

Election Reporting Training Manual (Maldives)



Preface

Elections serve as the cornerstone of democracy, reflecting the will of the people and shaping the future of a nation. In the Maldives, where the electoral process is vital to ensuring political stability and inclusivity, the role of accurate, fair, and comprehensive election reporting cannot be overstated. Despite the progress made, challenges still persist in equipping media workers, civil society, and the general public to effectively cover and navigate elections.

In response to these challenges, this document is created from the findings of the Electoral Information Assessment (EIA) conducted under the Advancing Political Pluralism and Transparency (APPT) project. The EIA has shed light on gaps in civic education, voter engagement, and the need for more civic education training in the Maldivian context. By bridging these gaps, this manual seeks to empower stakeholders and ensure the dissemination of accurate, unbiased electoral information, while also empowering members of the public with the correct knowledge for effective political participation.

This training manual for Election reporting was developed by the Society for Peace and Democracy in the Maldives in 2024 under the Advancing Political Pluralism and Transparency (APPT) project funded by the European Union. The APPT project objectives include enhancing democratic governance and supporting political pluralism and inclusiveness through improved integrity and transparency in the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Society for Peace and Democracy (SPD) is a non-profit and non-governmental organization registered in the Maldives. Its activities include community development, peace education, women and youth empowerment, worker's rights, and digital rights/digital safety.

Overview of the project and this document

The Election Reporting Curriculum is a comprehensive training manual designed to address the unique challenges faced by journalists, civil society organizations, and media professionals during elections in the Maldives. Rooted in the findings of the EIA, this curriculum provides practical tools and methodologies to:

- Enhance the quality of election coverage.
- Equip stakeholders with skills for pre-election, election-day, and post-election reporting.
- Promote ethical reporting and combat misinformation.

This document is structured to deliver a clear roadmap for training sessions, covering essential topics such as story preparation, fact-checking, diverse representation, and addressing gender and marginalized groups in electoral reporting.

Objectives of this curriculum

- 1. Improve media preparedness** by equipping journalists with the knowledge and skills to cover the electoral process comprehensively and ethically.
- 2. Address gaps in representation** by fostering inclusivity in politics, including women, youth, and PWDs.

3. Combatting misinformation by strengthening capacity of media professionals and media consumers by helping them know how to identify, counteract, and report misinformation during election cycles and beyond.

4. Encourage civic engagement by empowering members of the public to play an active role in promoting transparency and accountability during election cycles and beyond.

Expected Outcomes:

By the end of the training, the following outcomes are expected:

1. Enhanced reporting skills for media professionals
2. Increased awareness and comprehension in politics
3. Strengthened accountability
4. Empowered voices among marginalized groups

Training resources

- Spacious auditorium
- Projector, laptop, speakers.
- White board
- Flip Chart board
- Stationary

Structure of the training

This Election Reporting Training is based on five key sessions:

1. Introduction to Politics and Government
2. Elections in the Maldives
3. Public/Political issues in the Maldives
 - Nepotism, Corruption, etc
 - Misinformation and Disinformation
4. Women and Politics

(details of each session to follow)

Session 1: Introduction to Politics and Government

Objectives

- Understanding foundational concepts of politics, government, and the state.
- Understand the difference between a state and a government.
- Understand insight into the 2008 Maldivian Constitution.

Introduction to Politics

- Definition of Politics

Politics is to the processes, activities, and policies through which groups of people make collective decisions. It is about how resources, power, and authority are distributed and exercised within a society. Politics can take place at various levels, from local governments to international organizations.

- Definition of Power

Power in politics is the ability to influence or control the behavior of others, often through authority, persuasion, or coercion. It can manifest in different forms, such as political power (control over government), economic power (control over resources), and social power (influence over culture and public opinion). Power dynamics are central to political studies, as they shape relationships within governments and between states.

- General discussion about what “power” is.

