

## Q36 – The President of the United States is elected for how many years?

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### **DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:**

We elect our president for a term of four years, but it could have been much longer. The form of government best known to the Framers was the British monarchy. Some Framers wanted a president to serve for life – like a king. That idea narrowly failed, and Article II of the Constitution set the president’s term at four years.

At the end of his first term, our first president considered retiring. But Washington’s colleagues implored him to serve a second term for the good of the nation.

The Constitution sets no term limit, but Washington feared that if he died in office, he would set a precedent of lifetime tenure – like a king. So after eight years he went home.

Thomas Jefferson – the second president to serve two terms – believed eight years was enough for anyone. And every two-term president followed his example.

FDR: “I, Franklin Delano Roosevelt –“

Until FDR in 1940. As Roosevelt neared the end of his second term, Europe had plunged into World War II. Roosevelt decided he would run for an unprecedented third term on two conditions: If the war in Europe worsened, and if his party nominated him.

In the spring of 1940, the war did worsen. In a matter of weeks, Adolf Hitler had conquered Western Europe.

That summer, Democrats re-nominated FDR – and in November, he won.

In 1944, with America neck deep in the war, Roosevelt ran a fourth time, and won again, but died just a few months into his term. FDR’s tenure revived the Framers’ fear of a lifetime president: a king by another name. In 1951, the people ratified the Twenty-second Amendment – limiting presidents to two terms.