

Chapter 4

Organized Opposition: The Anti-Federalist Political Network



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4.1 Introduction

The old adage that ‘history is written by the winners’ perhaps applies as well to the debates over ratification of the American Constitution as anywhere. The opponents of the Constitution, after losing the fight over ratification, have lost the larger fight over the history of that contest. Even the names of the parties were written by the victorious Federalists; early in the debate they worked hard to brand their opponents ‘Antifederalists,’ and the name stuck. Certainly, the name was at least misleading, as the opponents of ratification generally argued that they wanted to see a federal system instead of the national one that they claimed the Constitution created, but despite different suggestions on the proper names of the two parties, Federalists and Anti-Federalists were the ones that persisted and were adopted by historians of the founding. The Anti-Federalists¹ have generally been little more than a footnote in history books, often attached to the adoption of the first ten amendments to the

¹The name of the opponents of ratification has been rendered in different ways, both in the contemporary debates and in subsequent scholarly literature. Though ‘Antifederalist’ is probably the most common version of the name, and is the one used by the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution* (DHRC) (Kaminski et al. 2018), we have decided to follow Herbert Storing’s convention and use ‘Anti-Federalist.’ He explains his reasoning in an early note in *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*: “‘Anti-Federalist’ balances the positive and negative sides by giving the group (or the position) a proper name, while still emphasizing its character as opposition. The typographically convenient ‘Antifederalist,’ now generally in favor, suggests more cohesion than actually existed, while ‘anti-Federalist’ suggests a merely negative, dependent unity” (Storing 1981, p. 79).

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Constitution, the Bill of Rights, for which they are generally given at least qualified credit. More recently, their influence on the development of American politics has been recognized, and additional work has been done on the ideas and ideology of this opposition movement.²

Various reasons have been given for the Anti-Federalists' loss in the great debate of 1787–1788. Kenyon (1955) calls them 'men of little faith,' unable or unwilling to trust that the people of the United States could successfully establish republican government at a national level. Herbert Storing, a defender of the Anti-Federalists, concurs to some extent with this position. 'The Anti-Federalists lost the debate over the Constitution,' he contends, 'not merely because they were less clever arguers or less skillful politicians but because they had the weaker argument' (Storing 1981, p. 71). Note that Storing's phrasing does not preclude the idea that the Federalists were cleverer and more skilled politicians. In this paper, we contend that Storing's conjecture misses an important part of the story. We present evidence that the Federalists were better organized, more strategically timely, and more able to control the flow of information concerning the Constitution.

To say that the Federalists were better organized, though, does not tell us why. The Anti-Federalists appear to have had the advantage of numbers, at least. Jackson Turner Main contends that 'the Federalists were a minority in at least six and probably seven states,' if not a minority nationally, so 'they ought surely to have been defeated. Yet they came from behind to win' (Main 1961, p. 249). Main's numbers probably give too much credit to the Anti-Federalists, though they did have a clear majority in Rhode Island, North Carolina, and New York, and they were no worse than even in South Carolina, Virginia, and New Hampshire.³ Nonetheless, had the Anti-Federalists held on to the first three, and taken two out of the next three, it would have been enough to prevent the nine ratifications necessary to put the Constitution into effect. Main offers several reasons for the Federalist victory. First, the delay in the distribution of Anti-Federalist materials, especially coupled with the Federalist leanings of most newspapers, played a major role. In addition to publishing more Federalist pieces, the proponents of ratification were also able 'to conceal or distort the facts.' They 'twisted' the arguments of their opponents 'so as to make them appear foolish,' and sometimes even denied the existence of opposition in distant states (Main 1961, p. 251). He sums up the organizational advantage of the Federalists:

²Saul Cornell's (1999) *The Other Founders* is perhaps the best recent example of tracing the Anti-Federalists' influence and legacy, though David Siemers (2002) has contributed two excellent books on the topic as well, one of them being perhaps the best currently available concise collection of opposition writings from the ratification debates. Perhaps the most significant work that revives the Anti-Federalist tradition, though, does not center on the Anti-Federalists: Pauline Maier's (2010) *Ratification* offers a rich history of the debates that is long overdue in the literature on the period.

³These six are the states Main identifies as having Anti-Federalist majorities, though the evidence is murky at best for the last three. The seventh state for Main was Pennsylvania, which has more recently been shown rather conclusively to have had a Federalist majority, albeit a small one (Ireland 1989).

The ability of the Federalists to outmaneuver their opponents was due in part to superior organization. The Antifederalists had not been able to unite, even within a particular state, in order to concert their efforts, until the creation of the Federal Republican Committee in New York [in April 1788]. Everywhere they were too late. On the other hand the Federalists were consistently ahead of the game from the time when, in September, the ‘gentleman’ of Philadelphia rode out to harangue ‘the rabble’ (Main 1961, pp. 252–253).

Main writes in particular of the ratifying conventions, and the failure of the Anti-Federalists to achieve a decisive rejection of the Constitution in any state.⁴ Rutland (1966) makes a similar argument concerning the reasons for Anti-Federalist defeat.

Steven Boyd critiques Main and Rutland for their focus on state conventions, rather than political maneuvering before and after those conventions. He concludes that, based on their activity, the Anti-Federalists were ‘a viable, organized opposition’ (Boyd 1979, p. 168).

There is a great deal of truth to this argument, but it fails to recognize that the proponents of ratification, at nearly every step, outmaneuvered the Anti-Federalists. In Pennsylvania the Federalists forced through a call for a ratifying convention before their opponents even had time to organize. In Massachusetts they won over more moderate Anti-Federalists with an implicit promise to amend the Constitution after ratification. In New Hampshire the Federalists managed an adjournment of the convention from February to June, against an Anti-Federalist majority, in order to win over hearts, minds, and, most importantly, votes. In Virginia and New York, it was the pressure of eight and ten prior ratifications, respectively, that helped Federalists win the votes of delegates like Edmund Randolph and Melancton Smith. Furthermore, the Federalists managed to largely control the newspapers and ensure that everyone had ample access to pro-Constitution arguments, while disrupting the distribution of opposition arguments. ‘Only about a half-dozen newspapers throughout the country maintained a blatantly Antifederal posture on the Constitution,’ writes John Kaminski, ‘while another half dozen or so remained neutral to the point where they printed a goodly amount of Antifederalist literature. The remaining eighty newspapers were patently Federalist’ (Kaminski et al. 2018, p. 280). The Federalists clearly had an advantage with respect to the dissemination of essays favorable to their view, and it is this factor that we will examine systematically for insight into the organization of the Anti-Federalist network.

⁴The North Carolina convention, meeting in July 1788, adjourned without a formal rejection of the Constitution, though a motion to ratify was defeated overwhelmingly. Rhode Island, meanwhile, held a referendum rather than a convention in March, in which the people voted against ratification, though the Federalists in the state generally boycotted the proceeding as improper; nowhere was this seen as an important defeat, as the Federalists seem to have hardly recognized (if at all) that such a referendum took place in ‘Rogue Island,’ the black sheep of the United States.

