

Historical Background

After declaring independence from Britain, the United States was governed under the Articles of Confederation, which gave most governing power to the individual states and created a weak central government. This system made it difficult for Congress to function effectively—it could not collect taxes, regulate trade, or enforce laws. As economic and political problems grew, it became clear that a stronger national government was needed. In 1787, delegates from twelve states met at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia with the original goal of revising the Articles. However, they quickly realized an entirely new constitution was necessary.

A major conflict at the Convention centered around **representation** in the new legislative branch. Delegates from larger states supported the **Virginia Plan**, which proposed a **bicameral** legislature with representation based on population. Smaller states feared being overpowered by the large states and supported the **New Jersey Plan**, which called for each state to have an equal vote. The disagreement threatened to divide the Convention. The solution came in the form of the **Great Compromise**, also called the Connecticut Compromise, which established a **bicameral** legislature with two houses: the **House of Representatives**, where representation would be based on population, and the **Senate**, where each state would have equal representation. This compromise balanced the interests of both large and small states and became a key part of the new United States Constitution.