



Bhutan National Human Development Report

TEN YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN BHUTAN



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.





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Resilient nations.*

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IN BHUTAN

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United Nations Development Programme Bhutan & Parliament of the Kingdom of Bhutan

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FOREWORD

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Parliament of the Kingdom of Bhutan are pleased to introduce this first of its kind *National Human Development Report*.

The report has been conceived through a strong partnership between the two parties on a unique theme, looking at the linkage between democracy and human development. It shows how a decade of efforts to cement democratic governance in Bhutan, through the perspective of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has expanded, enriched and contextualized the notion of human development in Bhutan.

In the history of Bhutan, governance systems have evolved from a monastic system to the royal courts of Kings, and then to a parliamentary democracy. The experience of Bhutan can influence and add value to ongoing global debates and thinking around development pathways and the role of democratic governance at a time when the international community continues to debate what has been described as the most studied system of governance.

In 2015, after several rounds of inclusive and participatory consultations involving a broad range of stakeholders from all over the world, 193 United Nations Member States, including Bhutan, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition to identifying a set of global goals, it coined the idea that transformational change should be attained while ensuring that “no one is left behind”. As a member of the global community, Bhutan has also embraced the SDGs and developed national development plans that fully embrace this multidimensional and holistic approach to development, also embodied in Gross National Happiness.

This *National Human Development Report* tells a story of progressive vision, and unequivocal commitment and compassion, both at the national and global levels, to pursue sustainable development with quality and dignity. These plans demonstrate the need for a high-level vision and goal—the rights, the duties, and the choices of citizens need to be protected and promoted in order to enrich human development.

This *National Human Development Report* comes at a time when Bhutanese society as a whole reflects on its past and ponders its future. It could not be more pertinent, timely, and auspicious. We hope and trust that decision-makers and stakeholders will find the story told in the report useful in pursuit of further advancing human development in the country.



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Tshogpoen Wangchuk Namgyel
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Ten Years of Democracy, Bhutan National Human Development Report 2018 is dedicated to the people of Bhutan. We hope that this report will inspire people to not only reflect on what the last 10 years of democracy have achieved but also look into the future to ensure that democracy will become more meaningful for Bhutan.

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ACRONYMS

ACC:	Anti-Corruption Commission
BCMD:	Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy
BICMA:	Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority
BKP:	Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Tshogpa
CBS:	Centre for Bhutan Studies
CSOs:	Civil Society Organizations
DNT:	Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa
DPT:	Druk Phuensum Tshogpa
ECB:	Election Commission of Bhutan
GDI:	Gender Development Index
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
GNHC:	Gross National Happiness Commission
GNH:	Gross National Happiness
HDI:	Human Development Index
NHDR:	National Human Development Report
PDP:	People's Democratic Party
RENEW:	Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracy and human development reinforce each other. Both require voice and participation. This *National Human Development Report* looks at the first decade of democracy in Bhutan, and its impact on national governance and, therefore, on human development. It studies Bhutan's unique context, where democracy was initiated by the Bhutanese King in 2008 after 100 years of Monarchy, and considers the path ahead.

At a time when nations are striving to make progress on governance as an integral part of their overall pursuit of human development, Bhutan's story of a peaceful shift from absolute Monarchy to parliamentary democracy is a powerful and important one.

The report emphasizes that democracy is a path to good governance, which is a pillar of Gross National Happiness, Bhutan's vision for human development. It explores the notable features that shape Bhutan's democratic vision: Gross National Happiness and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Constitution, the electoral system and Parliament, civil society, and emerging challenges and opportunities.

The report also looks at the resonance between Gross National Happiness and the Sustainable Development Goals as broad visions for human progress. While they were conceived at different times and under different circumstances, the two distinct approaches not only lead to the same goals for humanity, but share common features.

Are the people better off?

"Are the Bhutanese people better off after 10 years of democracy?" Available statistics say "yes" in terms of infrastructure, provision of health and education services, and governance structure. The core question is: "Is this because of democracy?" This report concludes that the process of democratization is an evolution of Bhutan's development and modernisation with the Monarchs at the helm. Human development indicators show that the past 10 years have been successful in advancing human development for Bhutan and the Bhutanese people.

The report presents data from "A Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy 2018," conducted to find out what Bhutanese people have to say about a decade of democracy. The survey revealed that, despite a period of adjustment, Bhutanese today are happy with the state of their democracy and perceive that they are engaged more than before in national decision-making.

Most survey respondents agreed that the introduction of democracy has made people more responsible. More than 80 percent said they enjoyed the right to express their views, and more than 75 percent said they are able to exercise their fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

The trend of health, education, infrastructure and other core development indicators from the advent of democracy until today clearly indicates that democratically elected governments have made significant efforts to enhance human development. Bhutan's Human Development Index value for 2017 was 0.612, having seen an over 20 percent rise since 2005. The country has almost eliminated extreme poverty and is about to reach the target on extreme poverty under the Sustainable Development Goals. It fares well among South Asian countries on all human development indicators except mean years of schooling. It is significant, therefore, that the Government elected in 2018 has prioritized education.

A substantial 36 percent of respondents to the survey conducted for the report perceived that democracy so far has not been able to reduce the gap between rich and poor. Other recent surveys have shown that while measures of Gross National Happiness have improved overall at the national level, urban Bhutanese tend to be happier than rural residents, and men more than women. It is also significant that the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa Government, which took the reins in 2018, campaigned and won the election on the promise of “Narrowing The Gap”.

New institutions sustain rights and choices

Principles such as equity, sustainability and empowerment, are deeply embedded in both human development and Gross National Happiness. The process of democratization in Bhutan is developing the core institutions that sustain democracy as well as providing conditions for fostering human development. As a national vision of development extending far beyond the classical definition of gross domestic product, Gross National Happiness requires that every citizen, to achieve happiness, is empowered to make decisions as part of a collective responsibility.

An inclusive and participatory process of preparing the Constitution in Bhutan began in 2001, under the guidance of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. A drafting committee was established representing various sectors and regions of the country. Through intensive consultations, all Bhutanese were given an opportunity to voice their opinions. The Constitution eventually incorporated the UN Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, adopting 22 articles as fundamental rights. It establishes mechanisms for good governance in line with sustainable and equitable development, and includes sweeping protections to maintain forest cover as well as the country’s spiritual and cultural heritage. It promotes human capabilities through provisions such as universal high school education.

Initially, few Bhutanese knew what a Constitution was, but today, a large majority do, and the report argues that it has made a critical contribution in starting to change the mindset of citizens. The Constitution symbolizes the shift from the people being loyal subjects of a King to loyal and responsible citizens of a democracy.

Despite its infancy, the bicameral Bhutanese Parliament has had an impact on the country’s political life and the course of human development. The first two Parliaments amended or enacted more than 60 laws, some in the face of public pressure. There has been noticeable growth in the capacity of parliamentarians, such as through budgetary oversight and the scrutiny of the legislative process. In the survey for this report, 85.8 percent of respondents maintained that Parliament has been able to carry out its legislative roles efficiently, and 87.4 percent said it has strengthened democratic culture.

A more inclusive atmosphere in decision-making is increasingly visible. With the Government announcing strategic plans, for example, to align the priorities of Gross National Happiness and the Sustainable Development Goals, parliamentarians have been able to bring in the views of people on issues such as conflicts between farmers and wildlife in the context of debates on the environment. Indicators show that there has been a steady improvement in service delivery under the parliamentary system, and government effectiveness has consistently improved.

With democracy, a major change has been the introduction of political parties in a competitive political arena. The main criticism of the electoral process has been that it has divided families and communities across the country as people aligned with different parties. While a majority of voters have accepted that parties are here to stay, there is a level of distrust among the electorate of politicians with concerns about their intentions and credibility.

Parties will likely face continued challenges, although there has been some evolution. Campaigns in 2008 largely focused on the personalities of the candidates. In 2018, a savvier electorate studied political pledges and benefits to constituencies. After three general election campaigns, it is clear that electoral promises need to be made seriously as they represent party priorities that translate into government policies and because voters are more discerning.

As governance has evolved from the Royal Court into a modern Government, civil society, a relatively new concept, has emerged. There is a growing understanding that while institutions and Constitutional bodies have clear mandates, and citizens enjoy fundamental rights, democracy will stall without civic engagement.

The formal creation of civil society institutions is still new to Bhutan. A common perception has been that these organizations primarily implement projects and programmes, filling gaps in social and economic services in places that the Government still does not reach. Many groups are now assuming a broader role in civic engagement, where citizens participate in their society, and leaders are held accountable.

A particular impetus comes from Bhutan's proposed graduation to a lower middle-income country. Diminishing interest among developing partners is putting achievements in social sectors at risk. Civil society can fill spaces where the government does not yet reach, build on the expertise they have developed on some issues, and call attention to socioeconomic development needs that remain acute in many parts of the country despite positive development outcomes at the national level.

Advancing an historic transformation

Ten years is a short time in the experience of democratic governance, but there is no right or wrong time to assess the success of a democracy, which will always be a work in progress. After a historic transformation, Bhutan has an opportunity to look at what has been learned and how to build on that experience into the future.

Understanding the challenges as well as conditions for success in the context of Bhutan's unique history and socio-cultural environment will bring into focus areas that need more attention, both to mitigate shortfalls and accelerate what is working well, in line with the vision of Gross National Happiness and the quest for human development.

Challenges and Recommendations

1. Short-term politics versus long-term goals

As the Head of State, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has advised the executive branch of Government not to give in to the temptation of shortsighted planning based on the electoral term of five years. There is a continued need for a long-term national vision and planning. This report recommends that Bhutan's Vision 2020 should be updated.

2. Decisions in the national interest

Notwithstanding the positive effects of democracy, Bhutanese citizens have seen that, once elected, governments are acutely sensitive to criticism and people's demands, and sometimes shy away from tough decisions. While some decisions may be difficult to make in the face of popular demand, they

should be guided by a vision of national interest. New measures should be pursued, such as well-functioning public transport.

3. Development of Political parties

Today, the political party is a key institution of democracy in Bhutan but has yet to achieve credibility as a trusted and respected provider of a national vision. Bhutanese parties therefore need to adopt transparent and farsighted ideologies that reflect their values and priorities.

4. Disharmony

Party politics has created and driven its own cleavages. Many people have come to view *tshogpas* (party coordinators) as the primary causes of disputes along party and community lines. The role of the *tshogpas* requires regulation. Parties have also suggested more informal exchanges like the “Democracy Forum 2018;” these should be encouraged.

5. Potential Regionalism

With nearly all constituencies in eastern Bhutan supporting the DPT (Druk Phuensum Tshogpa) party in 2018, there was a hint of regionalism. Political parties should continue attempts to balance regional representation in the Cabinet as an effective strategy to support national harmony.

6. Remaining apolitical

The requirement for bureaucrats, other public servants, and CSOs to be apolitical has created hesitation and tensions. It is important that public servants do not lobby or campaign for a party, but they need to know the views and ideologies of political parties to make informed choices. Developing a clearer definition of what it means to be “apolitical” is necessary to avoid discouraging open discourse.

7. Electoral trends and voter turnout

After some declines, voter turnout picked up in the 2018 election, helped by a vigorous campaign as well as postal ballots and facilitation booths for several categories of voters living outside their constituencies. The Election Commission of Bhutan could continue extending facilities to vote, using technology, so all citizens are eventually able to vote from their places of residence and employment.

8. Regulations during the election cycle

Electoral regulations require permission for public gatherings during the election period, including archery matches, religious ceremonies and private celebrations like weddings, with the concern that they could be unfairly used as political platforms and lead to disputes. The Bhutanese electorate needs to be trusted to use its political savvy and responsibility to ensure that no untoward or unlawful events take place. There is no need to suspend all gatherings and events.

9. Negative perceptions of politicians and politics

A major challenge is the negative stereotyping of politicians in South Asia and elsewhere. Bhutanese politicians sometimes begin their careers having to earn credibility with the electorate. A two-pronged approach to this issue is required, where the electorate is encouraged to become more

responsible in electing candidates and politicians are prompted to be more courageous and open in their intentions.

10. Gender imbalances in politics

The first five years of democracy had a positive impact on women's lives, creating leadership opportunities for both elite and ordinary women. But the debate on gender in politics in the second half of the decade predominantly laments the absence of women in the Bhutanese political scene. There is a need to step up advocacy to break away from social and cultural norms and stereotypical attitudes that result in gender discrimination. Ensuring that more women are in leadership roles could build on the use of special measures such as quotas to increase the share of women in Parliament.

11. Youth in politics

Youth are learning the rituals of politics, but they are not cultivating understanding of the culture and values that underpin a democratic ethos. Youth education on democracy should focus on civics and the culture of democracy—ideology and values—rather than the mechanics of elections and governance. Civic education should be scaled up and political science introduced as a field of study.

12. The religious community

Bhutan bans monks and nuns from voting. While there is general agreement that the *Dratshang* (Central Monk Body) should stay out of politics, there is a growing sense that the ban on voting by lay monks and nuns should be lifted. Parliament can do this as the ban is statutory, not constitutional.

13. Qualifications to run for office

By law, parliamentarians must have a university degree. Yet just 11.8 percent of people in Bhutan are university graduates. Parliament should waive this requirement when society achieves the right level of literacy. The requirement is statutory, not Constitutional.

14. A strong stance on corruption

Bhutan's anti-corruption laws are very strong, yet concerns remain about political parties relying on money to get elected. Party expenditure and the source of funding need to be more closely monitored.

15. Governance of urban centres

For urban communities, a decade of democracy has highlighted the need for better representation. By law, a voter in a *thromde* (city/town) must have a *gung* and *mitshi* (landed property), which disqualifies most urban residents because they do not own land. As a result, Thimphu, with an estimated population of 115,000, saw 1,335 people elect the *thrompon* in 2016. In Phuntsholing, with nearly 28,000 residents, 182 people elected the *thrompon*. Many urban residents want parks, bicycle trails, footpaths, more trees and more green space, but have no way of voting for these amenities. Landowners in contrast often want to maximize the use of land that will pay rent. One way forward would be to conduct a feasibility study on making the residents of Thimphu *thromde* who do not have landed property there eligible to participate in *thromde* elections.

16. A strong focus on decentralization

As part of decentralization, some major responsibilities and functions, especially construction and maintenance/rehabilitation, have been shifted to local governments. A major concern is that local governments do not yet have the adequate professional capacity to plan and implement activities at the local level. The most serious risk could stem from implementing fiscal decentralization before local governments have the capacity to manage development funds independently and effectively. Training on administration and financial management should be provided to local government authorities, drawing on local, national and international expertise.

17. Revenue mobilization at the local level

Generating revenue at local level is an important pillar of fiscal decentralization and should be pursued to finance part of local expenditure. Yet rural taxes have not been revised for 24 years. They could be increased to contribute to the sustainability of local governance activities and local self-sufficiency. The existing tax policy needs to be revised.

18. Civil society

The importance of civil society is stated in the Constitution, yet civil society organizations and civil society in general still struggle to receive recognition, attention and support. Bhutan needs policies and legislation that gives organizations more space to expand their reach and effectiveness, including in supporting vulnerable sections of society, and building the awareness and capacity of citizens. The State should also facilitate access to adequate funding both from internal and external sources.

19. Media

Bhutanese media have been encouraged to play a professional role in democratic governance with the Constitution guaranteeing “freedom of expression, freedom of media, and right to information.” They struggle with economic hurdles, however, as well as with professional development. The Government, being the biggest advertiser, needs to follow guidelines for professional advertising so that support goes to deserving media houses. There also needs to be a stronger focus on training media professionals. Media should be independent of political parties.

20. Social media

Open discourse has picked up on social media, with an oral society moving readily to this platform for democratic debate. But there are signs that some part of the electorate has misunderstood freedom to be freedom from responsibility, and much of the discourse is characterized by unauthenticated information, personal attacks and hate speech. The national social media policy should be updated and used during elections, avoiding overlap from different sets of regulations for different occasions. A comprehensive Defamation Act may be needed.

Achieving harmony, happiness and human development

As Bhutan continues its journey of democratization, it will need to seek harmony between Gross National Happiness as the national frame of reference and the global Sustainable Development Goals, building on overlap between the two. This harmony suggests that Bhutan’s careful path towards deeper engagement with the international community could be met with like-minded approaches

to progress, which in turn might be positively shaped by Bhutan's own vision of happiness. Since the two are mutually reinforcing and integrally linked to human development, a strategy for one may help find ways to achieve the other.

As His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has declared:

"Remember, what GNH is will never change, but how we achieve GNH will. A changing world will present new challenges and opportunities to Bhutan and it is the responsibility of every generation to find new ways of achieving the goals of GNH."

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. Obtaining income is certainly one of the main means of expanding choices and well-being. But too often, the expansion of income is confused with the enhancement of human capabilities. Human development goes well beyond income and growth to cover the full flourishing of all human capabilities. It emphasizes the importance of putting people – their needs, their rights, their aspirations, their choices – at the center of the development effort.

—1990 Human Development Report





CHAPTER ONE

Democracy: A Road to Human Development and Gross National Happiness

CHAPTER ONE

Democracy: A Road to Human Development and Gross National Happiness

1.1 Democracy and human development

Democracy and human development reinforce each other. Both require voice and participation. These evolve as state institutions develop and democracy deepens.¹ Being free to determine their own destiny, express their views and participate in the decisions that shape their lives are capabilities desired by people everywhere, and just as important for human development—and for expanding people’s choices—as being able to read or enjoy good health² and a decent standard of living. By expanding people’s choices about how and by whom they are governed, democracy brings principles of participation and accountability to the process of human development. Democracy should therefore widen and deepen if politics and political institutions are to promote human development and safeguard the interests and dignity of people in Bhutan.

This *National Human Development Report* looks at the first decade of democracy in Bhutan, and its impact on national governance and, therefore, on human development. The first question is: “Are the Bhutanese people better off after 10 years of democracy?” Available statistics say “yes” in terms of infrastructure, services in health and education, and even governance, meaning the overall functioning of society. The core question is: “Is this because of democracy?” From a broader perspective, democratization is a natural evolution of Bhutan’s development process over decades if not centuries. This report concludes that the process of democratization initiated by Bhutan’s Kings has been successful, as indicated by the improvement in human development indicators. From an analysis of Bhutan’s democracy, the report also recommends steps to deepen democracy, a move already initiated by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The report focuses on human development through the notable features that shape Bhutan’s democratic vision and enable good governance to serve the people. These comprise the implementation of Gross National Happiness (GNH) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, the electoral system and Parliament, civil society, and emerging challenges and opportunities in Bhutan’s approach to development. Each of these features is a chapter that examines the current situation and emerging issues, and makes a prognosis for the future.

The concept of “human development” grew from the understanding that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) alone cannot measure human wealth or happiness. The architects of human development understood that more money does not automatically lead to a better life, and so they initiated an intellectual search for a more holistic approach, built around a humanist model. Human development is today enshrined in the global SDGs, which recognize the inextricable connections between people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

While the term “human development” was being coined in global forums in the 1990s, this approach

¹Gerring, J., Thacker, S., & Alfaro, R. (2012). “Democracy and Human Development.” In *The Journal of Politics*, 74(1), 1-17. doi:10.1017/s0022381611001113.

²UNDP (2002). *Human Development Report*.

to development was being implemented high in the Himalayas. Bhutan's development vision of Gross National Happiness, in essence, represents a development goal beyond GDP. Bhutan's fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, took steps to update the nation's century old governance system, culminating in a democratically elected government in 2008.

Bhutan is seen as a country that dares to be different. While it is famous for its pursuit of happiness, the story less told is of its historic transition to democracy. At a time when nations are striving to make progress towards SDG targets on governance as an integral part of their overall pursuit of human development, Bhutan's story of a peaceful shift from absolute Monarchy to parliamentary democracy is an important one.

Those who negotiated and agreed on the SDGs were adamant that governance not be left out, resulting in SDG 16, to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive societies."³ The SDGs send the message that human development and good governance go hand-in-hand.

This *National Human Development Report* offers a reflection on the nation's first decade of democratic governance following 100 years of Monarchy. It studies Bhutan's unique context and approach, and considers the democratic path ahead, aiming to enhance collective understanding of democracy, which has been described as the most studied political system in the world.

Just as Bhutan has learned from the history of democratic governance around the world, are there lessons in the Bhutanese experience, which has already seen three new governments through three general elections? The premise of the report is that democracy is a path to good governance, which is a pillar of Gross National Happiness and a necessary condition for human development.

In understanding the first decade of democracy in Bhutan, it is vital to note that, unlike other democracies, the democratic system was an initiative of the throne. There was no demand for democracy from the citizenry. In fact, the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, abdicated and introduced parliamentary elections against the will of the people.

The current King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, has explained that democracy was the evolution of a century of development with the Kings of Bhutan at the helm. In his royal address to the first Parliament in 2008, he declared:

"The highest achievement of one hundred years of Monarchy has been the constant nurturing of democracy."

Despite some challenges, Bhutanese today are happy with the state of their democracy, and perceive that they are engaged more than before in national decision-making. Chapter 2 presents the state of human development in Bhutan while the chapters that follow look into the reasons for these positive development outcomes, by illustrating some constitutional provisions fostering human rights in Chapter 3, the practice of parliamentary democracy with increased participation of people and enhanced access to basic services in Chapter 4, and the increasing role of civil society in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 puts forth some challenges in the early years of democracy and their policy implications as well as lessons from the experience of the democratization process in Bhutan.

³United Nations (2015). *United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp. 9.



To back its analysis, the report uses data from “A Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy 2018,” conducted by UNDP. The purpose of this national household survey was to gather the views of urban and rural Bhutanese on a decade of democracy in Bhutan. The survey collected views from 1,536 households, 768 each from rural and urban areas in all three regions of Bhutan—eastern, central and western.

1.2 The process of democratization in Bhutan

From deities to Kings to the people

Bhutan was not always a united country led by Kings. The seeds of Bhutan as a cultural entity were planted by the teachings of Buddhist Saint Padhmasambhava in the 8th century. A formal Bhutanese polity emerged 900 years later under the dynamic Buddhist Lama Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. From that moment until the 20th century, Buddhist clergy governed the country.⁴ While this period, as chronicled in Buddhist scriptures, reads like mythology, more extraordinary changes were about to happen.

After decades of local and regional chieftains feuding for power, the Wangchuck dynasty consolidated national governance. A dual system of government, where the clergy and a secular head shared power, was replaced by a Monarchy when Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck was crowned the first hereditary King on 17 December 1907. Over the next century, Bhutan was brought into the “modern” era by five Kings of the dynasty. The Monarchy oversaw Bhutan’s dramatic shift towards a secular State with a modern economy.

Exactly 100 years later, the Kings handed political power to the people. On 9 December 2006, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck transferred his responsibilities as Head of State to his son and heir, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. In this historic transition, the fifth King inherited the responsibility of instituting the country’s first democratically elected government.



⁴Dorji, K. (2008) *Within the Realm of Happiness*. Thimphu, Bhutan, pp. iv.

Box 1.1

MILESTONES IN THE BIRTH OF A DEMOCRACY

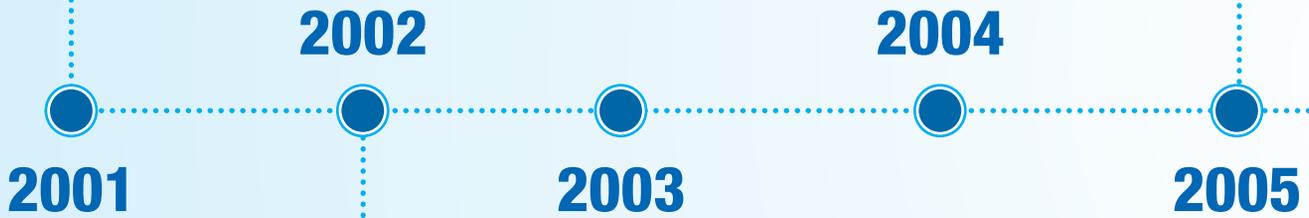


In 2001, the King commanded the drafting of a Constitution by a 39-member committee chaired by the Chief Justice.



The draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan was distributed throughout the country in 2005 and 2006. One member from every family was invited to attend.⁵

The discussions were started by the fourth King and concluded by his son, the Crown Prince, now the fifth King.



Between 2002 and 2005, several institutions were established to prepare for democracy: the Supreme Court, Election Commission of Bhutan, and Anti-Corruption Commission.



In an address to the nation in 2005, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced: “After 26 years of the process of decentralization and devolution of powers to the people, I have every confidence that our people will be able to choose the best political party that can provide good governance and serve the interest of the nation. I would like our people to know that the first national election to elect a government under a system of parliamentary democracy will take place in 2008.”

⁵Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), personal communication, 30 September 2018.



In 2006 the Government encouraged the establishment of private newspapers to build the right environment for freedom of speech in a democracy.



In 2006 and 2007, the Election Commission completed the delimitation of constituencies, registered about 400,000 eligible voters, and organized trial elections to teach the people the mechanics of voting.

Two political parties announced themselves in March 2007.



The first election to the National Assembly, the main law-making house of Parliament, was held on 24 March 2008.

2006

2008

2010

2007

2009



In December 2006, the fourth King abdicated and the fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, ascended the Throne. As his parting words, the fourth King encouraged ministers and other senior government leaders to take part in politics.



The first election to the National Council, which is the House of Review, was held on 31 December 2007.



The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan was adopted in July 2008.

A sudden change or an evolution?

A case can be made that democracy was not introduced to Bhutan in the past 10 years. It was already deeply ingrained in the Bhutanese cultural and philosophical outlook, which is informed by the Buddha's egalitarian principles and pursuit of freedom. Buddhism teaches freedom and enlightenment as the ultimate goal of life. Bhutan already had a profound and pervasive culture of democratic thought and practice, which manifested particularly in the spiritual domain.⁶ *This National Human Development Report*, however, focuses primarily on the experience and impact of the parliamentary democracy introduced in 2008.

In the 1950s, the third King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, took several steps to devolve power from the Throne. He established a unicameral National Assembly in 1953,⁷ monetized tax from the payment of tax-in-kind in 1954, stipulated the emancipation of slaves in 1956, enacted the *Thrimzung Chhenmo* (Supreme Laws)⁸ in 1959,⁹ created the Royal Advisory Council in 1965, separated the judiciary and the executive in 1967,¹⁰ and proclaimed a constitutional Monarchy in 1967.¹² The National Assembly was a form of representative democracy comprising government officials, the monastic community, the business community, the armed forces, an elected royal advisory council, and 158 members, known as chimis, elected directly in 158 constituencies. By enacting the *Thrimzung Chenmo*, the National Assembly became a legislative body.

In the late 1960s, His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck reportedly mentioned the democratization of Bhutan to Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who responded that, while His Majesty was best positioned to understand the situation, she felt that Bhutan would benefit if the change was gradual.

In an emotional but thoughtful discussion with the students of Sherubtse College in January 1991, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck said that it was time for Bhutan to adopt democracy as a form of government and that the “destiny of the country lies in the hands of the people.”¹³ This was an expression of the King's strong emphasis on “decentralization” of government authority. As the then—Planning Minister Lyonpo C Dorji explained, decentralization in Bhutan meant democratization through which authority was transferred from the central Government to the districts and blocks. In 1981, authority had been decentralized from the central Government to the *dzongkhag* (district) development committees. In 1991, the authority to plan and implement development was decentralized to the *gewog* (block of villages) level with the establishment of the *gewog* development committees.

In 1998, in a significant step towards democratization, a Council of Ministers was elected by the members of the National Assembly and given full executive power previously held by the Kings. A royal decree in 2001 commanded the drafting of a constitution to “ensure the sovereignty and security of Bhutan as a nation-state.”¹⁴ The decree outlined the objective of establishing “a dynamic system of

⁶Phuntsho, K. (2017). “Civil Society: Change, Challenge, and Chance.” In *The Druk Journal*, 3 (2): *Civil Society in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 5-14.

⁷*Kuensel*, 30 June 1968: “It may be mentioned that the National Assembly was brought into being by our King in 1953 in order to develop political consciousness among the people of the country.”

⁸The laws codified by the Third King His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck of Bhutan.

⁹First session of the 12th session of the National Assembly of Bhutan.

¹⁰*Kuensel*, 15 February 1969: “On royal command, the judiciary and the executive are being separated in the districts of ... The judicial functions will be vested in the *Thrimkhangs*, or District Courts, having three members, one of whom will represent the Monk Body, one the public and one the Government, who will be known as *Thrimpon*. The High Court and the Royal Advisory Council hope that this reorganisation will enable all cases to be settled expeditiously in the above nine districts, and will also prevent large numbers of cases being referred to the High Court at Thimphu by the District Officers. The separation of the judiciary from the executive will, it is hoped, also ensure better administration of justice in the districts.”

¹¹*Kuensel*, 30 June 1968 and 30 November 1968.

¹²Das, B. S. quoted by Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired) in his unpublished paper titled “A first decade for Bhutan's Constitution”, pp. 3.

¹³<http://www.kuenselonline.com/celebrating-a-kings-life/>

¹⁴His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan, *Kuensel*, 2001.

governance which would uphold the true principles of democracy and by which the collective will of the people of Bhutan will prevail in governance and in pursuit of development.”¹⁵

The Constitution, adopted in 2008, declared Bhutan a democratic constitutional Monarchy, with an elected government running the day-to-day affairs of governance and an elected bicameral Parliament enacting laws. Constitutional bodies were established: the Election Commission of Bhutan to oversee elections, the Anti-Corruption Commission as a safeguard to prevent democracy from being hijacked by corruption, the Supreme Court as the guardian of the Constitution, the National Assembly as the equivalent to a lower house of Parliament in some countries, and the National Council as the “house of review.” Between 2006 and 2008, private media were encouraged, a Civil Society Act was passed, and a Civil Society Authority established to register civil society organizations.

In 2008, 79.45 percent of the Bhutanese electorate went to polling stations to elect a Government, with many walking long distances to cast their first votes. Bhutan became the youngest democracy in the world.

