Federalists and Anti-Federalists

A Nation of Nations

Can One National Government Properly Represent and Protect the Rights of Individuals in a Pluralistic Society?

While most people can agree that they want to live under a free government that serves the will of its citizens, people do not always agree about the best way to govern a diverse population that has various interests and concerns. From the very beginning of this nation, politicians and citizens have debated the tension between the roles of federal and local governments.



n the early centuries of recorded history, most governments were relatively small-usually composed of one populated center surrounded by a cluster of farms or villages. As small governments grew to empires with vast territories, new problems arose-how to rule diverse and distant populations from one center. The early experience of England's North American colonies with the British monarchy made them especially sensitive to the problem of highly centralized power. In order to construct the best government, Founders such as James Madison dedicated themselves to research the success and failures of other confederacies (states united for mutual support). Their findings showed that vulnerability to outside forces combined with an inability to resolve conflicts from within could prove fatal to a young confederacy. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other leaders who were later to become Federalists thus decided that they must subordinate the states to the sovereignty of a central government. Other Americans, however, skeptical of centralized authority, agreed with eighteenth-century political philosopher Montesquieu, who claimed that laws needed to be established locally-in relation to "the climate of each country, to the quality of its soil . . . to the principal occupation of the natives . . . manners and customs." In becoming Anti-Federalists, these Americans feared the rise of a new aristocracy in the new American nation.





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Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote a series of 85 letters that urged ratification of the United States Constitution as a way of unifying the separate states. These letters, later put together in a publication called The Federalist, appeared in New York newspapers from October 27, 1777 to April 4, 1778. In the following excerpts from the January and June entries. Alexander Hamilton states that a strong national government is the only realistic way to achieve a healthy and peaceful society.

It should not be forgotten that a disposition in the State government to encroach upon the rights of the Union is quite as probable as a disposition in the Union to encroach upon the rights of the State governments. What side would be likely to prevail in such a conflict, must depend on the means which the contending parties could employ toward ensuring success. As in republics, strength is always on the side of the people, and as there are weighty reasons to induce a belief that the State governments will commonly possess most influence over them, the natural conclusion is that such contests will be most apt to end to the disadvantage of the Union; and that there is a greater probability of encroachment by the members upon the federal head, than by the federal head upon the members. . . .

Sir, if we have national objects to pur-

sue, we must have national revenues. If you make requisitions and they are not complied with, what is to be done? It has been well observed that to coerce the States is one of the maddest projects that was ever devised. A Failure of compliance will never be confined to a single state; this being the case, can we suppose it wise to hazard a civil war?...

But can we believe that one State will ever suffer itself to be used as an instrument of coercion? It is a dream. It is impossible. We are brought to this dilemma: either a federal standing army is to enforce the requisitions, or the federal treasury is left without supplies, and the government without support. What is the cure for this great evil? Nothing but to enable the national laws to operate on Individuals, in the same manner as those of the states do.





The following letter from Thomas Burke to the Governor of North Carolina, written in 1777, embodied the spirit of Anti-Federalism. Burke's major concern was the danger of giving absolute power to any single authority because of the potential for corruption.

The more experience I acquire, the stronger is my conviction that unlimited power can not be safely trusted to any man or set of men on earth. No men have undertaken to exercise authority with intentions more generous and disinterested than the Congress and none seem to have fewer or more feeble motives for increasing the power of their body politic. What could induce individuals blest with peaceable domestic affluence to forego all the enjoyment of a pleasing home, to neglect their private affairs, and at the expense of all their time and some part of their private fortunes, to attend public business under many insurmountable difficulties and inconveniences? What but a generous zeal for the public? ... A great part of our time is consumed in debates, whose object on

one side is to increase the power of Congress, and on the other to restrain it. The advocates do not always keep the same side of the contest. The same persons who on one day endeavor to carry through some resolutions, whose tendency is to increase the power of Congress, are often on another day very strenuous advocates to restrain it. From this I infer that no one has entertained a concerted design to increase the power; and the attempts to do it proceed from ignorance of what such a being ought to be....

These and many other considerations make me earnestly wish that the power of Congress was accurately defined and that there were adequate checks provided to prevent any excess.



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Federalist Fisher Ames was in favor of a strong federal government.



Fisher Ames, another important spokes-person for the Federalists, shows in the following passage that a strong federal government is a safeguard against the emergence of divisive and erratic factions that could upset social order.

Common sense and our own recent experience have shown that a combination of a very small minority can effectually defeat the authority of the national will. The votes of a majority may sometimes, though not invariably, show what ought to be done; but to awe or subdue the force of a thousand men, the government must call out the superior force of two thousand men. It is therefore established the very instant it is brought to the test, that the mere will of a majority is inefficient and without authority. And as to employing a superior force to procure obedience, which a democratic government has an undoubted right to do, and so indeed has every other, it is obvious that the admitted necessity of this resort completely over-

throws all the boasted advantages of the democratic system. For it obedience cannot be procured by reason, it must be obtained by compulsion; and this is exactly what every other government will do in a like case....

Now, if a faction is once admitted to exist in a state, the disposition and the means to obstruct the laws, or in other words, the will of the majority, must be perceived to exist also. If then it be true, that a democratic government is of all the most liable to faction, which no man of sense will deny, it is manifest that it is, from its very nature, obliged more than any other government to resort to force to overcome or awe the power of faction.



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Luther Martin, leader of Maryland's Anti-Federalists, said the following in a speech to the legislature of the state of Maryland in 1787. Concerned with the potential difficulty of owing allegiance to more than one ruler, Martin says that fundamental allegiance belongs to the state.

By the principles of the American Revolution arbitrary power may, and ought to be resisted even by arms if necessary. The time may come when it shall be the duty of the state, in order to preserve itself from the oppression of the general government, to have recourse to the sword. In which case the proposed form of government declares, that the state and every one of its citizens who act under its authority, are guilty of a direct act of treason; reducing by this provision the different states to this alternative that they must

tamely and passively yield to despotism or their citizens must oppose it at the hazard of the halter if unsuccessful, and reducing the citizens of the state which shall take arms, to a situation in which they must be exposed to punishment, let them act as they will, since if they obey the authority of their state government they will be guilty of treason against the United States, if they join the general government they will be guilty of treason against their own state.

The Debate Continues

Presidents as recent as Ronald Reagan have declared that the United States government risks having too much power, and have called for a "new federalism" that would reorganize responsibilities and policies between the federal and state level. By minimizing a centralized bureaucracy, many feel today that laws can be made more effective and more sensitive to the individual citizen's daily life.

नेपांच एक जिल्ला के प्रतिकारित के जिल्ला

Recalling Facts

- According to Alexander Hamilton, what is cone of the dangers of giving states enough autonomy to refuse federal regulations?
- 2. What eighteenth-century political philosopher provided the basis for the Anti-Eederalist stance?
- 3. How did Fisher Ames justify the use of force by a democratic government?
- 4. How does Luther Martin justify disobedience in the face of federal regulations?

What Do You Think?

Think of some law in your own state that is different in another state. Examples might be traffic laws, minimum marriage age, minimum schooling age or minimum drinking age. What does this comparison tell you about the values, interests, and religious composition in your state compared to the other? Do you feel your state represents you well? Discuss your opinion with a group of classmates.