

# **The Maldivian dilemma: Development or environment**

A study into the impact of the trend towards de-democratization  
on the politics of climate change adaptation

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the way that the degree of democracy has an impact on climate change adaptation. It takes the country of the Maldives as a case study to demonstrate how there has been a recent trend towards de-democratization since President Abdulla Yameen has been in office, and examines how this impacts the politics of climate change adaptation. The thesis combines theoretical and empirical data through an integrated approach, to uncover (i) what the major climate change threats in the Maldives are, (ii) what adaptation methods have been implemented to respond to those climate change threats, (iii) how the political system in the Maldives has undergone a gradual trend towards de-democratization over the last years, and (iv) in what ways de-democratization has impacted the politics of climate change adaptation. It concludes that President Yameen's strategies of recentralization, population consolidation, climate change minimization and censorship have led to a decrease in local environment authorities empowerment, 'islandness', local capacity and community resilience, and public consultation. These consequences have made local-level adaptation to climate change threats more difficult.

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## Table of contents

Introduction	1
Political context in the Maldives	2
Problem statement	6
Significance of study	7
Theoretical perspective	8
Chapter overview	9
1 Research Methodology	10
Step 1: Research design	10
Step 2: Data collection	12
Step 3: Data analysis	18
2 Climate change issues and adaptation in the Maldives	19
2.1 Main climate change threats	21
2.1.1 Seawater encroachment	21
2.1.2 Increase in storm surges, rainfall and flooding	23
2.1.3 Economic and infrastructural damages	24
2.1.4 Freshwater access	25
2.1.5 Loss of biodiversity	26
2.2 Adaptation methods to climate change threats	27
2.2.1 Hard adaptation methods	28
2.2.2 Soft adaptation methods	34

3	The trend towards de-democratization in the Maldives	38
3.1	What is de-democratization	40
3.2	The state of democracy in the Maldives	43
3.2.1	Electoral process	45
3.2.2	Political pluralism and participation	46
3.2.3	Functioning of the government	48
3.2.4	Freedom of expression and belief	49
3.2.5	Associational and organizational rights	51
3.2.6	Rule of law	53
3.2.7	Personal autonomy and individual rights	54
4	Impact of de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation	55
4.1	Decentralization versus recentralization	57
4.2	Population dispersion versus population consolidation	58
4.3	Climate change activism versus climate change minimization	60
4.4	Freedom of expression versus censorship	63
	Conclusion	66
	The answers to the sub-questions	66
	The answer to the research puzzle	68
	Implications of the research outcome	68
	Limitations of research	69
	Suggestions for further research	70
	Bibliography	72

## **Introduction**

With my suitcase packed and plane tickets printed I was ready to start my fieldwork in the Maldives. Only two months before departure I started looking into the Maldives as a case for my research into climate change adaptation. I had read that the island state has an average height of only 1.5 meter above sea and was expected to disappear to a large extent by the end of this century. I immediately became interested in how this situation would affect the islanders who are living in a country that would cease to exist in a matter of decades. After two months of preliminary research I decided to study the contention concerning the debate on climate change adaptation by examining the claim-making of government-affiliated institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Little did I know that during my visa application I became part of a contention transcending the climate change debate, which prevented me from being able to enter the country.

Despite the fact that I submitted all correct documents for a business visa application, the Immigration office of the Maldives refused to provide me with a visa. The reason for this was that I had been invited by a small research institute called the Island Livelihood institute, located on the island of Kudafari. According to the Immigration office, on this particular island there is a lot of opposition against the current government, which the Immigration office considered a valid reason to potentially start vetting the climate institute. After a lot of back-and-forth contact with the Immigration office, which wanted me to obtain a non-existing permit letter from the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and even after involvement of the Dutch Consulate, I still was not approved for a business visa and by this time the Island Livelihood Institute was starting to back out. Within a matter of two weeks, I was suddenly unable to conduct my research in the Maldives and I could not understand why. At this point in time I was not even examining the political unrest in the country and I thought that the topic of climate change adaptation would not be considered very controversial. I was wrong. As I adapted my research to be able to conduct it from the Netherlands I found out that climate change is actually a political issue in the Maldives and that my presence as a foreign researcher in the country may have been perceived as threatening, because I could start looking into the politically-motivated involvement in climate change adaptation.



## **Political context in the Maldives**

I wanted to understand why I was not allowed entry into the Maldives and why climate change adaptation was apparently considered a political issue in the Maldives, and therefore I had to learn more about Maldivian politics. The following section provides the reader with an overview of political events in the last decade. This background information is vital in order to later understand the politics surrounding climate change adaptation, because the dynamic shifts in governance reflect the ineffectiveness of climate change policies.

From 1978 until 2008, the country was ruled by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the longest serving dictator in Asia. According to Mohamed and King, Gayoom was known for showcasing highly liberal policies on international platforms while ruling with a heavy hand at home (2017: 224). Robinson describes Gayoom as a paternalistic leader who made sure that he was the final authority on all things Islamic (Robinson 2016). During Gayoom's Presidency, tourism started to flourish, but in order to preserve the Islamic identity of the Maldives and to promote the Maldives as a luxury resort destination, Gayoom installed strict rules about the separation of local islands and resort islands. Un-Islamic things like alcohol, bacon and bikini's should not be promoted on local islands, but by designating local islands as inhabited and resort islands uninhabited (even though local staff may live and work there), such un-Islamic things could still be allowed (Robinson 2015: 109). Gayoom was the first President to address Maldives' issues with climate change at an international stage, pleading for financial assistance, although at a local level he allowed little involvement from institutions and citizens (Mohamed and King 2017: 224).

Mohamed Nasheed, a Maldivian-native journalist educated in England, was not in favor with President Gayoom, because of his accusations of corruption and brutality on Gayoom's government. During his activist years, Nasheed was repeatedly arrested, jailed sixteen times, for months held in solitary confinement and even tortured (Aitkenhead 2012). Eventually, Nasheed fled into exile to England, where he established the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) with other activists in 2001. Gayoom's administration, intolerant of any criticism, nervously observed the professionalization of the MDP (Robinson 2015: 59). Following international criticism in 2003 on a killed prisoner, Gayoom was forced to introduce reforms leading to a movement towards democratization of the political system in the Maldives, and eventually to a new constitution in 2008 that would allow for multi-party democracy and separation of executive, legislative and judiciary powers (Robinson 2015: 62, Mohamed and King 2017: 219).

Although elected as part of a broad coalition, the MDP won the first multi-party elections in 2008. Stunned by his defeat but in international spotlight, Gayoom stepped down in one of South Asia's rare bloodless transfers of power (Robinson 2015: 66). The MDP, however, failed to win the parliamentary elections a year later, according to Robinson because of the opposition's "cross-country vote-buying extravaganza" (2015: 71). Although democracy may have arrived, Gayoom's party had thirty years of experience with the system of patronage in Maldivian society and they were very generous, whilst the MDP had less cash and trusted on the population's democratic idealism. This gave Gayoom a comfortable majority in parliament, which ensured that his party was able to systematically block all attempts at reform and control the country's 'independent' institutions, only to then blame Nasheed for not fulfilling his election promises (Robinson 2015: 72).

When Nasheed became president, state assets were low while expenditure was expected to increase dramatically with the new democratic institutions to fund. Nasheed decided to increase state revenue by introducing a 3.5 per cent Tourism Goods and Services Tax, revealing the true scale of the industry at US\$2.5 – 3 billion, which was four times the size than estimated (Robinson 2015: 86). In addition to that, President Nasheed had always been a strong advocator for international cooperation on climate change issues. During his presidency there was generally more openness to discuss environmental issues and there was a higher degree of cooperation between the government and non-governmental organizations. Other ambitious reforms of Nasheed included a health and pension scheme and decentralizing government tasks to seven provinces. However, Nasheed's administration overlooked the reform of the judiciary, embedded with corruption and still full of Gayoom-loyal handpicked judges (Robinson 2016). Once Nasheed made an attempt at reforming the judiciary system, it would eventually lead to his (forced) resignation.

Nasheed arrested and detained a judge, who was complicit in protecting Gayoom from investigation for corruption and human right abuses during his rule, and was accused of having links to organized crime (Robinson 2015: 8). As true as these accusations might be, by detaining the judge, Nasheed disregarded the Constitutional separation of powers and the detention led to massive protests of Gayoom's party supporters. Although the protests that followed the detention of the judge may seem like the cause of Nasheed's fall, there was a separate underlying motivation. For years on end, Gayoom's party had tried to denounce President Nasheed by calling him un-Islamic and the MDP a Christian-influenced party. Islamic values are highly significant in

Maldivian society and thus this message resonated with many Maldivians. According to Robinson, xenophobic Islamic nationalism was the last attempt of the old regime to get back into power (2015: 5). Eighteen months after Nasheed's resignation it was revealed that Nasheed's opposition carefully prepared a plan to oust him out of office. A document was signed by most opposition parties that planned out how a 'Defend Islam-rally' would lead to civil disobedience and how the Supreme Court would determine that Nasheed would be incapable of continuing his Presidency, where after his vice-President Mohammed Waheed would be sworn in (Robinson 2015: 217). Even though real events turned out a bit different, the document demonstrates the calculative efforts of the opposition to overthrow Nasheed's government, using religion as a tool.

On 7 February 2012, after military forces stormed the Presidential residence, Mohamed Nasheed resigned from his Presidential post, voluntarily according to opposition parties, under gunpoint according to Nasheed. In a recording later obtained by an Australian journalist, Nasheed can be heard pleading for his family to be protected, just before he would announce his resignation<sup>1</sup> (Robinson 2015: 13). Initially, international media copied the opposition's message, claiming that President Nasheed had lost control over a spontaneous, chaotic situation which he had chosen to resolve by resigning (Robinson 2015: 18). Part of the reason for that is that the just sworn-in vice-President Waheed was considered an adequate replacement, as he was a calm and softly spoken man, whereas Nasheed had developed a reputation for being brash and quick to show frustration (Robinson 2015: 208). In addition to that, Waheed was Stanford-educated, the first Maldivian to receive a PhD and had worked for UNICEF, and was thus considered a force for stability, despite the controversial way he came into power (Robinson 2015: 207).

However, the growing quantity of footage of violence following the events on 7 February 2012 in combination with rumors that the coup was planned led to questions in the international community that eventually started to call for early elections (Robinson 2015: 227-8). The elections were eventually held late November 2013, though messily, since the first voting round was annulled by the Supreme Court for unclear reasons and new voting rounds were postponed three times (Robinson 2015: 278-285). President Waheed's party lost the election with 5.13 per cent of the popular vote, which is the lowest percentage of an incumbent President party in any election, in any country ever (Robinson 2015: 260). Nasheed's MDP gained 46.93 per cent of the votes, and

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<sup>1</sup> The inside story of Australian Special Broadcasting Service on the coup in the Maldives, called "Mutiny in the Maldives" can be accessed via [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akxK-jS9\\_is](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akxK-jS9_is), last accessed 26 July 2017

Gayoom's half-brother Abdulla Yameen's Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM) took 29.72 per cent. At that time few seriously credited Yameen with the results, because he could not have achieved it without Gayoom's endorsement (Robinson 2015: 285). Although the results of the first voting round demonstrated that the MDP was very close to the fifty per cent plus mark that would gain them the victory, they lost in the second voting round with 48.61 per cent against PPM's 51.39 per cent. Robinson insinuates that bribery and vote-buying were present, but Transparency Maldives declared the elections as credible, transparent and well-ministered (2015: 289-90). According to Robinson, a low voter turnout and apathy saw the PPM also gain the majority in the parliamentary elections a few months later. Robinson states that with that "The Maldives was back to business as usual" (2015: 296).

Although President Yameen was thus initially regarded a puppet of his half-brother Gayoom, 2016 saw him ousting Gayoom out of the PPM after an internal conflict. Robinson finds it predictable that a regime like Yameen's has grown increasingly paranoid (2015: 296). He claims that autocratic leaders have a tendency to shed former allies in an environment where loyalty is only rented or bought, and once political opponents are removed the witch hunt turns inwards (Robinson 2016). In his few years in office, President Yameen has succeeded in jailing or forcing into exile the entirety of the opposition's leadership, as well as two of his vice-Presidents. In February 2015, Nasheed was sentenced with terrorism charges for ordering the abduction of the judge to thirteen years in prison in a trial that, according to Robinson, was farcical even by Maldivian judicial standards (2015: 297). The same was recognized by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, that stated that there are "systemic problems in the Maldives involving the arrest of political opposition leaders, the lack of independence of the judiciary and prosecutors, and procedural defects in providing a fair trial" (2015: 18). Since then, Nasheed has received asylum in Great Britain, where he was for medical treatment (Aneez and Sirilal 2016).

Since a few months, Nasheed has aligned with some of his former rivals, including former President Gayoom, and other opposition parties in the 'United Opposition'. This alignment has the common agenda to restore democracy in the Maldives, ensure free and fair elections and protecting Maldivians' constitutional rights (Maldivian Democratic Party 2017). Although it can be considered quite remarkable how these opposition parties were able to align, especially considering the many times that President Nasheed was jailed by President Gayoom, the United Opposition is preparing for the Presidential elections in 2018.

## **Problem statement**

Taking into consideration the political unrest in the Maldives over the last decade, I realized I had to incorporate this aspect in my research puzzle that revolved around climate change adaptation. For a country that has for decades been experiencing impacts of climate change, like rising sea levels, I was wondering what impact a democratic system, or lack thereof, has on the politics concerning climate change adaptation. As mentioned, Nasheed was the first democratically-elected President in the Maldives and was known as an advocator for the need for international cooperation to respond to climate change threats. During his time in office, there was an unprecedented freedom of expression and civil participation. Although current President Yameen was also democratically elected, Freedom House ratings on political rights and civil liberties and those of Reporters without Borders on Press Freedom had decreased over the last four years. That is why the research question of this thesis is as follows. *What is the impact of the trend towards de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives since 2013?* In other words, this thesis examines the impact of the movement away from democracy since President Yameen's inauguration on the adaptation efforts to climate change impacts.

The analytical frame of this thesis is thus de-democratization, the complication is the politics of climate change adaptation, and the case study is the Maldives. De-democratization is the theoretical perspective of this puzzle, because I argue that this process has been taking place in the Maldives since President Yameen is in office. Politics of climate change adaptation is the complication in this thesis, because, as will become apparent through the thesis, present and past governments have used climate change adaptation as a political tool. This puzzle asks if the de-democratizing nature of the Maldivian political landscape has had an impact on this. I have chosen the Maldives as a case study, because of the country's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has predicted that with current sea level rise eighty per cent of the Maldives will be inundated by the end of this century (Moosa et al. 2007: 20). 2013 is taken as the starting point of analysis, since this marks the year that the current government of President Yameen was installed.

Since the time frame of this research puzzle are the years following 2013, the focus will be on the political developments concerning climate change adaptation since the inauguration of President Yameen. However, I will often draw comparisons with the way of governing of President Nasheed's administration since his government was the first democratically-elected in the

Maldives and a frontrunner in the debate on climate change issues. This comparison allows to demonstrate the distinction between the way the two administrations govern the country, particularly with regards to their policies on climate change adaptation. I do acknowledge that President Waheed was head of state in the period February 2012-November 2013, but I have chosen to exclude his governing term from my analysis, because of the short-lived nature of his government and the little policies he made in terms of climate change adaptation (Mohamed and King 2017: 221).

A limitation of the chosen approach is the underlying assumption that the Maldives is de-democratizing, whilst the scope of the thesis is too limited to perform a complete analysis of the state of democracy in the Maldives. In addition to that, potentially, the politics of climate change adaptation are impacted by factors other than de-democratization, which are not captured by this thesis. That is why I do not attempt to capture a causal relationship, but a correlation instead.