4.2 The Contours of the Debate

A brief summary of the ratification debates will be helpful here.⁵ In the summer of 1787, fifty-five delegates, representing twelve of the thirteen states, met in convention ostensibly to suggest revisions to the Articles of Confederation. When the delegates met, however, they rather quickly decided to scrap the Articles and design an entirely new system of government. James Madison and Edmund Randolph, both of Virginia, wrote and presented what came to be known as the Virginia Plan, a broad outline for a strong national government that would serve as the agenda for the constitutional debate at the Convention. Since the delegates agreed to a rule of secrecy concerning their proceedings, very little information on the debates in convention appeared in the newspapers, or in any other public forum. There was plenty of speculation of course, including the idea that the Convention would suggest drastic changes to the system of government. This was fairly obvious, if for no other reason than the fact that the Convention sat for four months deliberating; minor changes, one imagines, would not have taken such time.⁶

Because of the rule of secrecy, only the delegates knew what the proposed Constitution contained when it was released to the public, largely through the newspapers, starting in September.⁷ Since these delegates came from twelve different states, they had a built-in national network for effectively advocating ratification of the Constitution, which required the approval of special conventions in at least nine states. Immediately following the Convention, many of the delegates began to correspond with acquaintances they believed would be sympathetic to the proposed government.⁸ Most of the eventual leaders of the push for ratification were delegates to the Convention or had close ties to those delegates. The probable opponents of ratifica-

⁵It would be out of place to include an extensive history here, but fortunately Pauline Maier's (2010) *Ratification* offers an excellent account of the national debate, weaving together the events in the various states. For state-by-state accounts, two edited volumes that appeared during the American bicentennial both offer a great deal of insightful analysis. *Ratifying the Constitution* by Gillespie and Lienesch (1989) offers more detailed accounts of the actual debates on the Constitution in 1787–1788, while *The Constitution and the States* by Conley and Kaminski (1988) gives richer background for each state, as well as a very useful short bibliographic essay for each state, and a more extensive one on ratification as a whole.

⁶The classic account of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 is Catherine Drinker Bowen's (1966) *Miracle at Philadelphia*, though Richard Beeman's (2010) *Plain, Honest Men* presents a narrative that draws on more recent material and historical analysis. Max Farrand's (1966) *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* remains the best documentary collection relating to the Convention, and his *Framing of the Constitution* (Farrand 1913), published a half century before Bowen's book, is still a worthwhile read.

⁷The editors of the DHRC counted at least seventy-five newspapers that printed the Constitution within two months of the end of the Philadelphia Convention (Kaminski et al. 2018).

⁸Many of these letters were reprinted by Farrand (1966) in volume 3 of his *Records*. More such letters were reprinted in volume 4 of the *Documentary History of the Constitution* (Department of State 1905). Virtually the entire surviving correspondence on the Constitution during the ratification debates will eventually be included in the Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution, and much interesting correspondence has appeared in the volumes of the DHRC released so far (Kaminski et al. 2018).

tion, meanwhile, had to read and consider the Constitution before they could begin to critique it, or form any kind of viable opposition network. Many of them were caught unaware by the bold effort to discard the old government and replace it with a new one.

There were only three delegates present at the end of the debates in the Philadelphia Convention who refused to sign and support the Constitution, out of the forty-two still there. Two of them, Elbridge Gerry and George Mason, became important critics of the Constitution, and provided some early public material in opposition to ratification. The third non-signer, Edmund Randolph, believed that the proposed Constitution was a substantial improvement over the Articles of Confederation, but refused to sign only because the other delegates were unwilling to allow for amendments before ratification; he did not join the public debate on either side, except for one reluctant letter explaining his reasons for not signing, until the Virginia ratifying convention.⁹ Several other delegates who had left before the end of the proceedings were similarly prepared: John Lansing and Robert Yates of New York, and John Francis Mercer and Luther Martin of Maryland. This gave the opposition a total of seven men in four states who had any idea what the Constitution might look like prior to the beginning of the ratification struggle, compared to 39 delegates who signed the Constitution, and nine others who left early but supported the final document; these 48 represented every state but Rhode Island.

In part because their leaders were ready to defend the Constitution before its opponents were organized, the proponents of ratification were successfully able to publicly label themselves ‘federalists’ and their opponents ‘antifederalists.’ The Anti-Federalists bristled at this name, largely because they saw themselves as the defenders of federal principles against those who championed what they saw as consolidation under the Constitution. By the time the Anti-Federalists were at all organized on a national level, though, the names had stuck.

There were in essence at least fourteen distinct debates over ratification. In addition to an overriding national political debate unlike any in the United States since the founding, each state was to decide separately whether to ratify, and each had its own reasons both in favor of and opposed to ratification. The debate often filtered down to the local level as well, with some decidedly idiosyncratic discussions about the influence of the proposed Constitution on individual towns. The debate from town to town, and from state to state, differed widely as the geography differed, but the main arguments for and against the Constitution, those presented in an essentially national arena, were consistent throughout the United States. As a whole, the debate over ratification was a surprisingly enlightened and educated debate, with ordinary citizens discussing abstract ideas about government. The main facilitator of the distribution of materials and ideas was the newspapers, which were widely read and even more widely discussed in 1780s America.

⁹For Madison’s notes on the objections expressed by each of these three delegates at the close of the Convention, see Farrand (1966, pp. 631–633). For the published objections of the three, see Kaminski et al. (2018, vol. XIII, pp. 346–51; 546–555) and Kaminski et al. (2018, vol. XV, pp. 117–35).

There was very little debate in three of the first four states to ratify. The conventions in Delaware, New Jersey, and Georgia each voted unanimously for ratification. In Pennsylvania and Connecticut, the second and fifth states, there was a determined resistance that was substantially outnumbered in convention, amid allegations that the Federalists were attempting to stifle all dissent. While the allegations were exaggerated, they were basically true; Federalists in these states (and others) tried to bully and cajole Anti-Federalists and the newspapers that printed opposition essays into silence.¹⁰ The most common tactic was for individual Federalists to cancel subscriptions to Anti-Federalist newspapers; at least one newspaper that dared to print opposition literature was eventually forced to close down for want of subscribers, while others were pressured and attacked, in at least one case physically as well as verbally.¹¹ This extended even to papers that printed balanced accounts of the debates in the ratifying conventions (that is, Anti-Federalist as well as Federalist speeches), which is why we know relatively little about the opposition argument in both Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

¹⁰In Pennsylvania, the Federalists succeeded in calling a ratifying convention only after a friendly mob in Philadelphia physically carried two Anti-Federalist legislators back to their seats in order to establish a quorum. The nineteen members of the opposition had walked out of the session to prevent such a hurried convention. In the ratifying convention, the minority was prevented from even proposing its amendments or having them entered on the minutes. In both cases, the indignant minority members published a newspaper essay about their mistreatment, and in fact both essays were widely reprinted. In Connecticut, those who dared oppose the Constitution were threatened with political repercussions and general character assassination in the press. The minority, wrote Hugh Ledlie to John Lamb (who coordinated much of the national correspondence among opponents of the Constitution from New York), ‘were told plainly that if they did not turn and vote for it, they must not expect any places either of trust or profit under the new Constitution.’ The Federalists were as good as their word, relentlessly attacking James Wadsworth, the principal Anti-Federalist in the state, as well as several prominent opposition leaders who ultimately did vote for ratification. With every newspaper in the state strongly Federalist, the minority had little recourse for defense (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. II, pp. 112–117; 617–639; vol. III, p. 579).

