

The Founders and Federalism

By UShistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.12.19

Word Count **659**

Level **770L**



Alexander Hamilton (right), James Madison (left) and George Washington (center) were advocates of the federal system. Photos via Wikimedia Commons

The goal of federalism was to carefully split power between states and the central government.

The Founders hoped federalism would balance order with liberty.

They had several reasons for creating it:

- to avoid tyranny
- to allow more participation in politics
- to use the states as "laboratories" for new ideas and programs.

James Madison imagined a problem in *The Federalist Papers*: What if a power-hungry leader tried to take over a few states at once?

National leaders can stop that leader's power from spreading. In other words, federalism prevents a person who takes control of a state from easily taking control of the federal government, too.

Citizens' Voice In Government

In the founders' view, citizens should be able to elect both state and national officials. This also increases the voice of citizens in their government.

Say a state adopts a new policy, and things do not go well. At least it would not be a disaster for everyone. On the other hand, let's say a state's new programs work well. If so, other states can use those ideas. They may adjust them to their own needs.

National Government Powers

The Constitution gives three types of power to the national government:

Delegated powers are specifically granted to the federal government. This appears in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution. Such powers include the power to coin money, to make rules on business and to declare war. It also gives power to raise and maintain armed forces. In all, the Constitution delegates 27 powers specifically to the federal government.

Implied powers are ones not specifically stated in the Constitution. However, they are granted in the elastic clause. It is in Article I, Section 8. This section gives Congress the right "to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper" for executing powers granted to government. These powers are not stated clearly. Often, the courts are left to decide what counts as an implied power.

Inherent powers are not specifically listed in the Constitution. However, they grow out of the very existence of the national government. For example, the United States has the power to conquer territory. This is mainly because most governments in general claim that right.

The Constitution also identifies reserved powers. These are set aside for the states. Unlike delegated powers, they are not listed specifically. Still, they are guaranteed by the Tenth Amendment. One such power would be making rules for trade within a state. Another would be carrying out elections.

Some powers of federal and state governments overlap. For example, both can borrow money. Both can charge taxes to citizens. Both can make laws. These powers are not granted exclusively to the national government.

Prohibited powers are denied either to the national government, state governments or both (Article I, Section 9). The national government cannot exercise its powers in some ways. It may not block a state's ability to perform its responsibilities. Meanwhile, states cannot tax goods that come in from other countries. They can't create their own money, either.

States Have Responsibilities To One Another

States also have responsibilities to one another. This is explained in Article IV of the Constitution. Each state must give "full faith and credit" to the public acts, records and civil court proceedings of every other state. Business contracts, then, are recognized by all states. Marriages are also recognized. Extradition is also required by Article IV. This is when an accused criminal is returned to the state where the crime was committed.

The founders very carefully divided powers between federal and state governments. They were responding to anger with the tyranny of King George III of Britain. They also recognized the

failure of the Articles of Confederation. This governing document came before the Constitution.

The blending and separation of powers guarded against tyranny. It also allowed for more citizen participation in government. It provided a way for putting new policies and programs into practice.