### **Significance of study**

This puzzle is significant to ask for a number of reasons. Firstly, adaptation to climate change hazards is expected to become a more important policy for an increasing number of countries, as consequences of climate change will occur more frequently with more devastating outcomes in the future. In this way, the results of this study are relevant to a wider audience, because sea level rise and other climate change-induced impacts are occurring on a global scale with increasing consequences. Projected future climate change is likely to necessitate system transformations as some economic activities may no longer be viable in particular places within this century (Nelson et al. 2007: 396). Secondly, there is a gap in academic literature to the study of de-democratization in relation to climate change. This research attempts to fill this gap by examining how a movement away from democracy impacts the politics of climate change adaptation. This can be useful for future research in the field of climate change studies and democracy, because there are more countries that are confronted with climate change issues which are also on the scale between authoritarian and democratic regimes. Finally, this study is significant, because its case study is the Maldives, a country for which it is predicted that it will be among the first to be confronted with climate change consequences on a national scale. In this way, this research may be an exemplary case to other countries that have to adapt to climate change impacts in the future.

## **Theoretical perspective**

The theoretical frame of the research puzzle is de-democratization. This thesis uses the work of Charles Tilly and the indicators of Freedom House on political rights and civil liberties to demonstrate that there is a trend towards de-democratization in the Maldives since the current President Yameen came in office in 2013. Tilly defines de-democratization as a movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected, and less mutually binding political relations. This means that in a de-democratizing state, the majority of the citizens are excluded from public politics, certain ethnicities enjoy very unequal rights as compared to others, citizens are not protected against state's arbitrary actions, and citizens have no direct access to state benefits. Tilly argues that a de-democratizing state can be recognized when there is a withdrawal of trust networks in public politics, and an increase in both categorical inequality and in the autonomy of coercive power.

According to Tilly, ratings such as those of Freedom House are very useful for concretizing arguments changes of political regimes. This thesis takes a similar approach and investigates the state of democracy in the Maldives using the seven categories of Freedom House that measure political rights and civil liberties. These categories are (i) electoral process, (ii) political pluralism and participation, and (iii) functioning of the government, (iv) freedom of expression and belief, (v) associational and organizational rights, (vi) rule of law, and (vii) personal autonomy and individual rights.

De-democratization is chosen as a frame for this thesis, because of the sharp contrast in the way of governing of President Yameen's government, as compared to former President Nasheed's administration. Since President Yameen has been in office, there has been an observable decline in freedom of expression and press, a suppression of opposition voices and a questionable impartiality of the judiciary and independent institutions. The thesis seeks to understand the ways in which this trend impacts the politics of climate change adaptation.

## **Chapter overview**

In order to explain how I designed this research and what choices I have made in terms of research strategy, data collection and data analysis, the first chapter elaborates on the research methodology of this thesis. The research methodology consists out of three steps; (1) Research design, (2) Data collection, and (3) Data analysis. The first chapter explains the research methodology by going through these three steps and clarifying what choices were made and for what reasons.

The second chapter discusses the climate change threats in the Maldives and what methods have been employed in order to adapt to these impacts, as well as the relation between climate change and tourism and local population attitudes towards climate change. The first section examines in detail the main climate change threats and identifies the high risk impacts as (i) sea water encroachment, (ii) increase in storm surges, rainfall and flooding, (iii) economic and infrastructural damages, (iv) freshwater access, and (v) loss of biodiversity. The second section clarifies what hard and soft adaptation methods have been employed by various governments to respond to climate change threats.

The third chapter identifies a trend towards de-democratization since the government of President Yasheed has been installed in 2013. The first section breaks down the analytic frame de-democratization using the work of Charles Tilly and the second section explains the use of the Freedom House indicators on political rights and civil liberties and uses these to concretize the claims on the state of democracy in the Maldives.

The fourth chapter demonstrates the different environmental strategies of President Nasheed and Yameen, who have employed democratic environmentalism and authoritarian environmentalism respectively. Through the categories of (i) decentralization versus recentralization, (ii) population dispersion versus population consolidation, (iii) climate change activism versus climate change minimization, and (iv) freedom of expression versus censorship, the thesis analyzes how de-democratization impacts the politics of climate change adaptation.

The conclusion shortly summarizes the main findings of this thesis and answers the research puzzle by explaining what the impact of the trend towards de-democratization is on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives since 2013. After that, the implications of the research outcome are discussed, the limitations of this research are mentioned and some suggestions for further research are made.



## 1. Research methodology

The following section elaborates on the research methodology of this thesis. The method of this research consists out of three steps. In step 1, I discuss the research design. Step 2 revolved around how I collected my data and I will explain the way that the participants were selected and what data collection techniques were used. Step 3 is where I explain how I analyzed the data that I gathered in the previous step.

### *Step 1: Research design*

I have chosen to research this topic through a *qualitative* research strategy, because I think it is more suitable to the puzzle than a quantitative approach. In order to determine if de-democratization plays a significant role in the politics of climate change adaptation, I had to conduct in-depth primary and secondary data analysis of government publications and policies, as well as current academic knowledge on the topic and interview testimonies. A quantitative research strategy would not have allowed me to answer the puzzle, because it only would have led me to gather large amounts of data to explain a certain phenomenon, rather than understanding a phenomenon by examining all aspects. Within the variety of qualitative research design approaches, I have chosen to examine a case study, that is, the country of the Maldives.

Furthermore, I had to determine the ontological and epistemological stance of my research. The *ontological* nature of this research is constructivism, meaning that I am studying a phenomenon that is socially constructed. According to constructivism, human beings try to make sense of their reality by comparing their experiences to their ideas. This means that according to the constructivist approach reality is subjective and the researcher constructs the knowledge it examines. The constructivist method is contrary to the positivist method, that is generally more related to quantitative research and is based on the idea that knowledge exists outside of the researcher's realm (Dudovskiy 2016a). This research has a constructivist approach, because I believe that my position as a researcher influences the data that I gain and how I analyze it. Of course I have attempted to remain as objective as possible, but it cannot be avoided that some degree of bias remains.

*Epistemologically*, the nature of this research is interpretivist, because this refers to the idea that the way to make sense of reality is through social constructions. The interpretivist approach is based on data collection techniques, such as interviews, observations and secondary data analysis. A disadvantage of interpretivist research is that it leaves room for bias on behalf of the researcher, because of the subjective nature of the approach. This means that primary data can often not be generalized, since it is impacted by personal viewpoints and values. However, on the advantageous side, the sense of depth or interpretivist data is associated with a high level of validity (Dudovskiy 2016b). I have chosen for an interpretivist approach, because I think it is most suitable for the qualitative approach of a case study. Empirical data is central to an interpretivist approach, and this is reflected in the way that the interview data is presented in this research.

I have chosen to present my thesis by integrating theoretical knowledge with empirical data, rather than discussing the two separately. I prefer the *integrated approach*, because I think it is a more pleasant way to read the thesis. By instantly presenting the empirical evidence after I have discussed the theoretical premises and vice versa, the reader is able to immediately get a clear understanding on the sub-topic. By analyzing primary and secondary data of a sub-topic within one chapter, I am able to provide the reader with conclusions after the end of each chapter, as opposed to only providing them in the conclusion at the end of the thesis. If I would have structured the thesis in the traditional way by first discussing all theory and only later present the empirical data, the reader would have perhaps had to return to the literature review in order to understand the empirical evidence. All in all, I think that an integrated approach of thesis writing is most suitable for this research topic, as first the sub-topic of climate change adaptation can be discussed as a whole, before indulging into the sub-topic de-democratization in the Maldives, and finally into answering the research question in the final chapter on the impact of the trend of de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives.

### *Step 2: Data collection*

In the second step, I collected the data I needed to answer the research puzzle. I selected both primary and secondary data, the latter through academic literature, government publications and online news articles, and first through semi-structured in-depth interviews. I selected this data to be able to answer the following sub-questions to the research puzzle ‘What is the impact of the trend towards de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives since 2013?’.

1. What are the main climate change threats in the Maldives?
2. What adaptation methods have been implemented to respond to climate change threats?
3. What does a trend towards de-democratization entail?
4. How has the current government of President Yameen been moving towards de-democratization as compared to the previous administration of President Nasheed?
5. How has the trend towards de-democratization led to a different environmental strategy of President Yameen’s government, as compared to President Nasheed’s administration?
6. What impacts does President Yameen’s authoritarian environmental strategy have on climate change adaptation?

In answering sub-questions one and two, I made use of document analysis of government publications in the Maldives on climate change threats and adaptation policy frameworks. One significant government publication is the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA), that was published in 2007. This documents enlists the most immediate impacts of climate change and how the Maldivian government plans to adapt to them. I also used information from academic publications on climate change threats in the Maldives to add to the official information and give insights to research that has been conducted in the Maldives regarding this topic. In addition to that, I leaned heavily on the interview data, as over half of the respondents have worked for

organizations that were involved with climate change adaptation, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These respondents were often able to provide examples of islands with significant climate change-induced issues and could elaborate on the effectiveness of particular adaptation methods, as they were often personally involved in implementing those. The analysis of this data and answers to sub-questions one and two can be found in the second chapter of this thesis.

Sub-questions three and four aim to find answers about the analytical frame of the research puzzle and how it has manifested itself in Maldivian politics in the recent years. I used academic publications in answering the third sub-question in order to unravel what de-democratization is and how it can be recognized. For this I leaned heavily on Charles Tilly's deconstruction of de-democratization, as well as the Freedom House aggregates of political rights and civil liberties. Maldives' only independent news source *The Maldives Independent* was also useful in terms of gaining insights into the everyday effects of living in de-democratizing country. The former editor of that news website J.J. Robinson has since his resignation written a book called *The Maldives: Islamic Republic, Tropical Autocracy* that describes life in the Maldives on the verge of a coup d'état and explains what has led up to that political event. Robinson's observations also proved very useful in the discussion on de-democratization in the Maldives. The majority of the respondents were also able to recognize signs of de-democratization, such as a decline on press freedom and restricted freedom of expression, and I have used the interview data to build on the argument that since the current administration was installed in 2013, there has been a trend towards de-democratization. The third chapter of this thesis answers sub-questions three and four.

The fifth and sixth sub-questions seek to understand how the trend towards de-democratization has led to President Yameen taking a different environmental strategy than his predecessor and how this new strategy has impacted climate change adaptation. To answer these sub-questions, I made use of a UNICEF report on decentralization efforts of President Nasheed and Mohamed and King's recent publication on the legacy of authoritative environmentalism and path-dependent historic institutionalism in the Maldives. In addition to that, I used more academic publications, as well as government statements and empirical data from the interviews. The answers on sub-questions five and six are presented in chapter four of this thesis.

Selection of participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
Ibrahim Mohamed	Employee at the Environment Protection Agency PhD student (climate change adaptation) at James Cook University, Australia	2 May 2017
Ali Rilwan	Co-director of Maldivian environmental NGO Bluepeace	3 May 2017
Shumais Thawfeeq	PhD student (energy, economics and policy) in Korea Former employee at Environmental Protection Agency	9 May 2017
Thoriq Hamid and Shaziya Ali	Employees at CSO Transparency Maldives	17 May 2017
Muaz Adnan	Employee at the Environmental Protection Agency Former employee at United Nations Development Program and Global Environmental Fund	19 May 2017
Mohamed Ilham	Established Leads Institute of Management and Policy Studies in the Maldives Former employee Transparency Maldives	22 May 2017
Farooq Hassan	Former Minister of State for Home Affairs (2009-2011) Former National Consultant and Project Manager, Tourism Adaptation Project	23 May 2017
Mohamed Aslam	Director La Mer (organization that does environmental impact assessments) Former Minister of Housing and Environment (2008-2012)	30 May 2017

Figure 1-1: List of participants for skype interviews

I selected the interview participants for this thesis by making use of purposive sampling through the snowball effect. I contacted those individuals or organizations that I had previously already arranged an interview with for when I would have been in the Maldives. Not all of them returned to me, but representatives of both CSO Transparency Maldives, Thoriq Hamid and Shaziya Ali, and environmental NGO Bluepeace, Ali Rilwan, were willing to do a skype interview with me. I retrieved most of the other participants by use of the snowball effect. I contacted Ibrahim Mohamed myself through Facebook after I had read an article of him online on climate change adaptation in the Maldives. Through him I got in touch with Shumais Thawfeeq, who put me in contact with Muaz Adnan, Mohamed Ilham and Farooq Hassan. I got the contact details from former Minister of Housing and Environment Mohamed Aslam from Ali Rilwan.

Purposive sampling was the appropriate sampling method for this thesis, because it allowed me to target individuals who had experience within the field of climate change and/or had insights into the state of democracy in the Maldives. I have attempted to select participants from both the political sphere and from civil society organizations (CSOs). With political sphere I refer to those institutions that are working for the government, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is affiliated to the Ministry of Environment and Energy. Three participants have or are working at the EPA and two other participants are former Ministers in President Nasheed's government. Of those two former Minister, one has become very critical towards Nasheed during his Presidency, supposedly for his inexperience and stubbornness. The other former Minister is currently involved in the efforts of the United Opposition to participate in the 2018 Presidential elections. In addition to that, I have spoken with representatives of two CSOs, that is Transparency Maldives and Bluepeace. The first is heavily involved in the debate on political issues, but has a climate governance program. The latter is the first environmental NGO that was established in the Maldives and has been advocating for climate change adaptation since its establishment in 1989.

I asked all my participants at the end of our conversations if I was allowed to use their full name when I would quote them. All of them with exception of one agreed, the latter stating that he would not mind being quoted on the information he provided on climate change adaption, but he does not want to be quoted on his remarks about the political situation in the Maldives. In other words, all statements made by the interviewees in this thesis have been approved for publishing.

### Semi-structured in-depth interviews

I created a topic guide in order to semi-structure the in-depth interviews that I held. This allowed me to determine a number of topics that I was able to discuss with all my participants, while still remaining flexible about discussing other subjects. The fact that I had a number of topics set that guided me through the interview allowed me later to compare the responses from the interviewees. At the same time, the flexible character of a topic guide has allowed the interviewees to provide me with information about subtopics that I had not included. In general, the great advantage of conducting the interviews was that respondents were able to provide me with examples that I could not have found in government reports or academic publications, and they could mention certain aspects that I was still unaware of and could look into after the interview.

I was forced to conduct skype interviews instead of face-to-face interviews, since I was not able to travel into the Maldives. In advance I thought this would prove to be disadvantageous, because it would perhaps not allow me to have a natural-flowing conversation. In addition to that, I thought that, the respondents may wish to have an efficient conversation of maximum and hour in a skype interview, whilst there may be more (valuable) ‘chitchat’ time when we would have met face-to-face. Though the latter may have been the case, I found that it was quite easy to have a natural-flowing conversation on skype, despite the occasional technological difficulty. I think what contributed to this was that I had a topic guide instead of a set of questions, but also because my respondents were all very willing to help me. In fact, in some way I think it may have even proven more advantageous that I spoke to the respondents over Skype, because some of them have disclosed quite delicate information that they may not have had if I would have met them in the capital Male. Because the capital is so overcrowded, chances are high I would have met a number of my respondents in public places like cafés and because of my foreign appearance the pair of us would quite stand out. Although I cannot say it with full certainty, I suspect that some of my respondents would have been less willing to disclose the information that they did if there was a chance of eavesdropping, or other more serious consequences.

Below the topic guide for the skype interviews of this thesis is presented.