¹¹The *Pennsylvania Herald*, during the state convention, published versions of the debates along with commentary by its editor Alexander Dallas, until prominent Federalists complained that Dallas was entirely too friendly to the Anti-Federalist cause, at which point he was fired and his accounts were no longer printed. The *Herald* ceased publication shortly afterwards because of the loss of so many Federalist subscriptions. In Boston, Federalists managed to pressure Benjamin Russell, printer of the *Massachusetts Centinel*, into insisting that the name of the author of any Anti-Federalist piece be made available to the public, to the consternation of the opposition in the state and elsewhere. (The policy did not apply to pieces in favor of the Constitution.) When another printer, Edward Powars of the *American Herald*, criticized this policy, local Federalists responded, in the words of an Anti-Federalist writer in the newspaper, ‘by THREATENING the Printer and DROPPING the papers that contain’ writings against the Constitution. By the end of June, Powars was forced to close up shop for lack of subscriptions, and he was effectively run out of town, reopening his paper two months later in Worcester. In New York, many Federalists refused to advertise in Thomas Greenleaf’s *New York Journal* because it printed so much Anti-Federalist material. Even other printers in the city attacked him on this score. Many Federalists cancelled subscriptions to put financial pressure on Greenleaf’s paper, and after New York’s ratification a Federalist mob attacked his office and destroyed much of his equipment (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. II, p. 40; vol. IV, pp. 41–44; p. 352, liv; vol. XIX, pp. lvii–lxi).

The turning point for the debate was the sixth convention, in Massachusetts. As Pauline Maier explains:

The Massachusetts ratifying convention was the first to meet in a state where there was significant opposition to the Constitution. If Massachusetts refused to ratify, other states—particularly New Hampshire and New York—would probably follow her example. That would all but seal the Constitution’s fate since Rhode Island and now perhaps also Virginia were likely to vote ‘no.’ If, however, Massachusetts ratified, the Constitution would be well on its way toward enactment (Maier 2010, p. 155).

By this time, many Anti-Federalists had moved from outright opposing ratification to demanding amendments prior to adoption. Since the Philadelphia Convention, the Federalists had resisted the idea of amending prior to ratification, or approval conditional on amendments. Instead, Federalists in Massachusetts agreed to formally recommend amendments approved by the state convention. Using this tactic and thereby winning over two key figures in the state, old patriots John Hancock and Samuel Adams, the Federalists achieved their sixth state victory. Of the remaining seven states, six would recommend amendments with their ratifications, like Massachusetts, but all seven would ratify unconditionally.

4.3 The Role of Newspapers

American newspapers in the 1780s generally consisted of a single sheet folded over, giving four pages of material.¹² Approximately a quarter of this space (and often more) was typically devoted to advertising and public announcements, with some of the remaining space focused on reporting of foreign events. This left a little more than half of the paper to be filled with political and social news and commentary, or writings on almost any other subject. Some newspapers were printed as often as daily, though most were weekly. Printers collectively operated an informal network of exchange, sending newspapers to each other through the mail, and reprinting interesting items from other papers, generally without identifying the newspaper from which the piece was taken.¹³ This sharing of newspapers led to a substantial controversy in early 1788, when changes in postal regulations prevented the distribution of newspapers sent to printers in other parts of the United States. Specifically, the Postmaster General, Ebenezer Hazard, permitted post riders to decide whether to carry newspapers as a favor to printers (or for a negotiated fee), instead of the previous policy making this part of the regular mail service. In either case, printers were not paying any kind of postage. The Anti-Federalists portrayed this change as a Federalist plot to prevent a balanced debate on the Constitution; Federalist papers, some

¹²The online database ‘America’s Historical Newspapers’ provides electronic versions of a substantial number of newspapers from the debate. It can be found at www.readex.com.

¹³The idea of free sharing and lax attribution would be gross violations of contemporary journalistic ethics, but at the time they were seen as perfectly acceptable. The closest modern equivalent to this system of shared news and commentary is news blogs, which will copy material without permission, though bloggers will usually post the source of the material.

Anti-Federalists alleged, were still delivered to other printers. There is no evidence that this allegation is true, however, and the evidence for a Federalist conspiracy is scant at best; the more likely conclusion is that the policy was simply a bad idea by Hazard.¹⁴ It is clear, though, that there were delays in reprinting essays in early 1788, because the delivery of newspapers to other printers was disrupted during this time.¹⁵

Since newspapers freely reprinted from one another, essays and ideas could spread almost as quickly as the newspaper itself could be carried. On the other hand, since newspapers often did not note where the material was previously printed, it is difficult to trace the pattern of dissemination of any given article.¹⁶ The sheer quantity of material is staggering; there were about a hundred newspapers operating in the thirteen states during the ratification process, and news and commentary about the Constitution crowded out almost everything else, except advertisements. In fact, it even crept into the ads, as numerous pamphlets and broadsides containing arguments about the Constitution were printed and advertised for sale.¹⁷

In the early American republic, it was common and expected that political essays would be published under a pseudonym. The reason for this was a prevailing sentiment that arguments mattered more than names. This did not, of course, stop anyone from appealing to authority figures or well-liked and well-respected individuals to win political points; the Federalist literature in the ratification debates was full of references to George Washington and Benjamin Franklin in particular, as well as individuals who are now lesser known but at the time were of tremendous political importance. The relative anonymity afforded by pseudonyms made it very easy for

¹⁴Hazard's general incompetence led to a congressional investigation, though he was not removed from office. This incident was not forgotten, though; when it came time for George Washington, as President, to appoint a postmaster general under the new Constitution (since all such positions, legally, would have to be reappointed or reassigned), he decided not to reappoint Hazard, despite the fact that nearly every other officeholder under the Articles of Confederation was retained in his post. Washington's position on Hazard is clear in a letter he wrote to John Jay in July, 1788. He wrote that 'if the Postmaster General (with whose character I am unacquainted & therefore would not be understood to form an unfavorable opinion of his motives) has any candid advisers who conceive that he merits the public employment they ought to counsel him to wipe away the aspersion he has incautiously brought upon a good cause [that is, ratification of the Constitution]. If he is unworthy of the Office he holds, it would be well that the ground of a complaint, apparently so general, should be enquired into, and, if founded, redressed through the medium of a better appointment' (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XVI, p. 596).

