

What is a citizen?

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



A citizen is a member of a community of people who owe loyalty to a government and, in turn, are entitled to its protection. The idea of citizenship, or the rights and duties of citizens, dates back more than two thousand years to ancient Greece and Rome. Citizenship gave people legal rights and allowed them to take part in government. During those times citizenship was only for men who owned property. Citizens' duties to the government included paying taxes and serving in the armed forces. Over the centuries, other ideas about citizenship replaced the Greek and Roman views. In the seventeenth century, though, revolutionary thinkers in America and France brought back the ancient ideas, with some changes to the old definition. First, they defined citizens in terms of belonging to a nation. Second, they said that the power of government comes from the people governed. This idea is known as the "consent of the governed." Citizens give their consent, or agreement, by participating in government. This new idea had the chance to give much power to the people. Still, that power had limits. For many years, United States citizenship was limited largely to white men. Gradually, and with much struggle other groups gained the opportunity of full citizenship for the United States of America. African Americans gained the opportunity to become citizens through the 14th Amendment which was passed in 1868. Next, women gained the right to vote. That came as a result to the 19th amendment which was passed in the year of 1920. Members of a few Native American groups became citizens through treaties with the federal government. Not until 1924 did Congress pass the Indian Citizenship Act allowing all Native Americans to gain full citizenship. In the United States today citizenship is not based in wealth, gender, race, or religion. A person

can become an American citizen in either of two ways. They are by birth or by going through particular process. Any person born in any of the 50 states or in the District of Columbia automatically becomes an American citizen at birth. The same is true of someone born in an American territory, such as Puerto Rico, or on a U. S. military base overseas. This rule also applies to children born on American soil to people who are not U. S. citizens. Those children become citizens at birth. Also, naturalization is another way of being an American citizen. Naturalization is a legal process to obtain citizenship. More than forty percent of the foreign-born people who live in the United States are naturalized citizens. Certain requirements must be met to become a U. S. citizen. A couple examples of these requirements are: They must be age 18 or older, they must be able to read, write, and speak English and they must show an understanding of U. S. civics. The first step in the naturalization process is to complete an application and send it to the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Next a USCIS official talk's to the applicant to make sure the person meets all the requirements necessary. Then, you take a citizenship exam. The exam tests the applicant's ability to read, write and speak English. The test also confirms that they know of the United States government and U. S. history. Once they have passed the citizenship exam they hold a special ceremony where you recite an oath to be loyal to the United States above all other countries. Americans can also lose their citizenship, and this occurs in any of these three ways: Expatriation, Denaturalization and being convicted of certain crimes. Only the federal government can grant citizenship or take it away. States can deny some privileges of your citizenship, but cannot take it away completely.

Citizens have responsibilities or an obligation that we meet of our own free will. Some examples of responsibilities are to be informed and vote, participate in your community and government, respect the rights and property of others and to respect different opinions and ways of life. Citizens also have duties or actions we are required to perform. Some examples of duties in the United States are to obey the law, pay taxes, to defend the nation, to serve in court and to attend school.