

Preface

Casting the Vote – Enhancing Governance

Bhutan, like countries everywhere, is negotiating disruptive times. As a global pandemic, devastating wars, and the impact of human activity on the ecology take a toll on societies across the globe, Bhutan, a landlocked country in South Asia, is also dealing with the uncertain times that are unsettling lives. But the outlook can be as stimulating as it is disruptive.

The country is undergoing major transformation in all aspects of governance to ride on the dramatic innovations of the 21st century. Against this background, the Autumn, 2023, issue of The Druk Journal comes on the eve of Bhutan's fourth general election. Three general elections saw three different governments and, in early 2024, Bhutanese voters will elect a government which will serve a country implementing yet another episode of change.

Besides graduating into a middle-income status, Bhutan will take a giant stride from being a wary questioner of GDP-driven values into a special economic zone in a country aspiring for a “first world” standard of living. This is history in the making.

The National Council elections in March, 2023, vindicated the unpredictability of the Bhutanese voting trends and a majority of incumbent candidates were replaced by new faces. Now a record five political parties and an unprecedented number of politicians are building a new tempo in the National Assembly race.

Bhutan's mainstream media as well as increasingly savvy social media users are playing a more critical role with every election for national governments. Local governments, with rising confidence and a growing number of participants, are re-defining the structure of national governance.

The Druk Journal will carry in-depth articles on political ideology, the interaction among political parties, the electoral process, voter trends, as well as the roles and responsibilities of key elements of a democracy - Constitutional bodies, the media and social media, citizens, the bureaucracy.

With half the population being female, the disproportionate gender representation in parliament and positions of governance is an important topic in political discourse. Gender discourse features prominently in this issue of the journal. Bhutanese society is discussing the need for a quota for women parliamentarians and questions like why do women not vote for women?

We ask contributors to be creative and discuss innovative perspectives of the Bhutanese political system. To take a deep dive into the evolution the Bhutanese electoral politics, we look at three groups of players in the game of national politics: the oversight agencies, political parties, and the famously unpredictable Bhutanese voters.

The Druk Journal prescribes a mix of academic and journalistic style of writing and presentation. This issue, however, accommodates a section from political parties which may convey a sense of politicking and one section from the oversight agencies with a tone of officialdom. All five political parties were asked to convey their ideology and vision. Four parties made their contributions but the DPT decided not to write an article. Meanwhile, the oversight institutions try to clarify their roles and their policies in the electoral system.

The purpose is to provide an understanding of the Bhutanese electoral process within the context of political evolution in the country. In terms of political analysis, it is important that we understand the broad vision of building a democratic constitutional monarchy. For the average citizen, however, it is important to understand and accept the purpose of the vote and the vital responsibility of choosing the right leaders.