¹⁵The *Documentary History* (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XVI, pp. 540–596) collects many of the writings about the controversy, and includes an excellent description of what happened. Although he says little about the post office controversy of 1788, Richard John (1995, pp. 30–42) offers an excellent discussion of the importance of the postal service in colonial America, and the issue of newspapers sent through the mail during the debate over the Post Office Act of 1792, which involved recognizable echoes of the ratification debates.

¹⁶Although ideally a network analysis would examine the path taken by reprints, noting the newspaper from which a copy was made rather than the original source, there is not sufficient information to consistently use anything but the original source of the material. This is what we have done here.

¹⁷The ads were sometimes political essays unto themselves, and a few such have been included in this analysis, including several for the book version of *The Federalist*.

good arguments to find an audience in other states, even when the author may not have been well known outside of his state, or perhaps even his town. Unfortunately for historians, this preference for pseudonyms, coupled with a reluctance (especially by Anti-Federalists) to claim authorship of pseudonymous writings, makes a full understanding of the participants in this momentous debate difficult.¹⁸

During the debate, the essays in defense of the Constitution ranged in quality from excellent political theory to worthless name-calling and mudslinging. The latter was perhaps more popular, especially in essays published under pseudonyms. The most reprinted items, though, were generally attached to named persons; the reliance on appeals to authority was apparent in the reprints. The single most reprinted item was an excerpt from a letter by George Washington, who tried to stay out of the public debate; this was reprinted no fewer than fifty times (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XV, pp. 135–137). The second most reprinted piece, at 49 times, was an excerpt from another letter by the future first President (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XVI, pp. 463–465). The next three most reprinted Federalist pieces were all at least in part about Washington. James Wilson, John Hancock, Francis Hopkinson, and Benjamin Franklin also saw many reprints.¹⁹ Among pseudonymous pieces, Tench Coxe's 'American Citizen' essays saw wide circulation, as did Oliver Ellsworth's 'Landholder.' The famous essays of *The Federalist*, by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, saw only modest reprintings (by Federalist standards), with two essays seeing 13 copies and roughly a quarter of them seeing at least five, but the book version probably came out too late to influence many people, except perhaps within the state of New York (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XIII, pp. 247, 561–562, 486–494).

For the Anti-Federalists, the reliance on great names was not as significant, but it was still the pieces with known authors that were most reprinted. The amendments proposed by William Paca in the Maryland ratifying convention topped the list in number of reprints, followed closely by Elbridge Gerry's objections to the Constitution (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XVII, pp. 236–239; vol. XIII, pp. 546–548). George Mason, George Clinton, Edmund Randolph, Robert Yates and John Lansing, Richard Henry Lee, and Luther Martin all saw wide reprinting. The dissent of the Pennsylvania convention minority, signed by twenty-one delegates, was reprinted nineteen times as well (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XV, pp. 7–13). Among the pseudonymous pieces, only Centinel spread widely, and only the first two of his essays. The two series widely considered to be the best in the opposition also did not see many

¹⁸For example, the authorship of three of the four most significant series of Anti-Federalist essays is heavily disputed. The letters of the Federal Farmer, traditionally attributed to Richard Henry Lee, are now more commonly credited to Melancton Smith, though that attribution is tenuous. The letters of Brutus are also sometimes attributed to Smith, and sometimes to Robert or Abraham Yates, and a few other New Yorkers. The authorship of the letters of Cato, generally credited to Governor George Clinton of New York, is also seriously disputed. Of the four main series, only the identity of Centinel is generally beyond dispute, as Samuel Bryan bragged about his authorship; still, some historians believe that he wrote only part of the series, or that the author was actually a group of people, of which Bryan was only a part. Many of the less influential pieces remain completely anonymous to historians.

¹⁹The numbers of printings, divided by state, of the pieces we have considered here can be found in the appendices of the DHRC, volumes XIII–XVIII.

reprintings; none of the essays of Brutus was reprinted more than three times, and the Federal Farmer saw only four reprints of his first pamphlet, with only one reprint in a newspaper (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XIII, pp. 326–328, 411–412; vol. XIV, pp. 14–18). The pamphlet form was distributed nationally, mostly by personal correspondence, and seems to have been widely read; in this respect it is similar to *The Federalist*, which also traveled mostly through the mail rather than through the newspapers. The extent of this distribution suggests that the Anti-Federalists were effectively communicating across state lines by mail, but the fact that a series of such importance to the Anti-Federalist side failed to be often reprinted in the newspapers suggests weakness in the Anti-Federalist newspaper network.

The importance of the newspapers in the debate was tremendous; ‘A Friend for Liberty’ suggests that the newspapers ‘are now more read than the Bible at this time’ (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. IX, p. 231). The impact of the papers, though, has never been systematically studied.²⁰ The distribution of materials throughout the states, mostly in the medium of newspapers, potentially tells us a great deal about the Federalist and Anti-Federalist political networks, and the level of cooperation and coordination by each side during the debate. This project is a first step toward a better understanding of these public debates.

4.4 Examining the Spread of Federalist and Anti-Federalist Literature

In order to study the spread of arguments about the Constitution, we focus here on essays written for or against ratification. We are interested primarily in material that was reprinted in newspapers across state lines. Given the available data, we believe that the sharing of newspaper essays serves as a good proxy for the overall national organization of each side of the debate. We believe that the sharing of essays shows two aspects of organization: (1) It shows how quickly each side was able to draft a collection of persuasive essays. (2) It shows how quickly each side was able to distribute their essays throughout the states. In addition to organization, the sharing of essays may also reflect the fact that the Federalists were simply wealthier and therefore had the means to ensure the republication of essays.²¹ There are of

²⁰John Alexander (1990) examines the newspaper coverage of the Philadelphia Convention itself, and draws some fascinating conclusions about the biases and political and ideological leanings of printers across the country, but this is neither a systematic study nor an examination of the ratification debates. Nonetheless, it represents a significant and important effort to understand the role of newspapers, and especially the spread of news. Richard John’s (1995) work on the postal system also addresses the spread of newspapers, as does Johann Neem’s (2008) work on the development of civil society and democratic culture in New England. Neither of these, though, offers a systematic analysis of how news and opinions traveled via newspapers in eighteenth-century America.

