



Election FAQs: Maldives

Parliamentary Election

April 21, 2024

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | USA | www.IFES.org

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Election Snapshot

- **Election Day:** April 21, 2024.
- **Registered voters:** 284,663 (145,302 men and 139,361 women).
- **Polling stations:** 602.
- **Number of polling centers:**
 - 319 in the atolls;
 - 241 in the Greater Malé area;
 - 34 in non-residential resort islands;
 - 5 in jails; and
 - 3 abroad (one each in Sri Lanka, India, and Malaysia).
- **Seats:** 93 seats (87 current seats and six new ones added through this election).
- **Candidate lists:** 369.
- **Campaign expenditure and donation limits:** 2,000 Maldivian rafiyaa (approximately \$130 USD) per eligible voter in a constituency, with a maximum of 5,000 voters in each constituency.
- **International and national observers:** 2,166 international observers and an unknown number of national observers as of the date of publication.
- **Increase in eligible voters since the previous election:** 2,085.

When is Election Day?

The parliamentary election in the Maldives is scheduled for April 21, 2024. Voting will take place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 602 polling stations, including three outside the country.

Election Day was previously scheduled for March 17, 2024, during Ramadan. On February 29, the president ratified an amendment to the General Elections Act stipulating that the country cannot hold elections during Ramadan or until 10 days after the end of the period. The constitutionality of this amendment has raised concerns, as future postponements could place elections outside the constitutional requirement for polling 30 days before the terms of current members of Parliament end. This does not pose an issue for the April 21 parliamentary election; as the last Parliament took office on May 29, 2019, members' term will end on May 28.

Why are these elections important?

The People's Majlis, the Maldivian Parliament, is the country's unicameral legislative body, which passes legislation. Political affiliations have evolved since the previous parliamentary election in 2019, with splinter parties gaining more influence. Recent reconciliations between the Maldivian Democratic Party and its splinter faction, the Democrats, add a new dynamic to the political sphere. Those two opposition parties have focused their parliamentary campaigns on ensuring the accountability of President Mohamed Muizzu's administration, while Muizzu's Progressive Party of Maldives–People's National Congress coalition is emphasizing the need for a cooperative Parliament to fulfill campaign promises. No political party has publicized a manifesto outlining its development vision or key pledges for the upcoming parliamentary term.

The upcoming elections hold significant importance for foreign relations, especially considering President Muizzu's commitment to a "Maldives First" policy that prioritizes national interests and

sovereignty.¹ Since Muizzu took office in 2023, several developments have been seen by some political analysts as straining relations with India. These include President Muizzu’s campaign pledge to withdraw Indian military presence; an incident on January 31, 2024, when the Indian coast guard boarded Maldivian fishing vessels in the exclusive economic zone;² and social media comments by three deputy ministers of the Youth Ministry criticizing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, resulting in a diplomatic dispute.³ In this context, President Muizzu is viewed as strengthening diplomatic bonds with China, including by signing agreements to advance Chinese infrastructure projects in the islands.⁴ China’s influence might become more pronounced if the coalition parties of the Muizzu Administration secure a parliamentary majority.

Other key policy areas that voters will consider include economic challenges, such as the national debt and state-owned enterprises debt, housing issues, corruption, judicial reform, and the impact of drug use and gangs on youth.⁵

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Voters will cast ballots to select representatives for 93 constituencies, including six new seats. Article 4 of the Parliament Elections Act (2/2009) mandates voters to elect one representative for each constituency.

Article 71 of the Constitution states that the membership of the People’s Majlis is determined in accordance with the following principles: Each of the 21 administrative divisions has at least two members of Parliament regardless of the division’s size. Administrative divisions with more 5,000 residents will elect an additional member of Parliament for every additional 5,000 residents.

A total of 369 candidates are contesting the election: 132 independent candidates and 237 affiliated with political parties. The table below lists the number of candidates from each political party or coalition.

Political Party or Coalition	Number of Candidates
Progressive Coalition	90
Maldivian Democratic Party	89
The Democrats	38
Jumhooree Party	10
Adhaalath Party	4
Maldivian Democratic Alliance	4

¹ [President Muizzu: Maldives Will Have No Foreign Military Presence](#). (2023, November 17). VOA. The President’s Office. (2023, December 20).

“[President Dr Muizzu Announces That the RAS Malé Project Will Be Carried out without Any State Expenditures](#).”

² [Reports of Indian soldiers boarding Maldivian fishing vessel within EEZ](#). (2024, January 31). Avas.mv.