French diplomat and scholar Thierry Mathou described the elections as “a new and logical step in an ambitious program of guided political, economic, and administrative change initiated by the third *Druk Gyalpo* (King) back in the mid-1950s. Contrary to most countries with Monarchies where royals have resisted democratic politics, Bhutan’s Monarchy has always been the leading force of change.”¹⁶

Popular endorsement after initial growing pains

In 2018, the “Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy”¹⁷ was conducted for this report. It found that a majority of Bhutanese (76.7 percent) were happy with the performance of their democracy. People in rural areas in particular perceive that democracy has prepared them “to be more responsible” citizens (91.9 percent in rural areas compared to 82.6 percent in urban areas), indicating that people are starting to carry out their fundamental duties as Bhutanese citizens. This perception likely stems from a sense of greater engagement in decision-making.

But the change to democracy has at times also been traumatic. Between 2005 and 2008, the political atmosphere was somewhat surreal. The fourth King’s announcement that he would step down was received with shock. The general population knew little about democracy and the Bhutanese media had no experience of a democratic system. In 2007 and 2008, when the King introduced the draft Constitution for public discussion, the people’s response was mostly an emotional plea against the democratic change.

Observers in the international community, who believe democracy is the only acceptable political system, may not understand why anyone would object to it. But, at the time, the horizon of the average Bhutanese citizen did not stretch beyond South Asia, where media coverage made democracy seem synonymous with corruption and violence. Politicians and politics were not held in high esteem. So the first reaction for many Bhutanese was: “no thank you.”

Concerns were voiced in two questions asked of the King during the consultations for the Constitution, albeit cautiously: “Why?” and “Why now?” At a time when Bhutan was enjoying peace, stability and development success as a Monarchy, why was there need for change? As Henry Chu of the Los

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Mathou, T. (1999). “Political Reform in Bhutan: Change in a Buddhist Monarchy.” In *Asian Survey* 39, (4). University of California Press.

¹⁷Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp.18.

Angeles Times commented to his Bhutanese counterparts: “We Americans would say, is the King fixing something that ain’t broken?”¹⁸

The royal response was loud and clear. To the first question, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck said that a small country like Bhutan, wedged between the two most populous countries on earth, was too vulnerable to be left in the hands of one man who was chosen by birth rather than merit. “...*(T)he heir could be a person of mediocre ability or even an incapable person. That would create problems for a small country like Bhutan.*”¹⁹

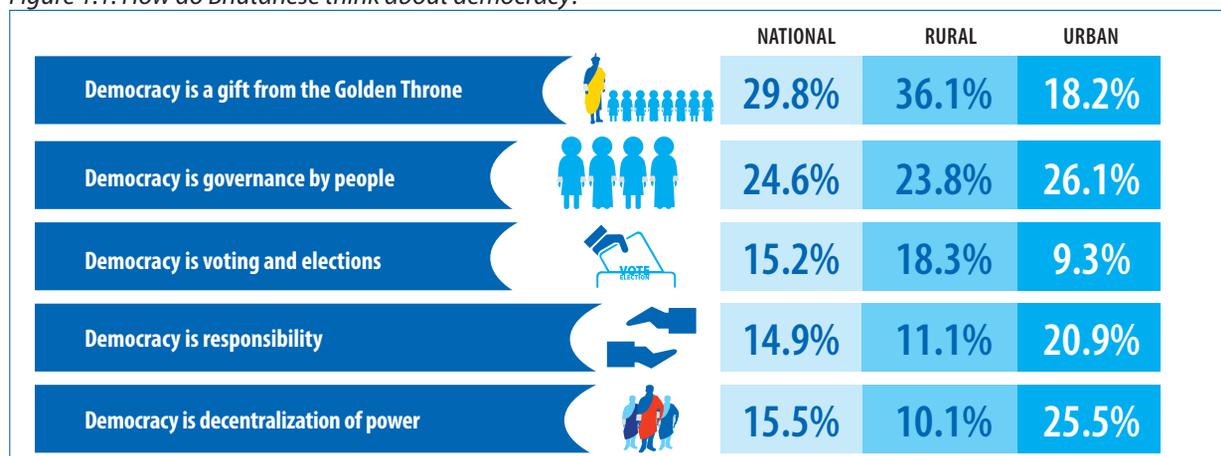
To the second question, he said that the best time to introduce change was when things were going well. Canadian writer, broadcaster and environmental activist David Suzuki, who attended a 2012 international conference on Gross National Happiness, told participants: “Now that was the reasoning of a truly wise man.”²⁰

Bhutanese citizens are still known to tell foreigners: “Democracy was thrust upon us.” Politicians changed that to: “Democracy is a gift from the throne.” Voicing their initial reluctance to join politics, some political leaders called themselves “accidental politicians.”²¹

Stanford University history professor (emeritus) Mark Mancall pointed out that Bhutan was ill-prepared for democratic governance. “This political turn was relatively sudden and the population was taken by surprise. While it was impressive that, with the King at the helm, the government adopted the Constitution, established the constitutional bodies, encouraged political parties, and even trained people in the mechanics of voting, the concept of ideology and the culture of democracy had a long way to go.”²²

That perception persists, in part. A majority of people still repeat that democracy is a “gift from the throne” (see Figure 1.1). Others describe it as “governance by the people” (24.6 percent), as an election (15.2 percent), as decentralization (15.5 percent) and by a range of other definitions. The general response reveals that democracy as a concept is new to the Bhutanese populace.

Figure 1.1. How do Bhutanese think about democracy?



Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp.15.

¹⁸Personal communication with Kinley Dorji, Former Managing Director of Kuensel and Former Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication, on 23 March during the 2008 election.

¹⁹Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), personal communication, 20 September 2018.

²⁰Thimphu, June 2012.

²¹P. Gyamtsho (opposition leader from 2013 to 2018), personal communication, 10 October 2018.

²²M. Mancall, personal communication, 10 November 2017.

There are Bhutanese who see the past 10 years as a disturbing experience. Until 1961, Bhutan was a self-contained “hermit” kingdom, surviving as a rural subsistence farming society. The election of the bicameral Parliament uses a popular Western voting procedure, rather than, for example, a traditional style *zhungzomdu* (selection through public meetings). The confrontational politicking that emerged with democracy came as a shock. Bhutanese, for the first time in their history, saw fellow citizens opposing each other in public.

At the “Democracy Forum 2018” organized by the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy and the Royal University of Bhutan, senior leaders of the four registered political parties agreed that this was largely because the Bhutanese population, which trusted and revered the King, felt “abandoned” to the authority of politicians when he announced he was stepping down.²³

Box 1.2 The New Truth

“The profundity of this gesture took some time to sink in all of us. Our own lives being steeped in layers of man-made culture, it took time for us to understand that a transfer of the royal mantle could be so simple. We were blinded by the anticipation of the Coronation and the celebrations... in other words, our human expectations. Here was a new truth. As the news spread, by word of mouth, Thimphu society went numb. Five days later it became official and the nation was in shock. As we discussed the news, in hushed tones, it struck me that His Majesty the King had taught us a supreme lesson in impermanence. The King was King no more. The rest of us suddenly found ourselves stripped of the petty images that we had built for ourselves. We were forced to ask, “Who are we? What are we?”

Source: Dorji, K. (2008). *Preface to Realm of Happiness*.

1.3 Democracy with Bhutanese characteristics

Bhutan’s democracy is not easily categorized. The former Chief Justice of Bhutan, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, describes it as a “constitutional democracy”.²⁴ It has also been referred to as a “natural democracy,”²⁵ resting on monarchical authority and cohesive rural communities, as a “guided democracy” with a considerable role for the Head of State, and as a “vibrant democracy” seeking to increase civic dialogue and drawing from research to shape policy.²⁶

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck told a meeting of the heads of constitutional bodies that all democratic societies can generally be grouped into three broad categories: failing democracies, struggling democracies and learning democracies.” The former Chief Justice recalled that the King described Bhutan as a “*learning democracy*.”²⁷

Bhutan’s democracy does adhere to a number of internationally accepted norms, such as the separation of powers through three arms of government, free and fair elections, competing candidates and political parties, free media and an independent judiciary.

²³Dorji, T. of Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa, (May 11, 2018). Bhutan Democracy Forum report on State of Bhutanese Democracy.

²⁴Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), personal communication, 20 September 2018.

²⁵Masaki, K. (2013) “Exploring Bhutan’s ‘Natural Democracy’: In Search of an Alternative View of Democracy.” In *Journal of Bhutan Studies* Volume 28. Thimphu, Bhutan: The Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp. 1-34.

²⁶Report of an International training conducted by International IDEA in 2016.

²⁷Quoted in *Strategy for Assessment of State of Bhutanese Democracy*, 2016.

At the same time, democracy in Bhutan is entirely an initiative from the throne and is, therefore, an unprecedented phenomenon. While popular sentiments were against democratization, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck was so revered that the people felt they could not disobey his royal command.

Indian political analyst Dr. S. Chandrasekharan noted at one point: *“Yet in another political gimmick, the Kingdom of Bhutan has commissioned a drafting committee to write a constitution in an absolute Monarchy ruled by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck.”*²⁸ Over time, his view changed: *“It should be said to the credit of the King that the Constitution was not forced on him... For a country that is going to experience democracy, the provisions are very innovative.”*²⁹

Bhutan offered a unique perspective on regime transformation, driven as it was by an absolute monarch rather than a critical mass of the middle class or heightened political consciousness among people at large.³⁰ It does not comply with conventional democratic transition theories, which are based on modern European history.

The Constitution promotes a “compassionate society rooted in the Buddhist ethos³¹ with provisions to protect the country’s spiritual heritage³² and culture.³³ These provisions foster spiritual and emotional well-being, an integral element of Gross National Happiness. Thus, not only are Buddhism and democracy compatible, but they are rooted in a common understanding of the equality and potential of every individual. The Constitution stipulates that “the state shall strive to promote those conditions.”³⁴

An ongoing process

Bhutan is also aware that establishing the institutions of democracy and holding successful elections does not guarantee democracy. As early as 2007, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck advised the nation that democratization must not only take root but continue to evolve:

*“Now, if we want our democratic system to work, if we want a democracy that will fulfill the aspirations of our people, then we must take the next step—we must adopt the ideals and principles of democracy. We must build a democratic culture. This period when democracy takes root is a slow process. It takes time. But this process is crucial to democracy’s ultimate success.”*³⁵

A new era of discourse

By 2018, civil society representatives, students, media professionals, politicians and farmers were all emphasizing the need to open up and deepen political discourse at the local and national levels.³⁶ Some concern was expressed about the role of social media, where discourse is largely characterized by rumor, gossip and hate speech. A government policy on social media has been practically ignored, although social media are emerging as an increasingly important forum for political dialogue.

²⁸Chandrasekharan, S. quoted by Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired) in his unpublished paper titled “A First decade for Bhutan’s Constitution”, pp.1.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Shaw, B. C. (2018) “Democracy in Bhutan.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.14-23.

³¹Article 9 (20), pp. 20.

³²Article 3, pp.9.

³³Article 4, pp.10.

³⁴Article 9 (2), pp.18.

³⁵His Majesty the Fifth King’s Royal Address to National Graduates Orientation Program.

³⁶Interviews with political science and media students of Sherubtse College and other relevant stakeholders, April and May 2018.

There are also signs of political discourse maturing from superficial, primarily personalized exchanges to more substantive issues. The “Democracy Forum 2018” was seen as the first real interactive dialogue among the four parties, with senior politicians discussing issues related to democratization. During the formal campaign period that followed, a more mature political discourse unfolded with a clearer focus on priorities reflected in party manifestos.

A traditionally hierarchical society and an educational system that emphasized rote memorization may have initially discouraged open debate. The role of education in taking understanding of democracy beyond the electoral process is being discussed with calls for civic education, the introduction of political science as an area of study in schools and colleges, and the engagement of the citizenry at large in broader political discourse.³⁷

Former Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, states that deeper understanding is only a matter of time, as the electorate is gaining experience and becoming more educated.³⁸ As “loyal subjects” become “responsible citizens,” Bhutanese people will take on more responsibility for governance.

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck explained Bhutanese democracy:

*“I have seen many people describe democracy as a jewel gifted to the people from the Throne. I would say that rather than a gift, democracy is the responsibility given to the people to further strengthen the country...”*³⁹

He also said:

*“The King, country, and people of Bhutan have a common aspiration for our democracy – we aspire for a democracy with rule of law, democracy with unity, democracy with integrity, democracy with talent and meritocracy, democracy that is responsible, and democracy that serves to create a just and harmonious society, we will truly have a people’s democracy.”*⁴⁰

The perspective survey for this report showed that, while only 15 percent of respondents described democracy as a “responsibility,” most agreed that the introduction of democracy has made people more responsible (Figure 1.2). Box 1.3 highlights current understanding of democracy.

Figure 1. 2 Findings on democracy as a responsibility

	National	Rural	Urban	
Democracy has prepared the Bhutanese to be more responsible.	Strongly agree	35.5%	35.9%	34.8%
	Agree	52.6%	55.2%	47.8%
	Do not know	8.4%	6.7%	11.6%
	Disagree	3.0%	2.2%	4.5%
	Strongly disagree	0.5%	0.1%	1.2%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp.18.

³⁷Pek-Dorji, S.S. (2018). “Youth and Politics in an Evolving Democracy.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1). *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. pp. 72-78.

³⁸Palden, T. and Wangdi, T. (2018). “Some Impact of Democratic Politics in Bhutan.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 97-104.

³⁹His Majesty the Fifth King’s Royal Address at the National Day, 17 December 2013.

⁴⁰His Majesty the Fifth King’s Address to the 7th Session of the Second Parliament, July 2016, retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/his-majesty-address/>.

Box 1.3 and Figure 1.2 highlight current understanding of democracy.

Box 1.3 Bhutanese understanding of democracy

The book *Drukyl Decides* recorded 17 variations in answers to the question, “What is democracy?” Similarly, during a three-day training workshop by International IDEA, volunteers presented 44 different responses to the question, “What does democracy mean for Bhutan’s citizens?” These included:

1. Rights more than responsibilities
2. Best form of government for the people at the right time
3. Free, fair, accountable and transparent way of government functioning
4. Exercising the fundamental right to vote and participation in decision-making
5. Monarchy
6. Change
7. Walking the talk and reflecting in equality and freedom
8. Giving people the power to elect their own government through supreme power of the people themselves
9. Election, voting, parties and rights

Source: Sithey, G. and Dorji, T. (2009). *Drukyl Decides: In the Minds of Bhutan’s First Voters*. Thimphu: Centre for Research Initiative.

Democracy and decentralization

Bhutan has long faced challenges in devolving authority from the central government to rural communities. The tendency of Thimphu-based politicians and officials was to concentrate power and authority at the centre. Over the decades, the Government has introduced a number of incentives to encourage civil servants to work in rural Bhutan, with limited success.

Democracy has now accelerated decentralization of authority. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck initiated several moves in this direction. In 2016, he awarded the *patang* (a ceremonial sword symbolizing authority) to local government chairpersons.⁴¹ He reminded the elected *gewog* leaders or *gups*, as well as the Bhutanese population, that it is a misconception to view local government as the lowest level of government. On the contrary, it is the most important level because local leaders are closest to the people.

This comes with a shift in the composition of people serving as *gups* or village heads. In the past, many literate *gups* were disrobed monks, traditional education being monastic education. With the development of the modern education system over the years there were 25 university graduates, and one with a postgraduate degree, by 2017. The rest of the 205 *gups* were “functionally literate,” meaning that they could read and write. One elderly *gup* said: “The situation between my early days and now is like the difference between the earth and the sky.”⁴²

This is not a comparison of two stages of recent Bhutanese history. It would be wrong to conclude that the current status of local government is “better” than the rural politics of the past. It would be equally

⁴¹<http://www.kuenselonline.com/his-majesty-the-king-awards-patang-to-thrizins/>.

⁴²Dorji, K. and Pem, T. (2018). “Dhar from the Throne: an Honour and a Responsibility.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.24-27.

wrong to surmise that the university graduate *gup* of today is more capable than the village elder of the past who was elected to the post because he (the first female *gup* was elected in 2011) was trusted by the people.

There are challenges stemming from human weaknesses. Just as the elected officials are close to the people, they are also vulnerable to influences themselves. They are straddling a triangle of politicians, civil servants and the people, and have to make sometimes complex choices about new allowances and facilities given to them by the central Government and the long-term interests of the people.

In the 1980s, with the decentralization of fiscal authority to Bhutan's 20 districts, several district governors were convicted of the misuse of funds, largely because they did not have accounting skills and did not understand audit regulations. With this authority being further decentralized to 205 *gewogs*, the problems become more complex.

1.4 Conclusion

*"Remember, what GNH is will never change, but how we achieve GNH will."*⁴³

-His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

While the word "democracy" is often a brand name for socio-political change, Bhutan needed to interpret it in the context of its own development philosophy. At a time when democracies are failing because they are too often interpreted merely as elections, Gross National Happiness provides perspective for Bhutan. It views its long-range future with the sense of hope that stems from viewing democracy not as a goal by itself, but as a path to good governance to enable people's happiness and well-being.

In the words of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, "destiny lies in the hands of the people."⁴⁴ This resonates with democracy because democracy, in its purest form, is the empowerment of the people. This means the expansion of human choices and freedoms, leading to human development.

Gross National Happiness requires that every citizen, to achieve happiness, is empowered to make decisions as part of a collective responsibility. Today, a new agenda has arrived, the global SDGs, offering further support to the implementation of Bhutan's national vision. On that basis, the Government has been given the mandate to work in the service of the people and, as expressed in the SDGs, "leave no one behind."⁴⁵

⁴³Royal Address during the National Graduates' Orientation Programme, Thimphu, 24 October 2007.

⁴⁴Dorji, K. (5/1/1991). "Destiny in the hands of the people." In *Kuensel*. Kuensel Corporation: Thimphu, Bhutan.

⁴⁵Gross National Happiness Commission (2016). *Bhutan Vulnerability Baseline Assessment 2016*.





CHAPTER TWO

The State of Human Development in Bhutan



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Gross National Happiness and the Sustainable Development Goals are broad visions for good governance and development. While they were conceived at different times and under different circumstances, the two distinct approaches not only lead to the same goals for humanity but share common features. In the context of this *National Human Development Report*, they promote democracy as a path to good governance and, therefore, human development.

This chapter looks at GNH as Bhutan's national vision and the SDGs as current global goals. It considers how they have enhanced or can advance human development. The Government of Bhutan has aligned the SDGs to its 11th and 12th five-year development plans (2019 to 2023). The national planning agency, the GNH Commission, is partnering with the United Nations on strategizing around implementing the SDGs within the GNH framework.

2.1 Gross National Happiness—a national vision

The concept of GNH is generally traced to 1972 when King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in his first royal address, outlined Bhutan's approach to development. The actual phrase "gross national happiness," a pun on gross national product, was first used in 1979 when the King was interviewed by Indian journalists in Mumbai on his way back from the Non-Aligned Movement's Havana Summit.

Global debate on GNH began after Bhutan introduced it at the UNDP Millennium Development Summit in Seoul in 1989, identifying four pillars of the concept.⁴⁶ These are: sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, promotion and preservation of cultural heritage, conservation of the environment and good governance.

The GNH vision, drawing from the Royal Addresses of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, is embodied by a "sovereign state" and a "just and harmonious society."⁴⁷ GNH inspires national policies in the sense that the Government is drawing on its philosophy and values and indicators. As Bhutan's benchmark for development, GNH calls for a sustainable and holistic approach to notions of progress, and for giving equal importance to non-economic aspects of human well-being.

After His Majesty King Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck took the reins of governance, he stated:

"GNH is the philosophy that acts as our national conscience, helping us as a nation to make better and wiser decisions for our future. It reminds us to uphold and work for the well-being and happiness of every single Bhutanese at all times."⁴⁸

The Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS), established as a think tank to research and steer national policy-making, expanded the four pillars into nine domains⁴⁹ that define the core of GNH. The centre has conducted two national surveys (2010 and 2015) using 33 indicators derived from the domains.⁵⁰ The indicators, summed up in a GNH index, serve as a basis for shaping government policy and other

⁴⁶http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/publicationFiles/ConferenceProceedings/4thGNH/1.4thGNH_keynote.pdf

⁴⁷His Majesty quoted by Gross National Happiness Commission in the *12th Five Year Plan document*.

⁴⁸His Majesty the Fifth King's Royal Address to the National Graduates Orientation Program, 24 October 2007.

⁴⁹The nine domains of GNH are ecological diversity, health, education, psychological well-being, cultural diversity, community vitality, living standards, time use and good governance.

⁵⁰CBS (2016). *A Compass towards a Just and Harmonious Society: 2015 GNH survey report*, pp.57-74.

decision-making, and enable review of the subsequent results. They also allow the public to evaluate improvements and changes in quality of life.

2.2 Democracy, good governance and GNH

GNH remains a forceful, if not fully elucidated, vision for development because it is closely linked to the Bhutanese Monarchy. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has been described as the "...conscience of GNH."⁵¹ While GNH is intended to be used by decision-makers to plan and measure progress,⁵² it is a work in progress to translate it into practical programmes, targets and indicators.

While the philosophical interpretation of GNH is personal contentment, GNH is a responsibility of the Bhutanese Government. Bhutan is the only country where the Government has the specific mandate to create conditions whereby citizens can pursue happiness.

During the subsistence era of Bhutanese history, people lived in harmony, not just with each other, but with all life forms. The village astrologer, the lay monk, the singer, the carpenter, the arrow maker, the elders and the youth all had their responsibilities. GNH encapsulated this interdependence—the vibrant community vitality that held human society together with wildlife and the natural environment because they were viewed and respected as sentient beings.

Today, the Government is taking steps to bring the business sector and civil society on board. In November 2017, the Government launched the "GNH for Business" initiative "to inject GNH values into the business world and subsequently promote it to a wider global audience."⁵³ In 2007, the Civil Society Organization Act was adopted to encourage civil society to be the "third sector" in the development process.

Has democracy been good for GNH? CBS's surveys indicate that the first three elections have affected community vitality, an important GNH domain, by introducing political divisions in families and communities. Of the 33 indicators for each of the nine domains, the findings show that indicators for psychological well-being and community vitality domains have deteriorated in these five years. A CBS researcher says: "This phenomenon is natural. Modernization comes at the cost of community vitality and Bhutan is no exception."⁵⁴

In assessing the fall in the governance domain, the 2015 GNH survey report states:

*"It is suspected that this came about because of the divisive impact electoral politics had on people. The people were largely divided into two opposing electoral camps and the voters of the opposing party naturally rated the performance of the ruling party low."*⁵⁵

While the 2015 GNH survey found that democracy has coincided with improvements in five domains—living standard, education, health, ecological diversity and time use—it would be premature to assume a causal relationship at this stage⁵⁶ as presented in Box 2.1. The most recent indicators discussed later in this chapter indicate steady progress in human development.

⁵¹Tobgay, T. (2017). *The State of the Nation Address. Ninth Session of the Second Parliament of Bhutan*. Thimphu, Bhutan.

⁵²Bjorn (2017), Førde, B. (2017). "Civil Society is Important – But Not a Magic Bullet." In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (2): *Civil Society in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. pp. 3 -13.

⁵³Personal communication of Dasho Tshering Tobgay (Prime Minister of Bhutan from 2013 to 2018), November 2017.

⁵⁴<http://www.kuenselonline.com/gnh-indicators-for-community-vitality-and-psychological-wellbeing-deteriorating/>.

⁵⁵CBS (November 2015). *Provisional Findings of the GNH survey: 2015*, pp. 68.

⁵⁶CBS (2016). *A Compass towards a Just and Harmonious Society: 2015 GNH survey report*, pp. 61.

Box 2.1 Improvements in happiness—at least for some Bhutanese

Between 2010 and 2015, the CBS GNH Index increased from 0.743 to 0.756, indicating that Bhutanese became happier. While the index for both rural and urban people rose, in both surveys, urban Bhutanese were happier. The index for both men and women improved in 2015, but men were happier than women.

Analysis by domain showed a decline in four domains in 2015: good governance, community vitality, psychological well-being and cultural diversity. Five domains improved, namely: living standards, education, health, ecological diversity and time use.

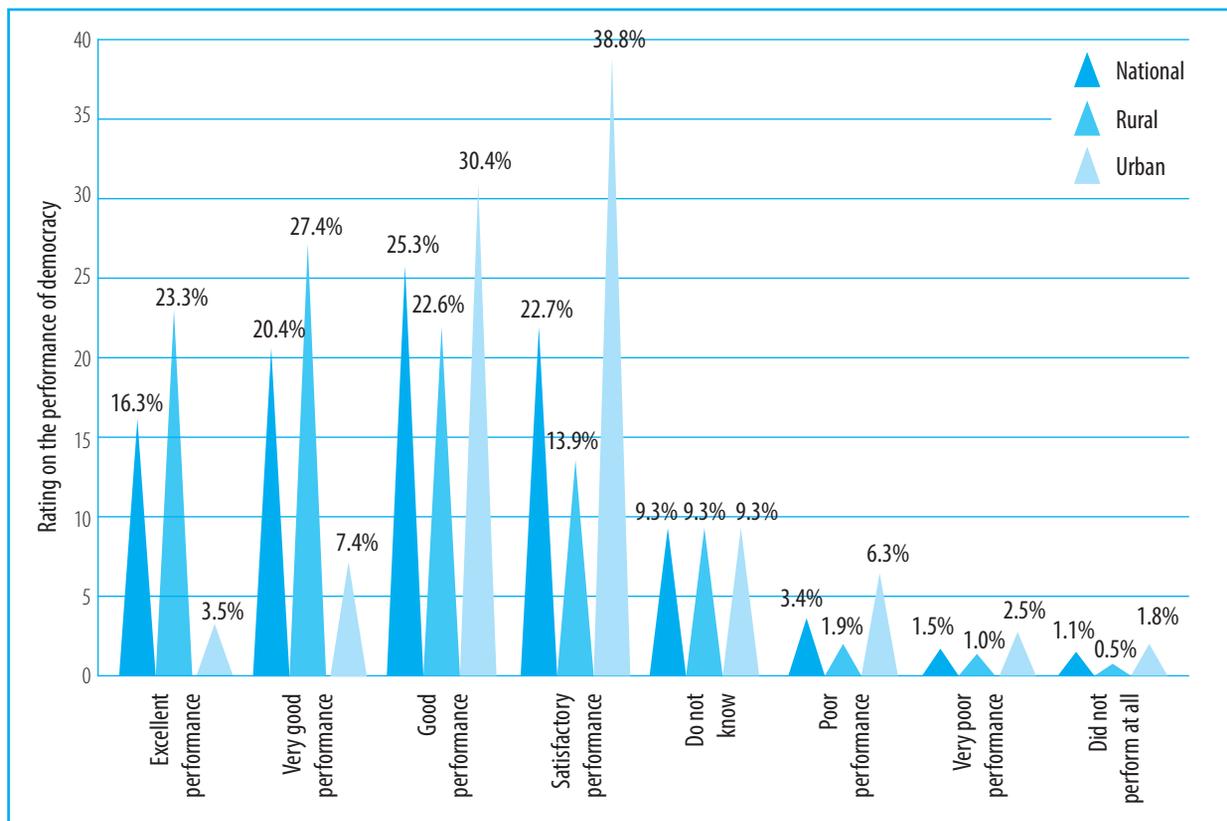
The fall in governance, community vitality, well-being, and cultural diversity flags potential obstacles to deepening democracy, including questions around whether the fall has been caused by democracy or other factors such as rising expectations of the people.

Future GNH surveys should examine these issues to provide new insights on the progress of democracy in the context of GNH.

Source: CBS (2016). *A Compass towards a Just and Harmonious Society: 2015 GNH survey report*. p.57-74.

Ten years after the Bhutanese people elected their first Government, the survey conducted for this *National Human Development Report* showed that people are generally happy with a democratic form of governance, with many defining democracy as governance by the people (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Perceptions on the performance of democracy



Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 17 and 18.

Democracy is based on the principle that happiness depends on living under a government chosen by and abiding by the will of the people. Undemocratic governance would in that sense violate the principle of GNH, as would the concentration of power in a few hands over many. In Bhutan, a democratic spirit and democratic practices have a long history. The Constitution contains an explicit commitment to fundamental democratic principles⁵⁷ and their role in human happiness and well-being. There is no turning back. His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck advised:

“Now, if we want our democratic system to work, if we want a democracy that will fulfill the aspirations of our people, then we must take the next step – we must adopt the ideals and principles of democracy. We must build a democratic culture. This period when democracy takes root is a slow process. It takes time. But this process is crucial for the ultimate success of democracy in our country.”⁵⁸

2.3 The Sustainable Development Goals: a global agenda

Bhutan inspired the United Nations declaration of March 20 as the International Day of Happiness and participated in global discourse shaping the 2030 Agenda. As a signatory to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, Bhutan has formally committed to the goals as well as their targets and indicators.

For the medium term, while recognizing that all 17 goals are deeply interconnected, the Government has prioritized three. With Goal 1, on ending poverty, there is continued emphasis on poverty reduction and the shift beyond income poverty towards addressing issues of social protection and vulnerable groups. Goal 13 on urgent action to combat climate change is integral to Bhutan’s commitment to remain carbon neutral at all times. Goal 15 on protecting, restoring and sustainably using terrestrial ecosystems such as forests aligns with one of the pillars of GNH and Bhutan’s long standing attention to and impressive achievements in terms of the environment.

Nationalizing the goals

The three core principles of the SDGs—universality, indivisibility and leaving no one behind—closely resonate with GNH, with its balancing of the social, economic and environmental aspects of development. Ending poverty, realizing sustainable development and pursuing progress centred on people’s well-being are integral to both the SDGs and GNH.

Bhutan has taken the pragmatic approach to build the SDGs into its five-year national development planning cycle, which first started in 1961. The country is currently implementing the 12th Five-Year Plan (2019-2023).

In view of the strong links between the SDGs and GNH, the Government felt there was no need to establish a separate institution to drive the SDGs.⁵⁹ The 15-member GNH Commission oversees SDG-related matters at the highest level. It is chaired by the Prime Minister with the Finance Minister as vice-chair. Secretaries of 10 ministries, the Cabinet Secretary, the Secretary to the National Environment Commission and the Secretary to the Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat also sit on the commission.

