

## Federalists and Anti-Federalists

From drafting the Constitution between May and September 1787 to its ratification in 1788, there was an intense debate on ratification. During this period, people were basically divided into two groups, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists.

The individuals opposed to the ratification of the Constitution were called the Anti-Federalists. The Anti-Federalists worried that the Constitution gave too much power to the federal (national) government at the expense of the state governments. They were also concerned that, within the federal government, the legislative and executive branches were too powerful. Specifically, the Anti-Federalists were concerned that the “necessary and proper” clause in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, which allows Congress to do what it believes is “necessary and proper” in order to carry out its other responsibilities, was too broad and would give Congress too much power.

Anti-Federalists were also concerned that the Constitution lacked a specific listing of rights. They believed that a bill of rights was essential to protect the people from the federal government. The Revolutionary War had just been fought because the American people needed to defend their rights. With the war experience still in mind, the Anti-Federalists wanted to prevent a powerful national government from taking away the rights the American people had just worked so hard to secure. The necessity for a Bill of Rights became the focus of their campaign against ratification. To communicate their concerns, Anti-Federalists such as Patrick Henry wrote essays and newspaper articles to spread their point of view, and these writings became known as the Anti-Federalist Papers.

The supporters of the proposed Constitution were known as Federalists. For the Federalists, the Constitution was necessary in order to protect the liberty and independence that was gained from the American Revolution. The main arguments in favor of ratifying the Constitution were stated in a series of essays published in newspapers written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay called the Federalist Papers.

They believed that the three branches of the national government separated the powers and protected people’s rights. Each branch is equal, so no one group can assume control over another. They also believed that a listing of rights could be a dangerous thing. If the federal government were to protect only the listed rights, what would stop it from violating or abusing rights that were not listed? Since they cannot list all the rights, the Federalists argued that it is better not to list any of the rights.

In the end, the Federalists were more organized in their efforts. By June of 1788, nine states had voted to ratify it (eight voted “yes” and New York at first voted “no”), and only one more vote was needed (New Hampshire). In order to secure the last votes, the Federalists agreed that when Congress met, it would draft the Bill of Rights. Finally, New York and Virginia voted “yes,” and the Constitution was ratified. Interestingly, the Bill of Rights was not originally a part of the Constitution, and yet it has proved to be highly important in protecting the rights of the people.