



PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE APRIL 4TH REFERENDUM  
AND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2026

MARCH 2026

## PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE APRIL 4TH REFERENDUM AND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS 2026

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines public sentiment surrounding the April 4, 2026, Maldivian referendum proposing concurrent Presidential and People's Majlis elections. Utilizing a mixed-mode sample (N=388) captured via digital networks and random digit dialing (RDD), the research identifies a significant 60% disapproval rate for the constitutional amendment. Furthermore 78% of respondents now prioritizing autonomous, independent political alignment over familial socialization. Despite government narratives framing the referendum through "Fiscal Logic" (administrative cost-savings), 78% of the electorate rejected these savings as a valid justification for altering the constitutional framework, prioritizing "Institutional Protectionism" and the separation of powers instead. The data further reveals that while social media has become the primary conduit for youth engagement, a "firehose of falsehood" and information saturation have contributed to a high proportion of uninformed and confused undecided voters (43% nationally), signaling a strategic withholding of support and a baseline of political cynicism. Ultimately, the results may suggest that the modern Maldivian voter is on a journey transitioning from a Socialization Model to a Rational Choice Model, viewing constitutional integrity as an indivisible public good rather than a transactional administrative ledger.

## SUPPORT FOR REFERENDUM PROPOSING CONCURRENT PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

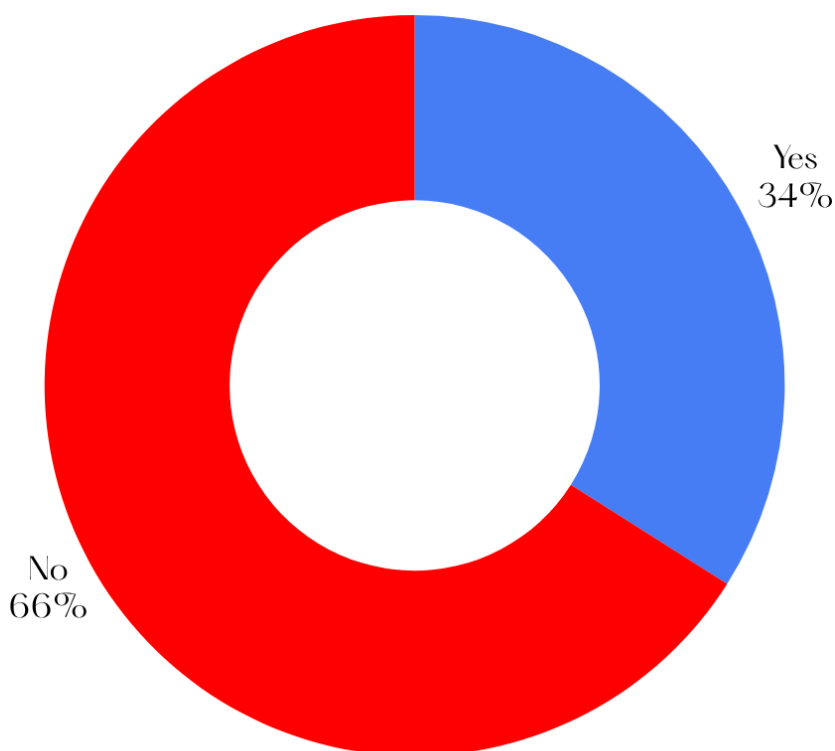


Fig. 1 Public support for April 4<sup>th</sup> Referendum for the Presidential and People's Majlis elections to be held concurrently and for a change to the term of the People's Majlis

More than 60% of the Maldivian public surveyed 'do not support' the referendum proposed by the incumbent government, of holding the Presidential and People's Majlis elections concurrently and changing the term of the People's Majlis. The referendum is set to take place on Saturday, 4th April 2026, alongside the 2026 Local Council Elections.

The Maldives Centre for Policy Research (MCPR) asked the Maldivian public to share their views on the proposal. Youth voters, in particular, showed high levels of disapproval. This reflects generational differences in attitudes and engagement which may stem from concerns in regard to concentration of power, potential undermining of

checks and balances and perceptions that reforms as such could reduce democratic accountability.

Many participants reported that they felt insufficiently informed about the proposed referendum and questioned the credibility of the information they had received. Voter knowledge and trust are critical factors influencing engagement and support and when individuals view information as inadequate or inaccurate, they are more inclined to withdraw support or outright reject the changes (Norris, 2011)

**SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES ACROSS THE MALDIVES**

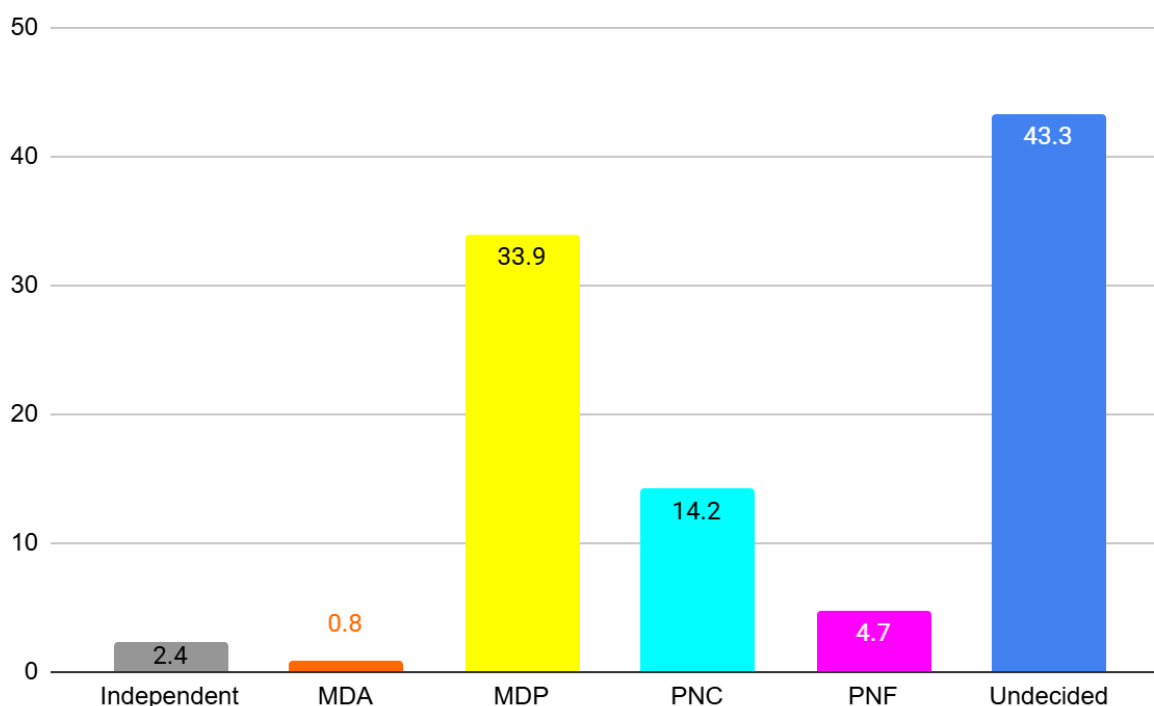


Fig 2. Support for political parties/candidates across the Maldives

Across the Maldives, a significantly high 43% of participants polled were still undecided about the Local Council Election, even with the election just days away. This may indicate voters are unconvinced by, or have not been reached by, political parties and candidates, or it could reflect low motivation or insufficient information to make informed decisions. If young people, in particular, do not receive encouragement to vote or guidance on issues and candidates, their likelihood of participating decreases.

Among those who expressed support, Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) support was at 33% of participants, while the People’s National Congress (PNC) received 14%, the People’s National Front (PNF) 4.7%, the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 0.8%, and independent candidates 2.4%.

SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN MALÉ CITY

Which political party do you support in local council?

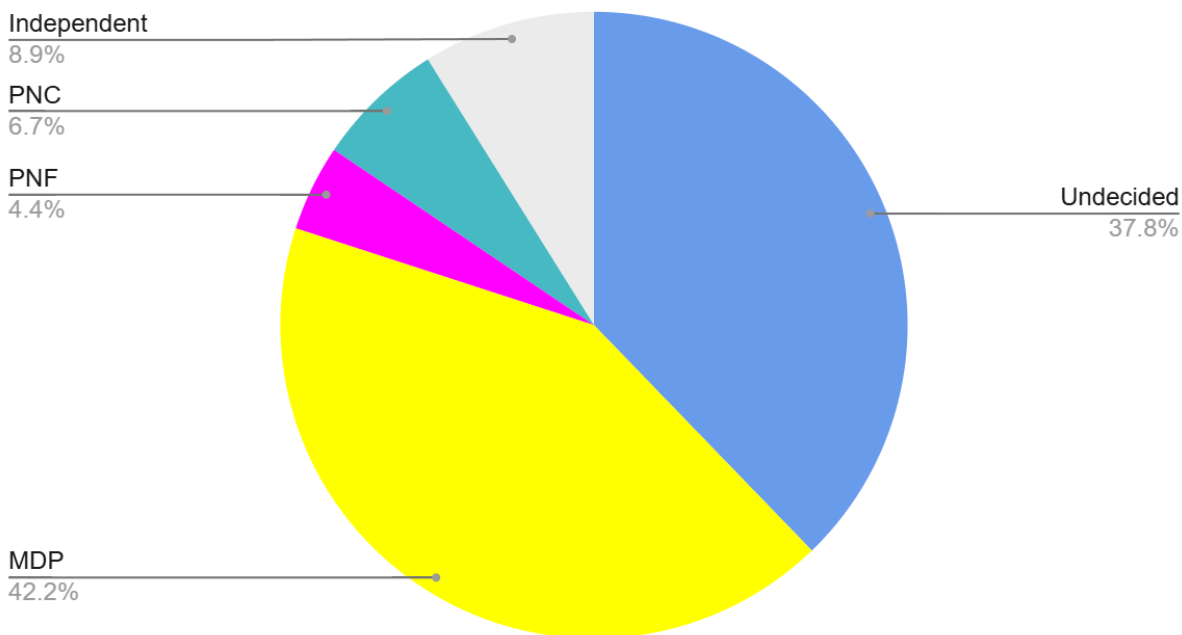


Fig 3. Support for political parties/candidates in Malé City constituency

42% of participants polled eligible for voting in Malé City constituency shared they prefer to vote for MDP.

7 percent of voters polled declared their support for People’s National Congress (PNC). This value might signal voter apprehension about sharing support as noted above.

8.9% of voters polled supported Independent candidates.

4.4%of voters polled supported PNF

However a significant number of voters reported they are undecided, amounting to 38% of poll participants eligible for voting in Malé City constituency. This number may signal a number of issues including how voters have not been effectively canvassed by the campaigns, dissatisfaction with political party performance and/or concerns about declaring support even in anonymous polls according to our analysis of the responses.

The high proportion of undecided voters in response to the question potentially points to deeper dynamics which may seep beyond indecision. Increased levels of non-commitment are commonly associated with voter apathy and dissatisfaction, particularly in situations when political choices are limited or unresponsive to the public needs (Dalton, 2004). The 'undecided' category itself may function as a means of political expression. Rather than neutrality, it may indicate a deliberate withholding of support as an implied criticism of candidates, parties or the broader political landscape. This corresponds with research that views non-commitment as an indicator of dissatisfaction (Hirshman, 1970). This apathy is weaponized through a "firehose of falsehood" (Paul & Matthews, 2016), transforming public exhaustion into a state-led utility. If, as Applebaum (2024) argues in *Autocracy, Inc.*, modern regimes have abandoned the requirement for active ideological fervor in favor of a baseline cynicism, then the perception of "unknowable truth" becomes the primary goal of the illiberal actor. The "undecided" voter, far from being a neutral observer, is the byproduct of a system that prioritizes cognitive overwhelm over democratic clarity (Muller, 2016). Therefore, saturation with contradictory narratives serves a specific function: it sidelines the electorate by ensuring that the status quo remains the only path of least resistance amidst manufactured noise.

At the same time, the 'undecided' category may function as a strategic withholding of political preferences, driven by concerns in regard to confidentiality and the potential for social or political repercussions, otherwise known as preference falsification, a phenomenon coined by Kuran (1995), which reveals that individuals often conceal their genuine views when they perceive potential risks associated with disclosure.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Which political party/candidate do you support in the Women Development Committee elections?

