

Responsibilities of U.S. Citizens

Citizenship Responsibilities

Citizenship is the state of being vested with the rights, privileges and duties of a citizen, but it can also be defined as the character of an individual viewed as a member of society. While U.S. citizenship provides many rights, it also involves many responsibilities.

The U.S. government, as established in the Constitution, protects the rights of each individual regardless of background, culture or religion. Although all U.S. citizens enjoy the freedoms, protections and legal rights that the Constitution promises, citizens also have the responsibility, or “civic duty,” to meet certain societal standards and guidelines.

Civic duties ensure that democratic values written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are upheld. Responsibilities include both those that are voluntary as well as those required by law.

Mandatory Duties of U.S. Citizens

Certain civic responsibilities considered central to the democratic philosophy of the country are required by law. U.S. citizens must comply with certain mandatory obligations, including:

- **Obeying the law.** Every U.S. citizen must obey federal, state and local laws, and pay the penalties that can be incurred when a law is broken.
- **Paying taxes.** All citizens must pay taxes in one form or another, including federal, state, local, Social Security, property and sales taxes. Each tax funds services and programs - i.e., schools, roads, police and fire protection, Medicare and national defense - that would be impossible to maintain without the support of tax payments.
- **Serving on a jury when summoned.** Whether a citizen or not, all persons have a right to a trial by jury made up of a panel of their peers. Jurors are drawn by lot from the general population of citizens in a jurisdiction, and once randomly summoned to jury duty are required to be available to serve. A citizen also may be summoned or subpoenaed to serve as a witness during a trial and, if called, has the responsibility to appear and testify under oath regarding information pertinent to a given event.
- **Registering with the Selective Service.** The Selective Service is a federal agency within the executive branch of government that exists to readily resume a draft, if necessary, to provide the number of men needed by the armed forces in the event of war or other national emergency. Federal law requires virtually all male U.S. citizens and male noncitizens who are ages 18 through 25 to register with the Selective Service. Men who do not register are subject to prosecution and, if convicted, may be fined up to \$250,000 and/or serve up to five years in prison. Registration for Selective Service also is required to be eligible for various federal programs and benefits, including student loans, job training, federal employment and naturalization.ⁿ Citizens must report for jury duty when summoned.

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Voluntary Responsibilities of U.S. Citizens

Other civic responsibilities, while not mandatory, are central to democracy. U.S. citizens are encouraged to exercise certain responsibilities and privileges, including:

- **Voting.** While voting is a right and privilege of citizenship, it is also a duty or responsibility. U.S. citizens have a responsibility to participate in their government by registering to vote and voting in elections. By voting, citizens have a voice in their government and help ensure that the democratic representative system of government is maintained.
- **Staying informed.** Citizens have the responsibility to stay informed of the issues affecting their communities, as well as national and international issues, and to be active in the civic processes. This includes being well informed about the issues and candidates before voting in an election, getting involved in a political campaign or running for public office, or using their right to address the government through activism.
- **Community involvement.** Citizens also should contribute to the well-being of the community by recognizing where help or change is needed and by getting involved through offering their knowledge and talents to local organizations, committees and community projects.
- **Practicing tolerance.** With democracy comes diversity, and U.S. citizens have the responsibility to support and protect the rights of others and to respect the differences in opinions, religions, cultures and ethnic groups.
- **Passing it on.** It is the responsibility of citizens to pass along the importance of good citizenship to future generations. By teaching their children how to stay informed, to get involved, to obey the law, and the necessity of voting, parents and mentors demonstrate how to improve society.

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"The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his weight."

Theodore Roosevelt 26th U.S. President



"Our citizens - naturalized or native-born - must also seek to refresh and improve their knowledge of how our government operates under the Constitution and how they can participate in it. Only in this way can they assume the full responsibilities of citizenship and make our government more truly of, by, and for the people."

Lyndon B. Johnson 36th U.S. President



Responsibilities of U.S. Citizens

Why it important to be a responsible citizen

What would happen if people were not