³ [India-Maldives War of Words on Social Media Triggers Diplomatic Row](#). (2024, January 9).

TheDiplomat.com.

⁴ [Maldives’ Muizzu Throws in With China](#). (2024, January 18). TheDiplomat.com.

⁵ [Muizzu Pledges to Provide Housing to Those Removed from Hiya Scheme](#). PSMnews.mv. Accessed March 19, 2024.

Maldives National Party	2
Independent	132
Total	369

What is the electoral system?

The Maldives employs a first-past-the-post majoritarian voting system. As outlined in the Parliamentary Election Act (2/2009), if more than one candidate in an electoral constituency is tied with the highest number of votes, a run-off election is required within 15 days. This process repeats until a member of Parliament is elected with the largest number of votes for that constituency.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The constitution of the Maldives establishes the People’s Majlis, or Parliament, as the state’s legislative body. The number of members of Parliament is determined by the number of constituencies, and the power to allocate constituencies is vested in the Elections Commission of the Maldives (ECM), as stipulated in the General Elections Act. The ECM allocates constituencies every five years, and members of Parliament are elected to five-year terms. The Maldivian legal system does not impose any restrictions on the number of terms a member of Parliament may serve.

Key legislation and regulations pertaining to the parliamentary elections include:

- The Constitution of the Maldives;
- General Elections Act (11/2008);
- Act on Parliamentary Elections (2/2009);
- 2024 Regulation on Parliament Elections (R-3/2024);
- General Regulation on Elections (R-48/2020); and
- Constituency Delineation Act (1/2009).

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

Qualifications to contest as a parliamentary candidate in the Maldives include Maldivian citizenship, without citizenship elsewhere. All candidates must be Muslim, practice Sunni Islam, and be 18 years of age or older and of “sound mind.” Naturalized citizens must wait five years after acquiring Maldivian citizenship to contest parliamentary elections and must be domiciled in the Maldives.

Candidates are disqualified if they have unpaid decreed debt, have been convicted of a criminal offense with a sentence exceeding 12 months, were released or pardoned for a criminal offense within the last three years, or are active members of the judiciary.

Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

The Maldives has no legal framework for reserving seats for women in the 2024 parliamentary election. Although local government elections have a 33 percent quota for women, no quotas have been established at the national level. Four women currently serve as members of Parliament.

Of the 369 candidates running for election, 43 (11.6 percent) are women. The breakdown of women candidates by political party is shown in the table below.

Party	Number of Women Candidates	Percentage of Party Candidates
Progressive Coalition	2	2.2%
Maldivian Democratic Party	6	6.7%
The Democrats	12	31.6%
Jumhooree Party	2	20.0%
Adhaalath Party	0	0.0%
Maldivian Democratic Alliance	0	0.0%
Maldives National Party	0	0.0%
Independent	21	15.9%
Total	43	11.6%

What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?

Article 69 of the General Elections Act states candidates may not spend more than 2,000 Maldivian rafiya (MVR), or approximately \$130 USD for each individual eligible to cast a vote in the contested constituency. The number of registered voters per electoral constituency will not exceed 5,000. The expenditure ceiling for candidates differs according to the size of the constituency, but the maximum is 10 million MVR (approximately \$650,000).

Article 70 of the General Elections Act prohibits the provision of financial or material assistance for or in association with a candidate's campaign by foreign individuals, agencies, governments, or organizations; international organizations; anonymous contributors; public bodies (other than assistance legally provided by the state to political parties); and any company or entity in which the government holds a stake.

Who can vote in these elections?

All Maldivian citizens over the age of 18 who are registered on the electoral roll are eligible to vote in the parliamentary elections. Voters must present valid photo identification to cast ballots. Those who will be away from their permanent residences on Election Day had until March 26, 2024, to re-register at the location where they expect to be on April 21. In total, 284,663 individuals (145,302 men and 139,361 women) are registered to vote in this election. In the 2019 parliamentary election, 264,442 people (135,387 men and 129,055 women) voted.

What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups?

The Election Commission of Maldives (ECM) is working to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to the electoral process. It is doing so by providing facilities and assistance at polling stations to enable people with disabilities to vote independently, ensuring polling stations are accessible to voters with physical disabilities, and making the voter education awareness materials it disseminates accessible to persons with disabilities.

The General Elections Act includes stipulations for voters who request accommodations. Specifically,

- Voters who are physically unable to mark a ballot paper by themselves may receive assistance from another individual, and
- Voters who have visual impairments and wish to vote without assistance can vote using a braille template ballot paper.