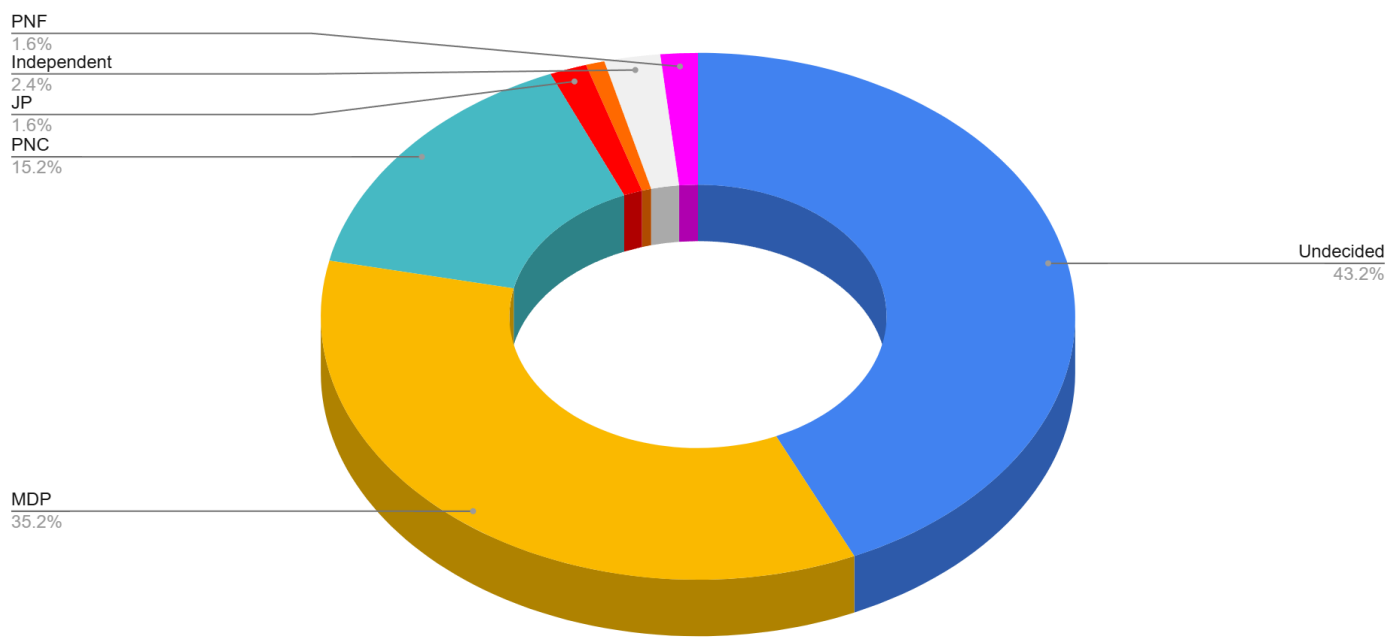


Fig 4. Support for political party/ candidates in women’s development committee across Maldives

The survey shows the largest segment of 43.2% voters remain undecided, suggesting that the outcome could shift.

MDP holds the strongest declared support at 35.2%.

PNC follows with 15.2%.

Other parties and candidates, including JP at 1.6%, PNF at 1.6%, and independent candidates at 2.4% hold limited share of the support.

The high number of undecided respondents may suggest a degree of ambivalence about the relevance of Women’s Development Committee (WDC) and this points to broader concerns about whether the current structure meaningfully incorporates

women's concerns or operates as a symbolic partisan body. There is a distinction between descriptive representation, characterized by the presence of women in political spheres, and substantive representation which ensures that women may influence policy results. When participatory institutions such as the WDCs are viewed as biased or performative, public confidence and involvement often tend to diminish (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). In this instance, the respondents' uncertainty may mean that WDC does not translate women's representation into a measurable impact, thereby implying the need for more credible and integrated forms of representation.

Furthermore, the ambiguity may be a reflection of the limited information about the candidates and the election or voters may be waiting to see the campaign developments prior to a committed decision. The outcome could be influenced by how candidates interact and engage with the voters during the remaining period.

## PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER

Participants by gender

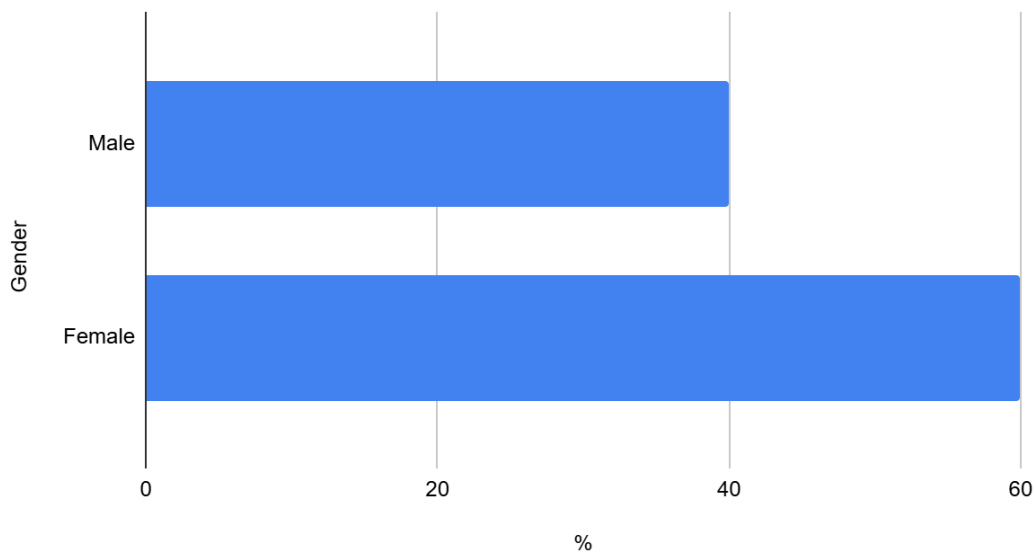


Fig 5. Participants by gender

The majority of respondents to the poll were women with 60% of participants. Men made up 40% of respondents. The data was weighted as detailed in methodology.

This imbalance is not unexpected, as women are generally more actively engaged in community-level and grassroots initiatives.

