

## America's Forgotten Constitution: The Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation was the first constitution of the United States. The Articles were ratified by all 13 States on March 1, 1781 and was in effect until 1789. The Constitution established a “firm league of friendship” between the thirteen original states. The weaknesses of the Articles are summarized below:

- **Weak Central Government:** The central government under the Articles of Confederation was extremely weak and lacked the ability govern the nation. It lacked the power to enforce laws, collect taxes, or regulate trade. States acted much like independent countries.
- **No Executive or Judicial Branch:** The Articles of Confederation lacked an executive branch to enforce laws or a judicial branch to interpret them.
- **Inadequate Legislative Power:** The unicameral (one house) legislature, known as the Continental Congress, had limited authority. It could not enforce its laws on the states, and each state had an equal vote regardless of its size or population.
- **No Power to Tax or Regulate Trade:** One of the most significant weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation was the central government's inability to levy taxes or regulate interstate commerce. It heavily relied on voluntary contributions from the states, which often led to funding shortages and financial instability. States had their own trade policies, leading to economic conflicts.
- **Difficulty in Amending the Articles:** The process of amending the Articles of Confederation required unanimous consent from all thirteen states. As a result no amendment was ever passed.
- **Lack of Central Defense:** The central government had limited power to raise and maintain a military force under the Articles of Confederation. This made it challenging to defend the nation against external threats and left the country vulnerable to potential attacks or conflicts.

However, the Articles of Confederation did have some positive achievements:

- **The Land Ordinance of 1785** was adopted by the United States Congress of the Confederation on May 20, 1785. It created a standard system for settlers to purchase farmland in the undeveloped west. Congress needed money and the sale of the lands provided the new government money. The Ordinance used a survey system that eventually covered (the current states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin). over three-quarters of the area of the continental United States. Written by Thomas Jefferson calling for Congress to take action. The land west of the Appalachian Mountains, north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River was to be divided into ten separate states. Land was to be systematically surveyed into square townships, 6 mi (9.7 km) on a side, each divided into thirty-six sections of 1 sq mi (2.6 km<sup>2</sup>) or 640 acres (260 ha). These sections could then be subdivided for re-sale by settlers and land speculators.[4]
- Northwest Ordinance of 1787\*
- Gives country name: The United States of America\*
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