



How many votes does it take to win a U.S. congressional election?

More than any other candidate. In short, the candidate who receives a plurality of the vote (that is, the greatest number of votes in the given voting district) wins the election. This is known as the “single-member” district system. In 39 states candidates for most federal and state offices can be elected with a simple plurality, but 11 states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and Vermont) have provisions for runoff elections if no candidate receives a majority of the vote.

Unlike the proportional systems in some democracies, single-member districts mean that only one party wins in any given district. This system puts smaller political parties at a disadvantage, because they find it hard to win enough districts to achieve national influence and power.

- IN HIS FIRST RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE, MASSACHUSETTS DEMOCRAT JOHN F. KENNEDY WAS ELECTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WHERE HE SERVED FROM 1947 TO 1953.