⁵⁷Hirata, J. (2005). “How Should Happiness Guide Policy? Why Gross National Happiness is not opposed to Democracy.” In *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 12. Thimphu. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp. 1-22.

⁵⁸National Graduates’ Orientation Programme on 24 October 2007.

⁵⁹Royal Government of Bhutan (2017). *Sustainable Development and Happiness: Bhutan’s Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp.16.

Bhutan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that guided by the development paradigm of GNH, Bhutan is committed to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development... "The 22 variables that assess the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and psychological impacts of proposed public policies are aligned to the principles and goals of sustainable development. Likewise, out of 143 relevant SDG targets, 134 SDG targets were aligned with the indicators of the 11th Five-Year Plan, excluding targets related to SDG 14 on life below water and SDG 17 on Means of Implementation. With 'Just, Harmonious and Sustainable Society through enhanced Decentralization' as the overarching goal, the 16NKRA and KPIs of the 12th Five-Year Plan are aligned to the 17 SDGs, their targets and indicators."⁶⁰

Formulating the 12th Five-Year Plan involved all stakeholders, including civil society, academia, media, business people and people from all strata of the society. This was done to harness the opportunities of taking the benefits of SDGs to every citizen, particularly to the poor and marginalized segment of the society. The plan noted that the 22 variables in a checklist for assessing the alignment of key results with GNH can also gauge if proposed public policies follow the principles and goals of sustainable development.⁶¹

Given the relative sophistication of the goals, aligning them with GNH will not only help translate the national vision into proven strategies, but the SDGs could become a recognized international benchmark for GNH to assess the success of development activities.

Democracy in Bhutan is still at a young stage, with more to be done to strengthen inclusive governance. Realizing the commitment to the SDGs and to leaving no one behind is thus critically important. Building on the already strong linkages between GNH and the SDGs, and on the high levels of integration of the SDG targets in the national planning framework, momentum for further integration and reporting on the SDGs could rapidly accelerate.⁶² The GNH Commission has identified the "Triple C's"—coordination, collaboration and consolidation—as essential to the implementation of the 12th Five-Year Plan.

It is also significant that the Government has committed to partnership with multiple stakeholders including the international community, private sector, civil society and local governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.⁶³ This includes promoting the roles of communities, civil society and the private sector in contributing to national sovereignty, prosperity and sustainability through development plans and policies.

2.4 Human development

Human development aims at enlarging people's choices. These can be infinite. They can also change over time. Income, voice and participation represent important choices. Today, people seek not only to increase their incomes, but also their education, their social status and dignity. They want to take part in the political system, various groups and organizations, and speak out to have their stake in the State and society.

UNDP has introduced various indices to measure human development, including the Human Development Index, which has evolved with the times. It measures average achievement in three dimensions: a long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge, as measured

⁶⁰Ibid. pp.7.

⁶¹<http://www.lk.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/meetTheSDGs/Session%20IA%20National%20-%20Bhutan%20and%20the%20SDGs.pdf>.

⁶²United Nations System in Bhutan (2018). *Common Country Analysis (Bhutan)*.

⁶³Ibid.

by mean years of education among the adult population, and access to learning and knowledge by expected years of schooling for children of school-entry age; and standard of living measured by gross national income (GNI) per capita expressed in constant 2011 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) conversion rates.

As UNDP Resident Representative in Bhutan Renata Dessailien said: *“With the evolution of the HDI from being a purely income measure to the current interpretation, you could say that it has moved toward the GNH concept.”*⁶⁴

The Bhutanese context

What impact has democratization had on human development in Bhutan? This section of the report looks at progress in health, education and infrastructure—Bhutan’s core development priorities—during 10 years of democracy. As stated in the introduction of the report, many advances built on the modernization that started in 1961, but they were enabled by decisions made by the first two democratically elected governments.

A comparison of the health, education and infrastructure indicators between the two points of time—2007 before democracy and in 2018—clearly indicates that democratic governments have made significant efforts to enhance human development through investing in the provision of infrastructure and basic services. These efforts will have a higher pay off in the near future. It will increase the mean years of schooling, which is less at the moment compared to many South Asian countries, and enhance human development.

Achievements in health

During the last two decades, Bhutan has achieved noteworthy improvements in health outcomes (Table 2.1), but critical challenges remain. There has been expansion of both human resources and infrastructure. In 2007, a year before democracy began, there were 29 hospitals, 178 basic health units and 26 indigenous dispensaries. By 2017, health services were being delivered through 27 hospitals, 1 indigenous hospital, 208 basic health units, 66 indigenous dispensaries and 551 outreach clinics. The number of doctors and nurses went up from 157 doctors and 545 nurses in 2007 to 345 doctors and 1,264 nurses in 2017.

Table 2.1 Health indicators

Indicators	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Under-5 mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births)	62	61.5	61.5	37.3	NA
Infant mortality per 1,000 live births	40	40.1	40.1	30	NA
Maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births)	255	255	NA	86	121
Life expectancy at birth in years	65.7	66	67.8	68.9	70.6
Doctors per 10,000 population	2.4	2.5	3	3.3	4.3
Hospital beds per 10,000 population	17.6	17.6	NA	17	18
Deliveries attended by health professional (%)	53.6	66.3	64.5	74.6	96.4
Population with access to safe drinking water (%)	82	83	88	95	98

Source: Ministry of Health, *Annual Health Bulletin 2018, 2016, 2011 and 2009*; National Statistical Bureau, *Statistical Year Book 2018, 2016, 2011 and 2009*.

⁶⁴Personal communication in Paro, May 2009.

Access to health services has improved. For instance, in 2007, a year before the establishment of democracy, there were only 2.4 doctors and 17.6 hospital beds per 10,000 people. By 2017, there were 4.3 doctors and 18 hospital beds per 10,000 people.

Deliveries attended by health professionals have increased from 53.6 percent in 2007 to 96.4 percent in 2017. The share of the population with access to safe drinking water went up from 82 percent in 2007 to 98 percent in 2017. Life expectancy has made steady progress from 65.7 years in 2007 to 70.6 years in 2017. The under-5 mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births) and infant mortality (per 1,000 live births) rates have declined from 62 and 40 in 2007 to 37.3 and 30 in 2015, respectively.

Although health and nutrition outcomes are the second best in South Asia (after Sri Lanka), there are socio-economic and geographic disparities within Bhutan. For example, infant and under-5 mortality rates are higher in the eastern region than in the western and central regions, and under-5 mortality in rural areas is twice that of urban areas. The prevalence of stunting is still high, with every fifth child under age 5 being stunted, yet this is less than in many other countries of South Asia, including Nepal.

As Bhutan develops, significant changes in life style are occurring, leading to the emergence of new health challenges. Non-communicable diseases are on the rise and account for more than 70 percent of the reported disease burden. This poses a significant risk to people's health in their productive years. Mental health problems including alcoholism and suicide are on the rise, including for reasons related to sociocultural changes, growing urbanization, migration and unemployment. The Government has developed the Multi-Sectoral National Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (2015-2020), the Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2015-2023) and the National Health Promotion Action Plan. Operationalization is at an early stage.⁶⁵

Achievements in education

The Government has always prioritized education, which has seen significant progress over the years. Expenditure on education has increased significantly, from 5.1 percent of GDP in fiscal 2013 to 6.7 percent in fiscal 2016. Bhutan's expenditure is higher than in neighbouring countries,⁶⁶ demonstrating significant government commitment to investment in human capabilities. The key initiatives undertaken by the Government include increasing the number of schools, improved learning through teacher professional development and skills development as well as early childhood care.

The total number of educational institutions, from early childhood care and development centres to colleges, increased from 1,304 in 2007 to 1,860 in 2018. In parallel, the total number of students in these institutions increased from 186,278 in 2007 to 206,123 in 2018. The number of students in tertiary institutions increased from 3,820 in 2007 to 11,259 in 2018, an almost threefold increase (Table 2.2).

⁶⁵World Bank (2019). *Bhutan Development Report: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development. Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment Global Practice, January 2019.*

⁶⁶*ibid.*

Table 2.2 Education indicators

Indicators	2007	2008	2010	2015	2018
Number of schools (extended classrooms, Community Primary School, Primary School, Lower Secondary School, Middle Secondary School and Higher Secondary School)	502	523	609	635	694
Number of institutions/colleges	10	10	10	13	27
Number of early childhood care and development centres	6	10	25	251	340
Others (special education centres, Non Formal Education, Continuing Education, Vocational and Patshala)	786	756	730	754	799
Total educational institutions all types	1304	1299	1374	1653	1860
Number of students studying in schools	152,194	157,112	170,405	171,402	167,108
Number of students in institutions/colleges	3,820	4190	5243	10909	11,259
Number of children in early childhood care and development centres	215	294	659	5894	8,499
Number of students in other educational centres (special education centres, Non Formal Education, Continuing Education, Vocational and Patshala)	30,049	27336	13988	10909	19257
Total students studying in all types of educational institutions	186,278	188,932	190,295	199,114	206,123
Student-teacher ratio in schools	28.3	27.4	24.1	21.7	17.1
Gross enrolment ratio (primary)	106%	112%	126%	112%	105.6%
Dropout rate total (primary)	4%	2.8%	1.7%	2.10%	2.3%
Gender parity index (primary)	0.99	1.012	1.03	1.06	1

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual Education Statistics 2018, 2015, 2010 and 2009. National Statistical Bureau, Statistical Year Book 2018, 2016, 2011 and 2009.

The student-teacher ratio improved from 28.3 in 2007 to 17.1 in 2018 indicating that teachers handle fewer students, which directly impacts the quality of education. The Constitution of Bhutan⁶⁷ requires the Government to provide free education until the completion of grade 10. The new Government elected in October 2018 is now committed to providing free education until grade 12 to all students who pass grade 10.

The gross enrolment ratio in primary schools has been consistently good; the decline from 126 percent in 2010 to 105.6 percent in 2018 indicates that there are now fewer over aged and under aged students seeking admission. The dropout rate from primary schools has also declined from 4 percent in 2007 to 2.3 percent in 2018, indicating that more students are now continuing to the next level. Even in terms of gender parity, the index shows improvement. For instance, in 2007 the index was 0.99; for every 100

⁶⁷Article 9 (16), pp. 20.

boys, 99 girls were enrolled. The index increased to a high of 1.06 in 2015, with 106 girls for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school. In 2018, the Gender Parity Index was 1, which means that the ratio of boys and girls admitted to primary school is approximately the same.

Infrastructure—roads and ICT connectivity

Road accessibility propels development activities. Both paved and unpaved roads increased from 4,947 kilometers in 2007 to 18,181 kilometers in 2017. The number of subscribers of mobile phone services also went up from 82,078 in 2007 to 730,623 in 2017 (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Road, landline and mobile connectivity

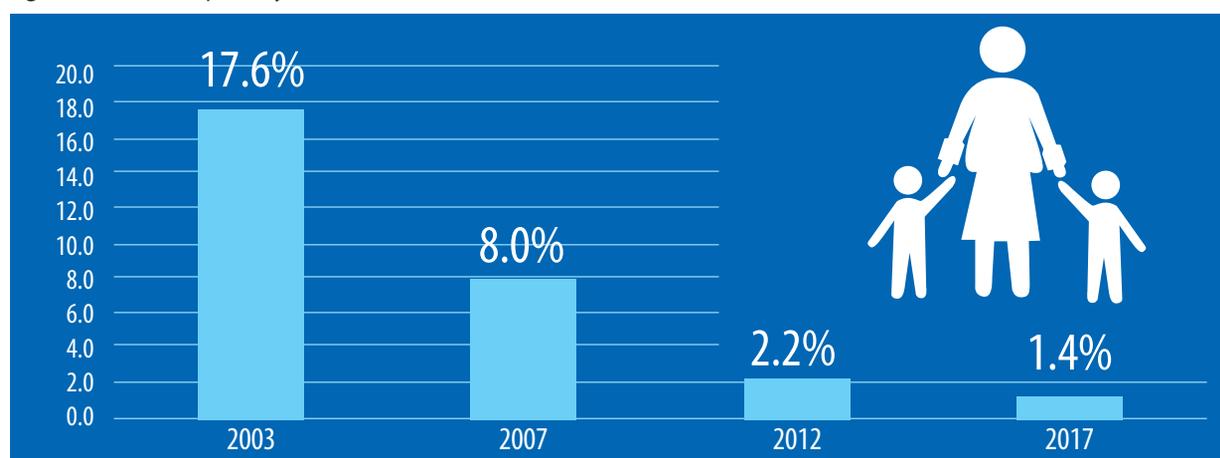
Items	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Roads in kilometres (paved and unpaved)	4,947	5,363	8,366	11,177	18,181
Number of fixed lines/landlines connections	31,526	27,937	26,361	21,811	21,364
Number of mobile phones/cell phones of Bhutan Telecom subscribers	82,078	178,346	305,215	486,228	475,394
Number of mobile phones/cell phones of Tashicell subscribers	Not established	57,948	83,903	189,805	255,229

Source: National Statistical Bureau, Statistical Year Book 2018, 2016, 2011 and 2009.

2.5 Incidence of poverty

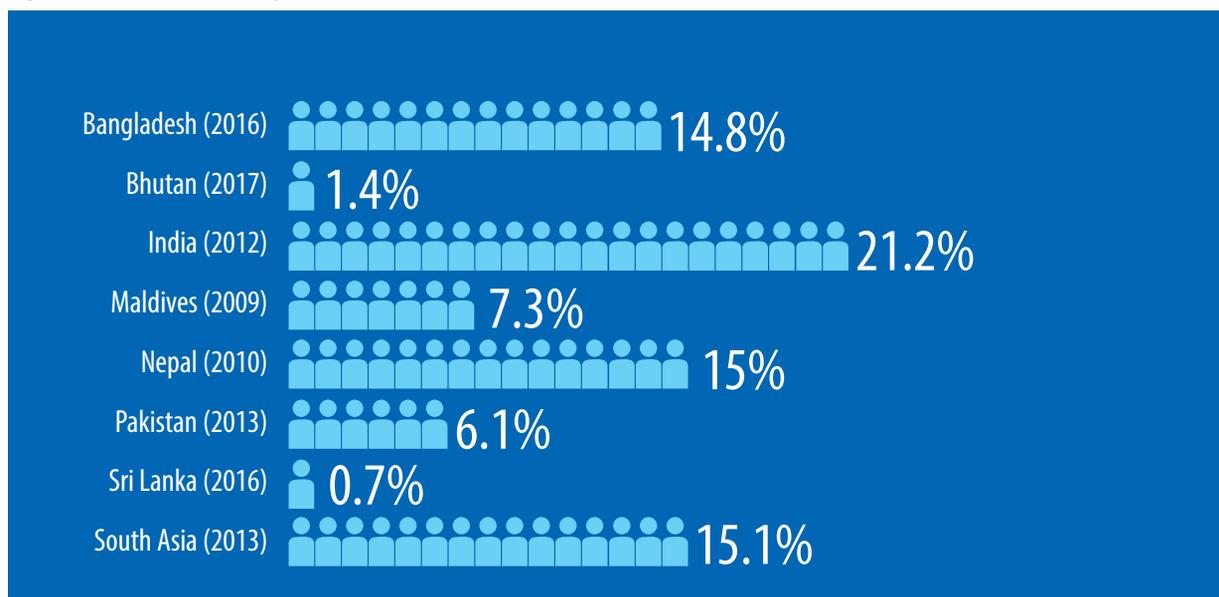
Looking at the SDG ambition to eradicate poverty, Bhutan has made steady progress towards equitable and sustainable development. It has improved on both non-monetary measures and income or consumption based outcomes since 2008. The country has almost eliminated extreme poverty (Figure 2.2). Only 1.4 percent of the population lived on less than \$1.90 a day in 2017. This is the second-lowest level in South Asia and substantially lower than the regional average of 15 percent (Figure 2.3). Thus, Bhutan is already about to reach the income poverty target under the first SDG.

Figure 2.2 Extreme poverty in Bhutan



Source: World Bank Pov Cal.

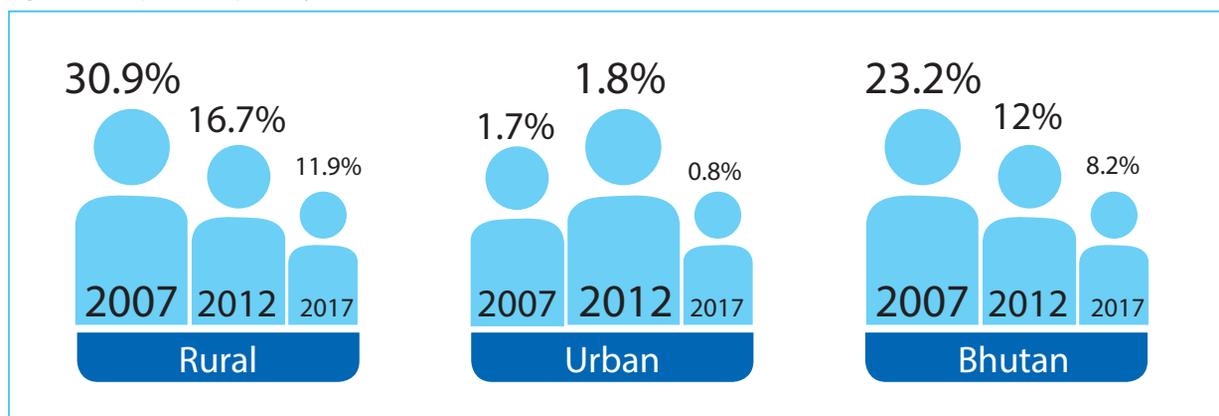
Figure 2.3 Extreme poverty in South Asian countries



Source: World Bank (2018). *Bhutan Development Report: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development. Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment Global Practice.*

According to the national definition of poverty, however, the poverty rate in Bhutan is still high, mainly in rural areas. In 2007, a year before the establishment of democracy, the national poverty rate was 23.2 percent, breaking down to 30.9 percent in rural areas and 1.7 percent in urban ones (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 Population poverty rate under the national definition



Source: National Statistical Bureau (2017). *Bhutan Poverty Analysis Report, pp.14.*

Poverty in Bhutan fell to 12 percent in 2012, a year before the second parliamentary election. In 2017, the poverty rate stood at 8.2 percent, or 11.9 in rural areas and 0.8 percent in urban ones. The significant decrease is due to the rapid increase in income per capita and higher economic growth. The growth rate of consumption for the bottom 40 percent of people in Bhutan was at 6.5 percent between 2007 and 2012, the highest rate in South Asia. Between 2000 and 2017, Bhutan’s per capita GDP increased more than four times to \$3,100.⁶⁸

⁶⁸World Bank (2019). *Bhutan Development Report: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development. Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment Global Practice, January 2019.*

Growth has been driven mainly by the public sector through State-led hydropower development. An annual average GDP growth rate of 7.6 percent since 1981 was the third-highest in the world. The country's power generation capacity increased from 336 MW in 1990 to 1,606 MW in 2015, and has remained the same since then. During the same period, gross fixed capital formation (mainly hydropower investment) contributed to more than 60 percent of GDP growth.

Hydropower development is undertaken by Druk Holding and Investments, which is fully owned by the Government. The sector accounted for about 40 percent of exports in 2016 and 25 percent of total domestic revenues. The benefits of hydropower development have been distributed to the population through increased government spending on health and education⁶⁹ aimed at building human capabilities.

Equity

The survey for this *National Human Development Report* revealed that 36 percent of respondents perceived that democracy has not been able to reduce the gap between rich and poor; the share was higher among urban people (46.3 percent) compared with rural Bhutanese (30.3 percent) (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 Findings on the impact of democracy

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	16.5%	19.9%	10.3%
Agree	34.7%	41.7%	21.8%
Do not know	12.8%	8.0%	21.7%
Disagree	21.4%	17.4%	28.7%
Strongly disagree	14.6%	12.9%	17.6%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 18 and 19

It is also significant that the manifesto of the DNT, the ruling party, carries a bold slogan: "Narrowing the Gap." Equitable development was one of the main campaign thrusts made by the party.

2.6 Employment

Human development requires both improvement in and use of human capabilities. The Government's increased investment, for example, in education will most effectively enhance human development if people with new skills have productive employment opportunities. Employment remains high on the agenda of the third democratically elected Government, which has pledged to work on reducing the unemployment rate.

The unemployment rate in Bhutan was 3.7 percent in 2007. It increased to 4 percent in 2008, when democracy was introduced. Since then, it has dropped from 3.3 percent in 2010 to 2.5 percent in 2015 and 2.4 percent in 2017. Unemployment has continued to be an issue for all three elected governments.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Ibid

⁷⁰National Statistical Bureau, *Bhutan at a glance 2008, 2009, 2011, 2016 and 2018*.

Despite the increase in investments and reforms, available jobs remain vacant, while educated youth remain unemployed. This indicates a mismatch in the demand for and supply of labour. Given the capital-intensive nature of the country's primary growth driver, the hydropower sector, which employs only 0.8 percent of the labour force, and extensive use of foreign labour in hydropower construction, the structure of employment remains overwhelmingly agrarian, accounting for 70 percent of jobs in the private sector. This is also reflected in the lack of job opportunities for youth. Their unemployment rate reached 13 percent in 2016. The unemployment rate for educated youth (with a bachelor's degree) stood at 67 percent in 2016. Though overall unemployment is low at around 2 percent, this masks pockets of unemployment and inequality. Bhutan's public sector provides about 20 percent of all jobs, and offers better monetary and non-monetary benefits than the private sector.⁷¹

The share of working-age people is projected to increase from 65 percent in 2010 to 71 percent in 2025. In other words, about 8,000 people will be entering the labour market annually. Most will be better educated than the previous generation. It will be important to create quality jobs for working-age people to ensure sustainable and inclusive development in the future.⁷²

2.7 The South Asian context

South Asia consists of eight countries. In terms of its ranking on the Human Development Index in 2010, Bhutan was in fourth position, behind Sri Lanka, the Maldives and India (Table 2.4). At the global level, Bhutan has moved up four places in the last seven years, making significant progress in less than a decade.

Table 2.4 Human Development Index trends, 1990-2017

		Human Development Index							
Rank	Country	Value							
		1990	2000	2010	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017
76	Sri Lanka	0.625	0.685	0.745	0.757	0.763	0.766	0.768	0.770
101	Maldives	..	0.606	0.671	0.688	0.705	0.710	0.712	0.717
130	India	0.427	0.493	0.581	0.600	0.618	0.627	0.636	0.640
134	Bhutan	0.566	0.585	0.599	0.603	0.609	0.612
136	Bangladesh	0.387	0.468	0.545	0.566	0.583	0.592	0.597	0.608
149	Nepal	0.378	0.446	0.529	0.548	0.560	0.566	0.569	0.574
150	Pakistan	0.404	0.450	0.526	0.535	0.548	0.551	0.560	0.562
168	Afghanistan	0.463	0.482	0.491	0.493	0.494	0.498
	South Asia	0.439	0.503	0.584	0.602	0.618	0.625	0.634	0.638

Source: UNDP (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*.

Figure 2.6 presents the indicators of the three dimensions of the Human Development Index. Bhutan fares well among South Asian countries on all indicators except mean years of schooling. In fact, Bhutan's life expectancy as well as GNI per capita is higher than in India. The lag in mean years of schooling implies that an increase in the level of education can improve HDI more rapidly in Bhutan and

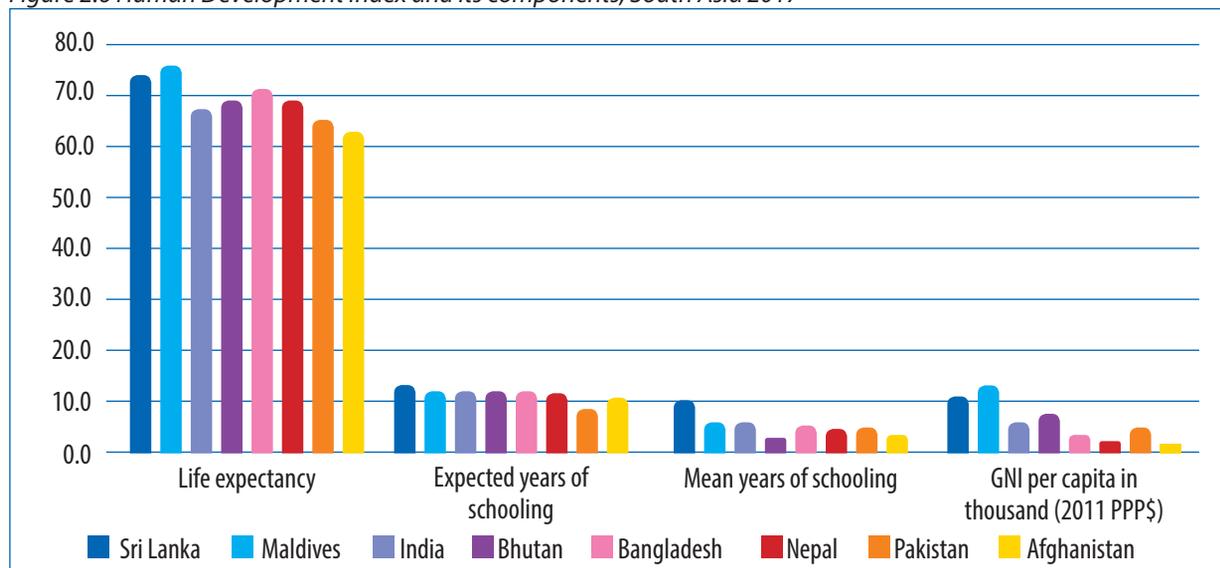
⁷¹World Bank (2019). *Bhutan Development Report: A Path to Inclusive and Sustainable Development. Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment Global Practice, January 2019*.

⁷²Ibid.

improve its position in the South Asia. It is significant, therefore, that the newly elected Government has prioritized education. The first session of Parliament in 2019 was devoted largely to education policy.

Bhutan's Human Development Index value for 2017 was 0.612, putting the country in the medium human development category. It ranks at the 134th position out of 189 countries and territories. Between 2005 and 2017, Bhutan's index value rose from 0.510 to 0.612, an increase of 20.1 percent (Table 2.5). During this period, life expectancy increased by 5.7 years (8.8 percent), expected years of schooling by 3 years (32.3 percent), mean years of schooling by 0.8 years (34.8 percent) and GNI per capita by \$3,608 (2011 PPP) (81 percent). These are significant achievements in a span of 12 years.

Figure 2.6 Human Development Index and its components, South Asia 2017



Source: UNDP (2018). Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update.

Table 2.5 Trends in the Human Development Index in Bhutan, 1990-2017

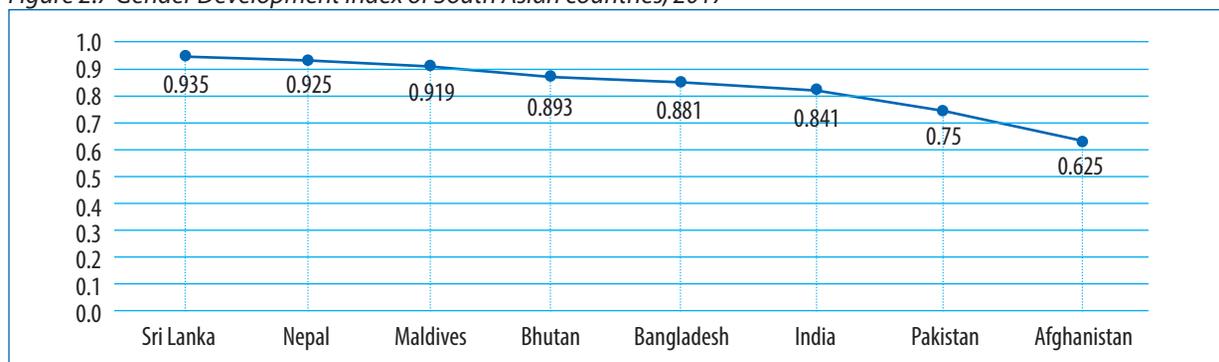
Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011 PPP\$)	Human Development Index value
1990	52.9	5.4		2,099	
1995	56.7	6.4		2,453	
2000	60.8	7.6		3,535	
2005	64.9	9.3	2.3	4,457	0.510
2010	67.8	11.5	2.3	6,062	0.566
2015	69.8	12.2	3.1	7,066	0.603
2016	70.2	12.3	3.1	7,574	0.609
2017	70.6	12.3	3.1	8,065	0.612

Source: UNDP (2018). Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update. Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update (Bhutan).

2.8 Gender and human development

In the global 2014 Human Development Report, UNDP introduced a new measure of human development, the Gender Development Index, based on the sex-disaggregated Human Development Index, defined as a ratio of the female-to-male value. The Gender Development Index measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development. The 2017 female Human Development Index value for Bhutan was 0.576 in contrast with 0.645 for males, resulting in a Gender Development Index value of 0.893. As is the case with the Human Development Index, Bhutan stands at the 4th position out of 8 countries in South Asia on the Gender Development Index. It is behind Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7 Gender Development Index of South Asian countries, 2017



Source: UNDP (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*.

Gender has become an important issue in Bhutan's political discourse. The visible absence of women among top political leaders as well as among the political candidates in all four parties has heightened discussion on gender inequality (see more on this issue in Chapter 4)

2.9 Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index

Human development achievements, while significant, are not equal among all parts of the population. Bhutan loses some of its human development gains when inequality is factored in through the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index.⁷³ The "loss" in human development due to inequality is given by the difference between the Human Development Index and the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index. As inequality in a country increases, the loss in human development also increases.

