

Governance

Bahá'í Governance

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse – Governance - Bahai

The governance problem

- Our systems of governance today are dysfunctional.
- The partisan politics of democratic governments foster disunity and enmity, us and them, often winner takes all.
- For professional politicians, personal interests in power and wealth take priority over the common interest.
- Those who seize power want to hold on to it as long as possible, becoming autocrats if not dictators.

Politics

...no human institutions today are as corrupt as political ones. They are agencies through which man's worst characteristics find expression. For the motivating principle which governs politics today is self-interest; the tools it employs are, in most cases, intrigue, compromise and deceit; and the fruits it yields are mainly discord, strife and ruin.

(Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol 2, p.88)

Bahá'í Governance

Fortunately, there is an alternative which Bahá'u'lláh already proposed in the nineteenth century, and the Bahá'í community has been systematically developing for its 8 million followers in most countries of the world.

The Bahá'í administrative order corrects for all the failures in present systems of governance.

Bahá'í Governance

The Bahá'í administrative system is a model for study. Bahá'ís attach great importance to cooperative decision-making and assign organizational responsibility for community affairs to freely elected governing councils at the local, national, and international levels. This hierarchy devolves decision-making to the lowest practicable level—thereby instituting a unique vehicle for grassroots participation in governance—while at the same time providing a level of coordination and authority that makes possible collaboration on a global scale.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, [Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions](#))



Universal House of Justice 2018

Bahá'í Governance

A unique feature of the Bahá'í electoral process is the maximum freedom of choice given to the electorate through the prohibition of nominations, candidature and solicitation. Election to Bahá'í administrative bodies is based not on personal ambition but rather on recognized ability, mature experience, and a commitment to service. Because the Bahá'í system does not allow the imposition of the arbitrary will or leadership of individuals, it cannot be used as a pathway to power. Decision-making authority rests with corporate bodies.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, [Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions](#))

Bahá'í Governance

All members of the Bahá'í community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and principles of their Faith. Significantly, in many parts of the world, the first exercises in democratic activity have occurred within the Bahá'í community.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, [Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions](#))

Bahá'í Governance

The capacity of any institution to effect and manage change, and to respond creatively to challenges that lie before it, entails the development of a number of critical skills.

This constellation of skills must obviously draw on both intellectual and moral resources.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, [Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions](#))

Bahá'í Governance

These include the ability to maintain a clear perception of social reality and of the forces operating in it; to properly assess the resources of the community; to consult freely and harmoniously as a body and with one's constituency; to realize that every decision has both a material and spiritual dimension; to arrive at decisions in a manner that preserves and promotes institutional unity; to win the confidence, respect and genuine support of those affected by these decisions; to effectively use the energies and diverse talents of the members of the community it serves; to integrate the diversity of initiatives of individuals and groups into one forward movement that benefits all; to uphold standards of fairness and equity; and to implement decisions with an openness and flexibility that avoid all traces of dictatorial behavior.

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, [Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions](#))

Bahá'í Governance

In the Bahá'í writings, those individuals who are engaged in government service are exhorted to "*approach their duties with entire detachment, integrity and independence of spirit, and with complete consecration and sanctity of purpose.*" Their personal fulfillment comes not from material reward but from "*the devising of methods to insure the progress of the people,*" from experiencing the "*delights of dispensing justice,*" and drinking from "*the springs of a clear conscience and a sincere intent.*"

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, *Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions*)

Bahá'í Governance

In the end, the "*happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace*" of the public servant does not consist in "*his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.*"

(Bahá'í International Community, 2001 May 28-31, *Overcoming Corruption in Public Institutions*)

Seat
of the
Universal
House of
Justice,
Haifa,
Israel



Governance

The rationale for governance should be to achieve our higher human purpose and general well-being through systems that function effectively. There are several dimensions to this: the importance of values like justice and equity, the need for multilevel governance from the grassroots to the global level to manage our global commons, and institutions of governance that could be free of the all-to-human failings of everything we have tried so far.

