

**ELECTION COMMISSION OF BHUTAN**



**Guidelines for Conducting Public Debates for the Third  
Thromde Elections, 2021  
in Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu**

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# **Guidelines for Conducting Public Debates for the Third Thromde Elections, 2021 in Thimphu, Phuentshogling and Gelegphu**

## **Background**

Public debates for the candidates contesting the Thromde elections are found necessary in view of the importance of the posts and the electorate's right to information for an informed choice.

It is for this reason that the debates are required to be sponsored by the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) under Section 78(a) of the Public Election Fund Act, 2008.

The Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation (BBSC) shall be responsible for production and airing of the public debates within the parameters set out in the Electoral Laws and in this Guideline.

## **Principles**

- 1.** A Public Debate is to facilitate voters to hear the vision, ideology and strategy of the candidates and help voters assess the possession of the leadership potential and qualities.
- 2.** A Public Debate provides candidates the opportunity to project their capabilities to address, express and manage a situation.
- 3.** A Public Debate provides candidates the opportunity to interact with other candidates face to face, witnessed by voters.
- 4.** A Public Debate provides candidates the opportunity to showcase their leadership qualities and also point out the weaknesses of their opponents through questions/critique.
- 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.

## **Objectives**

The Objective of the debates is to help people know more about the candidates contesting the Thromde elections, who will, upon being elected, be responsible, to guide the course of the nation.

## **Rules**

1. The Public Debates between the candidates at the Thromde level will be conducted in a single round.
2. A moderator appointed by the ECB shall be responsible for conducting the debate in an unbiased manner.
3. The candidates must always be respectful to one another and observe proper decorum.

## **Public Debates**

1. The candidates nominated from each Thromde *Demkhongs* shall participate in the debate.
2. There shall be a standard format and time allotted for the debate, based on the number of candidates contesting the thromde election.
3. Every candidate shall be, allotted a maximum time of 30 minutes.
4. For every additional candidate, time allocation would increase by 30 minutes.
5. Within the given timeframe, each candidate will get two minutes to pose a question and 3 minutes to answer the question.
6. Two copies of every question in the set will be made for the question bank, and the ones chosen by the candidate will be made available for both the moderator and the candidate.
7. The format for each *Public Debate* according to the number of candidates are as follows:

## **A. Single candidate**

### **Round 1 – Introductory**

1. Moderator introduces the format and the candidate (3)
2. Candidate will be given five minutes to make his/her statement. (5)
3. Moderator will pose a question based on his/her presentation. (1+4)

### **Round 2 – Question Round**

1. Three questions will be posed in this round from the question bank. The moderator will inform the candidate of the total number of questions in the question bank.
2. The candidate will be given choice to select three numbers from the set of questions in the question bank.
3. The moderator will pose questions corresponding to the numbers selected by the candidate from the Question Bank. (1+1+1+4+4+4=15)

### **Round 3 – Final Round**

1. The candidate will be given 5 minutes to make the final statement. (5)
2. The moderator closes the debate with the vote of thanks.

## **B. Two candidates**

### **Round 1 – Introductory**

1. Moderator introduces the format and the candidates (5)
2. Each Candidate will be given five minutes to make his/her statement. (5+5)
3. Moderator will pose a question each, based on his/her presentation. (1+1+4+4)

### **Round 2 – Question Round**

1. Each candidate will pose two questions, one at a time to each other. (Candidate A will pose a question to candidate B, B will answer the question, followed by B posing a question to A and A will answer) (1+1+1+1+4+4+4+4)
2. Moderator will pose a question from the question bank. The candidate will choose a number, and the moderator will pose a question each to both the candidates corresponding to the choice made by the candidate from the question bank. (1+1+4+4)

### **Round 3 – Final Round**

1. The candidate will be given 5 minutes to make the final statement. (5+5)
2. The moderator closes the debate with the vote of thanks.

