

ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN



Guidelines for Conduct of Public Debates during National Assembly Elections, 2018

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Guidelines for Conduct of Public Debates During National Assembly Elections, 2018

Background

Public Debates for the Candidates contesting the National Assembly elections are found necessary in view of the importance of the posts, the electorate's right to information for an informed choice and the benefits of a debate as a forum to effectively reveal the qualities of a Candidate and present their election manifesto.

The conduct of the Debates is provided for under Section 78(a) of the Public Election Fund Act 2008 and shall be organized jointly by the Election Commission of Bhutan (hereafter the Commission) and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC).

The BBSC shall be responsible for production and airing of the Public Debates within the parameters set out in the Electoral Laws and these Guidelines.

Principles

1. A Public Debate shall facilitate voters to hear the vision, ideology and strategy of the Candidates and help voters assess the possession of leadership potential and qualities.
2. A Public Debate provides Candidates the opportunity to reveal the merit (or lack of it) of the beliefs and ideals of their opponents through questioning/critiquing.
3. A Public Debate provides opportunity to Candidates to project their capabilities to address, express and manage a situation.
4. A Public Debate provides Candidates the opportunity to interact with other Candidates face to face, witnessed by voters.
5. A Public Debate would exhibit time management and effective communication skills of the Speaker.
6. A Public Debate would allow voters to have a comparative understanding of the capability of the Candidates.
7. A Public Debate conducted as an electoral forum is neither a regular TV programme, Radio talk show, an entertainment and commercial activity, nor an academic exercise with pros and cons session for or against a motion.

Objectives

8. The Objective of the Debates is to help people know more about the registered Political Parties and Candidates contesting the National Assembly Elections, who will, upon being elected, be responsible to guide the course of the Nation.

General Rules

9. A moderator, appointed by the Commission shall be responsible for conducting the Debate in an unbiased manner.
10. The Participants must always be respectful to one another and observe proper decorum.
11. The Public Debate shall be conducted in the national language.
12. The sequence of speaking shall be decided by draw of lots.

Primary Round of National Assembly Elections

13. There shall be two Public Debates for the Primary Round, conducted in Thimphu, in collaboration with the BBSC and telecast live.
14. The President of the political parties contesting elections shall represent the parties at the First Public Debate.
15. The Presidents or another party leader may be nominated by a party to represent it at the Second Public Debate.

Primary Round: First Public Debate

16. The first Public Debate in the Primary Round shall be conducted in the first week of the campaign period on the date specified in the Election Schedule. It shall comprise of the following three segments.
17. The first segment shall be based on the Party ideology and proceed as follows:
 - 17.1. The first Speaker, sequenced by draw of lots, shall have 5 minutes to deliver the Opening Statement based on the Party's ideology.
 - 17.2. The other Speakers, one after the other, shall have 2 minutes each to comment on or pose a question to the opening statement made.
 - 17.3. The Speaker shall have 5 minutes, at the end of all the questions/comments by the other Speakers, to respond.

- 17.4. The Moderator shall have 1 minute to comment on or pose a question to each of the Speakers based on their opening statement.
- 17.5. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment by the Moderator.
- 17.6. The same procedure shall be followed for each of the Speakers offering the same opportunity to all.
18. The second segment shall be theme-based with four sealed envelopes, containing the themes, being placed in a transparent bowl for each Speaker to pick from. The procedure for each Speaker shall be as follows:
 - 18.1. The Speaker shall have 3 minutes to speak on the theme.
 - 18.2. The next Speaker shall have 2 minutes to make a comment or pose a question.
 - 18.3. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment.
 - 18.4. The other Speaker who commented/questioned shall have 1 minute to make a response.
 - 18.5. The above procedure shall be repeated for all the Speakers.
19. The third segment shall consist of the Final Focus.
 - 19.1. Each Speaker shall have 3 minutes each to make a final focus and deliver their closing statements.

Primary Round: Second Public Debate

20. The second Public Debate in the Primary Round shall be conducted mid-campaign period before the operation of the Postal Ballot Facilitation Booths, on the date specified in the Election Schedule. It shall comprise of the following three segments.
21. The first segment shall be based on the Party's campaign manifesto and proceed as follows:
 - 21.1. The first Speaker, sequenced by draw of lots, shall have 5 minutes to deliver the Opening Statement based on the Party's manifesto.
 - 21.2. The other Speakers, one after the other, shall have 2 minutes each to comment on or pose a question to the opening statement made.

