

The Anti-Federalists

Topic: Anti-Federalists, Ratification of the Constitution,
By: UC Irvine History Project

Guiding Question: What were the Anti-Federalists' fears about the new Constitution?

History Standards and Framework Excerpt:

8.2 Students analyze the political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution and compare the enumerated and implied powers of the federal government.

8.2.3 Evaluate the major debates that occurred during the development of the Constitution and their ultimate resolutions in such areas as shared power among institutions, divided state-federal power, slavery, the rights of individuals and states.

Students should also learn about the challenges and multiple attempts to form a stable government; the Articles of Confederation, for example, taught leaders in America the importance of a centralized government. The Articles of Confederation were the first attempt to create a federal government for the 13 autonomous states that had freed themselves from British rule....

In addition to their examination of the Constitution itself, students consider the civil liberties outlined in the Bill of Rights by analyzing both the historical context for their inclusion as well as current implications of their adoption. As Thomas Jefferson noted in a letter to James Madison in 1787, "[A] bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, and what no just government should refuse." Students first consider why the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution, studying the debate between the Federalists (who believed the protections were already included in the Constitution itself), and the Anti-Federalists (who opposed ratification of the Constitution without inclusion of a specific list of guaranteed protections of individual rights). CHSSP Framework (p. 241-243)

Common Core State Standards/ Literacy Skill Addressed:

RH.8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

RH.8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

RH.8.9 Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

W.8.1 a Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

W8.1 b Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

W8.1 c Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

W8.1 d Establish and maintain a formal style. W8.1 e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Overview of Lesson:

To Antifederalists the proposed Constitution threatened to lead the United States down an all-too-familiar road of political corruption. All three branches of the new central government threatened Antifederalists' traditional belief in the importance of restraining government power.

The most powerful objection raised by the Antifederalists, however, hinged on the lack of protection for individual liberties in the Constitution. Most of the state constitutions of the era had built on the Virginia model that included an explicit protection of individual rights that could not be intruded upon by the state. This was seen as a central safeguard of people's rights and was considered a major Revolutionary improvement over the unwritten protections of the British constitution.

Why, then, had the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention not included a bill of rights in their proposed Constitution? Most Antifederalists thought that such protections were not granted because the Federalists represented a sinister movement to roll back the gains made for ordinary people during the Revolution.

Ratification of the federal Constitution was neither unanimous nor inevitable. Large numbers of Revolutionary patriots, including Samuel Adams, George Mason, and Patrick Henry, did not support the new constitution. Antifederalists never constituted a majority of Americans, but their numbers could be found as far north as New England and as far south as South Carolina. One of the most pressing social and economic problems facing the nation at the time of the Constitutional Convention, and throughout the ratification process, was money. Under the Articles of Confederation, each state had the power to manage and print its own forms of paper currency, or money. This led to major problems because, by 1789, currency from states like Rhode Island had experienced extreme devaluation. Much of this money was worth less than its face value. To understand what this means, imagine trying to buy lunch with a \$10.00 bill but the restaurant refusing to serve you because they claim the bill is worth only \$1.00. The framers of the Constitution wanted to fix this problem by giving power over money to the new federal government. Thus one of the key goals of the framers was not just to balance power between the three branches of the federal government, but to balance power between the individual states and federal government. Much of the debate over the Constitution concerned the fact that the Constitution took some powers *away* from the states and give it to the federal government. In addition to increasing the power of the US Congress to tax citizens of the individual states, the federal constitution also barred the individual states from issuing paper money. Antifederalists complained about this transfer of power to the federal government—several Antifederalists wrote against the federal government's powers of taxation—but the Antifederalists mostly

avoided discussing the Constitution's prohibition against state-issued currency. Why? And does this explain, in part, why the Antifederalists lost the debate?

Sources:

Source 1: Excerpts from "The Address and reasons of dissent of the minority of the convention, of the state of Pennsylvania, to their constituents" Philadelphia, December 12, 1787

Source 2: Brutus 1, October 18, 1787, author unknown, possibly Robert Yates

Source 3: Article 1, Section 10, US Constitution

Source 4: Article 9, Articles of Confederation

Source 5: "The looking glass for 1787. A house divided against itself cannot stand." by Amos Doolittle (1787)

Source 6: Federalist #44 by James Madison

Source 7: "Examine Coolly Every Article, Clause, and Word" by "Federal Farmer" *Letters from the "Federal Farmer" to "The Republican"*

Source 8: "State-Issued Currency and the Ratification of the U.S. Constitution" by Mary M. Schweitzer (1989)

Please note that some of the content and source materials we will cover uses violent and sexist language, and includes outdated and offensive terms and images not in use today. We welcome all discussions about what is, is not, or could be appropriate for classroom instruction. Images are high resolution and may be resized for classroom use.