Topic	Subtopics
Introduction of the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction of the researcher</li> <li>- Explaining why I could not enter the Maldives and how this has impacted the research</li> <li>- Topics to be discussed</li> </ul>
Introduction of the participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Current and past work experience</li> </ul>
Climate change threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the imminent climate change threats in the Maldives?</li> <li>- How can those threats be recognized?</li> </ul>
Climate change adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What adaptation measures have different administrations implemented?</li> <li>- How effective were these adaptation measures?</li> <li>- What adaptation measure does the participant consider the most effective?</li> <li>- What is the relation between climate change adaptation and the tourism industry?</li> </ul>
Political situation in the Maldives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How has the political situation changed since the new administration took place on government?</li> <li>- How does the respondent interpret the efforts of the opposition to align in the United Opposition?</li> <li>- How does the respondent look at the future, especially considering the upcoming 2018 Presidential elections?</li> </ul>
Democracy and climate change adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can the respondent recognize a relation between democracy and climate change adaptation?</li> <li>- What aspects of de-democratization can the respondent recognize since the last four years?</li> </ul>
Ending the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agreements on the use of information</li> <li>- Asking for a follow-up interview</li> <li>- Asking for further contacts</li> </ul>

Figure 2-1: Topic guide



### *Step 3: Data analysis*

After gathering the data, I could start the analysis, that would enable me to answer the sub-questions, and finally the research puzzle. The first step I had to take before I could start the analysis was to transcribe the interviews at length. Despite time constraints I decided to transcribe the total length of all records, because I thought this would allow me to make a more encompassing analysis. I am glad that I took the time to do this, even if it meant more study hours per week, because it allowed for a more exhaustive coding process and the opportunity to return to the transcripts when needed. After having transcribed the interviews, I could start coding by close reading all transcripts and categorizing the data into codes. Naturally the set-up of the topic guide has had an influence in the categories that I obtained. The main codes were:

- Climate change threats and adaptation measures in the Maldives
- Stance of Yameen administration on climate change issues
- Stance of Nasheed administration on climate change issues
- Climate change and tourism
- Characteristics Yameen administration
- Characteristics Nasheed administration
- Signs of de-democratization
- Climate change adaptation as political tool
- United Opposition and the 2018 Presidential elections
- Local population involvement in environmental issues

From these codes, I organized the data into themes, which would later correspond with the chapter outline. I derives the following three themes from the coding process: (1) Climate change threats and adaptation measures, (2) De-democratization and Maldivian Politics, and (3) Climate change as political tool. I organized the academic literature that I had gathered and the (government) reports and other publications under these themes as well. In this way, the empirical data has been very influential in determining the set-up of this thesis.

## **2. Climate change issues and adaptation in the Maldives**

The Maldives is a country consisting out of 25 atolls, including 1192 island out of which about 200 are inhabited and 100 are used as resort islands. It has a population of about 400.000 with roughly one third of the inhabitants living on the capital island Male. Apart from Male there are only three other islands with a population bigger than 5.000, and there are 74 islands with a population of less than 500. The Maldivian population is culturally homogeneous, although originating from a varied ethnic mixture of Sinhalese, Arabs, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, and speaks the same language Dhivehi (Moosa et al. 2007: 9-10). Income levels have increased over the last few decades, leading to a promotion from the UN definition in 2011 of a least developed country to a developing country status, which had only ever happened to two countries before (Robinson 2015: 73). However, income disparity has increased, especially when comparing the more affluent capital Male to the atolls (Moosa et al. 2007: 10). Tourism is the main economic activity and contributes to 41.5 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014, and is expected to grow by 3.1 per cent in 2025 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2015: 3). The fishing sector is the largest contributor to export and counts for about seven per cent of the Maldivian GDP (Moosa et al. 2007: 10).

The Maldives is the lowest lying country in the world, with eighty per cent of the land area less than one meter above sea, according the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) (Moosa et al. 2007: 20). That is why the Maldives is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, in particular to rising sea levels, increasing sea temperatures and flooding. The country is not built on sand, but on coral reefs, the earth's most endangered ecosystem, as rising sea temperatures and levels both kill coral reef systems (Carrington 2013). The first mention to the threat of sea level rise was in the Male Declaration on Global Warming and Sea Level Rise in 1989, adopted at the Small States conference. In this declaration it was determined that there should be a coordinated program of action among the small states and it calls upon "all state of the world family of nations" to take measures to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses and to protect those small states most vulnerable to sea level rise (Republic of Maldives 1991: 3-4).

In 2007, the Maldivian government published the NAPA, in which the most urgent and immediate adaptation needs to climate change threats in the Maldives are outlined. Sea level rise and extreme weather events were considered as most threatening to the Maldivian nation (Moosa

et al. 2007: 47). The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has predicted a worst case scenario of eighty-eight centimeter sea level rise by 2100. Since the large majority of the Maldivian islands thus have an elevation of less than one meter, this prediction would lead to encroachment of large parts of the Maldives (Moosa et al. 2007: 20). According to the NAPA, this would have tremendous impacts on the country's livelihood possibilities, ecosystems and economic potential.

In addition to the climate change-induced threats, human intervention methods in the Maldives have also worsened the resilience against climate change. By introducing poorly designed infrastructure, like sea boulders and harbors, or removing coastal vegetation like sea grasses, climate change issues such as erosion have actually intensified. Human intervention methods offset the natural balance of ecosystems such as the coral reefs and thereby thus exacerbate the impacts caused by climate change (Shareef et al. 2015: 10). According to the NAPA, "Coral reefs have a critical coastal protection function, yet there have been a number of human stresses on the reef system such as coral mining, reef entrance blasting, dredging, solid waste disposal and sewage disposal that has affected the health, integrity and productivity of reefs" (Moosa et al. 2007: 22). In addition to that, the practice of land reclamation and enlargement has also increased the vulnerability of natural ecosystems and increased erosion issues. The importance of the tourism industry in the Maldives is an important factor for the increase of human intervention methods, as it has led to an increase in hard adaptation infrastructure and the removal of natural adaptation ecosystems.

This chapter first discusses the main climate change threats in the Maldives, including sea level rise and extreme weather events. The section after that expands on what adaptation methods have been implemented to protect the Maldivian islands from those threats. The third section elaborates on the relation between climate change adaptation and the tourism industry. Finally, the attitudes of the Maldivian local population on climate change adaptation is discussed.

## 2.1 Main climate change threats

Some of the specific climate change issues that the Maldives is dealing with are seawater encroachment, increased occurrence and intensity of storms and unpredictable rainfall, economic and infrastructural damages, freshwater access, and loss of biodiversity (Peinhardt 2014: 22). This section discusses these main climate change threats in the Maldives using academic literature, government publications and interview data.

### 2.1.1 Seawater encroachment

Khan et al. found that the Maldives is the most vulnerable country to sea level rise in South Asia, and are describing it as the flattest country on earth (2002: 133). They can confirm that the combination of rising sea levels and flat topography increases the risk flooding and erosion (Khan et al. 2002: 134). Since eighty per cent of the land mass is less than one meter above sea level, the IPCC predicts that large parts of the country will be submerged by the end of this century (Khan et al. 2002: 136). Karthikheyan agrees that there is a strong belief that the Maldives will be flooded over the next 50-100 years, leaving no trace of its existence (2010: 349).

Seawater encroachment has already started to show itself on the Maldives. The Maldives is the lowest lying country on earth and rising sea levels along with more frequent and intense storm surges will lead to severe coastal erosion. This will only quicken the encroachment process leading to the inundation of the Maldives (Leary 2008: 14). According to the NAPA, more than ninety-seven per cent of inhabited islands have reported beach erosion in 2004, of which sixty-four per cent were severe (Moosa et al. 2007: 21). A background paper on the national adaptation efforts to climate change provided by the Maldivian Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment states that unless expensive coastal protection measures are undertaken, the Maldives indeed face the threat of inundation (2009: 4). Since forty-two per cent of the population lives within 100 meter of shore, the sustainability of housing structures are at severe risk with projected sea level rise (Moosa et al. 2007: 20).

The issue of sea level rise is also considered threatening by the majority of the interview respondents.<sup>2</sup> One respondent who is the co-director of Maldivian environmental NGO Bluepeace

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<sup>2</sup> Skype interviews with Rilwan, Thawfeeq, Mohamed, Adnan, Hassan, May 2017

states that “we will be the first country to be submerged if the science is correct”.<sup>3</sup> Another respondent claims that sea level rise and the increase of erosion is the main adaptation issues in the Maldives and that erosion has become more frequent due to civilian action. Before human intervention methods such as poorly designed coastal infrastructure, removal of coastal vegetation, and land reclamation, erosion was only a seasonal occurrence in which the beach eroded from one section to another. This natural cycle is now disturbed, however, which has led to a decrease in land area for many islands.<sup>4</sup> A former employee of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) confirms this phenomenon and gives the example of an island called Ukulhas where he did measurements in 2013 to determine where the waste management center should be located.<sup>5</sup> The minimum distance from the coastline had to be twenty meters, so the waste center was built on this distance. Now only a few years later the waste center is only located one meter from coast, which means that nineteen meters of land has eroded in that short period of time. The reason for this is the enlargement of the harbor on Ukulhas which has resulted in changing the course of the waves and has increased erosion on the other side of the island. This can be observed in the picture below that the former EPA employee provided.



Figure 2-1: Three images of the island of Ukulhas, which shows the increase in beach erosion, due to harbor construction<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>4</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

<sup>5</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>6</sup> Images provided by Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

On the image of the island in 2016 it can be observed that the harbor on the right hand side of the Ukulhas has been enlarged. This has led to erosion issues on the lower left side of the island in 2016, as compared to the island in 2013. The respondent emphasizes that he thinks that human intervention is one of the major reasons for the loss of beach on the islands.<sup>7</sup> Constructing harbors and removing natural vegetation such as seagrasses worsen the erosion issue that rising sea levels already cause. Another interviewee agrees that there were no significant erosion problems before human intervention. He states that erosion problems occurred only after reclamation processes commenced and the government started building jetty's and harbors.<sup>8</sup>

### *2.1.2 Increase in storm surges, rainfall and flooding*

In addition to seawater encroachment there is also an increased occurrence and intensity of storms, rainfall and flooding in the Maldives. Because of its unique territorial geography, Maldivian islands are very small, the largest being little over six square kilometer (Moosa et al. 2007: 7). This means that the majority of the Maldivian population lives near shore and is thus often directly impacted by storm surges and flooding. As the Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment states: “The scarcity of land, the smallness of the islands, and their extreme low elevation all make retreat inland or to higher ground impossible” (2009: 4). One respondent confirms this when he says that the Maldives is a flat country with no mountains to climb on and there is a need for dry land on a rainy day. He stresses that the tsunami of 2004 “showed us how vulnerable we are”.<sup>9</sup> Due to its proximity to the equator, the Maldives is located out of the tropical cyclone zone, but there have been incidents in the past when cyclonic storms have passed over the Maldives and this remains probable for the future (Moosa et al. 2007: 17).

In terms of storm surges, at a medium prediction, waves up to 2.78 meter can occur which will inundate small to medium islands, and at high prediction waves up to 3.18 meter are expected, which can inundate even the largest of islands (Moosa et al. 2007: 16). In addition to that, between the years 2000-2006, more than 90 inhabited islands have been flooded at least once, which led to evacuating an estimated population of 1600 (Moosa et al. 2007: 20). A respondent remarks that due to climate change rain patterns have become very unpredictable, but if it rains it is very heavily.

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<sup>7</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>8</sup> Skype interview with Hassan, 23 May 2017

<sup>9</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

In addition to that, he explains how the rainfall and flood issue also impacts farming activities. There used to be a certain amount of sun and rain, but now there is so much flood and rainfall, and sometimes a complete abundance of rain, that crops are destroyed.<sup>10</sup> This observation is confirmed by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Water who states that rainfall and flood issues, as well as temperature changes and sea level rise will impact the agricultural sector in the Maldives critically, especially since it is already under stress because of due to poor soil quality and limited land availability (Moosa et al. 2007: 36).

### *2.1.3 Economic and infrastructural damages*

The homogeneous nature of the Maldivian economy makes the country very fragile to the impacts of climate change. Since the country's GDP is mainly comprised of incomes from the tourism industry and fisheries (Moosa et al. 2007: 10), the financial impact will be tremendous if such activities are disturbed. More than ninety per cent of all resort infrastructure and ninety-nine per cent of tourist accommodation are within 100 meter of coastline, which makes this most crucial economic product of the country highly vulnerable to sea level rise and storm conditions (Moosa et al. 2007: 23-4). As is mentioned in the NAPA; "In the Maldives one resort is one island and these small tropical tourist resorts are among the most vulnerable and least defensible in the world. The resort islands are vulnerable due to their smallness, low elevation and geographical dispersion" (Moosa et al. 2007: 26). These resorts are already experiencing the impacts of climate change through beach erosion and damages to coral reefs, while both beaches and coral reefs are important assets in the tourism industry (Moosa et al. 2007: 26-7). Because of the relative homogeneous outlook of the Maldivian economy, loss of land and tourism assets will create economic suffering and eventually loss of economic identity (Karthikheyen 2010: 350).

In addition to that, critical infrastructure like two international airports, lay within just fifty meter of shore, with parts of the Male International airport only fifteen meter from the wave break zone (Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment 2009: 5). The Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment claims that if the appropriate adaption measures are not taken, such infrastructures could be frequently inundated, thereby severely damaging the country's economy and threatening the safety of the people (2009: 5).

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<sup>10</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 may 2017

#### *2.1.4 Freshwater access*

Groundwater is a scarce resource in the Maldives and the freshwater aquifer is only one to 1.5 meter below surface and no more than a few meters thick (Moosa et al. 2007: 33). In her paper on island communities and climate change, Lazrus claims that shifts in climatic patterns will create weather instability and unpredictability, meaning that the timing and amount of rain will be an additional risk for freshwater access for island nations such as the Maldives (2012: 288). Freshwater aquifers face the risk of depletion if there are longer periods of absence of rainfall, and on top of that rising sea levels and flooding increases the risk of saltwater intrusion in aquifers (Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment 2009: 8). A study by the Climate Change department of the Ministry of Environment and Energy has furthermore demonstrate that uncontrolled human interference also impacts degraded groundwater quality. The uninhabited island Dhekanbaa has been used as a control site for impacts of human activities and it was found in 2013 that the groundwater salinity had increased, whereas the groundwater was not saline in the 2001 assessment. Since the first assessment, nearby residents have started to process sea cucumber, which involves high rates of water extraction increasing salinity. This example demonstrates that human intervention also accounts for groundwater vulnerability (Mohamed et al. 2016: 71).

Ninety per cent of households now use rainwater as the principal source of freshwater (Moosa et al. 2007: 33). This water is collected in storage tanks, but those facilities are very vulnerable to flooding and high wave incidences, as has been demonstrated by the effects of the 2004 tsunami (Moosa et al. 2007: 34). Desalinated sea water is an additional water source, but according to Sovacool's results it is "often used only at resorts, is very energy intensive, and prohibitively expensive" (2011: 739). One respondent agrees that the Maldives suffers from very unpredictable weather patterns, where there can be very heavy rain at times, whilst other times there is a need for freshwater supply because of the absence of rainfall. This means that the government has to supply the islands with water, which is very expensive since only few islands have water tanks. Even when island communities do have a water tank, this is harder to rely on because of climate change, since rain patterns are not as predictable as they used to be.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017



### *2.1.5 Loss of biodiversity*

Climate change impacts such as sea level rise and increasing temperatures will further affect biodiversity on the Maldivian islands. The coral reef system of the Maldives supports rich biodiversity, including over 1090 fish species, 180 stony coral species and over fifteen species of sharks (Moosa et al. 2007: 38). Coral systems are highly vulnerable to changes in temperature and it is predicted that reef growth may not be able to keep up with rising sea levels, which would reduce natural adaptation efforts of the coral reef system (Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment 2009: 10). Rising sea temperatures leads to algae to leave the coral polyp, causing the coral to bleach and eventually die. Besides losing its astatically appeal and tourist potential, degraded reefs are no longer able to protect islands from waves and tidal forces (Robinson 2015: 82). In their research on climate dangers in atolls countries, Barnett and Adger find that increasing water temperatures affect the coral reefs, fish species, eventually contributes to a loss of geophysical identity of the Maldivian state (2003: 325). The 1998 El Niño event had killed ninety-five per cent of the coral reefs in the Maldives and a second period of increased temperatures in 2010 killed of reefs that were just beginning to recover (Robinson 2015: 82).

