



# Politics

## Power and Authority

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Politics

# Politics

Politics is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations among individuals, such as the distribution of status or resources. The branch of social science that studies politics and government is referred to as political science. A variety of methods are deployed in politics, including promoting one's own political views among people, negotiation with other political subjects, making laws, and exercising internal and external force, including warfare against adversaries. ([Wikipedia](#))

# Failure of Politics

*The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divideth and afflicteth the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appeareth to be lamentably defective.*

# Failure of Politics

*How long will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men? How long will discord agitate the face of society? ...*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings CX)*

# 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)

# Politics

Recognizing the destructive nature of the present-day order in human society, the bankruptcy of its political, religious and social institutions and their inability to bring unity to the human race, the Bahá'ís are engaged in erecting on a global scale the framework of a new world order based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

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

# Politics

The principles of universality and the oneness of the human race, of truthfulness and honesty, of uprightness and integrity, of love and fellowship are completely opposite to the way in which politics are conducted today.

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

# Power to Transform

Transforming society raises both the question of the power to make this change, and who or what authority can use that power. With the rapid integration of the planet and its people, both of these familiar terms need to be redefined.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §54)



# Power

Throughout history power has largely meant the advantage enjoyed by persons or groups. Often, this is just some means to be used against others. Power in this way has become part of our culture of division and conflict for several thousand years, regardless of the social, religious, or political groups in power in different ages and parts of the world.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §55)

# Power

In general, power has been something held by individuals, factions, peoples, classes, and nations, mostly by men rather than women. Those who hold power are able to acquire, to surpass, to dominate, to resist, to win.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §55)

# Power in history

The historical use of power has both ruined and set back human well-being, and made great advances in civilization. We can appreciate the benefits and recognise the setbacks, as well as the limits in the behaviour that has produced both. Habits and attitudes related to the use of power in the past are no longer effective.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §56)

# Power today

Today, when most pressing problems are global, we cannot see power as advantage to some people, which is wrong in theory and of no practical use to the social and economic development of the planet. Those who still try to use power in this way are blocked and frustrated. The traditional, competitive use of power is as useless to the needs of humanity's future as the technologies of railways would be to launching satellites into orbit.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §56)

# Power of truth

In the same way, the human race in its maturity must give up its inherited understanding and use of power. This is possible because humanity has always been able to think of power in other ways to support its hopes. People everywhere, down the ages, have found a wide range of creative resources within themselves. The best example is the power of truth itself, an agent of change leading to great advances in our philosophical, religious, artistic, and scientific experience.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §57)

# Power of unity

A strong character is another means of mobilising a great human response, as is the influence of example, whether in the lives of individuals or in human societies. Imagine how great will be the force generated by the achievement of unity, an influence "*so powerful*", in Bahá'u'lláh's words, "*that it can illuminate the whole Earth.*"

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995), §57

# Authority

The institutions of society will be able to draw on and direct the potential in human consciousness when authority is exercised by applying principles that are in the interest of a rapidly maturing human race.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §58)

# Authority

Such principles include the obligation of those in authority to win the confidence, respect, and genuine support of those they govern; to consult openly and fully with all who are affected by their decisions; to assess objectively the real needs and hopes of the communities they serve; to benefit from scientific and moral progress to make appropriate use of the community's resources, including the energies of its members.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §58)



# Authority

The most important principle of effective authority is building and maintaining unity among the members of a society and the members of its administrative institutions. Also important is the commitment to the search for justice in all matters.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §58)



Newly elected Universal House of Justice 1963

# Democracy

Such principles can only be applied within a culture that is democratic in spirit and method. This does not mean the partisan form of democracy with parties in conflict which, despite past contributions to human progress, has led today to cynicism, apathy, and corruption.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §59)

# Democracy

In selecting decision-makers, society does not need and is not well served by the politics of nominations, candidates, electioneering, and solicitation. As people become educated and see that their real development interests are being served, they can adopt electoral procedures to improve the selection of their decision-making bodies.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §59)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

Their Faith they conceive to be essentially non-political, supra-national in character, rigidly non-partisan, and entirely dissociated from nationalistic ambitions, pursuits, and purposes. Such a Faith knows no division of class or of party.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 198; Compilation on Social Action §39)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

It subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected.

(Shoghi Effendi, from a letter dated 11 March 1936, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 198;  
Compilation on Social Action §39)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

The term “politics” can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá'í community is social transformation.

(letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer; Compilation on Social Action §21)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

“much as the friends must guard against in any way seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings”.

...there is “no objection at all to the students taking part in something so obviously akin to the spirit of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice.”

(letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in letter dated 23 December 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer; Compilation on Social Action §21)



# The Bahá'í approach to politics

Inseparable from the Bahá'í perspective on politics is a particular conception of history, its course and direction. Humanity, it is the firm conviction of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, is approaching today the crowning stage in a millennia-long process which has brought it from its collective infancy to the threshold of maturity—a stage that will witness the unification of the human race.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran; Compilation on Social Action §31)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran; Compilation on Social Action §31)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

Bahá'ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran; Compilation on Social Action §31)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

The operation of the former is everywhere apparent—in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose.

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran; Compilation on Social Action §31)

# The Bahá'í approach to politics

Bahá'ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated....

(Universal House of Justice, message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran; Compilation on Social Action §31)

# Bahá'ís and Politics

While as a fundamental principle Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political affairs, this should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the friends from full and active participation in the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing humanity.

# Bahá'ís and Politics

Whenever Bahá'ís do participate in activities associated with this topic in the wider society, they can help to contribute to a constructive process by elevating the discourse above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action.

# Governance through Consultation

Concepts and principles associated with Bahá'í consultation inform how the friends should interact among themselves and how they participate in social discourses and social action. 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.

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 [https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129\\_001](https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001))



# Governance through Consultation

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, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.”

(Universal House of Justice, letter of 29 November 2017 [https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129\\_001](https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171129_001))

# Welfare of all humankind

As humanity becomes more integrated, those who are... selected will have to see all their efforts in a global perspective. At both the national and local levels, the elected governors of human affairs should, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, consider themselves responsible for the welfare of all of humankind.

(based on Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*, 1995, §60)

# Politics for Unity

*Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth....*

*(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings CX)*

# Politics for Unity

*Please God, the peoples of the world may be led, as the result of the high endeavors exerted by their rulers and the wise and learned amongst men, to recognize their best interests.*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings CX*)

# Moderation in All Things

*It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men....*

(Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings CX*)

# Politics for Justice

*We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny. If the rulers and kings of the earth, the symbols of the power of God, exalted be His glory, arise and resolve to dedicate themselves to whatever will promote the highest interests of the whole of humanity, the reign of justice will assuredly be established amongst the children of men, and the effulgence of its light will envelop the whole earth.*



Seat of the Universal House of Justice, Haifa