

# ■ Federalist No. 10

**Date:** 1787

**Author:** James Madison

**Genre:** Essay

## Summary Overview

As the newly independent United States began to build its system of government, it became clear that the new nation could easily be fractured from within. Writing in favor of the Constitution and a federal government, James Madison, under the pseudonym Publius, suggested ways in which the new union could mitigate the negative effects of factionalism. He believed that the primary cause of factions was the unequal distribution of property, which in turn fostered a system of political inequality. In “Federalist No. 10,” Madison suggests that a representative democracy, rather than a direct democracy, could prevent the political disenfranchisement that occurred in society as a result of this inequality.

## Defining Moment

In 1787, the newly independent United States of America began the difficult task of establishing a new national government. This effort was marked by considerable controversy between two main camps. The first group, led by such figures as George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Madison, advocated for a strong central government that would oversee matters of nationwide concern, such as foreign relations and defense. Supporters of this position came to be known as the Federalists. On the other side of the constitutional debate were the Anti-Federalists, who advocated for a more decentralized form of government that would empower each state to manage its own affairs. The group, led by such figures as Patrick Henry and George Clinton, expressed great concern that a strong federal government would inevitably abuse its power and infringe upon the basic rights of the people.

As the Constitution was completed, it needed to be ratified by each state. During this period, however, a series of Anti-Federalist pamphlets and letters were published and distributed in large volume. These writings argued that American liberties were at stake and encouraged citizens not to ratify the document. In order to

counter this movement, Madison, Hamilton, and John Jay wrote another series of essays, letters, and pamphlets that advocated for the federal approach and particularly sought to convince the residents of New York to support ratification. These papers later became known as the *Federalist Papers*.

Each author wrote under the pen name Publius, taking inspiration from the famous Roman statesman Publius Valerius Publicola, who helped establish the stable Roman Republic after the fall of King Tarquin the Proud in the sixth century BCE. They are believed to have written a total of eighty-five papers, though the authorship of a number of the essays continues to be debated among historians. “Federalist No. 10” is one of the best known of the *Federalist Papers*. The previous paper in the series, written by Hamilton as a letter to the people of New York, warned that the nation was in danger of domestic insurrection and the development of factions that could undermine the new government. Madison examines this issue further in his essay, suggesting that factions are caused by inequities in the political economy and proposing the adoption of a republican form of government in order to address this issue.

## Author Biography

James Madison was born on March 16, 1751, in Port Conway, Virginia, to James Madison Sr. and Nellie Conway Madison. He was raised and educated on his family’s plantation, Montpelier, before enrolling in the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) at the age of eighteen. There, he became strongly influenced by the writings of such iconic seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers as John Locke and Isaac Newton and helped found the American Whig Society, a debate club. Madison graduated from the college after two years.

During the American Revolution, Madison joined the cause by gaining election to the Virginia Convention in 1776, where he helped draft the state’s new constitution.

He also served in the Virginia House of Delegates. In 1780, Madison was elected to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, where he honed his belief that Britain's rule should be replaced with a centralized, federal government. He attended the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and contributed heavily to the writing of the new Constitution. Seeking to encourage the states to ratify the document, Madison collaborated with Hamilton and Jay on the *Federalist Papers*. Their efforts were successful, and the Constitution was ratified by the required number of states in 1788 and by all thirteen states in 1790.

Madison served as secretary of state during Thomas Jefferson's presidency, during which time he helped to negotiate the purchase of the extensive French territory known as Louisiana; this purchase dramatically increased the geographical size of the country, a possibility Madison had predicted in "Federalist No. 10." He won the presidency in 1808, serving two terms. Following his presidency, Madison returned to Montpelier, although he would later advise his successor, James Monroe, on foreign policy matters. He also remained true to the cause of federal government, speaking out on issues that arose under the auspices of states' rights. He died at Montpelier on June 28, 1836.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