Biodiversity is not only affected by climate change, but also by human interference of natural defense systems. One respondent who used to work at the EPA explains that many communities get rid of natural defense systems like seagrasses and mangroves, because these are considered as aesthetically less appealing for tourists. He adds that “as a result of this there is a lot of imbalance within the food chain and ecosystem”, because it affects some fish species and turtles who feed off the seagrasses and mangroves.<sup>12</sup> The co-director of Bluepeace agrees that coastal vegetation is not considered important nowadays and that existing hydrodynamics are upset, for instance by performing massive reclamation on the reefs.<sup>13</sup> Another interviewee gives the example of an island which has very diverse biodiversity, including mangrove areas, seagrasses, mango trees, sharks, turtles and it has a lack of beach erosion. Even though there is a list of protected islands in the Maldives that should be preserved because of their rich biodiversity, for unclear reasons this island is not included on that list. Recently it has been decided that the government will build an airport on this same island, which will naturally impact the island’s biodiversity immensely.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

<sup>13</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>14</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

## 2.2 Adaptation methods to climate change

The IPCC defines climate change adaptation as “the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate and its effects” (Mach et al. 2014: 118). However, Nelson et al. emphasize that climate change adaptation is not one-dimensional, as it includes activities, attitudes and decision that reflect existing social norms and processes (2007: 397). Adger and colleagues agree when they state that culture and politics interact in climate change adaptation and determine what information is legitimate and who has voice (2012: 114). This means that adaptation is concerned with different actors, actions and agency (Nelson et al. 2007: 398). In addition to that, Moser and Ekstrom point out that the IPCC definition of adaptation does not consider the context of non-climatic opportunities, like renovating a building, and it also assumes effectiveness of the outcome, whereas some adaptive actions may turn out to be maladaptive later (2010: 22026). For these reasons, this thesis adopts the generic, but inclusive definition of adaptation, as posed by Moser and Ekstrom (2010: 22026), which is as follows.

*“Adaptation involves changes in social-ecological systems in response to actual and expected impacts of climate change in the context of interacting nonclimatic changes. Adaptation strategies and actions can range from short-term coping to longer-term, deeper transformations, aim to meet more than climate change goals alone, and may or may not succeed in moderating harm or exploiting beneficial opportunities”.*

There are various measures in which adaptation to climate change can be implemented. These methods can be divided among hard and soft adaptation methods. The first refers to using hard-engineering tools, such as building sea walls and boulders, whilst the latter refers to ecosystem-based adaptation, such as protecting coral reefs and planting coastal vegetation. For instance, with a climate change issue like rising sea levels, the hard adaptation measure would be to construct seawalls, whereas the softer measure would focus on mangrove afforestation and beach nourishment (Sovacool 2011: 745). This chapter first discusses hard adaptation methods to climate change, including hard-engineering infrastructure, reclamation and relocation. The second section elaborates on soft climate change adaptation methods, such as the ecosystem-based approach.

### *2.2.1 Hard adaptation methods*

All governments in the Maldives have implemented hard adaptation methods to climate change. President Gayoom (1978-2008) emphasized on building harbors and relocating vulnerable communities to better protected islands or artificial islands. President Nasheed's (2008-2012) main policy was to reclaim lost land in order to enlarge islands and ensuring that local populations could remain on their home island by improving the nation's transport system. President Yameen (2013-present) continues Gayoom's policy line in terms of population consolidation and developing artificial islands to relocate Maldivian communities. In the following section, first hard-engineering tools to combat climate change impacts are discussed, where after both reclamation and relocation strategies are elaborated upon.

#### Hard-engineering infrastructure

Hard adaptation methods to climate change impacts include using hard-engineering tools, such as building sea walls, harbors, boulders and other coastal infrastructure. An employee at the EPA explains that the main adaptation strategy to climate change impacts during President Gayoom's administration was to build hard-engineer infrastructure, such as harbors and sea walls. The local island people were attracted to the infrastructure wall that the government was providing and getting a harbor was "the buzzing thing".<sup>15</sup> Back then, this was the prevention method for erosion and destroying reefs was considered an appropriate way of protecting the local population. A respondent who used to work for the Environment Protection Agency says that during President Gayoom's time, reefs were blasted in order to build the harbors. This is a very harming for the environment, because the explosives destroys the reefs and can kill all kind of micro-organisms. During President Gayoom's time it was also recognized how damaging this practice was to the environment and he stopped blasting the reefs. President Nasheed also did not blast the reefs in order to make new harbors, but just a few months ago there was a blasting again.<sup>16</sup> Supposedly the EPA approved the reef blasting after it came under pressure from the government, despite initially refusing using such damaging methods. An EPA official states that "the environment ministry

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<sup>15</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

<sup>16</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

made it clear that the approvals must be given. The agency had no choice in the matter” (Junayd 2016).

Often hard-engineer infrastructure has been implemented without proper assessment of what the impact of these measures would be on the island’s hydrodynamics. As Socavool found, poorly engineered or implemented protection measures have actually reduced the flow of nutrients to coral reefs and thereby weakened the natural protection system against storm swells and surges (2011: 740). The lack of proper modelling is also noticed by the Former Minister of State for Home Affairs. He claims that when a local island population notices erosion problems, the first thing they will do is ask the government for hard-engineer tools, such as building boulders, sea walls and harbors. He argues that the issue with these kind of interventions is that there is no proper modelling done in advance, that is, a study that examines the coastal dimensions and how an artificial structure in the sea will affect the wave flow around the island.<sup>17</sup> The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has surveyed the vulnerability of Maldivian islands to climate change in 2009 and found that hard-engineering tools have actually accelerated coastal erosion, because they decrease ecosystem resilience by destroying reef systems and coastal vegetation. This is also the experience of one respondent from when he used to work for the EPA. He explains that there are two ways that erosion develops, through the natural cycle and because of human activities. The first refers to the seasonal functioning of the wave flow that determines where the beach is and what parts are eroded. However, because of human intervention such as building harbors this natural cycle is disturbed, because such infrastructures change the course of the waves. When this happens erosion will actually increase and become an issue for that particular island.<sup>18</sup>

Since tourism comprises 41.5 per cent of the country’s GDP, it is very relevant to look at the relation between tourism and climate change adaptation. In assignment of the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Adaptation Project (TAP) examined climate change vulnerabilities impacts in the tourism sector and the industry’s adaptive capacity (2015). They found that tourism operators practice several adaptive measures to climate change impacts. The most common form of coastal protection are sea walls and most of the resort owners practice sustainable waste segregation and composting (Shareef et al. 2015: vii). Resorts have a vested interested in the natural beauty of their islands, but have contributed to ineffective adaptation methods. Even though beaches seasonally

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<sup>17</sup> Skype interview with Hassan, 23 May 2017

<sup>18</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

shift from one side of the island to the other, many resorts have tried to mitigate this by sandbagging and pumping sand, thereby changing the water flow and increasing erosion and flooding (Robinson 2015: 82).

The respondent who led the TAP comments on the unsustainable nature of the resort industry. He points out that tourism is a very trendy business and thus often resorts demolish and completely renovate their resort after ten years. For this reason many resort owners do not feel obliged to invest in ecosystem-based adaptation measures. According to the respondent a lack of convincing data on climate change impacts further stops the resort owners from building more low-risk adaptation structures. In addition to that, the respondent explains that because the Maldives is located in a relative safe zone and the tsunami of 2004 was not a climate change event, resort owners tend to not regard climate change as a serious issue. Although as part of the TAP the respondent ensured resort owners that their water bungalows were located in very high-risk areas, protecting these structure are not considered as prime concerns by the resort owners, because they do not consider climate change as that threatening.<sup>19</sup>

One respondent gives an example on how using hard-engineer tools can actually harm the tourism industry. His birth island Maafushi had many erosion problem and thus the local population called for building sea walls and a harbor. To build this harbor, large parts of the beach and coral reefs had to be destroyed and nowadays Maafushi only still has a small stretch of beach left. A few years ago, President Nasheed's administration has introduced local tourism and lifted the ban on local guesthouses. This was installed during the Gayoom administration when local and tourist islands were very strictly separated by the Gayoom administration as a means to protect the nation from "bikinis, bacon, alcohol and other religions" (Robinson 2015: 115). By 2013, there were 171 guest houses, almost the double number of resorts, and the introduction of local tourism was presented as inclusive development, benefiting local island communities directly (Robinson 2015: 114-5). For Maafushi the introduction of local tourism meant an additional way of generating income, but since they had chosen hard-engineer tools to combat erosion issues, the locals destroyed most of their valuable natural resources, like the beach and coral reefs, which they could have actually used for income.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Skype interview with Hassan, 23 May 2017

<sup>20</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

In addition to that, many communities demand hard infrastructure from the government, such as jetty's and harbors, because they consider having those as an indicator of development, and they can also be employed for local tourism purposes. This is claimed by various respondents<sup>21</sup>, who disclose that the current and past governments have often given in to those demands, because they want to gain support from those communities. Even though it is very expensive to build such infrastructure and it may contrast the environmental mindset that governments such as Nasheed's had, they will often still listen to the demands of the people.<sup>22</sup>

### Reclamation

In addition to hard-engineering tools like sea walls and boulders, another example of a hard adaptation measure is land reclamation. Reclamation is the process of creating new land from the ocean or river beds and in the Maldives is done by filling shallow lagoons and reefs with sand. This measure is implemented if (parts of) an island are significantly eroded and there is a need for this land to be reclaimed, also called land expansion or enlargement, or, in some cases, an entire new island is reclaimed. The latter measure is also known as creating an artificial island. Since erosion is such a widespread issue in the Maldives, even a few meters of reclaimed land is considered an asset, especially for those small islands that are hit hardest by coastal erosion problems. A former EPA employee says that for this reason often island communities want to enlarge the size of their island and pressure the government to perform reclamation methods in order to obtain more land. Nasheed's administration has actually undertaken many reclamation projects, which according to the respondent is a major reason why he got support. However, reclaiming land has very negative impacts on the islands' coral reefs, because filling the reefs with sand will damage them.<sup>23</sup> In the words of one of the respondents: "You do the reclamation and it destroys the ecosystem completely".<sup>24</sup> Another respondent claims that many of these reclamation projects are often done without a proper environmental impact assessment process.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> As mentioned in skype interviews with Thawfeeq, Adnan, Hamid and Ali, Mohamed May 2017

<sup>22</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>23</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>24</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

<sup>25</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

In some instances, island communities have performed land reclamation themselves by using environmental-harming methods. A respondent who used to work at the EPA provides an example of the island of Himmafushi, on which the local population has extended land by using waste. This particular island has a beach erosion issue, which was possibly worsened because of a harbor that was constructed there. Since land increase is an asset for the population, they started putting fences in a shallow lagoon and dumped garbage on it, to later put sand over the waste. In this way the local population is able to increase the surface of their island.



Figure 2-2 and 2-3: Reclamation of land on Himmafushi by using waste<sup>26</sup>

As can be seen in the images above all kinds of waste, including plastic, aluminum cans and glass is used to reclaim the lost land and gain more surface. Apart from the stank this reclamation method will also attract rats and mosquitos which can increase health problems. Furthermore, using these kind of materials as opposed to natural materials like wood and leaves also pollutes the water and reefs.<sup>27</sup> This example demonstrates the urgency of the issue of land loss in the Maldives and how local communities use environmental-harming methods to reclaim the land they lost to erosion.

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<sup>26</sup> Images provided by Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>27</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

## Relocation

Alternatively to reclaiming parts of existing islands, those communities of environmentally vulnerable islands have also been relocated to other islands in the past and present. In the Maldives relocation is often synonymous to population consolidation, because both the Gayoom and Yameen administration have promoted centralizing relocation strategies. Relocation and population consolidation are not only considered as tools to adapt to climate change, but this centralization is also economically beneficial for the government, since it is very expensive to provide all services to such a dispersed nation as the Maldives. In fact, population consolidation is the second most urgent adaptation strategy according to the NAPA of the Maldives (Moosa et al. 2007: 43). As mentioned, President Gayoom emphasized population consolidation during his years in office. Under the Population and Development Consolidation program, the Gayoom administration tries to “resettle populations through incentives to migrate from islands that are environmentally vulnerable” (Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment 2009: 10-1). However, one respondent claims that some island communities lost their place identity when they were being migrated to other islands. Despite the fact that the Maldives is a relative homogeneous country, there was still differentiation and discrimination occurring when the migrated community tried to integrate on the new island with the local population. Although there are also examples of islands on which both old and new communities live harmoniously, in some instances hostility took place, because the local island community felt that the migrants were taking their jobs.<sup>28</sup>

One way by which the current and pasts government of the Maldives have been trying to adapt to climate change through relocation is by building a number of artificial islands. The most developed example is the island Hulhumale, located in close proximity to the capital Male. Hulhumale is set to accommodate 100.000 people by 2030, many of them climate refugees, but also to relieve some stress of the overpopulated capital (Sovacool 2011: 747). Building Hulhumale was initiated during President Gayoom’s time since population consolidation was one of his main policies. The current President Yameen is also promoting relocating vulnerable communities to islands like Hulhumale.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Gayoom and Yameen, President Nasheed thought that it was important for the island nation to remain dispersed, because it is important for Maldivians to keep their sense of

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<sup>28</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

<sup>29</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017



'islandness'. Islandness is "a deeply held feeling of sacred connectedness to place" that derives from the experience of physical isolation, which helps maintain island communities despite of economic pressures to abandon them (Conkling 2007: 191, 198). Nasheed focused on improving the country's transport systems and decentralizing utility services so that communities from small islands were able to remain on their native island. When attending the University of Liverpool, Nasheed wrote his dissertation on the development of a public transport system in the Maldives, and once he became President he worked on developing this by building harbors and providing public transport, also to those islands that are less accessible or have smaller populations. Access to health services and other utilities for small island communities increased dramatically during Nasheed's Presidency (Smolczyk 2009). One interviewee has taken 'islandness' as a theoretical frame for his PhD on climate change adaptation and he found that many Maldivians have a very strong sense of belonging and affiliation to their island. Moving people to other islands or to artificial islands will lead to a loss of this connection to land, because these islanders will lose the opportunity to act out some of the traditional economic activities, such as fish processing, rope-making and farming. He emphasizes that population consolidation would mean that these people have to be employed in factories or offices and lead a very hard industrialized life. He adds that the pressure on the ecosystem will actually be less if the population is more dispersed.<sup>30</sup>

### *2.2.2 Soft adaptation methods*

Ecosystem-based adaptation is "the use of natural capital by people to adapt to climate change impacts" (Munang et al. 2013: 67). In this way ecosystem-based adaptation addresses the need to protect that ecosystems that provide the essential services that all species depend on. According to Munang and colleagues healthy functioning ecosystems are more resilient and thus are more able to adapt to climate change impacts (2013: 67). Protecting the coral reefs is vital, because it provides protection from waves and slows down erosion considerably (Khan et al 2002: 141). Co-director of environmental NGO Bluepeace explains how important the reefs are for the protection of the Maldivian islands, because of their function as a natural defense system against wave surge. The reefs are the first line of defense, the lagoon between the reef and the beach is the second line of defense, and the coastal vegetation is considered the third line of defense. Those islands which

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<sup>30</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

have mangroves are even better protected against rising sea levels or environmental disasters like tsunamis.<sup>31</sup> This is confirmed by another respondent, who explains that his research showed that mangroves and wetlands help to reduce a flood or the impacts of heavy rainfall, because their low-elevated location accumulates the water. He found that if an island does not have a mangrove, whether by nature or because it was removed, the flood impacts are higher. In addition to that, mangroves provide nursing ground for many species connected to the sea.<sup>32</sup>

The UNDP and the Global Environment Fund (GEF) have written a report called ‘Integrating Climate Change Risks into Resilient Island Planning in the Maldives (ICCR) in which they recognize the significance of preserving natural reef systems and coastal vegetation. The ICCR promotes adopting soft adaptation measures rather than hard ones, such as improving coastal vegetation or planting mangroves. Such measures are not only better for the environment, but also cheaper and longer lasting (Sovacool 2011: 744-5). Studies and practical examinations have demonstrated that ecosystem-based adaptation is a cost-effective adaptation approach. In the case of the Maldives it has been estimated that the costs of hard-engineering infrastructure to replace the natural reefs would be US\$1.6 billion – 2.7 billion. However, if instead of building infrastructure like seawalls and breakwater, the government would invest in conserving the existing natural reef system, the costs would be US\$34 million in start-up and US\$47 million annually. Besides it being the cheaper option, investing in conserving the coral reefs could also generate US\$10 billion per year through tourism and sustainable fisheries (Munang et al. 2013: 69).

