

Maldives — Va-PoReg Country Report

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12/16/1887 Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: The Sultanate of Maldives was established in 1153.¹ On 12/16/1887, the British signed an agreement with the Sultan, granting „protection“ and monopolizing the Maldives’ foreign affairs. However, the British refrained from intervening in internal administration (Maloney 1976). As a result, the absolutist character of the sultanate persisted in all domestic matters without any changes. (Lehr 2001: 585). A thirteen-member constitutional committee had begun to draft a constitution on 03/22/1931 (Lehr 2001: 585-586).² The background had been dissatisfaction with the extensive power of the Sultan. Upon the enactment of the initial Constitution, certain royal prerogatives of the Sultan were relinquished. In their stead emerged a People’s Assembly comprised of 47 members elected from the atolls and a Legislative Council consisting of 28 members, with seven nominees appointed by the Sultan (Zulfa 2018: 2). Nonetheless, the government remained a family matter of the Sultan. Therefore, we do not consider the installment of the first constitution to be a regime-changing act. In spite of this, representation of the atolls in parliament was introduced for the first time (Zulfa 2018: 2). In 1932, universal suffrage was introduced in the Maldives.³ Furthermore, the constitution of 1932 transformed the monarchy into not only a constitutional but also an elective one. Henceforth, the accession to the Sultan’s throne was no longer hereditary; instead, a suitable candidate was elected by the Majlis and the nobility (Lehr 2001: 585-586). In 1934, the Sultan was removed from power over allegations of scheming to undermine the Constitution. He was succeeded by Sultan Hassan Nur-ud-din, who introduced a new constitution. Amidst widespread demand, he was deemed „unfit“ and abdicated in 1943. After two years under a Council of Regency, Abdul Majeed, a respected figure, was elected Sultan. He passed away in Colombo in 1952 (Maloney 1976). On 04/18/1952, a public referendum converted the Maldives from a monarchy to a republic, enforced by a third constitution on 01/01/1953. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem’s PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent. Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent. V-Dem’s LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited between 1941-1952 and otherwise show no value or indicate an absence of legislative constraints. Therefore, we classify this period as an autocratic monarchy.

01/01/1953 End Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: Prime Minister Muhammad Amin Didi led a movement to form a republic. The constitution established presidential elections, a judiciary, and a bicameral legislature.⁴ Amin Didi was elected as president with 98% of the votes (Maloney 1976). The available sources regarding the right to vote are limited. It is not clear whether universal suffrage was actually or only de jure granted. It is not evident how many percent of the population voted in the presidential election. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The election was competitive according to LIED. On the contrary V-Dem’s EF&FI declares that no elections were held this year, thus V-Dem’s CEI scores no electoral cleanliness. However, it is clear that the nobility

and the old elites always exerted a great deal of influence (Lehr 2001: 585-586, Phadnis/Luithui 1981: 168) . This can also be seen in the political dominance of various families, most notably the Didi family.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI affirm the absence of political liberties. Therefore, we classify this short period as an electoral oligarchical autocracy. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

08/21/1953 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, President Amin Didi was overthrown by a popular revolution, and the country reverted to a Sultanate on 03/07/1954, with Muhammad Fareed Didi as sultan. A unicameral legislature was reinstated, of which six members represented the king, 46 represented the people, and two represented the business sector. Only Maldivian men were allowed to vote for the People's Majlis.⁶ Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

07/26/1965 Continuation Autocratic Monarchy [as independent country]: On 07/26/1965, an agreement was signed on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan, by Kilegefan, Prime Minister, and on behalf of The Queen which ended the British responsibility for the defense and external affairs of the Maldives and full independence was granted by Britain in 1965 (Maloney 1976).⁷ According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were absent until 1964, from 1965 onward only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent for this timeframe. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

11/11/1968 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Personalist Autocracy: On this date, the Second Republic of the Maldives was proclaimed, following a vote taken in parliament on 11/15/1967 to decide if the Maldives should continue as a constitutional monarchy or become a republic and a national referendum on the same issue on 03/15/1968. We consider this regime change event to be a civilian coup because the monarchy was abolished through elite-driven political pressure and a tightly controlled referendum, without the Sultan's genuine voluntary agreement. On 11/11/1968, a republic was declared again, a revised constitution promulgated, and Ibrahim Nasir elected as president. There were no political parties (Maloney 1976). On 04/14/1969, the name of the country changed from Maldives' Islands to Maldives. Nasir was elected indirectly to a four-year presidential term by the Majlis (legislature), and his candidacy later ratified by a referendum. Nasir had been previously involved in the 'depopulation' of the Maldivian island Havaru Thinhadhoo in 1962, which has been criticized as a crime against humanity.⁸ In 1973 Nasir was elected to a second term under the constitution as amended in 1972, which extended the presidential term to five years, and which also provided for the election of the prime minister by the Majlis.⁹ Like 1968 the election 1973 took the form of a referendum with Ibrahim Nassir as the sole candidate.¹⁰ Designated as prime minister in 1972, Ahmed Zaki was reappointed in February 1975 but was later dismissed from office and detained in March. President Ibrahim Nasir assumed executive duties, and Zaki was subsequently banished (Lansford 2021: 1032). On 12/07/1978, Nasir went into self-exile in Singapore after resigning from his post.¹¹ Maumoon Abdul Gayoom succeeded Nassir. He was appointed by the Majlis and confirmed through a referendum in 1978. He was then reelected, again via a referendum in which he was the only candidate, in 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003.¹² The presidential elections under Nassir and Gayoom are therefore not genuine executive (s)elections, but one-candidate referendums. Since no political parties were allowed, the elections for the

