



# The Maldives: Islamic Republic, Tropical Autocracy

By J.J. Robinson

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## The Maldives: Islamic Republic, Tropical Autocracy By J.J. Robinson

The Maldives is a small and beautiful archipelago south of India, more renowned for luxury resorts than experiments in democracy. It is a country of contradictions, where tourists sip cocktails on the beach while on nearby islands local women are flogged for extramarital sex and blackmarket vodka costs \$140 a bottle.

Until 2008 the Maldives also hosted Asia's longest-serving dictator, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. A former political prisoner, Mohamed Nasheed, an environmental activist, journalist, and politician, brought Gayoom's thirty-year autocracy to a sudden end, in the Maldives' first democratic elections. Young, progressive and charismatic, President Nasheed thrust the Maldives into the spotlight as a symbol of the fight against climate change and the struggle for democracy and human rights in one of the world's strictest Islamic societies.

But dictatorships are hard to defeat, enduring in a country's institutions and the minds of people conditioned to autocracy over three decades. Democracy brought turmoil, protests, violence and intense political polarization. The ousted dictatorship overthrew Nasheed's government in February 2012, supported by Islamic radicals and mutinying security forces. Amid Byzantine intrigue, the fight for democracy was just beginning.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"Too little attention has been paid to the Maldives as a country, rather than a luxury resort. As J.J. Robinson notes in this comprehensive, perceptive and readable account of its recent politics, the island nation has been a bellwether of change, good and bad, across much of the Islamic World. Anyone interested in south Asia, and the tensions in many other Muslim countries, should read this excellent book." -- Jason Burke, South Asia correspondent for *The Guardian*, and author of *The New Threat From Islamic Militancy*

"A compelling and frightening account of a young democracy betrayed by corruption and Islamic extremism -- the Maldives may be a small country, but JJ Robinson's book has lessons that need to be learned worldwide." -- Mark Lynas, climate advisor to former President Nasheed

"JJ Robinson has produced the definitive book on a country few outsiders come to grips with. It is lucid, free of spin, very humorous, yet also chilling. Robinson lays bare the dark side of the Maldives -- public floggings, violent nationalism, sexual hypocrisy, the shameless use of Islam for political ends and a politically manipulated judiciary. And his outlook is bleak: he believes the future of electoral democracy is dead and misses his young colleague, abducted and still missing. Yet he also shows affection for the country and his Maldivian friends and admiration for some heroic figures who show that there can be a better way." - Charles Haviland, former BBC correspondent for Sri Lanka and the Maldives

"An excellent, highly readable and deeply revealing account of the struggle against tyranny in the Maldives. JJ Robinson's honest and good humoured portrayal of the Maldivians' push for democracy reads beautifully as a travel book -- a must to read for any visitor." -- Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International

### **About the Author**

J. J. Robinson was formerly editor of the Maldives' only independent English news service, Minivan News. He is a Fulbright scholar and graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism.

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