Bahá’í Elections – A Pocket Compilation
**BAHÁ’Í ELECTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WITHIN CONTEXT OF BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATION</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATURE OF BAHÁ’Í ELECTION</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PREPARATION FOR VOTING</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MIND SET WHEN VOTING</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUALIFICATIONS OF THOSE TO VOTE FOR</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOTING FOR INSTITUTION, NOT INDIVIDUAL</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHEN IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND SUITABLE CANDIDATES</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOTING FOR ONESSELF</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BAHÁ’Í ELECTION

WITHIN CONTEXT OF BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATION

It should be noted in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá’u’lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism. (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha’u’llah, p. 144)

Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God’s immutable Purpose for mankind in this day. The Source from which it derives its inspiration is no one less than Bahá’u’lláh Himself. Its shield and defender are the embattled hosts of the Abha Kingdom. Its seed is the blood of no less than twenty thousand martyrs who have offered up their lives that it may be born and flourish. The axis round which its institutions revolve are the authentic provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Its guiding principles are the truths which He Who is the unerring Interpreter of the teachings of our Faith has so clearly enunciated in His public addresses throughout the West. The laws that govern its operation and limit its functions are those which have been expressly ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The seat round which its spiritual, its humanitarian and administrative activities will cluster are the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar and its Dependencies. The pillars that sustain its authority and buttress its structure are the twin institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice. The central, the underlying aim which animates it is the establishment of the New World Order as adumbrated by Bahá’u’lláh. The methods it employs, the standard it inculcates, incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor colored. Its watchword is the unification of the human race; its standard the “Most Great Peace”; its consummation the advent of that golden millennium -- the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Bahá’u’lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha’u’llah, p. 156)

The administrative machinery of the Cause ... should both provide the impulse whereby the dynamic forces latent in the Faith can unfold, crystallize, and shape the lives and conduct of men, and serve as a medium for the interchange of thought and the co-ordination of activities among the divers elements that constitute the Bahá’í community. (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932”, p. 109)
NATURE OF BAHÁ’Í ELECTION

As you know very well, the method of Bahá’í elections is at complete variance with the methods and practices of elections in political systems. The beloved Guardian has pointed out to us that should we follow the method of the politicians in our Bahá’í elections, misunderstandings and differences will arise, chaos and confusion will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmations of God will be cut off from that Bahá’í community. In view of these grave warnings, the utmost care must always be exercised so that the purity and spiritual character of Bahá’í elections are maintained and preserved. (Bahá’í Elections, No. 23, p. 8.)

Equally significant to the procedures for election -- to further extend the example -- is the evocation of that rarefied atmosphere of prayer and reflection, that quiet dignity of the process, devoid of nominations and campaigning, in which the individual’s freedom to choose is limited only by his own conscience, exercised in private in an attitude that invites communion with the Holy Spirit. In this sphere, the elector regards the outcome as an expression of the will of God, and those elected as being primarily responsible to that will, not to the constituency which elected them. An election thus conducted portrays an aspect of that organic unity of the inner and outer realities of human life which is necessary to the construction of a mature society in this new Age. In no other system do individuals exercise such a breadth of freedom in the electoral process. (Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: A statement by The Universal House of Justice 1992; Bahá’í Publishing Trust, USA; p. 10.)

The manner of participation by all adult members of the community in these elections is a distinguishing feature of the System of Bahá’u’lláh; for it is a bounden duty that confers a high privilege upon every Bahá’í to select, as a responsible citizen of the new world being brought into existence, the composition of the institutions having authority over the functioning of the Bahá’í community. In this regard, indifference and neglect on the part of any believer are alien to the spirit of the Cause. The friends must strive ceaselessly to avoid being contaminated with these destructive attitudes, which have inflicted such damage on the integrity and authority of the institutions of a declining world order. (Letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 25th of March 2007)

The aim should always be so to educate the friends during the year that they consider their participation in Bahá’í elections not only as a right they exercise, but as a spiritual obligation which, when discharged in the proper Bahá’í spirit, contributes to the health and growth of the Bahá’í community. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 6, p. 2.)

When called upon to vote in a Bahá’í election, believers should be aware that they are carrying out a sacred task unique to this Dispensation. They should approach this duty in a prayerful attitude, seeking divine guidance and confirmation. As Shoghi Effendi has advised, “they must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity
of heart, participate in the elections." (From the letter of the Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007)

**Preparation for Voting**

What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such membership (i.e. membership of the Regional Assembly) without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 25, p. 9)

It is also expected that, through the 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 familiarise 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. (Bahá’í Elections: A compilation of extracts from the Bahá’í Writings prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, No. 18, p. 6).

... Shoghi Effendi finds no other practical method that is in conformity with the spirit of the teachings, except through better acquaintance of the friends during the annual conventions and summer schools. It is the duty of the individual friends to come to know one another and find out who are the persons best fitted to become members of that body. This is a slow process but surely the best one and gives the greatest freedom of choice to the electors. (Lights of Guidance 3rd ed., 1994, No. 64, p. 19.)

