



CONSTITUTIONUS.COM

HOW MANY TERMS CAN A PRESIDENT SERVE?

Multiple Choice Quiz

ABOUT THIS QUIZ



How Many Terms Can a President Serve?

This quiz is about Presidential terms.

All questions have 4 possible answers of which only 1 is correct.

You may read the article over the next few pages to freshen up before taking the quiz!

At the back of the book, will be an answer sheet.

For more information, go to:
<https://constitutionus.com>



How many terms can a US President Serve?

In the original constitution, there was nothing written about how many terms a president could serve. However, after the 22nd amendment was passed, it became clearer.

How many terms can a president serve?

How long is a presidential term?

According to the constitution and the 22nd amendment, a president can only serve for two terms. The length of a presidential term is 4 years.

A President's Term

Some leaders of countries seem to have an indefinite period of rule. In Russia, Vladimir Putin has served almost two decades as president.

In the United States, there are Constitutional limits to prevent one person from holding too much power for too long.

So, how long can you be president for and when did this rule come into play?

How Long Can A President Serve?

Under normal circumstances, a president can serve 8 years. The 8 years is split into two terms of 4 years each.

The current constitution with amendments states that a president can serve a four-year term from the inauguration and seek re-election. If they are successful in gaining a second term, they are not allowed to run for office again after finishing the second term.

Instead, the party must find a new nominee and campaign for them with the endorsement of the current leader.

Exceptions to the 2 Terms Rule

Yet, there are some cases where this isn't quite so straightforward.

Some presidents don't start their journey as President-Elect but instead enter office mid-term. Also, terms don't have to be consecutive and this two-term rule wasn't always in force.

How Did Franklin D. Roosevelt Serve More Than Two Terms?

We are used to presidents serving for 4 years, seeking re-election, and then passing the baton on at the end of a second term. However, this hasn't always been the case.

Political and social changes tended to allow for a natural line of succession as different parties took power and new faces became the best candidates. FDR was the exception to the rule.

Franklin D. Roosevelt served 4 terms as president

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected into office four times, although he only served a fraction of the fourth before his death. His popularity and the success of his policies throughout his presidency meant that he could easily seek re-election with the support of the party and voters.

His full presidency ran from March 4, 1933, to April 12, 1945, which saw the nation past the Depression, through the New Deal, and into the Second World War.

In total, that meant three full terms and one partial term. He was elected for a fourth but died after just 2 months and 23 days into his fourth term.

Did Any Other President Try For A Third Term?

The rule about limiting the president to two terms came into the constitution so late, you would expect to see more three-term presidencies earlier on. But, this wasn't the case and Roosevelt was the only one to do so. This is because of a combination of factors regarding the health and popularity of two-term presidents.

There was also an unwritten agreement to stick to two terms. The idea of a two-term limit had been around since the Constitutional Convention and both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were said to be in favor. James Madison, James Monroe, and Andrew Jackson all decided to continue with the principle.

This wasn't the case for everyone though, as there were presidents that wanted to continue. Ulysses S. Grant was one of them and made different attempts to do so. There was an initial plan to stay on and try for re-election for a consecutive third term in 1876 but negative opinion persuaded him not to. Still, he put himself up for nomination in 1880 and lost to James Garfield.

What changed to limit the president to 2 terms?

In order to stop this sort of extreme presidential run from happening again after Roosevelt, the country needed an amendment to the constitution. The 22nd Amendment states that

“no person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice”

This came from House Joint Resolution 27 following the death of Roosevelt. It took 3 years, 343 days for the ratification process to reach completion on February 27, 1951.

There was a vital caveat to this amendment that affected the presidency of current president Harry S. Truman. Because he was the incumbent president and the amendment was to apply to future presidents, he could have served more than two terms. However, this important grandfather clause ended up being unnecessary. Truman could have sought re-election in 1952 even though he served one full term and most of Roosevelt's fourth. But, his approval rating of 27% was enough for him to step aside.

