

## FEDERALISM

### Read the following information about Federalism.

Federalism is a system of government in which a written constitution divides power between a central government and regional or sub-divisional governments.

In the United States, the central government is Washington D.C. or the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches. The regional or sub-divisional governments in the United States are the individual states.

At the same time the thirteen original colonies drafted the Declaration of Independence to announce their intended separation from England, they also wrote the Articles of Confederation to define their relationship with each other as a joint entity. The Articles served to unify the colonies through the Revolution, but as the new states tried to recover from the war and move ahead as a nation, the Articles of Confederation proved too weak to be effective. As the Library of Congress article ["To Form a More Perfect Union"](#) explains, "With the passage of time, weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation became apparent; Congress commanded little respect and no support from state governments anxious to maintain their power. Congress could not raise funds, regulate trade, or conduct foreign policy without the voluntary agreement of the states. Recognizing the need to improve the government, Congress tried to strengthen the Articles, but problems persisted."

Essentially, the Congress could not raise money from the states, and thus there was no budget for the collective governing body. Thus, the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was convened. "To Form a More Perfect Union" summarizes the cause and result of this convention: "The Constitutional Convention of 1787 was called to revise the ailing Articles of Confederation. However, the Convention soon abandoned the Articles, drafting a new Constitution with a much stronger national government. Nine states had to approve the Constitution before it could go into effect. After a long and often bitter debate, eleven states ratified the Constitution, which instituted a new form of government for the United States."

The debate was lively and heated and largely centered around how much power the federal government should have. Two Founding Fathers who represented opposing sides were Alexander Hamilton, who argued for a strong national government with James Madison and John Jay in the seminal *Federalist Papers*, and Thomas Jefferson, who favored a weaker central government and more power resting with individual states. Behind their philosophies were their

different perspectives on human nature: Jefferson was an idealist who believed in the inherent good of humanity, and Hamilton was a pragmatist who was more cynical about trusting people to do the right thing. These men and others spent months deliberating about how much centralized government was the right amount for a functioning democracy. The issue was particularly salient because the states had just won independence from a government they considered too controlling, in which decisions were made about the colonists' lives and finances without involving those affected. Thus, there was a strong reaction against a government far removed from those being governed and their concerns, which differed significantly among the colonies. Nonetheless, a government that could not even raise enough money to support its own work could do little good for its people.

Eventually, the Constitution was developed through much deliberation, compromise, and commitment to democratic ideals. The Congress approved the Constitution in 1787, and it was ratified in 1788 by the ninth state (New Hampshire), the final approval needed to put it into effect. This document established the structure of our democratic government as it still stands today. The first ten amendments, known as the *Bill of Rights*, were proposed in 1789 and ratified in 1791.

1. What was written by the original thirteen colonies at the same time that the Declaration of Independence was being drafted?
2. What purpose did the Articles serve?
3. List four problems with the Articles of Confederation.
4. Why was it necessary to have the Constitutional convention of 1787?
5. The debates in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were mostly centered on what topic?
6. Alexander Hamilton represented which side of the debate?
7. Which side did James Madison and John Jay represent?

8. Explain in your own words, what the following passage is describing. Here's a hint, it's talking about state's rights.

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