

8.5 Issue: How Should States Be Represented in the New Government?

When the convention began, most delegates believed that their task was to revise the Articles of Confederation. To their surprise, the Virginia delegation presented them with a completely new plan of government. After a lengthy debate, the delegates made a bold move. They agreed to throw out the Articles of Confederation and write a new constitution.

While the delegates—later known as the *framers*—agreed to design a new framework of government, they were divided on a key issue. Where should the government's power to rule come from? The states? Or the people? Under the Articles of Confederation, the answer was the states. Madison's answer in the Virginia Plan was that the government's power should come directly from the people.

The Virginia Plan The Virginia Plan called for a strong national government with three branches or parts. A legislative branch, or congress, would make laws. An executive branch would carry out ("execute") the laws. A judicial branch, or system of courts, would apply and interpret the laws.

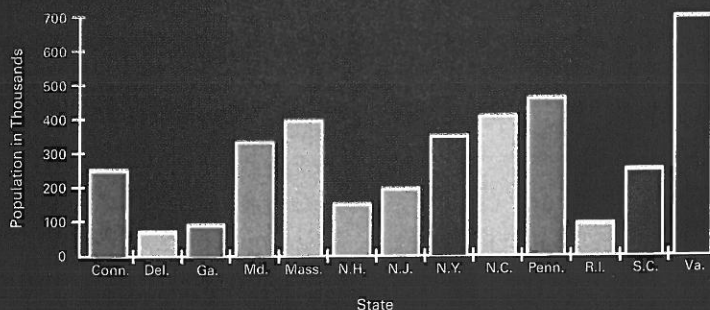
Under the Virginia Plan, Congress was to be made up of two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The number of lawmakers that a state could send to Congress depended on its population. States with a large number of people would have more representatives than smaller states.

Delegates from Virginia, Pennsylvania, and other large states liked the Virginia Plan. Having the new government represent people, not states, would give them more representatives and more power in both houses of Congress.

The New Jersey Plan Not surprisingly, delegates from the small states disliked the Virginia Plan. Just as the convention was about to vote on it, William Paterson of New Jersey introduced a rival proposal.

Like the Virginia Plan, the New Jersey Plan called for a government with three branches. However, the legislative branch would have just one house, not two. And each state would have an equal vote in Congress, no matter how big or small. This plan, Paterson argued, would keep the small states from being "swallowed up" by their more populous neighbors.

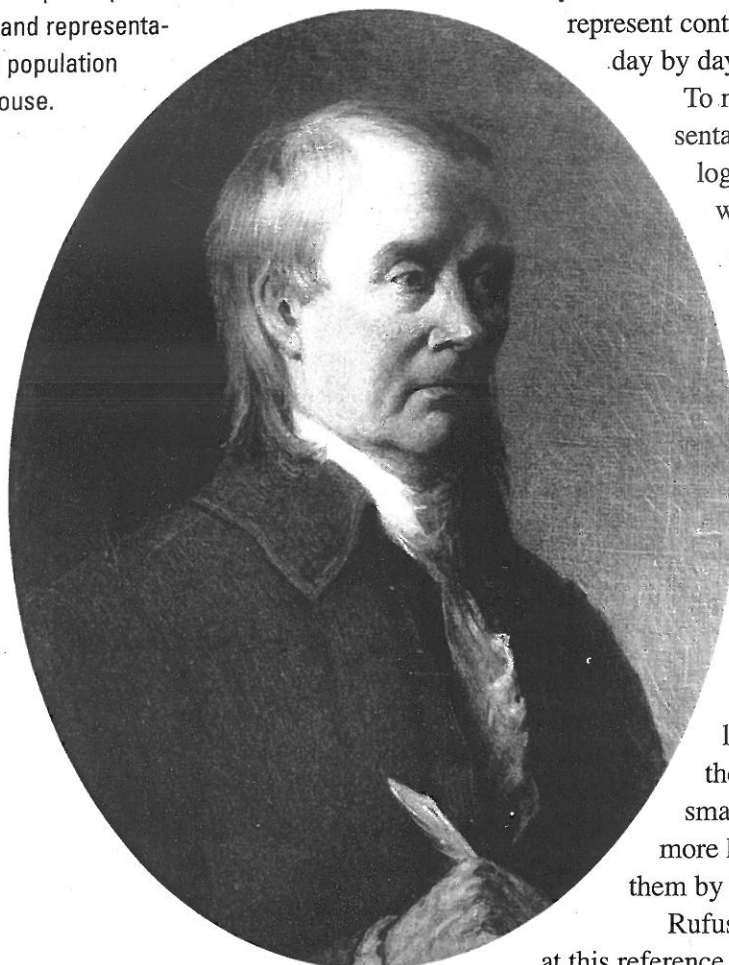
Population of States, 1790



A major issue that confronted the Constitutional Convention was how to determine representation in the new government. Should each state have the same number of representatives, or should representation be based on population? Looking at this chart, which states would want equal representation for each state?

8.6 Resolution: The Great Compromise

Roger Sherman, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, helped construct the Great Compromise that called for a Congress of two houses. Each state had equal representation in one house and representation based on population in the other house.



The New Jersey Plan was warmly received by delegates from small states. The majority of delegates, however, saw Paterson's plan as little improvement over the Articles of Confederation and rejected it. But they could not agree on what should replace it.

Tempers Rise The debate over who Congress should represent continued into July, with tempers rising day by day.

To most delegates from large states, representation based on population seemed both logical and fair. "Can we forget for whom we are forming a Government?" asked James Wilson of Pennsylvania. "Is it for men, or for the imaginary beings called States?"

To Wilson, the answer was obvious. But his logic could not overcome the fears of small-state delegates. One hot Saturday afternoon, Gunning Bedford of Delaware tore into the delegates from large states. "They insist," he said, "they will never hurt or injure the lesser states." His reply was, "I do not, gentlemen, trust you!" If the large states continued trying to "crush the smaller states," Bedford warned, "the small ones will find some foreign ally of more honor and good faith who will take them by the hand and do them justice."

Rufus King of Massachusetts was shocked at this reference to foreign powers. He shot back that he was "grieved, that such a thought had entered into the heart." Still, every delegate knew that Britain, France, and Spain were just waiting for the United States to fall apart so that they could pick up the pieces.

compromise an agreement in which both sides in a dispute agree to give up something they want in order to achieve a settlement

A Compromise Is Reached Finally, a **compromise** was proposed based on a plan put forward earlier by Roger Sherman of Connecticut.

The compromise plan kept a two-house Congress. The first house, the House of Representatives, would represent the people. In this house, the number of representatives from each state would be based on the state's population. The second house, the Senate, would represent the states. Each state would have two senators, to be elected by their state legislatures.

The vote was very close, but the compromise plan was approved. This plan saved the convention and became known as the Great Compromise.