

History of federalists vs. anti-federalists



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Historical Context

Over the course of American history, the United States Constitution has laid out the laws that the American government must abide by and rule with. The Constitution has been an important document in America for many years and is still very important to our nation today. During the earliest years of the Constitution's history, there were a series of documents that comprised the Constitution, called the Articles of Confederation. These documents were established in 1776, written by a select few members of a committee, such as John Dickinson, and they aided in the United State's triumph in the Revolutionary War against the British.

In the events leading up to and during the war, Americans came to the decision that the new, young country will be run under different ideals than that of their motherland, Britain. This decision led to the creation of many of the democratic ideals that we know of today. The Americans yearned for a land where they could be free of the oppressive rule of Britain, a land where people would be treated fairly and equally. The Articles of Confederation helped guide the Americans into creating their new style of government. The Articles loosely outlined a new set of laws that would ensure that the new government would not resemble Britain's oppressive rule. Unfortunately, these Articles were soon discovered to be written too loosely. The result was that America's central government was much too weak in power as most of the governmental power rested in the arms of the states (Hall *Articles & Constitutional Convention Compromises* pg 1).

The loosely written Articles and the central government's lack of power led to a series of challenges for America, starting with its weakened economy. The United States faced economic problems due to there being a shortage in authority in the central government, making them unable to manage the nation's tax laws, as well as commerce. Seeing the young nation's early struggles, three men by the names of John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton encouraged a ratification of the Constitution through a series of eighty-five essays, called the *Federalists Papers*. These essays were written by the three men in 1788 with hopes to restore the order in the central government by establishing the papers as the primary documents through which the nation would be governed (Hall *Introduction to Federalists Papers* pg 1). Like with any change being brought forth, these papers met with criticism from select citizens that feared the new constitution would give too much power to the central government, leaving the citizens with none. They feared that the new constitution would revert their current form of government back into the style of Britain's where individuals lacked any voice, creating the exact situation that Americans fought against in the Revolutionary War. This type of opposition is still evident in society today, demonstrating the value that humans place in being able to voice their opinions, showing that the ideals in the *Federalists Papers* are just as important today as they were in government centuries ago.

Summary of the *Federalists Papers*

Drafted mostly by Alexander Hamilton, the *Federalists Papers* are a series of eighty-five essays that were written in 1788 to address the problems that America would soon encounter due to the lack of authority in the central

government. Of the eighty-five essays, the two most important are *Federalist No. 1* and *Federalist No. 84*. Together, these two essays create a strong foundation for consideration that America choose to ratify a new Constitution. In *Federalist Paper No. 1*, Alexander Hamilton addresses an important concern of the people and states that he believes individuals have the right to possess a say in the government. He clarifies that politicians may only have authority if the people consent to giving the politicians that authority with votes through an election. Hamilton emphasizes having a fair and legal government. He believes that the only way to do so is through the people giving their consent to be governed to those who govern in an election process that lacks any type of coercion. Additionally, Hamilton brings to light “ whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force” (Hamilton *Federalist Paper No. 1* pg 1). Although Hamilton leaves this question unanswered in his first essay, he later explains the most critical component of a possible answer.

In his next most influential essay, *Federalist No. 84*, Hamilton shares his opinion on the idea of a Bill of Rights. Hamilton starts with confirming his belief that the United States Constitution does not already have an existing Bill of Rights scripted into it, nor is one necessary to have. Hamilton was a full believer that having a clearly defined document that outlines the powers humans are capable of is limiting the actual potential of the human.

Hamilton believed a Bill of Rights would be dangerous for this matter, as it unknowingly manipulates the mind and human power. Instead, Alexander

Hamilton argued that the Constitution was a Bill of Rights all on its own stating,

“ The only use of the declaration was to recognize the ancient law and to remove doubts which might have been occasioned by the Revolution. This consequently can be considered as no part of a declaration of rights, which under our constitutions must be intended as limitations of the power of the government itself” (Hamilton *Federalist Paper No. 84*).

Hamilton explains here that all the rights that require any documentation have already been documented with the Constitution.