Governance

Justice must become the guiding principle of governance at all levels, allowing every individual and group to make their full contribution. Only in this way can unity of thought and action be achieved and sustained among diverse peoples, leading to collective prosperity and well-being through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.

Governance

A just civilisation requires coherent societies, depending on moral and ethical values. It should enable us to achieve our true purpose and spiritual potential, maximising love and selfless service. This will open up a whole new dimension of social systems enabling an ever-advancing civilisation. This also requires justice with the natural world, integrating human communities into the ecosystems and resources appropriate to each locality. All parts of society must contribute, including business entities taking on social and environmental responsibilities.

Governance

The community or neighbourhood is the foundational level of social organization, where people can interact directly, build relationships and work for their common good. Science needs to be accessible at the community level, since some critical planetary boundaries are revealed and experienced first at the local level. It is important to raise the capacity of local communities to consult together, to read their local reality, and to take measures available to them to reduce their vulnerability and increase their resilience, protecting critical local resources and adapting to unavoidable changes.

Governance

Nature-based solutions can be within the capacity of local people and can provide local benefits with equity. Local institutions should facilitate consultation and consensus on measures to take within their means, guided by both science and local experience. For example, a priority might be classes for the education of children and youth, as well as continuing education for adults. Another can be to strengthen spiritual ties through devotional meetings open to those of all faiths and no faith.

Governance

At a time when disintegration is affecting all levels of human organisation and could result in the collapse of economic relationships and political institutions, building unity and solidarity at the community level can be an important insurance and source of resilience during troubled times.

Governance

In the Bahá'í administrative order, the unique characteristic is that no individual has power or authority in its system, allowing it to escape from human ego-centric governance.

Governance

Bahá'í governance consists of elected consultative bodies of nine members at the local, national and international levels, elected from all the community with no nominations or campaigning. A local administrative body is elected annually by all the Bahá'ís of the village, town or city.

Local
Spiritual
Assembly

Carmel
1963



Governance

At the national level, the Bahá'ís of the country elect delegates to a national convention, which then elects annually the national administrative body from all the Bahá'ís of the country. At the global level, all the members of national administrative bodies are the delegates to an international convention every five years that elects the global institution.

Governance

The members of these institutions, functionally referred to as the rulers, consult and make decisions collectively, responsible to their conscience and to God, not to those who elected them. These institutions are provided for in the Bahá'í scriptures, which also furnish the laws and spiritual principles on which they base their decisions.

Governance

This system, which will evolve in the future as required, provides all the governance functions needed without giving any individual power or authority, with all the dangers of ego that the latter represents.

National
Spiritual
Assembly

SW Pacific
1975



Local House of Justice

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of Bahá, and should it exceed this number it doth not matter. They should consider themselves as entering the Court of the presence of God, the Exalted, the Most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Aqdas, §30)

Local House of Justice

It behooveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Aqdas, §30)

Consultation

Bahá'u'lláh has established consultation as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith and has exhorted the believers to *“take counsel together in all matters.”* He describes consultation as *“the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way”* and as *“the bestower of understanding.”* Shoghi Effendi states that the “principle of consultation ... constitutes one of the basic laws” of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, note 52)

National Bahá'í Convention

New
Caledonia
2023



Spiritual Assemblies

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them. In this day, assemblies of consultation are of the greatest importance and a vital necessity. Obedience unto them is essential and obligatory.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 5 March 1922, p.21)

Spiritual Assemblies

The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion, a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 5 March 1922, p.21)

Spiritual Assemblies

The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 5 March 1922, p.22-23)

Spiritual Assemblies

The second condition:—They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 5 March 1922, p.22-23)

Spiritual Assemblies

It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness....

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, letter of 5 March 1922, p.22-23)

Spiritual Assemblies

Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.