### **The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection**

*Daily Advertiser*

Thursday, November 22, 1787

No man is allowed to be a judge in his own cause, because his interest would certainly bias his judgment, and, not improbably, corrupt his integrity. With equal, nay with greater reason, a body of men are unfit to be both judges and parties at the same time; yet what are many of the most important acts of legislation, but so many judicial determinations, not indeed concerning the rights of single persons, but concerning the rights of large bodies of citizens? And what are the different classes of legislators but advocates and parties to the causes which they determine? Is a law proposed concerning private debts? It is a question to which the creditors are parties on one side and the debtors on the other. Justice ought to hold the balance between them. Yet the parties are, and must be, themselves the judges; and the most numerous party, or, in other words, the most powerful faction must be expected to prevail. Shall domestic manufactures be encouraged, and in what degree, by restrictions on foreign manufactures? are questions which would be differently decided by the landed and the manufacturing classes, and probably by neither with a sole regard to justice and the public good. The apportionment of taxes on the various descriptions of property is an act which

seems to require the most exact impartiality; yet there is, perhaps, no legislative act in which greater opportunity and temptation are given to a predominant party to trample on the rules of justice. Every shilling with which they overburden the inferior number, is a shilling saved to their own pockets.

It is in vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests, and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm. Nor, in many cases, can such an adjustment be made at all without taking into view indirect and remote considerations, which will rarely prevail over the immediate interest which one party may find in disregarding the rights of another or the good of the whole.

The inference to which we are brought is, that the *causes* of faction cannot be removed, and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its *effects*.

If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. It may clog the administration, it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to execute and mask its violence under the forms of the Constitution. When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government, on the other hand, enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens. To secure the public good and private rights against

the danger of such a faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed. Let me add that it is the great desideratum by which this form of government can be rescued from the opprobrium under which it has so long labored, and be recommended to the esteem and adoption of mankind.

By what means is this object attainable? Evidently by one of two only. Either the existence of the same passion or interest in a majority at the same time must be prevented, or the majority, having such coexistent passion or interest, must be rendered, by their number and local situation, unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression. If the impulse and the opportunity be suffered to coincide, we well know that neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control. They are not found to be such on the injustice and violence of individuals, and lose their efficacy in proportion to the number combined together, that is, in proportion as their efficacy becomes needful.

From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths. Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.

A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking. Let us examine the points in which it varies from pure democracy, and we shall comprehend both the

nature of the cure and the efficacy which it must derive from the Union.

The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.

The effect of the first difference is, on the one hand, to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations. Under such a regulation, it may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose. On the other hand, the effect may be inverted. Men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs, may, by intrigue, by corruption, or by other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people. The question resulting is, whether small or extensive republics are more favorable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal; and it is clearly decided in favor of the latter by two obvious considerations:

In the first place, it is to be remarked that, however small the republic may be, the representatives must be raised to a certain number, in order to guard against the cabals of a few; and that, however large it may be, they must be limited to a certain number, in order to guard against the confusion of a multitude. Hence, the number of representatives in the two cases not being in proportion to that of the two constituents, and being proportionally greater in the small republic, it follows that, if the proportion of fit characters be not less in the large than in the small republic, the former will present a greater option, and consequently a greater probability of a fit choice.

In the next place, as each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried; and the suffrages of

the people being more free, will be more likely to centre in men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters.

It must be confessed that in this, as in most other cases, there is a mean, on both sides of which inconveniences will be found to lie. By enlarging too much the number of electors, you render the representatives too little acquainted with all their local circumstances and lesser interests; as by reducing it too much, you render him unduly attached to these, and too little fit to comprehend and pursue great and national objects. The federal Constitution forms a happy combination in this respect; the great and aggregate interests being referred to the national, the local and particular to the State legislatures.

The other point of difference is, the greater number of citizens and extent of territory which may be brought within the compass of republican than of democratic government; and it is this circumstance principally which renders factious combinations less to be dreaded in the former than in the latter. The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it; the fewer the distinct parties and interests, the more frequently will a majority be found of the same party; and the smaller the number of individuals composing a majority, and the smaller the compass within which they are placed, the more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression. Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other. Besides other impediments, it may be remarked that, where there is a consciousness of unjust or dishonorable purposes, communication is always checked by distrust in proportion to the number whose concurrence is necessary.

