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# **Elections in the Maldives**

## *2019 Parliamentary Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org)

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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*Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Maldivian elections authorities as of April 5, 2019, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## When is Election Day?

Elections to the *People's Majlis*, the Maldivian Parliament, are scheduled for April 6, 2019. Voting will take place from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

## Why is this election important?

In September 2018, the Maldives held a presidential election that resulted in the defeat of incumbent President Abdulla Yameen by opposition candidate and long-serving Member of Parliament Ibrahim Solih from the Maldives Democratic Party (MDP). Several rights groups and civil society advocates saw the presidential election as a repudiation of democratic backsliding in recent years as evidenced by government restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly, restrictions on civil society and the media, and increased control over national commissions and the judiciary.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in the months leading up to the 2018 presidential election, there were reported attempts by the Government of the Maldives to block opposition candidates from contesting and limit opposition parties' campaign activities.<sup>2</sup>

Within this context, the parliamentary elections are seen by some as a choice between the former and current administrations. Former President Yameen is currently the opposition leader of a coalition formed between the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) and the newly formed People's National Congress (PNC), which is running in opposition to President Solih's MDP.

## Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Citizens will cast their ballots to elect all 87 members of the *People's Majlis*. Elected parliamentarians serve a five-year term. Candidate registration was open from January 28 to February 21, 2019,<sup>3</sup> with a total of 395 candidates contesting for the 87 seats.

The main parties contesting the parliamentary elections include current President Solih's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), the Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) led by former President Yameen,<sup>4</sup> the Jumhooree Party (JP), the Adhaalath Party (AP), and the People's National Congress (PNC). Former President Mohamed Nasheed is leader of the MDP and contesting for the newly formed mid-Machchangoalhi constituency in Malé. The PNC and PPM have formed an alliance to counter the MDP. While the JP is a member of the MDP-led coalition in the current Parliament, it will be supporting the opposition PPM/PNC alliance following a disagreement with the MDP. The JP alleges that the MDP violated a coalition agreement when it determined to contest for every constituency in the Maldives, rather than splitting the constituencies with the JP.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International (2018). "[Maldives 2017/2018 Country Report](#)."

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch (2018). "[Maldives Events of 2018](#)."

<sup>3</sup> <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/voters-list-published-for-parliamentary-polls-143636>

<sup>4</sup> In March 2019, former President Abdulla Yameen reassumed leadership of the PPM following his release from prison, where he was being held under charges of corruption and money-laundering.

<sup>5</sup> The Edition (March 31, 2019). "[Government requires parliament majority to ensure peace](#)."

In December 2018, the PPM announced the names of 42 candidates for the elections, including 24 incumbent members of parliament. No primaries for the parliamentary candidates were held. The MDP held primary elections in January 2019, with 279 candidates running to become the party's nominees for 85 seats.

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

There are no reserved seats for women. Women make up 35 of 395 (8.9 percent) parliamentary candidates.<sup>6</sup> This is a slight increase from the 2014 parliamentary election, in which women represented only 23 out of 304 (7.6 percent) contesting candidates. There are currently five women serving in Parliament.

## **Who can vote in the country?**

All Maldivian citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote. Eligible voters must be on the register of electors (the voter register) prior to Election Day and must present a valid photo ID to cast a ballot. The Election Commission of the Maldives published the initial list of eligible voters on January 31, 2019, received complaints through February 9, 2019, and published the final list of eligible voters on March 18, 2019.

Those who will be away from their permanent residence on Election Day had until March 2 to re-register at the location they expect to be at on April 6, 2019.<sup>7</sup> Registration on Election Day is not permitted.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

There are 264,442 eligible voters for the upcoming elections.<sup>8</sup> Voters can check their voter registration location by sending a text message with their national identity card to a central number managed by the Election Commission.

## **What is the structure of the government? What is the electoral system?**

The Maldives is a democratic republic based on the principles of Islam. The head of 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 elected through a first-past-the-post majoritarian system in which the winning presidential candidate must receive 50 percent of the vote plus one in order to be declared the winner. Current President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected in September 2018.

The legislative authority of the Maldives lies with the *People's Majlis*, a unicameral legislative body currently composed of 85 elected members serving five-year terms. The number of members will increase to 87 in the April 2019 elections due to population growth, with two new seats created in Malé.

