

The Constitutional Convention (1787)

A convention, or meeting, was called in Philadelphia for the purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation. Delegates present included Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin. The representatives quickly agreed on discarding the Articles of Confederation. They decided a new national constitution was needed.

George Washington initially did not support the meeting. What changed his mind? Shays' Rebellion showed the government was too weak. Washington was chosen to be the leader of the convention.

James Madison is often considered the Father of the Constitution because: he kept a record of the convention and authored the basic plan they adopted.

The delegates agreed on the need for strengthening the national government and for creating 3 branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. They disagreed on how states should be represented in Congress. Two plans were proposed to address the problem of representation:

Proposed Plans for Representation in Congress

The Virginia Plan

Representation should be based on population.

States with larger populations would have more voice in making the laws.

This was considered more democratic than the system under the Articles of Confederation, in which each state had one vote regardless of population.



The New Jersey Plan

Favored the smaller states.

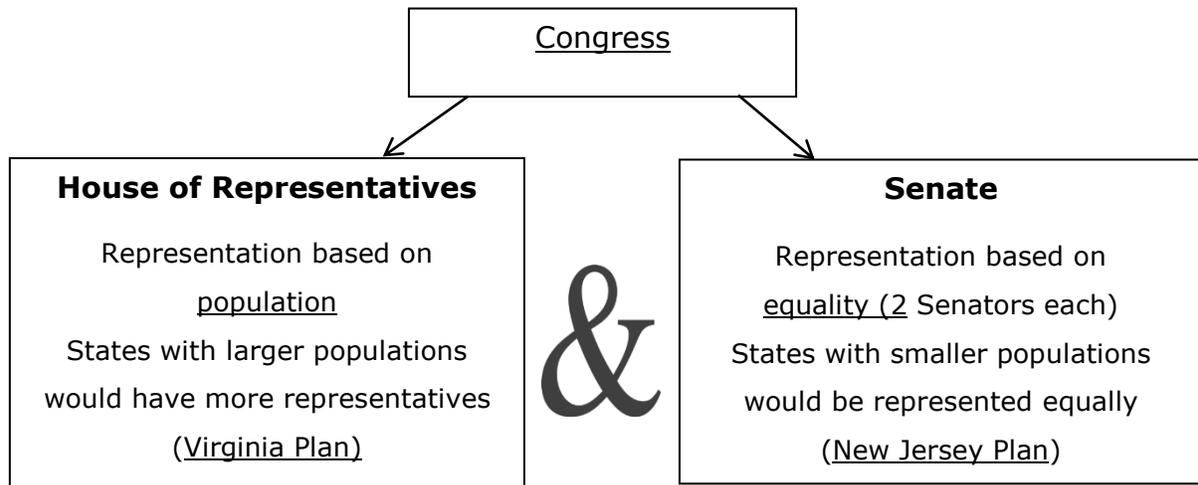
Representation in Congress is based on the idea that all states should be equal.

This system gives smaller states a voice. Smaller states will not always be outvoted by states with larger populations.

The Great Compromise

Created the Legislative (law-making) Branch

Plan created by: Roger Sherman from Connecticut.



This system provides balance between states with larger populations and states with smaller populations. It created a bicameral (two houses) legislature, and all laws must be approved by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Other Compromises

Three-Fifths Compromise

Problem: Should slaves count as part of a state's population?

Compromise: 5 slaves count as 3 people for the purpose of determining representation in Congress and for setting taxes.

Commerce Compromise

Problem: North and South disagreed over whether imports/exports should be taxed.

Compromise: 1. Congress can regulate foreign and domestic trade.
2. Congress can tax imports, but not exports.

Slavery

Problem: Should the slave trade be banned everywhere, not just in the North?

Compromise: 1. Slaves are considered property under the Constitution and must be returned to their owners if they run away.

2. Northerners agreed to keep the new Congress from interfering with the slave trade until 1808.