Bhutan's Human Development Index score for 2017 was 0.612, but when the value is discounted for inequality, the score falls to 0.446, a loss of 27.2 percent. Because of inequality, Bhutan falls five ranks on the Human Development Index, a loss close to the average of South Asia. Losses in the region range from 13.8 percent in Sri Lanka to 31 percent in Pakistan. The Maldives and Nepal show losses due to inequality of 23.4 percent and 25.6 percent, respectively. The average loss due to inequality for

⁷³The Human Development Index is an average measure of basic human development achievements in a country. Like all averages, the Human Development Index masks inequality in the distribution of human development across the population at the country level. The 2010 Human Development Report introduced the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index, which takes into account inequality in all three dimensions of the Human Development Index by "discounting" each dimension's average value according to its level of inequality.

medium human development countries is 25.1 percent, and for South Asia, it is 26.1 percent (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6 Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index

Human Development Index			Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index			Inequality in life expectancy	Inequality in education	Inequality in income
Human Development Index rank	Country	Value	Value	Overall loss (%)	Difference from Human Development Index rank	(%)	(%)	(%)
		2017	2017	2017	2017	2015–2020	2017	2017
76	Sri Lanka	0.770	0.664	13.8	0	7.1	12.8	21.0
101	Maldives	0.717	0.549	23.4	-9	5.7	40.0	20.5
130	India	0.640	0.468	26.8	-1	21.4	38.7	18.8
134	Bhutan	0.612	0.446	27.2	-5	17.8	41.7	19.6
136	Bangladesh	0.608	0.462	24.1	-1	17.3	37.3	15.7
149	Nepal	0.574	0.427	25.6	5	16.6	40.9	16.3
150	Pakistan	0.562	0.387	31.0	-1	31.0	46.2	11.6
168	Afghanistan	0.498	0.350	29.6	7	28.4	45.4	10.8
	South Asia	0.638	0.471	26.1	—	21.4	37.7	17.6

Source: UNDP (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*.

2.10 Gender Inequality Index

The global 2010 Human Development Report introduced the Gender Inequality Index, which is similar to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index. The Gender Inequality Index can be interpreted as the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in three dimensions—reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment by the share of parliamentary seats held by women, and attainment in secondary and higher education by women and men; and economic activity by the labour market participation rates for women and men.

Bhutan has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.476, ranking 117 out of 160 countries in 2017. In Bhutan, 8.3 percent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and 6 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 13.7 percent of their male counterparts. For every 100,000 live births, 148 women die from pregnancy-related causes. The adolescent birth rate is 20.3 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

Female participation in the labour market is 58 percent compared to 74.3 percent for men. In comparison, Maldives and Nepal are ranked at 76 and 118, respectively, on this index. In South Asia, Bhutan stands third after the Maldives with a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.343 and Sri Lanka with a value of 0.354. At a value of 0.653, Afghanistan has the highest inequality.⁷⁴

In South Asia, Bhutan stands at the 4th position in terms of human development and gender development indexes, having made significant strides. Decreasing the gaps between population groups can further accelerate human development.

2.11 Conclusion

Bhutan has made steady progress in human development since democracy was introduced in 2008, as measured by various indexes and indicators. This implies that democracy provides an environment for people to flourish. The following chapters detail how constitutional provisions, the functions of Parliament as well as a growing civil society are contributing to human development.

⁷⁴UNDP (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*.



Preamble

WE, the people of Bhutan:

***BLESSED** by the Triple Gem, the protection of our guardian deities, the wisdom of our leaders, the everlasting fortunes of the Pelden Drukpa and the guidance of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck;*

***SOLEMNLY** pledging ourselves to strengthen the sovereignty of Bhutan, to secure the blessings of liberty, to ensure justice and tranquillity and to enhance the unity, happiness and well-being of the people for all time;*

***DO HEREBY** ordain and adopt this Constitution for the Kingdom of Bhutan on the Fifteenth Day of the Fifth Month of the Male Earth Rat Year corresponding to the Eighteenth Day of July, Two Thousand and Eight.*



CHAPTER THREE

■ The Constitution and Human Development

CHAPTER THREE

The Constitution and Human Development

The global 1995 *Human Development Report* explained human development in terms of four principles: productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment. These principles are embedded in the Bhutanese Constitution, providing conditions for fostering human development. Ten years may be too early to document the in-depth impact of a Constitution introduced as a new concept to the Bhutanese population, but this *National Human Development Report* argues it has made a critical contribution in starting to change the mindset of citizens.

This chapter explores how the Constitution was drafted and adopted, its primary features and role in Bhutan's deepening democracy, and how it distinguishes itself from other constitutions worldwide. The chapter considers a series of fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution to promote human development, including for the provision of education and health care and to ensure ecological balance.

3.1 Process for drafting the Constitution

Beginning with “We, the people of Bhutan...,”⁷⁵ Bhutan's Constitution is the cornerstone of a carefully planned shift from 100 years of absolute Monarchy to a democratic constitutional Monarchy. By adopting the Constitution in July 2008, Bhutan completed a cycle of governance where leadership vested in an elected dynasty was handed back to the people.

The transition, though far reaching, was not inadvertent. In the words of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck:

*“My Father the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and I hereby return to our people the powers that had been vested in our Kings by our forefathers one hundred years ago. We do so with absolute faith and confidence, and offer our complete support and prayers for the success of democracy.”*⁷⁶

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck established an inclusive and participatory process in preparing the Constitution. This began in 2001 with the creation of a drafting committee representing various sectors and regions of the country. In addition, all Bhutanese were given an opportunity to voice their opinion in the process of its preparation. This created broader ownership.

Chaired by Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, the drafting committee had 39 members, who included the Speaker of the National Assembly, one representative from each of the 20 districts, the Chairperson and members of the Royal Advisory Council, five representatives of the Government and two lawyers from the High Court. The Chairperson explained that “this was not to be a Constitution drafted by lawyers alone but by the people.”⁷⁷

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck briefed the committee that the most important objectives of the Constitution were to ensure the sovereignty and security of the country, and the interest and

⁷⁵Preamble, 2008.

⁷⁶Royal Address to the first Parliament, 8 May 2008.

⁷⁷Personal communication of Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), 20 September 2018.

well-being of the people. Beside functional and utilitarian objectives, the Constitution must promote progress, stability and values.⁷⁸

The drafting, as a legislative process, may have been unique. The drafting committee began by studying 100 Constitutions, eventually drawing extensively from 22 of them. More than 40 existing laws were harmonized to ensure consistency.⁷⁹

On 26 March 2005, the draft was distributed to all sections of the Government, the clergy and the armed forces, and more importantly to every family around the country. It was also placed online to get views from Bhutanese as well as international experts and observers. Between October 2005 and May 2006, His Majesty the King and the then-Crown Prince His Royal Highness Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck held consultation meetings in all 20 districts.

For Bhutanese society, it was an emotional period, when their King and Crown Prince explained each article and, in fact, justified the need for the Constitution to the people. While the tone of the consultations conveyed the reluctance of people to make the transition from the Monarchy, the Chief Justice recorded more than 300 substantive questions, indicating vigorous debate.⁸⁰

Besides pleas made to the fourth King not to abdicate, some questions and comments reflected a strong sense of insecurity during the public consultations. There were worries that Bhutanese culture, the basis of the national identity, would be diluted with electoral politics. People proposed that the Constitution should specifically require the preservation of the national language and national dress.⁸¹

On 1 April 2006, 10,000 people gathered in Samtse to meet with His Royal Highness the Crown Prince. Their trepidation was that the general populace did not have a high enough literacy level to plan and implement government activities. On 15 February 2006, people in Sarpang expressed fears that there would inevitably be electoral violence as seen around South Asia. People in Dagana were worried that the liberal tone of the Constitution, which protected all religions, would be a threat to the Buddhist traditions of Bhutan.⁸²

During discussions on 11 February 2006 in Tsirang and on 27 May 2006 in Trongsa, there was heated debate on culture, religion, the institution of the Monarchy, and the unpredictable and undesirable forces of corruption, including nepotism and unhealthy politics. There was a widely shared view that, during elections, political parties would resort to bribery, corruption and other illegal means, and that this would have an adverse effect on society. On the citizenship law, people expressed their concerns that the naturalization clause seemed to make it very easy to gain citizenship, and therefore the criteria and length of stay in Bhutan should be raised.⁸³

In May 2008, the draft was submitted for parliamentary debate. The Constitution was adopted on 18 July 2008 at a ceremony attended by the fourth and fifth Kings, the *Dratshang* (monk body), the royal family, government leaders, members of the international community and representatives from all sections of Bhutanese society. In a way, it was a replay of the *genja* (social contract) signed in 1907 when the people elected the first hereditary King, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹*Kuensel*, 29 October 2005.

⁸²*Kuensel*, 8 February 2006.

⁸³*Kuensel*, 1 April 2006.

The Chairperson of the drafting committee, said: “Democracy in Bhutan is truly a result of the desire, aspiration and complete commitment of the Monarchy to the well-being of the people and country.”

The Constitution symbolizes the shift from the people being loyal subjects to loyal and responsible citizens. Bhutanese people have taken a growing interest on the Constitution and its provisions in the past 10 years. A significant shift has occurred from nobody knowing what a Constitution is to a majority of the people discussing and understanding it. The survey conducted for this report showed that overall, 74.8 percent of Bhutanese today know what a Constitution is while 25.2 percent still do not, as given in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Findings on understanding the Constitution

Understanding the Constitution		National	Rural	Urban
I know what a constitution is	YES	74.8%	66.0%	91.1%
	NO	25.2%	34.0%	8.9%
I read the Constitution of Bhutan	YES	24.6%	14.3%	43.6%
	NO	75.4%	85.7%	56.4%
I have listened to the explanation on the contents of the Constitution of Bhutan	YES	55.5%	51.4%	63.1%
	NO	44.5%	48.6%	36.9%

Source: Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy, 2018. pp. 15.

3.2 Royal proclamations on democratic transition

His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck announced in June 2007 during the last sitting of the pre-democracy National Assembly:

“Bhutan has made history. It is an unprecedented achievement in the world that a benevolent King has, over 34 years of earnest effort, laid the foundation for democracy... I hope and pray that the strengthening of democracy brings greater unity, harmony, and prosperity to our nation, and fulfills the aspirations of our people.”⁸⁴

His Majesty pronounced the mandates of successive governments to translate the “solemn pledge” that the Constitution symbolized:

“Henceforth, our responsibilities will always be first and foremost the peace and tranquillity of the nation, the sovereignty and security of our country, the fulfilling of the vision of Gross National Happiness, and the strengthening of this new system of democracy.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴Royal Address during the Inaugural session of the 87th National Assembly, 7 June 2007.

⁸⁵Royal Address during the National Day, 17 December 2006.

Moving forward, His Majesty the King also pointed out that Bhutan had successfully established the institutions of democracy. Now it was important to adopt the ideals and principles of democracy, and build a culture of democracy. In his Royal Addresses, the King envisaged the last as a democratic system that is clean, healthy, responsible, effective, firm, good, sound, strong, vibrant and well-functioning with democratic ideals, principles, traditions and values.

*"The spirit of democracy must be a part of one's life at home with one's family, in the community, at work and in the government. It is not a word to be used for politics alone. It depends not on the form of government but on the principles, integrity and values of the individual."*⁸⁶

At a time when the Bhutanese electorate was debating the historical significance of the Constitution, the King advised that it should not be considered a gift from the King to the people. "It is my duty to initiate the Constitutional process so that our people can become fully involved in shaping and looking after the future destiny of our country."⁸⁷

King, Constitution and democracy

The first debate on the Constitution was whether to debate it or not. With the Constitution then described as a gift from the King, a moral dilemma arose around questioning a royal gift.⁸⁸ The prevailing perception was that a sacred gift would be defiled by discussions and debates in the Parliament let alone by possible amendments. Nevertheless, debates and discussions did take place. For example, members of Parliament wanted to be included in the local governments of their constituencies, but this was not approved.

The extent of the debate with the people and within Parliament was described by His Majesty the King who said:

*"Each word has earned its place with the blessings of every citizen in our nation. This is the people's Constitution."*⁸⁹

The Chairperson of the drafting committee recalled that the Constitution was introduced at a time of unprecedented peace, when everything was going well, unlike in countries that have drafted constitutions under pressure.⁹⁰ The study of other constitutions enabled the committee to pick the best from these, focusing on Bhutan's national interests, common good and well-being. For example, the head of Government having to be "natural born" was from the Constitution of the United States, the status of the Monarchy was from the Swedish and Danish Constitutions, and India's "directive principles" became "state policy" in the Bhutanese Constitution.

Notably, the challenges that Bhutan has seen in 10 years of democratic governance were foreseen and even cautioned against in the Constitution. In his commentaries on it, the former Chief Justice emphasized a number of problems that Bhutanese society should expect in the experience of democracy.⁹¹

⁸⁶Royal Address of His Majesty the Fifth King to the 87th session of the National Assembly, 7 June 2007. Retrieved from https://www.raonline.ch/pages/bt/pol/bt_polnatass05.html

⁸⁷Kinga, S. (2010). "The Constitution – The King's gift: Defiling and Sanctifying a Sacred Gift." In *Beyond the Ballot Box: Report from the Deepening and Sustaining Democracy in Asia Conference, 11-14 2009*. Thimphu. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp.136.

⁸⁸Ibid, pp.134-135.

⁸⁹Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired) quoting His Majesty the Fourth King, 20 September 2018.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Palden, T. and Wangdi, T. (2018). "Some Impact of Democratic Politics in Bhutan." In *The Druk Journal, 4 (1): Democratisation in Bhutan*.

Democracy must not divide people and fracture the society through elections. Therefore, the Constitution has the challenge of devising a uniting and healing mechanism that must be ensured in Parliament. The Constitution must ensure protection from retribution, and protect the right to vote so that people are not targeted in any way for voting for a losing party.

3.3 The provision of human rights in the Constitution

Human rights and human development have much in common. Both hold that people should not be treated as a means to an end, but as ends themselves. Both are focused on the advancement of human freedoms promised in the founding documents of international human rights.⁹² Ensuring human rights through constitutional provisions can therefore promote human development.

In development discourse, the interpretation of fundamental rights has seen an interesting twist. The post-war Western world interpreted democracy as a symbol of all human rights, to the extent that any system that was not covertly democratic was seen to be “wrong.” When Bhutan opened up to the world in the 1960s, democracy and human rights were used interchangeably; Bhutanese officials were initially defensive about any form of criticism. A former UNICEF representative, Stewart McNab, often commented: “The problem here is that people, for example, enjoy more rights in Bhutan than most countries I have worked in, but my Bhutanese colleagues react defensively to any proposal that we make. The term ‘rights’ is interpreted as ‘wrongs.’”⁹³

Article 7 of the Constitution,⁹⁴ Fundamental Rights, has overcome this mindset. Article 7 was inspired by the traditional understanding of people’s rights conveyed by the Bhutanese proverb:

Gyalpoicheypa bang, bang-girewadekid, Dekid-gitsa-wathrim. (A King loves his people, his people desire happiness, the people’s source of happiness is rule of law.)

The fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, said:⁹⁵

“The fundamental rights enshrined in the Bhutanese Constitution are more comprehensive than those granted under the Constitutions of most countries.”

The Chairperson of the drafting committee explained that Bhutan’s Constitution incorporated the UN Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, adopting 22 articles as fundamental rights. Fundamental rights are bestowed by the Constitution to protect the dignity of an individual as a human being. Fundamental rights limit the power of the legislature, secure individual liberty, act as a barricade against the tyranny of the majority and provide security against arbitrary action by an intrusive Government.

In his commentaries on the Constitution, the Chairperson⁹⁶ wrote that the Constitution not only ensures people rights, freedom and correlative responsibilities, but provides for good governance of sustainable and equitable development, in other words, Gross National Happiness. The Constitution promotes a compassionate society rooted in the Buddhist ethos with provisions to protect the

Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.97-104.

⁹²Alkire, S. (2010). *Human Development: Definitions, Critiques and Related Concepts. Background Paper for Human Development Report 2010.*

⁹³Stewart McNab, personal communication, 7 August 2018.

⁹⁴pp.13.

⁹⁵Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired) quoting His Majesty the Fourth King, 20 September 2018.

⁹⁶Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), personal communication, 20 September 2018.

country’s spiritual heritage and culture. These provisions foster spiritual and emotional well-being, an integral element of GNH. Thus, not only are Buddhism and democracy compatible, but they are rooted in a common understanding of the equality and potential of every individual.

There is evidence that the Bhutanese are able to exercise their fundamental rights under the new democratic Constitution. For example, in the Perspective Survey on a Decade of Democracy, more than three-fourths of respondents felt that they are able to exercise their fundamental rights (Figure 3.2). More rural Bhutanese than urban residents subscribe to this perception. This may be because, with the establishment of democracy, both parliamentarians as well as elected local government leaders are easily accessible, and people are able to express their voices and raise their concerns.

“As much as people are interested in what issues the Parliament discuss, they are also interested in whether their MPs stand up to speak, represent their issues or take positions on key national issues. The electorate has pressured their MPs who do not participate in the parliamentary debates. Strong views have been expressed through various means against such MPs and directly to them when they visit constituencies.”⁹⁷

Figure 3.2 Views of Bhutanese on exercising their fundamental rights

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	29.5%	29.7%	29.1%
Agree	46.4%	48.2%	42.9%
Do not know	10.0%	8.4%	12.8%
Disagree	6.7%	5.5%	8.9%
Strongly disagree	7.5%	8.2%	6.3%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 29.

Checks and balances

The Constitution has provided a basis for political stability and democratic governance over three general elections. It has guided establishment of a government with built-in checks and balances, including through a series of constitutional bodies, and a “separation of powers” across the judiciary, executive branch and legislature. A vertical check and balance functions through a bicameral system, and a horizontal check and balance operates through constitutional offices to ensure that the Government is responsible and accountable to the principles of constitutional government. This government structure has seen minimal imbalances even as an untried political system replaced a trusted Monarchy in the first decade of democracy.

The Constitution guarantees the independence of constitutional bodies to ensure that they are not used by the Government for party interests or political vendettas, such as against opposition parties. Independent bodies such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, Royal Audit Authority, Royal Civil Service Commission and the Election Commission of Bhutan were established to prevent political forces from altering the legal and institutional framework for their short-term and personal gains. The translation of this principle on the ground continues to be debated in the process of electoral party politics, however, with the nature and independence of institutions of governance partially influenced by personalities.⁹⁸

⁹⁷Kinga, S. (2018). *Party Politics, Elections and Human Development* (background paper for this report).

⁹⁸Article 31, pp. 56-57.

As the house of review, the National Council has been an instrument of checks and balances, even questioning the decisions of the National Assembly when the media and public voices were weak. The Election Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission have played active roles in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and transparency in governance. The Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy conducted for this report found that citizens generally believe that Constitutional bodies enjoy autonomy, based on media reports on actions particularly by the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Effectiveness of constitutional bodies

		National	Rural	Urban
The constitutional bodies function without any influence from the Government	Strongly agree	21.1%	26.3%	11.6%
	Agree	46.9%	44.0%	52.2%
	Do not know	26.8%	25.8%	28.7%
	Disagree	4.0%	2.8%	6.1%
	Strongly disagree	1.2%	1.1%	1.3%
The constitutional bodies are efficient and effective in the delivery of their responsibilities	Strongly agree	22.5%	25.5%	17.0%
	Agree	52.7%	49.6%	58.4%
	Do not know	23.1%	23.9%	21.5%
	Disagree	1.5%	0.7%	2.8%
	Strongly disagree	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
The constitutional bodies act as a check and balance mechanism	Strongly agree	21.4%	25.4%	13.9%
	Agree	49.2%	48.0%	51.5%
	Do not know	26.7%	25.1%	29.6%
	Disagree	2.3%	1.3%	4.3%
	Strongly disagree	0.4%	0.2%	0.7%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 23.

The constitutional bodies have so far not shown any affiliation to any political party. The former Chairperson of the National Council said: “If they were aligned with or perceived to be aligned with particular candidates and political parties, people’s confidence and faith in them would be shaken. Nothing must risk undermining people’s faith, respect and confidence in them.”⁹⁹

But a risk in a relatively untested political climate is that institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission may be influenced, or even explicitly used, by the ruling Government to “witch hunt” a preceding Government or the opposition. Transparent decision-making is critical in avoiding this risk, as is greater autonomy, for example, through independent staffing. Currently, the staff is provided by the Royal Civil Service Commission.

The Election Commission of Bhutan has played a central role in the Bhutanese electoral process since democracy was introduced. It follows an Election Act aimed at ensuring minimum credentials of candidates, subjecting members to strict ethical standards, upholding the sanctity of the Parliament house, and preventing coalitions and political instabilities, providing Bhutanese democracy with a high degree of credibility.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Kinga, S. (2018). *Bhutanese Democracy - challenges and a reasoned prognosis for the future (background paper for this report)*, pp.8.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, pp.27.

But the Election Commission has also been criticized for being somewhat draconian in the sense that gatherings, including weddings and religious ceremonies, require its permission during the election period. It established its own media arbitration committee, although there are existing regulatory organizations, like Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA).

The Commission's decisions to deny registration to two political parties for 2018¹⁰¹ and to one in 2008 were meant to deter the formation of too many adhoc parties, an important consideration in a small country. Another issue relates to the shortage of candidates for political parties.

The role of the Monarchy in ensuring stability

The formal era of democratic governance in Bhutan was marked by the abdication of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. But this did not mean the end of the Monarchy. The unique connection between Bhutan's Monarchy and democracy is an important element of the Bhutanese system. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck said:¹⁰²

"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 well-being of Bhutan."

Article 2 of the Constitution states that the *Druk Gyalpo* (King of Bhutan) is the Head of State and symbol of unity.¹⁰³ The role of the Monarch, disengaged from everyday politics, continues to evolve but the "Golden Throne" remains a powerful symbol of unity and stability (Article 2(1)) and plays a vital role in the Bhutanese system. In this regard, understanding the concept of democracy and the Monarchy as two different things could be misleading, since the Monarchy is part and parcel of the democratic system in Bhutan.

The Constitution also stipulates that the King be "the upholder of *chhoe-sid*" (Article 2(2)), namely the *chhoe* (religious) and *sid* (political) values of peace and prosperity.¹⁰⁴ The latter clause is derived from the Buddhist conception of Kingship, shared by the people of Bhutan who place their popular will in the King.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the King of Bhutan is still well-positioned to be a pillar of national unity and stability should political transition prove to be a challenge to national consensus.

The shift to democracy in Bhutan was possible because of the deep reverence that people had for their King. His own abdication had to be implemented through a Royal Command. Despite initial concerns, Bhutan started its democratic journey on the premise that there is no turning back. Ten years on, no political actors, institutions or the general populace have articulated the need for an alternative.

The role of leadership has generally received less attention in the study of democratic transition and consolidation. Greater attention has gone to institutions and processes. But the strongest foundation for the success of Bhutan's democracy is the commitment of its Monarchs, including the affirmation of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck that the success of democracy will be one of the primary goals of his reign.

¹⁰¹<https://www.ecb.bt/?p=5852>.

¹⁰²https://www.raonline.ch/pages/bt/pol/bt_polrep0701.html

¹⁰³*The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*, pp. 2.

¹⁰⁴Masaki, K. (2013). "Exploring Bhutan's 'Natural Democracy': In Search of an Alternative View of Democracy." In *Journal of Bhutan Studies* Volume 28. Thimphu. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp. 47-72.

Bhutan's identity, as well as its development philosophy and vision, is linked to the Monarchy. Gross National Happiness is a broad, long-term vision from the throne. Some concern has arisen over the last decade when politicians have come up with short-term visions and transitory thinking contradicting Gross National Happiness.

During the opening of the third session of the second Parliament, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck placed in perspective the transitory nature of an executive team elected for five years. Bhutan has already seen that conflicting party goals and campaign promises can lead to a neglect of the long-term national vision because parties are more concerned about gaining political dividends through short-term approaches to development.¹⁰⁶ This has been jarring to a polity emerging from a century during which a consistent direction was broadly maintained.

The past decade has been a lesson for the future. The Monarchy has provided the stability as three elections saw three new governments. In the annual State of the Nation reports over 10 years, the three Prime Ministers have all quoted the King's advice as their inspiration and guidance. Bhutan's transition to democracy has enabled a healthy separation of the State and Government.

Royal prerogatives

The Bhutanese Constitution defines the formal prerogatives of the *Druk Gyalpo*: the *kidu* (social safety net) system; the award of titles and decorations; citizenship and land; amnesty, pardon and reduction of sentences; command bills and other measures in Parliament; and a number of decisions in the interest of the nation.¹⁰⁷

The unique *kidu* system was instituted by the Monarchy to address the grievances and needs of vulnerable people, such as those who are economically disadvantaged or destitute, older, disabled, landless farmers or students. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck professionalized and regularized the system by appointing officials at district levels to identify vulnerable individuals.

It is the King's prerogative to grant the special honour of awarding scarves and swords. For example, conferring such an honour to members of Parliament showed the extent of his respect for the popular will expressed through elections.¹⁰⁸ The real power of the King is his popularity among the people. His frequent visits to various parts of the country, required by the mandate to ensure the well-being of the people (Article 2), also make him the most informed participant in Parliament.

*"As King, henceforth, it is my sacred duty to ensure the success of our new democracy so that it will serve to fulfill the aspirations of our people always."*¹⁰⁹

*"If we can do this, may be, our grandchildren will be proud enough to say that our forefathers have left the legacy of a vibrant Democracy."*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Royal Addresses by King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to the Opening of the Third Session of the Second Parliament of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2014.

¹⁰⁷Article 2 (16), pp 6.

¹⁰⁸Kinga, S. (2018). *Bhutanese Democracy - challenges and a reasoned prognosis for the future (background paper for this report)*, pp.25.

¹⁰⁹Royal Address quoted in the report of three days training workshop on "International IDEA's State of Democracy Framework and its Application in Bhutan" (6th-8th of April, 2016).

¹¹⁰Ibid.

3.4 Creating conditions for Gross National Happiness and human development

Article 9 of the Constitution¹¹¹ makes a solemn pledge to Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. This is viewed broadly as a responsibility of the State to create the right conditions for the Bhutanese people to be happy. In most literature on Gross National Happiness, these conditions are interpreted as preserving culture and the natural environment, sustainable economic development and good governance.

Though human development does not appear directly in the Constitution, ensuring happiness does, and the "happiness" literature defines well-being sufficiently broadly that it is more or less synonymous with human development. In fact, Gross National Happiness, and its Gross National Happiness Index, have nine domains: health, education, standard of living, governance, environment, community vitality, culture and spirituality, time use and emotional well-being. The domains and indicators used to reflect Gross National Happiness thus could be seen as a country-specific articulation of human development.

Environmental and cultural rights

Article 5 of the Constitution is one of its most unique aspects: "The Government shall ensure that, in order to conserve the country's natural resources and to prevent degradation of the ecosystem, a minimum of 60 percent of Bhutan's total land shall be maintained under forest cover for all time."¹¹² It also empowers Parliament to declare any part of the country to be a national park, wildlife reserve, nature reserve, protected forest, biosphere reserve, critical watershed and other categories meriting protection. This constitutional provision goes along with the human development principle of sustainability over generations.

The Constitution also mandates the State to protect traditional Bhutanese culture as it has evolved over the years. This clause reflects a rare priority in today's rapidly changing world. Article 4 specifies culture as the culture to be preserved as well as the dynamic and evolving culture.¹¹³

Right to education and health

The Constitution mandates that the Government provide free basic education up to Grade 10¹¹⁴ and free basic public health services¹¹⁵ in both modern and traditional medicines for all citizens. The third Government recently raised this to Grade 12 for all students who have passed Grade 10.¹¹⁶ This aspiration is challenged by issues of cost and quality, however. The former Chairperson of the Constitutional Drafting Committee clarified that the Government will have to be creative in revenue generation to realize this commitment, and prioritize areas for funding, such as good social programmes instead of military spending.¹¹⁷

Inclusion and participation

The Constitution also requires diversity within the Government. Article 17.5 stipulates: "Not more than two members elected from the electoral constituencies of the same dzongkhag shall be entitled to be

¹¹¹pp. 18.

¹¹²pp. 11.

¹¹³ibid.

¹¹⁴pp. 20.

¹¹⁵ibid.

¹¹⁶<http://www.kuenselonline.com/cut-off-point-for-class-x-is-off/>

¹¹⁷Personal communication of Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), 20 September 2018.

appointed as ministers.”¹¹⁸ With this, there is a mandatory distribution of Cabinet posts, compared to the past when most ministers came from smaller western districts.

Vested interests are also prevented from taking root, with candidates for election being disallowed if they hold any office of profit under the Government, public companies or corporations as prescribed in the electoral laws.¹¹⁹ That means that people must have personal financial means to stand as a candidate. But what has been seen in the first three elections is that more candidates are running for office, seeing it as a job opportunity, and then seeking employment in the private sector if they lose the election.

In Bhutan’s democratic transition, Gross National Happiness represents a consistent long-term national vision. As noted by most observers, all Bhutanese political parties, despite their differences, have framed their formal manifestos and campaigns on the premise of Gross National Happiness.

Awareness and exercise of human rights

The rights and provisions of the Constitution have already shown their value in improving the lives of the Bhutanese people through greater awareness, improved accountability and transparency, and better governance and services delivery.

How has the Constitution changed Bhutanese polity? Besides socio-economic development, which has seen steady progress over the past 10 years, democratic change is most visible in the political sphere. There is a heightened awareness of fundamental rights as defined in the Constitution to the extent that citizens are demanding more from the Government on the premise that they choose the leaders.

The survey conducted for this report found that 82.1 percent of respondents believe they enjoy the right to express their views. While 75.9 percent said they are able to exercise their fundamental rights, 14.3 percent disagreed (Figure 3.4). This group of people who have disagreed reflects the tendency towards strong self-censorship in a small society, particularly in critical comments that affect other members of that society.¹²⁰

Figure 3.4 Perception of the right to enjoy and express fundamental rights

Assessment indicators		National	Rural	Urban
Bhutanese citizens enjoy the right to express their views	Strongly agree	35.1%	36.5%	32.4%
	Agree	47%	51.4%	39.0%
	Do not know	9.2%	6.7%	13.8%
	Disagree	5.3%	4.4%	6.9%
	Strongly disagree	3.4%	0.9%	7.9%
Bhutanese citizens are able to exercise their fundamental rights	Strongly agree	29.5%	29.7%	29.1%
	Agree	46.4%	48.2%	42.9%
	Do not know	10%	8.4%	12.8%
	Disagree	6.7%	5.5%	8.9%
	Strongly disagree	7.5%	8.2%	6.3%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 28 and 28.

