

**Main Idea**

Delegates at the Constitutional Convention compromised on key issues to create a plan for a strong national government.

**Reading Focus**

1. Why did the Constitutional Convention draft a new plan for government?
2. How did the rival plans for the new government differ?
3. What other conflicts required the Framers to compromise?

**Key Terms**

Framers

Virginia Plan

New Jersey Plan

Great Compromise

Three-Fifths Compromise

**Drafting a New Constitution**

(pg. 52)

In May 1787 when delegates gathered at the planned convention in Philadelphia to revise the Articles of Confederation, they agreed that the document was too weak to meet the nation's needs. Over the course of four months, delegates from 12 of the 13 states worked together to draft the framework for a new government.

The 55 delegates included many remarkable people. Most had government experience. Many had served in the Continental Army. The oldest delegate was 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin. Together, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention are known as the **Framers** of the Constitution for their efforts in drafting the framework of the new government.

**Reading Check Identifying the Main Idea**

Why did the delegates create a new plan for government?

**Rival Plans** (pg. 52–53)

When the convention opened, delegates soon raised the idea of creating a new form

of government, instead of revising the Articles. Two rival plans were created.

The Virginia plan was presented by delegates from Virginia. Virginia delegate Edmund Randolph presented the group's proposal. The **Virginia Plan** called for a strong national government divided into three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial. It provided for a bicameral legislature. Members in both houses would be determined by a state's population. Upper-house members would be selected by state legislatures, while lower-house members would be elected by the people.

Smaller states supported the New Jersey plan, presented by William Paterson of New Jersey. Paterson's **New Jersey Plan** called for a strong central government made up of three branches. However, the plan was designed to stick closer to the Articles of Confederation. It provided for a unicameral legislature, with each state having one vote, regardless of population. Thus every state would have an equal voice. This plan was ultimately rejected.

**Reading Check Contrasting** How did the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan differ?

## Conflict and Compromise (pg. 53–55)

For weeks after the rejection of the New Jersey plan, the Convention was locked in debate. In the end, several compromises saved the Convention.

**The Great Compromise** The first compromise involved the issue of representation in the legislature. The Connecticut Compromise, now known as the **Great Compromise**, combined elements from both the Virginia and the New Jersey plans. It created a bicameral legislature. Membership in the lower house, called the House of Representatives, would be based on population and would be chosen by the people. In the upper house, known as the Senate, each state would have two members, regardless of population. Senators would be chosen by state legislatures. The delegates approved the compromise.

**Compromises over Slavery** Slavery was also an issue at the convention. The delegates disagreed on two issues: whether or not slaves should be counted as part of a state's population, and whether the government should put an end to the importation, or bringing into the country, of enslaved people. Northern and southern

delegates disagreed on the first issue. Counting slaves as part of the population would increase southern states' population and thus their membership in the House. This dispute was settled by what came to be called the **Three-Fifths Compromise**. It provided that three-fifths of the enslaved people in a state would be counted when determining a state's population. Delegates also compromised on the slave trade by allowing it to continue for 20 more years.

**Presidential Election** The delegates also compromised on how to select the president. They created a system in which the president would be chosen by state electors. This balanced the desire for state legislatures to choose the president against those who thought the president should be directly elected by the people.

By September 1787 most of the work on the Constitution was finished. The delegates now needed to sign the document. Most signed it. Others refused to do so because it lacked a bill of rights. In all 39 delegates from 12 states signed the document, and the convention ended. It was now time for the people to approve the document.

**Reading Check Summarizing** What compromises made the Constitution possible?

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

1. **Recall** What was the original purpose of the 1787 Constitutional Convention?
2. **Explain** How did the **Virginia Plan** aim to improve the structure of the national government?
3. **Summarize** What were the key issues involved in the compromises made over slavery?