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<sup>6</sup> The Edition (March 28, 2019). "[Female Parliamentarians: Setting the bar for future generations.](#)"

<sup>7</sup> Ali, Humaam (February 18, 2019). "[EC opens opportunity to re-register for parliamentary election.](#)"

<sup>8</sup> Maldives Independent (March 19, 2019). "[Final voter registry published.](#)"

Each member of Parliament is directly elected to a single-member constituency through the first-past-the-post process.

The country is divided into 20 administrative atolls (groups of islands) and three cities (Malé, Addu and Fuvahmulah). Each of these administrative atolls and Malé are considered separate administrative divisions and have a minimum of two elected members, with additional members elected if the population of the administrative division is over 5,000.

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 election management body? What are its powers?**

Elections in the Maldives are managed by the Election Commission, which is comprised of five members. As outlined in article 170 of the Constitution, the Election Commission's responsibilities include: 1) conducting, managing, supervising and facilitating all elections and public referendums; 2) preparing the electoral rolls; 3) declaring results for elections and public referendums; 4) compiling and revising the register of voters in each constituency; 5) fixing, demarcating and reviewing constituency boundaries; 6) registering political parties; and 7) conducting voter education outreach. The voter register is compiled with information from the Department of National Registration.

### **Where are polling stations set up?**

In the Maldives, polling stations – in which the ballot boxes are placed – are typically located in schools and administrative centers. Voters are assigned to a specific ballot box within the polling station, although most polling stations contain only one ballot box. A “polling area,” or voting area, is the designated area for conducting the voting process. The polling area constitutes a 100-foot radius around the polling station. It can cover parks, empty land and playgrounds, but not homes and roads. Police must remain outside this radius at all times, unless invited in by the head of a polling station.

There are 507 polling stations for the *People's Majlis* elections, including those placed abroad. In Malé, polling stations will be set up in 17 government buildings. Additionally, because tourism is one of the largest areas of employment in the Maldives, the law requires placement of polling stations in tourist resorts and on industrial islands if more than 50 eligible voters re-register to vote in those locations.

### **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Yes. Voting will be organized at Maldivian embassies and consulates in countries with a sizeable Maldivian population and with more than 150 registered voters. Polling stations will be placed in four cities – Colombo, Sri Lanka; Trivandrum, India; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and London, United Kingdom (U.K.) – with the following voting hours:

- India: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Sri Lanka: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

- Malaysia: 11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
- U.K.: 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

## **How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?**

Voters with disabilities may be assisted by an election official or person who is also registered to vote at the same ballot box, as long as this is approved by the head official at that polling station. Unless the person is an election official, he or she may only assist one voter and will be required to provide his or her name, address and national identification number.

## **Where are votes counted and tabulated?**

Once voting ends at 4:00 p.m., ballot boxes are sealed. After sealing the ballot boxes, all materials used for voting, including the unused ballots and counterfoils, will be packed and sealed in a designated security envelop. Ballot boxes will then be opened in their respective area. Counting is done by hand. Designated officials will count ballots, total the votes and announce results for their ballot box. The unsealing of the ballot box, vote counting and tabulation process is completed in the presence of candidates, official elections agents of candidates, candidate representatives, and election observers and monitors, if present.

Preliminary results will first be announced in each polling area, and then communicated to the Election Commission through an electronic tablet. After the preliminary count, the results are sent to the main counting center in Malé.

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. Similarly, polling stations that close after 4:00 p.m. must also wait 30 minutes before starting the count.

## **Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

Individuals identified by political parties, candidates and nongovernmental organizations registered in the Maldives, and international organizations and individuals who request and receive accreditation may observe elections. Maldivian legislation differentiates between observers and monitors. Observers come from organizations as outlined above. Monitors are media representatives who also apply and receive accreditation. The main difference is that observers are not allowed to take photos or record audio/video in the polling area.

Transparency Maldives, a domestic observation group, plans to deploy over 300 domestic short-term observers to 252 polling stations. In addition, the Human Rights Commission of Maldives will also deploy short-term observers. International observation missions are being fielded by the European Union and the Commonwealth, as well as four international media organizations.

## **When will official results be announced?**

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

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

Any individual with the right to vote, a contesting candidate, a political party, an approved election observer or monitor, or any election official may file a complaint, according to the law. The complaint can be lodged verbally with the head of the polling station on Election Day. Complaints can also be lodged in writing or by phone on Election Day at the National Elections Complaints Bureau in Malé, at any of the Atoll/City Complaints Bureaus or at any local Island Focal Point. A complainant can also file a petition with the High Court. If any person conducts a criminal offence in contravention of laws and regulations of elections, only the Election Commission can refer the matter 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 official election results are announced.