

TABLE 2.2 Voting of Delegates After the First National Election

Americans elected delegates in each state, who then voted on whether to ratify the Constitution. *At what point did the founders have enough states on board to start a feasible government?* Signed: 9/17/87

State	Date	Yes Votes	No Votes	Percentage Yes
Delaware	Dec. 7, 1787	30	0	100.0
Pennsylvania	Dec. 11, 1787	46	23	66.7
New Jersey	Dec. 18, 1787	38	0	100.0
Georgia	Jan. 2, 1788	26	0	100.0
Connecticut	Jan. 9, 1788	128	40	B of R 76.2
Massachusetts	Feb. 6, 1788	187	168	promise 52.7
Maryland	Apr. 26, 1788	63	11	S.Adams/ 85.1
South Carolina	May 23, 1788	149	73	Hancock 67.1
New Hampshire	June 21, 1788*	57	47	CC 54.8
Virginia	June 25, 1788	89	79	antifed/ 53.0
New York	July 26, 1788	30	27	fed 52.6
North Carolina	Nov. 21, 1789	194	77	comprom. 71.6
Rhode Island	May 29, 1790	34	32	51.5

Source: Lauren Bahr and Bernard Johnson, ed., *Collier's Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7 (New York: P. F. Collier, 1992), p. 239.

over ratification in Massachusetts. They narrowly secured the state's support only after promising to amend the Constitution so that it would protect freedoms explicitly. Victories in Virginia and New York required similar guarantees—and North Carolina and Rhode Island withheld ratification until the Constitution's first ten amendments, the **Bill of Rights**, passed through the Federalist-controlled Congress. This single temporary setback is instructive, because it clearly reveals how Federalist successes otherwise depended on anticipation of popular sentiment. The one time they ran directly against public opinion, they were forced to back down. (See Chapter 14 for a detailed discussion of the Bill of Rights.)

Evaluating the Constitution

American schoolchildren often learn a sanitized version of their nation's founding, one that hides the political maneuvering behind the U.S. Constitution and portrays early leaders as saints. It may seem unpatriotic to remind readers, as historian Joseph Ellis writes, "that all the Founding Fathers, before they were marbleized and mythologized, were considered fallible and controversial figures."²³ Won't acknowledging the gritty truth just add to modern cynicism? Not really. As Ellis recognizes, public discontent builds from a false sense that today's decision makers fall well below the caliber of leadership once available.

TABLE 2.3 Comparing the Charters

The Articles of Confederation were a “league of friendship” and seldom allowed the national government to give orders to states. *What do you consider to be the most important difference between the Articles and the Constitution?*

Weaknesses of the Articles

of Confederation	How Addressed in Constitution
Congress could not levy taxes.	Congress has power to levy taxes (Article I, Section 8).
States could restrict commerce among states.	States cannot regulate commerce without the consent of Congress (Article I, Section 10).
States could issue their own currency.	States are prohibited from coining money (Article I, Section 10).
Executive was not independent of Congress.	An independently elected president holds the executive power (Article II).
There was no national judicial system.	The Supreme Court was created, and Congress was granted the power to establish lower federal courts (Article III, Section 1).
Amendments to Articles had to have unanimous approval of states.	Large majorities are necessary to amend the Constitution, but there are several different ways to do so (Article V).

Source: Articles of Confederation; U.S. Constitution, articles listed. See Appendix.

as mastering duties that were present from the beginning, but that became increasingly complicated (such as defending the nation and organizing the government bureaucracy).

In the more than two centuries that have followed, the main lines of conflict have changed. People no longer worry much about the political divisions that captivated the framers. But the Constitution still allows the American political system to reconcile demands and opinions from many different groups and interests. In that sense, the true hero of the story lives on. Subsequent chapters discuss ways in which the compromises of 1787 have been redefined in response to changing political circumstances, allowing the U.S. Constitution to become the longest lasting Constitution in the world.

Chapter Summary

The Constitution grew out of a colonial political tradition that recognized that legitimate government arises from the consent of the people. Americans' first attempt at putting their principles into practice, the Articles of Confederation, was a loosely organized system with a weak central government. It lasted less than a decade.