

This Day in History... November 7, 1944

FDR Elected to Record Fourth Term

On November 7, 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt made history as the first—and only—US president elected to a fourth term. His remarkable political career reshaped both the country's government and its role in the world.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt first ran for president in 1932, at the height of the Great Depression. He faced incumbent Herbert Hoover, whose policies many Americans blamed for the country's severe economic collapse. Roosevelt's message of hope, confidence, and reform electrified voters. His campaign promise of a "New Deal" offered not only recovery, but a vision of renewal. Once elected, he moved quickly to fulfill that promise—launching dozens of programs within his first 100 days in office. These efforts, including job creation and financial reforms, helped stabilize the economy and restore public faith in government. Roosevelt's leadership and optimism inspired struggling Americans, earning him a landslide re-election in 1936.



Roosevelt won in 1944 by 3.6 million votes – a 7.5% margin.



Roosevelt won 36 states against Dewey's 12.

By the end of his second term, the world had changed dramatically.

War had erupted across Europe and Asia, and Roosevelt faced a difficult decision: whether to follow George Washington's example and step aside, or continue leading through the mounting global crisis. No president before him had sought a third term, and even Roosevelt himself had once implied he wouldn't. But as Nazi Germany advanced through Europe, he believed his experience was essential to America's security. Despite fierce opposition from critics who accused him of seeking too much power, Roosevelt decided to run again in 1940—and he won handily.

Just over a year later, on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. The next day, Roosevelt delivered his famous "Day of Infamy" speech, declaring war on Japan and thrusting the United States into World War II. He quickly forged strong alliances with Britain and other countries, forming the Allied Powers to confront Germany, Italy, and Japan. The war effort dominated Roosevelt's third term, and his steady leadership at home and abroad earned widespread respect.

As the war continued, Roosevelt faced yet another election in 1944. Though he easily secured his party's nomination, growing concerns about his health and age dominated the discussion. Many in the Democratic Party opposed his current vice president, Henry Wallace, believing him too liberal and unpredictable to serve as president if Roosevelt were unable to continue. Party leaders urged Roosevelt to select Senator Harry S. Truman instead. Though Roosevelt barely knew Truman, he agreed to the change in the name of party unity.

Meanwhile, the Republicans chose New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey as their nominee. Dewey, a skilled prosecutor and moderate Republican, campaigned on a promise to end what he called the inefficiency and overreach of Roosevelt's New Deal programs. He called for smaller government and reduced regulation, arguing that America needed new leadership to manage the transition from wartime to peacetime.



The 1944 election was last in which a candidate received over 90% of the vote in a single state (FDR had 94% of the votes in Mississippi).



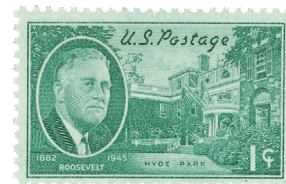
Had he won, Dewey would've been the youngest US president ever.

Initially, Roosevelt intended to run a quiet campaign, relying on his record and wartime reputation to carry him through. But rumors about his declining health began to spread. In response, Roosevelt launched an active campaign tour in October 1944, traveling in an open car and giving speeches to demonstrate his vitality. His appearance reassured many Americans, and the country's recent military victories in Europe and the Pacific further boosted morale.

On November 7, 1944, Roosevelt won re-election, though by a smaller margin than in his previous campaigns. The victory made him the only president in US history to serve four terms—a reflection of both the extraordinary challenges of his time and the public's trust in his leadership.

Tragically, Roosevelt's health continued to deteriorate. On April 12, 1945, just five months into his fourth term, he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia, and died at age 63. Vice President Harry S. Truman was sworn in as president that same day, taking command during the final months of World War II.

In the years following Roosevelt's death, many lawmakers argued that no one person should hold presidential power for so long again. The debate led to the ratification of the 22nd Amendment in 1951, which formally limited future presidents to two terms in office. Roosevelt's unprecedented tenure thus reshaped not only America's government but also the constitutional framework that defines it.



This was the only election in which both candidates hailed from the same county (Dutchess in New York).

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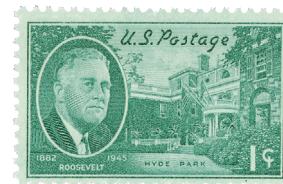
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