

What Does It Mean To Be A Natural Born Citizen?

Learning About The Presidency

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Only United States citizens have the right to vote and the right serve as an elected member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives.

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution defines citizenship this way: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

But to be President, you must also be a "natural born" citizen, according to Section I, Article II of the U.S. Constitution. What does that mean?

The only thing that is black-and-white about citizenship and the presidency is this:

1. A child of a two American citizens who is born on U.S. soil is clearly eligible to be President;
2. Anyone who becomes a naturalized U.S. citizen after birth (think Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger) is clearly not eligible to be President.

Then life turns gray, or at least contested, as [events of the 2008 Presidential election make clear](#).

What constitutes being "natural born" falls into two philosophical camps: geography or blood.

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One group argues that blood rules -- that you are "natural born" regardless of geography, if both parents are citizens. Another group argues that geography rules -- that you are "natural born" only if you are born on U.S. soil.

Purists insist that both parents must be U.S. citizens and you must be born on U.S. soil. This narrow interpretation would mean that Barack Obama is ineligible to be President of the United States.

Presidential Candidates Born Abroad

Two contemporary Republican candidates for the presidential nomination were born outside the borders of the United States.

- Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) was born in 1936 at the Coco Solo Naval Air Station in the Panama Canal Zone. Both parents were U.S. citizens. In April 2008, the U.S. Senate approved a [non-binding resolution](#) recognizing that McCain is a natural born citizen. McCain was a presidential candidate in 2000 and the Republican nominee in 2008.

- Gov. George Romney (R-MI) was born in 1907 in Mexico. Romney's grandfather had emigrated to Mexico in 1886 after Utah outlawed polygamy, taking his wives and children with him. Romney's father, Gaskell Romney, and mother, Anna Amelia Pratt, were born in Utah but married in 1895 in Mexico. Romney was a presidential candidate in 1968.

The Law Is Little Help

[Title 8, Section 1401 of the U.S. Code](#) defines a national and citizen of the United States "at birth". Note that this legal definition does not include the phrase "natural born."

- a person born in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof;
- a person born in the United States to a member of an Indian, Eskimo, Aleutian, or other aboriginal tribe: Provided, That the granting of citizenship under this subsection shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of such person to tribal or other property;
- a person born outside of the United States and its outlying possessions of parents both of whom are citizens of the United States and one of whom has had a residence in the United States or one of its outlying possessions, prior to the birth of such person;
- a person born outside of the United States and its outlying possessions of parents one of whom is a citizen of the United States who has been physically present in the United States or one of its outlying possessions for a continuous period of one year prior to the birth of such person, and the other of whom is a national, but not a citizen of the United States;
- a person born in an outlying possession of the United States of parents one of whom is a citizen of the United States who has been physically present in the United States or one of its outlying possessions for a continuous period of one year at any time prior to the birth of such person;
- a person of unknown parentage found in the United States while under the age of five years, until shown, prior to his attaining the

age of twenty-one years, not to have been born in the United States;

- a person born outside the geographical limits of the United States and its outlying possessions of parents one of whom is an alien, and the other a citizen of the United States who, prior to the birth of such person, was physically present in the United States or its outlying possessions for a period or periods totaling not less than five years, at least two of which were after attaining the age of fourteen years: Provided, That any periods of honorable service in the Armed Forces of the United States, or periods of employment with the United States Government or with an international organization as that term is defined in section 288 of title 22 by such citizen parent, or any periods during which such citizen parent is physically present abroad as the dependent unmarried son or daughter and a member of the household of a person
- honorably serving with the Armed Forces of the United States, or
- employed by the United States Government or an international organization as defined in section 288 of title 22, may be included in order to satisfy the physical-presence requirement of this paragraph. This proviso shall be applicable to persons born on or after December 24, 1952, to the same extent as if it had become effective in its present form on that date; and
- a person born before noon (Eastern Standard Time) May 24, 1934, outside the limits and jurisdiction of the United States of an alien father and a mother who is a citizen of the United States who, prior to the birth of such person, had resided in the United States.

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