

The New Nation

*Revolution and the New
Nation (1754–1815)*



Uniting the states

The Constitution

Ruling the new nation

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn how the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation were dealt with, and be able to answer these key questions:

- What processes led to the formulation of the Constitution?
- What did this document stipulate?
- What was the Bill of Rights and how did it differ from the Constitution?



Fears of internal unrest and instability forced the delegates of the states into action. The ineffectiveness of the Articles of Confederation could be ignored no longer.

Delegates from 12 states gathered in Philadelphia for the **Constitutional Convention** in May 1787. They elected George Washington to lead the discussion and quickly dropped the plan to revise the Articles of Confederation. Throughout the summer, delegates debated the best way to organize the government.



What do you think would be the key areas of conflict?



During the Constitutional Convention, the key contentious issue was **representation**. Delegates had different ideas about what this should involve based on historical examples and their own experiences. Watch this animation to find out about the delegates' ideas on representation.

Press **start** to begin.

start

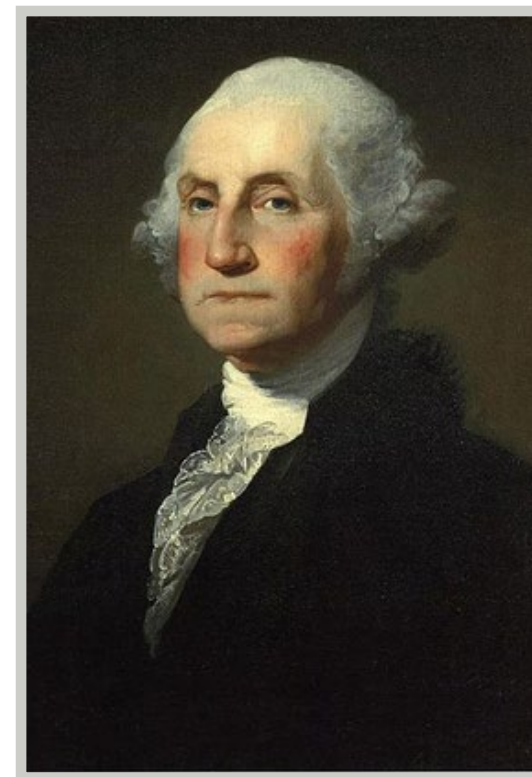


Can you think of any problems with this system?



In September 1787, the Constitution was written. It contained seven Articles detailing the structure of the government:

- articles 1–3 stated how the branches of government would be structured
- article 4 dealt with state powers
- article 5 explained how amendments could be added, allowing for change
- article 6 established the Constitution's legitimacy, stating who should obey it
- article 7 stated how the Constitution would be ratified.





In the Great Compromise, the committee used Britain's mixed government, which represented the three strata of society, as a model. Drag the labels to the correct places in the table to show how the new U.S. government compared to the British system.

Press **start** to begin.

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How else did these two systems differ?



Checks and balances



Each branch of the national government was granted certain powers to prevent one branch from dominating the others. Can you identify what key checks and balances each branch had? Drag the labels to the correct places. Press **start** to begin.

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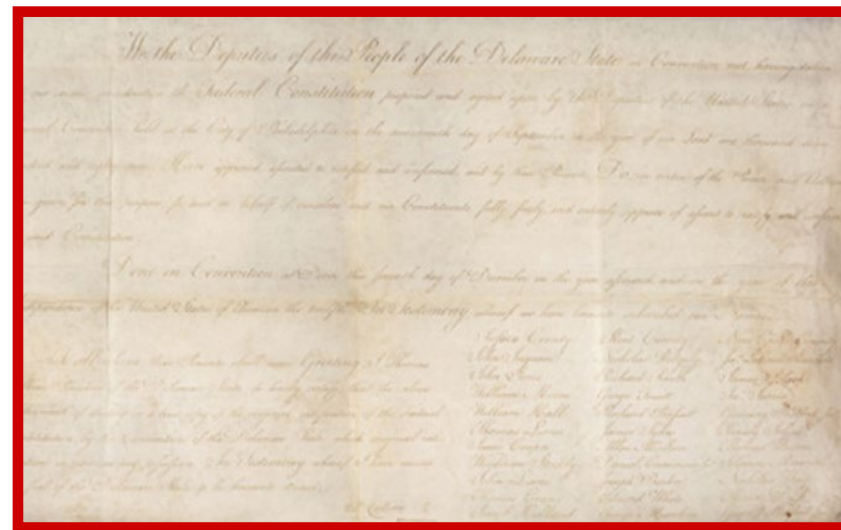
What other checks does each branch have?



