



The Florida Joint  
Center for Citizenship  
*A Partnership for Florida's Civic Health*



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## Highlights: Federalists v. Anti-Federalists

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Explain the viewpoints of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists regarding the ratification of the Constitution and inclusion of a bill of rights.


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## The Federalists, Anti-Federalists and a Bill of Rights

It is a common misconception that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution were united in their efforts and desires to move past the Articles of Confederation and form a federal system that would:

- Protect the nation from foreign and internal aggressors.
- Unite the nation in their efforts to experience representative democracy.
- Create a government based on separation of powers, checks and balances and federalism.




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## Perspectives among Attendees at the 1787 Constitutional Convention

Three Dimensions:

- A. Retain the Articles of Confederation with some modification to address the concerns that weakened the Articles of Confederation.
- B. Support a restructuring of government that would shift power from the states to a shared power system between the national and state governments.
- C. Support returning to status as British subjects.




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## The Dominant Conflict

The dominant conflict at the convention was between the Federalists (those supporting a new federal system) and the Anti-Federalists (those who wanted to retain the structure of the Articles of Confederation).

One of the key dimensions of conflict was whether the new federal constitution should include a listing of rights that protected individuals from government abuse of power. The resolution of this conflict was achieved with the Bill of Rights.



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### Key Arguments Opposing the New Federal Constitution

The group that opposed the new federal Constitution was called the Anti-Federalists, who believed:

- The Constitution gave too much power to the national government at the expense of the state governments.
- The Constitution lacked a specific enumeration of rights which was needed in order to protect the people from the national government.
- The “necessary and proper” clause (also called the “elastic clause”) gave too much power to Congress.



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### The Addition of a Bill of Rights as Compromise

The most effective argument presented by the Anti-Federalists was the lack of a specific enumeration of rights. Americans feared that the newly formed and empowered national government might withhold those rights.

The lack of a bill of rights became the centerpiece of the Anti-Federalists’ arguments against the new federal Constitution.



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### The Federalists and Anti-Federalists through a Contemporary Lens

The core concern between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists was that the federal government would not protect individual rights. It was the states, being close to the people, who the Anti-Federalists believed could protect the people’s rights because the government was close to the people.

The Bill of Rights that was eventually added to the U.S. Constitution as enumerated (listed) individual rights.

What about the states? The Tenth Amendment reads as follows:

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.



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