

# OUR 1<sup>ST</sup> GOVERNMENT - THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

*Read and Watch – [What You Should Know About the Articles of Confederation \(2:41\)](#)*

**Independent Citizens Seek**  
*Weak*  
**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.

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. It was the first written constitution of the United States after it was ratified (approved) in 1781. 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. In 1787, representatives from every state except Rhode Island met in Philadelphia to fix the Articles. The Constitutional Convention effectively closed the history of government under the Articles of Confederation.

## DISTRIBUTION OF POWER BY GOVERNMENT TYPE

### UNITARY GOVERNMENT



Define:

Example:

**Great Britain**

### CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT



Define:

Example:

**U.S.A. under Art. of Conf.**

### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



Define:

Example:

**U.S.A. under Constitution**

👉👉👉 **Read about the Articles of Confederation on pages 55-56 in your textbook.** 👈👈👈

List the four weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

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| 2. | 4. |