Can A President Serve For More Than 8 Years?

This is where things get a little more complicated. A presidential term is fixed to 4 years with the Inauguration taking place on the same date, January 20th. This means that two full presidential terms add up to 8 years and no more. It is also interesting to measure the length of a president's time in office by day. All two-term presidents served for 2,922 days apart from Washington's 2,865.

Washington took power before it was decided to have all terms begin on the 4th of March. This later switched to the 20th of January. However, there is a potential situation where a president could serve for 10 years. It all depends on how they come to power.

The 25th Amendment is a great tool to protect the office of the president and ensure that the right person is in charge at all times. There are plenty of examples of presidents that didn't see the end of their term. Impeachment, death by natural causes, and assassination all meant that the nation could have been without a leader until the next election if there wasn't someone to fill in. This role typically falls to the vice president, unless there is good reason to go further down the line of succession.

A vice president may be sworn-in directly after the death or removal of a president from office and then seek to be nominated as the party candidate at the next election.

The second clause of the 22nd amendment states the following:

“no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once.”

Therefore, as long as that original partial term didn't exceed two years, presidents are then free to stand again after a successful full term. The opportunity is there for a 10-year term. However, this has never happened. There are a few cases of presidents that took over mid-term and went on to be elected themselves but none went any further for various reasons.

Lyndon B. Johnson's Potential For A 9-Year Term

The best example of a modern-day president to come close to this achievement is Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson originally came to power from his role as vice president. Kennedy was assassinated 1 year, 1 month, and 29 days into his second term and Johnson took over immediately. After completing this term, Johnson was re-elected by a landslide in 1964. The rule on the length of the partial term meant he was allowed to run again in 1968. This was considered, but Johnson ultimately pulled out due to a combination of health and political reasons. There were fears about his heart and his handling of the Vietnam War.

Do Presidential Terms Have To Be Consecutive?

No rule states that a president must take on their second term in office directly after their first. However, it is rare to see non-consecutive terms in office. For a start, many of the presidents of the period of the late 20th and early 21st century were successful in their bid for direct re-election. Before Trump became unsuccessful in his attempt for re-election, three presidents were able to achieve two consecutive terms.

Bill Clinton won the election of 1992 and stayed until 2000. Here power switched parties with Bush Jr. taking the presidency. In 2008 Bush had to step down and his successor fought for election against Barack Obama. Obama stayed in power until 2016 when Trump won his election.

Grover Cleveland's Non-Consecutive Terms

Presidents that lose their re-election bid are perfectly entitled to try again later on in life. Those 8 years in power could be pretty far apart, as long as the same person doesn't stay in office for more than those two terms. There have been plenty of attempts to get back into power at a later date, but only one was successful.

Grover Cleveland came to power on March 4, 1885, and served his full four-year term until 1889. He had lost the bid for re-election in the 1888 election. But, that didn't stop him from trying again in the next race. Not only did he achieve the party nomination but the public voted him back in during the 1892 election. He would then serve his second full term – as the 24th President of the United States – from March 4, 1893, to March 4, 1897.

Presidents That Tried For Non-Consecutive Terms And Failed

It is a tough process to win back the trust of a party and supporters after one failed attempt, especially if a political landscape evolves beyond the ideas that got you into power. Some former presidents have tried to go back to their party and return to the office, while others evolved in a different direction.

Martin Van Buren's Attempt To Regain The Democratic Nomination

Van Buren was one of a small number of presidents that did not retire gracefully and leave politics to younger men. He was up for re-election in 1840 but lost, leading him to retire. Dissatisfied with the outcome, he came back to political life in 1844 to fight for the nomination. He came close but lost to Polk. By the time the 1848 election came around, there was growing tension between Van Buren and the Democratic Party, and his chances of nomination were even slimmer. So, he decided to run as a candidate for the Free Soil Party. This got him on the ballot again for the first time in eight years but didn't earn him many votes.