- 21.3. The Speaker shall have 3 minutes, at the end of all the questions/comments by the other Speakers, to respond.
 - 21.4. The Moderator shall have 1 minute to comment on or pose a question to each of the Speakers based on their opening statement.
 - 21.5. The Speaker shall have 3 minutes to respond to the question/comment by the Moderator.
 - 21.6. The same procedure shall be followed for each of the Speakers offering the same opportunity to all.
22. The second segment shall be issue-based with four sealed envelopes, containing the issues, being placed in a transparent bowl for each Speaker to pick from. The procedure for each Speaker shall be as follows:
- 22.1. The Speaker shall have 3 minutes to speak on the issue.
 - 22.2. The next Speaker shall have 2 minutes to make a comment or pose a question.
 - 22.3. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment.
 - 22.4. The other Speaker who commented/questioned shall have 1 minute to make a response.
 - 22.5. The above procedure shall be repeated for all the Speakers until all have received same opportunity.
23. The third segment shall consist of the Final Focus.
- 23.1. Each Speaker shall have 3 minutes each to make a final focus and deliver their closing statements.

General Elections

24. The Public Debates for the General Elections, between the two Candidates of the two contesting Parties, shall be scheduled such that all debates in the 47 constituencies are completed before the operation of the Postal Ballot Facilitation Booths.
25. The Public Debate, comprising of three segments, shall be held in the respective *Demkhongs* as far as possible.
26. The first segment shall be based on the Party's campaign manifesto and proceed as follows:

- 26.1. The first Speaker shall have 4 minutes to deliver the Opening Statement based on the Party's manifesto.
 - 26.2. The other Speaker shall have 2 minutes to comment on or pose a question to the opening statement made.
 - 26.3. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment by the other Speaker.
 - 26.4. The other Speaker shall have 2 minutes to make a further response.
 - 26.5. The Speaker shall be again provided 2 minutes to make the final remarks.
27. The second segment shall be issue-based with an issue in two separate and sealed envelopes placed in a transparent bowl for the Speakers to pick from. The procedure for each Speaker shall be as follows:
- 27.1. The Speaker shall have 3 minutes to speak on the issue.
 - 27.2. The other Speaker shall have 2 minutes to make a comment or pose a question.
 - 27.3. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment.
 - 27.4. The Moderator shall have 1 minute to comment on or pose a question to each of the Speakers based on the issue.
 - 27.5. The Speaker shall have 2 minutes to respond to the question/comment by the Moderator.
28. The third segment shall consist of the Final Focus.
- 28.1. Each Speaker shall have 3 minutes each to make a final focus in his/her closing statement.

Introduction of the Candidates

29. The Moderator shall prepare a standard introduction of each Candidate stating the name, main academic qualification, the last position occupied based on information provided by the respective Candidate.
30. The Moderator shall inform the audience that applauding or deploring a Candidate shall not be allowed.

31. A Moderator shall announce in his/her introductory remarks that any disturbance, by anyone at the time of Debate will be considered an offence under the Electoral Laws and the law enforcing authorities are empowered to deal with it accordingly.
32. The Moderator shall reserve the right to reject any questions, which is not in line with the election code of conduct.
33. A Moderator shall make brief concluding remarks acknowledging the participants, organizers, audience and the technical team.

Order of Speakers

34. The speaking and seating order of the Candidates shall be determined by draw of lots.

Questions/ Comments

35. Questions or comments during the Debate must abide by the election code of conduct and be aimed to test or reveal the real qualities of the opponents and the content of the Manifesto.
36. The Moderators and the Candidates must take note that there shall be no questions asked or comments made that would jeopardize the nation's security, sovereignty or foreign relations, including those relating to religion or regionalism.
37. There shall be a Research Team formed by BBSC to ensure that all the background documents and information are available to the debate conducting team in advance for preparation.
38. The Questions/ Issues in the sealed Envelopes must be brief and direct and sent to the respective Chief Election Coordinators (CECos) by the assigned ECB and BBSC joint team. These shall be made available to the debate conducting team only immediately prior to the conduct of the debate.

