

## The Federalists Versus the Anti-Federalists

Getting the Constitution approved by the States was a struggle. The supporters of the Constitution, called the Federalists, had a plan to get it ratified. The Anti-Federalists, the opponents of the Constitution, argued that the new plan of government should not be approved. Your **tasks** are to learn (a) the differences between the arguments of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, (b) the process of the Constitution's ratification, and (c) the definitions of the following words (ratified, ratifying conventions, Anti-Federalists, Federalists, **The Federalist**, and the Bill of Rights). Work **cooperatively** and ensure that all members of your group successfully complete the three learning tasks.

The Federalists wrote the Constitution of the United States in secret because many leaders in Congress and the state governments were against it. Because the Constitution was written in secret, the Anti-Federalists have not had time to prepare all their arguments against it. James Madison developed a plan for ratifying the Constitution. He was certain that if the Constitution were presented to either the Congress or the state legislatures for ratification, it would be rejected. He recommended, therefore, to present the Constitution directly to the eligible voters of each state at special **Ratifying Conventions** to be held in each state. The delegates to these conventions would be elected by popular vote of the people for the sole purpose of approving the Constitution.

Madison based his plan on the idea contained in the Preamble to the Constitution, which says, "We the People...do ordain and establish this Constitution...." The people who were to be governed by the new national government were asked to consent to its creation and to agree to obey its decisions. Thus, the Constitution can be considered a social contract.

The Framers at the Convention approved Madison's plan and made a few additions. They decided that the Constitution would be ratified nationally if nine of the thirteen states ratified it. They did this because they feared that requiring all thirteen states to ratify would result in its defeat. They also decided to encourage the states to organize and elect delegates to the state ratifying conventions as quickly as possible. They knew that the opposition had not had much time to prepare their arguments. By contrast, the supporters of the Constitution had worked on it for almost four months. They knew the arguments for and against it. They thought if the state conventions acted quickly, the Constitution would be ratified before its opponents, the Anti-Federalists, could organize.

In spite of the strategy adopted by the Federalists, the Anti-Federalists were able to put up a strong fight. The political struggle over ratification in the states was intense, sometimes

bitter, and lasted ten months. In New York the fight was especially difficult. To help the Federalist cause, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote a series of articles supporting ratification for a New York newspaper. These articles are now called **The Federalist**. The articles were also used in the Virginia ratification debates.

There were many leaders of the Anti-Federalist movement, most of whom wrote pamphlets explaining why they were against the Constitution. George Mason, Edmund Randolph, and Elbridge Gerry had attended the Philadelphia Convention but refused to sign the document. John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and Richard Henry Lee, all leading revolutionaries and signers of the Declaration of Independence, fought against ratification of the Constitution. Mercy Otis Warren, a playwright, also opposed ratification. Patrick Henry, who had always opposed the idea of a strong national government, became a leading Anti-Federalist at the Virginia ratifying convention.

The arguments for and against the Constitution focused on three basic questions:

1. Will the new Constitution maintain a republican form of government?
2. Will the national government would have too much power?
3. Is a bill of rights needed?

James Madison

Federalist



John Hancock Anti-Federalist



## The Federalists . . .

You represent the Federalist perspective. Your position is that the Constitution must be ratified. In preparing your position write several slogans for the ratification of the Constitution. Also make at least one visual to help you present a persuasive case for ratification.

1. **Without controls on factions gaining control of government for their personal gain a republic will not work.** History proves that all the small republics in the past were destroyed by special interests. The citizens' civic virtue was not enough to prevent them from seeking their own selfish interests rather than the common welfare. Special interests can be more easily controlled in a large republic where (a) the government is organized on the basis of checks and balances and (b) power is divided between the national and the state governments.
2. **Loyalty will be gained through results.** The national government will protect the rights of the people so well that they will soon give it their loyalty and support. The central government can not become a tyrant because of the limitations placed on it by the system of checks and balances and separation of powers.
3. **The power of the central government is limited.** The Constitution will give the national government greater power than it has under the Articles of Confederation. But its powers are limited to dealing with tasks that face the entire nation such as trade, currency, and defense. A stronger national government is needed to deal with these problems. The Constitution provides adequate protections for the state governments.
4. **The powers given to the central government are necessary.** The necessary and proper and general welfare clauses are necessary if the national government is to accomplish the things it is responsible for doing.
5. **A national balance of power protects the states.** The powers of the national government are separated and balanced among the three branches so no one can dominate the others. A strong executive branch is necessary for the national government to be able to fulfill its responsibilities. The Constitution gives Congress and the Supreme Court ways to check the use of power by the executive branch so it cannot become a monarchy.
6. **It is better to keep individual rights ambiguous.** A national bill of rights could give the impression that the people would only be given protection for those rights that were actually listed.



You represent the Anti-Federalist perspective. Your position is that the Constitution must not be ratified. In preparing your position write several slogans against the ratification of the Constitution. Also make at least one visual to help you present a persuasive case against ratification.

1. **It will not work in a large country.** Throughout history, the only places where republican governments have worked have been small communities where the people have been about equal in wealth and have held the same values. Thus, it was possible for them to possess civic virtue and to agree upon what was best for their common welfare.



2. **A federal government will resort to tyranny to keep its power.** Free government requires the active participation of the people. The national government provided by the Constitution would be located too far from most people's communities to allow them to participate. As a result, the only way the government would be able to rule would be through the use of military force. The result would be a tyranny.



3. **The state governments will be destroyed.** The Constitution gives the national government too much power at the expense of the state governments. It gives the government the power to tax citizens and to raise and keep an army. The supremacy clause means all of the national government's laws are superior to laws made by the states. As a result, it would only be a matter of time until the state governments are destroyed.
4. **The limits to the federal government's power are not clear.** The necessary and proper clause is too general and, as a result, gives too much power to the national government. It is dangerous not to list the powers of the government in order to put clear limits on them.



5. **The President will become a monarch.** The Constitution gives too much power to the executive branch of government. It could soon become a monarchy.



6. **The freedom of individuals is not protected.** The Constitution does not include a bill of rights which is essential for protecting individuals against the power of the national government.