Power is the ability to influence or control the behavior of others, and it can manifest in different forms and through various mechanisms There are various types of power:

- **Political Power:** ability of individuals, groups, or institutions to shape laws, policies, and governance structures. It involves the capacity to make decisions that affect the distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities in society.
- **Economic Power:** the control over resources—money, goods, services, and capital. Those who have economic power often have the ability to shape markets, influence economic policies, and determine access to wealth. Large corporations, financial institutions, and wealthy individuals are examples of entities that wield economic power.
- **Social power:** the ability to influence the values, norms, and behaviors within a society. It can be exerted by individuals, social groups, or cultural institutions. Social power is often connected to influence over public opinion, media, education, and even social movements.
- **Power in governance:** power is exercised through institutions like the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The balance and separation of powers are central to democratic systems to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful. In non-democratic systems, power may be concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a small group
- **People power:** collective power exercised by the people—especially when it is used to challenge authority, advocate for social change, or influence political decisions. It’s a form of power where citizens come together, often in large groups, to assert their will or demand rights, often in opposition to government or established institutions.

Eg: Grassroots movements. Nonviolent resistance or civil disobedience. Social media and digital activism. Democratic participation.

Introduction to State and Government

- What is a State

a political entity that exercises sovereignty over a defined geographic area and has a structured government that creates and enforces laws, maintains order, and represents the population both domestically and internationally. A state has four elements:

- (a) a territory
- (b) a permanent population
- (c) a sovereign government
- (d) recognition by other states

- What is a government

the system or group of people who are responsible for making and enforcing laws and policies within a state. It acts as the administrative machinery that manages the state's affairs and makes decisions on behalf of the people. Governments have the authority to regulate behavior, maintain public order, provide public services, and defend the country from external threats.

- Difference between State and Government

State and government are often used interchangeably. But it is different.

(a) State refers to the overall political entity, that includes the territory, population, an sovereignty. It represents the entire system of legal and political institutions. State has branches. 1) Executive. 2) Legislature. 3) Judiciary.

(b) Government refers to the individual or bodies that manage and operate the state. Or it is the apparatus through which the state authority is exercised. Governments are temporary structures that govern the state. It changes over time through elections or other political processes.

- Types of Governments. Explain the following with examples:
 - **Monarchies:** a single person, the **monarch**, holds supreme authority. There are two types. 1) Absolute, and 2) Constitutional.
 - **Democracies:** power is vested in the people, who elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. Democracies are based on popular sovereignty—meaning the people hold ultimate power.
 - **Autocracies:** a single person or a small group holds all the political power and authority. It is also called a dictatorship. Power is not derived from the will of the people, an is often maintained through coercion, force, or manipulation.
 - **Theocracies:** religious leaders or institutions hold political power, and the laws of the state are based on religious teachings or scripture. Religion and government are intertwined, and political decisions are made with references to religious doctrines.

The Maldivian Political/Governance System

- Introduce Constitution and its purpose

The Maldivian constitution was made in 2008. It was made following a period of political volatility and calls for reform. The purpose of the new constitution was to modernize and democratic the country's governance framework. Some of the advancements of the new constitution were:

- (a) Democratization, and establishment of a multi-party system
- (b) Establish separation of powers among three branches of the state
- (c) Grant more human rights and fundamental freedoms to the people
- (d) Establish an Executive Presidency system in which the people directly elect the head of state/government.
- (e.) Establish checks and balances mechanisms
- (f) Establish decentralization and local governance by the introduction of elected local councils.
- (g) Establishment of independent institutions that play critical roles in ensuring accountability, transparency, protection of rights, an integrity of the state.

- Introduce branches of the Maldivian State
 - Executive (President)
 - Cabinet
 - Civil Service
 - Local Governance
 - Legislature (People's Majlis)
 - Judiciary (Courts)
 - Low-tier Courts
 - Superior Courts
- Introduce Independent Institutions
 - Institutions formed under the constitution
 - Elections Commission
 - Anti-Corruption Commission
 - Auditor General
 - Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
 - Other Institutions formed under other laws (no need to go into detail)

Introduction to Maldivian Elections [brief mentions]

- Presidential Elections [Riyaasee Inthihaabu]
- Parliamentary Elections [Rayyithunge Majlis Inthihaabu]
- LCE Elections [Council thakuge Inthihaabu]
- Referendums [Fenna-Nufenna Vote]

Activity – Furthest election memory [10 minutes]

- 1. Everyone grabs a post-it note*
- 2. Asks everyone to write their very first childhood election memory (a word, phrase, a short sentence)*
- 3. Discussion on the answers stuck on the post-it wall.*

Session 2: Elections

Objectives

- Understand the concept and purpose of elections
- Familiarize with different election systems and their global applications
- Gain knowledge on the electoral history of Maldives
- Gain insights of the role of the Elections Commission
- Recognize the significance of elections and the responsibilities of voters and elected officials.

