

VOTERS' CHOICE: ON MALDIVES PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

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The interim results of Sunday's presidential election in the Maldives have given the joint opposition candidate, [Ibrahim Mohamed Solih](#) a resounding victory in the direct contest with the incumbent, Abdulla Yameen. The final results will be published by the election commission by September 30 and the current government will, according to procedure, hand over charge on November 17. But it is immediately clear that [Maldivian voters](#) have ushered in change, with 58% of the voters choosing Mr. Solih. Regardless of political affiliation, Maldivians have much to celebrate with the successful completion of the election. To begin with, the turnout of 89.2% has disproved pre-election cynicism about the integrity of the electoral process. Early on, the opposition had suffered a setback when [former President Mohammed Nasheed](#), who was seen as the frontrunner, was disqualified from contesting because of a "terrorism conviction". Former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was behind bars on the charge of attempting a coup in February this year. Just ahead of the elections too, there had also been many misgivings over the conduct of the election commission, the courts and security forces, with these worries heightened when the headquarters of the main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party, to which Mr. Solih belongs, were raided. Counting procedures were changed at the last minute, which led to some confusion during Sunday's polling, and many foreign journalists, including from India, were denied visas. Fortunately, the outcome has belied the worst fears about the election, and after meeting with Mr. Solih, President Yameen conceded defeat and vowed to ensure a smooth transition.

For New Delhi, the results are especially heartening as they present a chance to reset ties with Male, which have been on a downward spiral for several years. This was perceived to be a result of Mr. Yameen's close understanding with China, to which the Maldives is now heavily indebted. Mr. Yameen responded to India's criticism of the emergency he declared this year by clamping down on visas to Indian job holders, hundreds of whom await some movement in the matter after the new government takes over. India can also now renew talks over the fate of Indian Coast Guard and Air Force personnel stationed in the Maldives, whose visas have been pending since June. India was quick to welcome the provisional results and to congratulate, among others, the Maldivian Democratic Party, and the Jumhooree Party — to which the Vice-President-elect Faisal Naseem belongs. Going forward, New Delhi must stay clear of partisan positioning on the internal politics of the Maldives. The larger agenda must be to partner the Maldives in its stability and development rather than engaging in a tug of war with China.

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