

## Democracy in the United States

The United States is a representative democracy.

This means that our government is elected by citizens.

Here, citizens vote for their government officials.

These officials represent the citizens' ideas and concerns in government.

Voting is one way to participate in our democracy.

Citizens can also contact their officials when they want to support or change a law.

Voting in an election and contacting our elected officials are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy.



*Voting booth in Atascadero, California, in 2008. Photo by Ace Armstrong.  
Courtesy of the Polling Place Photo Project.*

## Becoming a U.S. Citizen



*Taking the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony in Washington, D.C.  
Courtesy of USCIS.*

The process required to become a citizen is called naturalization.

To become a U.S. citizen, you must meet legal requirements.

You must complete an interview with a USCIS officer.

You must also pass an English and Civics test.

Then, you take the Oath of Allegiance.

This means that you promise loyalty to the United States.

When you become a U.S. citizen, you also make these promises:

- ★ give up loyalty to other countries
- ★ defend the Constitution and laws of the United States
- ★ obey the laws of the United States
- ★ serve in the U.S. military (if needed)
- ★ do important work for the nation (if needed)

After you take the Oath of Allegiance, you are a U.S. citizen.

## Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens

Voting is one important right and responsibility of U.S. citizens.

Another right of all citizens is running for federal office.

Many naturalized citizens are elected to federal office.

However, to be president or vice president, you must be a natural-born United States citizen.

One responsibility of all citizens is to serve on a jury.

This means that you can help decide the result of a court case.

Only citizens can serve on a jury.



*U.S. Representative Dalip Singh Saund was born in India. He served in Congress from 1957 to 1962.*

*Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-102603*



*The jury box in the Howard M. Metzenbaum U.S. Courthouse, Cleveland, Ohio.*

*Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-highsm-10671.*

# Dividing the Power of Government

Federal and state laws control and protect different parts of people's lives.

Our Constitution explains the powers that the federal government has when it makes laws.

Federal powers are for things that must be the same for the whole country.

For example, the whole country needs one system for its money.

State powers are for things that can be different in each state.

For example, states can have different systems for giving driver's licenses.

## Federal Powers

- to print money
- to declare war
- to create an army
- to make treaties

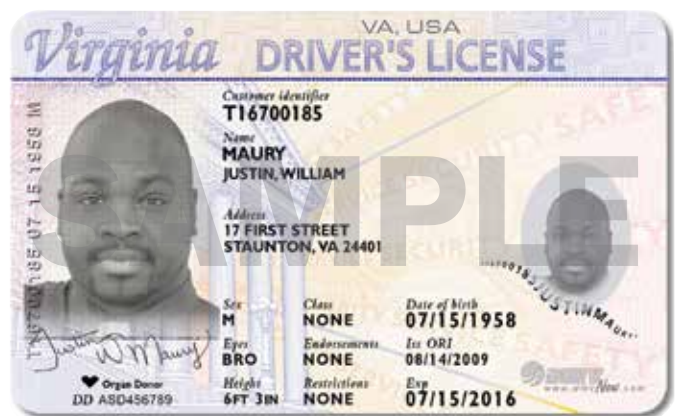
One Example  
of Federal Powers



## State Powers

- provide schooling and education
- provide protection (police)
- provide safety (fire departments)
- give a driver's license
- approve zoning and land use

One Example  
of State Powers



Driver's License from the Commonwealth of Virginia.