

Participating in a Democracy

The Constitution established the United States as a democratic republic. It is democratic because the people govern themselves, and it is a republic because the government’s power is derived from its people.

This means that our government – federal, state, and local – is elected by the citizens. Citizens vote for their government officials and these officials represent the concerns and ideas of the citizens in government. For example, your Governor is elected by the voters in your state. The Governor is in charge of the executive branch for your state.

Voting is one important way that we can participate in our democracy. In order to vote for President in a federal election, a citizen must be 18 or older. Besides voting for officials, we also

vote on issues. Voters may want to make changes to their community, such as building bigger schools or adding new roads. We can contact our government officials when we want to support or change a law. Voting in an election and contacting our elected officials are two ways that Americans can participate in our democracy.



*Young woman voting in 1964.
Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-04300.*



Discuss this question with your class.

You must be a citizen in order to vote in a federal election. However, there are many other ways to participate in our democracy. What are some ways that people can participate in their democracy besides voting?

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. Who is the Governor of your state now? _____
2. How old do citizens have to be to vote for President? _____
3. What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy? _____



To learn the name of the governor of your state or territory, go to nga.org/governors.

Becoming a U.S. Citizen

Changing your citizenship is a serious personal decision. People want to become a U.S. citizen for different reasons. What are some reasons that someone would want to become a U.S. citizen? Make a list with your partner and share your ideas with your classmates.

In order to become a U.S. citizen, you must successfully complete the naturalization process. First, you must be eligible to apply for citizenship. There are important requirements to meet in order to apply. For example, you must be a permanent resident who has lived in the United States for a specific period of time. You must also have good moral character, and understand and support the Constitution.



*Taking the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony in Washington, D.C.
Courtesy of USCIS.*

Then, you must complete an eligibility interview with a USCIS Officer and pass the English and Civics tests. After you successfully complete the interview and the tests, you must take the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony. Taking the oath means that you promise loyalty to the United States as well as these promises:

- give up loyalty to other countries
- defend the Constitution and laws of the United States
- obey the laws of the United States
- serve in the U.S. military (if needed)
- serve (do important work for) the nation (if needed)
- be loyal to the United States

Answer this Civics Test question.

1. What is one promise you make when you become a United States citizen? _____



For more information about the steps required to become a U.S. citizen, visit uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/apply-citizenship.

The Oath of Allegiance

At the naturalization ceremony, you will raise your right hand and say the Oath of Allegiance.

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;

that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic;

that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;

that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;

that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law;

that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

Discuss the meaning of these important words from the Oath of Allegiance with your teacher. Practice the pronunciation of these words together.

- abjure: give up, reject
- allegiance: loyalty
- bear arms: carry a gun or a weapon
- behalf of: for
- declare: say publicly, say out loud
- enemies: opponents
- heretofore: from now on
- fidelity: loyalty, faithfulness
- mental reservation: doubt
- noncombatant: non-fighting
- oath: vow, promise
- perform: do
- potentate: ruler, leader
- purpose of evasion: in order to avoid
- renounce: refuse, give up, quit
- sovereignty: authority, rule, power

Rights and Responsibilities of U.S. Citizens



The jury box in the Howard M. Metzenbaum U.S. Courthouse, Cleveland, Ohio. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-highsm-10671.

There are two important responsibilities that are only for U.S. citizens: to vote in federal elections and to serve on a jury. A jury is a group of citizens in a courtroom that listens to a trial. The jury decides the outcome of a trial. If a citizen gets a court letter to serve on a jury, the person must go. Another responsibility of citizens is voting. The law does not require citizens to vote, but voting is a very important part of any democracy. By voting, citizens are participating in the democratic process. Citizens vote for leaders to represent them and their ideas, and the leaders support the citizens' interests.

There are two special rights only for U.S. citizens: voting in federal elections and running for federal office. Many naturalized citizens

have been elected as U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives. In order to run for the Senate, a candidate must have been a U.S. citizen for at least 9 years. To run for the House of Representatives, a candidate must have been a U.S. citizen for at least 7 years. To run for president of the United States, a candidate must be a natural born (not naturalized) citizen.



U.S. Representative Dalip Singh Saund was born in India. He served in Congress from 1957 to 1962. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-102603.

Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens? _____
2. Name one right only for United States citizens. _____

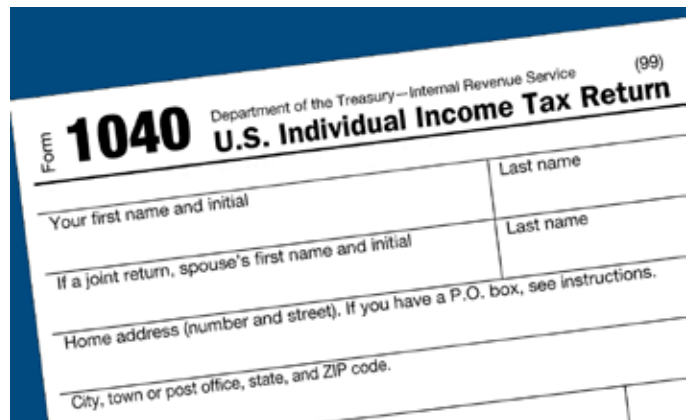
Rights and Responsibilities of Everyone in the United States

There are certain rights that are for everyone living in the United States. Some of these rights are freedom of expression, of religion, of speech, and the right to bear arms. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights give many of these rights to all people living in the United States. All people living in the United States must obey laws, including local, state, and federal ones.

Two important federal laws are registering for the Selective Service and paying taxes:

- All men between 18 and 26 must register for the Selective Service. When a man registers, he tells the government that he is available to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. He can register at a United States post office or on the internet. To register for the Selective Service on the internet, visit the Selective Service website at sss.gov.

- Every year, people must send in their federal income tax forms by April 15. The Constitution gave the federal government the power to collect taxes. The federal government uses the money to pay the nation's debts and to defend and provide for the needs of the country.



Answer these Civics Test questions.

1. What are two rights of everyone living in the United States? _____
2. When must all men register for the Selective Service? _____
3. When is the last day you can send in federal income tax forms? _____

Review—Rights and Responsibilities

Read all the rights and responsibilities in the box below and decide if they are for **U.S. citizens only** or for **everyone living in the United States**. Write the words in the correct column.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Promise loyalty to the United States | Register for the Selective Service: (only men 18-26) | Serve on a jury |
| Contact your Senator | Practice a religion or practice no religion | Own a gun |
| Attend a peaceful demonstration | Obey all laws | Write to the newspaper editor about an issue |
| Vote for Vice President | Vote for President | |
| Pay taxes | Run for House of Representatives | |

U.S. Citizens Only

Everyone Living in the U.S.

Civics Test Questions—Rights and Responsibilities

Read the test questions and write the answers. Take turns practicing them with your partner.

1. Who is the Governor of your state now? _____
2. What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens? _____
3. Name one right only for United States citizens. _____
4. What are two rights of everyone living in the United States? _____
5. What is one promise you make when you become a United States citizen? _____
6. How old do citizens have to be to vote for President? _____
7. What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy? _____
8. When is the last day you can send in federal income tax forms? _____
9. When must all men register for the Selective Service? _____