¹¹⁸pp. 35.

¹¹⁹2008. *Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan* (Chapter 9), pp. 56.

¹²⁰Dema, T. (2018) "National Interest Versus Party Interest: What Former Chimis Think of Parliamentary Discussions." In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.59-65

Tackling corruption

One of the most visible trends after the establishment of democracy was an active Anti-Corruption Commission, which received 4,990 complaints and investigated 216 between 2006 and 2017. In the past, the Royal Audit Authority was the only organization auditing government actions. The Anti-Corruption Commission has raised many issues; a number of people were tried in court for corrupt practices. Senior officials, including Cabinet ministers, were removed from their posts.

The Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International shows that Bhutan ranks among the more corruption-free countries. In 2007 as well as in 2008, it ranked 46 out of 179 countries with a score of 5. Since the introduction of democracy in 2008, the score continued to improve constantly from 5.7 in 2010 to 6.7 in 2017, indicating that Bhutan is making steady progress in controlling corruption. In 2017, it ranked 26th out of 180 countries. Within the SAARC region, Bhutan is ranked 1 and India 2, with a score 2.7 points lower than that of Bhutan (Table 3.1). Afghanistan ranks lowest at 1.5 or 177 out of 180 countries.

Table 3.1 Corruption Perception Index of South Asian countries

Country	2007 (179 Countries)		2008 (179 Countries)		2010 (178 countries)		2015 (167 countries)		2017 (180 countries)	
	Rank	Score								
Afghanistan	172	1.8	172	1.8	176	1.4	166	1.1	177	1.5
Bangladesh	162	2	162	2	134	2.4	139	2.5	143	2.8
Bhutan	46	5	46	5	36	5.7	27	6.5	26	6.7
India	72	3.5	72	3.5	87	3.3	76	3.8	81	4
Maldives	84	3.3	84	3.3	143	2.3		112	3.3	
Nepal	131	2.5	131	2.5	146	2.2	130	2.7	122	3.1
Pakistan	138	2.4	138	2.4	143	2.3	117	3	117	3.2
Sri Lanka	94	3.2	94	3.2	91	3.2	83	3.7	91	3.8

Note: Zero means highly corrupt and 10 means very clean.

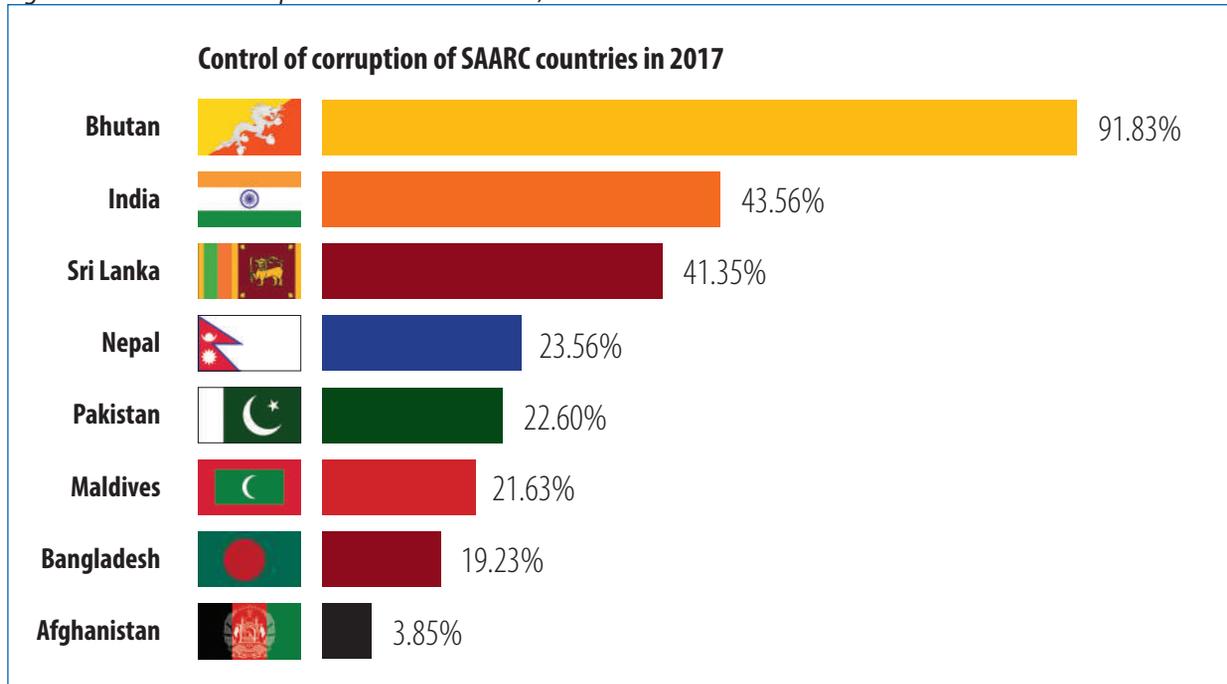
Source: https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2007/0.

The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators¹²¹ also indicate that Bhutan is a comparatively clean country. A comparison of the 2017 data shows that, among the SAARC countries, Bhutan is first with a percentile rank of 91.85; India is second with a much lower percentile rank of 48.56.

¹²¹ www.govindicators.org.

In the control of corruption, according to the Worldwide Governance Indicators data, Bhutan's percentile rank was 77.67 in 2007 as well as in 2008. The rank has steadily improved reaching 91.83 in 2017 (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Control of corruption in SAARC countries, 2017



Source: https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2007/0.

The low incidence of corruption of Bhutan can be credited in part to the legal and institutional framework created through the Anti-Corruption Commission and the 2011 Anti-corruption Act, as well as the Royal Audit Authority. The authority is empowered by Article 25.1 of the Constitution to audit and report on efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public resources.

3.5 Conclusion

The fundamental rights enshrined in Bhutan's Constitution underpin its largely successful fledgling democracy and advances in human happiness and human development. Many improvements have been made in education and health care, for example, although there is scope for improvement in the quality of services. Unlike many other developing resource-rich countries, Bhutan has strong governance and a stable political environment, reflected in low levels of corruption and insecurity.





CHAPTER FOUR

■ The Role of Parliament in Human Development

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of Parliament in Human Development

4.1 Parliament and its functions

The Parliament of Bhutan comprises the King of Bhutan, the National Council as a House of Review, and the National Assembly, known in some countries as the lower house. The National Council comprises 25 members, 20 elected from 20 districts in open elections, and five “eminent members” appointed by the King. The members of the National Assembly are elected in a two-tier electoral process. A multi party primary election is held to choose the two parties that secure the most votes to contest in the general election, where the party that wins the largest number of constituencies forms the Government, its leader becoming Prime Minister. The party that loses the general election sits in opposition.

Generally, Parliament has three major functions: legislation (enacting laws), representation (acting on behalf of voters and citizens) and oversight (monitoring the Government). These functions are critical for promoting human development. This chapter assesses these roles through the lens of expanding the choices of the Bhutanese people. Despite its infancy, the Bhutanese Parliament has had an impact on the country’s political life.

Sitting on the Golden Throne in the parliamentary hall, the King of Bhutan advises and reminds Parliament and the Government of their mandates. As Parliament first sat to define its mandates and work out mechanisms to carry them out, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk advised:

“Parliament is an august body of national conscience, which is expected to show the highest moral and legal standards... I urge you to look beyond your term in office and look at 15, 20, or 30 years into the future. Regardless of which party or government is in power, the interest of the people and nation must always be foremost on your minds.”¹²²

Both houses of Parliament, the National Assembly and the National Council, share equal legislative powers, although bills involving the budget can originate only in the National Assembly. Parliamentary committees help ensure that the Government safeguards the interest of the nation and fulfills the aspirations of the people through public reviews of policies, bills and legislation, and through scrutiny of state functions.¹²³ There were 11 parliamentary committees in the National Assembly and seven in the National Council during the Second Parliament. Adhoc committees are established for specific issues as they arise.

Legislative functions

The primary mandate of the Parliament is to enact laws. The first Parliament had the responsibility of promulgating the Constitution and amending or enacting about 40 acts to ensure that basic legislation necessary for a functioning democracy was in place. The second Parliament added another 20 laws. Table 4.1 lists the laws passed in the second Parliament.

¹²²Royal Address of His Majesty during adoption of The Constitution, 18 July 2008.

¹²³The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008). Article 10, pp. 21.

Table 4.1 Acts passed by Parliament (2013-2018)

Sl. #	Title of act	Year of enactment	Session No.	House of origin
1	Tobacco Control (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2014	2014	13 th	National Council
2	Right to Information Bill of Bhutan 2014	Dead Bill	-	National Assembly
3	National Assembly (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2014	2014	14 th Joint session	National Assembly
4	National Council (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2014	2014	14 th Joint session	National Council
5	Local Government (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2014	2014	14 th Joint session	National Assembly
6	Parliamentary Entitlement (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2014	2014	14 th Joint session	National Assembly
7	Office of Attorney General Act of Bhutan 2015	2015	15 th Joint session	National Council
8	Local Government Entitlement Act of Bhutan 2015	2015	15 th Joint session	National Assembly
9	Bio-Safety Act of Bhutan 2015	2015	15 th Joint session	National Assembly
10	Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2015	2015	15 th Joint session	National Assembly
11	Tenancy Act of Bhutan 2015	2015	15 th Joint session	National Assembly
12	Entitlement and Service Conditions for Holders, Members and Commissioners of the Constitutional Offices (Amendment) Bill 2014	2015	15 th	National Assembly
13	Jabmi (Amendment) Act of Bhutan 2016	2016	17 th Joint session	National Assembly
14	Companies Act of Bhutan 2016	2016	17 th Joint session	National Assembly
15	Enterprise Registration Act of Bhutan 2015		16 th	National Assembly
16	Bhutan Red Cross Society Act 2016	2016	18 th	National Council
17	Civil Aviation Act of Bhutan 2016	2016	18 th	National Assembly
18	Customs Act of Bhutan 2017	2017	19 th Joint session	National Assembly
19	Audit Bill of Bhutan 2017	2018	21 st Joint session	National Council
20	Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Bill 2017	2017	20 th	National Assembly
21	Information, Communications and Media Bill, 2017	2017	20 th	National Assembly
22	Narcotics Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse (Amendment) Bill of Bhutan 2017 (Urgent Bill)	2017	20 th	National Assembly

Source: Kinga, S. (2018). *Party Politics, Elections and Human Development* (background paper for this report, pp. 20-21).

Bhutan's new democracy discovered that not all acts passed by Parliament are directly applicable or accepted unconditionally by the people. For example, the Tobacco Control Act passed by the first Parliament was deemed too draconian.¹²⁴ Under public pressure, it was amended. The Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse Act was amended because it was found too lenient. These amendments show how legislation has also been influenced by popular responses and feedback.

Not all bills proposed by the Government have been passed. The Right to Information Act was passed by the National Assembly but the National Council objected to it on procedural grounds and it was withdrawn. The Enterprise Registration Bill was also withdrawn by the government after the National Assembly initially passed it. The National Council saw this law as being unnecessary and redundant, since existing legislation and by laws already had established procedures for registration and licensing of new enterprises. With the National Council's strong objections, one bilateral agreement with the European Investment Bank and a regional agreement on the Motor Vehicle Agreement between Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal were withdrawn.

Not all the laws were new. Some were amendments to those passed earlier. Again, not all bills have been proposed by the Government; some have been initiated by the National Council at the request of constitutional bodies. The Anti-Corruption Commission Act and Royal Audit Authority Act are good examples. The immediate impact of these early bills was that constitutional bodies and civil society organizations have been able to function.

Formulation and review of public policies

Overseeing the budget is one of the most important parliamentary roles vis-à-vis the bureaucracy. When the National Assembly was first established in 1953, members were elected from the *gewogs* directly by the people and were mostly farmers. Lacking professional experience, the Assembly approved proposals tabled by the Ministry of Finance without debate. The budget, therefore, was mainly decided by the executive organ of the government - the Ministry of Finance.

Over time, there has been significant growth in the capacity of Parliament members. In the new Parliament, the Finance Committee of the National Assembly scrutinizes the national budget, which is sent to the National Council after being passed by the Assembly. This is significant because, in the absence of an opposition, Parliament did not challenge the budget allocation by the Cabinet in the past.

Another critical parliamentary oversight duty is to follow up on government resolutions, through mechanisms like the Question Hour. The National Council had difficulty in instituting the Question Hour in its first term, since the Assembly and the bureaucracy would not respond when ministers and civil servants were summoned. According to the former Chairperson of the National Council, this was resolved after a series of discussions and, in the last five years, about 235 questions were posed to the Government both orally and in writing.¹²⁵ The National Assembly posed 484 questions, according to its Secretary General.¹²⁶

¹²⁴"Bhutanese monk gets three years for possessing tobacco," 4 March 2011, available at <https://www.dw.com/en/bhutanese-monk-gets-three-years-for-possessing-tobacco/a-6459417> (accessed on 11 July 2018).

¹²⁵Kinga, S. (2018). *Party Politics, Elections and Human Development (background paper for this report)*, pp.23

¹²⁶Personal communication of Sangay Duba.

Parliamentary committees hold public hearings bringing experts (including from the Government), interested organizations, the press and the public together to share expertise and hear stakeholder perspectives, to gain a better understanding of policies and legislation, to educate the public, to conduct oversight exercises or further investigations, and to put testimony and documents on the record and in the public domain.

Given the more active role of Parliament after democratization, 85.8 percent of respondents to the survey for this report maintained that it has been able to carry out its legislative roles efficiently. Figure 4.1 shows that people generally agree that Parliament has been effective.

Representing constituencies

The King advised Parliament that an important responsibility of members as representatives of the people was to understand the people’s views, concerns and ground realities, to consult with them on national development activities and policies in the process of lawmaking, and to keep them informed. All of these measures are aimed at adequately reflecting the will of the people.

The survey for this report showed that, to a large extent, this function has been performed by Parliament. For instance, 85.8 percent of respondents said that Parliament has been able to carry out its representative roles efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, 83.1 percent agreed that their representatives voice their concerns in the Parliament. While 4.1 percent disagree that Parliament as a body carries out its representative roles, the share rises to 9.8 percent on the representative roles played by individual members, indicating that not all members represent their constituencies well. Meanwhile, 15.2 percent of survey respondents feel that parliamentarians do not understand their concerns and ground realities (see Figure 4.1 to 4.4).

Figure 4.1 Views on the effectiveness of Parliament in its legislative roles

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	24.0%	29.2%	14.6%
Agree	61.8%	61.7%	62.0%
Do not know	11.2%	7.7%	17.6%
Disagree	2.7%	1.3%	5.2%
Strongly disagree	0.4%	0.2%	0.7%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 20.

Figure 4.2 Views on the effectiveness of Parliament in its representative roles

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	25.6%	31.5%	14.7%
Agree	60.2%	58.2%	64.0%
Do not know	10.0%	8.4%	13.0%
Disagree	3.9%	1.8%	7.7%
Strongly disagree	0.2%	0.0%	0.6%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 21.

Figure 4.3 Views on the effectiveness of Parliament in voicing the concerns constituencies

	National	Rural	Urban	
The elected members of Parliament are able to represent the voices of the people of their constituency in Parliament	Strongly agree	32.3%	45.4%	17.9%
	Agree	50.8%	43.4%	51.8%
	Do not know	7.1%	6.1%	12.2%
	Disagree	8.5%	4.7%	14.8%
	Strongly disagree	1.3%	0.4%	3.4%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 22.

Figure 4.4 Views on Parliament's ability to understand the concerns of the people

	National	Rural	Urban	
The elected members of Parliament understand the concerns and ground realities of the people	Strongly agree	23.6%	39.2%	6.4%
	Agree	47.2%	44.2%	47.0%
	Do not know	13.9%	9.9%	24.9%
	Disagree	12.6%	5.7%	17.0%
	Strongly disagree	2.6%	1.0%	4.7%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 22.

Yet despite generally positive perspectives on Parliament, Bhutan has seen three new Parliaments across three elections. Feedback from voters and political candidates, in personal communications and in social media, indicate that, when it comes to elections, Bhutanese voters still support or oppose a party and sometimes personalities rather than the competence of individual candidates.

The new parliamentary system invited some comparison of the effectiveness of the pre-democracy Assembly members who were elected as direct representatives of the people and not as party members. Previous National Assembly members claimed that they were elected for their status in society, and that they represented the people's views, while today's members generally tend to represent only their party's stand on issues. A serving member, who asked to be anonymous, said there were occasions when he contradicted his own principles and convictions to tow the party line.¹²⁷

Today's members claim the advantage of being more qualified, particularly on legal issues that require substantial research, a criteria for their eligibility being that they must be university graduates and have the capability to discuss legislation. Former Assembly members were recognized for their experience and respect earned as senior citizens.

Both the current National Council and National Assembly devote a special sitting every session to "constituency issues." Parliamentarians are not part of the local government and are expected not to get involved in local government issues. But they do represent the constituencies and have a direct interest in them. Their relations and cooperation with local officials demand skill and patience to avoid the impression of interfering with local government.

¹²⁷Dema, T. (2018). "National Interest Versus Party Interest: What Former Chimis Think of Parliamentary Discussions." In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 59-65.

4.2 Improvement in the functioning of Parliament

With most parliamentarians in a “learning” stage, the two houses of Parliament have been refining their individual roles and relationship. There have been a number of questions as well as some tensions, such as the procedures of the National Council summoning ministers and civil servants for questioning on various decisions and issues. These, however, have led to healthy debates on national issues and constructive policies as well as parliamentary procedures.

The budget discussion and Parliament’s enquiry into grants and demands have become much more robust in recent years. Different priorities pledged by political parties have prompted questions on the allocation of the budget. Political debate has brought new perspectives to light, for example, concerns over public debt and the funding of government pledges.

A more inclusive atmosphere in decision-making is increasingly visible. With the Government announcing strategic plans, for example, to align the priorities of GNH and the SDGs, parliamentarians have been able to bring in the views of people on issues such as conflicts between farmers and wildlife in the context of debates on the environment.

With experience, the secretariat and members of Parliament themselves have gained improved capacities for enhanced oversight, scrutiny and leadership. During the closing ceremony of the seventh session of Parliament in November 2017, His Majesty the King commended the higher quality of debate since the introduction of parliamentary democracy:

“In the course of their duties, our parliamentarians have been careful in selecting bills for discussion, based on their relevance and benefits. They have researched the issues well and deliberated on them extensively, endorsing their final decisions based on consensus.”

This has been further corroborated by the fact that 87.4 percent of respondents to the survey for this report agreed that the legislature has been able to strengthen democratic culture, leading to a deepening of democracy (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Views on the strengthening of democracy by the Parliament

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	30.5%	34.3%	23.6%
Agree	56.9%	54.2%	61.9%
Do not know	10.5%	9.9%	11.5%
Disagree	2.0%	1.5%	2.8%
Strongly disagree	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%

The Parliament of Bhutan has strengthened democratic culture in Bhutan

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 20.

In summary, parliamentary democracy is a decade-long experience in Bhutan. Parliament has been gaining experience and started playing a significant role in review and oversight functions. Parliamentarians are improving their capabilities and discharging their responsibilities more effectively, helping to expand the choices and well-being of the constituencies they represent.

4.3 Improved service delivery

Indicators show that there has been a steady improvement in service delivery under the parliamentary system. The Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank show that government effectiveness has consistently improved, from a percentile rank of 63.59 in 2007 to 70.67 in 2017 (Table 4.2). Among SAARC countries, Bhutan ranks 1 and India 2 (Table 4.3).

Table 4.2 Percentile ranking of Bhutan on three Worldwide Governance Indicators

Indicators assessing governance in Bhutan	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Government effectiveness	63.59	65.05	69.86	67.79	70.67
Regulatory quality	24.76	22.82	10.53	26.92	38.94
Rule of law	60.29	62.02	60.66	70.19	74.04

Source: www.govindicators.org.

In terms of regulatory quality, Bhutan's percentile rank was 24.76 in 2007. It went down to 22.82 in 2008 when parliamentary democracy was established. It further fell to 10.53 in 2010, two years after the establishment of democracy. However, it picked up to 26.92 in 2015, and in 2017 stood at 38.94. Among the SAARC countries, Bhutan is in third place after Sri Lanka, with a percentile rank of 50.48, and India with 42.31 (Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

On the rule of law, Bhutan's percentile rank was 60.29 in 2007, rising to 62.02 in 2008 when democracy was established. In 2010, its rank went down to 60.66 but picked up again to 70.19 in 2015 and 74.04 in 2017. Bhutan is first among SAARC countries, followed by Sri Lanka with a percentile rank of 55.29 (Tables 4.2 and 4.3).

Table 4.3 Percentile ranking of SAARC countries on three Worldwide Governance Indicators in 2017

Country	Government effectiveness	Regulatory quality	Rule of law
Afghanistan	9.13	6.73	4.81
Bangladesh	22.12	20.67	28.37
Bhutan	70.67	38.94	74.04
India	56.73	42.31	52.88
Maldives	35.58	35.58	30.77
Nepal	18.75	25.96	27.40
Pakistan	31.25	29.33	24.04
Sri Lanka	48.08	50.48	55.29

Source: www.govindicators.org.

Improvement in service delivery by the Government stems from the enhanced capacity of Parliament to perform its oversight function more effectively. As presented in Chapter 2, this has contributed to steady progress in development outcomes even after the change in the political system in 2008. In a parliamentary system with increased participation, however, new issues and challenges emerge as detailed in the following section. These also bring opportunities to widen and deepen democracy.

4.4 Emerging challenges

Despite progress, Parliament faces a number of challenges and issues that have emerged from experiences over the past 10 years. Most National Assembly resolutions appear to be based on the ruling Government's need to show people that it is implementing its political manifesto. While the opposition protests that, as the minority, it is overruled on such issues, political parties outside Parliament have

also become increasingly vocal, proposing more say on issues with national significance.¹²⁸

This situation has given rise to some concerns of an “us versus them” syndrome. One member of the Parliament explained that legislators were referred to by the names of their parties, thus branding them and making it difficult for reconciliation after the elections. “Ideally you should represent your constituency and that is why the Speaker, when referring to MPs, calls them by their constituency names,” he said. “But when it comes to the stand a member takes it is mostly in line with party interests and not as a member of the House.”¹²⁹

The opposition in the first Parliament questioned a number of incentives given by the Government to businesses, such as some waivers including of vehicle taxes. The Parliament passed the Government’s submission but the opposition leader took the Government to court and won the case when the Supreme Court decided that tax incentives should be approved by Parliament and not the Government.

The experience of two governments has shown that when committee chairs are monopolized by the ruling party, the opposition loses interest in being a part of committee decisions, even though these are at the heart of the parliamentary system. The third Government, however, has five out of nine committees chaired by opposition members.

The Election Commission has sought to encourage more interaction among the different parties during the campaign period. The “Democracy Forum 2018” organized by the Royal University of Bhutan and the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy before the 2018 elections brought all four party leaders together informally to discuss a number of issues critical to Bhutanese democracy. On the request of the parties, the forum is to be repeated because it was more interactive than formal television debates. In December 2018, His Majesty the King invited all four party presidents to attend the National Day celebrations together, an opportunity for informal interaction and discussions.

An important challenge for Bhutan’s democracy in the coming years will be to strengthen the independence of Parliament, particularly in its relation to the executive branch and civil service. There is a need for better coordination between Parliament and the bureaucracy.

Box 4.1 Virtual Zomdu: bringing Parliament to the people¹⁵⁷

Bhutan continues to adopt technology to connect people. The Virtual Zomdu, first prototyped in 2014, is a promising initiative of Parliament in collaboration with UNDP. It takes the tradition of *zomdu* (village meetings) to a virtual platform through a network of digitally connected community centres around the country. More than 77 percent of parliamentarians, *gups* (village headmen) and community centre operators recommended setting up the virtual *zomdu* facility in all 205 *gewogs*. The purpose is to engage more people from all backgrounds in decision-making.

The Virtual Zomdu has demonstrated its utility, to a degree. For example, during a trial session, school children asked the Speaker of the National Assembly to explain the lack of transport to school in their area. The issue of a school bus previously promised but forgotten was raised. The Speaker followed through and a bus was provided.

The Virtual Zomdu has not yet had a large-scale, visible impact, however, with underutilization caused mainly by the absence of advocacy, telecommunications network fluctuations and clear guidelines.

Source: Dorji, T. (2017). *Virtual Zomdu: Bringing Parliament to the People of Bhutan*.

¹²⁸Democracy Forum organised by Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, 11 May 2018.

¹²⁹Dema, T. (2018). “National Interest Versus Party Interest: What Former Chimis Think of Parliamentary Discussions.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 62.

Parties: defining a new form of politics

A major change from the National Assembly functioning prior to democracy was the introduction of party politics. The first two political parties, established for the 2008 election, claimed that they were responding to the needs of the times, with their Monarch having declared Bhutan a parliamentary democracy. Senior Bhutanese leaders were urged to join politics. Some even declared that they were reluctant politicians, meaning that they did not harbour political ambitions.

The manifestos of the two parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT), both emphasized Gross National Happiness, which became a common framework for organizing their policies and programmes. The parties were and are still identified by their logos. For the primary elections in the third round, voters were supporting the horse, birds, flower or jewels.

By the second general election, an absence of ideology saw increased cross-party movement of members, party workers and supporters. This suggested that political parties are seen as an opportunity to take part in governance and build a career.

There have been sporadic voices calling for doing away with political parties, and returning to the more peaceful and benign rule preceding 2008. But these have stemmed more from frustrations with confrontational and personality-based politics than anti-democratic sentiments.

While political parties will continue to face challenges, a majority of voters have accepted that they are here to stay. Their identity remains malleable at this point, however, which may affect the nature and course of Bhutanese democracy.

New parties will likely form in the future.¹³⁰ Existing ones may disband to regroup. Members of parties who do not win party tickets but desire to participate may resign and form parties. It is probable that every election season will see one or more new parties and just as likely that some may disband.

The mushrooming of political parties to contest elections rather than to build institutions that continue into the future and participate actively in the democratic process may not be healthy for Bhutan. For a population of less than 700,000 people, there is no space for too many parties. This will remain a challenge for Bhutan's democracy and should be of concern to the Election Commission.

It is clear that parties will face challenges in establishing their credibility. Among survey respondents, 9.3 percent said they do not trust parties. Distrust is higher among urban residents, at 19 percent, than among rural ones, at 4.1 percent. Further, 12.7 percent of respondents said they "do not know" on the question of trusting parties (Figure 4.6).

¹³⁰Kinga, S. (2018). *Bhutanese Democracy - challenges and a reasoned prognosis for the future (background paper for this report)*, pp.5.

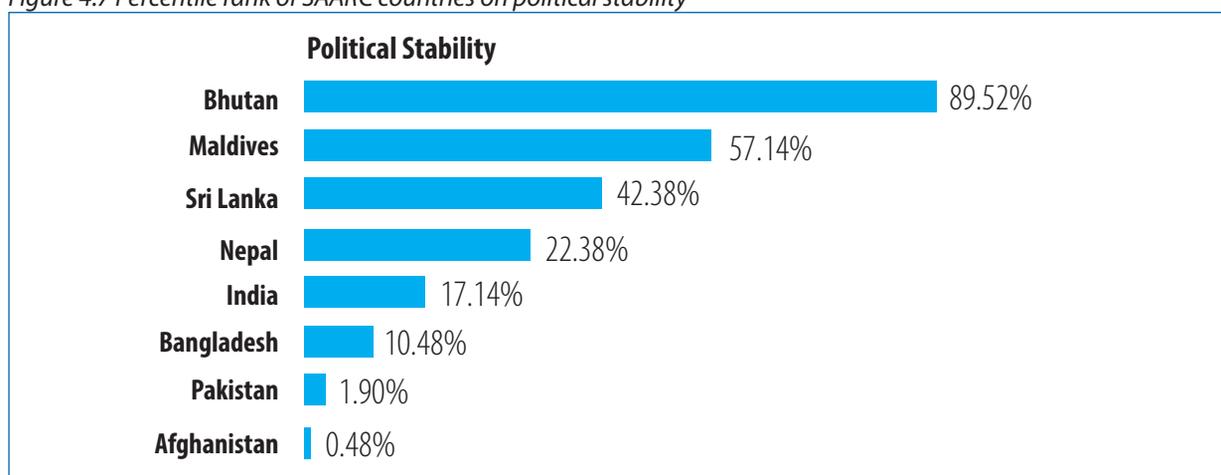
Figure 4.6 Views on trusting political parties

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	28.5%	36.6%	13.5%
Agree	49.4%	51.6%	45.4%
Do not know	12.7%	7.6%	22.1%
Disagree	6.6%	3.5%	12.3%
Strongly disagree	2.7%	0.6%	6.7%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 26.

Yet the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators show that political stability has improved since 2008.¹³¹

Figure 4.7 Percentile rank of SAARC countries on political stability



Source: www.govindicators.org.

The political stability and absence of terrorism and violence indicator of the Worldwide Governance data of World Bank show that the percentile rank of Bhutan stood at 65.7 in 2007, a year before establishment of democracy in Bhutan. In 2008, it was 70.19 and continued to increase steadily. In 2017, its percentile rank is 89.52 indicating that Bhutan is a politically stable country with absence of terrorism and violence.

Among the SAARC countries, Bhutan is very high in its political stability. Even the second, the Maldives, has a percentile rank of only 57.14. It goes to as low as 0.48 for Afghanistan indicating a high political instability and torn apart by violence and terrorism (Figure 4.7).

The Bhutanese people have experienced both the positive and negative impact of democracy. The “Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy” shows that of the many positive experiences of democracy, the ones common to both rural and urban residents are “freedom of speech and fundamental rights, good governance and decentralization of power.” On the other hand, “corruption during voting leads to electing the wrong candidate, democracy brings disharmony in

¹³¹Refer to chapter three, section on The Role of the Monarchy for ensuring stability.

society, all the manifestos are not achievable and poor voter turnout” were mentioned as negative experiences. Other positive and negative experiences are listed in Figure 4.8 and 4.9.

