

Wanted: A Just Right Government Name:

Independent Citizens Seek Awesome Government

When the American colonists gained their independence from the British after the Revolutionary War, the Americans were faced with a problem: What kind of government should they have? They'd lived for years under British rule, and they had lots of complaints. Now they would create a government from scratch, and they had a few requirements.

Independent citizens seek government that...

- Has enough power to do its job
- Doesn't give anyone too much power
- Considers the needs of all the states
- Lets citizens have a say
- Protects individual rights



Benjamin Franklin worked on the Articles of Confederation before he helped write the Constitution.

Independent Citizens Seek ^{Weak}Awesome Government

Their experience under heavy-handed British rule left the newly independent Americans a little bit skittish. Basically, they wanted a government that couldn't do much. They started by drafting a document called the Articles of Confederation. A **confederation** is a group of individuals united together for a purpose—in this case, the 13 states that had been British colonies before the war. The **Articles of Confederation** explained how the 13 states would be governed as one nation. Here are the basics:

- Each state was independent and had its own government.
- Each state would send representatives to the "Congress of the Confederation," a lawmaking body.
- Congress was the only branch of government. (No president or courts.)
- In Congress, each state got one vote.

A Rocky Start

On one hand, the Articles of Confederation had qualities that citizens appreciated. Because the Articles did not set up a very strong government, states got to keep their power and independence. There was no powerful government telling them what to do. Citizens also wanted protection, and the Articles gave Congress the power to create a military to protect all the states.

← PROS

However, there were problems. For one thing, the Articles did not give Congress the power to enforce its laws. Congress also had no power to collect taxes to pay for the military. And in order to change the Articles, every single state had to agree to the changes. These and other problems meant that, in general, citizens felt like the relationship... er, the *government*, wasn't working.

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Lots of Differences

With thirteen different states, there was no easy solution. Here's why:

- *States had different needs.* For example, some states depended on fishing, while others mostly grew crops.
- *States had different sizes.* Some states had many people; others had few.
- *People had different opinions.* Some people feared a central government, while others thought a central government was necessary.



That last one was especially troublesome. Many people feared they would lose their freedom if a central government had too much power. Others were tired of the weak government created under the Articles of Confederation and felt like nothing would ever get done if nobody was in charge.