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“Holding the President More Accountable and Establishing Trust: Reevaluating Presidential Qualifications”

**Introduction**

Trust is the most essential aspect of the political process. Without it, the government would struggle to function efficiently and would lack public support. As the highest office in the nation and arguably the most powerful position in the world, the president must be held more accountable to foster this trust. Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution established the formal requirements for a presidential candidate. The person must be a natural-born citizen of the United States, a resident for at least 14 years, and be at least 35 years old. This is a long-established precedent but in the modern era, it may require some change to keep up with the ever-changing political landscape. In recent years, there have been presidential candidates and even presidents who may be perceived by some as unfit for the position. To protect our democracy, we must make some changes to counteract this trend. The role of the president demands far more than mere eligibility. It requires a deep understanding of law, economics, diplomacy, and crisis management, as well as the moral and ethical integrity to lead responsibly. In an era marked by complex domestic and global challenges, ranging from economic instability and national security threats to climate change and geopolitical conflicts, the absence of more rigorous qualifications raises concerns about whether any individual meeting only these minimal standards is truly prepared to lead the country. To safeguard the stability and progress of the nation, it is worth considering a constitutional amendment that would establish additional qualifications, ensuring that future presidents possess the education, experience, ability, and ethical standards necessary to make informed decisions in the best interest of the American people.

**Education and Government Experience**

The first proposed change I would make to Article II would include an educational and government experience requirement. First, I believe that having an educated president is essential to preserving and strengthening American democracy. Several jobs have minimum degree requirements for a position but not for the presidency. Being the president of the United States is arguably one of the most difficult and expert-driven vocations ever. So why would people seeking this office not be required to be educated? Obtaining a college degree has crucial benefits such as comprehending global issues, addressing challenges, and making decisions that impact millions of lives (Chin, 2024). I affirm that there should be a minimum requirement of at least a bachelor's degree to become president, ensuring that the person becoming the leader of the nation has the skills and education necessary to govern the United States.

Moreover, on the topic of government experience, a Gallup Poll from 2016 states that 72 percent of the public believe that a state governor would be the best candidate for president. Additionally, the American people demonstrated in the poll, “that experience in major governmental offices -- whether as a senator, governor or cabinet member -- is an asset for anyone seeking the presidency” (Norman, 2016). It is evident that the American people expect their leaders to possess meaningful experience in the field of government. Government experience would give them the ability to handle tense and difficult situations as well as have a better understanding of issues like the economy, infrastructure, and more. Furthermore, those who have held leadership roles in government or other civil institutions have gained first-hand experience in policy-making, negotiation, and administration, making them better equipped to assume the responsibilities of the presidency. I postulate that requiring some amount of government experience whether in politics, the military, or as a civil servant would reap immense rewards for the accountability and aptitude of our presidential candidates. To safeguard the stability and progress of the nation, it is worth considering a constitutional amendment that would establish additional qualifications, ensuring that future presidents possess the education, experience, ability, and ethical standards necessary to make informed decisions in the best interest of the American people.

**Ethical and Criminal Conduct Standards**

Another proposition would be to include ethical and criminal conduct standards. This would mean ensuring that any candidate running for president has no criminal background. While the U.S. Constitution provides mechanisms for impeachment and removal from office in cases of misconduct, it does not impose any restrictions on individuals with serious criminal histories from running for or holding the presidency. I hold that the president of the nation should serve as an exemplary character and while that may be interpreted differently by different perspectives, I think anyone with a criminal history should not be considered a candidate. This is a practice demonstrated in democracies around the world. For example, in Canada, a similar democracy to our own, people are ineligible to run for office if they were “convicted of committing an offense that is an illegal practice or, a person who committed an offense that is considered a corrupt practice” (Canada, 2024). Currently, no legal restrictions are preventing convicted felons from running for president in the United States. Additionally, another intriguing aspect of the lack of these restrictions is that some U.S. states have laws that prohibit felons from running for state and local office. However, these restrictions do not extend to federal positions, including the presidency (Astor, 2023). Allowing individuals with a history of such crimes to run for office poses a significant risk to governance, as it may invite unethical decision-making, conflicts of interest, and potential erosion of public trust in the executive branch. An amendment to require the president to have no criminal background would immensely benefit the American people and prevent those who are not fit to be president from doing so. To have a felony as a typical American is life-altering and prevents one from voting, securing loans, governmental assistance, and many more things. (Coates, 2024). This is not the characteristic of a person who should be able to serve as the leader of the free world. When a person is named a felon, he or she becomes almost a second-class citizen, and that is not someone who should be given the power of the presidency. In many other fields, there are background checks and requirements to not have any criminal history. For example, prospective lawyers must inform bar examiners of any recklessness throughout their lives. This can include anything from noise complaints and speeding tickets to more serious indiscretions. The goal is to reduce the number of morally unethical lawyers and, in turn, decrease the risk of harm to the public (Coates, 2024). Why would we have these requirements for other jobs but not the highest office in the nation? Implementing an amendment that disqualifies individuals convicted of felonies would not be an infringement on democratic participation but rather a necessary measure to protect the integrity of the office and ensure that only individuals of sound moral character and ethical judgment are entrusted with the power to lead the country. Such a reform would reinforce public confidence in the presidency, demonstrating a national commitment to upholding the highest standards of leadership, accountability, and trust in government.