What is an Election

An election is a decision-making process in which citizens choose individuals to hold public office or make decisions on specific issues. Elections are also cornerstones of democratic systems, as it provides a mechanism for people to express their will.

- Purpose of an election

(a) Representation: it allows people to select representatives who will act on behalf as a president, govern their local communities as councilors, or make laws as their members of parliament.

(b) Accountability: through elections, people hold their representatives and leaders accountable for their actions of policies. Citizens can reward reps/leaders based on their performance via giving them a second term, or punish their leaders by rejecting them or voting them out.

(c.) Legitimacy: Elections provide a legal and moral basis for governance. A government elected through free and fair elections is seen as legitimate by citizens and the international community. They also hold a legitimate mandate or by the people to act on their behalf.

(d) Participation: elections encourage public involvement in governance. It fosters a sense of civic responsibility.

History of Elections in the Maldives

- 1932 – Elections recognized in first constitution. Gaanoonu Hadhaa Majlis and Rayithunge Majlis (two houses) had to have elected members.
- 1932 – Women could vote too!
- 1952 – Referendum to change to a Republic. Vote taken only in Male.
- 1952 – First Presidential Elections in the Maldives.
- 1953 – Referendum to revert to a Monarchy.
- 1967 – Referendum to revert to Presidency
- 2008 – New constitution, New election system

Types of Elections in the Maldives

- **Presidential Elections** – Constitution, Presidential Elections Act (12/2008), Elections Act – General (11/2008)
- **Parliamentary Elections** – Constitution, Majlis Elections Act (2/2009), Elections Act – General (11/2008), Electoral Divisions Act (1/2009)
- **LC Election** – Constitution, LCE Act (10/2010), LCE Special Act 2020 (3/2020), Elections Act – General (11/2008).
- **Referendums** – Constitution.

Election systems

- First-past-the-post

The candidate with the most votes win. (eg: Majlis elections in the Maldives)

A variation of FPTP is also practiced in the Maldives, in Presidential elections. If no candidate wins 50% and above of the total votes, then the top two candidates compete in a runoff vote.

- Preferential Voting

Voters rank candidates in an order of preference. If no candidate secures more than 50% of the first preferences, then the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes are re-distributed based on the voters' next preference. This continues until a candidate achieves a majority. (eg: Sri Lanka's presidential elections)

- Proportional representation and National Lists

A system where voters select political parties instead of individual candidates, and parties are allocated seats based on the proportion of votes they receive nationally. Parties nominate candidates from a pre-published list to fill these seats. (eg: Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections)

- Write-in candidates

Voters manually write name of a candidate if their name is not on the official list. (eg: USA)

- NOTA Option

A choice that allows a voter to reject all candidates if they are dissatisfied. This vote is often symbolic. Some countries mandate re-elections if the NOTA vote wins.

Role of Elections Commission of Maldives

- Constitution says an impartial EC must exist.
- EC Act.
- Functions of Elections Commission
 - Organizing, running, and overseeing elections and referendums

- Preparing voter registry.
- Declaring electoral constituencies (Majlis, LC Elections)
- Deciding locations of polling stations in Maldives and abroad
- Registering political parties and maintaining membership registries.

Electoral Process

- EC announces elections

EC declares the schedule for an election, including dates for filing nominations and other details. These details are broadly publicized.

- Voters' List, grievances, re-registrations

EC compiles and publishes a voter's list. There is a grievance period for people to check the list and raise objections or correct errors. Voters who will not be in their registered location on election day can apply for re-registration at a different location.

- Nominations

Political parties or independent candidates submit nominations to contest in elections. Nominees must meet criteria set out by the constitution and election laws. EC verifies nominations and publishes the final list of candidates.