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Source 1: Excerpts from “The Address and reasons of dissent of the minority of the convention, of the state of Pennsylvania, to their constituents” Philadelphia, December 12, 1787

Note: While the Constitution was written by a committee of 55 delegates from the states, not everyone attending the convention agreed to everything in the final draft. When Pennsylvania became the second state to ratify the Constitution on December 12, 1787, twenty-two members of the Constitutional Convention wrote this essay in an attempt to convince other states to not ratify the Constitution..

The powers of Congress under the new constitution, are complete and unlimited over **the purse and the sword**, and are perfectly independent of, and supreme over, the state governments: whose intervention in these great points is entirely destroyed. By virtue of their power of taxation, Congress may command the whole, or any part of the property of the people. They may impose what **imposts** upon commerce; they may impose what land-taxes, poll-taxes, excises, duties on all written instruments, and duties on every other article that may judge proper; in short, every species of taxation, whether of an external or internal nature is **comprised** in section 8 of the 1st article, “The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises, to pay the debts, and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States.”

the purse and the sword - the power to control spending and to fight wars

imposts - taxes

comprised - made up of

Questions

1. How could Congress justify an abuse of its power of taxation?
2. Inferring from the text, what would a danger be in giving the federal government unlimited power of the purse and the sword?

Source 2: Brutus 1, October 18, 1787, author unknown, possibly Robert Yates

Note: There is no one definitive Anti-Federalist counterpart to the writings of Hamilton, Madison, and Jay. Anti-Federalist writings were generally not as organized as the essays now known as The Federalist Papers, but their writing was vast and varied. Anti-Federalist writings do not typically match up with specific essays in The Federalist Papers but rather discuss arguments against the Constitution on a thematic level. Like The Federalist Papers, many of the Anti-Federalist writings were published serially in newspapers and under pseudonyms. The following Anti-Federalist essay appears in The New York Journal. Between October 18, 1787, and April 10, 1788, this newspaper published sixteen Anti-Federalist essays written under the pen name Brutus.

When the people once part with power, they can seldom or never resume it again but by force. Many instances can be produced in which the people have voluntarily increased the powers of their rulers; but few, if any, in which rulers have willingly **abridged** their authority. This is a sufficient reason to induce you to be careful, in the first instance, how you **deposit** the powers of government....

This government is to possess absolute and uncontrollable power, legislative, executive and judicial, with respect to every object to which it extends, for by the last clause of section 8th, article 1st, it is declared “that the Congress shall have power to make all laws which shall be **necessary and proper** for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this constitution, in the government of the United States; or in any department or office thereof.” . . .

abridged - to be shortened

deposit - to store for safekeeping

necessary and proper - this clause of the Constitution has been used to expand the power of Congress by claiming it can do whatever it needs to carry out other powers given in Article 1, Section 8.

Questions

1. According to Brutus, what is the danger in states giving their power to the federal government?
2. What warning does Brutus give regarding the “necessary and proper” clause?

Source 3: Article 1, Section 10, US Constitution

No State shall enter into any Treaty, Alliance, or Confederation; grant **Letters of Marque and Reprisal**; coin Money; emit Bills of Credit; make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a **Tender** in Payment of Debts; pass any **Bill of Attainder**, ex post facto Law, or Law impairing the Obligation of Contracts, or grant any Title of Nobility...

Letters of Marque and Reprisal—authorization of individual subject or citizen to commit piracy on the high seas in the name of the government, often as an act of war

Tender—money

Bill of Attainder—law passed by legislature punishing an individual or group of a crime, often without trial

Questions

1. Article 1, Section 10 of the Constitution says “no state shall... coin Money; emit Bills of Credit; make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debt.” To which government does the Constitution grant that power?
2. How does the Constitution assign power over monetary policy? Does it assign particular powers to the federal government or deny particular powers to the individual states?

Source 4: Article 9, Articles of Confederation

The united states, in congress assembled, shall never engage in a war; nor grant **letters of marque and reprisal** in time of peace, nor enter into any treaties or alliances, nor coin money, nor regulate the value thereof nor ascertain the sums and expenses necessary for the defense and welfare of the united states, or any of them, nor emit bills, nor borrow money on the credit of the united states, nor appropriate money...unless nine states assent to the same...