**Cognitive Testing and Age Limit**

A final proposal I would add into an amendment for Article II, Section 1, would be to include a cognitive test of all candidates running for president. This would ensure that people have the mental fitness to be president and can handle all the intricacies of the job. A president’s responsibilities are multifaceted ranging from making life-altering decisions on matters of national security, economic policy, and foreign diplomacy, to serving as a figurehead for the country and addressing the public during crises. Given the extraordinary pressures associated with leading a nation, it is essential that those seeking the office possess the capabilities to carry out these duties effectively. In the past few presidential cycles, we have witnessed an increase in the age of presidential candidates and nominees. This has caused some concern over the abilities of candidates, and I believe that there should be a system in place to examine whether aspirants are capable of withstanding the rigors of the office. Such assessments could be conducted by an independent, bipartisan medical board to provide an objective evaluation of a candidate's fitness for duty. A former White House physician stated in a *New York Times* article that he believes “all candidates running for the office of president must agree to undergo a comprehensive neurocognitive assessment that follows critical decision-making guidelines, performed as a baseline and periodically repeated” (Kuhlman, 2024). Undoubtedly, Dr. Kuhlman has first-hand experience with the office of president, and he believes that to best serve the American people, we must ensure the president is qualified for the role. It is also a fact that past the age of 60, the average person’s cognitive abilities decline, specifically skills dealing with reasoning, memory, and speed. Furthermore, some jobs that deal with public safety like airline pilots and FBI agents have age limits in place (Kuhlman, 2024). These jobs assume that age declines a person’s ability to perform in these roles, so why would we not hold the same standards for the president? I believe that we would experience monumental merits from creating an amendment that includes a federal age limit for the president. I propose that there should be an age limit that states that candidates must be 70 years old or younger by the date of their inauguration. According to Pew Research, “nearly 80% of U.S. adults surveyed support having upper age limits for federal elected officials, including the president” (Escobar, 2024). Accordingly, this is an issue that is important to the American people, and I think the combination of mandatory cognitive tests for candidates and age limits would safeguard the proficiency of the presidency but also enhance public confidence in the electoral process. The American people need to be able to have trust in the experts that those running for president are suited and able to fulfill the role.

**Proposed Amendment**

"No person shall be elected to the office of President of the United States unless he or she is a natural-born citizen, have been a resident of the United States for at least fourteen years, and have attained the age of thirty-five years. Additionally, the individual must: (1) possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution; (2) have at least some experience in public service, including roles in government, military, or public administration; (3) have no convictions for felonies involving corruption, treason, or violent crimes; (4) pass a cognitive health examination administered by an independent, bipartisan medical board; and (5) must be 70 years old or younger at the date of his or her inauguration"​

**Conclusion**

Amending the Constitution to refine presidential qualifications is an essential step in ensuring that those elected to the presidency possess the necessary knowledge, experience, and integrity to lead effectively. By establishing more strict criteria in an amendment, such as advanced educational credentials and a proven track record in public service, we can elevate the standards for presidential candidates while maintaining democratic accessibility. This approach not only prioritizes competency and accountability but also protects the stability of the nation by equipping leaders to navigate complex challenges. Ultimately, these amendments would foster public confidence in the presidency and contribute to a more effective and responsible government, ensuring that the values and responsibilities of this esteemed office are upheld for the benefit of all citizens.

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