²¹Beard (1921) presents the classic version of the argument that the Federalists were rich and the Anti-Federalists were men of modest means, though the opposition frequently referred to the Federalists as the aristocratic party during the debates. Main (1961, pp. 266–278) disputes Beard

course many aspects of organization that the sharing of essays does not directly measure. The most obvious is the local and state organization done by like minded citizens and politicians in order to win elections and effect policies in councils and legislatures.²² Using our measure of essay sharing, it appears that the Federalists were better organized; the Anti-Federalists themselves acknowledged this. Aedus Burke of South Carolina, for example, writes in a letter to John Lamb that ‘we in the Opposition, had not, previous to our Meeting [the South Carolina ratifying convention], either wrote, or spoke, hardly a word against it, nor took any one step in the matter. We had no principle of concert or union, while its friends and abettors left no expedient untried to push it forward’ (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. VXIII, p. 55). This was a problem throughout the states. Observing this, in mid-1788 the Anti-Federalists in New York, largely through the efforts of Lamb, made a belated push to unify the Anti-Federalists nationally, but it seems to have made little difference. Lamb and others did what they could to disseminate materials against ratification, but they met with only modest and mixed success.²³

We investigate here whether the Federalists were indeed better at disseminating the material in favor of the Constitution than were their opponents. In particular, we examine reprints of newspaper essays, broadsides, and pamphlets across the various states. We have drawn our data from volumes XIII through XVIII of the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*. These volumes, titled by the editors *Commentaries on the Constitution*, include material important to the national debate over ratification, or at least significant in a region broader than the state of publication. Material included in the other volumes, but not here, was generally local in its focus, and was rarely reprinted outside of its state of origin.²⁴ We have

on this point. Although there is evidence that the breakdown between parties was at least somewhat along socioeconomic lines, there was a distinct urban/rural split that transcended wealth. Even the poorer classes in the cities tended to support the Constitution, and the wealthier planters were as likely to be skeptical as more modest farmers. Despite this complication, it is reasonable to say that the Federalists, on the whole, were wealthier than their opponents. It is difficult to assess, however, just how much impact this wealth advantage had in their success at securing ratification.

²²Main (1961) and Rutland (1966) both suggest that the Anti-Federalists were less organized and were politically outmaneuvered. While this was certainly true in some states, in others, notably New York and Virginia, they did organize effectively and put up a strong opposition. Boyd (1979) disagrees with Main and Rutland on this point, noting that the Anti-Federalists were actually quite organized politically, contesting convention elections and generally doing all they could to stop the ratification process or outright reject the Constitution. This debate about electoral organization, of course, falls outside the scope of this analysis.

²³The concentration of Anti-Federalist material in New York, instead of indicating a lack of national organization, might suggest that the opposition to the Constitution was merely focusing its efforts on a crucial state. A close examination of John Lamb’s letters, though, thoroughly undermines such a hypothesis. Lamb wrote to Anti-Federalists in many states, and with the exception perhaps of Virginia (and of course New York) the responses invariably suggest a disorganized opposition overmatched and outmaneuvered by the Federalists (Kaminski et al. 2018, vol. XVIII, pp. 32–68).

²⁴With any edited collection of documents, one must be wary of selection bias. The DHRC, though, because it is comprehensive in its scope and designed to include virtually every document relevant to ratification, no matter how tedious or trivial, does not raise any red flags. The *Commentaries* section of the DHRC in particular is reliable, because the essays selected for those volumes were

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics

	Federalists	Anti-Federalists
Total pieces	325	165
Pieces reprinted at least once	301	139
Pieces reprinted at least ten times	103	18
Average number of reprints	8.6	4.8

included every document in the *Commentaries* except for those that appeared before the Philadelphia Convention ended, private letters that were not published at the time, pieces that did not advocate or oppose ratification, and newspaper squibs included in the appendices.²⁵ The number of reprints includes publication as pamphlets and broadsides; we have not distinguished types of publication in our analysis, with one exception: publication of essays in the *American Museum*, a Philadelphia-based magazine with a national circulation, was not included among the Pennsylvania reprints, due to its national presence. When an essay was often reprinted in parts, we have treated it as several essays. This was uncommon with essays submitted to the newspaper, but it was much more common with editorial comments by the printers, which occasionally spanned several paragraphs. Where two separate and distinct versions of the same item appeared (as was often the case with convention speeches and anecdotes), they have been treated as separate writings. Versions with slight alterations between printings were treated as a single piece.

4.5 Comparing the Federalist and Anti-Federalist Newspaper Networks

A quick examination of the data, as shown in Table 4.1, is suggestive of the overall picture. The Anti-Federalists published 165 pieces collected in the *Commentaries*, of which 139 were reprinted at least once. Eighteen were reprinted at least ten times, and the average essay was reprinted 4.8 times. The same collection includes 325

selected for either their intellectual importance to the debate, or their political importance; the latter is essentially a reflection of how often the essays were reprinted across state lines. Thus, this collection does not omit anything that was widely reprinted, so there is no reason to suspect any bias that might affect our conclusions.

²⁵The omission of squibs was a practical decision, given that they would substantially increase the amount of data, and would raise the question of whether they should count equally with longer essays in comparing the organizations on either side of the ratification question. Since an overwhelming number of the squibs, like the majority of newspapers, were Federalist in nature, this analysis, by excluding squibs, probably understates the extent and impact of the Federalist network. The reprinting of squibs is worth a separate analysis, and we expect it would suggest not just an advantage but a Federalist dominance when it comes to newspaper reprintings.

Table 4.2 Federalist printings per Anti-Federalist printing

State	Ratio	State	Ratio
PA	1.94	MD	2.61
VA	2.96	RI	3.04
NY	3.11	MA	3.17
SC	3.37	NC	4.25
GA	6.40	CT	7.24
VT	7.60	DE	8.00
NJ	8.25	NH	11.90
National	3.27		

Federalist pieces, of which 301 were reprinted at least once. One hundred and three were reprinted at least ten times, and the average number of reprints was 8.6. These numbers alone suggest a strong Federalist dominance. Overall, there were 3,124 total printings of the Federalist pieces to 954 opposition printings.

When we examine the disparity by state, displayed in Table 4.2, the difference is more pronounced. In Pennsylvania, easily the most balanced state in terms of total printings, there were just under two Federalist essays per Anti-Federalist one. In the three most significant other states (Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia) the ratio was around 3:1. In five states (Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Georgia, and Vermont) there were roughly six to eight pieces for every opposition piece. In New Hampshire, by far the most imbalanced state, there were 203 Federalist printings to just seventeen Anti-Federalist ones, a 12:1 ratio. Certainly, in sheer numbers, the Federalists overwhelmed their opponents.

