

Should Non-Citizens Vote?

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Immigrant workers pay taxes, work hard, serve in the military, send children to schools, and make contributions to their communities. Their families buy groceries at the corner store, play in the local park, and take the bus. Non-citizens are affected by the same community concerns as their citizen neighbors. They worry about the quality of public schools, struggle to find affordable housing, and want clean, safe streets. So why shouldn't they be able to vote and have a say in local government?

Many believe that non-citizens should be allowed to vote in local elections because voting gives residents a stake in the society by including them in the decisions that affect them. Like other citizens, immigrants tend to become more involved and invested in their communities and the nation when they have a voice in social and political processes.

Others believe that non-citizens should not be allowed to vote because then they would have less reason to become citizens. They worry that non-citizens may not have enough knowledge about or loyalty to this country.

What is the Connection between Citizenship and Voting?

Historically, the right to vote has never been tied to citizenship, which is why women and African Americans – who were both citizens – were widely denied the vote until 1920 (women) and in some places until 1965 (African-Americans). This idea that voting is tied to citizenship is rather recent. For most of our history (1776 until 1926), non-citizen voting was widespread in the United States. Non-citizens voted in forty states and federal territories in local, state and even federal elections. Non-citizens also held public office. The Constitution does not preclude it and the courts have upheld voting by non-citizens.

In fact, this country was founded on the idea of “no taxation without representation,” the belief that you cannot tax people who do not have their voice represented in government. And non-citizens certainly pay taxes.

Voting is about choosing the representatives that will make decisions about our lives. Because non-citizens lack voting rights, politicians can ignore their interests. Non-citizens are at risk of discrimination in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and criminal justice. This is not healthy for a democracy. Extending the right to vote to non-citizens would help keep government representative, responsive, and accountable to all.

Arguments FOR non-citizen voting rights

- 1. Non-citizens work hard, pay taxes, and contribute to society. Many non-citizens even fight and die in the country's military. People say that non-citizens have earned the right to vote because of these sacrifices to our nation.**
- 2. Voting is an important part of participating in our democracy. By allowing people to vote and be part of the democratic process, you encourage them to be active members in our society.**
- 3. Politicians often do things to please voters. Because non-citizens cannot vote, politicians do not feel responsible for helping them. As a result, the needs of non-citizens are ignored. Voting rights would make politicians more accountable to the needs of non-citizens.**