Constitutional Democracy/ Historical Background

**Articles of Confederation-** The first constitution of the American states, ratified in 1781

**Constitutional Convention-** The convention in Philadelphia, May 25 to Sept. 17, 1797 that framed the Constitution of the U.S.

**Shay’s Rebellion-** Rebellion by farmers in western Massachusetts in 1786-87, protesting mortgage foreclosure; highlighted the need for a strong national gov’t.

**Bicameralism-** The principle of a two-house legislature.

**Virginia Plan-** Proposal made by Virginia delegation for a strong central gov’t with a bicameral legislature, the lower house to be elected by the voters and the upper chosen by the lower.

**New Jersey Plan-** Proposal made by New Jersey delegation for a central gov’t with a single-house legislature in which each state would be represented equally.

**Connecticut Compromise-** Compromise for a bicameral legislature with a lower house which reps. would be based on population, and upper house in which each state would have two senators.

**Absrtact:**

* Popular consent, and Respect for the individual
* Equality of opportunity, and Personal liberty
* Free and fair elections, Majority rule, and Freedom of expression
* Articles of Confederation were the first move toward a strong central gov’t but was very weak
* States disagreed on the strength of the new central gov’t
* Shay’s Rebellion made delegates realize the need for a central authority
* Virginia Plan favored larger states
* New Jersey Plan favored smaller states
* Connecticut Compromise took the major provisions of the Virginia and New Jersey Plan and combined them
* Federalists supported a strong central gov’t
* Antifederalists opposed a strong central gov’t

The Articles of Confederation were a much needed step towards constitutional democracy but they were also an inadequate solution. The Articles could not levy taxes or regulate commerce, sovereignty was retained by the states, and each state had one vote in Congress. Other problems with representation included 9 of 13 votes in Congress were required for any measure, consent by all states for an amendment, and delegates were picked and paid for by legislatures. These issues along with little money being coined by Congress, territorial disputes, and a lack of a national judicial system demonstrated the need for a new constitution.

One solution to the Articles was the Virginia Plan. This proposal called for a bicameral legislature made up of a lower and upper house. The lower house was to be elected by the voters with the number of representatives determined by the state’s population. The upper house was to be elected by the lower house. From here, an executive and along with federal judges were to be appointed by the legislature. This plan was proposed as a means to benefit larger states with a greater population.

Another solution to revising the Articles was the New Jersey Plan. In this proposal, there was to be a single-house legislature in which there would be one delegate per state and each state received a single vote. The executive branch would consist of 2 or more executives elected by the legislature. The judicial branch would only have a supreme court whereby judges were appointed by the executives. This plan favored small states with lower populations.

**Necessities:**

Constitutional democracy in the United States formed out of the weakness of the Articles of Confederation. With a Lockean influence, the Framers sought to create a strong central gov’t that would simultaneously not pose a threat to liberty. The Constitutional Convention held on May 25 to Sept. 17, 1787 gathered delegates from the 13 states to outline the objectives of government: to secure the right to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness.

The Connecticut Compromise would be the final agreement settled upon by the states. It called for a bicameral legislature with a lower house which reps. would be based on population, and upper house in which each state would have two senators. This agreement allowed deliberations to continue and thus led to the [Three-Fifths Compromise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-fifths_compromise), which further wrangled the issue of popular representation in the House. After equality of representation in the Senate was accepted, most objections to a strong national government dissolved

**Further Information**

* <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/intro.html>
* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connecticut_Compromise>
* Government by the People. pg. 12-21