When we examine the newspaper networks of each side, an even clearer picture of Federalist dominance emerges. Here we construct two networks for each month, one for the Federalist works, and one for the Anti-Federalist works. An edge between states A and B indicates that an essay originating in state A in that month later appeared in state B. The thickness of the edge between two states reflects the number of essays shared between the two states that originated that month. The states are the nodes, and the writings are the edges. For the graphs, the Fruchterman and Reingold force-directed placement method is used. This method is one of many ‘force-directed’ methods for drawing mathematical graphs. The method considers each node to have certain ‘gravitational’ properties. The more edges that two nodes share the stronger their attraction. Conversely, the fewer edges that they share the less the attraction. Nodes that share no edges actually repel each other. The method strives to display the graph in an esthetically pleasing way based on a fixed set of rules.²⁶

The Federalist advantage is readily apparent immediately following the publication of the Constitution in September (Fig. 4.1). Federalist articles are shared with

²⁶Fruchterman and Reingold (1991, pp. 1129–1164); For more on force-direct methods of graph drawing see chapter five in Tamassia (2013).

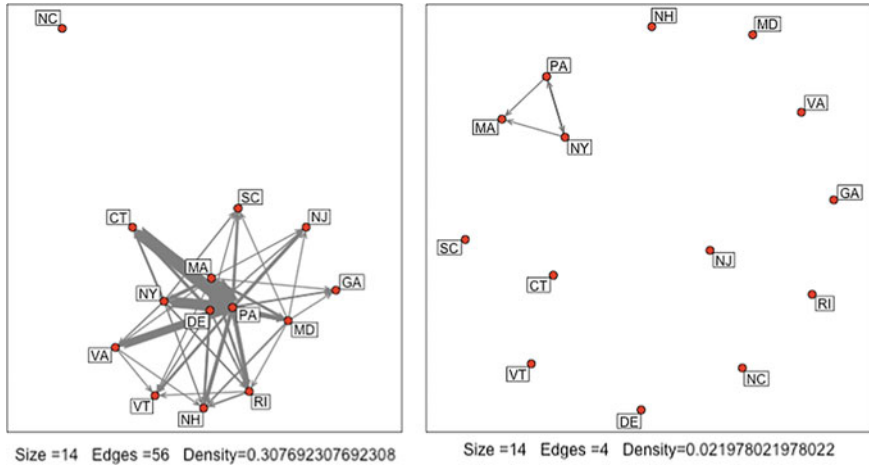


Fig. 4.1 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, September 1787. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

virtually all states, with seven states originating material.²⁷ In contrast, the Anti-Federalists produced only two essays in the month of September, shared in only three states. One of these, the first essay by Cato in New York, was among the mildest Anti-Federalist pieces; it merely urged caution and calm deliberation. The Anti-Federalists were not even prepared to begin the fight yet. Over the next several months, the Federalists maintained their advantage, and their opponents tried to catch up (Figs. 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4).

The Federalist network remained strong through the end of 1787. Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania were at the center of the network, with most of the work originating in those states, and most other work reprinted there as well. Without these states, though, the sharing was still substantial. In November and December (Figs. 4.3 and 4.4), Connecticut became surprisingly central as well, due primarily to Oliver Ellsworth's 'Landholder' series, one of the most influential series in defense of the Constitution. Only Tench. Coxe's 'American Citizen' essays (originally published in Philadelphia) received wider reprinting than Landholder. Roger Sherman's 'Countryman' essays, published in the same month, were much less widely reprinted, though probably as influential in Connecticut.

²⁷North Carolina is the only state without a Federalist reprint in September. It is very likely that newspapers in the state did in fact reprint Federalist essays in this (and every) month, but unfortunately North Carolina's newspapers had a low survival rate, and few copies are extant. Thus, we really do not know the extent of material reprinted in the state. Relatively few writings appear to have originated there but given its strong Anti-Federalist leanings it seems likely that some of the opposition material was republished in North Carolina, though our data includes no Anti-Federalist reprintings in that state.

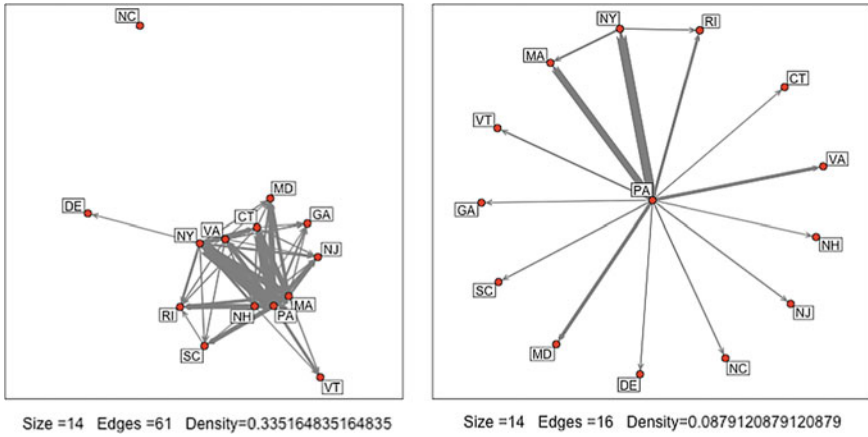


Fig. 4.2 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, October 1787. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

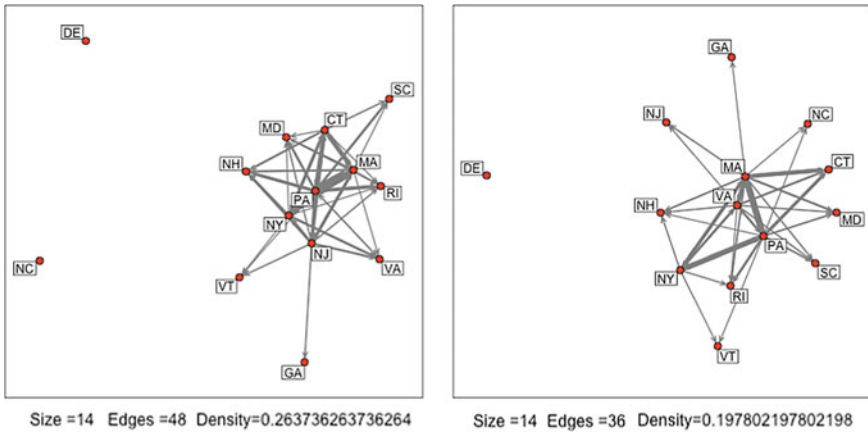


Fig. 4.3 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, November 1787. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

The Anti-Federalist network paints a very different picture. By October (Fig. 4.2), the Anti-Federalists had really mobilized in only two states, Pennsylvania and New York. The latter state’s Anti-Federalist material did not travel very far, reaching only adjacent states, but Pennsylvania’s indefatigable printers made sure to distribute their papers nationally. The first two essays of *Centinel* reached as far north as Massachusetts and south to Virginia, while the ‘Address of the Seceding Assemblymen,’ who refused to attend a legislative session in an attempt to prevent a quorum for a ratifying convention from being called, reached even further. By this point, despite a flood of material praising the Constitution in Federalist newspapers, the debate had scarcely begun anywhere but Philadelphia; Eleazer Oswald, printer of the largely

