

# Do you want to be a good member of society? Voting, climate change efforts are a start, survey says

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You go to work. You pay your taxes. You vote, and you may even go to a place of worship regularly. But which of these actions, if any, make you

a good citizen?

According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, voting is a huge part of it.

The center did a survey this spring in 19 countries, presenting respondents with a list of actions to find out just what makes someone a good citizen in the public eye. Countries included the U.S., Canada, Belgium, France, Germany, Japan and Singapore.

Respondents were asked how much they consider the following actions an important part of being a good member of society:

- Voting
- Making choices that help reduce the effects of climate change
- Keeping up with current events in other countries
- Keeping up with politics in your own country
- Getting a coronavirus vaccine
- Joining demonstrations about issues important to you
- Attending [religious services](#) regularly

Richard Wike, Pew's global attitudes research director, said people have a broad idea of being a good member of society. But among the options presented to respondents, voting topped the list.

"We also found that most people say making choices to help reduce the effects of climate change is very important," he said. "Getting a coronavirus vaccine is very important. ... It's a lot of different things."

Generally, people believe it's imperative to vote to be considered a good member of society. Across included countries, a median of 91% said voting is important, and 73% consider it very important.

Still, keep in mind that about 15% of the world's democracies have mandatory voting, said Kimi King, a professor in the department of political science at the University of North Texas.

For King, it was surprising to see that in places where voting is mandatory such as Belgium, only 57% of respondents found voting very important, King said.

But sometimes people say the opposite of what they do, King said.

Voter turnout in the U.S. reached a 21st-century high of 66.8% in the 2020 [presidential election](#), although midterm election turnout has historically been much lower, generally hovering at 35% to 50% of the voting-eligible population in recent decades.

"There's a distinction (between) what people will tell you on a public opinion poll and then what they actually do in person," King said.

"People will say that they believe in God, that God is important, but when you go and drill into it, we are losing people in churches and we are becoming divided in terms of religiosity as an ideology."

Amy Cohen is executive director of the Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service at the George Washington University.

She said the way people might respond to the question of "What makes one a good member of society?" includes influence from their education, youth groups, families, newspapers, [news media](#) and social media.

She expected more people to find voting important. Then again, in the U.S., [civic engagement](#) isn't pushed in K-12 education as much as some would like it to be, she said.

## **Americans and the coronavirus vaccine**

Overall, Americans were less likely to say getting the coronavirus vaccine is important for being a good member of society, Pew found.

The majority in all 19 countries surveyed said it's at least somewhat important to get a coronavirus vaccine to be a good member of society. And in almost every country surveyed, those ages 50 and up were much more likely to say it's very important.

In every surveyed country, those who support the parties now governing were more likely to say the vaccine is important than those who don't support the governing parties.

U.S. numbers showed the largest difference in this category; 64% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents said vaccines are very important, while 20% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said it is very important.

Wike, from Pew, said Americans were also less likely to say fighting against climate change is vital to being a good member of society.

When asked how important it is to take steps to deal with climate change, the U.S. has the biggest ideological division, he said.

And voting and climate change weren't the only standouts in the survey.

There's also religion.

Most people surveyed said religious service attendance is not imperative to good citizenship. In the U.S., 22% found it very important, 24% found it somewhat important and 53% said it's not important at all.

Cohen, from the George Washington University, said religious attendance has been on the decline in the U.S. for quite some time.

Wike said the countries included in the [survey](#) are more economically advanced, higher-income countries. The COVID-19 pandemic, he said, has made it difficult to do surveys in countries such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, India and other nations in Southeast Asia.

"The good news is we're going to be back doing surveys in a broader set of [countries](#) early in 2023," he said. "We weren't able to do that in 2022."

Cohen said that while Pew asked interesting questions, there are others that could have been included. For example, respondents were asked if they think demonstrating makes someone a good citizen. Demonstrations are important, she said, but that's just one form of civic engagement.

"I think when you ask someone 'Do you think demonstrating is important?' there are people who think that's a negative," she said. "Being a positive citizen by doing work in your community or attending something that's not a protest, attending a vigil or an affirmation is a whole different way of asking the question."

She said questions Pew could have included are:

- Does philanthropy play a role in being a good citizen?
- Does doing direct service in your community play a role?

"I think there's a variety of different ways that people express their belonging in society and active citizenship," she said.

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