



The Gallup Poll

FOR RELEASE:
Thursday,
September 17, 1987

As Nation Celebrates Constitution Day . . .

Public Supports Constitution's Principles But Many See Need for Improvements

By George Gallup, Jr.

PRINCETON, N.J. — The celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Constitution comes at a time when a majority of Americans believe the document to be basically sound and, at the same time, overwhelmingly endorse the key "separation of powers" provision.

On the other hand, as many as 44% believe the Constitution is in need of some basic changes or amendments, although the public convincingly rejects a constitutional convention as the vehicle to bring about these changes.

Amending the Constitution

Article V of the Constitution provides two mechanisms for amendments. The first requires a proposed amendment to gain approval of both houses of Congress. The approved amendment then must be ratified by at least three-fourths of the states. A second requires Congress to call a constitutional convention when requested by two-thirds of the states. Any changes passed by such a convention would then need to be ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Although all 26 amendments were proposed in Congress, the prospect for the first constitutional convention since 1787 is only two states away from approval, having obtained applications from 32 of the necessary 34 states.

Following are the questions asked and the key findings:

Do you believe that after 200 years the Constitution is still basically sound and meets the needs of our country, or do you think the Constitution is in need of some basic changes or amendments?

Current Validity of Constitution

Still meets nation's needs	53%
Needs basic changes	44
No opinion	3
	<u>100%</u>

Assessments of whether or not the Constitution is still able to meet the country's needs vary significantly by education, age and race. About seven college graduates in 10 (72%) say the Constitution can still meet the needs of the country while only 48% of those without a college degree give this response. Among respondents 30 and older, 56% feel the Constitution is still sound,

while 42% of those under 30 concur. Whites (55%) are substantially more likely than non-whites (36%) to feel the Constitution is basically sound. Public opinion on the other questions is less affected by demographic background.

Some people say that splitting the power of government among the administrative, legislative, and judicial branches is a good idea because it keeps any one branch of government from becoming too powerful. Others say such checks and balances are a bad idea because they get in the way of efficient government. Which comes closer to your view?

Separation of Powers

Good idea	73%
Bad idea	19
No opinion	8
	<u>100%</u>

Do you believe we need a national convention to make basic changes or amendments to the Constitution, or do you think such a convention might make too many changes in the Constitution and leave things worse than before?

Constitutional Convention

Needed to make changes	21%
Might makes things worse	72
No opinion	7
	<u>100%</u>

The findings are based on telephone interviews with 812 adults, 18 and older, conducted for NEWSWEEK by The Gallup Organization in selected localities across the nation during May 6-7. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects should not exceed 4 percentage points in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *This report conforms to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*