Teddy Roosevelt's Attempt To Remove Taft From Power

One of the most interesting cases of a president trying their luck numerous times is that of Teddy Roosevelt. His initial run consisted of a partial term of 3 years, 5 months, and 18 days and then one full term following his election.

At this point, Roosevelt passed the torch to Taft and declined to run for a second full term. At this point in history, it would have been fine according to the constitution for him to continue. The problem was that he regretted his endorsement after Taft's election in 1908, which led him to challenge Taft for the nomination in 1912.

Taft retained the Republican nomination, so Roosevelt tried a different approach to oust him from power. He formed the Bull Moose Party (officially known as the Progressive Party) to challenge as a third-party independent. The vote was split leading the Democrat Woodrow Wilson won the race.

Could We See Non-Consecutive Presidential Terms Again?

One of the curiosities about the rules for running for president is that there is a lower age limit of 35 but no upper limit. Therefore, there is nothing to stop former single-term presidents from running again 4 or even 8 years after a failed bid. The flip side to that is that you now have presidents that are already quite old when they take office for the first time. This limits the chances of any interesting campaigns for non-consecutive terms in the future.

At the moment, we have two living former presidents that served a single term and could theoretically come back. The odds of Jimmy Carter getting back into politics are incredibly low given that he is 97. There is always speculation about Donald Trump trying again in 2024, at which point he would be 77. Then there is Joe Biden, who is already 79 in his first year in office.

Two-term Presidencies Are Here To Stay

The two-term rule may be a little more complex than it first appears, but it is an essential part of presidential rule in the United States. Even before the ratification of the 22nd Amendment, there was that unwritten agreement that two terms were more than enough. This is unlikely to ever change.

Multiple Choice Quiz

1. How many terms can a President serve?

- A. 2
- B. 3
- C. 4
- D. As many as one wants

2. A full Presidential term will last for how many years?

- A. 2
- B. 4
- C. 6
- D. 8

3. What part of the Constitution specifies the number of terms a President can serve?

- A. 21st Amendment
- B. 22nd Amendment
- C. 23rd Amendment
- D. Not listed

4. Which President served more terms in office than any other?

- A. Theodore Roosevelt
- B. William Howard Taft
- C. Grover Cleveland
- D. Franklin D. Roosevelt

5. What inspired the limit on how many terms a President can serve?

- A. An unwritten agreement set by George Washington
- B. A specific rule listed in the Articles of Confederation
- C. Ulysses Grant's attempt to run for a third term
- D. The Civil War

6. A President can serve more than eight years in office if that person:

- A. Was in the military
- B. Has at least twenty years of prior elected experience
- C. Is listed as an independent politician
- D. Starts one's tenure midway through the predecessor's term

7. Who is the only President to serve his terms as President non-consecutively?

- A. James Garfield
- B. Ulysses Grant
- C. Grover Cleveland
- D. William Howard Taft

8. If a President loses reelection, that person can run for the Presidency once again when?

- A. Four years later
- B. Eight years later
- C. Twelve years later
- D. The President won't be able to run again after losing

9. The consecutive presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama are noteworthy for how these three Presidents all:

- A. Were in the same political party
- B. Served two consecutive terms in office
- C. Had attempted a run for President at least once before winning
- D. Planned to run for office again after leaving the White House

10. Which late-nineteenth-century President attempted to run for a third term but was unsuccessful in doing so?

- A. Ulysses Grant
- B. William McKinley
- C. Benjamin Harrison
- D. Chester A. Arthur

11. What can a President do surrounding the next candidate in one's party after serving one's last term in office?

- A. Personally select the next person who will run for office
- B. Raise funds for the next candidate
- C. Plan the primary schedule for determining who runs next
- D. Provide an endorsement of the next candidate

Multiple Choice Quiz Answers

1. A
2. B
3. B
4. D
5. A
6. D
7. C
8. A
9. B
10. A
11. D