Figure 4.8 Positive experiences with democracy

Rural	Urban
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm road in the village • Improved drinking water supply • GDG fund good to meet immediate needs of the <i>gewog</i> • Women participants are increasing in elections • Good development activities in rural areas • Bolero (utility vehicle) is good as <i>gewog</i> officials can travel to attend to people • Central school is a great benefit for low income and poor • Gender equality is getting attention • Agricultural sector is growing • Living standard is improving • Improvement in environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth employment is getting importance • Helicopter rescue system good during emergencies • People are understanding human rights and their rights • Improved health facilities • Improved road system • Improving education facilities • People are realizing their role in democracy • Freedom to share views and rights for people • Opportunity to vote for the leader of our choice • Facilities for youth are improving

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 31.

Figure 4.9 Negative experiences with democracy

Rural	Urban
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor road condition in our village • No immediate response from government to address problems • Shortage of water for irrigation is not solved • Some force their cousins and children to vote for their candidates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased foreign debt • Gap between poor and rich is increasing • Communication gap is increasing • Door-to-door campaign is not advisable as it leads to corruption • Candidates with money win the election • MPs are looking for their own benefits only • No justice in democracy

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 31.

A perspective has been provided by His Majesty the King, with a note of optimism:

“Party politics was an entirely new concept for Bhutan. Yet, we managed to steer our country in the right direction from the very beginning and, in the course of eight years, we have gained invaluable experience and built a stable democracy.”¹³²

Elections: from personalities to issues

Bhutan’s Constitution defines a two-tier electoral process as well as the responsibilities of political parties and criteria for party registration. The Public Election Fund Act establishes a pool of finance to ensure the broad participation of registered political parties and candidates, curb the undue influence of unequal money power, and prevent the unregulated flow of funds in the political arena.

The objective is to help ensure clean, free and fair elections. As Justice J. S. Verma of India commented: “Such provisions tend to promote political morality. Mahatma Gandhi named politics without morality as one of the seven deadly sins.”¹³³

Campaigns in 2008 largely focused on the personalities of the candidates. The DPT’s narrative highlighted its president and the presence of five former ministers. In 2013, the strong tone and intention was change. The PDP, having strengthened its potential Cabinet by taking five senior candidates of a new party, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT), won the election. In 2018, a savvier electorate studied political pledges and benefits to constituencies. The DNT was elected to form the third government on the promise of change.

As seen in the 2018 elections, the “party as a whole” will continue to be an important factor influencing voting decisions. But the influence of the head of the family and relatives as deciding factors seem to be declining. The choice of candidate based on gender has been a determining factor for only a small fraction of the population. The 2018 election indicated potential regionalism with candidates of the other three parties viewing eastern Bhutan as largely supporting the DPT.¹³⁴

Table 4.4 Views as a basis for voting in the past election

Past election	National	Rural	Urban
Party as a whole	21%	17.6%	27.2%
Party leadership	16.8%	15.3%	19.8%
Capability and experience of candidate	49.2%	58.1%	32.7%
Relation	7.4%	3.8%	14.0%
Gender	0.7%	0.6%	1.0%
Influence by head of the family	3.9%	3.4%	4.8%
Influence of civil servants	1%	1.3%	0.5%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 31-32.

¹³²Royal Address during the Closing Ceremony of the 7th Session of the Second Parliament, 7 July 2016.

¹³³Quoted by Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired) in his unpublished paper “A first decade for Bhutan’s Constitution,” pp. 11.

¹³⁴The 2018 general round election result shows potential regionalism as all of the 17 elected DPT candidates were from central and eastern part of Bhutan with none from western and southern Bhutan. On the other hand, of the 30 elected candidates of the DNT only 6 were from eastern and central Bhutan.

Table 4.5 Views as a basis for voting in a future election

Future election	National	Rural	Urban
Party as a whole	24.8%	16.1%	40.8%
Party leadership	11.6%	11.0%	12.6%
Capability and experience of candidate	60.8%	70.7%	42.6%
Relation	0.8%	0.2%	1.7%
Gender	0.8%	1.0%	0.6%
Influence by head of the family	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%
Influence of civil servants	0.8%	0.5%	1.4%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 31-32.

Political promises

Political parties are moving from personality and leadership-based electoral contests to issue-oriented campaigns, although it is likely that the former criteria will continue to be important in Bhutan's small society.

Public debates during the 2018 campaign, organized under the supervision of the Elections Commission, were more focused than in the past. The electorate was more interested in the policy priorities of parties as declared in their manifestos and the pledges that individual candidates made to their constituencies. Voters used social media to make demands and to pressure parties to keep their pledges.

A growing sense of entitlement among citizens is being nourished by promises made by politicians and, after three general election campaigns, it is clear that political parties are less likely to conduct a campaign based on unrealistic promises to please voters and boost their chances of winning elections. Electoral promises need to be made seriously as they represent party priorities that translate into government policies.

A common—and predictably transparent - promise by all political parties is to raise the salaries of civil servants. Civil servants, being the best qualified and usually the bread earners of extended families, are seen as an influential section of society. This promise does not come without criticism, however, because a raise in the salaries of people with the bulk of society's purchasing power results in higher rents and prices and overall cost of living.

A question repeated by politicians, media, and citizens, and left unanswered in the debates, is: "How will the government fund all the activities that are promised during the campaigns?"¹³⁵ The implication is that the Government will become more dependent on external funding, therefore defeating the goal of self-reliance. In the 2018 election campaign, the DPT made self-reliance its central policy priority, going back to one of the fourth King's main development goals.

¹³⁵Dasho Neten Zangmo (President of Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party), Party President Debate, Thimphu, 2018.

Grappling with debate

Bhutanese politicians begin their careers with a disadvantage. Politicians in South Asia generally do not enjoy public trust and are often associated with corruption. Bhutanese politicians have also experienced a form of trust deficit to different degrees, fanned by party politics characterized by the exchange of allegations between politicians and their supporters.

A major criticism of the electoral process has been that it has divided families and communities across the country as people aligned with political parties. There were widespread stories of how families and neighbours have split along party lines and ceased to exchange labour, visit during times of illness or death, or provide the everyday support and cooperation vital to community life and well-being.

Stories of married couples, siblings and friends becoming estranged, engaging in physical fights and limiting access to community resources because of party differences were told and re-told, often with inflated melodrama, including in the media. These social tensions pose a direct threat to community vitality, a core component of GNH.

In general, after 10 years of democracy, people at large have come to accept that debates and differences are not antithetical to democracy. Yet among survey respondents, 11.6 percent still said that electoral process has caused social disharmony, a serious concern in a country with a small population (Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10 Impact of elections on social harmony

	National	Rural	Urban
Strongly agree	30.6%	33.4%	25.5%
Agree	45.7%	47.8%	42.0%
Do not know	12.0%	9.5%	16.7%
Disagree	8.7%	7.6%	10.7%
Strongly disagree	2.9%	1.7%	5.0%

Participation in elections has led to social harmony and unity in the community.

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 27.

Women in leadership

Since the inception of democracy in Bhutan, the representation of women has been low in both Parliament and local government. In 2008 there were four female parliamentarians out of 25 in the National Council, including two eminent members nominated by His Majesty the King. In the 2013 election, no female candidates were elected, leaving only two eminent members. In 2018, two female candidates were elected for a total of four female National Council members, including the two eminent members (combined, they comprised 16 percent of members).

In the National Assembly, female representation has gone up from four in the 2008 and 2013 elections to seven in the 2018 elections (14.9 percent of members).

Representation in local governments has improved from 2011, when 103 women were elected compared to 1,328 men. In 2015, 169 women were elected compared to 1,291 men (11.4 percent of the total).

Table 4.6 Elected women in Parliament and local government

Year	Elections	Male	Female	Women's share of seats (%)
2008	National Council	21	4 (2 eminent)	16
	National Assembly	43	4	8.5
2011	Local government	1,328	103	7.2
2013	National Council	23	2 eminent	8
	National Assembly	43	4	8.5
2015/2016	Local government	1,291	169	11.6
2018	National Council	21	4 (2 eminent)	16
	National Assembly	40	7	14.9

Source: Personal documentation of Dasho Kinley Dorji, Lead Author of this report.

The second elected government initially pledged to start drafting a quota system for women in Parliament but dropped it in 2016. Women's groups led by the National Commission for Women and Children and the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women are currently pursuing the introduction of "special measures," which involve a quota for women in Parliament.

Being apolitical

One issue that sections of Bhutanese society are grappling with is the need to be apolitical, a concept that is not quite clear. Civil servants cannot contest or openly campaign for or against candidates and political parties. But more people are questioning the ban on civil servants attending public meetings where candidates address the people and explain their manifestos. The argument is that, as voters, they have to understand the ideologies and priorities of different parties.

The royal family and religious community are not allowed to stand for elections or even to vote, based on the principle of "separation of church and State."¹³⁶ There is agreement that lamas should not get involved in politics, but there are also people who believe that lay monks who live among rural communities should be allowed to vote.

A growing role for social media

The emergence of social media as a tool in elections can be traced back to the 2008 presidential election in the United States. It is widely accepted that Barack Obama changed electoral politics by using social media to reach out to voters, raise funds and mobilize supporters. Social media also helped Donald Trump win the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. Notwithstanding the controversy of Russian involvement that still continues, a Trump campaign digital director noted, "Twitter is how [Trump] talked to the people, Facebook was going to be how he won."¹³⁷

Narendra Modi's victory in India's 2014 election has been attributed to his skillful use of social media. His campaign included a website (www.narendramodi.in), a Facebook page, Twitter, a Pinterest board, a YouTube channel, and profiles on Google+, LinkedIn, Tumbler, Instagram and a mobile app called India272+ to pass messages and organize volunteers.

¹³⁶Personal communication of Justice Sonam Tobgye (retired), 20 September 2018

¹³⁷<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/08/trump-digital-director-brad-parscale-facebook-advertising>

Initial discourse by Bhutanese on social media has been dominated by false news and hate speech, fanning widespread rumours in Bhutan’s oral society, to the extent that the Election Commission issued social media rules for the electorate. The commission also appointed a media arbitrator to monitor trends in social media and establish an appeals process for offenses as defined by the commission. During the 2018 elections, a total of 17 complaints were lodged by political parties and 22 objections raised by the media arbitrator. Nearly all involved social media.¹³⁸

Social media has become a major platform for political discourse in part due to inadequate coverage by mainstream media that are grappling with a shortage of funds in a small market as well as the pressures of a small society. The survey showed that 93.8 percent of urban respondents said that they use social media, compared with 48 percent in rural areas.

Nationally, 76.1 percent of respondents agreed that social media is an important tool to reach the electorate, yet 82.4 percent are not connected to a political candidate running for election through social media (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11 Views on social media

		National	Rural	Urban
I use social media	YES	64.1%	48.0%	93.8%
	NO	35.9%	52.0%	6.2%
Social media is an important tool to reach the electorate.	YES	76.1%	66.7%	93.5%
	NO	23.9%	33.3%	6.5%
I am connected to a political candidate running for election through social media	YES	17.6%	16.3%	19.9%
	NO	82.4%	83.7%	80.1%
Social media will help political candidates win votes	YES	65.2%	58.7%	77.0%
	NO	34.8%	41.3%	23.0%
Social media is good for strengthening democracy	YES	65.0%	56.5%	80.6%
	NO	35%	43.5%	19.4%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 33-34.

4.5 Conclusion

Parliament has become a lively institution, and party politics is maturing with electoral experience. The two Houses of Parliament have worked out mechanisms to cooperate, particularly in the enactment of laws. In the third Parliament, the opposition has declared that it will work with the ruling party in the national interest, but made clear that it will continue to hold differing views on issues. Political parties have come together for informal discussions like the “Democracy Forum 2018” and all party presidents celebrated National Day 2018 together with the King of Bhutan.

¹³⁸Personal communication with Deki Pema, Commissioner of the Election Commission of Bhutan in October 2018





CHAPTER FIVE

Democracy and Development of Civil Society

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Democracy and Development of Civil Society

As governance evolved in Bhutan from the Royal Court into a modern Government, the structure and functioning of society changed. Civil society, a relatively new concept, emerged, along with a business community with increasing purchasing power, youth cultures influenced by globalization and a dramatic shift in lifestyle for many sections of society.

Civil society is often described as the “third space” in national governance, alongside government and business. Governments and international organizations, including the United Nations, recognize its vital roles. Charles Tilly in his book *Democracy* states that “a regime is democratic to the extent that political relations between state and citizens feature broad, equally protected and mutually binding consultations. Thus, all citizens ought to be treated equally and to have no significant political rights and obligations based on ethnicity, religion, race or caste, while interest or pressure groups should have the latitude to influence the institutional structures of the state and its key policies through various means.”¹³⁹

Comprising formal and informal civil society and community organizations, the media and engaged citizens in their own right, Bhutanese civil society provides a range of services, such as improving the quality of handicrafts and rural food products, supporting women who have survived abuse, advancing democratic discourse, and providing youth education and training.

In the past the Bhutanese Monarchy was characterized by the relationship between the people and the King, who was a father figure responsible for all aspects of the people’s lives, well-being and happiness. In the new system, civil society has stepped into roles particularly where the Government is less effective, including care for stray animals, waste management and toilet care during large gatherings, palliative medical care and support for nunneries.

Constitutional democracy rests on the day-to-day actions that create a democratic way of life based on principles enshrined in the Constitution. Former Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye quotes Aristotle: “If all citizens are aware of law, history, and the Constitution, they will endeavour to maintain a good government, structures of the state and its key policies through various means.”¹⁴⁰

This chapter looks at citizen awareness, capability and the engagement of Bhutanese society as a whole, and among different groups such as women, youth, the media and social media, and urban and rural residents.

5.1 Citizenry as civil society

With the introduction of democratic governance, Bhutan set up formal institutions along with guidelines for their functioning. But the general understanding of the role of civil society in a democratic system was initially low.

Civil society is and should be an arena of diverse interests and points of views where values of tolerance, compromise, and respect for different and opposing views are cultivated. It is an arena to engage in

¹³⁹Tilly, C. (2007). *Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴⁰Tobgye, Justice Sonam (retired). “A first decade for Bhutan’s Constitution”. (unpublished paper).

issues affecting society. In organizing and empowering civil society, the focus needs to be on citizens, and their rights and needs.

Hirata argues that a specific path of good development must be negotiated in a given society under deliberative democracy, meaning consensus decision-making through deliberation. Such negotiation makes, and should make, some moral demands on the negotiators—the citizens. In other words, good development needs both appropriate rules of the game and citizens who care about others' moral rights.¹⁴¹

In transitioning from a traditional hierarchy to a democracy, Bhutan is shedding an instinct nurtured by its dependence on an absolute Monarchy for 100 years. At times, the term “*non-governmental*” has carried connotations of being anti-government. Limited understanding and appreciation of civil society beyond its formally organized form has fed a perception that “*informal groups are illegal groups*,” or that they are not credible. Other concerns have been fuelled by the random and prolific growth of non-governmental organizations in South Asia, accompanied by reports of violent activism and corruption.

The rights and responsibilities of citizens

At this stage of democratization in Bhutan, there is some emphasis on what still needs to be done to realize the flourishing of civil society. A striking feature of the Bhutanese Constitution is a strong emphasis on the fundamental human rights and duties of citizens, which provides a base for a strong civil society. Fundamental rights protect the dignity of individuals as human beings. They limit the power of the legislature, secure individual liberty, act as a barricade against the tyranny of the majority and provide security against arbitrary action by an intrusive government.

The fundamental duties of a Bhutanese citizen include the responsibility to protect the sovereignty of the nation as well as the cultural heritage and natural environment. A change from the past is that people saw these as the responsibility of the King, as the father figure. Now, with modernization, they see them as the responsibility of the Government.

Freedom House reports that civil liberties remain limited in Bhutan despite recent signs of improvement. It gave the country a score of 3.72 on a scale of 7 for civil liberty, with very low points on freedom of association and protection of ethnic minorities. Low scores suggest that concepts of civic freedom and civic consciousness are still being formed. Another gap entails the lack of trade unions. Demonstrations—though not illegal—simply do not occur.

5.2 The emergence of civil society organizations

The formalization of civic engagement through civil society organizations (CSOs) is still new to Bhutan. Before democracy, civil society encompassed farmers' groups, village associations, water users' groups and women's associations, to name a few. They were self-governed and interdependent, providing mutual support to their members. These were all necessary elements of communal life in small and isolated communities in Bhutan, helping to meet collective social, economic and spiritual needs.

Later, there were youth groups, alumni associations, sports associations and friendship associations.

¹⁴¹Hirata, J. (2005). “How Should Happiness Guide Policy? Why Gross National Happiness is not opposed to Democracy.” In *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 12. Thimphu. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, pp. 1-22 .

More recently, agriculture, livestock and forest-related groups have attempted to gain economic strength by producing and selling products together.

Some civil society groups have successfully combined an income objective (e.g., producing turmeric for the local market) with democratic processes (e.g., transparent decision-making). A community group from Bumthang managing a community forest claims that *“democracy has made decisions on accessing rural timber more efficient.”*¹⁴²

In 1973, the National Youth Association of Bhutan became the first formally organized CSO. Since then, the number of organizations has grown dramatically. Article 7 of the Constitution guarantees Bhutanese citizens the *“right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, other than membership of associations that are harmful to the peace and unity of the country, and shall not be compelled to belong to any association.”*¹⁴³ Fifty CSOs registered after the enactment of the Civil Society Act in 2007 and the creation of the CSO Authority in 2010, both of which were part of establishing a democratic system.

In a society where citizens were hesitant to take initiatives in public service at the national level, it has helped that members of the Royal Family have spearheaded non-profits. CSOs with royal patronage have received support and cooperation more readily from the Government.

The 10th Five-Year Plan (2008-2013) specifically mentioned expanding collaboration with civil society, particularly in the delivery of targeted poverty interventions in rural and remote areas of Bhutan. The 11th Five-Year Plan (2014-2018) highlighted how *“CSOs complement and supplement the efforts of the Government in provision of services that the Government is unable to deliver services that can be delivered more effectively by such organizations.”*

The Prime Minister acknowledged in his 2017 State of the Nation address that *“CSOs help get everyone on board in the process of development, especially the marginalized sections of the population. Our country’s CSOs are growing and the government continues to provide necessary support.”*¹⁴⁴

Going beyond service delivery

A common perception has been that CSOs primarily implement projects and programmes, filling gaps in social and economic services in places that the Government still does not reach. A 2014 UNDP study showed that only 23.26 percent of respondents said that CSOs have been very successful in providing services. Among CSOs, 21.53 percent reported that they were very successful in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. Only 7.57 percent of respondents rated these organizations as very successful in advocating for state service provision (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 How successful is civil society in meeting the needs of all people?

Answer options	Very successful, %	Moderately successful, %	Not successful, %
Advocating for state service provision (N=66)	7.57	69.70	22.73
Directly providing services (N=66)	23.26	63.24	13.50
Addressing the needs of vulnerable groups (N=65)	21.53	69.24	9.23

Source: UNDP (2014). *Facilitating people’s participation in democratic governance: role, challenges and opportunities for civil society and media in Bhutan*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁴²Focus Group Discussion with stakeholders in Bumthang, July 2018.

¹⁴³*The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan*, pp.13-15.

¹⁴⁴Tobgay, T.(2017). *The State of the Nation Address. Ninth Session of the Second Parliament of Bhutan*. Thimphu, Bhutan.

The perspective survey conducted for this *National Human Development Report* revealed that only 55.7 percent of respondents know about CSOs, with knowledge higher in urban areas. While 58.5 percent were aware of the potential for CSOs to positively influence the development of the society, 39.7 percent said that they do not know if there will be any impact. Only 12.1 percent said they have benefited from CSO initiatives, despite the increased number of organizations in recent years (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Figure 5.1 Awareness of CSOs is relatively low

		National	Rural	Urban
I have heard of CSOs	Strongly agree	43.0%	31.8%	63.5%
	Agree	12.7%	10.8%	16.2%
	Do not know	26.9%	34.6%	12.8%
	Disagree	3.3%	3.0%	3.9%
	Strongly disagree	14.1%	19.7%	3.6%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy* pp. 27-28.

Figure 5.2 Perceptions of the impact CSOs make on society

		National	Rural	Urban
I have benefited from the initiatives of CSOs	Strongly agree	7.5%	8.4%	5.9%
	Agree	4.6%	4.7%	4.4%
	Do not know	25.9%	28.4%	21.3%
	Disagree	8.9%	8.9%	8.7%
	Strongly disagree	53.1%	49.5%	59.7%
CSOs can make a difference to the development of society	Strongly agree	32.7%	31.1%	35.5%
	Agree	25.8%	18.3%	39.6%
	Do not know	39.7%	49.5%	21.7%
	Disagree	1.0%	0.5%	2.0%
	Strongly disagree	0.8%	0.5%	1.2%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy* pp. 27-28.

Advocating for and enhancing the visibility of CSOs may help them engage more meaningfully. Already, many CSOs are becoming more innovative and creative. Their contributions are increasingly recognized, largely for work on topics affecting the poor and vulnerable (e.g., persons with disabilities, senior citizens, individuals with various health needs, youth facing economic or social difficulties, and women).

Groups focus on social protection and access to basic services; some emphasize income and livelihood opportunities. Emerging issues of waste management, sanitation and the environment, as well as passions for music and the arts have prompted a few groups to emerge around these topics.

On 17 December 2016, civil society came into sharper focus when His Majesty the King awarded 22 CSOs the National Order of Merit (Gold) medal. It was the highest recognition of non-government services that encompassed livelihood support, care-giving, gender equality, media, governance, the environment, animal welfare and poverty alleviation.

The award was a confidence booster for CSOs, which have since become more active and vocal. It helped advance new understanding that democracy depends on civil society advocating and encouraging the practice of human rights, and that the Government and CSOs must work together.

Strong added value on issues critical to democracy

CSOs are not just for service delivery but also serve to deepen democracy, with long-term benefits that go beyond short-term services. Their work on “soft” topics important in a democracy includes expressing their views on public issues, engaging in deliberations on policies, and advocating for the needs and concerns of citizens.

Many groups are now assuming a broader role in civic engagement, where citizens participate in their society, and leaders are held accountable. The Bhutan Cancer Society and Bhutan Kidney Foundation are a few examples of CSOs advocating for services for vulnerable groups while Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW) is for legal rights, and Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) is for citizen engagement and public discourse.

While 53.8 percent of respondents to the survey for this report still said they do not know anything about CSO contributions to strengthening democracy, 42.6 percent said that CSOs will contribute to strengthening democracy (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Views on CSO contributions to strengthening democracy

		National	Rural	Urban
CSOs can contribute to strengthening democracy	Strongly agree	18.7%	18.7%	18.9%
	Agree	23.9%	19.0%	32.8%
	Do not know	53.8%	59.8%	42.6%
	Disagree	2.1%	1.2%	3.8%
	Strongly disagree	1.5%	1.2%	2.0%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 27-28.

The 2014 UNDP study showed that CSO participation in national policy and legislative decision-making is very low. Only 2.9 percent of survey respondents said that CSOs were very successful in taking part in national policies and legislative processes. At the local level, only 5.9 percent felt CSOs have very successfully participated in decision-making. In terms of national and local budgets, only 1.5 percent stated that CSOs have been very successful in getting involved (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 How successful are civil society actors in taking part in decision-making?

Level and type	Very successful, %	Moderately successful, %	Not successful, %
National policies and legislative processes (N=69)	2.9%	53.6%	43.5%
Local policies and plans (N=68)	5.9%	63.2%	30.9%
National and local budgets (N=68)	1.5%	36.8%	61.7%

Source: UNDP (2014). *Facilitating people's participation in democratic governance: role, challenges and opportunities for civil society and media in Bhutan*, pp.37-39.

There are now a few successful cases of CSO engagement in policy-making. For instance, the Bhutan Youth Development Fund was involved in the development of the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 and the Youth Policy and Population Policy. RENEW successfully influenced the legal reform of the Domestic Violence Act of Bhutan 2013.¹⁴⁵ These cases indicate that government partners are willing to cooperate and engage with CSOs.

A qualitative study conducted by the Royal Institute of Management stated that CSOs operate at the grass-roots level and know ground realities. They therefore should be engaged in policy and other dialogues with the Government, but only on issues related to social welfare.¹⁴⁶

A sense of caution remains around CSOs engaging in policy dialogues and decisions, and holding state and other actors accountable. While *"it does not hurt to have CSOs more involved (in policy discussions)"*¹⁴⁷ and providing inputs into policies, their role is not seen as explicitly influencing and engaging in policy decisions.

A step on a longer journey

While they are evolving, CSOs still face a number of challenges. To a large extent, they have not been able to engage in initiatives with a long-term impact. They struggle with a limited ability to develop and retain skilled people. A lack of interaction and cooperation leads to territorialism, which undercuts efficiency and effectiveness.¹⁴⁸

Most CSOs heavily depend on external funding. A 2017 CSO perception study¹⁴⁹ as well as the UNDP 2014 study¹⁵⁰ both recommended an endowment fund or the continuation of a CSO Fund Facility established by the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy to ensure stability. The proposal was not approved.

Overall, despite their challenges, CSOs are progressing and shouldering their responsibilities for advancing fundamental rights and civic engagement, and deepening democracy. The initial step towards fulfilling the aspiration of the Kings to shift the mindset of the Bhutanese from being loyal subjects to being engaged citizens has been taken. The journey should continue with zeal.

¹⁴⁵UNDP (2014). *Facilitating people's participation in democratic governance: role, challenges and opportunities for civil society and media in Bhutan*, pp.37-39.

¹⁴⁶Choiden S. and Penjor, D. (2017). *The information was also shared during the Focus Group Discussion with the GNHC in July 2018*. pp 11 and 13.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰UNDP (2014). *Facilitating people's participation in democratic governance: role, challenges and opportunities for civil society and media in Bhutan*. pp.63-64.

A particular impetus now comes from Bhutan’s proposed graduation to a lower middle-income country. Diminishing interest among developing partners is putting achievements in social sectors at risk. Civil society can fill spaces where the government does not yet reach, build on the expertise they have developed on some issues, and call attention to socioeconomic development needs that remain acute in many parts of the country despite positive national indicators.

5.3 From an oral society to a modern media state

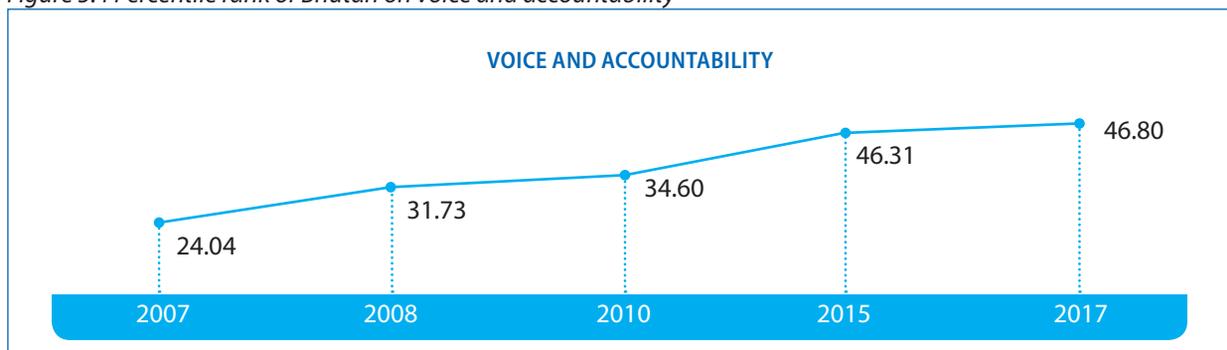
Like civil society, media are vital to democracy and to making governance transparent and interactive. Media are seen as part of civil society in some countries, but not in others because they are commercial entities. In Bhutan, the Journalists Association of Bhutan is a registered CSO.

Like all aspects of change in Bhutan, the media have evolved. *“Bhutan’s journey from an oral society to a modern media state has been rapid, bypassing a few stages of evolutionary development previously undertaken by other nation-states to create a unique matrix of ancient and modern communication platforms.”*¹⁵¹ Most noticeable is the shift from the tendency to self-censor to more open criticism of the Government and more dialogue around corruption and social ills, including crime and youth problems.

Private media were encouraged and licensed in 2006 to “prepare” for democracy. From a long-standing situation where Bhutan had one government-owned newspaper and one government-run television and radio station, the first five years of democracy saw the establishment of 10 newspapers and six radio stations.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators of the World Bank show that voice and accountability in Bhutan has improved steadily from a percentile rank of 24.04 in 2007 to 46.80 in 2017 (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4 Percentile rank of Bhutan on voice and accountability



Source: www.govindicators.org

Compared with other SAARC countries, Bhutan stands second after India with a percentile rank of 60.10. It is followed by Sri Lanka with 43.35, Nepal with 38.92, Bangladesh with 30.05, Pakistan with 28.08, the Maldives with 25.62 and Afghanistan with 22.17.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹Avieson, B. (2015). “From Mani Stones to Twitter: Bhutan Creates a Unique Media Matrix for a 21st-Century Democracy.” In *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 9. University of Sydney, Australia: International Journal of Communication.

¹⁵²www.govindicators.org

Print media have struggled to survive in a small market, however, while radio has become largely a source of entertainment. There is a noticeable level of self-censorship. While 71 percent of respondents to the perspective survey for this report perceive that media are free to express the truth, 8.2 percent disagree, 5.5 percent strongly disagree and 15.3 percent do not know (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 Perceptions of the role of media

		National	Rural	Urban
Media are free to express the truth	Strongly agree	33.0%	35.7%	28.1%
	Agree	38.0%	41.4%	31.7%
	Do not know	15.3%	16.3%	13.5%
	Disagree	8.2%	4.0%	15.8%
	Strongly disagree	5.5%	2.5%	10.9%
Media voice the concerns of the people	Strongly agree	34.9%	35.7%	33.4%
	Agree	47.1%	48.2%	45.0%
	Do not know	12.1%	13.6%	9.3%
	Disagree	5.1%	2.3%	10.3%
	Strongly disagree	0.8%	0.2%	1.9%
Media give enough information on democracy	Strongly agree	39.7%	42.4%	34.7%
	Agree	41.7%	43.7%	38.1%
	Do not know	11.5%	11.9%	10.7%
	Disagree	4.5%	1.5%	10.2%
	Strongly disagree	2.6%	0.6%	6.4%

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 25-26.