However, human activities such as damaging the reefs, pollution and threatening existing biodiversity has degraded ecosystems and these are therefore unable to function as natural defense systems to climate change impacts. This is a serious concern, because by disturbing the coral reefs and wetlands the protection they once provided is eliminated, which can lead to further encroachment of coastal areas (Leary 2008: 14). Maldivian authorities also acknowledge in the NAPA that coral reefs have a critical protection function, but that there have been a number of human-induced stresses on the reef systems, such as reef blasting, coral mining and waste disposal that has effected the health of these reefs (Moosa et al. 2007: 22). The Bluepeace co-director claims that at the moment not much attention is being paid to ecosystem-based adaptation and instead the hydrodynamics of many islands are upset, because of the government’s massive reclamation

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<sup>31</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>32</sup> Skype interview with Adnan, 19 May 2017

projects. He says that unfortunately the current government prefers hard-engineering tools to combat erosion issues, rather than the natural defenses that are already in place. The respondent states that at a minimum, proper EIA's need to be conducted to study the wave flows and hydrodynamics of an island.<sup>33</sup> Another interviewee claims that the government sees development as reclamation and blasting of reefs and he states that: "We are destroying our natural adaptation and trying to bring artificial hard-engineering kind of things".<sup>34</sup>

Another example of how humans have affected natural adaptation systems besides coral reefs is the removal of coastal vegetation. Island communities have removed vegetation like seagrasses in order to expand settlements and resorts or other forms of land use (Sovacool 2011: 740). A respondent who used to work at the EPA explains that seagrasses protect islands from coastal erosion, but especially with the surge of tourism many Maldivians developed a dislike for them. They think that seagrasses stand in the way of the potential for local tourism, because of Maldives' image of white sandy beaches and crystal clear lagoons. Because they think that tourists do not find seagrasses aesthetically pleasant, local island communities remove this important coastal vegetation, sometimes using chemicals.<sup>35</sup>

### **Findings on climate change adaptation**

This chapter has identified the main climate change threats in the Maldives (sub-question one). Firstly, because of the general low elevation of the Maldivian islands and the rising sea levels, there is an increasing threat of erosion and seawater encroachment. Predictions of the IPCC are that large parts of the country will be inundated by the end of this century. In addition to that, there is an increased occurrence and intensity of storms, rainfall and flooding, with increased unpredictability. Furthermore, climate change impacts have led to economic and infrastructural damages, which is particularly worrisome for the tourism industry, since this is the main contributor to the country's GDP. There is also a significant issue with freshwater access, as aquifers risk depletion because of longer periods of drought as well as salt water intrusion from flooding and higher sea levels. Finally, biodiversity is also under threat, because of the vulnerability of coral reefs and fish species

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<sup>33</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>34</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>35</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

to temperature changes. The analysis has demonstrated that human interference has worsened the impacts of climate change. By building harbors or poorly designed infrastructure, erosion issues have actually increased, because of the infrastructure's impact on the wave flows. In addition to that, human intervention in natural adaptation systems, such as the removal of coastal vegetation and disturbance of coral reefs, has weakened natural ecosystem defense systems against climate change impacts.

In addition to that, this chapter has identified the adaptation methods that have been implemented to respond to the climate change threats (sub-question two). The current and past governments have mainly employed hard adaptation strategies to deal with climate change threats. Despite the fact that ecosystem-based approaches protect ecosystems in providing their natural services, no government has seriously invested in protecting and preserving natural defense systems. [poorly designed] President Nasheed's administration focused mainly on reclaiming land and improving the country's transport system in order to preserve the nation's island identity, whereas President Yameen's administration continues former President Gayoom's policy in terms of population consolidation and developing artificial islands. The tourism industry has also contributed to the use of poorly designed hard adaptation infrastructure and the removal of natural vegetation and other ecosystem defense barriers, that have led to increased erosion. Local island populations have degraded ecosystems as well and in some cases used environmental-harming methods for reclaiming land. In addition to that, local communities have pressured governments to build harbors that harm coral reef systems and increase erosion.

This chapter has outlined the major climate threats in the Maldives and the adaptation methods that have been implemented by the different administrations. It has demonstrated that the Nasheed and Yameen governments have quite different approaches to climate change adaptation. The next chapter will discuss the analytical frame de-democratization and analyze the trend towards de-democratization in the Maldives since the current government of President Yameen was installed. This is relevant, because this thesis argues that the trend towards de-democratization has an impact on climate change adaptation and explains the different climate change adaptation policies that President Nasheed and Yameen have implemented. However, before this argument can be fully outlined in chapter four, chapter three will first deconstruct the frame de-democratization and apply it to the case study of the Maldives.

### 3. The trend towards de-democratization in the Maldives

*“The opposition has been calling for the police and military to mutiny and join the mob in bringing down the country’s first democratically elected government,” he said.*

*“You’re saying this is a coup?” I asked.*

*“Yes,” he replied softly, and hung up.*

- Conversation between journalist J.J. Robinson and Paul Roberts, Communication Adviser to President Nasheed, 7 February 2012

(Robinson 2015: 11)

In his book ‘The Maldives: Islamic Republic, Tropical Autocracy’, Journalist J.J. Robinson vividly describes the events leading up to and following the controversial transfer of power on 7 February 2012. Robinson was the chief editor of Maldives’ only independent English language news service “Minivan News” (translated from Dhivehi to English as ‘Independent News’) and was at first unimpressed by the thousand-strong angry group of protesters on Republic Square, since political uprisings are not uncommon in the Maldives (Robinson 2015: 11). However, once Robinson saw that the police was at the center of the mob and he was told that it was not safe for him to be on the square as a Western journalist, he “became acutely aware of a sense of impunity and impending crisis” (2015: 12). The mob later turned out to be the final stage of a well-planned coup to overthrow President Nasheed’s administration. It worked, because after having spent many hours stuck in the military barracks, Nasheed resigned as President. In a recording that was later obtained, the President can be heard pleading for the protection of his family, before he would go to the Presidential Office to publicly announce that in his view the best thing for the country was to resign (Robinson 2015: 13). Nasheed would later state that he was forced to resign, because otherwise his life and that of his family and party members would be endangered.

One may ask why President Nasheed's administration generated such strong opposition, that he would eventually be forced out of office. As mentioned, Mohamed Nasheed was the first democratically elected President of the Maldives after the thirty year authoritarian regime of President Gayoom. Nasheed was a stark contrast to the old regime with his international reputation of young and charismatic human rights activist (Robinson 2015: 3). When Nasheed came in office, he was confronted with a very challenging economic situation, described by the World Bank as the worst economic position of any country undergoing a democratic transition since 1956. Whilst not being an economist, Nasheed expected the people around him to get things done with similar enthusiasm to his (Robinson 2015: 5). Since Gayoom's party had a majority in parliament, Nasheed had to deal with political blockade preventing him from being able to cut state expenditure and he felt misunderstood by organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that had begun to regard Nasheed as erratic and impulsive (Robinson 2015: 73). Against all odds, by late 2011, the economic situation looked brighter because of financial reforms, investor's goodwill to the young democracy and a healthy tourism economy. Nasheed had also provided national healthcare, a pension scheme, and decentralization policies that empowered local authorities' decision-making (Robinson 2015: 4).

However, the roots of the old regime were still securely fastened in the parliament and the judiciary, and they perceived Nasheed's rule as a degradation into Westernization and un-Islamic openness to other religions. In a country in which constitutionally everyone is Muslim and all lawmaking contrary to the tenets of the Islam is banned, liberally educated Nasheed had steered clear of religion. Former President Gayoom, on the other hand, is a trained Islamic scholar and did not hesitate to use religion as a political weapon. The risky venture to use xenophobic Islamic nationalism to overthrow Nasheed in a country dependent on Western tourism worked, leading to the nation's largest rally on 23 December 2011 to "Defend Islam" in the Maldives (Robinson 2015: 5). The carefully planned out coup by the opposition that would follow two months later would include an "Islamic symposium" that would escalate in civil and military disobedience and Nasheed's resignation (Robinson 2015: 217). The 'coup agreement' states that Nasheed had disrespected Islam and the Maldivian laws and regulations, by carrying out secular actions and undermining the courts, for which reasons it is determined among fraternal political groups that Nasheed is unfit for President of the Maldives, and he and the Christian-influenced MDP should

be completely erased from Maldivian politics (Robinson 2015: 217).<sup>36</sup> When Robinson got ahold of the document that lays out the playbook of the coup, signed by multiple opposition parties, he first was skeptical over the authenticity, because “sealing and signing what appeared to be evidence of treason seemed intellectually short-sighted even by the standards of contemporary Maldivian politics” (Robinson 2015: 218). Although the actual coup resulted out of a demonstration against Nasheed’s detention of a judge, rather than a pro-Islam rally, it may be clear that Nasheed’s opposition was ready to oust him out of office either way.

This chapter argues that since the ousting of Nasheed and the instalment of President Yameen there has been a gradual trend towards de-democratization. It will do so by deconstructing what de-democratization is, in order to examine in detail the country’s political situation since Yameen’s administration is in office as compared to when Nasheed’s administration was. The first section of this chapter discusses the analytical frame de-democratization and explains why and how this frame is used for this case study. The second section presents the Freedom House indicators on political rights and civil liberties and applies these to the current political situation in the Maldives using both academic and news sources, as well as interview data.

### **3.1 What is de-democratization**

The analytic frame of this thesis is de-democratization. This term is to a large extent associated with the work of Charles Tilly. Tilly has written a book called ‘Democracy’, which presents a systematic analysis of the processes that generate democratic regimes and it seeks to explain variation in the extent of democracy from a historical perspective (2007: 7). Tilly argues that democratization is a dynamic process that is never finished and always runs the risk of reversal, in other words, de-democratization (2007: xi). Tilly defines democracy as follows.

*“A regime is democratic to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected, mutually binding consultation” (Tilly 2007: 13-4).*

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<sup>36</sup> Minivan News has published a translation of the document on their website, where the original document can also be found. Minivan News. “Translation: Leaked ‘coup agreement’”. *Minivan News Archive*. 2 Sept 2013. Web. 28 July 2017

Since de-democratization is the reversal of democratization, it refers to a movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected, and less mutually binding political relations.

In order to fully understand Tilly's definition of democracy and the trend towards or away from democracy, it is important to explain what Tilly means by the terms 'broad', 'equal', 'protected' and 'mutually binding'. Firstly, the breadth of political relations in a democratic regime refers to a very wide political inclusion under the state's jurisdiction. De-democratizing states are thus moving towards a smaller segment of people enjoying political rights, whilst the majority of its citizens are largely excluded from public politics (Tilly 2007: 14). Secondly, citizens in democratic regimes enjoy extensive equality, whereas citizens in de-democratizing states experience great inequality. For instance, in democratic regimes ethnicity has no significant connection with political rights and obligations, whereas in de-democratic regimes certain ethnic categories will enjoy very unequal rights and obligations compared to others (Tilly 2007: 14). Thirdly, citizens in democratic regimes enjoy publicly visible protection against the state, whilst citizens in undemocratic regimes are not protected against state's arbitrary action. Finally, in democratic regimes, state agents have clear obligations towards benefitting its citizens, while in undemocratic regimes citizens must bribe or use third-party influence in order to enjoy the state's benefits (Tilly 2007: 15). Tilly recognizes democratization if there is an average movement up these four categories, and de-democratization if those movement goes downward.

The question remains how the movement of these four categories can be explained. Tilly argues that the movement up or down the breadth, equality, protection and mutually binding aspect of political relations can be explained by changes in three areas: (i) trust networks, (ii) categorical inequality, and (iii) autonomous power centers. Trust networks refer to interpersonal networks of trust in which people set valued resources and enterprises at risk to the failures of others. Examples of trust networks are kinships, trading diasporas and religious sects. If there is an increase in the interaction between trust networks and public politics, a great democratization trend occurs, whereas a withdrawal of trust networks from public politics leads to a greater degree of de-democratization (Tilly 2007: 74). Categorical inequality refers "organization of social life around boundaries separating whole sets of people who differ collectively in their life chances" (Tilly 2007: 75), for instance, because of their gender, race and religious beliefs. A decrease of categorical inequality in public politics is an indicator of democratization, while more categorical inequality reflect greater de-democratization. Autonomy of coercive power refers to power centers such as



warlords, armies and religious institutions, that operate outside of the control of public politics. They include those interpersonal connections that give political actors with altering existing dynamics within a regime, sometimes existing within the state itself (Tilly 2007: 76). A decrease in the autonomy of such power centers in public politics is a sign of a democratizing system, whereas an increase in the autonomy of coercive power is typical for a de-democratizing regime.

The core idea of Tilly's arguments is that democratization can never occur without at least partial realization of the three large processes of integrating trust networks into public politics, insulating public politics of categorical inequality and eliminating autonomous power centers, and the reversal of any of these processes de-democratizes regimes (Tilly 2007: 78). Throughout his book, Tilly demonstrates that both historical and contemporary cases have taught us that de-democratization occurs almost as frequently as democratization and that even established democracies fluctuate constantly between a degree of more or less democracy (2007: 189).

Although Tilly has set out extensive guidelines for detecting democratization and de-democratization, he admits that none of his analyses reach the ambitious standard of measurements proposed by this methodology (2007: 59). At the same time, Tilly explains that it is not enough to use checklists which list of characteristics of a democratic system, such as free and fair elections and press freedom, because a country can implement democratic components in its system without allowing them to function democratically (2007: 65). However, he argues that checklists such as the Freedom House ratings do concretize his arguments on the nature of political regimes, because these ratings actually contain information about changes in the nature of a political regime (Tilly 2007: 66). For that reason, Tilly relies heavily on the Freedom House ratings for his analysis, with the political rights scores generally reflecting the breadth, equality and mutually binding consultation aspects within public politics, and the civil liberties as proxy for protection (Tilly 2007: 61). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully apply Tilly's methodology, so instead this thesis will also use the Freedom House ratings to concretize the claims about the state of democracy in the Maldives, triangulated with secondary data from academic and online publications, as well as primary data from interview testimonies.

### 3.2 The state of democracy in the Maldives

Using the Freedom House aggregates, the state of democracy in the Maldives is examined including information from the Freedom House reports, academic and newspaper publications, and interview data. The organization Freedom House describes itself as an “independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world” (Freedom House “About us”). This American organization publishes data on political rights and civil liberties of nearly every country in the world and has been doing so annually since 1973. This thesis uses the Freedom House indicators for analyzing the state of democracy in the Maldives, because their ratings and reports have become the most widely read and cited of its kind by policymakers, journalists, academics and many others (Freedom House “Freedom of the World”). Just like they do for Charles Tilly, the Freedom House ratings concretize my claims about the state of democracy in the Maldives.

Freedom House assigns scores on the state of political rights and civil liberties in a particular country, ranging from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free), by examining and rating a number of aggregates. Freedom House identifies the Maldives as a Partly Free country. This means that the average of the political rights and civil liberties score was between 3.0 and 5.0. A country is considered Free if the average of the ratings is lower than 3.0 and Not Free if these are worse than 5.0. The average score of these two measures in the Maldives in 2016 is 5.0 since both political and civil rights score 5.0/7.0. An overview of the scores on political rights and civil liberties and the Freedom status of the Maldives for the years 2013-2016 can be found in figure 3-1.

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Political rights	4.0	4.0	4.0	5.0
Civil liberties	4.0	4.0	5.0	5.0
Freedom status	Partly free	Partly free	Partly free	Partly free

Figure 3-1: Freedom House’s political right and civil liberties ratings and freedom status of the Maldives in 2013-2016<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Scores can be found in the Freedom House reports on the Maldives of the years 2013-2016

Despite the fact that the freedom status of Maldives has not changed in the given time period, the ratings in figure 3-1 suggest a slight trend towards de-democratization, as both scores of political rights and civil liberties have decreased in the years 2013-2016 from 4.0 to 5.0.

The Political rights rating is determined by examining three aggregates, that is (i) electoral process, (ii) political pluralism and participation, and (iii) functioning of the government. These individual aggregate scores will determine what score is assigned to the total political rights of a given country. The same goes for civil liberties, which has a total of four aggregates that examine (i) freedom of expression and belief, (ii) associational and organizational rights, (iii) rule of law, and (iv) personal autonomy and individual rights. An overview of the aggregate scores of political rights and civil liberties in the Maldives in the years 2013-2016 can be found in figure 3-2.

