

How Government Works: What is citizenship?

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Citizens in California vote during the 2008 presidential election. Choosing a leader of the government, like the president, is a right citizens have. Photo from: Associated Press.

Citizenship is all about rights and responsibilities. A citizen is a person who is a full member of a country. Citizens have rights that are given by the country's government. For example, a citizen has the right to be protected by a country's laws.

In return, citizens have responsibilities, or duties, that they owe to the country. One of the most important duties is being loyal to the country.

Citizenship is not the same as nationality. A person's nationality tells which country that person is from. A person can be from a country without being a citizen of that country, though. The person might have gained citizenship in another country. Or, they might have lost their citizenship. People who live in a country but are not citizens or nationals of that country are called aliens.

How To Become A Citizen



Each country sets its own rules for citizenship. Many countries have set up four ways to become a citizen. The first way is to be born in the country. The second is to have a mother or father who is a citizen. The third is to marry a citizen. The fourth way is to go through certain steps to become a citizen of a country. That process is called naturalization.

Naturalization allows someone born in one country to become a citizen of another country. Naturalization laws are different in every country. Usually, people must have lived in the new country for several years. They usually must speak the country's language. They might have to pass a test about the country's laws and history. Often, they must promise to be loyal to the country. They swear that they will live by the country's laws.

Citizens Have Rights And Duties

Citizens have certain rights. Some countries give their citizens more or different rights than other countries. Citizens usually have the right to vote. They often have the right to be elected to government jobs, too. Other rights may include the right to follow any religion they choose and the right to speak freely.

Citizens also have duties. Voting is a right. Yet it is also a duty. Citizens must vote to make sure that their government works for the good of its citizens. Citizens also might have the duty to serve on a jury during a trial in court. Some countries also make serving in the military a duty of all citizens.

Aliens might have some of the same rights as citizens. But those rights are limited. For example, they usually cannot vote or serve in the government. Aliens also have some of the same duties as citizens. For one thing, they must obey the country's laws. For another, they often must pay taxes.



Citizenship Can Be Lost

Losing citizenship is possible, but it does not happen often. It only happens in special cases. There are a few ways that people can lose their citizenship. One way is to become a citizen of a different country. Another way is to show loyalty to another country. An example of this would be serving in another country's military. Naturalized citizens who commit serious crimes might lose their citizenship as well.

Those who lose their citizenship can end up as citizens of no country. Then they are called stateless persons.

Quiz

- 1 Read the summary below. Choose the answer that BEST fits into the blank to complete the summary.
- Citizens are people who are full members of a country. _____. Citizens also have duties that they owe to their country. Rules and processes for citizenship are different for every country.
- (A) They can become stateless persons if they lose citizenship.
 - (B) Citizens must be loyal and speak a country's language.
 - (C) They must follow the laws of a country to keep being citizens.
 - (D) Citizens have rights that are given and protected by the government.
- 2 Which section of the article explains HOW people might be forced to give up their citizenship?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-3]
 - (B) “How To Become A Citizen”
 - (C) “Citizens Have Rights And Duties”
 - (D) “Citizenships Can Be Lost”
- 3 Read the section “Citizens Have Rights And Duties.”
- Select the paragraph from the section that gives examples of how citizens show their responsibility to their country.
- 4 Which detail from the section “How to Become A Citizen” BEST helps explain why naturalization is not an easy process?
- (A) Naturalization allows someone born in one country to become a citizen of another country.
 - (B) Naturalization laws are different in every country.
 - (C) They might have to pass a test about the country's laws and history.
 - (D) They swear that they will live by the country's laws.