Hence, it clearly appears, that the same advantage

which a republic has over a democracy, in controlling the effects of faction, is enjoyed by a large over a small republic,—is enjoyed by the Union over the States composing it. Does the advantage consist in the substitution of representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices and schemes of injustice? It will not be denied that the representation of the Union will be most likely to possess these requisite endowments. Does it consist in the greater security afforded by a greater variety of parties, against the event of any one party being able to outnumber and oppress the rest? In an equal degree does the increased variety of parties comprised within the Union, increase this security. Does it, in fine, consist in the greater obstacles opposed to the concert and accomplishment of the secret wishes of an unjust and interested majority? Here, again, the extent of the Union gives it the most palpable advantage.

The influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States. A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils against any danger from that source. A rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project, will be less apt to pervade the whole body of the Union than a particular member of it; in the same proportion as such a malady is more likely to taint a particular county or district, than an entire State.

In the extent and proper structure of the Union, therefore, we behold a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government. And according to the degree of pleasure and pride we feel in being republicans, ought to be our zeal in cherishing the spirit and supporting the character of Federalists.

PUBLIUS

## GLOSSARY

**cabal:** plot, or a group involved in a plot

**desideratum:** something highly desired or needed

**opprobrium:** disgrace

**republic:** government in which elected representatives and officials rule based on the laws of the country and the interests of the electorate

**theoretic:** concerned primarily with theoretical rather than practical considerations

### Document Analysis

The *Federalist Papers* were written as a counterpoint to another series of pamphlets and position papers introduced to New York readers, calling upon the people to reject the proposed Constitution and embrace a small, decentralized government that deferred power to the states. In “Federalist No. 10,” Madison, writing under the pen name Publius, does not take to task the notion of states’ rights (or, for that matter, the basic rights due all American citizens under the new government) stressed by Anti-Federalists. Rather, he focuses on the negative effects of political factions on the political system as a whole and argues that a large, republican form of government, as defined by the Constitution, would make public policy and public administration more efficient and focused on the public good.

Madison begins his letter to the people of New York by commenting on the nature of people living within a political system. He states that within this context, all people are inherently biased toward their own interests. Therefore, he writes, no individual can be relied upon to judge his or her own cause impartially. However, a body politic requires political leaders and infrastructure to facilitate the public policy and public administrative process. In a society, bodies of citizens have to develop and introduce legislation and laws to the rest of the society, despite this bias toward personal interest. In fact, legislatures, he writes, are composed of individuals who are expected to serve the interests of their various constituents. This diversity inevitably leads to different perspectives on certain types of legislation and laws. For example, Madison offers, a legislator whose constituency serves entrepreneurs with foreign interests would be more inclined to support legislation that bolsters foreign-based

manufacturers, while other legislators may support legislation that is supportive of domestic businesses.

The only area in which all involved parties do not seem to have a diversity of interest but instead a degree of impartiality, Madison suggests, is taxation. This is due to the fact that property values are set based on existing statutes and not easily changed to satisfy the whims of a few. Then again, he warns, not all aspects of taxation are set in such a manner. New taxes on income levels, products, and services could be levied, much in the same manner by which taxes were levied on colonial goods during the years leading up to the Revolution. Madison cautions that certain socioeconomic classes, once placed into positions of political power, could use that influence to “trample on the rules of justice” by imposing taxes on other classes, keeping them at bay while benefiting financially from the revenues generated.

Madison’s point is that factions—groups with a common interest—form within a political system because of the diversity of groups in a society. These factions could be regional in nature, composed of members devoted to local interests such as rural areas, or economic in nature, composed of wealthy merchants as opposed to impoverished farmers. Furthermore, factions could be focused on a singular issue, such as the establishment of a paper currency or the lowering of taxes. The leaders sent forth by factions, Madison argues, are thus dedicated to their factions rather than the entire population.

Under ideal circumstances, legislators who represent different factions would find commonality in passing laws. Put simply, these legislators would ideally form a singular, powerful faction dedicated to the governance of the new nation. However, Madison writes, such a scenario would only be possible if the most “enlightened”

legislators assumed the top levels of political power in the country. Such ideal leaders would be able to write laws that would place all competing interests at a lower priority level than that of the common good. Based on the notion that it would be far too difficult to place enlightened leaders in a majority position in government and therefore ensure that the development of political factions would be stymied, Madison concludes that factions are inevitable, and so the task is to control their effects.

