

Unit 1

Ratifying the Constitution

Name: _____ Period: _____

Adapted in part from <https://www.ushistory.org/us/16a.asp> and <https://www.ushistory.org/us/16b.asp>

Two sides developed over the issue of ratifying the newly created Constitution. Read the two texts regarding Federalists and Anti-Federalists and answer the questions that follow.

Federalists

Along with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, James Madison penned *The Federalist Papers*.

Key Vocabulary

Constitution (noun)

Definition: the fundamental laws and principles that govern a country

Example: *The Constitution outlines the rights and responsibilities of citizens.*

Articles of Confederation (noun)

Definition: the first constitution of the United States, which created a weak central government

Example: *The Articles of Confederation gave more power to the individual states.*

influential (adjective)

Definition: having the power to change or affect something

Example: *Martin Luther King Jr. was an influential leader in the civil rights movement.*

democracy (noun)

Definition: a system of government in which power is vested in the people, who rule either directly or through elected representatives

Example: *In a democracy, citizens have the right to vote for their leaders.*



The supporters of the proposed Constitution called themselves "**FEDERALISTS**." Their adopted name implied a commitment to a loose, decentralized system of government. In many respects "**FEDERALISM**" — which implies a strong central government — was the opposite of the proposed plan that they supported. A more accurate name for the supporters of the Constitution would have been "**NATIONALISTS**."

The "nationalist" label, however, would have been a political liability in the 1780s. Traditional political belief of the Revolutionary Era held that strong centralized authority would inevitably lead to an abuse of power. The Federalists were also aware that the problems of the country in the 1780s stemmed from the weaknesses of the central government created by the Articles of Confederation.

For Federalists, the Constitution was required in order to safeguard the liberty and independence that the American Revolution had created. While the Federalists definitely had developed a new political philosophy, they saw their most important role as defending the social gains of the Revolution. As James Madison, one of the great Federalist leaders later explained, the Constitution was designed to be a "*republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government.*"

The Federalists had more than an innovative political plan and a well-chosen name to aid their cause. Many of the most talented leaders of the era who had the most experience in national-level work were Federalists. For example the only two national-level celebrities of the period, Benjamin Franklin

and George Washington, favored the Constitution. In addition to these impressive superstars, the Federalists were well organized, well funded, and made especially careful use of the printed word. Most newspapers supported the Federalists' political plan and published articles and pamphlets to explain why the people should approve the Constitution.

In spite of this range of major advantages, the Federalists still had a hard fight in front of them. Their new solutions were a significant alteration of political beliefs in this period. Most significantly, the Federalists believed that the greatest threat to the future of the United States did not lie in the abuse of central power, but instead could be found in what they saw as the excesses of democracy as evidenced in popular disturbances like Shays' Rebellion and the pro-debtor policies of many states.

How could the Federalists convince the undecided portion of the American people that for the nation to thrive, democracy needed to be constrained in favor of a strong central government?

Answer the following questions about the Federalists:

1. What is the main idea of this passage?
 - a. The Federalists wanted a government that was not too powerful and spread out.
 - b. The Constitution was necessary to protect the freedom and independence gained from the American Revolution.
 - c. The Federalists believed that a strong central government would lead to abuse of power.
 - d. The Federalists faced challenges because their ideas were different from what people believed at that time.

2. According to the text, what did the Federalists believe was the biggest threat to the United States' future?
 - a. A weak central government
 - b. Too much democracy
 - c. Influential leaders like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington
 - d. The problems caused by the Articles of Confederation

3. Which of the following statements is supported by the text?
 - a. The Federalists believed that a strong central government was necessary to protect the freedom and independence gained from the American Revolution.
 - b. The Federalists believed that a powerful central government would lead to abuse of power.
 - c. The Federalists believed that the biggest threat to the United States' future was not a powerful central government, but instead the problems caused by too much democracy.
 - d. The Federalists believed that the problems the country faced were because of the weak central government created by the Articles of Confederation.

4. What were the challenges faced by the Federalists?
 - a. Lack of support from influential leaders
 - b. Lack of understanding about the Constitution
 - c. Opposition from the Anti-Federalists
 - d. Lack of resources to promote their ideas

Anti-Federalists

Patrick Henry delivers his famous "If this be treason, make the most of it!" speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses.

Key Vocabulary

ratification (noun)

Definition: the formal approval or acceptance of something, usually a law or agreement.