### **C. Three candidates**

#### **Round 1 – Introductory**

1. Moderator introduces the format and the candidates (7)
2. Each candidate will be given five minutes to make his/her statement.
3. Moderator will pose a question each based on his/her presentation.  
(1+1+1+4+4+4=15)

#### **Round 2 – Question Round**

1. Each candidate will pose a question to the other two candidates. (Candidate A will pose a question each to candidate B and C, B will pose a question each to candidate C and A, and so on. (1 +1+1+1+1+1+4+4+4+4+4+4 =30)
2. Moderator will pose a question from the question bank. The candidate will choose a number, and the moderator will pose a question each to all the candidates corresponding to the choice made by the candidate from the Question Bank.  
(1+1+1+4+4+4=15)

#### **Round 3 – Final Round**

1. The candidate will be given 5 minutes to make the final statement. (5x3=15)
2. The moderator closes the debate with the vote of thanks.

### **D. Four or more candidates**

#### **Round 1 – Introductory**

1. Moderator introduces the format and the candidates (9)
2. Each Candidate will be given five minutes to make his/her statement.
3. Moderator will pose a question each, based on his/her presentation.  
(1+1+1+1+4+4+4+4=20)

## **Round 2 – Question Round**

1. Each candidate shall choose a name through draw of lots.
2. Each candidate shall pose a question to another candidate chosen through a draw of lots. (1+1+1+1+4+4+4+4=20).
3. In the case of odd number candidates, one of the questions will be posed by one of the candidates through another draw of lots.
4. Moderator will pose 2 questions from the question bank. The candidate will choose two numbers from the question bank. The moderator will pose the first set of questions to all the candidates followed by the second set as per the number drawn from the lots. (1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+4+4+4+4+4+4+4+4=40).

## **Round 3 – Final Round**

1. Each candidate will be given 5 minutes to make the final statement. (5x4=20)
2. The moderator closes the debate with the vote of thanks.

## **Questions**

1. Questions shall be asked by each candidate, to test or reveal the real qualities of the opponents.
2. The ECB, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, shall prepare questions for use during the public debates.
3. There shall be a Research team formed by BBSC to ensure that all the background documents and information are made available to the debate conducting team in advance to facilitate preparations.
4. All questions must be written, in English and Dzongkha.
5. Both the moderators and the candidates must note that no questions shall be asked to jeopardize the nation's security, sovereignty or foreign relations, including those relating to religion or regionalism.
6. On the day of the Debate, the Questions shall be sent to Chief Election Coordinator two hours prior to the debate.
7. Two sets of questions shall be printed and made available for the debate.
8. Soft copy of the questions shall be sent to the BBSC technical team to feature them on the screen.
9. Questions must confine and be relevant to the purpose of the debates.
10. Questions must be brief and direct.

## **Airtime**

The Public Debate shall commence LIVE from 6 p.m. with 10 minutes news break at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., respectively, without any commercial breaks.

## **Venues**

1. The Public Debate shall be conducted in respective Dzongkhag Thomdes of the candidates.
2. The Dzongkhag Election Office, in consultation with the candidates, shall decide on the venue of the Debate.
3. A Public Debate shall not be organized inside a Dzong, *lhakhang* or any religious institution.
4. The Dzongkhag Election Authority shall decide the number of participants to be allowed for the Public debate.
5. The Returning Officer shall ensure that the information related to the venue, date, and time of a Public Debate is notified in advance.

## **Setting**

1. The setting and ambiance of the venue must be augmented and be conducive for serious discourse.
2. The atmosphere must evoke confidence and seriousness.
3. There shall be a formal portrait of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo provided by the ECB.

## **Qualifications of Moderators**

1. An official who has the experience of conducting a debate of high standard shall be appointed as the moderator.
2. The moderator must be proficient in Dzongkha and have sound knowledge and understanding of issues.
3. The moderator must be a person who is known to be sensitive to the socio-cultural nuances of society.
4. An official who is appointed as a moderator to conduct the debate in a *Demkhong* shall be one whose *Mitsi* is not registered in that place.



