

# CITIZENSHIP



# IN THE UNITED STATES



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

***Citizenship in the United States***  
**U.S. Immigration Report Series, Volume 1**

**About this Edition**

This document provides a general overview of citizenship and naturalization. The purpose of this report is to provide information to citizens, potential citizens, and other interested individuals about the meaning of citizenship and the rights and responsibilities incurred with this important status. Basic information is provided on U.S. laws and policies related to citizenship, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the naturalization process, historical trends in naturalization, and the loss of U.S. citizenship. Topics related to U.S. citizenship policy, such as dual citizenship, international migration, and transnationalism, are also briefly addressed.

U.S. citizenship is an important honor and responsibility, whether acquired at birth or through the naturalization process. Citizenship signifies inclusion and participation in the national community and carries with it both rights and obligations. This report intends to provide an overview of this important topic with the intention of enriching the experience for citizens and prospective citizens alike.



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and Immigration  
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# CITIZENSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

Research and Evaluation Division

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Office of Policy and Strategy

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and Immigration  
Services

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## INTRODUCTION

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

*United States Constitution*

What does it mean to be an American?

A shared sense of identity and purpose is what binds the people of the United States of America together as a national community. As citizens, we share a common belief in and respect for the principles of the United States and the freedoms it represents.

But what does it really mean to be a citizen of the United States of America? Citizenship is both a right and an obligation. It is bestowed upon persons born in the United States, persons born to U.S. citizens, and persons who pledge allegiance to the United States through the process of naturalization. Citizenship provides the protection of the U.S. Government and the rights that are guaranteed to citizens by the Constitution. In addition, citizenship carries with it certain obligations to our country, such as our individual responsibilities for political participation and national security.

Citizenship is a precious right, actively sought after by some, taken for granted by others. The choice to become a citizen is an important demonstration of one's respect for the institutions and people of the United States of America. This backgrounder provides an overview – for both native-born and naturalized citizens, and for those considering U.S. citizenship – of the



fundamentals of citizenship: what it is, what it means, how to obtain it, and how to lose it. However, it is not a “how-to” manual or a civics textbook. In contrast, it provides a summary of the many elements of citizenship policy, including the legal underpinnings of citizenship and the place of naturalization in the context of the United States as a nation of immigrants.

This document also describes the legal, international, and demographic changes that have had an impact on citizenship and naturalization throughout our nation's history. Section I answers the question, “What is Citizenship?” through a discussion of the meanings of the terms citizen, national, and citizenship, and a description of the ways of becoming a citizen, both in the United States and in other countries. Section II explains the rights and obligations of U.S. citizens and the paths to becoming a U.S. citizen. Section III explains the historical and legal context of citizenship and naturalization in the United States, and provides information on immigration and emigration, which are related to naturalization.

Section IV provides an overview of the mechanics of becoming a U.S. citizen, and Section V explains the ways in which citizenship can be lost. Finally, Section VI summarizes additional issues that may affect citizenship policy in the United States.

The purpose of this document is to inform all citizens and potential citizens of the issues concerning citizenship and United States policies related to citizenship. While the circumstances surrounding our nation and the world continually change, the basic concept of citizenship has remained unchanged – citizenship is an expression of our commitment to our country and our willingness to work together to protect and uphold the ideals it represents.













































































































































































