Majlis cannot be understood as elections in a true sense either. The candidates all had to run as independents. Furthermore, 8 of the 54 members were appointed by the president.¹³ The regime under both Nassir and Gyoom is considered to be a personalist autocracy, because nothing changed in terms of institutional conditions. Both presidents were not subject to any institutional restrictions. On 01/22/2005, legislative elections to the 50-seat People's Majlis were held. Since political parties were still banned, all candidates ran as independents. Supporters of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom emerged as the largest group in the People's Majlis (Lansford 2021: 1033). After the elections political parties were legalized.¹⁴ According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held until 2004, from 2005 onward multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. As per FH's classification for the period from 1972 to 1974, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. From 1975 to 1977 a score of 6 to 7 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. Per FH's evaluation for the period between 1978 and 1985, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. From 1986 onward, a score between 11 and 14 indicates that the country is not free, and thus is also placed in the not free category. In 2008, it is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent until 2004 and are ambiguous afterwards. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent and limited in 2008, while V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited between 2005-2007 and otherwise absent.

05/09/2009 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On 06/02/2005 on President Gayoom's request, the People's Majlis unanimously passed a reform allowing the registration of political parties. The first multiparty legislative elections, for an expanded 77-seat People's Majlis, were held on 05/09/2009. Eleven of 13 registered parties offered candidates and 5 won seats (Lansford 2021: 1033). Election observers characterized the elections as relatively free and fair, although some irregularities persisted. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies these elections as competitive between 2009 and 2011 and 2013 and 2014. The elections were somewhat clean from 2009 to 2012. Since 2013, ambiguous cleanliness is scored (V-Dem CEI). Since 2009 V-Dem's EF&FI underlines somewhat free and fair elections. The political and civil rights situation continued to improve, although some restrictions continued.¹⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED political liberties are not achieved for the entire time. V-Dem's PCLI scores full political liberties from 2009 to 2011, in 2012 they were somewhat present and from 2013 to 2018 they score ambiguous outcomes. Since 2019 V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate between 2009-2011, limited from 2012-2017, absent in 2018, robust between 2019-2021 and comprehensive from 2022-2023. V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust between 2009-2012 and 2019-2023, and moderate between 2013-2018. Per FH, for the period until 2011, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. In 2012 the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. For 2013 and 2014 the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. From 2015 onward it scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. The independence of the judiciary also increased. But some influence of the president remained.¹⁶ The presidential election on 09/23/2018 witnessed the improper utilization of state resources in support of the incumbent president Abdulla Yameen from the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), interference by the police in opposition campaign activities, and manipulation by electoral officials in diverse forms.¹⁷ Before the elections, apprehensions arose regarding potential vote manipulation by the government, given Yameen's appointment of his supporter, Ahmed Shareef, as the head of the Electoral Commission. International observers were prohibited from overseeing the elections, and foreign media faced significant

restrictions.¹⁸ The April 2019 elections were predominantly transparent and competitive, according to Commonwealth observers. However, according to LIED the elections were competitive. Moreover, V-Dem's CEI indicates ambiguous cleanliness in 2018 but somewhat clean elections since 2019. V-Dem's EF&FI classifies the overall election conditions as somewhat free and fair. Although vote buying, albeit still an issue, seemed to be less widespread compared to previous elections.¹⁹

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sultanate_of_Maldives
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Maldives
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Maldives
- ⁵ https://factsanddetails.com/south-asia/Maldives/History_Maldives/entry-8035.html#chapter-0
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Maldives
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Maldives#Independence
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_Nasir
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Maldives#Independence
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Maldivian_presidential_election
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_Nasir
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maumoon_Abdul_Gayoom#
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Maldivian_parliamentary_election
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_Maldivian_parliamentary_election
- ¹⁵ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136090.htm>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judiciary_of_the_Maldives
- ¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/maldives/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Maldivian_presidential_election#International_observers
- ¹⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/maldives/freedom-world/2022>

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