

The absence of an upper age limit for the presidency and Congress has been a subject of debate and discussion. With the advanced age of some U.S. political leaders in the spotlight, 79 percent of Americans favor maximum age limits for elected officials, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. Some argue that age can be a relevant factor in assessing a candidate’s ability to fulfill the demanding responsibilities of the office, given the physical and mental demands of both roles. Others believe that voters should be free to choose a candidate based on their qualifications and policies, regardless of age.

The U.S. Constitution sets minimum, but not maximum, age thresholds for presidents and members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The minimum age is 35 for presidents, 30 for senators and 25 for representatives. How would we determine if our elected representatives are too old?

Age of President of the United States

Democratic President Joe Biden, who turns 81 in November, plans to run for reelection in 2024. His predecessor in the White House, 77-year-old Donald Trump, is running for the Republican nomination. A victory next November would make either man the oldest person ever elected U.S. president. Both candidates advanced age has raised questions about whether either should stand for a second term. Asked about Biden’s age, the White House points to accomplishments, including the 2020 presidential election, helping Democrats stave off losses in the 2022 elections and getting a host of legislation through Congress as president.

Do term limits help to keep our president productive and effective in leading our country? As to a president’s terms, the 22nd Amendment was enacted to prohibit presidential candidates from serving more than two terms (or ten years if serving out the remainder of another president’s term) in the years after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to four terms during the Great Depression and World War II. However, the leading candidates in the 2024 election both started their presidential careers at an advanced age.

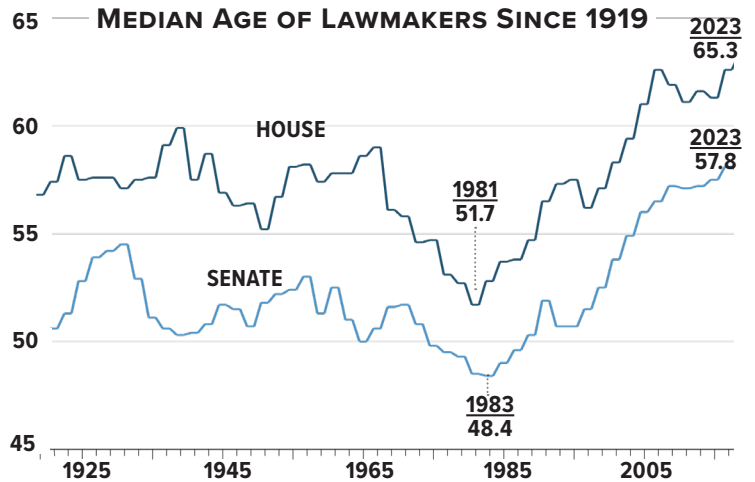
Age in the 118th U.S. Congress

Age has also become a focal point on Capitol Hill, with some members staying in office for decades. As you can see from the chart, the age of our current 118th Congress is 59, with the Senate average age of 66 and House is 57.

A recent USA Today/Suffolk University Poll asked 1,000 voters specifically about age limits for Congress, with 72 percent in favor of some limit. More specifically, 40 percent endorse setting a maximum age limit of 75, 23 percent recommend an age limit of 65, 22 percent do not agree with an age limit, and 9 percent want an age limit of 85.

If there was a maximum age of 75 for members of Congress, 14 of the 100 sitting senators and 33 sitting representatives would be ineligible to serve. Democrat Dianne Feinstein of California, who died in September 2023 at age 90, had been the Senate’s oldest member. Currently,

the longest-serving member is Senator Charles Grassley, who is 90 and has served in the House and Senate for more than 48 years. Recently, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, an 81-year-old Kentucky Republican, has faced a series of health scares. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is 83, serving 36 years, and has announced she would seek reelection in 2024.



Constitutional Amendment Required

Ultimately, any change to the eligibility requirements for the presidency or Congress would require a constitutional amendment, which is a complex and lengthy process. Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote in the U.S. Senate and House, followed by ratification by three-quarters of the states. Alternatively, Congress could call a convention to propose amendments if requested by two-thirds of the states, but that threshold has never been reached. To date, there have been no successful efforts to add an age limit to the presidency, and it remains a matter for citizens to consider when voting for presidential candidates.

RESEARCH & SHORT ANSWER EXERCISE

- Which amendment impacts a president’s term and how?

- For members of Congress, would you prefer *term limits*, *age limits*, *both*, or *neither*? _____
Please explain why. _____

- For the president, do you recommend an *age limit* and if so, what age and explain your rationale? _____

