

**THE TWO-TERM PRESIDENTIAL TRADITION
BEFORE THE ENACTMENT OF
THE 22ND AMENDMENT**

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Abstract

The U.S. Constitution of 1787 set no limit on Presidential reelection. When George Washington retired at the end of his second term because of personal considerations, he initiated a two-term precedent.

Thomas Jefferson opposed the perpetual reeligibility of the Presidency, and warned of the danger of a gradual degeneracy of the Presidency, into first a life tenure and then a hereditary monarchy. In order to prevent the possibility of monarchy, Jefferson decided to follow the precedent set by Washington, and influenced James Madison and James Monroe to retire at the ends of their second terms. The two-term tradition was established as an unwritten law and maintained until it was shattered by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940.

Although the two-term tradition reduced the power and prestige of the President as a political leader as the time for his forced retirement neared, it safeguarded the principle of the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances.

Four Presidents tried to challenge the tradition on grounds that they already had had the support of the people twice in the general elections and they were not too old to undertake the burden of the Presidency, but they failed.

Nevertheless, the people did not perceive the two-term tradition as an absolute taboo. The defiance of the two-term tradition by FDR proved that the lack of limitation on the Presidential terms was a flexible institutional framework in a time of national crisis. The two-term tradition, combined with the unlimited reeligibility of the Presidency permitted by the Constitution, had great elasticity.