5. All the team members assigned to conduct debate shall declare ‘no conflict of interest.’ A moderator shall, where it is evident or he/she considers his/her role entails a conflict of interest, immediately notify the election authorities of the fact.

### **Role of Moderators**

1. 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.
2. A moderator shall start the debate by greeting the participants, audience, stating the objective and setting the tone for the debate.
3. A moderator shall allow the candidates to complete the sentence after the last bell is sounded by the Time-Keeper.

### **Debate Schedule**

The moderators shall conduct the debates as per the schedule issued by the ECB.

### **Broadcast**

1. 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 disrupted, then the recorded debate shall be re-broadcast at the earliest.
2. Debates shall be conducted as soon as possible to facilitate postal voters to make an informed choice.
3. 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.
4. The BBSC shall provide recorded copies of the debate to the radio stations and cable TV-networks for re-broadcast.
5. The local cable network operators shall be directed to rebroadcast the recorded debates at least 2 times a week during hours specified by the Media Arbitrator, till the campaign period ends.

## **Introduction of the Candidates**

1. The Moderator shall prepare a standard introduction of each candidate stating the name, main academic qualification, the last three positions occupied based on information provided by the respective candidates.
2. The Moderator shall inform the audience that applauding or deploring a candidate shall not be allowed.
3. The 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 shall be empowered to deal with it accordingly.
4. The Moderator shall reserve the right to reject any questions, which is not in line with the code of conduct, required of the candidate.
5. A Moderator can make concluding remarks acknowledging the participants, organizers, audience and the technical team.

## **Media Coverage**

The recording of the debates shall not be made accessible to the other media outlets so that biased stories are not run/covered prior to the broadcast of the programme.

## **Orientation for Moderators**

1. There shall be an orientation arranged for moderators.
2. The ECB shall conduct the orientation for the moderators.

## **Audience**

1. The audience for the debates must be determined by the Dzongkhag Election Authority.
2. The audience shall serve as public witness to the debate and become more informed about the candidates.
3. The audience shall maintain decorum, befitting the occasion
4. Members of audience shall not ask questions to prevent distortion of the level playing field.
5. The Dzongkhag Election Authority shall oversee and ensure that law and order is maintained at the debate venues.

## **Order of Speakers**

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

## **Final Focus**

1. The Final Focus shall be a persuasive final re-statement by the candidates focusing on why voters should vote for him/her.
2. The candidate shall summarize key arguments in his/her speech and may refute the important arguments of the opponents.

## **Time Keeping**

1. The maximum time allotted to each candidate and turns must be spelt out right at the outset by the moderator.
2. The Dzongkhag Electoral Officer shall be the timekeeper for the debate.
3. 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.
4. The Timekeeper shall sound a warning buzzer when there is one minute before time is up and thereafter the candidate must conclude before the final buzzer is sounded to stop the speaker.

## **Rostrum**

1. There shall be standard Rostrum in all debates issued by the ECB and Dzongkhag
2. Electoral Officers shall make it available as per the schedule drawn.
3. The Rostrums shall bear the logo of the ECB.

## **Health safety protocol to be followed during the Public debate**

To carry out a safe and smooth Public Debate, the Dzongkhag Election Authority shall ensure:

- That the auditorium is disinfected one day before the Live public debate.
- The debate is conducted in a spacious facility to enforced physical distancing of 2 meters.
- All those authorized to enter the auditorium shall secure access through Druk Trace QR Code/entry of details in the Attendance Register.
- Temperatures of individuals are scanned with contactless thermal scanners.

- Handwashing facility with soap is installed at the entrance.
- Antigen tests for officials and candidates are under taken two hours before the start of the Public Debate (**Lockdown**).
- That unauthorized persons are not allowed entry into the premises.
- That the premises are secured with adequate security.
- That officials, candidates and audience wear face masks at all times.

Done under the seal of the Election Commission of the Kingdom of Bhutan on this ..... Day of..... Month of the Year 2021 corresponding to the .....Day of the .....Month of the Female Iron Ox Year of the Bhutanese Calendar.