

Guidance for Voting in Bahá'í Elections

Here is a study that can help develop a more mature and principled approach to deciding who to vote for in a Bahá'í election.

1. O ye dear friends of `Abdu'l-Bahá! A blessed letter hath been received from you, telling of the election of a Spiritual Assembly. It hath rejoiced my heart to know that, God be praised, the friends in that area, with absolute unity, fellowship and love, have held this new election and were successful in voting for souls who are sanctified, are favoured at the Holy Threshold and are well known amongst the friends to be staunch and firm in the Covenant. —`Abdu'l-Bahá

Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), no. 37, p. 77.

Covenant: binding agreement between God and mankind, and between both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá and the believers
favoured: regarded and treated with special attention
fellowship: companionship, friendly association, and mutual sharing
firm: certain and unchangeable under pressure

Holy Threshold: figuratively, near the presence of Bahá'u'lláh
sanctified: approved to a sacred duty
Spiritual Assembly: Administrative Body of a local Bahá'í community
staunch: steadfast in loyalty or principle
unity: harmony, agreement, peace, and accord, free of conflict, contention, dissension, and strife

2. If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in `Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience. —Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 88.

ability: skill or competence to perform the task
combine: bring into harmonious union for a common end or purpose
consider: think about carefully
consideration: attention or thought as grounds for choosing
delegates: voting representatives
devotion: acts of ardent dedication and affection [to the Cause, its ideals, and institutions]
enumerated: recounted one after another
experience: previous participation or learning in the activity
incumbent: imposed as a responsibility
irrespective: having no regard
least: smallest possible
loyalty: allegiance and faithfulness [to the Cause, its ideals, and institutions]
material: physical or worldly

mature: fully developed [from]
mind: mental and intellectual capabilities
necessary: essential or needed
passion: acting on ungovernable emotions as distinguished from reason
prejudice: preconceived opinion or judgment of those different from oneself, not based on reason, truth, or actual experience
qualities: distinctive virtues, powers, or traits of character
recognized: formally accepted and acknowledged
selfless: having no regard for oneself [in]
trace: minute sign or evidence
unquestioned: undoubted, unopposed, or undisputed
well-trained: excellently and properly directed and educated in development [of]

3. ... I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race, nationality or temperament who best combine the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá'í community....

—Shoghi Effendi

Cited in The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, (London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), no. 11, p. 4.

administrative institutions: the governing bodies that manage and direct Bahá'í affairs
Assembly: local or national Bahá'í administrative body
capable: able; efficient
Cause: Bahá'í Faith
choicest: most worthy of being chosen
combine: bring into harmonious union for a common end or purpose
disregard: intentionally ignore
elements: one of a number of distinct groups composing a larger group or community
essential: most important and necessary
impose: place or set by authority
limitations: binding, restricting, or restraining conditions
partiality: preference towards someone liked or fond of

passion: acting on ungovernable emotions as distinguished from reason
personalities: qualities that make someone socially interesting, appealing, or popular
prejudice: judgment or opinion of others formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge
qualifications: conditions or standards that must be met
qualities: distinctive virtues, powers, or traits of character
representative: made up of those whose qualities are examples
requirements: essentials; necessities
temperament: one's emotional or mental characteristics or disposition
varied: diverse; mixed

4. From among the pool of those whom the elector believes to be qualified to serve, selection should be made with due consideration given to such other factors as age distribution, diversity, and gender. The elector should make his choice after careful thought over an extended period before the actual election.

—The Universal House of Justice

Messages from the Universal House of Justice 2001-2022, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2024), par. 87.7, p. 168.

consideration: attention or thought as grounds for choosing
distribution: apportionment; spread out so as to be covered
diversity: difference or variety in people (especially of race or culture)

due: rightful; appropriate
factors: contributing elements or influences
gender: of men and women
qualified: having met the required conditions or standards
pool: group of people

5. In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá'í office, whatever its nature. But those are only an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfil them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can.

—written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 207.

aim: strive towards a goal
applicable: appropriate or suitable for being applied
delegates: voting representatives
he: Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith

indication: knowledge pointed out or directed to
outlined: see qualifications outlined in quotation number
qualifications: conditions or standards that must be met

6. Due regard must be paid to their actual capacity and present attainments, and only those who are best qualified for membership, be they men or women, and irrespective of social standing, should be elected to the extremely responsible position of a member of the Bahá'í Assembly. —Shoghi Effendi
Dawn of a New Day, (New Delhi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 4.

attainments: accomplishments or achievements
capacity: abilities and potential capability
due regard must be paid to: it is necessary to look upon and consider

irrespective of: having no regard
qualified: having met the required conditions or standards
social standing: rank or status among those with whom one associates or interacts

7. It is also expected that, through training and experience in the process and spirit of Bahá'í elections, the members of the electorate will have raised their consciousness of their responsibility to vote for only those who satisfy the requirements that the Guardian has outlined. They will, therefore, see it as their continuing duty to familiarize themselves with the character and abilities of those who are active in the community so that, when the time for an election comes, they will already have some idea of the people from among whom they must make their choice.

—The Universal House of Justice

Cited in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, (London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), no. 18, p. 6.

abilities: natural or acquired physical, moral, or intellectual powers, skills, or competencies
active: engaged or involved by action or works
character: distinguishing traits, qualities, or nature
consciousness: personal awareness and understanding
duty: moral obligation
electorate: body of people entitled to vote
expected: considered bound by duty
familiarize: make well known to or accustom
Guardian: One appointed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in ☞

His Will and Testament to carry on into the future the function of authoritative interpretation of the Sacred Writings and the care and protection of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi.
outlined: indicated as the principal features
requirements: needed essentials
responsibility: act for which one is morally accountable
satisfy: adequately fulfill
training: the learning of skills and proficiencies through instruction and guidance

8. ...the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold.

—Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 136.

elector: one entitled to vote
inspired: divinely influenced and motivated
prayer: "Prayer is conversation with God."
 —`Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Diary of Mírzá Ahmad Sohráb, 15 March 1914, "Prayer", in ☞

cited *Star of the West*, vol. VIII, no. 4 (May 17, 1917), p. 41.
reflection: attentive consideration or contemplation
uphold: give support to

9. Also relevant to this question is the statement made by `Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets to the effect that a voter should make his choice from among those whose good name has been widely diffused. ... The purpose is that those who are elected to an Assembly should be the most worthy for this service; this does not and cannot mean that all those who are worthy will be elected.

—The Universal House of Justice

Cited in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, (London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), no. 18, p. 6.

good name: honor, respect, and reputation
relevant: related and important

widely diffused: widespread; well-known
worthy: of sufficient qualities and requirements

