## **Runoff Elections**

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

In the November 3, 2020 federal election that took place in Georgia, the race for both U.S. Senate seats did not result in a majority vote for either seat. Neither candidate for either seat was able to get a majority (50% plus one) of the vote, and Georgia election law requires that winners in a general election **must** receive a majority of the vote to be declared the victor.

Generally, elections for the U.S. Senate are staggered so that there is only one seat per state contested at a time, but due to unusual circumstances in Georgia, both seats were up for a vote. And for the first time, the two Senate seats from a single state are going into a runoff general election.

So now, there will be a runoff election in early January for these two Senate seats, and this election will decide control of the United States Senate! When Congress convenes on January 3, 2021, the Republicans will be the majority party in the Senate, with 50 Republican Senators and 46 Democrats, with two independent senators (Bernie Sanders, Vermont and Angus King, Maine) caucusing with the Democrats and counting toward the Democrats' overall Senate seat total. But, after the runoff election on January 5th for the two Senate seats, the majority may increase for Republicans, or Democrats may become the majority party after Inauguration Day. Remember, the President of the Senate is the Vice President. The Vice President-elect is Democrat Kamala Harris and she would break any ties because the U.S. Constitution gives the Vice President this power.



What exactly is a runoff election? A runoff election is a separate election that takes place when no candidate for office meets the necessary vote tally required by state statute. Most runoff elections happen as a result of a close primary, and states can

## **Georgia Senate Runoff Elections**



Republican

Incumbent



**Reverend Raphael Warnock** Democrat



Senator David Perdue Republican Incumbent



Jon Ossoff Democrat

handle these in different ways. The truth is, runoff elections for a general election are rare. When they occur, it is usually due to a state requiring candidates for office to receive a simple majority of the votes, at least 50%, and not a plurality of the votes (more votes than any other candidate). This is one reason that the Georgia Senate runoff elections are so unique; it is one of only two states that require a candidate to get a majority, and not a plurality, of votes in a general election.

To Think and To Do: The difference between a plurality of the vote and a majority of the vote is strictly based on the numbers. To have a majority, one must have half of the number of voters, plus one more. To have a plurality, one must receive more votes than any other candidate. Read more about majority versus plurality here.

Go to your Secretary of State's website (scroll down to select your state) and research the election laws for your state. Does your state hold runoff elections? How do these elections work in your state? Does your state require a majority or plurality of the votes to declare a winner?

**Learn MORE** about the Georgia runoff elections. Free registration may be required.

UCF

- 2020 Runoff Elections, from Georgia.gov
- Georgia Runoff Election Article, from USA Today
- 2020 Senate Election Forecast, from FiveThirtyEight