Example: The ratification of the treaty required the approval of two-thirds of the Senate.

tyranny (noun)

Definition: cruel and oppressive government or rule.

Example: The citizens revolted against the tyranny of the dictator.

encroach (verb)

Definition: to gradually intrude or trespass on someone else's territory or rights.

Example: The construction of the new building encroached on the neighboring property.

oppressive (adjective)

Definition: unjustly harsh or controlling, causing people to feel burdened or restricted.

Example: The oppressive regime suppressed freedom of speech and assembly.

contention (noun)

Definition: a heated disagreement or argument.

Example: There was a contention between the two political parties over the proposed tax reform.



The **ANTI-FEDERALISTS** were a diverse coalition of people who opposed ratification of the Constitution. Although less well organized than the Federalists, they also had an impressive group of leaders who were especially prominent in state politics.

Ranging from political elites like **JAMES WINTHROP** in Massachusetts to **MELANCTON SMITH** of New York and Patrick Henry and George Mason of Virginia, these Anti-Federalists were joined by a large number of ordinary Americans particularly yeomen farmers who predominated in rural America. The one overriding social characteristic of the Anti-Federalists as a group was their strength in newer settled western regions of the country.

In spite of the diversity that characterized the Anti-Federalist opposition, they did share a core view of American politics. They believed that the greatest threat to the future of the United States lay in the government's potential to become corrupt and seize more and more power until its tyrannical rule completely dominated the people. Having just succeeded in rejecting what they saw as the **TYRANNY** of British power, such threats were seen as a very real part of political life.

To Anti-Federalists the proposed Constitution threatened to lead the United States down an all-too-familiar road of political **CORRUPTION**. All three branches of the new central government threatened Anti-Federalists' traditional belief in the importance of restraining government power.

The President's vast new powers, especially a veto that could overturn decisions of the people's representatives in the legislature, were especially disturbing. The court system of the national government appeared likely to encroach on local courts. Meanwhile, the proposed lower house of the legislature would have so few members that only elites were likely to be elected. Furthermore, they would represent people from such a large area that they couldn't really know their own constituents. The fifty-five members of the proposed national House of Representatives was quite a bit smaller

than most state legislatures in the period. Since the new legislature was to have increased fiscal authority, especially the right to raise taxes, the Anti-Federalists feared that before long Congress would pass oppressive taxes that they would enforce by creating a standing national army.

This range of objections boiled down to a central opposition to the sweeping new powers of the proposed central government. George Mason, a delegate to the Philadelphia Convention who refused to support the Constitution, explained the plan was "*totally subversive of every principle which has hitherto governed us. This power is calculated to [totally annihilate] the state governments.*" The rise of national power at the expense of state power was a common feature of Anti-Federalist opposition.

The most powerful objection raised by the Anti-Federalists, however, hinged on the lack of protection for **INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES** in the Constitution. Most of the state constitutions of the era had built on the Virginia model that included an explicit protection of individual rights that could not be intruded upon by the state. This was seen as a central safeguard of people's rights and was considered a major Revolutionary improvement over the unwritten protections of the British constitution.

Why, then, had the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention not included a bill of rights in their proposed Constitution? Most Anti-Federalists thought that such protections were not granted because the Federalists represented a sinister movement to roll back the gains made for ordinary people during the Revolution.

The Anti-Federalists and Federalists agreed on one thing: the future of the nation was at stake in the contest over the Constitution.

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1. What is the main idea of this passage?
 - a. The Anti-Federalists were a diverse group of individuals who opposed the ratification of the Constitution.
 - b. The Anti-Federalists believed that the government had the potential to become corrupt and dominate the people.
 - c. The proposed Constitution posed a danger of leading the United States down a familiar path of political corruption.
 - d. The Anti-Federalists objected to the lack of protection for individual liberties in the Constitution.
 2. Which of the following excerpts from the passage best supports the claim that the Anti-Federalists believed the government had the potential to become corrupt and dominate the people?
 - a. Despite their diversity, the Anti-Federalist opposition shared a common view of American politics.
 - b. All three branches of the new central government threatened the Anti-Federalists' traditional belief in restraining government power.
 - c. One of the main objections raised by the Anti-Federalists was the broad new powers granted to the proposed central government.
 - d. The absence of a bill of rights in the proposed Constitution was a point of contention between the Anti-Federalists and Federalists.

