

Attachment A: National versus State Government

The first type of government in America was based primarily on state government. Prior to the signing of the Constitution, America was made up of thirteen colonies, which were ruled by England. Following the Revolutionary War, these colonies, although they had formed a league of friendship under the Articles of Confederation, basically governed themselves. They feared a strong central government like the one they lived with under England's rule. However, it was soon discovered that this weak form of state government could not survive and so the Constitution was drafted. The Constitution:

- defines and limits the power of the national government
- defines the relationship between the national government and individual state governments
- guarantees the rights of the citizens of the United States.

This time, it was decided that a government system based on federalism would be established. In other words, power is shared between the national and state (local) governments. The opposite of this system of government is a centralized government, such as in France and Great Britain, where the national government maintains all power.

Sharing power between the national government and state governments allows the United States to enjoy the benefits of diversity and unity. For example, the national government may develop a uniform currency system. (Imagine having 50 different types of coins, each with a different value, requiring a calculator for shopping in another state.) A national system is fair to everyone, and the states do not have to bear the heavy burden of regulating their currency.

On the other hand, issues such as the death penalty for specified crimes have been left up to the individual states. The decision whether or not to have a death penalty depends on that state's history, needs, and philosophies.

Source: *Ben's Guide to Government for Kids*. U.S. Government Printing Office.