

Presidential Election in the Maldives

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Summary

The Maldivian presidential election on 9 September 2023 would appear to be a clear-cut contest for the ruling coalition should former President Abdulla Yameen not be eligible to contest. However, the feud between President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Mohamed Nasheed, Speaker of the Parliament, coupled with policy decisions taken by Solih's administration and opposition-led campaigns, will have an impact on the voters' decision at the polls.

On 15 January 2023, the Maldivian Election Commission (EC) announced that the presidential election will be held on 9 September 2023, with a second round of voting on 30 September 2023, if needed. The EC has estimated that more than 280,000 Maldivians will be eligible to vote in the [election](#).

Weeks before the presidential election was announced, the Maldives criminal court sentenced former President Abdulla Yameen (2013–2018) to 11 years in prison and fined him [US\\$5 million](#) (S\$6.5 million) on charges of receiving money through the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation via a private company during his [presidency](#). Yameen's lawyer, Abdulla Shiyaz, stated they would appeal the verdict in the [High Court](#) after receiving the case statements and full report of the verdict. Yameen was to be the Progressive Party of Maldives' candidate for the 2023 presidential election. However, as of now, the verdict and arrest make him ineligible to contest the [election](#).

Earlier in 2019, Yameen was sentenced to five years in jail and fined US\$5 million (S\$6.5 million) for embezzling state funds. Because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, he was put on house arrest and released in 2021 after the country's Supreme Court bench overturned the judgment's conviction in a [corruption case](#).

While the opposition looks to be in disarray due to Yameen's arrest, everything is also well within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). There is a leadership tug-of-war between Mohamed Nasheed, Speaker of the Parliament and a founding member of the MDP, and President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. Nasheed was all set to contest the presidential election in 2018 but was barred by the [country's law](#). After Nasheed's withdrawal, Solih contested and won the election on an MDP ticket. Differences on issues such as the change in presidential to the parliamentary system began soon after Solih assumed office. In April 2019, Nasheed reiterated his belief in a [parliamentary government](#) that would deter Solih from changing the system. Three years later, Nasheed even submitted a decree at the party Congress in August 2022 to hold a constitutional referendum to change the political system. However, he withdrew the decree before it was opened for [debate](#).

The divisions within the MDP were visible during the election of the party's chairperson. Solih favoured his Cabinet member, Minister of Economic Development, Fayyaz Ismail, while Nasheed's choice was Maafannu-North constituency Member of Parliament, Imthiyaz Fahmy. Fayyaz received more than 28,000 votes while Imthiyaz secured over [20,000 votes](#). Nasheed accused Solih of interfering in the parliamentary committee investigating his security breach following a [terror attack on him in 2021](#). Nasheed also issued a statement in July 2021 accusing Solih of reneging on a pledge to address [religious extremism in the Maldives](#).

In mid-2022, the MDP leaders infighting deepened after the arrest of Nasheed's younger brother Ahmad Nazim Abdul Sattar, on allegation of engaging in a homosexual act with a [Bangladeshi sex worker](#). Reacting to his brother's arrest, Nasheed, in a WhatsApp message and tweets, accused several political leaders from the MDP of engaging in homosexual activities, which is a crime in the island nation. He accused Solih of arresting his brother while [protecting others](#). He also claimed to have four photographs of Solih having sexual intercourse [with a girl](#). The Presidential office, however, denied these [allegations](#).

The MDP's presidential primary election is scheduled for 28 January 2023, with Solih contesting against Nasheed. During his campaign in Laamu atoll, Nasheed praised the cabinet ministers and held Solih responsible for the incomplete projects. He also alleged state-owned companies of being used by Solih to influence the vote in the MDP's [primary](#). On 3 January 2023, the MDP released a final list of members eligible for voting in the party's presidential primary. The list has removed 459 names after complaints by the members against the temporary list issued in [December 2022](#). In that list, 57,714 members were listed as eligible to vote. This was lower than over 97,000 members who had been eligible to cast their vote in the party's internal election in [May 2022](#). Nasheed made the accusation that the more than 39,000 expelled members would not have voted for Solih. However, Ismail, the party's chairperson, countered that the members removed from the MDP register were not on the [party's register maintained by the EC](#).

If Yameen does not get relief from the higher court and is barred from the presidential polls, it would seem that the ruling coalition's candidate could secure an easy victory. However, the feud between Nasheed and Solih, divisions within the MDP cadres, the Solih government's policies and the opposition parties' campaigns, among others, will have a considerable influence of the voter's choice on the next Maldivian president.

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