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Elections in the Republic of Maldives

September 7 Presidential Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Maldivian elections authorities, to the best of our knowledge as of September 3, 2013. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

What is significant about these elections?

Maldivians will cast their vote in the second democratic presidential election in the nation's history on September 7, 2013. Following 30 years of Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom's authoritarian rule, the first competitive election in the Maldives was held in 2008, when President Mohamed Nasheed was elected to office.

Although this is a regularly scheduled election, it is not without controversy. In February 2012, following weeks of protest, President Nasheed resigned and Vice President Mohamed Waheed was sworn in as President. The next day Nasheed said his resignation came under duress, and labeled it as a *coup d'état*. Public violence erupted, and clashes between police and supporters of Nasheed resulted in destruction of property, accusations of torture and excessive use of force by the police.

Subsequently, the Commission of National Inquiry issued a report, which stated the change of presidents was "legal and constitutional,"¹ although it also noted there were "acts of police brutality that must be investigated."² Nevertheless, supporters of former President Nasheed consider the transfer of power illegal.

The Republic of the Maldives uses a two-round system, meaning if no candidate receives 50 percent +1 vote on September 7, 2013, a run-off between the two leading contenders will take place on September 28, 2013.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Maldivians will cast their ballots for President. Local elections are expected to take place December 2013, and parliamentary polls in March or April 2014.

Who is eligible to run?

According to the constitution, the President must be Maldivian citizen who was born to Maldivian citizens, not a citizen of another country. He or she must be a Sunni Muslim who is at least 35 years of age, and who has never been convicted of "an offence for which a *hadd* is prescribed in Islam."³

On September 7, 2013, four candidates will be competing for the presidential seat, including current President Waheed; former President Nasheed; Yaameen Abdul Gayyoom, half-brother of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom; and Qasim Ibrahim, a well-known businessperson and resort owner.

¹ Commission of National Inquiry. 2013. "Report of Commission of National Inquiry." Accessed August 28, 2013 http://www.maldivesculture.com/pdf_files/CONI-Report-2012.pdf. Page 2

² Ibid.

³ Hussain, D. 2008. "Functional Translation of Constitution of Maldives." Accessed August 28, 2013. <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Documents/ConstitutionOfMaldives.pdf>. Page 37.

Who can vote in the country?

Any Maldivian citizen over 18 is eligible to vote. The law does not impose any additional restrictions based on criminal convictions or mental incapacity, as it is the case in some countries.

In order to cast a ballot, eligible citizens must be on the Register of Electors (voter register) prior to Election Day, and must present a valid photo ID to vote. Voters were given an opportunity to verify their registration from May 30 to June 3, 2013.

Those who were away from their permanent residence on Election Day and were on another inhabited island or in a country with a diplomatic mission had until August 7, 2013, to re-register to vote in the location they expect to be in on September 7, 2013. Registration on Election Day itself is not permitted; voters who do not find their name on the register will not be able to cast a ballot.

How many registered voters are there?

According to official figures from the Elections Commission, there are approximately 240,000 registered voters. This is an increase of approximately 31,000 from the 2008 presidential elections.

There are 116,737 female and 123,565 male voters.

What is the structure of the government?

The Maldives is a unitary democratic Republic based on the principles of Islam. The head of the government is the President, who, along with the Vice President, is elected to a five-year term and can serve a maximum of two terms, consecutive or otherwise.

The President is head of the executive branch and appoints the Cabinet, each member of which must be approved by the People's Majlis (parliament). The legislative authority of the Maldives lies with the People's Majlis, a unicameral legislative body currently composed of 77 elected members serving five-year terms. Judicial power is vested in the Supreme Court, High Court and Trial Courts, as established by the law. The Supreme Court is the highest authority for administration of justice; the Chief Justice is the highest authority in the Supreme Court.

What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

There are no women candidates running in these presidential elections. Currently only seven of the 77 parliament members are women.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

Elections are managed by the Elections Commission, which is a separate legal entity comprised of five members mandated by the Constitution of the Maldives. The commission manages and facilitates all affairs related to elections and public referendums. This includes announcing the date of election; maintaining and publishing the Register of Electors; declaring results of elections; registering political parties; and verifying party financing.

Additionally, more than 5,000 temporary election officials will be hired by the commission to organize and run elections throughout the archipelago. Considering there are approximately 240,000 voters, this is a high official-to-voter ratio, necessitated by the fact that voters and polling stations are thinly spread out over a large number of isolated islands.

What is a polling place? What is a polling booth?