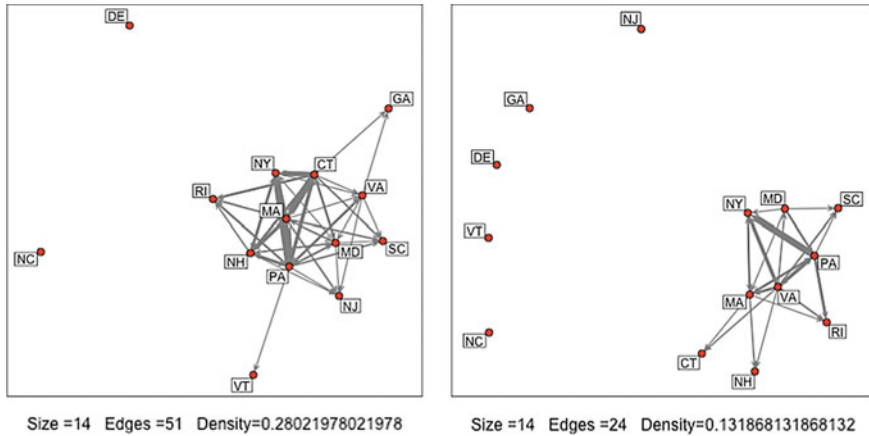


Fig. 4.4 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, December 1787. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

Anti-Federalist *Independent Gazetteer*, was happy to begin it. By November, printed Anti-Federalist material was spreading every bit as far as writings in defense of the Constitution, with only Federalist Delaware not participating, though the volume of material was still substantially less than that of the Federalists. Pennsylvania formed the heart of the Anti-Federalist network, and would remain at the center of the debate until the bitter (for the Anti-Federalists, anyway) end, long after the state's convention voted in December to ratify the Constitution. Virginia and Massachusetts joined Pennsylvania in importance in November, largely because of the wide distribution of the published objections of George Mason and Elbridge Gerry, respectively. The month turned out to be the high point for the Anti-Federalist organization. By December, five states, including three that unanimously approved the Constitution that month, did not reprint or offer for reprinting any material opposing ratification. The resistance had not yet died down elsewhere, though, as Edmund Randolph's reluctant objections, coupled with a letter by Richard Henry Lee, placed Virginia again at the heart of the opposition network. The dissent of the minority in Pennsylvania's convention also saw wide distribution.

Early in 1788, the Anti-Federalist network fell apart. In January (Fig. 4.5), six states saw two or fewer reprintings while contributing nothing original. In February (Fig. 4.6), there were ten such states, and seven in March (Fig. 4.7). Stubborn Pennsylvania remained the chief contributor, sending five articles to seven states in March. Given the timing, this reduced spread of Anti-Federalist materials may well be related to the change in postal policy, making it more difficult for printers to copy from other newspapers. It is hard to say whether this was decisive, or whether some other factor was at work. But after the high point of November, the worst months for Anti-Federalist reprintings were the three months during which complaints about the mails were most frequent. It is unlikely, though plausible, that this is coincidental;

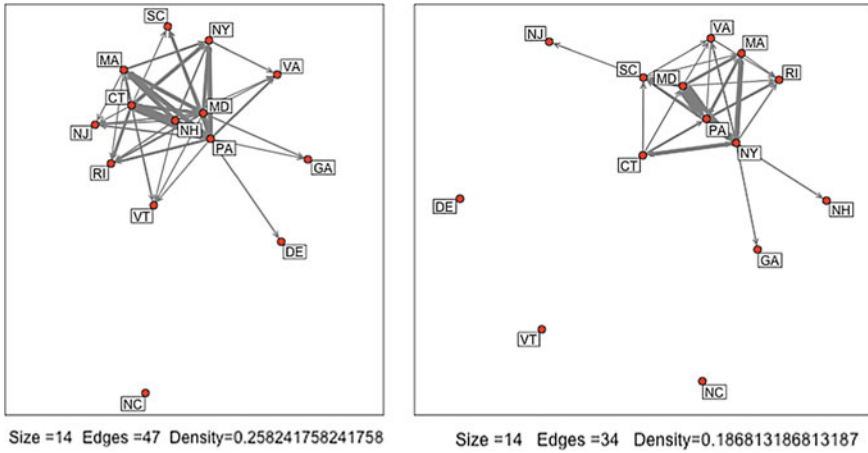


Fig. 4.5 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, January 1788. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

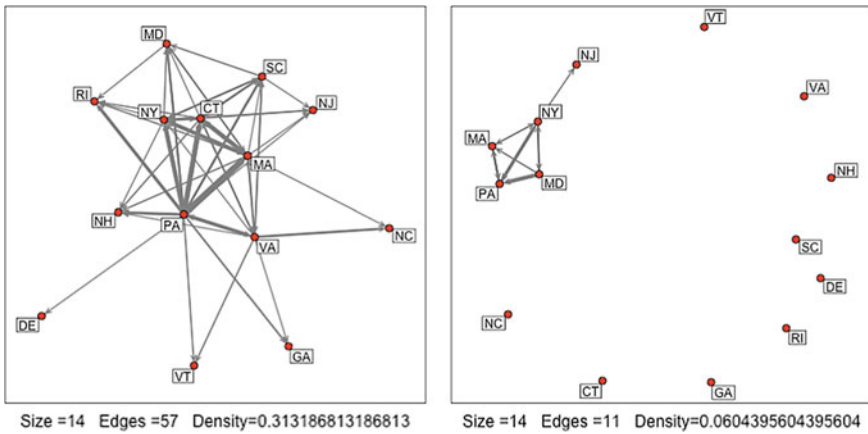


Fig. 4.6 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, February 1788. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right.

what is not clear is how much this hurt the opposition cause. It may well have done decisive damage, as the crucial Massachusetts convention met in mid-January and voted to ratify in February.