Existing research suggests that women tend to show higher levels of participation in local governance and advocacy for structural and social change, particularly on issues that directly affect households and communities (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). In contrast, men are typically shown to be less engaged in such localized participatory processes and in some contexts, more inclined towards maintaining existing institutional arrangements rather than pushing for reform (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

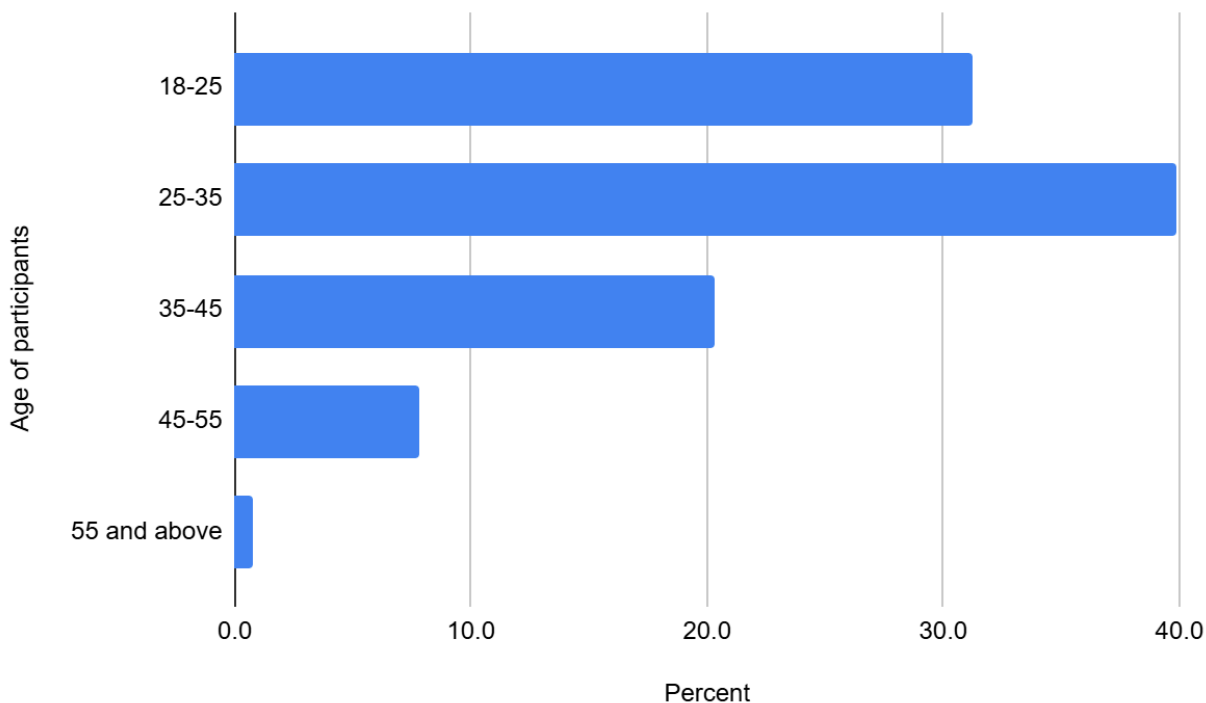
This gendered pattern of participation may help explain and understand both the higher response rate among women and the stronger interest in elections.

The 388 participant sample was captured via digital or academic networks a scholarly bubble rather than a randomized national door-to-door census, which may lead to the 20-point gender gap (60% female vs. 40% male) reflects a Participation Premium tied

to educational attainment rather than a national demographic split (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The data may not represent a general electorate but specifically captures an Attentive Public (Prior, 2007) where women have emerged as the primary, engaged demographic. The survey's Independent Alignment (78%) and Institutional Protectionism are weighted by a female cohort that has bypassed traditional political gatekeeping via higher education (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006).

Women in transitional or maturing democracies increasingly view institutional integrity as a safeguard for social progress (Waylen, 2007), their higher participation rate (60%) signals a greater Affective Stake in the constitutional outcomes being polled (Karp & Banducci, 2008). The rejection of "saving money on elections" (78% "No") is likely driven by a female-led consensus that prioritizes long-term structural safety over the ephemeral fiscal gains of administrative savings (Ansell & Samuels, 2014).

### AGE GROUPS



## ALIGNMENT POLITICAL PREFERENCES

Do you generally align with your own political preferences or those of your family/parents?

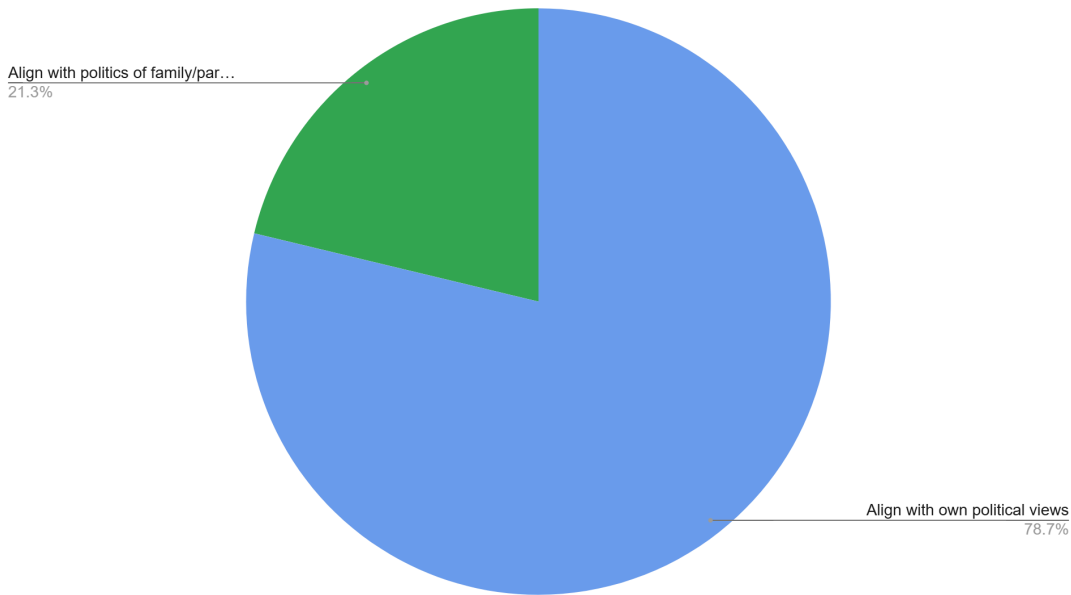


Fig 6. Political alignment preferences

The majority of participants polled shared they align with their own independent political views with 78% of respondents sharing this view.

A minority 21% percent of participants reported aligning their political preferences with their family or parents views. This points towards a strong sense of individual political choice among the participants although family views remain relevant for the noticeable minority which suggest that while personal political identity is quite dominant, traditional influences have not disappeared entirely. The traditional 73% intergenerational congruence rate (Jennings & Niemi, 1968), the historical benchmark for partisan inheritance (Campbell et al., 1960), effectively collapses when measured against this 78% independence figure. This data charts a linear departure from familial socialization toward a socialization deficit now filled by autonomous decision making (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009). The finding that only 21% of participants align with parental views confirms that high information environments (Prior, 2007) and expanded exposure to voting have superseded familial cues. Ultimately, the transition from a

Socialization Model to a Rational Choice Model (Fiorina, 1981) is complete; the modern voter has emerged as an unanchored, independent actor in a volatile electoral market (Dalton, 1984).