	Aggregates	2013	2014	2015	2016
Political rights	Electoral Process	7	7	7	7
	Political pluralism and participation	7	7	6	5
	Functioning of the government	5	6	6	5
	<b>Political rights aggregate score</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>
Civil liberties	Freedom of expression and belief	7	6	6	5
	Associational and organizational rights	7	7	5	5
	Rule of Law	7	7	6	6
	Personal autonomy and individual rights	8	8	7	7
	<b>Civil liberties aggregate score</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Total aggregate score</b>		<b>48</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>40</b>

Figure 3-2: Freedom House’s aggregate ratings of political rights and civil liberties in the Maldives in 2013-2016

As can be detected in table 3-2, both the aggregate scores of political rights and civil liberties have decreased in the given time period, also leading a decline in the total aggregate score. The categories that have particularly undergone this negative trend (each scoring two points less in 2016 than in 2013) are: political pluralism and participation; freedom of expression and belief, and; associational and organizational rights. Particular attention is paid to those three aggregates in the

discussion below on the status of each of these categories in the Maldives. In this discussion, the differences between former President Nasheed's way of governing as compared to current President Yameen's rule are identified and it is determined that in the period 2013-2016 there has been a trend towards de-democratization.

### *3.2.1 Electoral process*

The latest presidential elections of 2013 were deemed free and fair by both local and international monitors, although the voting process had to be reinstated three times (Freedom House 2016). The Commonwealth Observer Group reports that the presidential elections took place in a highly politicized context with guidelines imposed by the Supreme Court that were inconsistent with the Maldivian electoral legislative framework (The Commonwealth 2013: 45). In addition to that, two weeks before the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Maldivian Supreme Court sentenced all four members of the election committee to six month prison sentences, a move regarded unconstitutional (Freedom House 2016).

In 2018, new presidential elections are coming up, an event which is widely anticipated in the Maldives, because of the tensions among the different political parties. An employee at Transparency Maldives thinks that there is not any chance of a free and fair election in 2018. He makes this statement, because the recent local council elections have provided a landslide victory for the MDP. The respondent remarks that this outcome shows how unpopular President Yameen is and he believes that Yameen's administration will somehow rig the upcoming presidential election in their favor, because they will not allow to be embarrassed like this again.<sup>38</sup> The former Minister of Environment and Housing Mohamed Aslam is also openly questioning whether Yameen will allow a free and fair election and tolerate those who want to compete against him. He questions this, because, as is discussed in the next section, President Yameen has been able to disqualify most potential opposition leaders from competing for president. The former Minister thinks that if there is a free and fair election without government interference, Yameen is definitely bound to lose it.<sup>39</sup> Another respondent thinks that the opposition would need a very big margin to win the election since a small margin means that the results can easily be manipulated.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

<sup>39</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

<sup>40</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

The Freedom House aggregate rating for electoral process has been stable at 7/12 for the past five years (see figure 3-2), but according to half of the respondents<sup>41</sup>, the 2018 election will become a boiling point of tension over the next year. The Transparency Maldives employee even expects that there will be an increase of violence over the coming months.<sup>42</sup> It remains to be seen whether Yameen will use violent repression, but it may be obvious that political tensions in the Maldives are at a new height, as is further discussed in the next section.

### *3.2.2 Political pluralism and participation*

The 2016 Freedom House report states that former President Nasheed has been sentenced to thirteen years of prison on terrorism-related charges, which received widespread criticism by people who interpreted this as a way for the government to suppress the opposition. Al Jazeera's insightful documentary 'Stealing Paradise' also suggests that the length of Nasheed's sentence was directly determined by President Yameen. In the documentary, three men are portrayed who deliver bribe money in assignment of President Yameen and his former vice-President Ahmed Adeb. One of them tells how he was summoned to court to collect Nasheed's sentence sheet to bring to President Yameen, who then ordered an amendment (Al Jazeera 2016, see also Jordan 2016 for a summarization of the documentary). The source testifies:

*"The day Nasheed was sentenced, they called me and told me to pick up a letter... Nasheed's sentence. The president told [the vice president] there is something that has to be changed. That night, they sentenced Nasheed".*

In October 2016, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that "The Working Group considers that it is clearly impossible to invoke any legal basis justifying the deprivation of liberty of Mr. Nasheed" and that there it is strongly suggested that his conviction was politically motivated (2015: 17). Nasheed was granted asylum by the British government in May 2016 after he was authorized to seek medical treatment (Naish 2017). In addition to that, the same month in

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<sup>41</sup> As apparent from skype interviews with Hamid and Ali, Aslam, Mohamed, Ilham, May 2017

<sup>42</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

which Nasheed was convicted, an amendment was added to the 2013 Prisons and Parole Act to ban inmates from membership in political parties. This amendment effectively ousted Nasheed from the MDP and jeopardized political opportunities for many others, including several other opposition politicians who were arrested for taking part in demonstrations (Freedom House 2016). At the moment, Nasheed is still unable to contest in the 2018 Presidential elections for which he filed a complaint at the UN Human Rights Committee (Khandekar 2016b). In February of this year, President Yameen stated that Nasheed's presidential ambitions are futile, since he is legally barred from competing in the 2018 elections (Hameed and Naish 2017).

Besides Mohamed Nasheed, President Yameen has managed to disqualify more potential opposition leaders by jailing them or forcing them into exile, including his own vice-President and Minister of Defense (Aneez and Sirilal 2016). The latter two were jailed on treason charges for being in an alleged plot to assassinate the President by setting of an explosive device aboard his yacht. However, according to two out of three forensic analyses the blast was accidental and the 'Stealing Paradise' documentary suggest that the two were imprisoned on false pretense (Al Jazeera 2016, Jordan 2016). Another opposition leader, in addition to Nasheed, was sentenced to prison for twelve years. Sheikh Imran Abdulla, leader of the country's main Islamist party Adhaalath party, was arrested on terrorism charges after his party joined the MDP in May 2015 in a mass rally to protest against the government's jailing of dissidents. Following this demonstration, 175 people including Abdulla were arrested (Agence France-Presse in Male 2016). The Guardian (Agence France-Presse in Male 2016) reports that:

*“Almost all of the President's key rivals are either in jail or living in exile”*

One respondent confirms that President Yameen tries to stop and jail opposition figures which is why he does not have a real opposition at the moment. He adds that most of the opposition leaders are in exile and have meetings in Colombo, and are relying on only a few things, like international pressure, because locally they are unable to do much.<sup>43</sup> Nasheed's former Minister of Housing and Environment compares competing for the Maldivian Presidential elections with putting yourself in

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<sup>43</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

front of a shooting target. He says that “People don’t even want to express their intent to do this now [to contend in the presidential elections], because this is such a dangerous thing”.<sup>44</sup>

The opposition has recently united themselves in an alignment, called the United Opposition. This alliance is amongst others formed by former President Nasheed and former President Gayoom. Although in previous elections these individuals have publicly denounced each other and actively worked on getting the other out of office (or in jail), this alignment is presented as a genuine effort for “restoring Maldivian democracy, ensuring free and fair elections, and protecting Maldivians’ Constitutional rights” (Maldivian Democratic Party 2017). Not all respondents have confidence in how genuine the alliance is, saying that “their real motives will be exposed” once the elections arrive.<sup>45</sup> Another respondent claims, however, that the alignment is very strong, precisely because of the fact that two former rivals Nasheed and Gayoom were able to unite.<sup>46</sup> Political pluralism and participation’s aggregate score has decline to 5/16, showing a declining trend in this political right since 2014 (see figure 3-2).

### *3.2.3 Functioning of the government*

According to the Freedom House report, “political polarization and uncertainty continued to limit elected officials’ effectiveness in crafting policy and passing legislation”. This is for instance demonstrated by the long delays in draft laws and by the incapability of the Anti-Corruption Commission to be able to work efficiently (Freedom House 2016). The former Minister for Housing and Environment claims that the current government is corrupt, centralizes power, and can even be considered a dictatorship. He adds that the law, the parliament and the institutions all have become tools for a dictatorship.

*“As a dictator, he should be very comfortable with the controls he has over the state institutions and the people. He doesn’t need support, because dictators don’t need support of the people”.*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

<sup>45</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>46</sup> Skype interview with Ilham, 22 May 2017

<sup>47</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 20 May 2017

The employee at Transparency Maldives agrees with him when he says that president Yameen compensates his lack of political support with his power over institutions and the parliament. He states that President Yameen does not only create fear amongst the parliamentarians, but also provides gift incentives.<sup>48</sup> Another respondent agrees that government-aligned politicians are using corruption to propagate their agendas.<sup>49</sup> The documentary ‘Stealing Paradise’ uncovers the largest corruption scandal of the country’s history, in which nearly \$80 million raised from resort leases was stolen. In addition to that, the reporters of Al Jazeera got access to around 2.000 pages of legal documents accusing President Yameen of fraud and corruption within state-owned entities, at a value of nearly \$150 million (Al Jazeera 2016).

### *3.2.4 Freedom of expression and belief*

Since the installment of the current administration, the situation does not look well in terms of freedom of expression and belief according to some of the respondents. One of them says that asking questions to ministers or writing blogs can be life-threatening. Criticisms are not acceptable and the state of freedom of expression is as it was back in 2000.<sup>50</sup> Another respondent, who has just established a research institute in the Maldives called the Leads Institute of Management and Policy Studies, says that he is still deliberating on how to go about bringing people from overseas to give trainings, because the government may not like it.<sup>51</sup> The interviewee who is pursuing a PhD in Australia says that there are people with similar views to his, but these people fear that they will lose their jobs and the level of intimidation ensures that civil servants tend not to express these views openly. The interviewee thinks that he has the benefit of being abroad, but even he still sometimes receives warnings when he writes on corruption and religion issues. According to the respondent these warnings come mostly from religious extremists who easily denounce you as anti-Islamist if you criticize some elements of religion.<sup>52</sup> Such accusations have constitutional support, since the Maldivian constitution guarantees freedom of expression as long as it is exercised in a way not contrary to any tenet of Islam (Freedom House 2016).

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<sup>48</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

<sup>49</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>50</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>51</sup> Skype interview with Ilham, 22 May 2017

<sup>52</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017



An example of what could happen when you do decide to openly criticize elements of society and religion has occurred recently when blogger Yameen Rasheed was stabbed to death outside his apartment. Rasheed had an online satirical blog website, called The Daily Panic, with which he hoped to “comment upon the news, satirize the frequently unsatirizable politics of Maldives, and also provide a platform to capture and highlight the diversity of Maldivian opinion” (Rasheed 2016). Prior to his murder, the blogger had already received multiple death threats which he had reported to the police and posted screenshots of online (Moosa 2017). Rasheed’s case is not an isolated one. In fact, before his death, Rasheed was a vocal critic on the lack of government response on the disappearance of colleague and friend Ahmed Rilwan. This journalist who wrote about politics, criminal gangs and Islamic extremism is believed to be abducted in September 2014 outside of his apartment and to this day his whereabouts are unknown, much less whether he is still even alive. In addition to this unsolved case, a few years earlier well-known journalist and human rights campaigner Ismail Rasheed was stabbed in the throat outside of his home, only to be followed by the beating of a television journalist several month later (Buncombe 2014).

These cases also reflect the poor status of freedom of press in the Maldives in recent years. Compared to its score in 2016, the position of the Maldives on the World Freedom of Press Index has decreased with five places to the 117<sup>th</sup> position, and is considered as ‘bad’ (Reporters without Borders 2017). This position can be considered quite dramatic as compared with the state of freedom of press during President Nasheed’s government. Only a year after Nasheed was elected, the country actually climbed 53 places on the press freedom index in 2010 to place 51 (Wellman 2010). Freedom House considers the press freedom in the Maldives ‘not free’ in 2017, whereas the previous year the press freedom was still considered ‘partly free’ (Freedom House 2017: 24). Journalists are frequently harassed and arrested and during his ruling period Yameen has shut down three major news outlets (Luedi 2016), and there have been accusations that the government was involved in the blasting of an opposition-aligned TV Station (Rasheed and Robinson 2013).

In August 2016, Yameen also passed a strict anti-defamation law, which the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council has strongly condemned, since “The adopted Bill would criminalize speech deemed to be defamatory, to comment against ‘any tenet of Islam’, to ‘threaten national security’ or to ‘contradict general social norms’” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2016). There are concerns about the vague use of religion, defamation and social norms as grounds for punishing expression. Besides criminalizing

defamation, the law can also be used to force journalists to reveal their sources (Freedom House 2017: 18). Local media outlets have already been affected by this law, as they have had to resort to self-censorship to prevent the heavy fines or getting shut down (Khandekar 2016a). Yameen's government is also criticized for detaining eighteen journalists who protested against the anti-defamation bill (Aneez and Sirilal 2016). In addition to threats to local media, there are also multiple cases in which foreign media were not allowed access or were arrested whilst in the country (Pagani 2016). The status of freedom of expression and belief has thus deteriorated significantly over the last two years and this is reflected in the decreasing Freedom House score that this aggregate receives.

### *3.2.5 Associational and organizational rights*

In addition to the restraints on freedom of expression and press censorship, a respondent reports that there is also no freedom of assembly anymore as opposition to the government is unable to protest openly on the street.<sup>53</sup> This is confirmed by the former Minister of Housing and Environment who states that freedom of assembly is no longer there since anyone who challenges the President ends up in jail.<sup>54</sup> In 2015, the government introduced a ban on street protests, stating that the street should be peaceful public property, and not for disorder (Moosa 2015). Since then, the police “have blocked nearly all gatherings by opposition parties, civil society groups and journalists in Male” (Fathih 2016). Freedom House reports that nearly 200 opposition supporters were arrested during a protest calling for the release of detained opposition figures, such as former President Nasheed, some of them being detained for several months (Freedom House 2016).

In addition to that, NGO's have also experienced setbacks over the last year in their ability to operate freely on human rights and other sensitive issues (Freedom House 2016). An example of such an NGO is Transparency Maldives, which is a local charter of Transparency International, the international organization that advocates to combat corruption in over 100 countries (Transparency International “What is”). Transparency Maldives is involved in advocacy around civil and political liberties in the Maldives, informing young people on good governance and democracy, and also observes elections. A representative of Transparency Maldives notes that the

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<sup>53</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>54</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

organization faces many challenges since the current government was installed. He recognizes that no government in the past has been particularly friendly towards the organization, but past governments still made an effort to engage with them. The respondent states that the current government, however, systematically ignores the organization. Transparency Maldives experiences that the current government is not giving civil society a chance to be part of policymaking processes. “The level of intimidation and fear that we face is at an all-time high”, the respondent claims.<sup>55</sup> The space for CSO’s such as Transparency Maldives is shrinking and there is an attempt to discredit these organizations, again by denouncing them as anti-Islamist institutions. According to the employee many organizations and journalists who work on the same issues as Transparency Maldives have received threats, and some of them have been abducted or even killed, such as Yameen Rasheed and Ahmed Rilwan. Physical security threats is something that Transparency Maldives has to be very aware of now, the respondent adds. The organization did not have to worry about such things six years ago.

This example of the inability for NGO’s to work effectively is confirmed by another respondent who claims that NGO’s cannot stand up against the political pressure that they are under. In addition to that, the respondent claims that there is also a lack of trust in NGO’s, because people associate organizations like Transparency Maldives with political parties.<sup>56</sup> This is also what Robinson found during his years as a journalist in the Maldives when he challenged NGO’s on their silence on the overthrow of government in 2012. They would attribute this silence to fears of appearing politicized, which had some grounding since Nasheed was heavily promoting issues like human rights and democracy and if NGO’s advocate these same themes, in the Maldivian political landscape it could be perceived as being sympathetic to the MDP by association (Robinson 2015: 229). The Transparency Maldives employee adds that institutions have become very politicized under the current government and that the parliament, judiciary and even supposedly independent institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Human Rights Commission are heavily politicized.<sup>57</sup> Compared to the previous year, the Freedom House aggregate rating for associational and organizational rights has decreased by two points to 5/12 (see figure 3-2).

