

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 everything that has to do with being a citizen, or full member, of a country. Citizens have rights that are given by the country's government. For example, citizens have the right to be protected by a country's laws. In return, citizens have duties that they owe to the country. One of the most important duties is being loyal to the country.

Citizenship is different than nationality. A person's nationality tells which country that person (called a national) is from. But nationals from a certain country are not always citizens of that country. They may have gained citizenship in another country, or they may have lost their citizenship. People who live in a country but are not citizens or nationals of that country are called aliens.

Becoming A Citizen

Every country has its own rules about who is a citizen and how to become one. Many countries have set up four basic ways to become a citizen. First, anyone who is born in the country is a citizen of that country. Second, anyone whose mother or father is a citizen of the country is also a

citizen. Third, anyone who is married to a citizen becomes a citizen. Fourth, a person who goes through a process called naturalization becomes a citizen.

Naturalization is a method for people who are born in one country to become citizens of another country. Laws on naturalization are different from country to country. Usually, people who want to be naturalized must have lived in the new country for several years and must speak the country's language. They may have to pass a test about the country's laws and history and often they must take an oath, or swear to be loyal to the country.



Rights And Responsibilities

Citizens have certain rights, and some countries give their citizens more or different rights than other countries. Citizens usually have the right to vote and the right to be elected to government jobs, as well. Other rights of citizens may include the right to follow any religion and the right to speak freely.

Citizens also have duties, or responsibilities. Voting is a responsibility as well as a right. Citizens must vote to make sure that their government works for the good of its citizens. Citizens also may have the duty to serve on a jury during a trial in court. Some countries make serving in the military a duty of all citizens.

Aliens may have some of the same rights as citizens but they usually cannot vote or serve in the government. Aliens also have some of the same responsibilities as citizens. They must obey the country's laws and they often must pay taxes as well.

Losing Citizenship

People cannot lose their citizenship except in very special cases. A government may take away the citizenship of someone who becomes a naturalized citizen of another country. A government also may take away the citizenship of people who show allegiance to another country. Examples of this include voting in a foreign election and serving in a foreign military. Trying to overthrow the government by force is a serious crime that can result in loss of citizenship. Naturalized citizens who commit serious crimes may lose their citizenship as well.



People who have lost their citizenship can end up as citizens of no country, in which case they are called stateless persons.

Quiz

- 1 Read the summary below. Choose the answer that BEST fits into the blank to complete the summary.
- Citizenship refers to being a full member of a country. _____. They also have duties, like serving on a jury or serving in the military. Every country has different rules for who is considered a citizen, how to become a citizen and how to stay a citizen.
- (A) Citizens have rights that are protected by the government, such as freedom of religion and speech.
 - (B) Citizens have responsibilities to their countries, like paying taxes and voting in elections.
 - (C) Naturalization is a process that people can go through to become citizens of a different country.
 - (D) Sometimes people's nationality (where they are from) is different from their citizenship (where they are citizens).
- 2 What is the MOST likely reason the author included the example about voting in a foreign election?
- (A) The author wanted to give information on how naturalized citizens are different from other citizens.
 - (B) The author wanted to show that it is possible for people to have their rights as citizens taken away.
 - (C) The author wanted to explain part of the process for becoming a citizen in a foreign country.
 - (D) The author wanted to highlight the rare cases in which aliens become stateless persons instead of citizens.
- 3 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].
- One of the most important duties is being loyal to the country.*
- Which selection from the article describes a consequence for not following through with this duty?
- (A) They may have to pass a test about the country's laws and history and often they must take an oath, or swear to be loyal to the country.
 - (B) Citizens also may have the duty to serve on a jury during a trial in court. Some countries make serving in the military a duty of all citizens.
 - (C) Aliens may have some of the same rights as citizens but they usually cannot vote or serve in the government.
 - (D) Trying to overthrow the government by force is a serious crime that can result in loss of citizenship.
- 4 Which piece of evidence from the article BEST shows how becoming a citizen of another country is a complex process?
- (A) But nationals from a certain country are not always citizens of that country. They may have gained citizenship in another country, or they may have lost their citizenship.
 - (B) First, anyone who is born in the country is a citizen of that country. Second, anyone whose mother or father is a citizen of the country is also a citizen. Third, anyone who is married to a citizen becomes a citizen.
 - (C) Naturalization is a way for people who are born in one country to become citizens of another country. Laws on naturalization are different from country to country.
 - (D) Usually, people who want to be naturalized must have lived in the new country for several years and must speak the country's language. They may have to pass a test about the country's laws and history and often they must take an oath, or swear to be loyal to the country.