VIEWS ON SAVINGS JUSTIFICATION AND PARTICIPANT PRIORITIES FOR GOVT SPENDING

Is "saving money on election costs" (approx. MVR 80-120 million) a valid reason to change the Constitution?

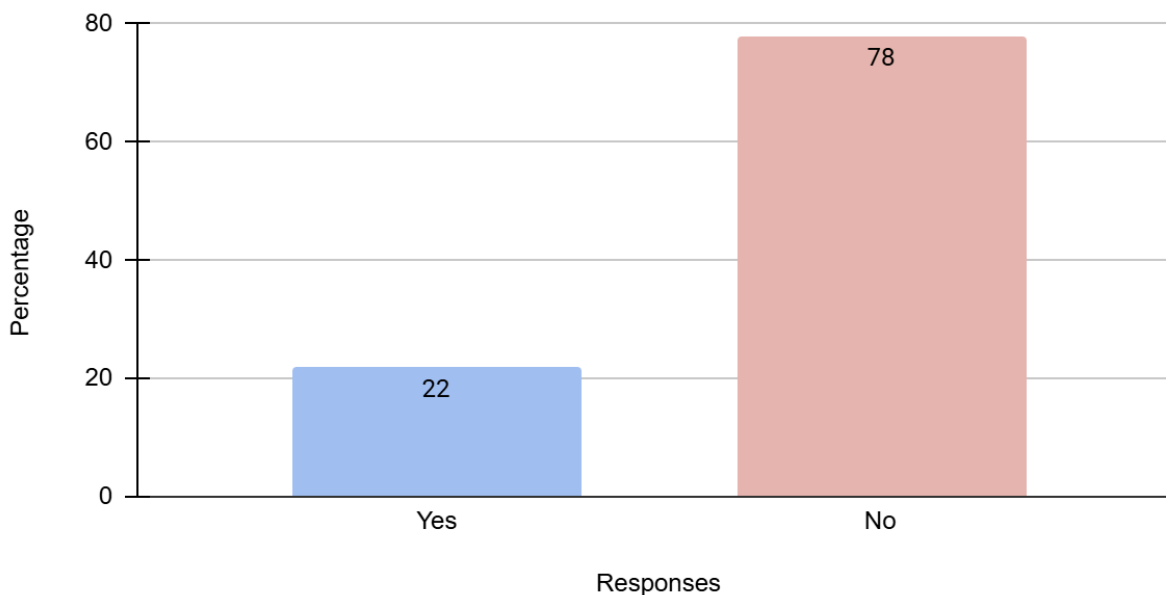


Fig 7. Views on savings justification

When asked about the justification for combining the elections noting it may help save taxpayers funding, 78 percent participants reported this was not a valid reason to make changes to the constitution. 22 percent of participants polled shared they believed that saving money on elections is a valid reason.

It can be inferred from the data that the electorate views the constitution as more than an administrative ledger; it is a structural foundation shielded from transactional logic (March & Olsen, 1984). While the Brexit "£350 million" slogan successfully hacked the behavioral software of the UK voter using arbitrary numbers (Lupia, 1994), this 78% margin suggests that institutional structuralism operates on a different frequency currently. This can be also given that most people who did the survey are not government party affiliated (Hetherington, 1998).

If a voter is asked to trade constitutional integrity for administrative savings, they are being asked to treat a permanent deed like a temporary lease (Weingast, 1997). This 78% "No" confirms that constitutional primacy is an indivisible public good (Fearon, 1995), rendering fiscal values are not comprehended to effect as a peripheral metric. Under the Institutional Entrenchment framework (Pierson, 2000), the overhead of governance is seen as a mere maintenance cost, whereas constitutional volatility is viewed as an existential risk (Powell, 2006). This data suggests that the electorate has signaled a clear capacity to distinguish between the ephemeral price of a ballot and the enduring cost of structural instability (North, 1990)

### If the government saves these funds, where specifically do you want that money to be spent?

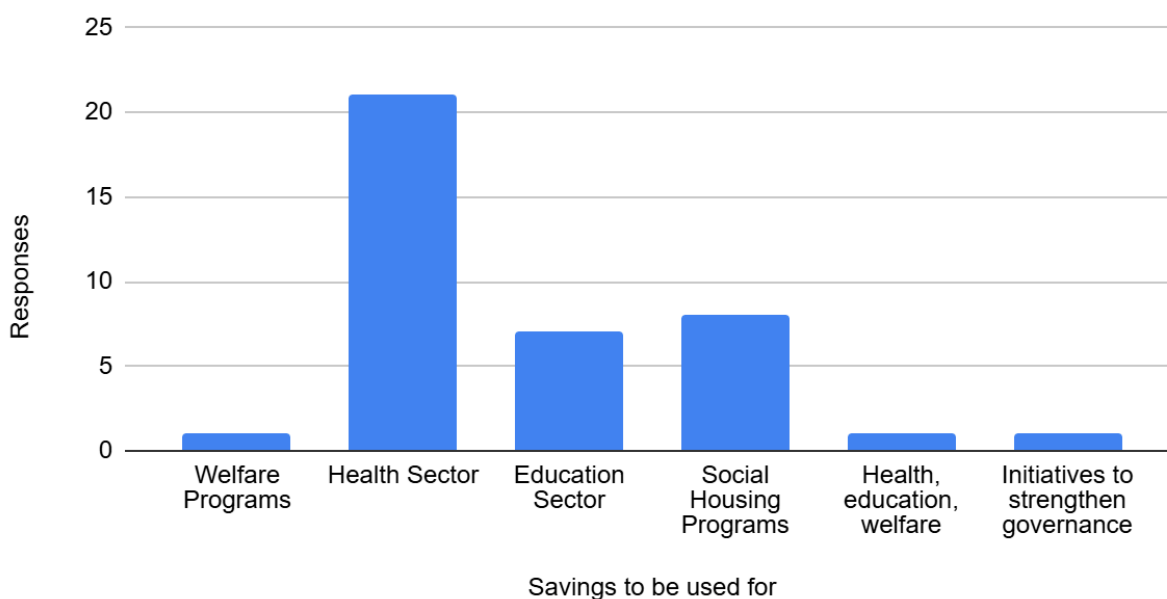


Fig 8. Views on participant priorities for government spending

The voter views the hypothetical 80-120 million as a fungible part of the national budget, which can act as a specific, isolated pot of money. This suggests that they are not engaging in Mental Accounting (Quattrone & Tversky, 1988), the cognitive tendency to categorize funds based on their source or intended use. Moreover, the desire to spend this saved money on health reveals a logic gap: the voter rejects the utility of the constitutional change while simultaneously claiming the utility of using this arbitrary money for social gains (Druckman, 2001). We must consider that it may not just be the lack of fiscal logic. The specific mention of "Healthcare" might trigger an

emotional, high-affect response that overrides utility thinking applied to the earlier question (Brader, 2005). The 80-120 million functions as a Behavioral Anchor (Lupia, 1994), mirroring the efficacy of the Brexit £350 million/NHS heuristic. The electorate's rationalism is effectively bound to emotion (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015), they are immune to fiscal logic when it threatens institutional structures, yet vulnerable to it when it is framed as a direct social gain. This may also suggest the importance of focusing policy changes on the healthcare sector.