- Campaigns

Candidates and parties launch their campaigns to present policies, manifestos, and promises. Campaign methods like rallies, speeches, debates, d2d visits, posters, and social media are used. EC monitors campaigns to ensure adherence to regulations such as limits on campaign financing, hate speech, etc. Rival candidates and the general public are allowed to submit grievances or complaints based on electoral or campaign malpractices.

- Vote Day (polling, complaints, etc)

Balloting take place at polling stations across the country. Voting in the Maldives takes place using paper ballots. EC usually arranges efficient logistics at polling stations.

- Results

Ballots are counted at polling stations under strict supervision of polling station officials, candidates' representatives, independent monitors, and the press. Result sheets are displayed outside every polling station upon completion of vote counting. EC would later announce preliminary results.

- Swearing in

Successful candidates take their oaths of office in formal swearing-in ceremonies. Presidential inaugurations take place in the Maldives at a special sitting of the People's Majlis, so these ceremonies are organized by the People's Majlis. The People's Majlis

swearing in ceremonies are also organized by the People's Majlis. Local Councils' swearing in ceremonies are organized and run by each council's secretariat.

Why do Elections matter?

- Explain the powers and functions of elected officials.
 - They represent YOU. So their good/bad actions reflect on you.
 - They manage public funds. It's a big responsibility.
 - They take decisions on behalf of YOU. And these decisions affect YOU.
 - Therefore, it is important to make an informed decision at the ballot box, and not blindly follow someone's instructions.

Activity – Good qualities in a leader [10 minutes]

- 1. Everyone grabs a post-it note*
- 2. Writes a quality in a good leader and sticks it on the wall. Everyone must write a different quality. No repeats. If someone has already written your answer, go back and change yours.*
- 3. Discussion on why the quality is important.*

Session 3: Common political issues in the Maldives

Objectives

- Understand key political issues in the Maldives and their definitions and examples.
- Recognize how these issues manifest in the Maldivian context and highlighting their impact on governance, public trust, and societal development.
- Reflect on how individuals can contribute to combatting on these issues, fostering accountability and promoting ethical governance practices.

Common political issues

- Corruption
 - Explanation: Misuse of public power or resources for personal gain. Corruption undermines public trust, hampers development, and weakens governance structures.
 - Types
 - Bribery: offering or accepting money or gifts to influence decisions
 - Embezzlement: misappropriation of public funds or resources (dhaulathuge faisa ga jehun)
 - Favoritism in public procurement or contracts
 - Kickbacks: Receiving a portion of funds in exchange for awarding contracts (katu negun)
 - Examples
 - MMPRC Scandal (2014-2015): Embezzlement case
 - Ventilator Scandal (2020): Favoritism, Embezzlement (alleged)
 - NSPA Scandal (2024): Misappropriation of public money (alleged)

- Abuse of power
 - Explanation: When public officials use their authority or positions for personal benefit or to disadvantage others in a manner of violating laws or disregarding ethical standards.
 - Types
 - Politicizing public institutions to influence decisions/outcomes
 - Using state resources for personal/political gains
 - Harassing or silencing critics or opponents using state machinery
 - Examples
 - Politicizing institutions: immediate promotion of judges to high-tier courts following issue of certain judgments
 - Using state resources for personal gain: launching projects during election cycles to influence voter attitudes (MDP during Komandoo byelection)
 - Harassing or silencing critics using state machinery: Imposing fines in millions on opposition-owned news channels (PYAG govt 2017-2018)

- Misinformation and Disinformation
 - Misinformation: Spreading false/misleading or manipulative information unintentionally. This manipulates public opinion, harm reputation, or influence political outcomes.
 - Disinformation: Spreading false/misleading or manipulative information deliberately. This manipulates public opinion, harm reputation, or influence political outcomes.
 - Types
 - Spreading fake news or images on social media
 - Politicians making false claims about opponents or their policies (eg: Samoa Agreement)

- Media outlets publishing biased or fabricated stories without fact-checking
- Nepotism
 - Explanation: Favoring relatives or close people in appointments, promotions, or awarding contracts, regardless of their qualifications or merit.
 - Types:
 - Appointing unqualified relatives or friends to government positions.
 - Granting contracts or benefits to family members or close associates without following transparent procedures
 - Examples (real local case studies)
 -
- CHANGE BEGINS WITH YOU

