

# The Articles of Confederation

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress wrote the Articles of Confederation, which was designed to form the basis for America's national government. The Articles are considered the nation's first constitution.

Under the Articles, the thirteen colonies became thirteen states. The Articles granted each state a good amount of independence. The states acted like individual countries. They did not work together. They refused to give up their individual rights. Under British rule they had, and now each state wanted its own power.

The people who drafted the Articles of Confederation did not want a strong central government. The Articles of Confederation set up a Congress of the Confederation. Some states had more members than other states, but each state was allowed only one vote.

There was no president, and there were no courts. Congress had very little power in what it could do. The states did not have to obey national laws that were passed.

## Articles of Confederation: Strengths and Weaknesses

### Achievements:

1. Establishment of a fair policy for lands west of the Appalachians.
  - Survey Act of 1785
  - Northwest Ordinance Act of 1787
  - Congress enacted two land ordinances providing organization.
2. Created a peace treaty with Great Britain
  - signed in 1783
  - Britain recognized American Independence
  - Britain enlarged the nation's boundaries
3. Set up departments of Foreign Affairs, War, Marine, and Treasury
  - this was done under a single permanent secretary

### Failures:

1. Congress did not have the power to levy or collect taxes
  - could only raise money by borrowing or requesting money from states
2. Did not have the power to regulate trade
3. Could not force anyone to obey laws or abide by the Articles of Confederation
  - could only advise and request the states to comply
4. Approval of 9/13 states was needed to pass laws
  - this caused many problems and made passing laws almost impossible
5. All the states had to agree to make an amendment
6. The central government had no executive branch
  - no unity in policy-making and no way to coordinate the work of the different committees
7. Had no national court system
  - made settling disputes very difficult

1. Why do you think the Founders created such a weak national government?
2. What do you feel are the most glaring weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?
3. Which parts of the Articles of Confederation do you think would remain in America's government?