**EXPOSURE TO CAMPAIGN MEDIUMS**

Where have you encountered advertisements or campaign materials about this referendum?

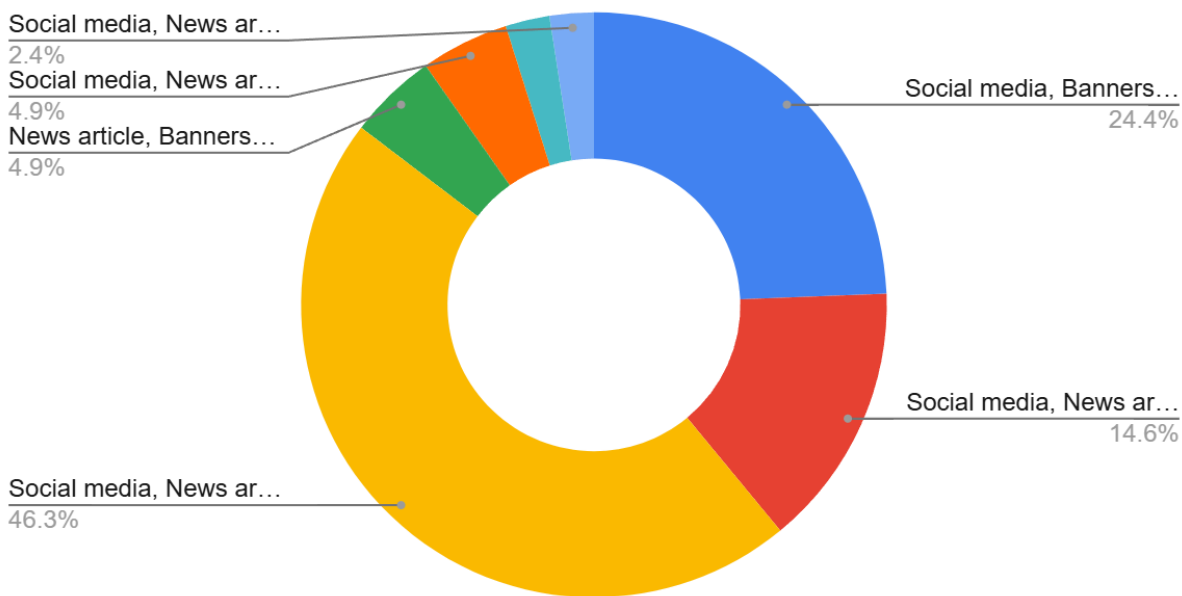


Fig 9. Exposure to campaign mediums

Participants reported that a mix of different mediums increased reach to voters that includes Social media, News article, Banners or Posters.

Social media, however, emerged as the most commonly reported channel, particularly among young voters. This reflects the way younger audiences engage with interactive and expressive content online (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), allowing parties and candidates to communicate directly (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2007), share

information creatively, and reach youth more effectively than traditional methods (Prior, 2007). While traditional mediums still contribute to overall visibility, social media appears to be the primary channel through which young voters encounter campaign materials (Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014), highlighting its central role in engaging this demographic (Boulianne, 2015).

### TRUST IN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT AROUND THIS REFERENDUM

Do you feel that holding this referendum on the same day as Local Council elections makes the voting process simpler or...

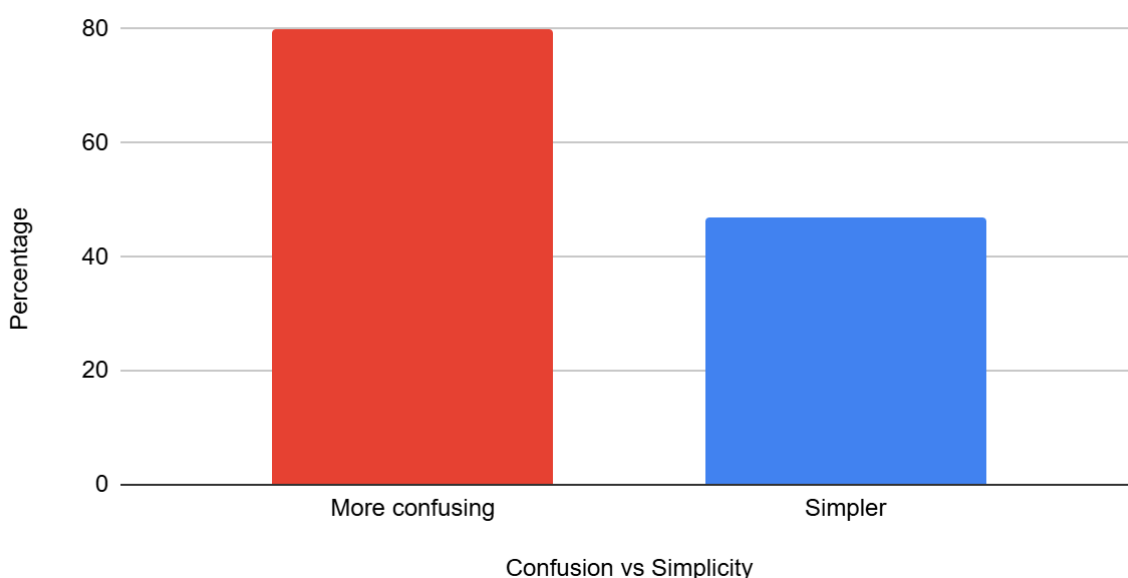


Fig 10. Voter views on referendum being held on same day as LCE

The survey findings indicate a pronounced lack of trust in the information available regarding the referendum. Although social media was the primary medium through which respondents accessed information, many participants informed feeling inadequately informed. This pattern suggests that both the duration of the information dissemination and the perceived impartiality of the content were insufficient to foster understanding. The widespread skepticism, as indicated by the respondents’ distrust of what they encountered, underscores the importance of credible sources and appropriately timed communication in public information campaigns (Norris, 2011). These results show that even highly accessible channels such as social media, may be ineffective in promoting meaningful engagement without transparent and trustworthy messaging.

