

BIRTH OF A NEW PRECEDENT?

Should we amend the Constitution to let foreign-born U.S. citizens become president?

No person except a natural-born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President . . .

-- Article II, Section 1

When the Framers wrote a new Constitution for the United States, fears of harmful foreign influence were very much on their minds. In Europe, royal families in one country often tried to put one of their own on another nation's throne. To ensure that this could never happen in America, the Framers adopted a clause making foreign-born U.S. citizens (except those present at the time of the Constitution's adoption) ineligible to become president.

But the United States today is a far cry from the country formed 216 years ago. Millions of immigrants have made ours the most diverse nation on Earth. Some people think it's time to change the Constitution to reflect that reality. This fall, Congress is considering various proposed



Photograph by Ron Murray (ImageActive), courtesy of the Office of the Governor of California.

constitutional amendments to provide "equal opportunity to govern." If adopted, anyone who has been a naturalized citizen for a set period—20 years by one proposal, 35 by others—could become president, so long as he or she has reached the age of 35 and has lived in this country for at least 14 years.

Supporters see this as a matter of equal rights—all Americans, they say, should have the chance to dream about becoming president, regardless of where they were born. Opponents, however, say that the Constitution doesn't offer to anyone the "right" to become president. They argue that, regardless of their loyalty to America, people born in another country could never fully escape the influence of their native land.

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YES

- People who become U.S. citizens by choice often better appreciate the Constitution and American values than those who are born here.
- Fears about a foreigner becoming president may have been well founded in 1787, but they're outdated and anti-American today.
- Naturalized U.S. citizens hold other elected offices, pay taxes, serve on juries and die in combat; they should be able to run for president.
- A minor change in wording to one clause of the Constitution will not affect how the nation is governed.

NO

- There can't be any question of "dual loyalties" in the person who serves as both chief executive and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.
- With more than 250 million native-born Americans to choose from, we don't need to expand the pool of those qualified to become president.
- Unlike other branches of government or the military, the power of the presidency is vested in a single individual, so it's appropriate to require that person to be native-born.
- Unless there's a compelling need to change the Constitution—which, in this case, there is not—the original wording should not be altered from what the Framers wrote.