The picture looks better for the Constitution’s opponents in April, but only because of the distribution of William Paca’s amendments proposed in (but not approved by) the Maryland convention. The convention had voted in late April to ratify the Constitution, but had neglected to take action on the amendments proposed by Paca, a former governor of the state who led the minority in convention. If these suggested amendments are left out of the network analysis, only three states saw more than

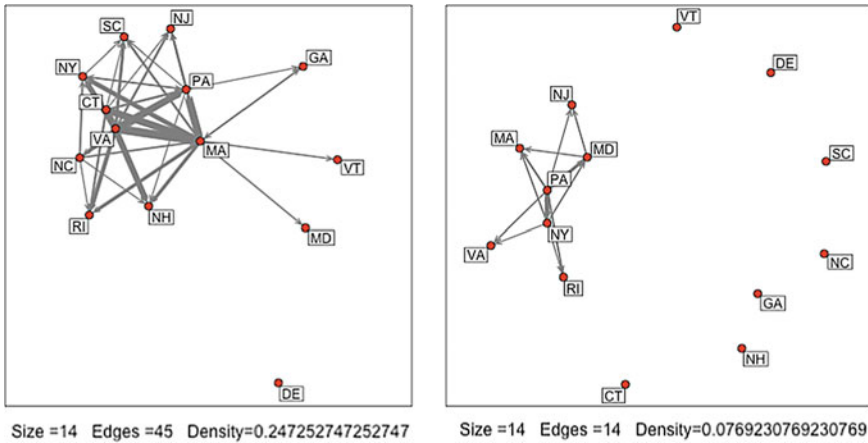


Fig. 4.7 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, March 1788. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

two articles reprinted. The Maryland convention was compelling for much the same reason as the Pennsylvania one: the minority was effectively steamrolled because it was heavily outnumbered, and the majority was not so gracious as to even seriously consider proposed changes to the Constitution. In both cases the minority published a statement of their objections; the address of the Maryland minority was the central opposition writing in May. Without this piece, even the crucial (and divided) state of Massachusetts drops out of the Anti-Federalist network.

Meanwhile, as the Anti-Federalist network crumbled, the Federalist material continued to flow freely.²⁸ By April (Fig. 4.8), the Federalist network thins out somewhat, though only two states did not see a single reprint. In May (Fig. 4.9), this jumps to a high of four, at a point when the opposition network scarcely even exists. In June, the decisive ninth state of New Hampshire and the crucial large state of Virginia both voted to ratify, with New York, one of the most devoutly Anti-Federalist states in the union, ratifying in July.

²⁸The Federalists do not seem to have been much affected by the new postal policies that clearly hampered their opponents. It is possible that, as *Centinel* claimed, post riders were more willing to carry Federalist newspapers. It seems more likely that more Federalists personally delivered newspapers to far away states. After all, the Federalists, well-represented among the wealthier (and hence more mobile) parts of society, likely traveled more, and could carry such materials along. But this is merely speculation.

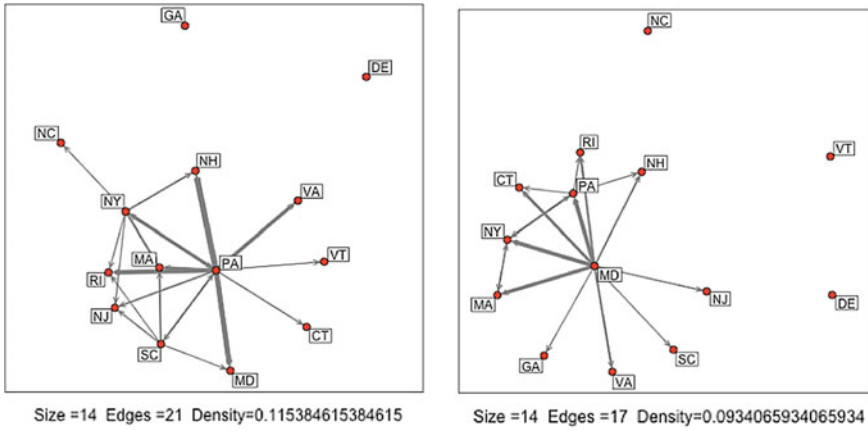


Fig. 4.8 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, April 1788. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

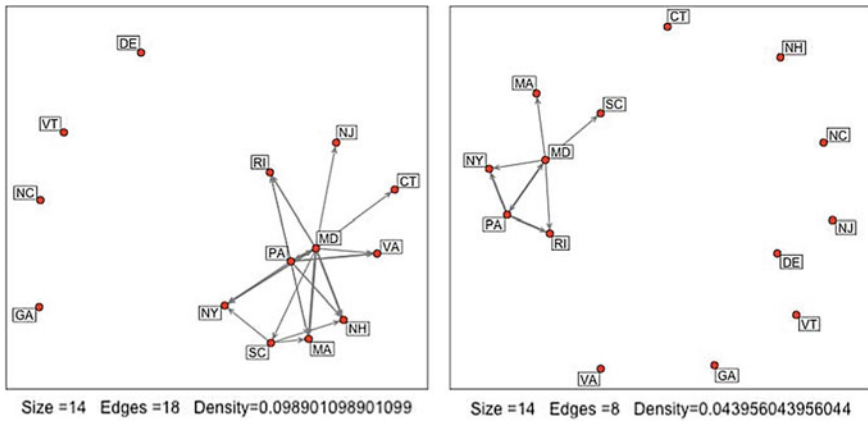


Fig. 4.9 Federalist and Anti-Federalist newspaper networks, May 1788. *Note* Federalist on left, Anti-Federalist on the right

4.6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided a first attempt at quantitatively investigating the organization of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist political networks during the debate over the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. We find, largely in line with the conventional view in the literature, that the Federalists were indeed quicker out of the gate in disseminating their writings to newspapers across the states. In the first month after the convention, the Federalists had published 56 pro-ratification essays which later appeared in newspapers in other states while the Anti-Federalists produced only four.

The Anti-Federalists took several months to approach the output of the Federalists and only did so by the end of 1787. By this point much of the terms of the debate had been dictated by the Federalists and several states had already ratified the new Constitution. The Anti-Federalist network died off quickly as ratification became increasingly likely. Once it was apparent that the Constitution would be approved, the flow of Anti-Federalist writings to other states, as well as the production of new material, slowed to a trickle.

This is only a preliminary look at the political networks of the ratification debates, however, because the available data is limited. The data available in the DHRC has three primary shortcomings for an analysis of this type. First, the dates of reprints are not recorded; with these dates we would be better able to trace the path of various writings as they moved through the states. Second, the particular newspapers in which items were reprinted are only rarely noted. Ideally, the individual newspapers, rather than the states, would serve as the nodes in our network analysis. Third, only the original source of individual essays is included, not the most recent source from which a particular newspaper copied an item. This information is largely unavailable, as most contemporary printers, most of the time, did not note their sources. Given otherwise complete data on the reprintings, however, we could reconstruct the most likely sources of particular essays in particular newspapers, giving us a much clearer picture of the two different networks at a given moment in the debate.

Even given the limitations of the available data, though, these results tell us a great deal about the national debate over ratification. We can see the preliminary organization of the Federalists and the predominance of Federalist newspapers. The informational advantages held by the Federalists throughout the debate are substantial. The Anti-Federalists never were able to catch up, and they were unable to sustain the network that did develop. Understanding partisan newspaper networks beyond these debates may tell us a great deal about the development of political party networks in the early republic as well. This analysis does not provide a clear answer for how the Federalists eventually won ratification in every state, despite several that likely had Anti-Federalist majorities, but it tells a substantial and important part of that story.

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