Final Focus

39. The Final Focus shall be a persuasive final closing statement by the Candidates focusing on why voters should vote for him/her/party.
40. The Speaker shall summarize key arguments in his/her speech and may refute the important arguments of the opponent.

Air Time

41. The Public Debates shall commence with the National Anthem and be broadcast LIVE.
42. The Primary Round Public Debates shall commence from 6 p.m. without the news presentation at 6 p.m. and 7 p.m.
43. For the General Elections, when three Public Debates becomes necessary to be broadcast in one evening, the first shall be broadcast from 5 to 6 p.m., second from 6 to 7 p.m. and the third from 7 to 8 p.m.

Venue

44. The respective Returning Officer shall decide the venue of the Debate and intimate the Political Parties accordingly.
45. A Debate shall not be organized inside a Dzong, *lhakhang* or any religious institutions.
46. The venue of the Debate should preferably be in a public auditorium with adequate seating capacity for the public to witness the Debate and if necessary extend close circuit viewing facilities.
47. The Commission shall ensure that the information related to the venue, date and time of a Debate is notified to the public in advance.

Setting

48. The setting and ambience of the place must augment and be conducive for serious discourse.
49. The atmosphere must evoke confidence and seriousness.
50. There shall be a formal portrait of His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo provided by the Commission as in Annexure A.
51. The banner of the particular Debate shall be placed below the portrait as in Annexure B and backdrop as provided by the Commission.

Moderators

Qualifications

52. An official who has the experience of conducting a Debate of high standard shall be appointed as the Moderator.
53. The Moderator must be proficient in Dzongkha and have sound knowledge and understanding of issues.
54. The Moderator must be a person who is sensitive to the socio-cultural nuances of the society.
55. An official who is appointed as a Moderator to conduct the Debate in a *Demkhong* shall not have *Mitsi* registered in that place.
56. All the team members assigned to conduct debate shall declare conflict of interest as in *Annexure D*. A Moderator shall, where it is evident or he/she considers his/her role entails conflict of interest, immediately notify the Election Authorities of the fact.

Role of Moderators

57. A Moderator shall ensure that there is an atmosphere of civility and not tolerate rude or disrespectful behavior from the Candidates. He/she must intervene if and when the code of conduct is breached.
58. A Moderator shall start the Debate by greeting the participants, audience, stating the objective of the Debate and setting the tone for the Debate. Detailed briefing may be done in the presence of all participants before the live broadcast in the interest of time.
59. A Moderator shall allow the Candidates to complete the sentence after the last bell is sounded by the Time-Keeper.
60. The Moderator, where required under these Guidelines, shall pose pertinent questions to the Speakers, in a professional and unbiased manner.

Orientation for Moderators

61. There shall be an orientation arranged for Moderators.
62. The Commission shall conduct the Orientation for the Moderators.

Debate Schedule

63. The Moderators shall conduct the Debates as per the Schedule issued by the Commission.

Broadcast

64. All the discussions shall be broadcast LIVE. There shall be simultaneous broadcast on BBSC TV Channel 2 and Radio Channel 2. If, due to some unforeseen reasons, the LIVE telecast is hampered, then the recorded debate shall be re-broadcast at the earliest.
65. The BBSC shall be required to re-broadcast these Debates once on both TV channels and radio, before the end of the election campaign period.
66. The BBSC shall provide recorded copies of the Debate to the radio stations and cable TV networks for re-broadcast.
67. The local cable network operators shall be directed to rebroadcast the recorded Debates at least once a week during hours specified by the Media Arbitrator, till the campaign period ends.
68. Any other programme related to the elections conducted by BBSC shall not be broadcast on the same day as the live Debate.

Media Coverage

69. The recording of the Debates shall be out of bounds for the other media if and when it becomes impossible to conduct the Debate LIVE so that no biased story is run before the broadcast of the programme.

Audience

70. The audience for the Debates shall be the voters of that *Demkhong* and persons authorized by the Commission. However, for the two Presidential Debates, any registered voter may attend with due regard to other legal provisions.
71. The audience shall serve as public witness to the Debate and become more informed about the Candidates to enable a sound voting decision on the Poll Day.
72. The audience shall maintain proper decorum during the debate.
73. Members of audience shall not ask questions to prevent distortion of the level playing field.

