AP Government
Federalist #10 Explained

James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote the Federalist Papers under the penname Publius. Publius Valerius Publicola (died 503 BC) was one of the first republican statesmen of ancient Rome. He helped to overthrow the last king of Rome, Tarquin the Proud, and to establish the Roman Republic. Later, when the people of Rome began to mistrust him for flaunting his power and riches by building his home on a well-known landmark, he tore down his house and rebuilt it on lower lands.

The Federalist Papers were a series of 85 essays written by Publius with the goal of convincing the pivotal states of New York and Virginia to ratify the new U.S. Constitution, drafted after the failure of the Articles of Confederation. Federalist 10 (written by Madison) is perhaps the best known of the essays. It continues the discussion of a question first broached in Federalist 9 (written by Hamilton): how to address the destructive role of faction in popular government (that is, a political society where the people rule).

As defined by Madison, a faction is a number of citizens, whether a majority or minority, who are united and activated "by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." It is important to note that Madison does not suggest that all political groups (for example, political parties) are factions. Rather a faction is a group of citizens with interests that are contrary to the rights of others or the interests of the community as a whole.

The tendency to form factions is deeply woven into human nature, Madison argues. It is an outgrowth or consequence of people being born with different physical and mental capacities. To remove the causes of faction, there are only two options: destroy the liberty that allows for differences of opinion orgive every citizen the same opinions, passions, and interests. The first cure is worse than the disease, and the second is neither desirable nor possible.

Property rights originate from the diverse faculties and abilities of men, and the protection of these rights is the first object of government. But the resulting "various and unequal distribution of property" is also the cause of the oldest and most common form of faction. The rich and poor, creditors and debtors, have different interests from one another. Madison feared that these various economic factions might band together and attempt to subvert the law to promote their own interests. In a democracy, where the poor are more numerous, they might plunder the wealthy few. Alternatively, the rich might use their political power to exploit the poor.

This analysis leads to a dilemma: How can self-interested individuals administering governmental powers be prevented from using those powers to destroy the freedoms that government is supposed to protect? Madison warns against relying on impartial and "enlightened statesmen" to solve the problem. We must assume that less disinterested leaders will sometimes occupy the seats of power. Thus, a "system" of government is needed to take the place of enlightened individuals. In this system, no man should be a judge in his own plight. People who judge cases of which they are a part cannot be trusted. The system of government must act to limit the power of all players and, thereby, limit the power of the government itself.

How can government address the problem of factions? If the causes of faction cannot be removed, Madison argues, then we must try to control the negative effects of faction.

Minority factions can be controlled by the majority, and are thus not a threat to civil society. However, if a faction is or becomes a majority, it can threaten the legitimate rights of the minority. Majority faction, then, is the biggest threat to popular government. The rest of Federalist 10 addresses the need to control majority factions. The solution is not to be found in direct democracy, Madison warns. A "pure democracy"—where every citizen gets to vote on every issue—is especially susceptible to majority faction. In order to work, direct democracies must be small, making it easier for a majority faction to arise and to influence government.

This leads Madison to his solution to the problem of faction: republican government. Republican (or representative) government has two advantages: 1) Representatives can help to "refine and enlarge the public views," and 2) Republics can be larger than pure democracies, making it more difficult for a majority faction to emerge.

This latter solution (called the "enlargement of the orbit" in Federalist 9) is Madison's most novel argument. By "extend[ing] the sphere" to "take in a greater variety of parties and interests," republican government makes it less likely that any one faction will achieve majority status and power. (In other words, the solution for the problem of faction is the multiplication of factions.) A large republic is harder to subvert or tyrannize than a smaller one. A large republic will also be more economically diverse. Factions therefore proliferate. With so many differing and varied interests, no one group of people will be able to overtake the others. Instead, large republics are governed by fleeting and loosely adhering majorities.

A number of advantages result from this enlargement of the orbit:

- A larger population makes it more difficult for a corrupt candidate to woo a large number of voters by devious means.
- A more expansive country ensures that local or statewide biases do not spread to other parts of the country.
- A large number of representatives, from different parts of the country, and who are held accountable by frequent elections, will have a difficult time conspiring together to the detriment of the people they represent and the country as a whole.

  In sum, under this new system of government, "ambition [is] made to counteract ambition" (Federalist51). As the editors of WSPWH write:

  Political struggle will be moderated not by moral and religious instruction aimed at making citizens more moderate and virtuous, but instead by the moderating effects of multiplicity and the requirements of effective commercial activity. By design, America's greatest bulwark against the danger of majority faction is the large commercial republic and competition of rival interests in pursuit of gain and personal advancement.

  What assumptions about human nature inform this ingenious solution? Why is heterogeneity preferable to homogeneity, and what, if any, might be its defects or costs? What sort of human character—with what sorts of passions, virtues, and vices—is produced by a large commercial republic? The Anti-Federalists, who opposed the large federal union, held that freedom can be experienced and preserved only in small communities, in which citizens know one another, are like-minded, and actively participate in public life. Might they have been right? Does our federal system, through its division of authority among national, state, and local powers, manage to secure the advantages of both bigness and smallness? What should we think today about the relation among commerce, freedom, and stability?