

Civil Elections

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September 30, 2024

As we approach the election period, it is helpful to reflect on the qualities that our ideal candidates should possess. The Bahá'í writings encourage us *“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.”* We are also encouraged to give due consideration to age distribution and diversity.

Sadly, we live in a very divided and polarized society, with an “Us” vs. “Them” mindset, which makes agreements and decision-making within our governments extremely difficult. *“The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity,”* those writings say.

But differences of opinion should not separate people, or be the cause of dispute, hatred, and strife. What is needed is a common desire to find the root causes of social problems, and a willingness to search for lasting solutions to those problems--solutions that are not only based on scientific, but also spiritual principles. *“The storms battering at the foundations of society will not be stilled,”* those writings point out, *“unless and until spiritual principles are actively engaged in the search for solutions to social problems.”*

There is indeed a need for diversity; *“The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions,”* the Bahá'í writings say. But with diversity comes the need for a collaborative attitude--a willingness to engage in true consultation:

“Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fair-minded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus. An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. Otherwise, stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling, and the truth will remain hidden.”

As we consider a diverse set of candidates who are sincere, experienced, capable, and competent, let us also look for the qualities that are conducive to a more unified government.