Every individual in a society has a responsibility to obey just laws and to disobey and resist unjust laws.

Write a response in which you discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the claim. In developing and supporting your position, be sure to address the most compelling reasons and/or examples that could be used to challenge your position.

Laws are generally enforced by governments to aid stability of society, and are generally justified as being vital to the population’s welfare. When dealing with an individual’s responsibility with respect to evaluating laws and obeying them only if they are justified, an absolute stance is hard to take, as there are many things at play, that may affect what ‘responsibility’ encompasses, and what may be safe or feasible for a citizen to do. In my opinion, I disagree with the stated claim, albeit only to a certain extent. In reasoning out a stance on this issue, there are two main points to consider.

To begin, it may not always be safe or feasible for an individual to obey only the laws they like, and to resist laws that they perceive as unjust. Consider the authoritarian regime of the People’s Republic of China, and the well-known Tianmen Square incident: Students and young people gathered to protest the lack of transparency in the government’s functioning, and they demanded a provision for them to be able to express their dissent. This is a clear case of individuals resisting the laws that kept them from having any amount of legislative power, which they believed to be greatly unjust. One may argue that this led to a huge pro-democracy movement, and that it even set an example for the people of other countries to protest injustice. However, since then, all information about the incident was claimed to be untrue by the Chinese government, and lots of censorship measures were put in place that effectively banned people from even acknowledging it. This has greatly suppressed any potential for the Chinese people who want to have a voice in their government. Consider the points of view of the students: They were fired upon by the military, and anyone suspected of being pro-democracy was severely punished. For the countless students who lost their lives that day, standing up to laws that they considered unjust led to their deaths. Thus, in these kind of situations where the government is highly authoritarian, and hence more likely to punish rebels harshly, it would not be feasible for individuals to ‘rise up’ against the establishment, or in their best interests, considering the trouble that they may get into.

Should people simply disobey laws that they think are unjust? One may argue that such defiance would set an example for those who are afraid to disobey unjust laws, and that this would send a message to the government. However, an assumption made here is that all individuals know what is best for them, and that what they consider ‘just’ is skewed by their other views, and possibly faulty moral compass. Consider the ‘anti-vax’ movement of the United States, that was composed of people who were against vaccinations, making baseless claims that vaccines are a cause of autism and that there were supposedly ‘micro-chips’ in them. They provided no empirical evidence for their claims, and dived into conspiracy after conspiracy when challenged. When such people disobeyed laws by not wearing a mask during the COVID-19 pandemic era when a mask mandate was in place, they placed themselves at a higher risk of contracting the disease. Hence, when an individual’s view on a law or measure goes against what they believe is true, but they have no substantiative evidence to back up their claims on the apparent ‘injustice’ of the law, then it would not be in their best interests to flout the law and be a potential hazard to other people.

In conclusion, every individual in a society does not have a responsibility to obey only the laws that are ‘just,’ since it may not be safe for them, as individuals, to openly flout the law, or it might be the case that their view of justice is heavily skewed. The reason I do not ‘strongly’ disagree with the prompt is the fact that, indeed, there may be some situations where civil disobedience works in favour of the people. However, based on the points discussed above, my stance on the issue is that on average, the stated claim is proven to be untrue or unreasonable.