Social media

Social media have changed the way civil society interacts. A BBC report noted in 2014: “Fortunately, social media has taken off (in Bhutan). This has provided opportunities for more critical voices via the mobile phones that have penetrated the farthest corners of the remote country.”¹⁵³ Facebook has become the most popular forum. WeChat serves rural areas where most people do not read or write.

Online blogs, some by former newspaper-trained journalists, have been successful in exposing corruption and initiating conversation on civic issues. And where newspapers have failed to penetrate beyond the political elite, online media spaces—what Passang Tshering called “the modern day tshechu” (festival) - are proving more culturally accessible. The Amend the Tobacco Act Facebook page created by two journalists demonstrated new possibilities for political activism when strong criticism from the public forced the amendment of the act.

¹⁵³How social media woke up Bhutan (19 February 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25314578>

In the years leading up to 2018, with mainstream media suffering a problem of financial sustainability, social media became an important platform for the Bhutanese electorate. One comment read:

Dear Registered Political Party for 2018. We will vote for those who are going to make the following happen:¹⁵⁴

- » Salary raise
- » Public housing
- » Pool vehicles
- » Raising tax
- » Mining/natural resources

At the same time, as in other societies, social media content has tended to centre on largely unverified views and exchanges, with some sites targeting personalities including prominent political leaders, prompting social media regulation. Through this, the Election Commission of Bhutan investigated more than 40 complaints. A government policy and guideline for the use of social media for governance remains largely unimplemented, however. The Ministry of Information and Communications drafted guidelines on how social media should be used by government offices but they were not actively applied.

5.4 The myth of gender equality

Traditional Bhutanese society, which is largely grounded on Buddhist precepts, has provided a secure environment for women. Large parts of the country are matrilineal, and women not only inherit property, but also have substantive decision-making power over property and family matters.¹⁵⁵ As a result of considerable investment in education, the proportion of girls is now virtually equal to that of boys from pre-primary levels to grade 10.¹⁵⁶ With democracy, there has been a deliberate focus within Bhutanese society on the role and status of women, including the imperative of bringing more women into leadership positions.

Bhutan has signed all international laws, conventions and agreements on promoting gender rights and the situation of women in society. While some authorities will argue that women today do not face discrimination, there are many obvious discrepancies, such as the absence of women in many functions of governance, particularly in leadership and decision-making.¹⁵⁷

Traditionally, Bhutanese society appeared to be comfortable letting men take the lead in governance. Elected members of the National Assembly established in 1953 have nearly all been men. Even in today's college campuses, there are often more female students, but they are rarely elected to positions of college leadership. It was a historic moment when Norbuling Rigter College¹⁵⁸ in Paro elected a female student president in August 2017, followed by Sherubtse College¹⁵⁹ in 2018.

Choden and Lhamu¹⁶⁰ describe the gender situation in Bhutan as the “myth of equality” and the “invisible” reality and ask: “Are we a matrilineal society doomed by patriarchal norms?” They have

¹⁵⁴Palden, T. and Wangdi, T. (2018). “Some Impact of Democratic Politics in Bhutan.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.97.

¹⁵⁵Madeleine K. Albright, retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/National.Democratic.Institute/posts/success-without-democracy-is-improbable-democracy-without-women-is-impossible-nd/10152280025130560/>

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Chhoden, P. and Lhamu, K. (2018). “Bhutanese Women in Politics – Myths and Realities.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 79.

¹⁵⁸Personal communication, Dr. Tandin Dorji, President of Norbuling Rigter College, September 2018.

¹⁵⁹Interview with Political Science and Media Students of Sherubtse College and Other relevant stakeholders, April and May 2018.

¹⁶⁰Chhoden, P. and Lhamu, K. (2018). “Bhutanese Women in Politics – Myths and Realities.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in*

highlighted several strategies for women’s increased participation. These include expanding the pool of qualified and capable women to run for elections, and transforming gender norms so that women leaders are accepted as legitimate and effective. An enabling legislative and policy environment can enhance women’s participation, as can gender-sensitive political institutions that extend specific support to women leaders. Support systems should include flexi-time, childcare provisions and breastfeeding facilities.

Focus group discussions with CSO heads and Sherubtse political science students in 2017 were dominated by gender issues, with female participants expressing their disappointment with the representation of women among institutions as well as political leaders. In 2019, the DNT Government introduced incentives for women including compensation for breastfeeding mothers.

5.5 Equipping youth for meaningful participation

In Bhutan today, about 56 percent of the population is under age 25. Youth make up approximately a third of the electorate.¹⁶¹ Yet Siok Sian Dorji, an active member of the emerging Bhutanese civil society, points out that youth are not groomed to be active participants of a democracy because the system focuses on the rituals and mechanics of electoral and parliamentary processes.¹⁶²

She argues that civics should be made central to education. Current textbooks—drafted before democracy was introduced—are outdated. Civics education is, according to the United States Centre for Civics Education, “education in self-governance.” Two Bhutanese colleges teach political science, but with a focus on international politics and discussions that are not necessarily related to Bhutan.¹⁶³

Most Bhutanese youth are not exposed to broader political discourse, and when they are, it is often superficial and limited. Social media tend to be dominated by rumour, gossip, personal attacks and hate speech. There is a growing concern that “youth wings” of political parties could be established for the wrong reasons. Examples across South Asia show that political parties recruit university students to agitate and even close down their universities by calling strikes based on party interests. Youth who display any interest in politics behave like politicians instead of questioning the vision and ideologies of parties to find out what they stand for, and to understand political promises and intentions.

*“Our youth should first learn about the functioning of government, what is good governance, and how does good governance create and strengthen a sovereign country where the well-being of people is a priority.”*¹⁶⁴

Bhutan. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp. 79-89.

¹⁶¹National Statistical Bureau (2018). *Statistical Year Book*.

¹⁶²Pek-Dorji, S.S. (2018). “Youth and Politics in an Evolving Democracy.” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1). *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.72-78.

¹⁶³Ibid, pp.72-78.

¹⁶⁴Ibid, pp.77.

Box 5.1 Decentralizing the Children's Parliament

The Bhutan Children's Parliament provides a platform for student democracy clubs to come together. Its "Constitution" encourages students to learn about the roles and responsibilities of citizens in nation-building and sustaining democracy.

The current centralized national "sitting" of the Children's Parliament, however, involves high costs for bringing teachers and students to the capital. A review by the Education Ministry recommended that it be decentralized to the district level so that more students can participate.

The review also suggested that the Children's Parliament stop sharing the proceedings of its sittings with higher authorities so that the sessions become less formal and less prone to scripting by teachers or older youth. This will enable youth to have free discussions without the fear of making "mistakes" or the pressure of having to make recommendations to the Government.

The suggestion here is that children should study and understand democracy rather than the mechanics of parliamentary sessions.

Source: Pek-Dorji, S.S. (2018). *Youth and Politics in an Evolving Democracy*. In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1). *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu, Bhutan: Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.75-76.

5.6 A more aware - and urban—electorate

Bhutan's steady progress in human development, including through gains in income and education, has had an impact on democratization, including through a more empowered electorate. Debate on national economic policies has become more audible, with the opposition and others criticizing the policies of both elected governments. The second government's prioritization of the five economic jewels—hydropower, cottage and small industries, mining, tourism and agriculture—was questioned during the "Better Business Summit" in 2018, particularly the prioritization of mining.

Unprecedented opportunities for social mobility and status mean that people from the humblest backgrounds can legitimately aspire to the highest positions of public office and freely compete as long as they fulfill basic criteria and qualifications. But the actual flattening of social relations depends on education and political exposure, which remains at far lower levels in rural areas. This coupled with demographic shifts prompting people to move to cities at record rates means that a once largely rural populace is becoming distinctly divided into rural and urban communities.

After three years of research in eastern Bhutan, Tshering Eudon concluded that the more exposed populace understands and is better able to take part in the democratic processes. The less exposed are bullied by *tshogpas* (party representatives).²⁶⁵ This situation requires national policies, awareness programmes and education on democracy, with an emphasis on preventing polarization by candidates and party workers, especially the *tshogpas*, during political campaigns. The practice so far, she said, had resulted in divisions in the family, disharmony in the community and fear instilled in people, consequences too costly for a small country.¹⁶⁶

For urban communities, a decade of democracy has highlighted the need for better representation. In 2011, when four *thromdes* (municipal councils) elected their *thrompon* (mayor) and a council

¹⁶⁵Eudon, T. (2018). "The Micro Effect of Democratisation in Rural Bhutan." In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.28.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

under a democratic set-up, social expectations soared.¹⁶⁷ There was optimism that an elected mayor would focus on the interests of all residents. But the electoral laws proved to be an obstacle to public involvement in urban planning and development. By law, a voter must have a *gung* and *mitshi* (landed property), which disqualifies most urban residents as they do not own land.

The perspective survey¹⁶⁸ for this report showed that 54.4 percent of urban respondents living in areas governed by *thromdes* said that they should be allowed to vote even when they are not registered there. Among respondents in urban areas, 83.9 percent maintained that “all people who work and live and are 18 years and above should participate and vote during the *thromde* elections.”¹⁶⁹

When asked about the *thrompon* looking after the interests of only eligible voters, 24.9 percent did not know, while 37.2 percent agreed this was the case. Generally, 57.3 percent felt that eligible voters in the past two elections had selected the right candidates; 66 percent of urban respondents were happy with the *thrompon’s* performance (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Perception of *thromde* elections

Assessment indicator	Rating	National
Only the people with census in the <i>thromde</i> should vote during the <i>thromde</i> elections	Yes	36.1
	No	54.4
	Do not know	9.4
All people who work and live and are 18 years and above should participate and vote during the <i>thromde</i> elections	Yes	83.9
	No	9.1
	Do not know	7.0
The <i>thrompon</i> looks after the interests of only the eligible voters	Yes	37.2
	No	37.9
	Do not know	24.9
The eligible voters of the past two <i>thromde</i> elections have voted for the right candidates	Yes	57.3
	No	10.6
	Do not know	32.2
I am happy with the overall performance of the <i>thrompon</i>	Yes	66.0
	No	11.4
	Do not know	22.6

Source: Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 34-35.

The predicament for urban Bhutan is that landowners who want to maximize the profitability of their plots, such as through urban beautification and recreation, have the civil registration that allows them to vote. The large majority of residents, however, many of whom have lived in towns for decades, would like to see urban development that includes parks and public spaces, affordable housing, water for domestic use, lower crime rates, urban sanitation, public transport and more efficient waste disposal. But they have no say in the election. Residents of the capital city, Thimphu, are increasingly frustrated with the lack of control over infrastructure and services, with examples including a disregard for zoning regulations and absence of car parks.

¹⁶⁷Penjore, U. (2018). “The *Thromde* Elections – an Inadequate Constituency?” In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1): *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp 38 to 45

¹⁶⁸Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

5.7 Engaging society as a whole

People in Bhutan have come a long way in the transition from being loyal subjects to being loyal and responsible citizens engaged in active democratic governance. Yet there is still far to go in building the culture of democracy that King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has made a goal of his reign. With structures and a regulatory environment having been established with the Constitution, Bhutanese society as a whole needs to take part in deepening democracy.

Institutions and constitutional bodies have clear mandates. Citizens enjoy fundamental rights. But democracy will stall without civic engagement in urban and rural areas, among all groups, including women and youth, and by CSOs and the media.

Civil society is becoming more active in service delivery and in advancing fundamental rights. The next stage could be a strong focus on specific measures to engage all sections of civil society. They face a new task of using social media with care. The citizenry needs to understand their formal responsibilities in voting and holding elected leaders accountable.

5.8 Conclusion

To enable the Bhutanese people to make the transition from being loyal subjects in a Monarchy to responsible citizens of a democracy, the Constitution guarantees their fundamental rights and also outlines their duties.

The nature of civil society and its important role in democratic governance needs to be better understood by Bhutanese officials and the citizenry at large. Meanwhile, CSOs are acknowledged as being important players in the process of human development but need to be given the space to function as autonomous agencies outside the Government. For example, CSOs should be helped with funding and their mandate to fulfill society's needs should be recognised.

This *National Human Development Report* defines civil society in the broadest sense, meaning the populace as a whole. The report also emphasizes the need for independent media in governance and for Bhutan to understand social media. Social media is benefiting a country where communication has always been a challenge but is also taking a toll on a small society just emerging from oral traditions. Youth and gender, as well as the responses of rural and urban communities to the transition into a democracy, are prominent issues.





CHAPTER SIX

Solutions on the Path to Deeper Democratization and Human Development

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Solutions on the Path to Deeper Democratization and Human Development

Ten years is a short time in the experience of democratic governance, but there is no right or wrong time to assess the success of a democracy, which will always be a work in progress. After a historic transformation, Bhutan has an opportunity to look at what has been learned and how to build on that experience into the future.

Bhutan's transition is widely accepted as unique because it was initiated by a Monarch, and was not a result of the public, and sometimes violent, agitation that has occurred elsewhere in the world. This approach tests the general assumption that there is an ideal model for a democracy. Democracy is indeed the aspiration of many people and societies, but that aspiration does not come with the will for total surrender of a people's history, culture and tradition.¹⁷⁰ The Constitution of Bhutan draws ideas from many Constitutions but it has many distinctive features like the preservation of cultural identity, care for a pristine environment, a unifying role for the Monarch, spiritual traditions and an age limit for leaders including the King.

In the wake of three rigorous election campaigns, democratic discourse has picked up. Bhutanese thinkers and international observers have identified a number of issues that could propel or constrain the deepening of democracy. This chapter argues that, rather than seeing these as problems, pragmatists identify them as opportunities that will be addressed with experience and time.

As an overview, the survey conducted for this report found many positive experiences of democracy, in urban and rural areas. These encompassed freedom of speech, fundamental rights, good governance through improved services in many sectors, and decentralization of power. All are necessary ingredients for human development. The future of democracy as well as human development looks promising.

Understanding the challenges as well as conditions for success in the context of Bhutan's unique history and socio-cultural environment will bring into focus areas that need more attention, both to mitigate shortfalls and accelerate what is working well, in line with the vision of Gross National Happiness.

6.1. Grappling with challenges—risks and recommendations

Bhutan will grapple with some challenges as it seeks a long-term vision for its democracy. Some have already emerged and are explored in the preceding chapters, which discuss the foundations of Bhutanese democracy and human development in more detail. A process of learning from the past 10 years will help Bhutan strengthen democratic governance and take advantage of new opportunities over the next decade and beyond.

Short-term politics versus long-term goals

Issue: As the Head of State, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has advised the executive branch of Government not to give in to the temptation of shortsighted planning based on the electoral term of five years.

¹⁷⁰Kinga, S. (2018). *Bhutanese Democracy - challenges and a reasoned prognosis for the future (Background paper for this report)*, pp. 3.

“One of the challenges that democracies around the world face is that every government has a limited term. This leads them to neglect long-term goals and vision required to successfully lead nations. They are more concerned about gaining political dividend and take short-term approaches to development.”¹⁷¹

Recommendation: There is a continued need for a long-term national vision and planning. Bhutan’s Vision 2020 should be updated.

Decisions in the national interest

Issue: Notwithstanding the positive effects of democracy, Bhutanese citizens have seen that, once elected, governments are acutely sensitive to criticism and people’s demands, and shy away from tough decisions. For example, the reluctance to introduce a vehicle tax, tolls for roads and bridges, and appropriate registration fees has resulted in long-predicted traffic congestion and air pollution in Thimphu and other cities. This already undermines Bhutan’s commitment to being a green and pristine country. The demand for roads and the ready pledges made by politicians is creating an increasingly scarred countryside and prevents the growth of a healthy eco-tourism industry.

Recommendations:

- Some decisions may be difficult to make in the face of popular demand but should be guided by a vision of national interest.
- New measures should be pursued, such as well-functioning public transport.

Political parties

Issue: While political parties are an indispensable part of democratic governance, some democratic countries have been overwhelmed by party politics. Today, the party is a key institution of democracy in Bhutan but has yet to achieve credibility as a trusted and respected provider of a national vision. Such a mandate must be shared by the electorate as voters, by the bureaucracy as the professional government machinery, by general civil society and by intellectuals as the inspiration for a national vision.

Recommendation: Bhutanese parties need to adopt transparent and farsighted ideologies that reflect their values and priorities.

Disharmony

Issue: Party politics has created and driven its own cleavages. Political parties and candidates have sometimes packaged and presented electoral contests as “us versus them” but without discernable ideological differences. Given this lack of clarity, many people and communities have come to view *tshogpas* (party coordinators) as the primary causes of disputes along party and community lines and, in the third election, a potential sense of regionalism.

Recommendation: The role of the *tshogpas* requires regulation.

¹⁷¹*The Bhutanese*. Retrieved from <https://thebhutanese.bt/the-great-reformer/>

Issue: Elections were perceived as a cause of social disharmony by 11.6 percent of the respondents to the survey for this report. Respondents also said that democracy has neglected steps to rebuild social harmony at the end of each election. People suggested that politicians and political parties should rebuild social harmony if Bhutanese democracy is to deepen and have strong roots.¹⁷² In his National Day address in 2016, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck pointed out that, for a small society, internal divide poses a greater threat to security than even being a small country with large neighbours.

It was, therefore, significant that His Majesty The King invited all party presidents to celebrate National Day together in Samtse district with the Royal Family and the leadership of all sections of Bhutanese society on 17 December 2018. This enabled an open and informal exchange among politicians and with society at large.

Recommendation: Parties have suggested more informal exchanges like the “Democracy Forum 2018;” these should be encouraged.

Potential regionalism

Issue: With nearly all constituencies in eastern Bhutan supporting the DPT in 2018, there was a hint of regionalism. It is no accident that Bhutan has just two parties in the general election. The Chairperson of the Constitutional Drafting Committee points out that this was designed to avoid political parties based on the three main regional groups: the east, west and south.¹⁷³

Recommendation: Political parties should continue attempts to balance regional representation in the Cabinet as an effective strategy to support national harmony.

Remaining apolitical

Issue: The requirement for bureaucrats, CSOs and other public servants to be apolitical has created hesitation and tensions. The fact that they are required to vote but cannot take part in politics has created a culture of secrecy. People are reluctant to discuss politics openly or share their views to avoid being accused of belonging to a particular party.

It is important that public servants do not lobby or campaign for a party, but they need to know the views and ideologies of political parties to make informed choices. The regulations of the Election Commission of Bhutan, however, do not even allow them to attend party meetings.

Recommendation: Develop a clearer definition of the term “apolitical.”

Electoral trends and voter turnout

Issue: In 2011, Bhutan ranked near the bottom half of the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, at 104 out of 167 countries. Voter turnout decreased in local government elections and again in the 2013 national elections.¹⁷⁴ While many people voted in the first elections because of a Royal Command from the King, fewer did so in the second election. The rugged terrain of rural Bhutan and

¹⁷²Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp.27.

¹⁷³Personal Communication of Justice Sonam Tobgye (Retired), 20 September 2018.

¹⁷⁴EIU on “Democracy index of Bhutan” retrieved from <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1908792975&Country=Bhutan&topic=Politics&subtopic=Recent+developments&oid=368325621>

long journeys will always be challenging for voting.

Turnout picked up in the 2018 election, approaching 72 percent,¹⁷⁵ which is considered high in South Asia (India saw 66 percent in 2014 and Nepal 68 percent in 2017).¹⁷⁶ The third election had the most vigorous campaign with four parties actively pursuing candidates and voters.

It also helped that voting was made easier through postal ballots and facilitation booths for several categories of voters (like spouses of public servants) living outside their constituencies.

Recommendation: The Election Commission of Bhutan could continue extending facilities to vote, using technology, so all citizens are eventually able to vote from their places of residence and employment.

Regulations during the election cycle

Issue: Three focus group discussions among the Thimphu readers of The Druk Journal, the heads of civil society organizations and Sherubtse College students echoed criticism of electoral regulations on public gatherings. The regulations ban public gatherings three months before the elections, including private ceremonies and celebrations, with the concern that they could be unfairly used as political platforms and lead to disputes.

The Election Commission of Bhutan banned political activity by parties even during the National Council electoral process, in which parties are not involved. It cautioned that people would be confused between the National Assembly and National Council.

Recommendation: The Bhutanese electorate needs to be trusted to use its political savvy and responsibility to ensure that no untoward or unlawful events take place. There is no need to suspend all gatherings and events including religious ceremonies and weddings.

Negative perceptions of politicians and politics

Issue: A major challenge is the negative stereotyping of politicians in South Asia and elsewhere. With politics viewed as being connected with corruption and violence, the first Bhutanese politicians had to be encouraged to run for office by His Majesty the King. This reluctance continues, with many politicians feeling targeted by the political opposition and their supporters in the broader society. Bhutanese politicians struggle to gain credibility with the electorate.

Recommendation: There is the need for a two-pronged approach to this issue. The electorate needs to become more responsible in electing candidates. Politicians should be more courageous and open in their intentions.

Gender imbalances in politics

Issue: A 2015 study¹⁷⁷ reported that the first five years of democracy had a positive impact on women's lives, creating leadership opportunities for both elite and ordinary women. For the first time, women became public figures as politicians and party workers. When democratic institutions such as the

¹⁷⁵Dema, T (19 October, 2018). "Bhutan votes for change" retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/bhutan-votes-for-change/>.

¹⁷⁶IDEAS retrieved from <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/question-countries-view/521/Asia/cnt>

¹⁷⁷Chuki, S. (2015). *Women in Politics in Democratic Transition: the case of Bhutan* (unpublished doctoral thesis).

Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission were established, long-serving and capable former women bureaucrats became leaders.¹⁷⁸

But the debate on gender in politics in the second half of the decade predominantly laments the absence of women in the Bhutanese political scene. A study conducted by the Election Commission found that 30.8 percent of respondents believed men make better leaders compared with 5.9 percent who believed women would be better.¹⁷⁹ Concerns include unequal educational outcomes, higher unemployment rates for women, and low literacy among adult women, limiting their participation in a modernizing society.¹⁸⁰ There is an ongoing discussion about a quota reserving seats for women in Parliament.

The Third National Conference on Women in Politics, Leadership, and Governance in Bhutan, organized by the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women and the National Commission for Women and Children in 2018, made several recommendations, including:

Recommendation:

- Step up advocacy to break away from social and cultural norms and stereotypical attitudes that result in gender discrimination.
- Ensure more women are in leadership roles to encourage women's participation.
- Call on the media to help disrupt discriminatory stereotypes and mindsets, and to promote women's greater participation in politics, leadership and governance.
- Consider special measures such as quotas to increase the share of women in Parliament.

Youth in politics

Issue: Bhutan's leaders have always stated that the future of the country lies in the hands of its youth. But youth are not truly being prepared for political careers. They are learning the rituals of politics, such as through the Children's Parliament, which emulates parliament and even "passes" resolutions. But they are not cultivating understanding of the culture and values that underpin a democratic ethos.¹⁸¹

Schools and tertiary institutions lack civics and political science in their curricula, for example, even though these are critical for future citizens to understand their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. Youth education on democracy should focus on civics and the culture of democracy—ideology and values—rather than the mechanics of elections and governance.

Recommendations:

- Scale up civics education over the next few years.
- Introduce political science as a field of study.

The religious community

Issue: Bhutan's separation of the "church and state" includes a ban on monks and nuns voting. Article 3 of the Constitution says that religious institutions and personalities shall remain above politics.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

¹⁷⁹Election Commission of Bhutan. "Study of the Determinants of Voter's Choice and Women's Participation in Election Offices in the Kingdom of Bhutan," pp.10 available at www.ecb.bt (accessed on 12 July 2018).

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁸¹Pek-Dorji, S.S. (2018). "Youth and Politics in an Evolving Democracy." In *The Druk Journal*, 4 (1). *Democratisation in Bhutan*. Thimphu. Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy, pp.72-78.

While there is general agreement that the *Dratshang* (Central Monk Body) should stay out of politics, a significant population of men and women are lay monks and nuns, and many are also village elders. In most villages, particularly in the eastern part of Bhutan, many lay monks combine both religious and worldly pursuits.

Recommendation: There is a growing sense that the ban on voting by lay monks and nuns should be lifted. Parliament can do this as the ban is statutory, not constitutional.

Qualifications to run for office

Issue: After 10 years, there are citizens who question the law that requires parliamentarians to have a university degree in a country where just 11.8 percent of the people are university graduates.¹⁸² Former Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan Dasho Kunzang Wangdi,¹⁸³ who spearheaded the Election Act, explains that the education requirement was necessary. Under the Monarchy, he noted, Bhutan achieved phenomenal progress between 1907 and 2008. With democracy, if parliamentarians and policymakers are not qualified, this progress could not be maintained, thus the inclusion of the education requirement. Members of Parliament are required to study policies and bills to make decisions.

Recommendation: With the Bhutanese population becoming rapidly more educated, Parliament should waive this requirement when it is deemed necessary. The requirement is statutory, not Constitutional.

A strong stance on corruption

Issue: The general nature of politics in South Asia has driven a concern that electoral corruption would be a great danger for Bhutan's young democracy. This has impelled close monitoring by the Election Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission. Actions by the latter have resulted in the removal or reprimand of a number of officials including ministers over the past 10 years.

Close to 25 percent of survey respondents said that political parties rely on money to get elected. Respondents also mentioned that Bhutanese democracy has not been able to prepare responsible politicians who do not engage in corrupt practices during elections. Eradicating such practices is viewed as a priority for strengthening democracy.¹⁸⁴

Bhutan's anti-corruption laws are very strong. The Election Commission runs a "tight ship" and vigilantly enforces a long list of electoral rules.¹⁸⁵ Disallowing the use of outside funds, the Commission increased the campaign fund for each party from Nu.100,000 in 2008 to Nu.130,000 in 2013 and Nu.150,000 in 2018.¹⁸⁶

Recommendation: Develop strategies to monitor party expenditure and the source of funding.

¹⁸²National Statistical Bureau (2018). *Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017*, pp.27

¹⁸³Personal communication, 17 October 2018: Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2008). Chapter 10, pp.62

¹⁸⁴Parliament and UNDP (2018), pp. 25.

¹⁸⁵IU on "Democracy index of Bhutan" retrieved from <http://country.eiu.com/article>.

[aspx?articleid=1908792975&Country=Bhutan&topic=Politics&subtopic=Recent+developments&oid=368325621](http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1908792975&Country=Bhutan&topic=Politics&subtopic=Recent+developments&oid=368325621)

¹⁸⁶Personal communication of political candidates who contested in both the elections.

Governance of urban centres

Issue: For urban communities, a decade of democracy has highlighted the need for a better representation. By law, a voter in a *thromde* (city municipality) must have a *gung* and *mitshi* (landed property), which disqualifies most urban residents because they do not own land. As a result, Thimphu, with an estimated population of 115,000,¹⁸⁷ saw 1,335 people elect the *thrompon* (mayor) in 2016. In Phuntsholing, with nearly 28,000 residents,¹⁸⁸ 182 people elected the *thrompon*. Many urban residents want parks, bicycle trails, footpaths, more trees and more green space, but have no way of voting for these amenities. Landowners in contrast often want to maximize the use of land that will pay rent.

Recommendation: Conduct a feasibility study on making the residents of Thimphu *thromde* who do not have landed property there eligible to participate in *thromde* elections.

A strong focus on decentralization

Issue: A democratic system of shared responsibilities calls for decentralizing functions to the local level to the extent possible, along with human and financial resources. The premise is that local governments are best placed to understand the needs of the people as they are situated closer to them and can respond to changing needs quickly and easily.

As part of decentralization, some major responsibilities and functions, especially construction and maintenance/rehabilitation, have been shifted to local governments in the 12th Five-Year Plan. These roles include the construction of schools, hospitals, local roads, small and medium industries, and tourism infrastructure.

A major concern is that local governments do not yet have the professional capacity to plan and implement activities at the local level. The most serious risk could stem from implementing fiscal decentralization before local governments have the capacity to manage development funds independently and effectively. For example, the Government announced a budget of Nu. 50 billion for local governments in the 12th Five-Year Plan, with flexibility in its utilization.¹⁸⁹

Recommendation: Draw on local, national and international expertise and resources to build local governance capacity.

Revenue mobilization at the local level

Issue: Local sourcing of revenue is an important pillar of fiscal decentralization and should be pursued to finance part of local expenditure. This is now possible through government initiatives to diversify the economy, with financial institutions providing loans and other incentives encouraging local enterprises.

Rural taxes have not been revised for 24 years and are as low as Nu. 12.00 per acre. Such rates have no relevance in the present economic context. Rural taxes could be increased to contribute to the sustainability of local governance activities.

Recommendation: The national tax policy should be revised to enhance local self-sufficiency.

¹⁸⁷National Statistical Bureau (2018). *Statistical Year Book*.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹DLG, 2017. *Fiscal Decentralization in Bhutan*.

Civil society—the will of the people

Issue: The importance of civil society for governance is stated in the Constitution, which grants people comprehensive rights. CSOs and civil society in general still struggle to receive recognition, attention and support,¹⁹⁰ however, Bhutan needs policies and legislation that give CSOs more space to expand their reach and effectiveness. For example, it is accepted that CSOs need to partner with the Government and businesses in supporting vulnerable sections of society, and building the awareness and capacity of citizens in both rural and urban areas.

Recommendation: The State should encourage civil society to grow, including through adequate funding both from internal and external sources.

Media

Issue: Bhutanese media have been encouraged to play a professional role in democratic governance with the Constitution guaranteeing “freedom of expression, freedom of media, and right to information.”¹⁹¹ In the excitement of taking advantage of new freedoms, 12 newspapers and six radio stations sprang up in 2006 to compete for a limited number of advertisers and small audiences.

Recommendations:

- The Government, being the biggest advertiser, needs to follow guidelines for professional advertising so that support goes to deserving media houses.
- Media should be independent of political parties.