Madison states that the very nature of a faction is the key to success in this endeavor. A faction, he reminds his readers, is often a group that is in a political minority. To be sure, a minority faction has the power to clog the political process and disrupt society. However, in a republican form of government, the majority would be capable of defeating a faction's "sinister" endeavors through a simple vote. But, Madison states, when a faction is part of a governing majority, that majority loses its incentive to act in the public interest rather than the narrower factional interest, and this is the problem that the new government of the United States will need to address.

Next, Madison explores the means by which the absorption of factions into a popular government could take place. He notes that the majority could either be prevented from acting upon the interests and passions that defined the faction or be rendered unable to create laws that would be oppressive. In either case, should factions pursue disruption of the government, Madison writes, neither religious nor other "moral" arguments could be expected to control that impulse. After all, he writes, such arguments often have little effect on the actions of individuals.

Madison next states that a pure democracy, a government system in which all eligible members of a society play an equal role in its governance, offers no solution to the "mischiefs of faction." He writes that a democracy by its very nature does not feature any safeguards against the tyranny of an oppressive majority. For this reason, pure democracies have historically fallen victim to turbulence, infighting, and controversy, becoming detached from the ideals of protecting personal and property rights. He criticizes "theoretic" politicians who have advocated for such systems, arguing that their support for such a form of government has been erroneously based on a notion that all citizens therein would enjoy equal standing, equal property, and unfettered ability to voice their political passions. On the other hand, Madison writes, the republic offered to Americans by the proposed Con-

stitution includes systems that could "cure" the political system of the problems created by factions.

Having described the dangers of factionalism inherent in a democratic system of government, Madison next seeks to convince his readers that the republican system would prove more effective in mitigating factions than a pure democracy. He begins by describing the differences between the two types of systems. Madison identifies two major differences, the first of which has to do with the delegation of government: In a republic, a small group of representatives is elected by the people to write laws and carry out the other functions of government. The other major difference of concern to Madison is that unlike a pure democracy, a republic is designed to grow with both the population and the geographical size of a country. This latter point proved to be important as the citizenry and boundaries of the United States expanded over time, particularly following the Louisiana Purchase during Madison's term as secretary of state.

The effect of the first of these differences, in Madison's estimation, is a broadening of the public's perspectives on government. The elected representatives, of which there would be a limited number, would use their wisdom, patriotism, and respect for justice to serve the best interests of the people. Madison notes that while these interests may not be consistent with public opinion, they would be consonant with the public good. Seemingly anticipating the objections of some of his readers, he admits that elected leaders who demonstrate "factious tempers" or biases toward local interests could potentially use their positions, through the political process or in a corrupt manner, to betray the public good. However, Madison argues that a republic, through its size and composition, would keep such corruption to a minimum.

No matter how small the republic might be, he writes, its leadership would need to be large enough in number to guard against the pursuits of dangerous factions. On the other hand, should the republic grow to a considerable size, the number of leaders to govern it must not exceed a certain number, as placing into power a multitude of officials would cause confusion. The key, he argues, is in creating the right proportion between citizens and their elected officials. Additionally, Madison notes that a larger republic would feature a greater number of voters who elect only a relatively small number of officials. In this dynamic, it would be more difficult for leaders who remain committed to their factional interests to gain success by taking advantage of the electoral system. Furthermore, because the people themselves would be free

to vote for any candidate, it would be more likely that a majority of the people would elect an upright candidate who would best represent them.

Madison acknowledges that there is a flaw in creating a large republic to govern the country. Because the limited number of elected officials would be put into office by sizable voting blocs, these officials might not be knowledgeable on every local matter. In fact, he writes, there is a risk that the people might, out of a perceived connection, link candidates to local issues with which they are not fully familiar. Furthermore, because of this connection to local interests, the person being elected might not be able to pursue national matters with great skill. Fortunately, Madison notes, the Constitution provides a solution to this flaw. By creating the jurisdictions of the national, state, and local governments, the document ensures that local matters are addressed by local officials and national matters are handled by those who focus solely on such large-scale issues.