Do you feel there has been enough time spent explaining the details of the referendum?

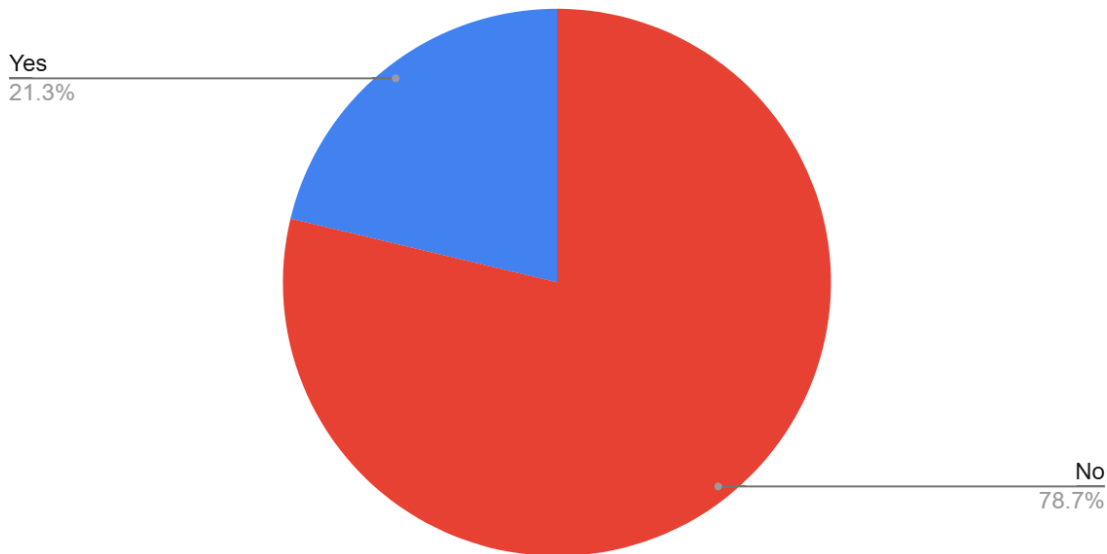


Fig 11. View on time spent on voter education

How much do you trust the information you have seen or heard about the referendum?

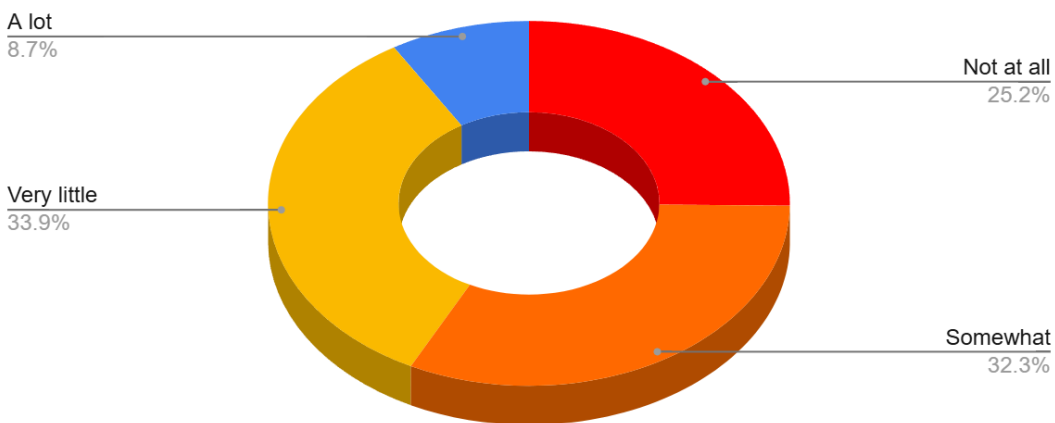


Fig 12. Trust in information environment

## METHODOLOGY

The Maldives Centre for Policy Research (MCPR) polled public support for the April 4th Referendum on the ratification of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which provides for the Presidential and People's Majlis elections to be held concurrently and for a change to the term of the People's Majlis, and the Local Council Elections 2026.

MCPR is an independent public policy organisation dedicated to research and scientific analysis for the objective of delivering actionable ideas that transform society.

As the state moves toward concurrent Presidential and Parliamentary cycles, we have assessed the public's valuation of two competing principles:

1. Administrative Efficiency: The optimization of state resources and fiscal "cost-saving" (The Fiscal Logic).
2. Institutional Checks: The maintenance of spreading out the votes as a safeguard for the separation of powers (The Legal Logic).
3. Structure: 9 questions (Binary "Yes/No" and Short Answer).
4. Objective: To map intergenerational political alignment and the impact of digital information environments on voter intent for the April 4th Referendum.
5. Privacy: All responses are anonymous. Data was synthesized for academic and policy analysis within the context of Maldivian governance.

The targeted population for the study was Maldivian voters aged 18 and above, as it would accommodate the voting eligible digitally literate population of the Maldives.

## SAMPLING

Multi-stage samples combining convenience sampling and probability sampling through random digit dialing strategy were used to increase reach and sample size. Data was collected through trained enumerators using online polling and randomised phone calls. We collected 388 samples. Polling was carried out from 26-31 March 2026.

This gave each individual in the accessible population an equal opportunity to be selected for the sample and random individuals selected through phone calls. Increasing the sample size to approach representative targets provide a more robust estimation of the prevalence of political affiliation and views of referendum. The statistically significant sample size for the Maldives population was estimated as 384 participants, using Cochran's formula for sample calculation at a 95% confidence

interval, with 5% margin of error, with a target to oversample to compensate for possible non-response.

## ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The Maldives stands at a critical constitutional juncture as the state moves toward the April 4, 2026, referendum to ratify the Eighth Amendment. This proposal aims to synchronize the Presidential and People's Majlis electoral cycles, a move the incumbent government justifies through the logic of administrative efficiency and fiscal optimization. However, initial data from the Maldives Centre for Policy Research (MCPR) suggests a profound disconnect between state-led "Fiscal Logic" and the "Legal Logic" held by a digitally literate, increasingly skeptical electorate.

