

Federalists and Anti-Federalists: Federalism Today

Prepared by: The New Jersey Center for Civic Education, Rutgers University

Grade Level: 6-8

Objectives: Students will be able to

- Compare the positions of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists
- Explain the need for and value of compromise
- Conduct a debate
- Analyze the relevance of Anti-Federalist concerns today.

New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Studies Standards (2020):

- 6.1.8.CivicsPD.3.a: Cite evidence to determine the role that compromise played in the creation and adoption of the Constitution and Bill of Rights.
- 6.1.8.HistoryCC.3.d: Compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution in terms of the decision-making powers of national government.
- 6.3.8.CivicsPR.5: Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society.

Background:

The Antifederalists (George Mason, Edmund Randolph, Elbridge Gerry, also John Hancock, Sam Adams and Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry) were mistrustful of government, especially strong national government. They argued that:

- Representative government could work only in a small community of citizens with similar interests and beliefs. National government would be too far away from most of its citizens. (Aristotle)
- In a large republic, the public good is sacrificed to a thousand views; it is subordinate to exceptions, and depends on accidents. In a small one, the interest of the public is easier perceived, better understood, and more within the reach of every citizen; abuses are of less extent, and of course are less protected. (Montesquieu)
- History furnishes no example of a free republic, anything like the extent of the United States.
- The proposed Constitution gives an enormous amount of power to the central government, especially the power to lay and collect taxes.
- The proposed Constitution vests so much power in the central government that it will entirely annihilate all the state government and reduce the country to one single government.

The Federalists (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay) supported a strong central government and supported ratifying the Constitution. The argued that in Federalist 10 (written by Madison):

- Factions (interest groups) posed the greatest danger to a democratic government. But in a large country there would be many different factions and none would be able to command a majority.
- Diffused power through federalism, separation of powers and checks and balances would promote republican government and prevent too much power from being accumulated by any one person or faction.
- Aggregate interests would be referred to the national government but local and particular issues would remain for the States to determine.

Activity: Card Sort

After lecturing and/or having students read about the views of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, cut up the cards in Handout One (The right side are the Anti-Federalists views, the left side the Federalists view) and hand them out to your students. Ask them to match the cards to Federalist and Anti-federalist views.

Activity: Debate about ratifying the Constitution

Set up rules regarding the amount of time for each side to debate about the ratification of the Constitution. The debate would rest primarily on three issues:

- Would the Constitution maintain republican government?
- Would the national government have too much power?
- Was a Bill of Rights needed?

Have students play the roles of the Federalists (Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay) and Anti-Federalists (George Mason, Edmund Randolph, Elbridge Gerry). Use the graphic organizer attached as Handout Two to organize and prepare and then orally debate the three questions about whether the Constitution should be ratified.

Why did the Federalists agree to add a bill of rights to the Constitution?

Nine states were needed for the Constitution to be ratified. The Federalists agreed to add a bill of rights in order to gain enough support for the Constitution to be ratified. They agreed that the first Congress would draft a bill of rights. Although this was a victory for the Anti-Federalists, it was Representative James Madison who, at the first congress on June 8, 1789, introduced a series of proposed amendments to the newly ratified U.S. Constitution.

Critical Thinking Activity: Do you think this was a good compromise?

Have a class discussion about whether Madison made a good compromise:

- What is a compromise?
 - A compromise is an agreement or a settlement of a dispute that is reached by each side making concessions.
 - Sometimes the word is used as a verb to indicate that someone has settled for less than he should have. This has added a bad connotation to the word, when in most cases, “compromise” is the way to get to a result that can be agreed upon. As long as you are not giving up important values, such as honesty, or agreeing to something that you cannot live with, compromise is positive.
- When is a compromise necessary?
 - When parties have differing interests or viewpoints but want or need to come to an agreement.
- What is the value of compromise in a democratic government?
 - A democratic government is based on elected representatives deliberating, deciding and being responsible for and to the public. Competing interests and viewpoints are expressed in the deliberations and often compromises are necessary in the decisions. Without compromises, a democratic government cannot function.
- Do you think that Madison made a good compromise in agreeing to add a Bill of Rights to the Constitution?
 - Yes, by this compromise he was able to get enough support for ratification of the Constitution without giving up any important value, such as a strong central government.

Do we still see the concerns expressed by the Anti-Federalists today?

Assessment: Have students write a short essay taking a position about whether any of the concerns expressed by the Anti-Federalists are still relevant today and explain which and why.

Essays should include reference to continuing concerns about the power of the central government and weakening of the power of the states.

Handout One: Federalist and Anti-Federalist Card Sort

<p>The national government will have greater power than it did under the Articles of Confederation. But its powers are limited to solving problems that face the entire nation, such as trade and defense.</p>	<p>The Constitution gives the national government too much power at the expense of the state governments, such as the power to tax citizens and raising and keeping an army during peacetime.</p>
<p>The Constitution provides protections for the state governments by specifically reserving certain powers for the states. This will prevent the states from being destroyed by the national government.</p>	<p>The supremacy clause in the Constitution means all the national laws are superior to laws made by the state governments. It will be only a matter of time until state governments are destroyed.</p>
<p>A strong executive branch is necessary so the national government can fulfill its responsibilities. Congress and the Supreme Court have checks on the use of power by the executive branch. The executive branch cannot become a monarchy.</p>	<p>The Constitution gives too much power to the executive branch of the national government. The executive branch will soon become a monarchy.</p>
<p>The powers of the national government are separated and balanced among the three branches. No one branch can dominate the others. These systems—separation of powers, and checks and balances—make it impossible for any one person or group to take complete control of the government.</p>	<p>Free government requires the active participation of the people. The national government will be located far from where most people live. As a result, the only way the government will be able to rule is with military force. The result will be tyranny.</p>
<p>A bill of rights is not needed. The Constitution is the ultimate protection for the people’s rights and the people the ultimate sovereigns. The Constitution does not give the government the power to take away people’s rights. It gives the government only a limited power to do certain things.</p>	<p>The Constitution does not include a bill of rights. A bill of rights is necessary to protect people against the power of the national government. Since these freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition are not in the Constitution, the government is free to violate them.</p>

Source: The Center for Civic Education at

<https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/lesson/492/Card%20Sort%20Activity%25E2%2580%2594Federalists%20vs.%20Anti-Federalists.pdf?rev=4250>

Handout Two: Debate

Federalists	Antifederalists
Would the Constitution retain republican government?	Would the Constitution retain republican government?
Would the national government have too much power?	Would the national government have too much power?
Should the Constitution include a Bill of Rights?	Should the Constitution include a Bill of Rights?

Source: *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*, Level 2, third ed., Center for Civic Education, 2017.