

Voting is one of our most basic rights and responsibilities in a democracy. We need to have our say on the issues and/or elect the representatives we want. For that purpose, we need to exercise our best judgement in deciding whom to vote for.

People may vote for a candidate for different reasons: Impressive looks, polished personality, charisma and smooth, confident talking style, each can win a lot of votes. However, a Muslim must evaluate a candidate primarily based on the candidate's views, stance and track record on important issues from the perspective of promoting goodness, discouraging evil, and maintaining balance, justice, and peace in the society. Thus, the proper approach to selecting the best candidate is through conducting an "issue-based evaluation" rooted in Muslim values. This involves:

- Developing a list of the issues that are important in the jurisdiction (School Boards, Municipal, Provincial or Federal) for which elections are being held;
- Identifying the best stance on each of those issues from the perspective of promoting goodness, discouraging evil, and maintaining balance, justice and peace in the society;
- Interviewing each candidate, reviewing his or her recent statements, past record, and voting history on that or similar issues.
- Rating the candidates on each issue as per the evaluation form below and calculating the total score.

The following evaluation form will help you in conducting this analysis with the candidate achieving the highest score being considered the best candidate.

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Issues / Questions

Candidates

Scoring the answer: 3 for clearly positive and committed response; 2 for prepared to work for it; 1 for

1

2

3

4

5

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

Total Score for the Candidate

Leader's Attitude and Party Policy

Total score

Some Muslims vote haphazardly according to whatever and whoever is promoted in the media. Some vote on the basis of who comes to attend their functions or their Masjid, while the same person may actually be opposed to everything our community stands for. There are very few who vote for “the best candidate” – a candidate identified to be the best on the basis of issue-based evaluation of all candidates, conducted from the perspective of promoting goodness, discouraging evil, and maintaining balance, justice, and peace.

Islam requires that people vote for the candidate whose stance on the contemporary issues of his/her jurisdiction is best aligned with the principles of promoting goodness, discouraging evil, and maintaining balance, justice, and peace in the society. This opinion is based on the

following Islamic injunctions:

- Allaah's commands us, as mentioned in part 1, to practise justice and to stand up as witnesses for justice. This requires that we support the best candidate, otherwise we will be acting unjustly;
- Voting is also an expression of our opinion as to who is the best. In other words, it is witness from the voter to the candidate and others that he or she is the best of the contestants. A Muslim must be a witness for justice, for Allaah's sake (65:2) and must not conceal it (2:283).
- We are also commanded to give trusts to those to whom they belong (4:58). Vote is a trust that belongs to the best candidate.
- The verse 4:58 also commands us to judge among people with justice. Selecting the best candidate is an exercise of judgement, and justice demands that we select the best of the candidates.

It is possible that the best candidate may not be a winning candidate. Does that justify voting for the second best? Whether the best candidate is going to win or not, it is our duty to vote only for the best. Voting for anyone else for any pragmatic or tactical reason will be doing injustice, giving trust to the wrong person and bearing false witness. Evaluation may indicate that none of the candidates is good enough according to our standard. Can that be a good reason for not voting? Absolutely not! We have to pick the better among all those who are running. If even the best of them is below an acceptable standard, a Muslim should encourage an appropriate person to run or himself/herself become a candidate.

By staying home and not voting, for any reason whatsoever, a Muslim violates the following principles of Islam:

- He indirectly votes for the worst candidate by depriving the better one of support.
- He does not give the trust to whom it belonged;
- He does not judge among people with justice, because he treats the worse and the better in the same way;
- He hides the witness that should have been given through the vote.

Many people think that the candidates of their favourite party are the best candidates to vote for. This is not true. Every major political party has good and bad candidates with good and bad ideas. Voting purely on the basis of party means one could be voting even for the worst candidates against the teachings of Islam.

Muslims who belong to a political party need to be mindful of their responsibility in a situation where another party's candidate happens to be a better candidate than his/her own party's candidate. They should not work for their party's candidate in that riding. Rather, they should work for their party in a different riding where their party's candidate happens to be the best.

Identifying the best candidate needs to be done on a riding-by-riding basis, without regard for which party the candidates belong to. Some people think that riding-by-riding evaluation of individual candidates does not fit well with a parliamentary system. In fact, it does so well. The riding by riding approach will help the party that has the highest number of good candidates and helps to weed out their bad candidates. Over the long run, this approach will enhance the quality of the candidates running for office and the quality of Canadian Government.

Some people may think that this emphasis on selecting the best candidates regardless of their party affiliation is misguided because all elected candidates will be bound by the party policies and party discipline. But it should be remembered that party caucuses still have considerable influence on party policy on issues of importance. If the best people have been elected, the party stance will also lean towards the best stance.

Selecting candidates according to the issue-based evaluation of all candidates on a riding-by-riding basis offers the following benefits:

- The candidates and parties become more focused on important issues;
- Candidates and parties will realize that they will have to deliver on these issues to count on Muslims' support; just appearing as a special guest or for photo-op at Muslim gatherings will not cut it anymore;
- Participants in these evaluating exercises develop their political judgement – the ability to discriminate between the good, the bad, and the ugly.
- The overall constitution and performance of elected assemblies is improved.