Activity – What’s the issue? [10 minutes]

- 1. Groups of participants are given a scenario based on the political issues discussed here.*
- 2. Groups discuss, deliberate, and identify the issue.*
- 3. Each group presents their scenario and identified issue, and talk about prevention/mitigation of the problem.*

Session 4: Women and Politics

Objectives

- Understand role of women in society and leadership
- Analyze current state of women in politics in the Maldives and South Asia
- Recognize the importance of women in leadership roles

Women and politics

- Women’s role in society
 - Women historically played roles in shaping families, communities, and nation. Their contributions span economic, social, and cultural domains. They often act as caregivers, educators, workers, and changemakers.
 - Economic participation: women are a large part of the global workforce.
 - Education: most teachers in are women
 - Caregivers: most healthcare workers are women.
 - Activism: most grassroots political activists are women.

- Women leadership in Islamic history (inspo)
 - Islam acknowledges the value of women's contribution to family, community, and governance. Women are accorded right to education, property, and participation in decision-making. Leadership is not restricted by gender. We must acknowledge and practice leadership to be defined by capability, knowledge, and character.
 - During the prophet's time, women were part of battles too. Not in combat, but in other roles like assisting the soldiers by offering food and drinks, providing treatment to wounded soldiers, etc.
 - Khadija Bint Khuwaylid:
 - Prophet Muhammad's wife. A successful Quraishi businesswoman and wealth owner. Her financial support was pivotal to the early Islamic period.
 - Aisha Bint Abu Bakr:
 - Prophet Muhammad's wife. A scholar and teacher. She played a vital role in preserving Islamic teachings. She was involved in the early political affairs of Islam, especially after Prophet Muhammad's demise.

- Muslim women political leaders (inspo)
 - Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan—First Woman Muslim Prime Minister of the modern world.
 - Begum Khalida Zia and Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh—The most influential political leaders of Bangladesh in modern times. Leaders of two opposing political factions of the country.
 - FM Pandor of South Africa—Foreign Minister of South Africa while South Africa proceeded the Palestinian Genocide Case at the ICJ against Israel.

- Women leaders of the world (inspo)
 - South Asia
 - Sri Lanka: PM Bandaranaike, PM/Pres Kumaratunga, PM Amarasuriya.
 - Bangladesh: PM Begum Zia, PM Hasina
 - India: PM Gandhi, Pres Patil, Pres Murmu
 - Pakistan: PM Bhutto
 - Nepal: Pres Bhandari
 - Only Maldives and Bhutan has not had a female head of state/govt in this region.

- But how far has women come in Maldives govt and politics? (inspo)
 - First President of the Senate (1953) was a woman. Princess Fatima Ibrahim Didi.

- First elected female MP, Moomina Haleem. She also was the first Minister of Maldives.
- First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Aneesa Ahmed [Aneesa was an appointed MP]
- Later, Eva Abdulla became the first Deputy Speaker of Parliament under the democratic constitution [Eva was an elected MP]
- First woman to run for higher office, Fathimath Nahid Shakir ran as a VP Candidate in 2008.
- First women justices in Supreme Court of Maldives appointed in 2019.
- Women have been included in [every cabinet since 1993](#). Mostly portfolios like education, health, social welfare.
- But elected women MPs drop with every term of Majlis.
- Why we need women leaders
 - It is important for balance and equity in society. Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to policymaking.
 - Representation and inclusion of women
 - Compassionate policymaking: more attuned to policies of healthcare, education, social welfare.
 - Diverse perspectives: fosters creativity in innovation in decisionmaking
 - Equity and opportunities: helps challenge societal norms and dismantle barriers to equality.

Activity – Guided Discussion on Women Political Leaders [15 minutes]

1. Groups are assigned a women political leader:

a) PM Indira Gandhi

b) President Chandrika Kumaratunga

c) PM Benazir Bhutto

d) PM Jacinda Ardern

2. Disregarding political viewpoints, groups research and develop case studies on their assigned personality based on the personality's

a) leadership

b) challenges faced / misogynistic criticism received

c) how they persisted in their politics

3. Each group presents their findings.