocacy and Communications Manager, Sara Naseem (+960 9955858)

Final Press Statement on the 2023 Presidential Elections

9 September 2023 - Transparency Maldives appreciates and thanks the over 400 observers and volunteers in our observer network, based in 20 atolls including resorts, industrial islands, prisons, and abroad in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Without the dedication and commitment extended by them, this domestic observation would not have been possible. Transparency Maldives believes that an independent observation effort at this scale promotes greater levels of trust in our electoral processes. Our observers played a crucial role in ensuring the transparency of electoral processes in the Maldives.

The methodology used for this observation was based on systematic random sampling. Our observers collected both qualitative and quantitative data from 311 polling stations representing 56.86% of all ballot boxes. Our approach allowed us to generate results from the sample to the entire population, within a margin of error of +/- 1%.

The following are the key findings we would like to highlight:

- 4.4 % of ballot boxes were closed before 4:00 pm, 91.2% of ballot boxes closed between 4:00 – 5:00 pm and 4.4% of boxes closed after 5:00pm
- There were reports that people were not able to vote because their names were not on the voter registry, but this affected very few cases (less than 0.1% of all voters).
- 1.8% of the total voter turnout were assisted voters spread across 78.6% of the polling stations.
- Voting was temporarily halted in 8% of polling stations. In 64% of these cases the interventions were at the direction of the Presiding Officer.
- Despite a few isolated cases of reported violence (1%) at the polling stations, we are happy to report that this election has been relatively peaceful. We will be closely monitoring any further developments.
- While Police entered inside 18% of polling stations, in 81% of these cases interventions occurred at the invitation of the Presiding Officer in accordance with the law.
- Candidate representation was highest for Dr Mohamed Muiz and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih during the counting process. Candidate representatives for Ilyas Labeeb, Qasim Ibrahim and Mohamed Nazim were present at 37%, 22% and 22% of polling stations respectively. It was noted that candidate representatives for independent candidate Umar Naseer, Faris Maumoon and Hassan Zameel were present at 2-3% of polling stations.
- Only 0.6% of ballot papers were disputed by the candidate/party observers during the counting process.

No reports or complaints regarding double voting, underage voting or issues with votes cast in the names of deceased individuals were reported in any of the boxes observed today.

Based on our quick count results, the simple majority of votes required was not reached by any candidate, resulting in a run-off election. The top two candidates, Dr. Mohamed Muiz and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih will be contesting in the second round, scheduled for 30 September 2023.

We call on all parties and candidates to maintain a peaceful environment, and ensure campaigning, which will resume on 6:00am on September 10, is conducted in accordance with electoral regulations and do not infringe on the rights of other parties or candidates.

ENDS

For all media queries, please contact Advocacy and Communications Manager, Sara Naseem (+960 9955858)

Press statement on the opening of polls for the second round of the 2023 Presidential Election

30 September 2023 - Transparency Maldives observer network has a wide national coverage spanning the Greater Male' Area, all the atolls, resorts, industrial islands and prisons, as well as abroad in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Trivandrum, India, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We thank the over 490 observers and volunteers deployed across the country for their dedication in observing and assisting in the election observation processes.

In observing the 2023 Presidential Election, Transparency Maldives is assessing both the election-day proceedings and have monitored the larger electoral and political environment during the pre-election since May 2023. The observations are carried out at ballot boxes which have been selected through a random sample. The results we report from our observation are generalisable to the entire country and have been obtained by our observers at 297 ballot boxes, which is over 50% of the total ballot boxes. The following results are based on the observation at the time of opening of polls.

The opening procedure went well, with all polling stations open by 9:00 am. 94.3% of polling stations opened within the first 10 minutes of the required opening time, and 5.4% of the polling stations opened between 8:10 – 8:30 am.

Nearly all polling station officials were in place at all polling stations.

The materials required for voting were present, the ballot papers were counted and reconciled at all polling stations, and all ballot boxes were verified as empty at the start of the voting process.

Candidates were well represented at polling stations. Observers from PPM/PNC coalition were present at 85% of the polling stations while 74% of polling stations had observers from MDP/AP coalition.

Transparency Maldives also notes that police were operating outside at 97% of the observed polling stations at the opening time.

Observers concluded that the polling stations were set up to ensure a secret vote in the vast majority of cases (96%). This was less clear in about 4% of all cases observed. These polling stations will be closely watched by our observers. We call on the polling officials, observers, monitors and voters to adhere to the guidelines set by the Elections Commission and ensure that the secrecy of vote is guaranteed throughout election day.

We encourage all parties to maintain peace during the voting process and after the preliminary results are announced.

Transparency Maldives encourages all those eligible to exercise their right to vote. Our observers will be present at polling stations during voting, vote counting, and the announcement of preliminary results.

ENDS

For all media queries, please contact Advocacy and Communications Manager, Sara Naseem (+960 9955858)

Press Statement on the Closing of Polls for the second round of the 2023 Presidential Elections

30 September 2023 - Transparency Maldives appreciates and thanks the over 490 observers and volunteers in our observer network, based in 20 atolls including resorts, industrial islands, prisons, and abroad in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Trivandrum, India and Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation and thanks to the dedicated and committed observers, without whom our domestic observation would not have been possible. We believe that an independent observation effort at this scale promotes greater levels of trust in our electoral processes, and that our observers played a crucial role in ensuring the transparency of electoral processes in the Maldives.

The methodology used for this observation was based on systematic random sampling. Our observers collected both qualitative and quantitative data from 302 polling stations representing 51.5% of all ballot boxes. Our approach allowed us to generate results from the sample to the entire population, within a margin of error of +/- 1%.

The following are the key findings we would like to highlight:

- 10.3 % of ballot boxes were closed before 5:00 pm, 89.4% of ballot boxes closed between 5:00 – 6:00 pm and 0.3% of boxes closed after 7:00pm
- There were reports that people were not able to vote because their names were not on the voter registry, but this affected very few cases (less than 0.1% of all voters).
- 1.9% of the total voter turnout were assisted voters spread across 77.5% of the polling stations.
- Voting was temporarily halted in 2.3% of polling stations.
- Despite a few isolated cases of reported violence (0.7%) at the polling stations, we are happy to report that this election has been relatively peaceful. We will be closely monitoring any further developments.
- While Police entered inside 12.2% of polling stations, in 79% of these cases interventions occurred at the invitation of the Presiding Officer in accordance with the law.
- Candidate representation was high across the polling stations. Candidate representatives for Dr Mohamed Muizz and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih were present at 80% of the polling stations.
- Only 0.3% of ballot papers were disputed by the candidate/party observers during the counting process across 27.4% of the polling stations. No reports or complaints regarding double voting, underage voting or issues with votes cast in the names of deceased individuals were reported in any of the boxes observed today.

Based on our quick count results, we are confident to announce that the Dr. Muizz has won the 2023 Presidential election having secured the required 50% plus 1 vote.

The electoral observation by Transparency Maldives includes more than just the voting day processes for the two rounds of election for this Presidential Election. It is also an analysis of the larger electoral environment. We maintain that there were serious systematic issues during the pre-election period. We call on all stakeholders to recognise and respect the decision of the electorate who have come out and used the power of the ballot to decide on the outcome of this election.

Transparency Maldives calls on all parties, candidates and the stakeholders to maintain an environment conducive for a peaceful transition

ENDS

For all media queries, please contact Advocacy and Communications Manager, Sara Naseem (+960 9955858)

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