




Political Community


Guidelines
for Government and Citizenship

a publication of
The Center for Public Justice

- 1** The political community – government accountable to citizens, and citizens under government – constitutes one of the most important institutions of contemporary life.
- 2** Humans have the capacity to build political communities because God created us with this capacity. We therefore have the responsibility to create the organized institutional means of upholding and enforcing justice for all, even as we develop and pursue a wide variety of other, nonpolitical callings for which we were also created.
- 3** The mutual obligation of citizens and public officials exhibits a covenantal character, pointing us to the accountability of government and citizens to God. The same can be said for the mutual obligations belonging to members of families, schools, economic enterprises, and other organizations. In other words, humans bear responsibility to one another as creatures called to heed God’s standards of justice, love, and good stewardship.
- 4** The American political community is called a republic, which is derived from the Latin expression *res publica*. The term *res publica* refers to a public-legal community different in kind from nonpolitical communities and associations such as families, churches, businesses, and many kinds of voluntary organizations. States need not have a republican form of government, however, to be just public-legal communities. Our republic and other legitimate states should be communities of citizens whose governments have the right and the power to enforce public laws for the good of all.
- 5** A sound and healthy republic is one in which government recognizes and protects by law the independent, non-political responsibilities that belong to the people – rather than trying to direct the exercise of all responsibilities and to satisfy all needs. At the same time, the constitution of a political community must ensure that all citizens can participate freely in the political process through effective democratic representation. All citizens should also enjoy equal treatment in the rights, privileges, and benefits of the republic’s commonwealth, for the sake of the common good.
- 6** Electoral, administrative, and judicial systems constitute part of the means by which citizens hold a constitutional republic like ours accountable. Yet our republic is accountable to more than simply the will and interests of its people as expressed through lawful domestic processes. The United States shares the space and resources of this globe with other peoples organized into political communities, all accountable to God. Therefore, the American government has the responsibility to cooperate with other governments to promote and uphold international justice for all.

Implications

1. While America's constitutional design carefully protects individual rights and freedoms, the system fails to fully recognize and protect institutions and organizations such as families, schools, and other nonpolitical entities. The social diversity of human life demands just treatment, which in turn calls for public policies that sustain "structural pluralism" – not just the rights of individuals in relation to government.

2. A political community should not be fashioned as a community of faith, whether of Christian faith, secularist faith, or a general civil-religious faith. Rather, our republic should be constituted as a community of citizens that does not discriminate against anyone for reasons of faith. Consequently, all citizens should have equal access to and equal rights in the political community, regardless of faith – just as they should be so treated regardless of their skin color, gender, ethnicity, and social status. Christian efforts to promote a just society must therefore also include the aim to protect the religious freedom and other civil rights of all citizens – not only in their worship communities, but also in education, welfare services, and more. We refer to this notion as "confessional pluralism."

For Further Reading

Marshall, Paul. *God and the Constitution: Christianity and American Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Skillen, James W. *In Pursuit of Justice: Christian-Democratic Explorations*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

— — —. *Recharging the American Experiment*. Chapters 1-7. Baker Publishing Group, 1994.

For more information, search on this topic at www.cpjustice.org.

Published by the Center for Public Justice, the Guidelines for Government and Citizenship are papers that:

- Address the nature of political community, the task of government, and the responsibility of citizens.
 - Illustrate how the Center's philosophy expresses itself when applied to a number of key policy areas.
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