

How were the Federalists and the Anti-federalist views of government different?

Background Information

When the delegates first met in May 1787, their initial purpose was to revise the **Articles of Confederation**. But the Virginia delegation proposed a new plan of government and after some debates and heated discussions, the delegates agreed to throw out the Articles of Confederation and write a new constitution. By mid September, the work on the new plan of government was complete but not all of the delegates were pleased with the final product. Out of the 55 delegates, only 38 signed the Constitution on September 17, 1787. Fourteen delegates left Philadelphia before the convention ended and three of the delegates that did remain refused to sign the Constitution.

The ultimate decision on the Constitution would come down to the people. In order for the Constitution to become the law of the land, 9 out of the 13 states would have to **ratify** (approve) the document. The new Constitution had its supporters, the **Federalists**, and its detractors, the **Anti-Federalists**. These two groups became the first political parties in the United States. In a series of essays and speeches that ran in newspapers across the country, the **Federalists** and **Anti-Federalists** laid their arguments before the public on the new plan of government. These written works fueled the national debate on the Constitution.

The Federalists

The Federalists supported the new Constitution and argued that the document would create a strong national government that would unite the 13 states into a **republic** (nation in which voters choose representatives to govern them). Leading the efforts for ratification were **James Madison**, **Alexander Hamilton**, and **John Jay**. In a series of articles, they outlined their support for the new Constitution and the problems with the Articles of Confederation. These 85 essays were later collected and published as *The Federalist Papers*.

They were published anonymously (a common practice of the time) under the pen name "Publius," an ancient Roman statesman. While these essays probably did not sway public opinion, they remain a great source of political thinking and a useful guide to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution. Even today, Supreme Court Justices often refer to *The Federalist Papers* when making Constitutional decisions.

- **James Madison** - Virginia delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Madison wrote on the structure of the new government.
- **Alexander Hamilton** - New York delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Hamilton wrote most of the essays focusing on the defects of the Articles of Confederation.
- **John Jay** - served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1784-1789. As a diplomat, he dealt with the ineffectiveness of the Articles of Confederation. The few essays Jay wrote focused on foreign policy.

The Anti-Federalists

The Anti-Federalists were opposed to the new Constitution. They had many issues with the proposed plan. They felt the national government was too strong and the states were too weak, the President had too much power, and Congress would ruin the country with taxes. But their major

complaint and strongest argument was that there was not a **bill of rights** to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals. The Anti-Federalists did not feel a republican government could work on a national scale. They saw themselves as the true protectors of the ideals fought for during the Revolution. George Mason, Patrick Henry, and Elbridge Gerry led the opposition to the Constitution. The articles and speeches written in response to *The Federalist Papers* are sometimes referred to as the *Anti-Federalist Papers*. They were published under various pen names, like "Cato," "Brutus," and "The Federal Farmer."

- **George Mason** - Virginia delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He refused to sign the Constitution and led the fight against ratification with Patrick Henry in Virginia.
- **Patrick Henry** - served as a delegate to the Virginia convention called to ratify the new Constitution. Henry was the leading opponent of ratification. He opposed the document on the grounds that it threatened the rights of states and individuals.
- **Elbridge Gerry** - Massachusetts delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He refused to sign the completed document because he objected to certain provisions as inadequate and dangerous.

The Outcome

The Anti-Federalists were divided and could offer no alternative plan to that of the Constitution. Some wanted to amend the Articles and others wanted to reject both the Articles and the Constitution in favor of some undetermined form of government. Their strongest argument against the Constitution, the need for a **bill of rights**, was put to rest when the Federalists agreed to the creation of a bill of rights once the Constitution was ratified. In June 1788, New Hampshire became the 9th state to ratify the Constitution thus making it the law of the land. By May 1790, all 13 states approved the new Constitution.