Madison next returns to the advantage a republic holds over a pure democracy within the context of growth of population or expansion of geographical boundaries. In a smaller society, there are likely to be fewer differences among a small number of parties. Indeed, majorities will be more easily attained and retained by smaller groups of people. The direction of the country will also be easily established by these majorities, as leaders will share a singular focus on their preferred goals. Then again, the ease by which these majorities would be gained, according to Madison, also means that oppressive measures could be applied at greater rates of speed and efficacy.

As the society grows, however, so too would the number of factions and interest groups. Madison argues that this trend would make obtaining a majority extremely challenging. If a majority is obtained, the leadership, beholden to the interests they serve, would have great difficulty in unifying the rest of the society to its cause. In a republic, however, distrust of a large, strong government would be mitigated by interparty communication and the proportionally smaller government's pursuit of common goals.

Madison reiterates that based on these benefits, a large republic such as the one he and his fellow Federalists advocated was more advantageous than a smaller republic or a purely democratic system. In a republic, it would be more likely that "enlightened" leaders would take office, even if there is the chance that those dedicated to more provincial interests could be among them. Additionally, because the new Union would allow for many different

parties, the republic would feature safeguards preventing the establishment of a single, dominating party. Furthermore, the republic would consist of a series of "obstacles" that would hinder the success of any "unjust" party seeking majority powers.

Madison indicates that the republic would not, however, be able to prevent the effects of factions on the state level. Because of the common perspectives among residents at these levels, factions could gain prominence in state governments, and "factious leaders" could influence a push for power in their respective states of residence. However, Madison notes that such influences would not be able to spread into other states. He cites, as an example, the presence of certain religious sects in some states. These sects might prove successful in generating a following among a state's populace. However, because there are so many other sects, a single sect's ability to cement support from other state religious groups would be stymied.

Furthermore, Madison writes, there is a multitude of political issues that might garner passionate support in the states. He cites the examples of interest in the abolition of debt, the equal division of property, and the pursuit of paper currency. In such cases, interest among the like-minded voters in a state might fan passions on such issues, but these likely would not carry into other states in which voters have other priorities. He adds that similar conditions might occur within states, as factions and voters in certain counties or regions are likely to be more passionate about certain issues than their state government personnel are.

Madison completes his essay by offering an appeal to the reader to endorse the republican style of government advocated by the Federalists in the Constitution. He refers to the republican system as a "remedy for the diseases" that afflict the new Union, a comment directed specifically toward interest groups that were more concerned with addressing their own provincial issues than the national public good. Madison saw such factions as dangers to the integrity of the new United States. He cites the great swell of pride he and other founding fathers feel with regard to this particular form of government. In light of this passion for republicanism as well as the fact that many prominent Federalists were highly respected by most Americans, Madison encourages his New York readers to eschew the rhetoric of the Anti-Federalists and embrace the many public policy and public administration advantages of the republican system of government.

### Essential Themes

“Federalist No. 10” is particularly known for its discussion of the dangers of factionalism. Madison believed that factions had the power to undermine a government’s ability to serve the people effectively, though he acknowledges that in light of the wide array of different factions in the new United States, dismantling or preventing the development of factions would be an exercise in futility. Such factions continued to be of concern following the adoption of the Constitution, and although Madison believed that the influence of many factions would be confined within individual states, he did not anticipate the rise of the mass media and its effects on politics and society. In later centuries, regional factions became able to disseminate information about various causes nationwide, and their influence was able to spread beyond state boundaries.

Madison’s work is also significant for its support of the federal government proposed in the Constitution and advocated by the Federalists. He believed that a strong, large republic, as opposed to a pure democracy or other popular forms of representative government, was designed to prevent factions from gaining power by fostering the election of more enlightened leaders who would focus on national matters and the common good. Popular governments akin to the pure democratic model, he argues in his essay, only lead to confusion and a larger number of disruptive factions. The Federalists were eventually successful in convincing the states to ratify the Constitution. However, the debate regarding the size and scope of government has continued, with some politicians arguing that more power should be given to the states.

—Michael Auerbach, MA

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