74. The CECos and Returning Officers shall oversee and ensure that Law and Order is maintained at the places of Debate.

Time Keeping

75. The maximum time allotted to each Candidate and the sequence of Speakers must be spelt out right at the outset by the Moderator.
76. The Dzongkhag Electoral Officer shall be the Time-Keeper for the Debate.
77. A digital time keeping device will be used for the Debates and where it is not available an appropriate clock or bell must be used.
78. The Time-Keeper shall give a warning buzz when there is one-minute left indicating that the Candidate should conclude and a final buzz when he/she must stop.

Rostrum

79. There shall be standard Rostrum in all debates issued by the Commission and Dzongkhag Electoral Officers shall make it available as per the schedule drawn.
80. The Rostrums shall bear the logo of the Commission.
81. The setting shall be as per the layout provided by the Commission as in Annexure B.

Judges

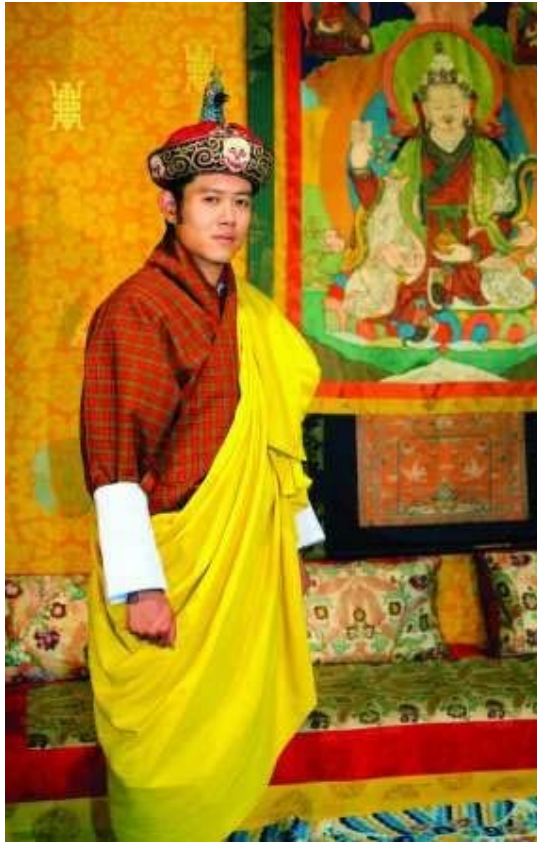
82. The community of voters in the audience, television viewers and radio listeners are the judges of the Debates with the judgment being passed on the Poll Day.

Done under the seal of the Election Commission of the Kingdom of Bhutan on this 18th Day of the 9th Month of the Year 2018 corresponding to the 9th Day of the 8th Month of the Earth Male Dog Year in the Bhutanese Calendar.


Election Commissioner


Election Commissioner


Chief Election Commissioner



“Today, in the womb of a strong and peaceful monarchy, we have begun to nurture the hopes of a vibrant democracy. It is this endeavour that we must henceforth uphold as our greatest priority – the success of democracy. For in the success of democracy lies the consolidation of our nation’s achievements and the future happiness and wellbeing of Bhutan.”

His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, 17th December 2007

Third Parliamentary Elections 2018: National Assembly

Public Debate

(Name of Dzongkhag to be displayed on the screen not on banner)

Portrait of His Majesty The Druk Gyalpo on the Wall

ECB Logo Prescribed Banner for the Debate *BBSC Logo*

Moderator

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7

Audience



Declaration of Conflict of Interest

I,(name), bearing CID No....., (Position Title)(Agency) declare, that as per Section 56 of the Guidelines for Conduct of Public Debates during National Assembly Elections 2018, in serving as a member of Public Debate Conducting Team from BBSC:

- I do not have or anticipate any Conflict of Interest. I shall notify the Authorities concerned immediately in the event any such interests arise in the course of or before discharging my duty; OR
- I do have Conflict of Interest in view of the following reason(s):
 - Family Member:
 - In-Laws:
 - Close Relative:
 - Close Friend:
 - Adversary:
 - Others:

I hereby confirm that the above information is true to the best of my knowledge. In the event the above declaration is found to be incorrect, I shall be liable for legal action.

Name and Signature:
Place:
Date: DD/MM/YY

Reviewed by:

BBSC Management

Received by:

**Head of Department
Department of Elections
ECB**