

Presidential Term Limits Encyclopedia Article

Presidential Term Limits

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Presidential Term Limits

Franklin Roosevelt's reelection to an unprecedented third and fourth term as U.S. president during World War II had a permanent impact on American politics: It inspired the Twenty-Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the amendment that limits presidents to two terms in office.

In his first term as president, during the Great Depression, Roosevelt demonstrated an impressive ability to relate to the common person. He instilled confidence and hope during hard times, and in 1936, though the Depression dragged on, the American public reelected him for a second term. In 1940 Americans were uneasy about the prospect of entering the worldwide war; again they chose Roosevelt—a familiar and comforting leader—as their president. Four years later, when victory appeared certain, new worries arose: When war production ceased, the U.S. economy might go back into a depression. Trusting that Roosevelt could prevent this, the public made him president for a fourth time.

Many Americans, though perhaps highly supportive of Roosevelt, generally believed a person should not hold the presidential office for so long. Their increased powers and influence would likely be unhealthy for the U.S. governmental system that relies on a balance between the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. Therefore, in 1951, the Twenty-Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted. The brief amendment begins simply, "No person shall be elected to the office of President more than twice...." Because of this amendment, Roosevelt's political legacy will likely remain unique in U.S. history.