Letters of Marque and Reprisal—authorization of private party to commit piracy on the high seas in the name of the government, often as an act of war

Questions

1. How does the Articles limit the power of the central government? Does it assign particular powers to the individual states or deny particular powers to the central government?

Source 5: "The looking glass for 1787. A house divided against itself cannot stand." by Amos Doolittle (1787)

Note: This drawing was a satire touching on some of the major issues in Connecticut politics about the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. A description of the details and a larger image can be found at the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661778/>



Questions:

1. What does the cart at the center of the cartoon represent?
2. Why is the cart stuck in the mud?
3. The Federalists pull the cart towards sunny skies; the Antifederalists pull it towards stormy skies. Is the artist of this cartoon making a Federalist or Antifederalist argument regarding ratification of the Constitution?

Source 6: Federalist #44 by James Madison

Note: Federalist #44 was one of the Federalist Papers written by James Madison to rally support for ratifying the Constitution. In this excerpt, Madison explains how money would help with trade among the states and with other countries.

<p>To the People of the State of New York:</p> <p>A FIFTH class of provisions in favor of the federal authority consists of the following restrictions on the authority of the several States:</p> <p>1. "No State shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation; grant letters of marque and reprisal; coin money; emit bills of credit; make any thing but gold and silver a legal tender in payment of debts; pass any bill of attainder, ex-post-facto law, or law impairing the obligation of contracts; or grant any title of nobility...</p> <p>The extension of the prohibition to bills of credit must give pleasure to every citizen...Had every State a right to regulate the value of its coin, there might be as many different currencies as States, and thus the intercourse among them would be impeded; retrospective alterations in its value might be made, and thus the citizens of other States be injured, and animosities be kindled among the States themselves.</p>	<p>intercourse—trade, business impeded—delay, prevent</p>
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Questions:

1. What short-term problem does Madison argue will result if the individual states are allowed to continue printing their own money?
2. What long-term problem does he argue will result if the states remain in control of their own money?

Source 7: “Examine Coolly Every Article, Clause, and Word” by “Federal Farmer” *Letters from the “Federal Farmer” to “The Republican”*

Note:

The **confederation** was formed when great confidence was placed in the voluntary **exertions** of individuals, and of the respective states; and the framers of it, to guard against **usurpation**, so limited and checked the powers, that, in many respects, they are inadequate to the exigencies of the union. We find, therefore, members of congress urging alterations in the federal system almost as soon as it was adopted....

The conduct of several legislatures, touching paper money, and **tender** laws, has prepared many honest men for changes in government, which otherwise they would not have thought of—when when by the evils, on the one hand, and by the secret instigations of **artful** men, on the other, the minds of men were become sufficiently uneasy, a bold step was taken, which is usually followed by a revolution, or a civil war.

confederation—United States; government under the Articles of Confederation
exertions—efforts

usurpation—unlawful taking of power

tender—money

artful—intelligent but immoral, like a con man

Questions:

1. Why, according to Federal Farmer, are “honest men” calling for a new government in 1787?
2. Is Federal Farmer for or against ratification? Is he complaining about the situation regarding paper money because he supports the federal Constitution? Or is he complaining about paper money because he supports the Articles of Confederation and worries that problems with paper money will persuade most people to reject the Articles in favor of the federal Constitution?

Source 8: “State-Issued Currency and the Ratification of the U.S. Constitution” by Mary M. Schweitzer (1989)

Note: One debate at the time of ratification was on who had the power to print paper money. The Articles of Confederation allowed for the federal government to print money. State governments were also allowed to print their own money. At the time, most people preferred the money from state banks because they did not trust the money printed by the federal government. The value of paper money could be different from one state to the next, so money printed by Virginia would not necessarily be accepted by a merchant in Massachusetts.

Shays' Rebellion, as it became known, and the Rhode Island currency issues both raised fears the economic policies of individual states could have ill effects across their borders, effects that might lead to invasion by outside forces....

Certainly a hardening of attitudes toward paper currency is visible in the Constitutional Convention.... The convention quickly voted down a milder version of the clause that had emerged from the Committee of Detail in August and would have allowed state governments to issue **bills of credit** with the permission of Congress. Instead, the convention had insisted upon an outright prohibition, with little dissent...