**Mind set when voting**

... in the time of election, the friends should be in the mood of prayer, disinterestedness and detachment from worldly motives. Then they will be inspired to elect the proper members to the assemblies. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 7, 1924)

On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty. (27 February 1923 to the Bahá’í in the East -- translated from the Persian)
Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God. (23 February 1924 to the Bahá’ís in North America, published in "Bahá’í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932")

... the elector... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust, inasmuch as it gives the right,... to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 27, 1927: Bahá’í Administration, p. 136)

Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped and is forbidden. (In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 March 1932 to a Local Spiritual Assembly translated from the Persian)

The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections; otherwise the outcome will be chaos and confusion, serious difficulties will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmation of God will be cut off. (In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 January 1923 to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Iran translated from the Persian)

**Qualifications of Those to Vote for**

The strength and progress of the Bahá’í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls.... (Bahá’í Elections No. 22, p. 7.)

... 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 ... (Bahá’í Elections., No. 9, p. 3.)

The electors ... must prayerfully and devotedly and after meditation and reflection elect faithful, sincere, experienced, capable and competent souls who are worthy of membership ... (Bahá’í Elections No. 13, p. 4.)

Among the "necessary qualities" specified by the Guardian are those "of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience". With a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body, the believer can properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast. 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. (From the letter of the Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007)

... 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 ... (Bahá’í Elections, No. 11, p. 4.)

Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they “must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá’í Community and promote the common weal.” Bahá’í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realization that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá’í institutional identity. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tell us that “when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire’s distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it.” As He averred, “ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice.” (From the message of the Universal House of Justice of the 28th December, 2010)

**Voting for Institution, not Individual**

With reference to your next question concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. (From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers)

We should respect the N.S.A, and the local S.A. because they are institutions founded by Bahá’u’lláh. It has nothing to do with personality, but is far above it. It will be a great day when the friends, on and off the assemblies, come to fully grasp the fact that it is not the individuals on
an assembly which is important, but the assembly as an institution. (National Spiritual Assembly compilation, p. 9)

**Changes in Membership**

The elections, especially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Bahá’í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it. (Bahá’í Elections, No 28, p. 10.)

There is no objection in principle to an Assembly being re-elected, whether in total or in part, provided the members are considered to be well qualified for that post. It is individual merit that counts. Novelty or the mere act of renewal of elections are purely secondary considerations. Changes in Assembly membership would be welcome so far as they do not prejudice the quality of such membership... (Bahá’í Elections No. 16, p. 5)

Shoghi Effendi has never said that the members of the National Assembly have to be renewed partially every year. The important thing is that they should be properly elected. It would be nice if there should be new members elected, for new blood always adds to the energy of the group and will keep up their spirit. But this depends entirely upon the will of the delegates as represented in the result of their voting. (Lights of Guidance, 3rd ed., 1994, No. 63, p. 19.)

**When it is Difficult to Find Suitable Candidates**

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 these 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. He does not feel the friends should attach so much importance to limitations -- such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental concept of everyone being willing to do Bahá’í service on administrative bodies will be weakened, and the friends may be tempted to vote for those who because of independent means or circumstances in their lives are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve. (Bahá’í Elections. No. 17, p. 6.)

It is a basic principle of elections for Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies that each voter must vote for the nine people who, in his or her opinion, are best suited to serve. He may have a low opinion of all those who are eligible, but his duty is to vote for those nine from among them who, in his estimation, best meet the standards for service on a Spiritual Assembly. This is how it is possible
to vote for exactly nine names. Since the membership of an Assembly is nine it would give rise to a number of statistical anomalies if voters were permitted to record votes for fewer or more than nine names. (Lights of Guidance, 3rd ed., 1994, No. 68, p. 21.)

... the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold ... (Bahá’í Elections, No. 10, p. 4.)

**VOTING FOR ONESELF**

A believer has the right to vote for himself during the election time, if he conscientiously feels the urge to do so. This does not necessarily imply that he is ambitious or selfish, for he might conscientiously believe that his qualifications entitle him to membership in a Bahá’í administrative body, and he might be right. The essential, however, is that he should be sincere in his belief, and should act according to the dictates of his conscience. Moreover, membership in an Assembly or committee is a form of service, and should not be looked upon as a mark of inherent superiority, or a means for selfpraise. (Bahá’í Elections No. 15, p. 5.)

In a letter written on his behalf, states that the concentration on "problems of a purely secondary importance" will result in the meetings of the Convention being "somewhat lacking in spiritual force". Further, since the National Convention is a national Bahá’í institution, the delegates must needs give attention to the interests of the Cause throughout the nation, rather than limiting their focus only to the needs of the region from which a particular delegate has been elected. (National Convention Compilation prepared by the research department of the Universal House of Justice, Dec 1999)