The electorate's rejection of the "saving money on elections" justification (78% "No") confirms that the constitution is viewed as a structural foundation shielded from transactional logic (March & Olsen, 1984). In this context, constitutional primacy is treated as an indivisible public good (Fearon, 1995). To the Maldivian public, trading constitutional integrity for administrative savings may be equivalent to treating a permanent deed like a temporary lease (Weingast, 1997). This "Institutional Protectionism" suggests that while behavioral "hacking" via arbitrary fiscal numbers, reminiscent of the Brexit £350 million heuristic, can influence social spending preferences (e.g., the high-affect response to "Healthcare"), it fails to penetrate when the perceived "existential risk" of constitutional volatility is at stake (Powell, 2006).

The high proportion of undecided voters (43% nationally) points to a sophisticated demobilization within the modern information landscape. This apathy is not necessarily a sign of neutrality; rather, it is frequently weaponized through a "firehose of falsehood" intended to wear down public engagement (Paul & Matthews, 2016). As outlined in *Autocracy, Inc.*, modern illiberal strategies often rely on a baseline of political cynicism where the truth is perceived as "unknowable" (Applebaum, 2024). Consequently, the "undecided" category may function as a form of "preference falsification" (Kuran, 1995), where individuals withhold genuine support due to a perceived lack of democratic clarity or fear of social repercussions.

The methodology of this study reflects a "Participation Premium" tied to educational attainment. The 20-point gender gap (60% female vs. 40% male) suggests that the data captures an "Attentive Public" (Prior, 2007) where women have bypassed traditional political gatekeeping via higher education (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006). This cohort increasingly views institutional integrity as a safeguard for social progress

(Waylen, 2007), signaling a greater affective stake in the constitutional outcomes being polled.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

**Selection Bias:** The reliance on digital and academic networks may contribute to creating a "scholarly bubble," likely overrepresenting highly educated, high-information urban demographics. In order to address this limitation, probability sampling and random digit dialing was utilised to reduce bias as much as possible during data collection.

**Gender Imbalance:** The 60% female participation rate may have skewed findings toward "affective" social priorities, even if statistical weighting was applied to the final data.

**Digital Divide:** The methodology inherently excluded voters with low digital literacy or limited internet access and phone connectivity, potentially missing some perspectives of senior citizens or rural populations.

**Preference Falsification:** In a climate of "cognitive overwhelm," some respondents may have concealed their true political leanings or support for the incumbent out of perceived risk or cynicism.

**Temporal Volatility:** As a "snapshot" taken just days before the April 4 deadline, the data may not account for last-minute campaign shifts that could mobilize the 43% undecided block.

**Non-Response Bias:** The use of Random Digit Dialing (RDD) often favors individuals with a higher-than-average interest in political participation, potentially excluding the "apathetic" segment of the general electorate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish an independent commission to issue neutral Constitutional Impact Statements, targeting the 43% undecided block by lowering the cognitive burden created by the current "firehose of falsehood" information environment.

Transform the Women's Development Committees from symbolic bodies into substantive authority endowed institutions by granting them mandatory statutory consultation rights and direct oversight of specific local development budgets.

Address the "Healthcare Logic Gap" by decoupling nationwide medical infrastructure upgrades from the referendum outcome, ensuring social progress remains an independent priority rather than a transactional exchange.

Pilot concurrent elections via a localized bi-election model to demonstrate administrative efficiency in a controlled setting, thereby mitigating the disapproval rate and avoiding a national legitimacy crisis.

To enhance public awareness and engagement, social media should be strategically leveraged as a primary information channel, allowing sufficient time for comprehensive voter education. Although conventional methods such as banners contributed to informing the public, digital platforms have provided more comprehensive and prompt communication, which can improve trust and understanding. Guaranteeing that the content on these platforms is credible and transparent is more likely to be effective in fostering informed participation rather than relying solely on static, traditional material.

## ABOUT MCPR

MCPR is an independent public policy organisation supported by an international team of advisors dedicated to research and scientific analysis with the objective of delivering actionable ideas that transform society. Based out of Maldives and South Asia, our expert's engagement in public policy that began in 2012 has contributed to open dialogue, policy changes, and institutional transformation in the areas of Urban Reform, Livelihood, Education, Health, Governance, Law, and International Relations & Security. MCPR champions public policy research, public diplomacy, and advocacy for democratic values and societal change.

MCPR Research Team analyses public data sets including publications by the Maldives Bureau of Statistics such as the Census 2022 and Maldives Population Projections 2022-2062 for the sample size calculations, data analysis and data weighting.

See more at [www.maldivespolicyresearch.com](http://www.maldivespolicyresearch.com)

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## ANNEX A. MCPR Poll Questionnaire - Public Support for the April 4th Referendum and Local Council Elections 2026

### Participant Details:

#### 1. Gender:

Male

Female

#### Age:

Atoll and island of permanent registration?

If other atoll and island of permanent registration, please share below;

### Poll Questions

1. Do you support holding Presidential and Parliamentary elections on the same day?

Yes

No

2. Please share your reason briefly

3. Which political party/candidate do you support in the local council elections?

Adhaalath Party (AP)

Maldives Development Alliance (MDA)

Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)

People's National Congress (PNC)

People's National Front (PNF)

Jumhooree Party (JP)

Other:

3.1 Which political party/candidate do you support in the Women Development Committee elections?

Adhaalath Party (AP)  
Maldives Development Alliance (MDA)  
Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)  
People's National Congress (PNC)  
People's National Front (PNF)  
Jumhooree Party (JP)  
Other:

4. Do you generally align with your own political preferences or those of your family/parents?

I align with my own political preferences  
I align with the political preferences of my family/parents

5. Is "saving money on election costs" (approx. MVR 80-120 million) a valid reason to change the Constitution? \*

Yes  
No

6. If the government saves these funds, where specifically do you want that money to be spent?

Education Sector  
Health Sector  
Welfare Programs  
Social Housing Programs  
Other:

7. Where have you encountered advertisements or campaign materials about this referendum?

Social media  
News article  
Banners or Posters  
Other:

8. Do you feel that holding this referendum on the same day as Local Council elections makes the voting process simpler or more confusing?\*

Simpler

More confusing

9. Do you feel there has been enough time spent explaining the details of the referendum?\*

Yes

No

10. How much do you trust the information you have seen or heard about the referendum?

A lot

Somewhat

Very little

Not at all

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See more at [www.maldivespolicyresearch.com](http://www.maldivespolicyresearch.com)

END