

# General Election (Leaders' Debates) Bill

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[AS INTRODUCED]

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# B I L L

TO

Set up a commission to make arrangements for debates between leaders of political parties during a General Election; and for connected purposes

**B**E IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

## 1 The Commission

- (1) The Secretary of State must by regulations establish a body (“the Commission”) to oversee televised debates between party leaders during each period between the dissolution of Parliament and general election polling day (the “relevant period”). 5
- (2) The Commission must be independent of government.
- (3) The Commission has a duty to seek to maximise—
  - (a) the number of viewers of the debates it oversees, and
  - (b) the wider media coverage of those debates.

## 2 Debates 10

- (1) The Commission must oversee the holding of a minimum of three televised debates during each relevant period.
- (2) At least one of those debates must be between the leaders of all political parties represented in the House of Commons on its last sitting day.
- (3) At least two of those debates must be between the leaders of the parties with the largest and second largest representation in the House of Commons on its last sitting day. 15
- (4) Party leaders are required to participate in debates under subsections (2) and (3) and may not nominate someone to participate in their place.
- (5) The Commission may invite a leader of a party not represented in the House of Commons on its last sitting day to participate in one or more debate. 20
- (6) At least one debate under subsection (2) and at least one debate under subsection (3) must be held no fewer than 19 days from polling day.

- (7) The Commission must publish the rules of each debate it oversees.
- (8) Those rules must—
- (a) be designed to discourage the reading of pre-prepared statements, and
  - (b) require the questioning of other participating party leaders by each participating party leader to be part of each debate. 5

### 3 Membership and operation of the Commission

- (1) A new Commission must be appointed on a day as soon as is practicable following a general election.
- (2) The Commission must ordinarily have seven members, comprising— 10
- (a) three members nominated by the Speaker of the House of Commons,
  - (b) two members nominated by television broadcasters,
  - (c) one member nominated by the leader of the largest party in the House of Commons on the day the Commission is appointed, and
  - (d) one member nominated by the leader of the second largest party in the House of Commons on the day the Commission is appointed. 15
- (3) One of the members nominated under subsection (2)(a) shall be Chair of the Commission.
- (4) Each Commission must be appointed for a whole Parliament.
- (5) The operating expenses of the Commission are to be funded by television broadcasters by agreement. 20
- (6) *Should broadcasters fail to reach an agreement under subsection (5) the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for a levy to be paid by television broadcasters for that purpose, and the charges under that levy must be proportionate to the size of the broadcaster and must be set so as to ensure that the charges over the course of a Parliament and the subsequent relevant period do not exceed the operating expenses of the Commission.* 25
- (7) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision for the membership and operation of the Commission.

### 4 Regulations 30

- (1) Any power to make regulations under this Act—
- (a) is exercisable by statutory instrument;
  - (b) includes power to make different provision for different purposes.
- (2) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this Act may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament. 35

### 5 Extent, commencement and short title

- (1) This Act extends to the whole United Kingdom.

- (2) This Act comes into force three months after it is passed.
- (3) This Act may be cited as the General Election (Leaders' Debates) Act 2021.

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*Presented by Mr Peter Bone*

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