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<sup>55</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

<sup>56</sup> Skype interview with Ilham, 22 May 2017

<sup>57</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

### *3.2.6 Rule of Law*

An interviewee states that “Justice is very partial and those who are powerful and who have money can influence the system and also if you have good connections with politicians, you can easily influence it”.<sup>58</sup> Another calls the current system a façade of democracy when you look at the changes that have been brought to the laws and to the constitution. He claims that the law has become a tool for a dictatorship.<sup>59</sup> These testimonies are reflected in the 2016 Freedom House report that states that constitutionally, the judicial branch is separated from the executive and legislative branches, but in practice the judiciary is subjected to the latter two branches and acts with limited transparency (Freedom House 2016). The interconnectedness between the three branches is also demonstrated by the Al Jazeera documentary ‘Stealing Paradise’ (Al Jazeera Investigative Unit 2016) in which it was discovered that senior judges have received money and luxury flats, and have regular meetings with President Yameen and his deputy, who meddle in high-profile cases and judicial appointments (Jordan 2016). A member of the Judicial Services Commission, the watchdog organization tasked with overseeing the conduct, appointment and discipline of judges, discovered that sixty per cent of the 200 sitting judges had less than a seven grade education, while a quarter had criminal records, including sexual misconduct and embezzlement (Robinson 2015: 176).

In a 2015 report, the International Commission for Jurists stated that “the Maldives government must immediately reverse the politicization of the country’s judiciary and the erosion of rule of law in the country” (International Commission of Jurists 2015). The report demonstrates how legal and institutional reforms have stalled democratic transition and offer opportunities for relapsing into authoritarianism. The Supreme Court’s influence on the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) has also led to concern about judicial independence and protective mechanisms for human rights (Freedom House 2016). In addition to that, there are concerns about serious violations of fundamental rights of civil society and human rights defenders, and judicial conduct in high-profile cases, such as the conviction of former President Nasheed, that raises serious concerns as to judicial independence (International Commission of Jurists 2015).

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<sup>58</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>59</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

### 3.2.7 Personal autonomy and individual rights

Finally, there has also been a decrease in the aggregate personal autonomy and individual rights, because of a significant lack in the implementation of laws to ensure equal treatment of women and the lack of new efforts to address human trafficking. Exploitation of migration workers, who comprise about a quarter of the population, is widespread as well (Freedom House 2016).

### **Findings on de-democratization**

This chapter has demonstrated that there has been a gradual trend to de-democratization since President Yameen has been leading the nation. First, it was determined what a trend towards de-democratization entails (sub-question three). This thesis uses Charles Tilly's definition of de-democratization, which refers to a movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected and less mutually binding political relations between citizens and the state. This occurs when there is a substantial withdrawal of *trust networks* from public politics, increasing insertion of *categorical inequalities* into public politics, and rising *autonomy of coercive power* centers.

Second, it was examined how the current government has been moving towards de-democratization as compared to the previous administration of President Nasheed (sub-question four). Just as Tilly does, this thesis uses the Freedom House indicators of political rights and civil liberties in order to concretize the claims on the state of democracy in the Maldives. These ratings demonstrate that the Maldives is experiencing a number of de-democratizing trends, especially in terms of political pluralism and participation, freedom of expression and belief, and associational and organizational rights. President Yameen has repeatedly arrested and jailed opposition figures and members of his own party that fell into disfavor, or forced them into exile. In addition to that, freedom of expression and press has significantly deterred, by introducing the anti-defamation law and shutting down major media outlets, and because of an increased hostility to journalists. Freedom of assembly has also been under threat and the space for NGO's is shrinking as they are not able to stand up against political pressure. Furthermore, the judicial branch is subjected to the executive and legislative branch and acts with limited transparency.

This chapter and the previous have answered sub-questions one to four, but the relation between de-democratization and the politics of climate change adaptation still has to be further examined in the next chapter by answering sub-questions five and six.

#### 4. Impact of de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation

One of the respondents who is doing his PhD on climate change adaptation tells a story of his native island that demonstrates how climate change adaptation has been used as a political tool by the Yameen administration.<sup>60</sup> On this particular island there are two communities, one living on one side of the island represented by a member of parliament of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the other community on the other side represented by a member of parliament of the government Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM). This particular island was dealing with erosion issues, and that is why the communities asked the government to take measures for coastal protection. However, the government only implemented coastal protection on the part of the island where the PPM supporters live and neglected protection measures on the side where the MDP supporters live. In addition to reinforcing categorical inequality that disadvantageous those with other political preferences, this adaptation measure has also led to ineffective protection against the island's erosion issues, because one cannot introduce coastal protection on one side of the island and expect that the island as a whole is properly protected against coastal erosion. The respondent says that the government justified this maladaptation by claiming that this particular side of the island was more vulnerable, but the interviewee thinks that this decision was very undemocratic.

Another respondent who works for Transparency Maldives confirms that over the last few years only those communities that clearly support the government receive adaptation measures. She claims that during past governments island communities would not have to necessarily show their political loyalty to be eligible for a particular adaptation project, but with the current government they do. The respondent states that

*“These projects are being used as a tool to get support from the communities, from the local governance and also kind of buy the members for their side [...] This has been the case I think even in past governments, but it is just now that it is happening at a grander scale than before”.*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>61</sup> Skype interview Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

These testimonies suggest that the current government is using climate change adaptation as a political tool in order to increase the support for their party. As this chapter will demonstrate, climate change adaptation has been used as a political tool by both the Nasheed and Yameen administrations, but it has had a different outcome in terms of local capacity and empowerment to respond to climate change threats. This chapter argues that de-democratizing trends, such as centralization and censorship, have an impact on climate change adaptation, because they make local adaptation to climate change more difficult.

The main premise of this chapter is that President Nasheed has employed a strategy of democratic environmentalism, whereas President Yameen has returned to an abated version of the authoritarian environmentalism strategy that his half-brother Gayoom employed during his thirty year rule. Authoritative environmentalism is when authoritarian policies are applied to climate change policies, based on the premise that the state and political elites should dictate policy since the population is considered subjective and irrational (Mohamed and King 2017: 212). In contrast, democratic environmentalism spreads authority across several levels and agencies of government and encourages public participation (Gilley 2012: 288-9).

In order to capture the different environmental strategies of the Nasheed and Yameen governments and its effects on climate change adaptation, this chapter is structured along four counter-positions that demonstrate the differences between democratic and authoritarian environmentalism. These categories are (i) decentralization versus recentralization, (ii) population dispersion versus population consolidation, (iii) climate change activism versus climate change minimization, and (iv) freedom of expression versus censorship. The first section discusses the way that President Yameen has recentralized many of the services that President Nasheed decentralized during his time in government. This has had a negative impact on local empowerment of environmental issues that Nasheed tried to establish, because local decision-making was returned to the state. The second section examines the reasons for and the impact of Yameen's strategy of population consolidation after Nasheed had promoted population dispersion, in order to preserve the nation's 'islandness'. The third section elaborates on the international role that both Presidents have in terms of climate change activism. Whereas Nasheed was known as an advocator for international cooperation on climate change issues, Yameen has not ever addressed environmental issues on local or international platforms. The final section of this chapter establishes the impact of censorship as opposed to freedom of expression on local capacity.

#### **4.1 Decentralization versus recentralization**

Nasheed's administration introduced the Decentralization Act in 2010 with the purpose to "allow the island communities to make their own decisions in a democratic and accountable manner" (UNICEF 2013: 11). The former President stated that the objective of these efforts was to "improve the standard of living of the people by improving the delivery of basic services, including electricity, water supply and sewerage system" (The Presidential Office 2009a). The Act formalized the role of the already existing local councils and women development committees in local islands which received central funding to provide for services and development projects locally (UNICEF 2013: 12-3). With this funding, local councils were mandated by the 2008 Constitution to "provide democratic and accountable governance; foster social and economic well-being and development of the community and establishing safe and healthy environments" (UNICEF 2013: 14). Environmental governance was also decentralized to local island councils. By introducing these decentralization efforts Nasheed's administration put a significant emphasis on empowering local authorities (Mohamed and King 2017: 223).

However, according to the United Nations, it is fair to say that Nasheed's decentralization efforts were rushed and therefore ineffective. They state that "reforms as far reaching as envisaged in the 2008 Constitution and the Decentralization Act take decades to be implemented successfully" (UNICEF 2013: 34). In addition to that, the sudden change of political power in 2012 has led to a rapid recentralization process that essentially retrieved any decentralized authority that had been established by Nasheed back to central power. Since local governance was already abolished again a few years after its introduction no effective decentralization has been established. Despite the inefficient implementation of decentralization efforts, the Nasheed administration attempted to empower local island authorities by authorizing them to perform former-central tasks.

Contrary to Nasheed's decentralization efforts, Yameen has actually recentralized many of the tasks and utilities that were in local hands. The sudden recentralization efforts have led to confusion and paralysis on all levels of governance about responsibilities (UNICEF 2013: 18). Unless Yameen's government adopts a very systematic, gradual approach to further decentralization, UNICEF thinks that such confusion will only increase (2013: 34). At the moment, island councils have less control over resources and services than they had prior to Nasheed's inauguration (UNICEF 2013: 26). By recentralizing local governance, including environmental governance, Yameen has decreased local capacity over climate change adaptation.



### Conclusion 1

During his short-lived rule, President Nasheed has sought to decentralize ministry tasks to local level authorities, including environmental governance, in order to empower local decision-making. President Yameen has recentralized essentially every process that was decentralized by his predecessor, and thereby returned local decision-making back to the state. For that reason the first conclusion is that the current government's recentralization policies have disarmed local environmental governance.

#### **4.2 Population dispersion versus population consolidation**

Nasheed thought that instead of relocating the population, the most important adaptation method is actually introduce an efficient transport system that would allow islanders to remain on their home island whilst still being able to travel elsewhere for work or to access services, and to develop trade (The Presidential Office 2009b).<sup>62</sup> A major reason why Nasheed wanted to keep the population dispersed was to preserve local island identities. According to Rasheed and Zakariyya "Having fewer people on an island puts less strain on the local ecosystem services and ensures that they are maintained within ecological limits" (2017). In this way, population dispersion not only promotes preserving the nation's 'islandness', but also has positive environmental consequences, since low pressure on existing ecosystems is beneficial for allowing their function as natural defense barriers against the impacts of climate change. The Nasheed administration considered population consolidation incompatible with democracy, because relocating entire island populations to a few islands is highly controversial, since the voluntary nature of relocation is questionable (Mohamed and King 2017: 221).

Instead of promoting a dispersed island nation, the Yameen administration actually does promote population consolidation. This policy makes sense from an economic perspective, because population consolidation accelerates economic activity and allows for cheaper and more efficient provision of services and goods. However, from an environmental point of view population consolidation puts strains on ecosystems and thus eventually to societal well-being (Rasheed and Zakariyya 2017). In addition to that, population consolidation negatively impacts the nation's island identity, because island communities may lose their sense of place, or place attachment, if

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<sup>62</sup> Skype interview with Thawfeeq, 9 May 2017

they are no longer living on their native island. However, Rasheed and Zakariyya argue that until now population consolidation has actually failed to increase economic activity in the Maldives since the highest unemployment rate can be found in the urban capital of Male. Nevertheless, Yameen promotes population consolidation to the area surrounding Male and Hulhumale, because he claims it is impossible to provide basic services and utilities to a dispersed nation. A critic remarks that Yameen only wants economic development and to accomplish that he wants to consolidate two thirds of the population to the ‘Greater Male Area’, willingly or submissively (Naseem 2016). According to Mohamed and King, the heavy focus of the Yameen government on economic development has undermined the climate change leadership of the Maldives, internationally, but especially at the local level. The past two governments have had stronger commitments and political will to address climate change (Mohamed and King 2017: 226). One respondent remarks that the current government thinks population consolidation is the best adaptation strategy, because they can protect people more easily from the impacts of climate change. At the same time, he thinks that the government primarily likes that it is easier to influence and control the population when they are not as dispersed as they are at the moment.<sup>63</sup> This is repeated by Rasheed and Zakariyya who state that “For the government, population consolidation means consolidation of power” (2017).

### Conclusion 2

President Nasheed has promoted population dispersion, because he wanted to preserve local island identities. Environmentally, this policy meant that there was less pressure on ecosystems. President Yameen has promoted population consolidation, because of the economic benefits, and possibly for power consolidation, but his focus on economic development has undermined climate change leadership and put strains on existing ecosystems. In conclusion, the current government’s policy of population consolidation has negative implications for island ecosystems and preserving the nation’s island identity.

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<sup>63</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

### 4.3 Climate change activism versus climate change minimization

Internationally, Mohamed Nasheed is perhaps most well-known for his passionate advocacy for the need to combat climate change. President Nasheed has brought global awareness to the urgency of climate change issues, for instance by organizing a widely-covered underwater cabinet as means to show the urgency of addressing global warming. President Nasheed and his cabinet signed a document calling for global cuts in carbon emissions whilst being five meter underwater (Lang 2009). Leading up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2009 in Copenhagen, Nasheed criticized the inactive attitude of the international community regarding climate change.

*“We in the Maldives desperately want to believe that one day our words will have an effect, and so we will continue to shout them, even though, deep down, we know that you’re not really listening.”<sup>64</sup>*

- President Nasheed on the Summit on Climate Change, 22 September 2009, New York

After winning the election, Nasheed repeated that democracy is the most important instrument for climate change adaptation and that he regarded community empowerment as a critical measure for resilience (Mohamed and King 2017: 220). According to Hirsch, “confronting the climate crisis became Nasheed’s key device for fulfilling the promise of a new democratic politics” (2015: 193). Instead of emphasizing the gradual impacts of climate change, Nasheed transformed the problem into a crisis which demanded resolutions within a short period of time (Doane 2006: 252). By claiming that the Maldives was a climate change synecdoche, climate change became a state-making device, for an administration that aspired democratic political culture. Hirsch argues that climate change advocacy was a post-authoritarian attempt to boost Maldivian nationalism (2015: 191). By stating things such as that the Maldives would be the country leading the way out of the mines to become the world’s first carbon-neutral state, Nasheed gave the Maldives a new geopolitical identity, which encouraged citizens to help reduce carbon emissions, as a form of democratic engagement.

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<sup>64</sup> Nasheed’s international advocacy on climate change issues are captured in the 2011 documentary ‘The Island President’ by Jon Shenk

His former Minister of Environment and Housing describes Nasheed as a man that is passionate about climate change. He says that even though he was not elected based on his plans to combat climate change issues, his passion led the nation. However, the fact that climate change was not a demand from the local people has become painfully obvious, since only a few years later Yameen was elected for President, who had development plans that were not necessarily environmental-friendly.<sup>65</sup> This is confirmed by Hirsch, who mentions that the seeming ‘eliteness’ of Nasheed’s international advocacy for climate change failed to articulate with daily life for many Maldivians (2015: 193).

Contrary to Nasheed, President Yameen does not present himself as a climate change activist. One respondent claims that Yameen has never spoken on any platform regarding climate change or environmental issues like President Nasheed did. He says that the reason why President Yameen does not stress environmental issues is that comes from a strong economic background and has both a lack of civil society engagement and lack of awareness on climate change issues. According to the respondent, Yameen is not aware of how critical the situation is and tries to separate environment and development as two different things.<sup>66</sup> Another respondent claims that the current government has no passion for the environment and even perceives it as an obstacle to their development program. He confirms that President Yameen has never been to any environmental summit in the years that he has been in office, which according to the respondent shows the lack of commitment on this matter. He thinks that perhaps this is the case because the current administration simply does not believe in the climate change issues or that they find that have other priorities.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to that, when the current government parties were still in opposition during president Nasheed’s administration, they used to say that Nasheed is intimidating potential investors with his statements on climate change issues. However, once they came to governance they realized that the active role of the Maldives that Nasheed established internationally has led to many donor-funded projects and environmental aid. The respondent argues that this is perhaps why the current government is now less outspoken against climate change. According to him Yameen’s administration is not criticizing the international efforts towards climate change

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<sup>65</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

<sup>66</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>67</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

adaptation in the Maldives, but they are not promoting it either.<sup>68</sup> Another reason why Yameen is not as vocal about climate change issues as Nasheed may be that Yameen wanted separate his persona from Nasheed's, a respondent claims. Since President Nasheed's international personality revolved around his advocacy around environmental issues, the current government may feel that by taking the same approach they are "kind of swimming in President Nasheed's shadow".<sup>69</sup> This illustrates how climate change adaptation is to some degree subordinate to political calculations.