Many of the convention delegates had opposed paper money in their own states. More perplexing than the **intransigent** attitude of the convention representatives was the complete lack of response by the anti-Federalists on the issue. Patrick Henry and Martin both mentioned paper money, but only in the larger context of the loss of state power to the federal government. The papers of “Centennial” in Pennsylvania, considered the anti-Federalist equivalent to the Federalist Papers, failed to mention paper money at all. The possibility of direct taxes being levied from a distant government was mentioned in anti-Federalist pamphlets with far greater frequency than the actuality of the outright prohibition against paper money.

bills of credit - a piece of paper printed by a government that promises to pay a certain amount of money; a replacement for currency

intransigent - refusing to change one's views

Questions:

1. What is Schweitzer's main argument? What evidence does she present to support her argument?
2. What, according to Schweitzer, was one of the main political fears of the framers with respect to paper currencies issued by the individual states?

3. What about the Anti-Federalists? Were they against the Constitution's ban on state-issued currency?

4. Which group, then, offered the nation a solution to the problem of state-issued paper money? The Federalists? Or the Antifederalists? How might this issue have affected the outcome of ratification? Explain your answer in 4-6 sentences.

Assessment:

Anti-Federalist Poster

For this task, students will create a poster from the Anti-Federalist perspective. The poster will work to rally support against ratifying the Constitution. Using the ideas and themes identified in the sources in answering the guiding question: "What were the Anti-Federalists' fears about the new Constitution?" students will create a poster that conveys the Anti-Federalists' message.

Brainstorm

Sketch/write/brainstorm on large paper any imagery that relates to the issue.

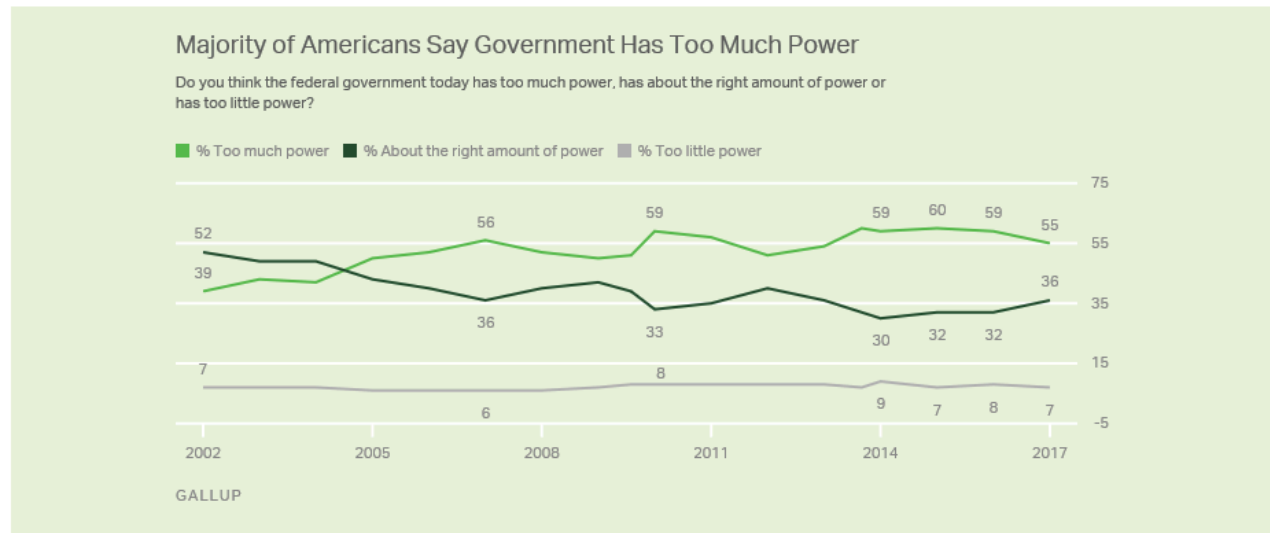
Questions to consider:

- What imagery comes to mind when you think of this issue?
- What words or phrases do you think of?
- Can you connect a song, poem, person, celebrity, symbol to the issue?
- What colors/lines/shapes might be connected to the issue?

Civic Engagement:

Is The Federal Government Too Powerful?

President Ronald Reagan, famously said, "... government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Recent polling has also found that a majority of Americans believe that the federal government is too powerful.



Source: [Gallup](https://www.gallup.com)

For this task, students will imagine that they are political campaign managers for a hypothetical candidate. They have been asked to advise this candidate on how her political platform should take into account concerns that the government is too powerful. Have students search for polling data regarding public opinion on government. After summarizing the major ideas from the polls, students write a one-page memo in which they recommend to their boss tactics for talking about the power of government and policies she might propose in its wake.

[Americans' Belief That Gov't Is Too Powerful at Record Level](#)

[Americans' Views of Government: Low Trust, but Some Positive Performance Ratings](#)

[Poll: Most American Think the Federal Government Has Too Much Power](#)