Once the delegates from the Convention had signed the Constitution, they needed each state to **ratify** it.

To increase the chances of ratification, the Convention:

- stated that only nine states had to ratify the Constitution before it went into effect
- compelled states to elect **conventions** for the purpose of judging the constitution.



Delaware was the first to ratify with a unanimous vote in 1787.



Why might states be hesitant to ratify the Constitution?

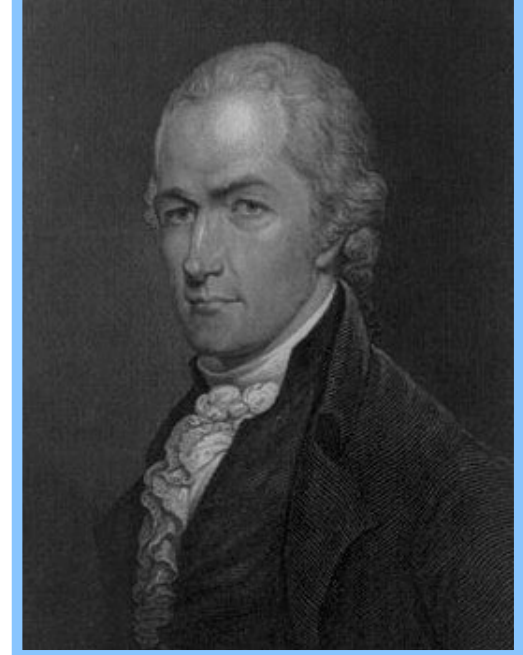




Opinion about the Constitution was divided. Supporters, such as **Alexander Hamilton**, became known as **Federalists**.

However, many states were not eager to ratify the constitution. Those that were against it were called **Antifederalists**.

Antifederalists such as Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams were against having a strong central government.

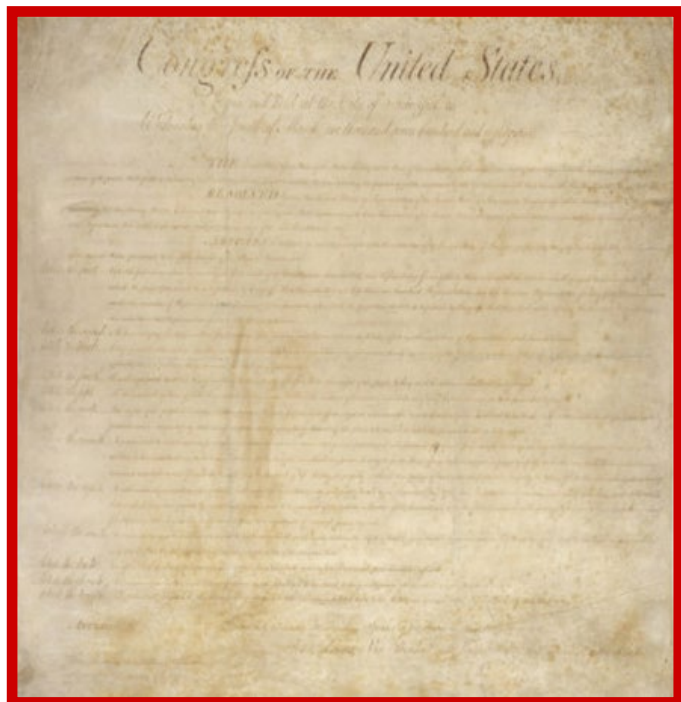


They believed that the Constitution would not prevent abuses of power and that it did not protect the **rights** of the individual.

How could Federalists ease these fears?



The Constitution spoke little of democracy and liberty, which were fundamental ideas in the Declaration of Independence.



To rectify this and alleviate the fears of Antifederalists, the Convention agreed to write several amendments to the Constitution.

These amendments would clarify people's civil liberties and would create a **Bill of Rights**.

In return, it was hoped that states would ratify the Constitution.

What rights do you think this bill should include?





Bill of Rights



In order to get the Constitution ratified, the **Bill of Rights** was added. This consisted of ten amendments which protected the rights and freedoms of Americans.

Watch this animation to read the amendments in full and to find out more about its coverage and language used.

Press **start** to begin.

start



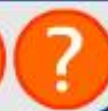


The four key documents of the foundation of the new nation were the Bill of Rights, the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

How much do you remember about the content and purpose of each document?

Press **start** to begin.

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In what order were these documents written?





In composing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the United States became one of the first nations to carefully lay out the rights of the people.



One of the chief advantages of these documents over the Articles of Confederation was their flexibility. Comparatively, they were easier to adapt and amend, allowing this new government a great elasticity to develop. This was to prove vital in the years to come.

Were all Americans affected by these documents?