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# 17TH AMENDMENT

## 17th Amendment

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Just like the President and our mayors and governors, we elect our senators to represent us in the United States Senate. The Senate is one of two houses (groups) in the US Congress. There are two Senators for every state, for a total of 100. This system is to make sure that every state has an equal amount of representatives in this important law-making body. Did you know that Americans were originally not allowed to vote for Senators? Believe it or not, the legislature of every state used to elect the state's senators and the people would elect the Congressmen that serve in the House of Representatives. If you think this sounds unfair, many Americans in 1912 thought so too. The 17th amendment provides for regular voters to elect their Senators. The reason for this is simple, when we look at the process to become a Senator in 1912.



The problem with letting representatives choose representatives is corruption. Corruption is breaking the law to get favors or better treatment for yourself or someone else. Many of the Senators that were "elected" by the state legislatures had struck corrupt bargains with the legislature and many people were angry over the lack of choice they had. By the time the 17th amendment was proposed, almost thirty states were in favor of directly electing senators. The 17th amendment was proposed in 1912 and was completely ratified by 1913.

### Text of the 17th amendment

The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, elected by the people thereof, for six years...

(every state will have two Senators, and they will serve six-year terms in Congress.)

...and each Senator shall have one vote.

(one vote per senator, which now means 100 votes in total for our Senate)

The electors in each State shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of the most numerous branch of the State legislatures.

(any person that can vote in state elections may vote for the senator of that state)

### There is also this important paragraph in the 17 amendment:

When vacancies happen in the representation of any State in the Senate,  
(if a senator leaves office)

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the executive authority of such State shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies (the governor may appoint someone to fill that opening)  
 Provided, That the legislature of any State may empower the executive thereof to make temporary appointments until the people fill the vacancies by election as the legislature may direct.  
 (as long as the state allows the governor to do this)

### Critics of the 17th amendment

Not everyone is in favor of the 17th amendment. States complain that their power to influence the federal government was taken away by the federal government. They could no longer have their interests represented in the legislature, as the Senators became disconnected with their state's government, an arrangement that many states did not like. The popularity of the 17th amendment with the people was important though and that helped the 17th amendment survive all the way to today.

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**John Antkowiak**

The 17th Amendment is popular because people don't understand how it killed the federalist system the Founders created for us. Do you know what federalism is? It's the balance of power between the federal, the State, and the People. The Founders so distrusted a central government that they put the eyes, ears, and voices of the States - whom they considered to be the true guardians of the People's liberty - into the belly of the federal Beast. They were given the Senate. The People were given the House of Representatives. The Senate was meant to protect the States from the control of Congress a... See More

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