Polling/voting stations in the Maldives are typically located in schools and administrative centers. A ballot box area (voting area) is the designated area for managing the voting process, and is marked by a radius of 100 feet from the ballot box, covering parks, empty land and playgrounds, but excluding homes and roads. Police must remain outside of this radius at all times, unless invited by the head of a polling station. Polling booths are placed within the designated voting area.

Polling stations are open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. However, as in many other countries, voters who are in line by 4:00 p.m. will be allowed to vote.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

A total of 470 ballot boxes will be set up throughout the Maldives and abroad for this election. In Male', 48 ballot boxes will be available for residents and an additional 55 ballot boxes will be set up for voters who are residents of other islands, but who will be in the capital city on September 7, 2013, and re-registered by the August 7 deadline.

Tourism is one of the largest branches of employment in the Maldives. Due to a significant number of voters working in over 100 different resorts, 42 ballot boxes will be set up on resort islands. A minimum of 50 registered voters are required for a ballot box to be established in a resort to assure secrecy of the vote. Those working at the resorts without the ballot boxes are registered at nearby islands.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Yes. Voting will be organized at Maldivian embassies and consulates in countries with a sizeable Maldivian population. A total of seven ballot boxes will be placed in embassies abroad, including Trivandrum and New Delhi, India; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; London, United Kingdom; Singapore; and two ballot boxes in Colombo, Sri Lanka. A total of 4,530 voters are registered for voting abroad. A ballot box may only be placed in areas where a Maldivian diplomatic office exists and a minimum of 100 voters have registered to vote.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

Voters with disabilities may be assisted by a person who will be voting at the same polling station, although the head official of the polling station must approve this. A person who can provide assistance may only do so for one voter, and will be required to provide their name, address and national identification number.

A person observing or monitoring the polling station, candidates or representatives of a candidate may not assist with voting.

Will the election management body use a media center?

The Elections Commission does not have a media center. Pre-registered and media representatives (officially called “monitors”) can cover the voting area, according to regulations set forth by the commission.

A key distinction between “observers” and “monitors” (i.e., media representatives) is that monitors are allowed to take photos and video in the polling station, while observers are not.

Where are voting, counting and tabulation held?

Once voting ends at 4:00 p.m., voting will cease and ballot boxes are sealed. At 4:30 p.m., ballot boxes will be opened in the polling station in which they are located and ballot counting will begin by hand. Designated officials will carry out ballot counting, consideration of ballots, totaling votes and finalizing results.

The preliminary results will be announced and displayed in each polling station and then sent to the main counting center in Male’, which will be operated by the Elections Commission, but not housed in the same building as the commission itself.

Polling stations that close early (in case 100 percent of registered voters already voted) must wait until 4:30 p.m. before starting the count.

Who will be/can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

Only individuals identified by political parties, candidates, non-governmental organizations registered in the Maldives, international organizations and individuals who request and receive accreditation may be election observers. Additionally, representatives from registered media outlets can apply to be monitors. Only one monitor or one observer per organization may be present at a voting or counting area.

Domestic observers currently include over 400 observers from Transparency Maldives and 40 observers from the Human Rights Commission of Maldives. Additionally, a large number of observers from political parties have been accredited by the Elections Commission.

The Commonwealth will deploy 17 international observers lead by former Prime Minister of Malta Dr. Lawrence Gonzi, and will issue an official statement on the conduct of elections. Additionally, several diplomatic missions – including those from Sri Lanka, the United States, European Union nations and Japan – will also deploy international observers on Election Day, although they are not expected to make any public statements about the process.

When will official results be announced?

The law requires that official results are announced within seven days of Election Day.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Any individual with the right to vote; a candidate; a political party; an election observer or monitor; or an election official has the right to file a complaint, according to law. Complaints may be lodged at different locations of the Elections Commission Complaints Bureau – the central office in Male’, Atoll/City Complaints Bureaus or Island Focal Points.

Additionally, any person mentioned above can file a petition with the High Court if they are dissatisfied with a decision of the commission, or if they find a person is acting in violation of the laws and regulations related to elections.

However, if any person conducts a criminal offence in contravention of election laws and regulations, only the Elections Commissions can refer the matter to the High Court through the Prosecutor General.

Resources

- Constitution of the Republic of Maldives 2008
 - [In English](#)
 - [In Dhivehi](#)
- Elections (General) Act 11/2008 ([In Dhivehi](#))
- Presidential Elections Regulations 2013 ([In Dhivehi](#))