Issue: Besides economic hurdles, news media are also struggling with professional development. In response, a number of media organizations, including the Journalists Association of Bhutan and the Bhutan Media Foundation, have planned professional training for journalists as a long-term strategy to strengthen the Bhutanese media. By some accounts, the media have failed to act as a watchdog over public institutions, although print media have been active enough to create some tensions with both Governments since 2008.¹⁹²

Recommendation: The focus should be on training media professionals, not direct subsidies as media houses have proposed.

Social media

Issue: Open discourse has picked up on social media, with an oral society moving readily to this platform for democratic debate. But there are signs that some part of the electorate has misunderstood freedom to be freedom from responsibility, and much of the discourse is characterized by unauthenticated information, personal attacks and hate speech.

The Election Commission of Bhutan issued social media rules for the election period. The Government has drafted a Social Media Policy for the Royal Government of Bhutan¹⁹³ that focuses on the use of social media for interactive governance. This would be beneficial for both the Cabinet, as the executive authority, and the bureaucracy.

¹⁹⁰Choiden, S. and Penjor, D. (2017). *The Perception Study of CSOs*. Thimphu: Royal Institute of Management.

¹⁹¹Article 7, pp.13.

¹⁹²Personal communication of journalists of Bhutan.

¹⁹³Department of Information and Media (2015). *Social Media Policy for the Royal Government of Bhutan*.

Recommendations:

- This Social Media Policy for the Royal Government of Bhutan should be updated and used during elections, avoiding overlap from different sets of regulations for different occasions.
- A comprehensive Defamation Act may be needed.

6.2. Conclusion: deepening democracy in Bhutan

Expectations of the electorate

The new Government elected in October 2018 began with a number of “lessons learned” from the global experience in democracy and the past 10 years in Bhutan. With national political discourse invigorated over three elections, a wide cross-section of Bhutanese society has offered feedback, perceptions and expectations.¹⁹⁴ The feedback from the Bhutanese polity provides good direction for elected governments as well as the business sector and civil society to build Bhutanese democracy.

The “Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy”¹⁹⁵ documented a wide range of views. While rural and urban Bhutanese expressed predictably specific expectations, there was a good range of shared perceptions and expectations. The initial concerns about the risks of the new political situation, mainly the absence of the King as Head of the Government, has appeared to change. The tone now leans more towards demands from the electorate.

The national priorities conveyed in the Royal Addresses of the fourth and fifth Kings of Bhutan were reflected in the responses to the survey. In terms of broader views, the sovereignty and security of the nation, preservation of the national identity and good governance in the service of the Tsawa Sum (King, country, people) were strongly reflected in the responses. The importance of stable governance was emphasized in concerns about initial tensions among the parties, and the importance of a united Parliament, and the prevention or overcoming of social disharmony. The expectations of a Bhutanese form of democracy are mainly:¹⁹⁶

- Strengthening the sovereignty and security of Bhutan
- Promotion of culture and national identity
- Unity among politicians to first serve Tsawa Sum
- Elected parties should focus on good governance
- Access to justice should be made easier
- Good relationship between ruling and opposition parties
- Stop social disharmony during elections

Corruption, particularly electoral corruption, featured as a key concern among the voters who stressed the need for political leaders to be made accountable, transparency in decision-making, checks and balances in the system, and politicians to earn the trust of citizens.

The electorate was conscious of its own mandate as responsible citizens. Voters need to elect capable candidates, there needs to be more advocacy to educate citizens on democracy, and citizens should be active in the political process. They also called for access to information.

¹⁹⁴Parliament and UNDP (2018). *Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁹⁵Ibid, pp. 35-37.

¹⁹⁶Ibid, pp. 35-36.

General views shared by rural and urban voters were problems related to youth, particularly education and unemployment; the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the need for economic growth to eradicate poverty, which included the reduction of national debt.

These perspectives resonated with the advice of the Monarchy. King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has provided the direction for the next stage in deepening democracy in Bhutan:

“Now, if we want our democratic system to work, if we want a democracy that will fulfill the aspirations of our people, then we must take the next step – we must adopt the ideals and principles of democracy. We must build a democratic culture. This period when democracy takes root is a slow process. It takes time. But this process is crucial to democracy’s ultimate success.”¹⁹⁷

Gross National Happiness and the SDGs—a broad vision and goals

There is a tendency, particularly among Bhutanese officials, to “compare” Gross National Happiness and the Sustainable Development Goals and inevitably place GNH as a “higher” goal. Yet the perception that Bhutan does not need the SDGs because it has GNH is misplaced. The choice is not either GNH or the SDGs. Instead, what is important is articulating a clear national vision for the SDGs that can help achieve GNH. The real challenge then is to translate the core values of GNH and the SDGs into practical development policies and strategies.

Both Gross National Happiness and the SDGs resonate with human development, being grounded in a deep understanding that the well-being of people rather than profit is the real wealth of nations. Both offer a way to measure progress in line with the Human Development Index, going beyond the broken promises of GDP alone. Both adhere to good governance and the need for an inclusive and peaceful society. As long-term development visions, they guide States to create conditions that place people—their needs, rights, aspirations and choices—at the centre of development.

GNH is a broad vision. The implementation of the SDGs will not be any simpler. Both are up against a fast-changing climate, conflict, inequality, persistent pockets of poverty and hunger, and rapid urbanization. Funding will be a growing problem. In an era of greatly reduced international development aid, there will be fewer grants for the goals. Bhutan’s graduation to a lower middle-income country renders bilateral and multilateral development aid increasingly difficult to mobilize. Its leaders face the responsibility of keeping GNH at the centre of national decision-making so that rising national GDP averages do not mask internal disparities.

In his 2013 National Day address, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck said that Bhutanese are good at planning but poor in implementing the plans.¹⁹⁸ How then can Bhutan move towards two potentially vast and profound agendas, GNH and the SDGs? With government ministries and agencies often disjointed in their operations, there is the risk that both GNH and the SDGs will remain unaccomplished aspirations.

Other challenges stem from sustaining a long-term commitment to conserving the environment and reducing climate change, given increasing socioeconomic pressures. Bhutan faces a process of diversifying its economy, reducing income inequalities, and meeting the multifaceted needs of its children, youth, women, elderly people and persons with disabilities, among others. Rapid

¹⁹⁷Royal Address during the National Graduates’ Orientation Programme, Thimphu, 23 October 2008.

¹⁹⁸Retrieved from <https://thebhutanese.bt/his-majesty-highlights-national-challenges/>

urbanization, and the continued strengthening of governance institutions and civic participation are additional issues.

Another critical gap is limited data and evidence to measure progress towards GNH and the SDGs, particularly at a disaggregated level to ensure development is sustainable, equitable and inclusive.

A clearer relationship needs to be developed between the two inspirational concepts. For their part, the SDGs provide a platform for thematic orientation. Their indicators are comprehensive and can be aligned to national priorities, including those of GNH, and used for international comparison. It is imperative that all stakeholders, including the private sector, academic institutions and CSOs, collaborate and orchestrate their efforts to build on each other.

As Bhutan continues its journey of modernization, it will need to seek harmony between GNH as the national frame of reference and the SDGs, building on overlap between the two. This harmony suggests that Bhutan's careful path towards deeper engagement with the international community could be met with like-minded approaches to progress, which in turn might be positively shaped by Bhutan's own GNH. Since the two visions are mutually reinforcing, a strategy for one may help find ways to achieve the other.

As His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has declared:

“Remember, what GNH is will never change, but how we achieve GNH will. A changing world will present new challenges and opportunities to Bhutan and it is the responsibility of every generation to find new ways of achieving the goals of GNH.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹Royal Address during the National Graduates' Orientation Programme, Thimphu, 24 October 2007.

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Statistical Annex

Part A: Human Development Indexes for Bhutan

Human Development Index

Year	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Expected years of schooling (years)	Mean years of schooling for ages 25 and above (years)	GNI per capita (2011 PPP US\$)	Index value	Index rank (all countries)
2017	70.6	12.3	3.1	8,065	0.612	134
2016	70.2	12.3	3.1	7,574	0.609	135
2015	69.8	12.2	3.1	7,066	0.607	132
2014	69.5	12.6	3.0	7,176	0.605	132
2013	68.3	12.4	2.3	6,775	0.584	134
2012	67.6	12.4	2.3	5,246	0.538	140
2010	67.8	11.5	2.3	6,062	0.566	NA
2007/2008	64.7	NA	NA	3,413	0.579	133
2005	64.9	9.3	2.3	4,457	0.510	NA
2003	66.1	NA	NA	2,060	0.583	NA
2000	60.8	7.6	NA	3,535	0.494	NA
1995	56.7	6.4	NA	2,453	NA	NA
1990	52.9	5.4	NA	2099	0.477	NA

Notes: The Human Development Index is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. See Technical Note 1 at http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2018_technical_notes.pdf for details on how the index is calculated. Higher value represents a higher level of human development.

Sources: Human Development Reports; details in references.

Gender Development Index

Year	HDI		Life expectancy at birth (years)		Expected years of schooling (years)		Mean years of schooling for ages 25 and above (years)		GNI per capita (PPP US\$)		GDI	Group	Rank
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male			
2017	0.576	0.645	70.9	70.3	12.4	12.2	2.1	4.2	6,002	9,889	0.893	5	134
2015	0.573	0.637	70.1	69.6	12.6	12.4	2.1	4.2	5,657	8,308	0.900	5	NA
2014	0.572	0.638	69.7	69.2	12.8	12.6	2	4.1	5,733	8418	0.897	5	NA

Note: The Gender Development Index is the ratio of female to male Human Development Index values. See Technical Note 3 at http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2018_technical_notes.pdf for details on how the Gender Development Index is calculated. Higher value represents a better level of gender development.

Sources: Human Development Reports; details in references.

Part B: Bhutan's scores on the Worldwide Governance Indicators

Percentile rating on different governance indicators

	2005	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Voice and accountability	16.83	24.04	31.73	34.60	46.31	46.80
Political stability and absence of violence and terrorism	92.23	65.70	70.19	71.56	81.90	89.52
Government effectiveness	62.75	63.59	65.05	69.86	67.79	70.67
Regulatory quality	45.59	24.76	22.82	10.53	26.92	38.94
Rule of law	59.33	60.29	62.02	60.66	70.19	74.04
Control of corruption	78.05	77.67	77.67	79.05	82.21	91.83

Note: The Worldwide Governance Indicators project constructs aggregate indicators of six broad dimensions of governance. The six aggregate indicators are based on over 30 underlying data sources reporting the perceptions of governance of a large number of survey respondents and expert assessments worldwide. Details on the underlying data sources, the aggregation method, and the interpretation of the indicators, can be found in a methodology paper. Percentile rank ranges from zero (lowest rank) to 100 (highest rank).

Source: www.govindicators.org

Percentile rating on different governance indicators of SAARC countries in 2017

Country	Voice and accountability	Political stability and absence of violence and terrorism	Government effectiveness	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Control of corruption
Afghanistan	22.17	0.48	9.13	6.73	4.81	3.85
Bangladesh	30.05	10.48	22.12	20.67	28.37	19.23
Bhutan	46.80	89.52	70.67	38.94	74.04	91.83
India	60.10	17.14	56.73	42.31	52.88	48.56
Maldives	25.62	57.14	35.58	35.58	30.77	21.63
Nepal	38.92	22.38	18.75	25.96	27.40	23.56
Pakistan	28.08	1.90	31.25	29.33	24.04	22.60
Sri Lanka	43.35	42.38	48.08	50.48	55.29	41.35

Note: Percentile rank ranges from zero (lowest rank) to 100 (highest rank).

Source: www.govindicators.org

Part C: The rank and score of SAARC countries on the Corruption Perception Index

Country	2006 (163 countries)		2007 (179 Countries)		2008 (179 Countries)		2010 (178 countries)		2015 (167 countries)		2017 (180 countries)	
	Rank	Score										
Afghanistan	No data		172	1.8	172	1.8	176	1.4	166	1.1	177	1.5
Bangladesh	156	2	162	2	162	2	134	2.4	139	2.5	143	2.8
Bhutan	32	6	46	5	46	5	36	5.7	27	6.5	26	6.7
India	70	3.3	72	3.5	72	3.5	87	3.3	76	3.8	81	4
Maldives	No data		84	3.3	84	3.3	143	2.3	No data		112	3.3
Nepal	121	2.5	131	2.5	131	2.5	146	2.2	130	2.7	122	3.1
Pakistan	142	2.2	138	2.4	138	2.4	143	2.3	117	3	117	3.2
Sri Lanka	84	3.1	94	3.2	94	3.2	91	3.2	83	3.7	91	3.8

Note: The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries according to perception of corruption in the public sector. The index is an aggregate indicator that combines different sources of information about corruption, making it possible to compare countries. For a country or territory to be included in the index, a minimum of three sources of assessment must be used. Thus inclusion in the index depends solely on the availability of information. A score of zero means highly corrupt and 10 means very clean. A lower rank means a cleaner country and low incidence of corruption.

Source: https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2007/0.

Part D: Data from the GNH surveys

(Refer to reference section of this report for source)

2010 and 2015 GNH Index

2010	2015	Increase in happiness
0.743	0.756	0.013

2010 and 2015 GNH index by rural and urban

Area	2010	2015	Change
Urban	0.786	0.811	0.025
Rural	0.715	0.731	0.016
Urban happier by	0.071	0.08	0.009

2010 and 2015 happiness in percentage

Verbal interpretation	Sufficiency level	2010	Average sufficiency across domains for each person	2015	Average sufficiency across domains for each person
Deeply happy	77-100	8.3	81.5	8.4	80.9
Extensively happy	66-76	32.6	70.7	35	70.8
Narrowly happy	50-65	48.7	59.10	47.9	59.1
Unhappy	0-49	10.4	44.7	8.8	45.2

2010 and 2015 GNH Index by domains in percentage

Domain	2010	2015	Up in 2015	Down in 2015
Living standard	10.26	10.91	0.65	
Ecological diversity	12.05	12.41	0.36	
Community vitality	12.40	11.56		-0.84
Good governance	10.32	10.18		-0.14
Cultural diversity	11.05	11.01		-0.04
Education	9.60	9.78	0.18	
Time use	10.28	10.57	0.29	
Health	12.88	13.10	0.22	
Psychological well-being	11.16	10.48		-0.68

2010 and 2015 GNH Index by sex

Sex	2010	2015	Change
Male	0.773	0.793	0.02
Female	0.695	0.730	0.035

2010 and 2015 GNH Index by age

Age group	2010	2015
15 to 19	0.771	0.792
20 to 24	0.774	0.777
25 to 29	0.791	0.794
30 to 34	0.755	0.767
35 to 39	0.746	0.761
40 to 44	0.723	0.745
45 to 49	0.726	0.725
50 to 54	0.729	0.756
55 to 59	0.722	0.744
60 to 64	0.707	0.735
65 to 69	0.664	0.734
70 to 74	0.675	0.675
75 and above	0.691	0.65

Part E: Key development data of Bhutan

(Refer to reference section of this report for source)

Elected women in Parliament and local government

Year	Elections	Male	Female	Percentage of women in total representation
2008	National Council	21	4 (2 eminent)	16
	National Assembly	43	4	8.5
2011	Local Government	1328	103	7.2
2013	National Council	23	2 eminent	8
	National Assembly	43	4	8.5
2015/2016	Local Government	1291	169	11.6
2018	National Council	21	4 (2 eminent)	16
	National Assembly	40	7	14.9

GNI per capita of Bhutan (2011 PPP\$)

2007/2008	2010	2015	2017
3,413	6,062	7066	8,065

Unemployment rate in percentage

2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
3.7	4	3.3	2.5	2.4

Poverty rate

Poverty	2003	2007	2012	2017
Poverty rate in percentage, national	31.7	23.2	12	8.2
Poverty rate in percentage for urban Bhutan	4.2	1.7	1.8	0.8
Poverty rate in percentage for rural Bhutan	38.3	30.9	16.7	11.9
Gini coefficient, national	0.42	0.35	0.36	0.38
Gini coefficient for urban Bhutan	NA	0.32	0.35	0.32
Gini coefficient for rural Bhutan	NA	0.32	0.34	0.35

Education indicators	2007	2008	2010	2015	2018
No. of schools (extended classrooms, CPS, PS, LSS, MSS and HSS)	502	523	609	635	694
No. of institutions/colleges	10	10	10	13	27
No. of early childhood care and development centres	6	10	25	251	340
Others (special education centres, NFE, CE, vocational, patshala)	786	756	730	754	799
Total educational institutions all types	1304	1299	1374	1653	1860
No. of students studying in schools	152,194	157,112	170,405	171,402	167,108
No. of students in institutions/colleges	3,820	4190	5243	10909	11,259
No. of children in early childhood care and development centres	215	294	659	5894	8,499
No. of students in other educational centers (special education centres, NFE, CE, vocational, patshala)	30,049	27336	13988	10909	19257
Total students studying in all types of educational institutions	186,278	188,932	190,295	199,114	206,123
Student-teacher ratio in schools	28.3	27.4	24.1	21.7	17.1
Gross enrollment ratio (primary) total	106%	112%	126%	112%	105.6%
Repetition rate total (primary)	6%	6%	5.6%	6.7%	7.1%
Dropout rate total (primary)	4%	2.8%	1.7%	2.10%	2.3%
Survival rate to grade x total	NA	NA	80%	72%	74.9%
Gender parity index primary	0.99	1.012	1.03	1.06	1

Health indicators	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Birth rate(crude) per 1,000 population	NA	NA	20	17.9	17
Death rate(crude) per 1,000 population	NA	NA	NA	6.2	12.2
Child mortality rate(crude) per 1,000 live births	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Under-5 mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births)	62	61.5	61.5	37.3	NA
Infant mortality per 1,000 live births	40	40.1	40.1	30	NA
Maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births)	255	255	NA	86	121
Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years)			59	28.4	8
Life expectancy at birth in years	65.7	66	67.8	68.9	70.6
Doctors per 10,000 population	2.4	2.5	3	3.3	4.3
Nurses per 10,000 population				14.1	16.2
Hospital beds per 10,000 population	17.6	17.6	NA	17	18
Population covered by health care (%)	90	90	90	90	90
Deliveries attended by health professional (%)	53.6	66.3	64.5	74.6	96.4
Population with access to safe drinking water (%)	82	83	88	95	98
Hospitals	29	30	31	31	27
Basic health units	178	178	181	207	208
Indigenous hospitals	1	1	1	1	1
Indigenous dispensaries	26	35	38	54	66
Outreach clinics/dispensaries			518	562	551
No. of doctors	157	171	187	251	345
No. of nurses	545	567	556	1,070	1,264

Road, landline and mobile connectivity	2007	2008	2010	2015	2017
Road in km (paved and unpaved)	4,947	5,363	8,366	11,177	18,181.30
No. of fixed lines/landlines connections	31,526	27,937	26,361	21,811	21,364
No. of mobile phones/cell phones of Bhutan Telecom subscribers	82,078	178,346	305,215	486,228	475,394
No. of mobile phones/cell phones of Tashicell subscribers	Not established	57,948	83,903	189,805	255,229

Part F: Data from “A Perspective Survey on a Decade of Parliamentary Democracy 2018” in percentage

Understanding of the Constitution	Rating	National	Rural	Urban
I know what a constitution is	Yes	74.8	66.0	91.1
	No	25.2	34.0	8.9
I read the Constitution of Bhutan	Yes	24.6	14.3	43.6
	No	75.4	85.7	56.4
I have listened to the explanation on the contents of the Constitution of Bhutan	Yes	55.5	51.4	63.1
	No	44.5	48.6	36.9

Definition of democracy	National	Rural	Urban
Democracy is governance by the people	24.6	23.8	26.1
Democracy is a gift from the Golden Throne	29.8	36.1	18.2
Democracy is voting and election	15.2	18.4	9.3
Democracy is responsibility	14.9	11.6	20.9
Democracy is decentralization of power	15.5	10.1	25.5

Ratings of different aspects of democracy				
	Rating	National	Rural	Urban
Performance of democracy				
Democracy has empowered the Bhutanese (their voices are heard)	Agree	85.4	90.4	76.3
	Do not know	6.4	6.1	6.9
	Disagree	8.2	3.4	16.8
Democracy has led to central Government devolving authority to the local leaders	Agree	88.5	92.2	81.7
	Do not know	8.4	6.4	11.6
	Disagree	3.2	1.4	6.4
Democracy has prepared the Bhutanese to be more responsible	Agree	88.1	91.1	82.6
	Do not know	8.4	6.7	11.6
	Disagree	3.5	2.3	5.7

Democracy in Bhutan has enhanced access to justice	Agree	70.1	77.1	57.4
	Do not know	14.4	10.2	22.2
	Disagree	15.4	12.7	20.4
Democracy in Bhutan has reduced the gap between rich and poor	Agree	51.2	61.6	42.3
	Do not know	12.8	8.0	21.7
	Disagree	36.0	30.4	46.3
Effectiveness of Parliament				
The Parliament of Bhutan has strengthened democratic culture in Bhutan	Agree	87.4	88.5	85.5
	Do not know	10.5	9.9	11.5
	Disagree	2.1	1.6	3.0
The Parliament of Bhutan has carried out its legislative roles efficiently and effectively	Agree	85.8	90.8	76.5
	Do not know	2.7	1.3	5.2
	Disagree	5.8	1.5	5.9
The Parliament of Bhutan has carried out its representative roles efficiently and effectively	Agree	85.8	89.7	78.7
	Do not know	10.0	8.4	13.0
	Disagree	4.1	1.8	8.3
The Parliament of Bhutan has carried out its oversight functions efficiently and effectively	Agree	80.0	87.8	65.5
	Do not know	14.4	9.8	22.8
	Disagree	5.6	2.3	11.7
The Parliament of Bhutan has ensured the sovereignty and security of the Nation	Agree	88.4	92.6	80.5
	Do not know	8.4	6.0	12.7
	Disagree	3.3	1.4	6.7
Effectiveness of members of Parliament				
The elected members are able to represent the voices of the people of their constituency in the Parliament	Agree	83.1	88.8	69.6
	Do not know	7.1	6.1	12.2
	Disagree	9.8	5.1	18.2
The elected members consult the people of their constituency effectively and have enhanced people's participation in decision making	Agree	79.2	88.4	66.0
	Do not know	10.6	5.9	17.5
	Disagree	10.2	5.6	16.5
The elected members understand the concerns and ground realities of the people	Agree	70.8	83.5	53.4
	Do not know	13.9	9.9	24.9
	Disagree	15.2	6.7	21.7
The elected members have brought development to their constituency.	Agree	83.1	90.5	70.3
	Do not know	9.4	5.0	17.9
	Disagree	7.4	4.5	11.8
The elected members are competent (has knowledge and skills) to lead the nation	Agree	83.7	91.5	71.0
	Do not know	10.6	5.8	17.5
	Disagree	5.7	2.7	11.5
Effectiveness of local government				
The local government makes decisions that are in the best interest of the <i>gewog</i>	Agree	89.9	94.3	81.8
	Do not know	6.2	2.9	12.3
	Disagree	3.9	2.9	6.0

The local government uses the available resources efficiently	Agree	72.9	83.5	53.5
	Do not know	16.3	9.3	29.2
	Disagree	10.7	7.2	17.3
The local government focuses on reaching (the far flung villages/all <i>thromde</i> areas) with development activities	Agree	74.1	83.2	57.5
	Do not know	15.8	10.8	24.8
	Disagree	10.1	6.0	17.7
Effectiveness of local government				
The local government leaders of my <i>gewog/thromde</i> elected until now are competent (have knowledge and skills) to lead the <i>gewog/thromde</i>	Agree	86.9	94.7	72.6
	Do not know	7.5	3.4	15.0
	Disagree	5.6	1.8	12.4
The local government leaders of my <i>gewog/thromde</i> elected until now consult the people of their <i>gewog/thromde</i> effectively and have enhanced people's participation in decision-making	Agree	83.2	91.9	67.3
	Do not know	11.5	4.8	23.8
	Disagree	5.3	3.3	8.9
The local government leaders of my <i>gewog/thromde</i> elected until now understand the need and priorities of the <i>gewog/thromde</i>	Agree	85.0	93.7	69.1
	Do not know	8.6	2.9	19.0
	Disagree	6.4	3.4	12.0
Effectiveness of the constitutional bodies				
The constitutional bodies function without any influence from the Government	Agree	68.0	70.3	63.9
	Do not know	26.8	25.8	28.7
	Disagree	5.2	3.9	7.5
The constitutional Bodies are efficient and effective in the delivery of their responsibilities	Agree	75.2	75.1	75.4
	Do not know	23.1	23.9	21.5
	Disagree	1.7	0.9	3.0
The constitutional bodies act as a check and balance mechanism.	Agree	70.6	73.4	65.3
	Do not know	26.7	25.1	29.6
	Disagree	2.7	1.5	5.1
The role of media in democracy				
Media are free to express the truth	Agree	71.0	77.2	59.8
	Do not know	15.3	16.3	13.5
	Disagree	13.7	6.5	26.7
Media voice the concerns of the people	Agree	82.0	83.9	78.5
	Do not know	12.1	13.6	9.3
	Disagree	5.9	2.5	12.2
Media give enough information on democracy	Agree	81.4	86.0	72.7
	Do not know	11.5	11.9	10.7
	Disagree	7.1	2.1	16.5
Political parties				
Ruling and opposition political parties represent the people and their voices	Agree	88.9	92.0	83.4
	Do not know	6.4	5.9	7.3
	Disagree	4.6	2.2	9.3

Ruling and opposition political parties discuss affairs that matter to the country and the people the most	Agree	86.8	91.2	78.5
	Do not know	8.4	6.6	11.3
	Disagree	4.9	2.1	9.9
The political parties that are not ruling or in the opposition raise issues and ask questions that matter to the country and the people	Agree	73.4	74.7	71.3
	Do not know	21.1	22.5	18.6
	Disagree	5.4	2.9	10.2
Political parties do not rely on money power to get elected	Agree	51.5	63.9	29.0
	Do not know	23.8	17.2	36.1
	Disagree	24.6	19.0	34.9
I trust the political parties of Bhutan.	Agree	77.9	88.2	58.9
	Do not know	12.7	7.6	22.1
	Disagree	9.3	4.1	19.1
Participation in elections				
It is important to participate in elections and vote	Agree	98.4	99.1	97.1
	Do not know	0.5	0.5	0.5
	Disagree	1.1	0.4	2.5
I always voted for the best candidate.	Agree	94.6	95.5	93.0
	Do not know	2.7	2.1	3.8
	Disagree	2.7	2.4	3.2
Participation in elections has led to creating social harmony and unity in the community.	Agree	76.3	81.2	67.6
	Do not know	12.0	9.5	16.7
	Disagree	11.6	9.3	15.8
Relevancy of civil society organizations				
I have heard of CSOs	Agree	55.7	42.7	79.8
	Do not know	26.9	34.6	12.8
	Disagree	17.4	22.8	7.5
CSO can make a difference to the development of society	Agree	58.5	49.5	75.1
	Do not know	39.7	49.5	21.7
	Disagree	1.8	1.1	3.2
CSO can contribute to strengthening of democracy.	Agree	42.6	37.7	51.7
	Do not know	53.8	59.8	12.6
	Disagree	3.6	2.5	5.7
Perspectives on civil society				
Bhutanese citizens enjoy the right to express their views	Agree	82.1	87.9	71.3
	Do not know	9.2	6.7	13.8
	Disagree	8.7	5.3	14.8
Bhutanese citizens are able to exercise their fundamental rights	Agree	75.9	77.9	72.0
	Do not know	10.0	8.4	12.8
	Disagree	14.2	13.7	15.2

Table showing factors that influence voting

	National	Rural	Urban
Past elections			
Party as a whole	21.0	17.6	27.2
Party leadership	16.8	15.3	19.8
Capability and experience of candidate	49.2	58.1	32.7
Relation	7.4	3.8	14.0
Gender	0.7	0.6	1.0
Influence by head of the family	3.9	3.4	4.8
Influence of civil servants	1.0	1.3	0.5
Future elections			
Party as a whole	24.8	16.1	40.8
Party leadership	11.6	11.0	12.6
Capability and experience of candidate	60.8	70.7	42.6
Relation	0.8	0.2	1.7
Gender	0.8	1.0	0.6
Influence by head of the family	0.4	0.6	0.2
Influence of civil servants	0.8	0.5	1.4

Assessment of Social Media

Response	Rating	National	Rural	Urban
I use social media	Yes	64.1	48.0	93.8
	No	35.9	52.0	6.2
Social media is an important tool to reach the electorate	Yes	76.1	66.7	93.5
	No	23.9	33.3	6.5
I am connected to a political candidate running for election through social media	Yes	17.6	16.3	19.9
	No	82.4	83.7	80.1
Social media will help political candidates win votes	Yes	65.2	58.7	77.0
	No	34.8	41.3	23.0
Social media is good for strengthening democracy	Yes	65.0	56.5	80.6
	No	35.0	43.5	19.4

The performance of democracy	National	Rural	Urban
Did not perform at all	1.1	0.5	1.8
Very poor performance	1.5	1.0	2.5
Poor performance	3.4	1.9	6.3
Do not know	9.3	9.3	9.3
Satisfactory performance	22.7	13.9	38.8
Good performance	25.3	22.6	30.4
Very good performance	20.4	27.4	7.4
Excellent performance	16.3	23.3	3.5

Assessment of thromde election	Rating	National
Only the people with census in the <i>thromde</i> should vote during the <i>thromde</i> elections	Yes	36.1
	No	54.4
	Do not know	9.4
All people who work and live and are 18 years and above should participate and vote during the <i>thromde</i> elections	Yes	83.9
	No	9.1
	Do not know	7.0
The <i>thrompon</i> looks after the interests of only the eligible voters	Yes	37.2
	No	37.9
	Do not know	24.9
The eligible voters of the past two <i>thromde</i> elections have voted for the right candidates	Yes	57.3
	No	10.6
	Do not know	32.2
I am happy with the overall performance of the <i>thrompon</i>	Yes	66.0
	No	11.4
	Do not know	22.6



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