The respondent that is pursuing a PhD in climate change adaptation claims that internationally the Maldives is still considered a strong leader on climate change advocacy as a delegation of the Ministry of Environment and Energy's climate change department is engaged on the frontline in negotiations and is representing the Alliance Of Small Island States (AOSIS). However, on local level the capacity to address environmental issues is very low and most adaptation projects are donor-driven. The interviewee thinks that it can actually be beneficial if an adaptation project is donor-driven, because it will uphold international judiciary standards and issues like corruption are less likely. He argues that since the government has a short-term adaptation approach, that aims to quickly gain public support, mal-adaptation is a danger.<sup>70</sup>

During the 2013 Presidential elections campaign, Yameen even pledged to do hydrocarbon exploration in the Maldives and start looking for oil to make the country a fossil fuel-based economy. Even though it was never followed up to, this pledge could not be further from President Nasheed's statement on low-carbon development and renewable energy sources. It is a complete U-turn for a nation that has been advocating internationally for giving up fossil fuels and retrieving clean energy.<sup>71</sup>

### Conclusion 3

President Nasheed raised global awareness to the Maldivian climate change issues and was able to activate others both on an international and local level. He thought that community empowerment was a critical tool for climate change resilience, and that is why he argued that democracy is the most important instrument for climate change adaptation. In other words, Nasheed emphasized democratic environmentalism, in which all layers of society were involved with the debate on how

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<sup>68</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>69</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

<sup>70</sup> Skype interview with Mohamed, 2 May 2017

<sup>71</sup> Skype interviews with Aslam and Hamid and Ali, May 2017

to respond to climate change threats. In stark contrast to Nasheed, President Yameen has never publicly spoken about environmental issues, and although his government is not against international efforts for climate change adaptation, they are not promoting it either. Although a delegation of the climate change department of the Ministry of Environment and Energy is still active internationally, locally the capacity is very low and many projects are donor-driven. This demonstrates that Yameen is employing a strategy of authoritative environmentalism, because the population is not expected to be involved in the debate on climate change issues. At the same time, Yameen is not employing authoritative environmentalism in the same way as his half-brother, since Gayoom was still very vocal on climate change issues on international platforms. Contrary to that, Yameen is minimizing the threat of climate change by not being vocal about it. In conclusion, the current government minimizes climate change issues, which has a negative impact on local capacity to implement adaptation measures and community resilience to climate change.

#### **4.4 Freedom of expression versus censorship**

The newfound Maldivian democracy under Nasheed's government also meant detaching from Gayoom's era of authoritarianism by making it possible for citizens to criticize the government. In terms of space for debate on climate change issues the co-director of NGO Bluepeace remarks that during President Nasheed's administration there were many freedoms for Bluepeace to show concern and to demonstrate. The organization even joined the political delegation to the Copenhagen world top meeting on climate change and had space to participate in forums.<sup>72</sup> Hirsch found the same in his interview with an environmental criticist of Nasheed's carbon neutrality plan, who had been jailed during previous President Gayoom's era, and said that "Now I can talk to you" (2015: 192). Another respondent confirms that during Nasheed's era there was a lot of room for NGO's and civilians to protest if the government wanted to reclaim an island.<sup>73</sup> The same was experienced by the employees of Transparency Maldives who state that it was a lot easier for organizations that work around climate change issues to do their work and have access to interaction with political institutions.<sup>74</sup> Nasheed's administration thus not only stressed the

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<sup>72</sup> Skype interview with Rilwan, 3 May 2017

<sup>73</sup> This respondent does not mind being quoted for adaptation issues, but would like to remain anonymous for issues concerning politics and democracy

<sup>74</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

importance of freedom of expression and welcomed criticism, but also was involved in public consultation on environmental issues. This means that the interests and demands of affected communities are represented in the climate change policy-making.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, according to Freedom House there has been a sharp decline in freedom of expression since 2013. This also translates to the freedom of expression on climate change issues. One respondent claims that when it comes to environmental and climate change issues, citizens and NGO's have nothing to say. One even risks the possibility of going to jail when speaking out. Even the EPA is not able to say anything, because the Presidential Office decides whether a project such as reclaiming a reef will commence.<sup>75</sup> The representative of Transparency Maldives confirms that NGO's working around climate change issues have much more difficulties nowadays to interact with political institutions. He says that on a relatively unpolitical issue like the environment, one would still face significant hurdles if they want to operate in the Maldives. He claims that the space of freedom of expression has definitely shrunk since the current administration.<sup>76</sup> Contrary to the Nasheed administration, Yameen's governance does not stress the importance of public consultation on climate change issues. According to Zuhair and Kurian, environmental impact assessments are made without proper consultation with the communities who are affected by the state's climate change policies. They argue that since there is no public consultation there are limited opportunities to derive at socially and environmentally sound solutions to climate change threats ( Zuhair and Kurian 2016: 139).

#### Conclusion 4

Nasheed has allowed for criticism on his government and on the environmental policies that his administration implemented. Compared to both his predecessor and successor's governments, there was an unprecedented level of freedom of expression and space for NGO's to engage in debates on climate change issues during Nasheed's time in office. In addition to that, the Nasheed administration was also involved in public consultation with affected island communities. Since Yameen is President, freedom of expression has deteriorated significantly and the space for NGO's to function has shrunk. Opportunities for public consultation have also ceased, as the Yameen administration is not facilitating deliberative democratic participation in climate change adaptation

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<sup>75</sup> This respondent does not mind being quoted for adaptation issues, but would like to remain anonymous for issues concerning politics and democracy

<sup>76</sup> Skype interview with Hamid and Ali, 17 May 2017

policies. In conclusion, the current government's policy of censorship on environmental issues for citizens and NGO's has led to the suppression of public consultation on climate change issues.

### **Findings on impact of de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation**

This chapter has demonstrated that de-democratizing trends have an impact on climate change adaptation, because they make local adaptation to climate change more difficult. First, the trend towards de-democratization has led to a different environmental strategy (sub-question five). Whereas President Nasheed's administration employed democratic environmentalism, President Yameen has returned to an authoritative environmentalism strategy that Gayoom also implemented. Yameen's interpretation of authoritative environmentalism is not the same to his half-brother's, since Gayoom was very vocal on environmental issues on an international stage, whereas Yameen has not openly discussed the topic. Authoritative environmentalism holds the premise that the state dictates climate change policies, with no involvement of the population.

Second, the impact of Yameen's strategy of authoritative environmentalism on climate change adaptation four counter-positions that demonstrate the difference between democratic and authoritative environmentalism (sub-question six). These are (i) decentralization versus recentralization, (ii) population dispersion versus population consolidation, (iii) climate change activism versus climate change minimization, and (iv) freedom of expression versus censorship.

The four conclusion that are derived from this discussion are:

1. The current government's recentralization policies have disarmed local environmental governance.
2. Yameen's strategy of population consolidation has negative implications for the nation's island identity and ecosystems.
3. President Yameen's minimization of climate change threats has led to a decrease in local capacity to implement adaptation measures and community resilience to climate change.
4. The current government's censorship policy on environmental issues for citizens and NGO's has led to the suppression of public consultation on climate change threats.



## **Conclusion**

This thesis has examined what the impact of the trend towards de-democratization is on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives since 2013. Each chapter has discussed two sub-questions and presented its findings in a structured manner. The answers on the sub-questions to the puzzle are summarized below. After the answers to the sub-questions are given, the research puzzle is answered. Thereafter, the implications of this research for the academic debate and general public are explored. Finally, some limitations of this research are discussed and some suggestions for further research on this topic are presented.

### **The answers to the sub-questions**

*What are the main climate change threats in the Maldives?*

The main climate change threats in the Maldives are (i) sea water encroachment, (ii) increased occurrence and intensity of storms, rainfall and flooding, (iii) economic and infrastructural damages, (iv) freshwater access, and (v) loss of biodiversity.

*What adaptation methods have been implemented to respond to climate change threats?*

The current and past governments have mainly employed hard adaptation methods to respond to climate change threats, such as hard-engineering infrastructure like sea boulders and harbors, reclamation of land, and relocation strategies. President Nasheed's administration has focused on the reclamation of existing islands and improving the country's transport system, by building harbors and providing public transport, also to less accessible islands with smaller populations. President Yameen continues President Gayoom's strategy of population consolidation and developing artificial islands.

*What does a trend towards de-democratization entail?*

A trend towards de-democratization is a movement toward narrower, more unequal, less protected and less mutually binding political relations between citizens and state. De-democratization occurs when there is substantial withdrawal of trust networks from public politics, and increasing insertion of categorical inequality and autonomy of coercive power centers into public politics.

*How has the current government of President Yameen been moving towards de-democratization as compared to the previous administration of President Nasheed?*

President Yameen's government has been moving towards de-democratization, especially in terms of political pluralism and participation, freedom of expression and belief, and associational and organizational rights. President Yameen has arrested and jailed opposition figures and members of his own party that fell into disfavor, or forced them into exile. Freedom of expression and press has decreased significantly since President Yameen introduced the anti-defamation law and shut down major media outlets. Freedom of assembly has been under threat and the space for citizens and NGO's to be critical has shrunk dramatically.

*How has the trend towards de-democratization led to a different environmental strategy of President Yameen's government, as compared to President Nasheed's administration?*

The trend towards de-democratization has led to President Yameen taking an authoritative environmental strategy, as opposed to President Nasheed's approach of democratic environmentalism, because the Yameen administration believes that the state should dictate climate change policies, rather than spreading authority across several of governance and consulting the population.

*What impacts does President Yameen's authoritarian environmental strategy have on climate change adaptation?*

President Yameen's approach of authoritarian environmentalism has led to a recentralization of local level tasks, including environmental governance; population consolidation for economic development; minimization of climate change issues in the public debate, and; censorship on environmental issues for NGO's and citizens.

### **The answer to the research puzzle**

The problem statement of this thesis was: ‘What is the impact of the trend towards de-democratization on the politics of climate change adaptation in the Maldives since 2013?’ It can now be disclosed that the trend towards de-democratization in the Maldives has impacted the politics of climate change adaptation in four ways. First, President Yameen’s recentralization policies have disarmed local environmental governance. Second, the current government’s population consolidation strategy has negative implications for preserving the nation’s island identity and ecosystems. Third, President Yameen’s minimization of climate change issues in the public debate has decreased local capacity to implement adaptation measures, as well as community resilience to climate change. Fourth, the current administration’s censorship strategy on environmental issues for citizens and NGO’s has led to the suppression of public consultation on climate change issues. These four consequences of President Yameen’s approach to governance are all related to climate change adaptation on a local level. The negative impact of de-democratization on these four elements also has negative implications for local adaptive capacity. The answer to the research puzzle is thus that decreases in local environmental governance empowerment, ‘islandness’, local capacity and community resilience, and public consultation have made local-level adaptation to climate change threats more difficult.

### **Implications of the research outcome**

The question remains what the outcome that de-democratization negatively impacts local-level adaptation to climate change threats in the Maldives has for a broader understanding of the relation between democracy and climate change. First of all, local-level adaptation is important for effective adaptation to climate change. As also argued by Laukkonen et al., it is at a local level where adaptation should be implemented, since the specific realities of climate change occur at this level (2009: 289). However, it is often in developing countries like the Maldives that local environment authorities lack the capacity and resources to efficiently respond to climate change threats. This is the case while responses to climate change require local knowledge, and participation and coordination from the state, NGO’s and the academia, to ensure internalization of climate change as an inherent challenge to local communities (Laukkonen et al 2009: 288, 291). In other words, the involvement of local actors will enhance the response towards climate change.

Second of all, the Maldives is not the only case in which the state of democracy has a negative impact on local-level adaptive capacity. Other examples that can potentially have similar implications are Bangladesh, India and Burma. This is why research into the relation between a political system and climate change is very important nowadays, because the nature of regime can have significant implications for the effectiveness of the response to climate change impacts. This research has thus demonstrated that there is an incentive for the academia, policymakers and the general public to discourage de-democratization processes as they have a negative impact on local adaptive capacity. This confirms that democracy and climate change adaptation are highly intertwined topics that has implications for a broader public.

A significant issue in the Maldivian case is that there is a lack of continuity in climate change policies, as there is, as one respondent framed it<sup>77</sup>, a ‘mismatch in the timeframe’ of politics and climate change adaptation. Within a decade, there have been four governments in the Maldives, each with different perceptions on climate change adaptation, and also outside of the Maldives it is common that a change in government reflects a change in the direction of (climate change) policies. Since political parties are often only a few years in office, they have a short-term approach to policymaking, whereas climate change is an issue which requires a long-term vision. Nevertheless, the state should encourage a long-term approach to climate change and organize the cooperation between different layers of governance, as well as the inclusion of civil society in the debate on climate change adaptation. This implicates that there is a strong connection between good governance and climate change. In the case of the Maldives, it remains to be seen whether the 2018 presidential elections will lead to yet another government, and potentially to a new approach to climate change adaptation.

### **Limitations of research**

The limitations of this research are the following. First of all, because I was not allowed to enter the country, I was not able to conduct fieldwork in the Maldives. This means that I have studied elements of a society without having been in the country. This has several disadvantages, because it means that I may have missed significant aspects of Maldivian society that could have contributed to this research. Besides that, meeting my respondents face-to-face may have resulted in additional

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<sup>77</sup> Skype interview with Aslam, 30 May 2017

data, because there would have been more time for ‘chitchat’ that could potentially have included valuable information. In addition to that, I was not able to do participant observation, for instance by spending some time in an institution such as the Environmental Protection Agency, or an NGO like Bluepeace. Participant observation could have potentially also provided me with insights that I was not able to gain in the way that this research was executed because of the physical distance between the researcher and the participants.

Secondly, the scope of this thesis did not allow for a complete analysis of the frame de-democratization as Tilly has laid out on his book ‘Democracy’ (2007). Just like Tilly has in his case-studies, I have used the Freedom House ratings to concretize my claims about the state of democracy in the Maldives. It would have been more encompassing, however, would I have fully applied Tilly’s methodology on de-democratization.

Finally, this study had a small n, and none of the respondents are working for the current government. The latter could have given me a slight bias, since I have mostly spoken with people who are critical towards the Yameen administration. A larger n, as well as a more inclusive selection of participants could have led to more convincing argumentation.

### **Suggestions for further research**

This research has found that local-level adaptation to climate change issues is more difficult because of the recent trend towards de-democratization. The question remains, however, if island communities are prepared and/or willing to adapt to climate change issues. Do they even perceive climate change as a threat? Some of the existing research suggests that local communities have a disinterest and denial of climate change issues, and consider the current political situation as more concerning.<sup>78</sup> After having outlined the country’s issues with corruption, de-democratization and radicalization, Robinson also states that “Today, it seems, climate change is the least of the Maldives’ concerns” (2016). Further research could examine the relation between democracy, climate change and local population attitudes in greater detail.

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<sup>78</sup> Please see the excellent PhD of Justyna Orłowska on islanders’ perception on climate change. Orłowska, Justyna. "Living on the sinking islands. Social aspects of climate change on example of Maldives." *Institute of Philosophy and Sociology Polish Academy of Sciences Graduate School for Social Research* (2015): 1-297. Web.

In addition to that, the impending climate change crisis in the Maldives and the relocation strategies that are implemented as a response to that bring up questions of what impact this has on the islanders sense of ‘attachment to place’, or ‘islandness’. Some communities are known to have lived on the same islands for generations and (forced) migration as a result of climate change may have significant implications for their island identities. Further research could examine the impact on one’s ‘sense of place’ if a vulnerable community has to relocate to another, better-protected island, or to an artificial island like Hulhumale.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, future research should examine the developments that will take place leading up to, and following, the 2018 presidential elections. As this research has demonstrated this event is associated with increasing political tensions, and some of the respondents are already questioning if this election will be free and fair. Future research should also examine how potential changes in the political landscape affect climate change adaptation.

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<sup>79</sup> One of the respondents, Ibrahim Mohamed, is currently doing his PhD on climate change adaptation in the Maldives and has taken ‘islandness’ as a theoretical frame, so this may lead to a contribution to existing academic knowledge on the topic

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