

# Rights and responsibilities of United States citizens

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Image 1. Members of the armed services recite the pledge of allegiance during a naturalization ceremony at the USS Midway Museum, in May 2009 in San Diego, California. Photo: Legalman 1st Class Jennifer L. Bailey/U.S. Navy

There are two texts that protect the rights of all Americans. One is the Declaration of Independence. This text was written when all the states in America joined to be free from the British.

The other text is the Constitution. The Constitution was written to explain how the U.S. government should work. It also contains the rights of all the American people.

Being a citizen in America means having these rights. It does not matter what religion or culture you have. If you are a U.S. citizen, you have the same rights.

## Rights Of A Citizen

**Freedom to speak.** You are free to speak your opinion and to meet in a group peacefully. If you think the government has done something wrong, you are free to protest. But, you can't hurt other people or stop them from having an opinion.

**Freedom to pray.** You are free to follow any religion or no religion. You can do this as long as your religion does not hurt other people.

**Right to a fair trial.** People accused of a crime have the right to a fair trial. They are judged by a jury. Each jury is made of U.S. citizens. Someone accused of a crime cannot be guilty without proof.

**Right to have guns.** Citizens have the right to protect themselves with a gun. People can lose this right if they are a danger to others. Criminals lose this right, too.

**Right to vote in elections.** Citizens can vote in elections. They vote to choose their next leaders. The right to vote stops leaders from having too much power. If leaders become too powerful, citizens can vote for new ones.

**Right to work in the government.** U.S. citizens can get jobs working for the government.

**Right to run for elected office.** A U.S. citizen can run in an election. If they want to be President or Vice President, they have to be born in the U.S.

**Freedom to pursue "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."** These words come from the Declaration of Independence. You can set your own goals. You can decide what path to take in life. But you cannot take rights from others.

### **Responsibilities Of A Citizen**

**Support and defend the Constitution against all enemies.** The Constitution only exists if citizens protect it. Some people might question the Constitution. But, citizens should defend it because it makes sure we have rights.

**Know what is happening around you.** U.S. citizens should learn about the people who run in elections. They should also know about problems in their city, state and country.

**Be a part of this democracy.** Citizens should vote in elections. Voting is your voice. It tells our leaders what needs to be done.

**Respect and obey our laws.** Every person living in the United States must follow the law. Laws keep society in order. Without order, we will not respect each other's rights.

**Respect the rights, thoughts and beliefs of others.** The United States is a nation of many different people. Many have different cultures. But everyone is part of the same nation. We need to know how to live together. We can only do that if we respect each other.



**Participate in your town or city.** Be a part of your community. Go to town hall meetings. Offer to help others. Citizens should try running in elections.

**Pay your**



**taxes.** Taxes pay for what the government does. The government needs money so it can help educate children and adults. The government also keeps our country safe, and our people healthy. Paying taxes on time helps all Americans.

**Serve on a jury when called upon.** U.S. citizens can serve on a jury in a court. They decide fairly if a person is innocent or guilty.

**Defend the country.** Citizens can volunteer to be a soldier. But there are other ways to defend our country in jobs that do not ask people to fight. You can volunteer to help with the environment, education or health care.