Summary of the *Anti-Federalists Papers*

To oppose the ideas of John Jay, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other federalists, a new series of essays, called the *Anti-Federalists Papers* , were written. The most influential of these papers is the essay titled *Brutus No. 1*, assumed to be written by Robert Yates. In his paper, Yates attempts to convince citizens in New York not to ratify the Constitution. He writes a strong paper and argues that a country as large-scale as the United States should not be controlled by one central government. He understands that America is too vast and that one central government would not be ideal because he believes,

“ this form of government contains principles that will lead to the subversion of liberty—if it tends to establish a despotism, or, what is worse, a tyrannic aristocracy; then, if you adopt it, this only remaining assylum for liberty will

be shut up, and posterity will execrate your memory” (Yates *Brutus No. 1* pg. 2).

Using historical examples such as the British empire and other Imperial empires, Yates builds his argument that one central government always leads to oppression and overbearing rule. Oppressive ruling then goes against the democratic ideals that the United States fought for in the Revolutionary War when battling against the British. Yates concludes his argument by explaining that returning power to the central government will only create a situation similar to what the Americans fought against the British for. He predicts that America will be susceptible to becoming a victim one more as history repeats itself.

Analysis of the Bill of Rights applied to Civil Rights and Liberties

When choosing whether the Federalists or Anti-federalists presented a more accurate argument about the outcome of having a Bill of Rights, all the many different aspects and events of the past and current government need to be considered. When adopting a Federalist mindset, a Bill of Rights was not deemed as necessary. Alexander Hamilton explains how having a document that writes out the powers of a human, the freedom that an individual believes he or she has the right to becomes limited. However, Hamilton also explains in his essays that people will still be able to keep a reasonable amount of power to themselves because any form of power that is not granted consensually to the central government will remain in the hands of the people and state. Therefore, according to the *Federalists Papers* and arguments by John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, a Bill of

Rights is not necessary as it will only limit individual freedom. According to them, there already exists a Bill of Rights in the Constitution that will protect the individual liberties of the people.

Additionally, written in his essays, Hamilton demonstrates that he understands the importance of having the people give their consent to the government. This ideal is still valued in today's current society, as shown by the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments. According to the Fifteenth Amendment, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," and according to the Nineteenth Amendment, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex" (*United States Constitution*). Through these Amendments that are still valued by many today, Hamilton's claim is confirmed; the power of the central government originates from the votes of the people.

In today's society, Anti-Federalist views have not gone unacknowledged, but Anti-Federalists have not seen as many glory days as the Federalists. The primary argument of the Anti-Federalists was that by utilizing a central government, America would lose the democratic ideals it was built upon and individual liberties would become constrained as the government became increasingly more and more tyrannical. However, throughout the years, this prediction has come untrue as America remains a very strong republic today. Even though we remain a republic and not totalitarian, some people still believe that we lose sight of our democratic ideals as the government can

seem too oppressive to some. These people believe that their individual liberties may be restricted by the government today.

Analysis of Federalism and State Rights

Today in our current government, a system of federalism is used. According to lecture, federalism produces “two relatively autonomous (independent) levels of government that each possess the ability to act directly on behalf of the people with the authority granted to it by the national constitution” (Hall *Federalism* pg. 2). In other words, federalism is a system, used by the government, designed to divvy up authority between the states and central government with a method that complies with the Constitution. Initially, the Anti-Federalist parties were worried about having their individual liberties restricted, but with today’s society, it can be seen that states still possess authority over some of the most important democratic ideals, such as conducting their own elections”, “maintaining and protecting their own health/safety/ and morals”, and “regulating intrastate commerce” (Hall *Federalism* pg. 3).

For the Federalists, their entire campaign start-up was the process to ratify the Constitution. This movement was propelled with the fear of what could result from the weakening economy. Today, the power that the central government possesses displays their glories. Some of their most notable victories, that we continue to value today, include “regulating foreign and interstate commerce,” and “tax imports/exports” (Hall *Federalism* pg. 3).

Another important Federalists victory includes being able to make legislatures and other documents that comply with the Constitution and

allow the economy and government of America to remain strong and prosper. The Federalists were able to make this happen as well, as seen in the right that the central government has, allowing them to make all of the laws “ ‘ necessary and proper’ to meet responsibilities per the U. S. Constitution” (Hall Federalism pg. 3). Overall, both Federalists and Anti-Federalists can see evidence of their arguments in society today. Both parties were able to demonstrate their concerns effectively and enact certain laws to protect what they valued. In the long run, Federalists have won more of their battles than Anti-Federalists, proving that the ideals that the original Federalists once had are important enough to resonate with our government today.

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