The ECM has announced the introduction of two templates for individuals with visual disabilities to be used in the parliamentary election. A custom template will be provided for voters with visual disabilities who registered for accessible templates; a standard template, featuring eight check boxes, will be available at every polling station for voters with visual disabilities who did not register for the custom template. The custom template will have a number of check boxes cut out to correspond to the number of candidates contesting the election in a given constituency. On the standard template has, all eight check boxes are cut out. Since no more than eight candidates will contest the election in any constituency, the standard template can be used in any administrative division. The ECM also extended the deadline to register for accessible templates to February 20, 2024; 61 voters with visual disabilities registered.

The ECM also announced that one seat on the advisory committee for the parliamentary election would be allocated to a person with disabilities. This seat was awarded to the Disability Council of the Maldives. This decision ensures that the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities are represented in election planning and implementation, promoting inclusivity and equal participation in the electoral process.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Voting will be organized at Maldivian embassies and consulates in countries with a sizeable Maldivian population and over 150 registered voters – Malaysia, India, and Sri Lanka.

Who can observe during Election Day?

National and international observers are permitted to observe the parliamentary election process. The Elections Commission of the Maldives (ECM) issues an announcement inviting applications for observer status and selects national observers based on their eligibility. The ECM manages international observers through direct invitations and public call for observers.

The criteria for international observers and monitors include that the observer should be 18 or older; a representative of International Associations and Societies related to electoral activities accredited by the Associations they belong to; not be involved in campaigning for any candidate

or political party; and act in accordance with Sections 40 and 41 of the Constitutional Act, 11/2008 Elections (General) Act and adhere to the Code of Conduct as stipulated in the Regulations for Parliamentary Elections 2024.⁶

Who is managing security on Election Day?

Section 32(f) of the General Elections Act states that the safety of voting stations, both before voting commences and until all activities relating to voting has ended, are the responsibility of the country's national security services.

Where is vote counting and tabulation held?

Once voting ends at 4 p.m. on Election Day, ballot boxes will be sealed and all materials used for voting, including unused ballots and counterfoils, will be packed and sealed in a designated security envelope. Ballot boxes will then be opened at each polling station in the presence of candidates, official elections agents of candidates, candidate representatives, and election observers and monitors, if present. Designated officials will open sealed ballot boxes, count ballots by hand, total votes, and announce the results for the ballot box.

Preliminary results are first announced in each polling area and then communicated to the Elections Commission of the Maldives using an electronic tablet. After the preliminary count, the results are sent to the main counting center in Malé.

Polling stations that close early (if 100 percent of registered voters have voted) must wait until 4:30 p.m. before starting the count. Polling stations that close after 4 p.m. to allow voters that had lined up cast their ballot before 4 p.m. to vote must wait 30 minutes before starting the count.

When will official results be announced?

Official results must be announced within seven days after Election Day.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Maldivian law permits any individual who has the right to vote, a contesting candidate, a political party, an approved election observer or monitor, or any election official to file a complaint. Complaints can be lodged in writing, through email prior to Election Day or verbally or by telephone with the head of a polling station on Election Day. Complainants can also file petitions with the High Court if they disagree with a decision by the National Complaints Bureau. Only the Elections Commission can refer criminal offenses in contravention of laws and regulations of elections to the High Court through the prosecutor general. The period for lodging electoral complaints begins when the Election Commission announces an election and ends 14 days after the official election results are announced.

⁶ [Announcement for International Observers and Monitors to Observe/Monitor the Electoral Process of the 2024 Parliamentary Elections of the Maldives](#). (2024, January 17). Elections Commission Maldives.

Resources

- [Constitution of the Republic of Maldives 2008](#) ([English](#)) and ([Dhivehi](#))
- [General Elections Act 2008](#) (English)
 - [All Five Amendments](#) (Dhivehi)
- [Regulation on General Elections R-48/2020](#) (Dhivehi)
- [Parliamentary Elections Act 2009](#) (English)
- [Regulation on Parliamentary Election 2014](#) (English)
- [Constituency Delineation Act 2009](#) (Dhivehi)

About IFES in the Maldives

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has supported the implementation of inclusive elections in the Maldives since 2015. IFES currently implements the Strong and Inclusive Maldivian Democracy program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). IFES' work on this program includes strengthening the Maldives' civic education curriculum; empowering women with disabilities as leaders and advocates; empowering women to participate in political and electoral processes through the *Vaané* campaign; and supporting the Election Commission of the Maldives' civic education outreach.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Election Commission of the Maldives as of April 12, 2024, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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