4.2 Creating a Government
How did decisions made at the Constitutional Convention affect the balance of power in the new nation?

Evaluate

Can We Fix It?

Many delegates who came to the Constitutional Convention believed the Articles of Confederation needed to be reworked to strengthen the government. Others believed a new constitution was needed.

The Framers agreed that the national government needed to be strengthened.

To prevent the central government from becoming too powerful, the Framers established a system of separation of powers as well as checks and balances among three branches of government.

The Framers decided to protect states' rights and powers by listing the powers of the national government. Any power not listed was reserved for the states.

Why Does It Matter?

The Framers wanted to be sure that the new government would not turn into the sort of government they had just fought to escape from. Their commitment to the rights of the states and of the people has helped to create an enduring democracy.

The State House in Philadelphia, now known as Independence Hall, was the birthplace of the Constitution.
Time to Compromise

The delegates of the Constitutional Convention had to come to agreement on many serious issues, and agreement was reached through compromise. Large and small states disagreed about representation. Northern and Southern states disagreed about slavery. People across the nation worried about protecting individual rights and liberties.

Disagreements about representation were resolved by the Great Compromise, which created a Congress composed of a Senate, with equal representation for all states, and a House of Representatives, with representation based on population.

Slavery would continue to be legal, but Congress could prohibit importation of enslaved people after 1808.

For both taxation and representation, population counts would include three-fifths of enslaved people.

The rights of the people would be spelled out in a bill of rights, which Congress promised to incorporate as amendments to the Constitution.

Why Does It Matter?

The work done at the Constitutional Convention is a testament to what a nation can accomplish, even when faced with serious differences. The compromises made at the convention created the U.S. Constitution, which has lasted for more than 200 years.

George Washington presided over the debates at the Constitutional Convention.