
A Comparison Between the Virginia Plan and the Articles of Confederation

U.S. Constitution Vs. Virginia Plan

The United States of America has been around for almost 250 years. We are still a very young country compared to Italy, Spain, and many other nations. Why that is so important is because the decisions we make in managing and shaping our young country are crucial to whether or not we will be able to be around for tens of thousands of years. There is no perfect system to govern any country, but we can try to get close. The Virginia Plan was a rushed idea to desperately replace the Articles of Confederation which was substantially worse than the form of government we have today. The Virginia Plan is neither great nor bad, but more of a rough draft to a final paper. The majority of the Virginia Plan is intertwined within the Constitution, but the plan itself would not bring the same benefits to the states nor the citizens of the United States. Additionally, there will be coercion imposed to the citizens of the smaller states if we had ratified the Virginia plan. The plan could have provided us with fewer veto points, but altogether, the critic is wrong because we would not have essential parts of our government and lifestyle that we have today, which include the Constitution, Senate, the electoral college, and our constitutional rights.

The Virginia Plan was heading in the right direction with making a bicameral legislative system. It was a large step away from the unicameral parliamentary system that the Articles of Confederation had. The Virginia Plan had two chambers, a lower house, and an upper chamber. Each had their representation based on state population. The citizens elect the lower house, and the representatives of the lower house elect the upper house. Dahl says, "The main reason, perhaps the only reason, why second chambers exist in all federal systems is to preserve and protect unequal representation. That is, they exist primarily to ensure that the representatives of small units cannot be readily outvoted by the representatives of the larger states" (47). What Dahl states can be problematic in this case because, if each chamber is based on the population of each state, there will be an uneven representation between the small states and the big states. It allows the larger states to have a majority and have unified control in the lower chamber; however, it is unfair for the smaller states because it diminishes the impact of their voice. Since the lower house elects the upper chamber, there will be a high chance of corruption because the citizens are not the ones that are selecting the upper chamber and also because there will be more representatives from larger states in the upper house.

The U.S. Senate was part of the Connecticut Compromise. It gave the bigger states the House

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of Representatives and gave the smaller states the Senate, where the states had the same number of seats regardless of state population (Connecticut Humanities, 1). Dahl says that one way that the Constitution is undemocratic is because “Senators were to be chosen not by the people but by the state legislatures,it would help ensure that senators would be less responsive to popular majorities and perhaps more sensitive to the needs of property holders” (17). Even though the Senators were not directly chosen by the people for the first one-hundred and twenty-five years of the country being under the Constitution (The U.S. National Archive and Records Administration, 1), eventually we got the seventeenth amendment that allows the citizens to elect the senators directly. Since 1913, the citizens could vote for the senators, and it had to happen because as the U.S. National Archive and Records Administration asserts, “Several state legislatures deadlocked over the election of senators, which led to Senate vacancies lasting months and even years. In other cases, political machines gained control over state legislatures, and the Senators elected with their support were dismissed as puppets” (The U.S. National Archive and Records Administration, 1). The Senate was created because the smaller states were concerned that they were not heard and were underrepresented.

The Constitution is an amazing document that has managed the way we have run our country for the last two centuries and a half. It has presented the citizens of the United States with the Bill of Rights, which gives us our constitutional rights (i.e. freedom of speech, press, religion). The Constitution also ends the coercion imposed on the smaller states by having the Senate, which gives the fifty states two senators to represent their state. It is more democratic than the Virginia Plan because the citizens can vote for both houses, not just the lower house. With all the great things that the Constitution has given us, it is still not a perfect system, but it should be recognized as the best plan we decided to ratify. One of the main flaws that the Constitution has is the various amounts of veto points.

James Madison states that if there are more veto points, it increases the chances of breaking up the large factions and have the minority rights protected (Federalist Paper #10). Factions are groups of people who gather together to promote and protect their individual economic interests and political opinions according to Madison (Federalist Paper # 10). Just because there are large factions that seem that they will work together to reach their group goal, it does not necessarily mean that they will all be trying as hard. As Olson likes to put it, “even if all of the individuals in a large group are rational and self-interested, and would gain if, as a group, they acted to achieve their common interest or objective, they will not voluntarily act to achieve that common or group interest”(Olson, 2). They also have the “free rider” problem which hurts the factions since most of the members are leaving the work to be done by the other members, especially in the larger factions (Olson, 5). Having more veto points hurt the development of our country by making it harder to pass laws. Our nation is the only nation out of the twenty-three long-standing democracies that have four veto points (Stepan and Linz, 844). It is bad because we have problems that are affecting our nation and it is tough for the representatives to come to

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terms with the president and senators to fix them. For example, our healthcare system is not the best it could be because, comparing it to other countries with lower veto points, the United States has a lower life expectancy and has the most health expenditures (Lecture 1, slide 5). We also have major problems with mass incarceration (Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*), our education system (Lynch, 1), and income inequality (Lecture 1, slide 2).

A system that helps every citizen and state have equal representation, that has no flaws, and has the full acceptance by every citizen in the country, is impossible. We could only try to get close to creating a perfect system. The Constitution of the United States was the best option we had. The ratification of the Virginia Plan would deny benefits such as those listed in the Bill of Rights and other amendments from the states and U.S. citizens. In addition, there would be no Senate. Since the Framers had no idea what was going to happen in the future, there were ways to revise and add amendments to the Constitution. That process is “Whether amendments are proposed by the states or Congress, 3/4ths of the states must ratify (or approve) them before they become a part of the Constitution- the Supreme Law of the land” (Bill of Rights Institute, 1). It would be easier to pass laws if we would have ratified the Virginia Plan in 1787, but that would be the only benefit it would give the citizens compared to all the advantages that the Constitution has given the states and citizens. If we want to remain here for the next tens of thousands of years, we need to continue to revise and add amendments that will help us become a better nation. We will never know where we would have been as a nation if the Virginia Plan were ratified. Between the Constitution and the Virginia Plan, the Constitution was the best choice, and we should be grateful that it was ratified.

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