**Redistricting 2012-2020 Retrospective**

The story of Republican’s REDMAP redistricting last decade is well known. In contrast, the congressional election results for 2012-2020 reveal two heretofore unknown puzzles:

1. The Republican advantage seen in 2012-2016 largely disappeared 2018-2020, and
2. Like REDMAP did for Republicans, Democrats also appeared to have enjoyed a significant increase in unearned seats over the previous decade.

IOW, REDMAP could have been worse. The purpose of this note is to unravel why it wasn’t.

Unearned Seats (UE)

This analysis uses the concept of unearned seats (UE). UE for a party and state are the seats the party actually won in excess of the number of whole (not fractional) seats closest to proportional representation (PR) based on two-party vote share.

Total UE for a party is UE summed across states. Net (or national) UE is the difference between total UE for Republicans and Democrats (hereafter simply R’s and D’s). By convention, UE favoring Republicans are positive, and UE favoring Democrats are negative.

In the analysis below, it’s important to keep in mind that UE is independent of two-party vote share: it measures the seats won (lost) different from PR. So changes in vote share can’t explain these two puzzles.

Data & Spreadsheet

The data supporting this analysis is in the associated “US House (2012-20).xlsx” spreadsheet. The congressional election data is the official data from the Clerk of the House with results for uncontested races imputed as described in this GitHub repository: <https://github.com/alecramsay/ushouse>.

The Tables tab shows UE seats for each state by election:

* Columns I–M show the results for the 2012-2020 elections.
* Columns D–H show the results for the previous decade for comparison.
* Columns N, O, and P show the average UE seats for 2002-10, 2012-16, and 2018-20, respectively.
* Column Q names the entity that controlled the initial redistricting in the 2010 cycle.

For reasons that will become obvious, I’ve sorted the states by their average UE for the 2012-16 to highlight four distinct groups:

* The first 14 states produced large R-favoring UE – AL, AR, FL, GA, IN, MI, NC, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, and VA (Group R) – Not surprisingly, 13 of the 14 maps were drawn by R-controlled redistricting processes.
* The next 16 states that yielded smaller R-favoring UE and they didn’t change much in 2018-2020 (also Group R) – AK, IA, ID, KS, KY, LA, MO, MS, MT, ND, NE, SD, UT, WI, WV, and WY – These maps were drawn by a mix of commissions, courts, split processes, or processes controlled by one party or the other.
* Three states that yielded proportional state delegations (Group N) – CO, NM, and NV.
* The last 17 states produced large (negative) UE favoring D’s (Group D) – AZ, CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, MA, MD, ME, MN, NH, NJ, NY, OR, RI, VT, and WA – Again not surprisingly, these maps tended to be drawn by commissions or D-controlled redistricting processes.

Now to the puzzles.

Puzzle #1

Over the decade before REDMAP, R’s enjoyed a small average national net UE of 3.2 seats (Table 1). With the 2011 redistricting and REDMAP, however, the aggregate UE seats of the R group more than doubled from 18.4 seats to 46.33 seats for 2012-2016 (Table 1 & blue line in Figure 1). As a result, R’s enjoyed new post-redistricting average national net UE of 21.67 seats (yellow line). This is REDMAP, in a nutshell.

Table

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Table 1: UE Seats 2010-2020

The first puzzle is that these changes substantially reversed in 2018-2020. R UE seats declined an average of -10.83 seats favoring D's, and D UE increased an average of -9.83 seats favoring D's. Together the new national net UE seats averaged just -0.50 seats (almost proportional) in 2018 and 2020. The first puzzle is why?

Chart, line chart

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Figure 1: UE Seats 2010-2020

The results for the 2018 and 2020 congressional elections are quite different. UE for the first R group declined an average of -11.17 seats with the bulk of the change (84%) coming from the five states listed in Table 2.

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| **State** | **ΔUE Seats** | **Notes** |
| PA | -2.83 | New map adopted 02/19/18. This affected the 2018 and 2020 elections. |
| NC | -1.00 | Map struck down 09/03/19. This affected the 2020 election. |
| FL | -0.83 | Map redrawn 12/02/15. This affected the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections. |
| MI | -2.00 | R's Mike Bishop (8th) and Dave Trott (11th) lost to Elissa Slotkin and Haley Stevens, respectively. <<< What happened here? |
| VA | -2.67 | R's Scott Taylor (2nd), Dave Brat (7th), and Barbara Comstock (10th) lost to Elaine Luria, Abigail Spanberger, and Jennifer Wexton, respectively. <<< What happened here? |
| **Total** | **-9.33** | of -11.17 seats |

Table 2: Changes to states consistently favoring Republicans

The first three changes are likely attributable to the maps being redrawn by court order in those states. It’s much less clear how why the big changes occurred in Michigan and Virginia.

The changes to UE in the second R-leaning group, were much smaller, just 0.33 in aggregate.

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| **State** | **ΔUE Seats** | **Notes** |
| NJ | -3.50 | What happened here? Political commission |
| CA | -3.17 | What happened here? Independent commission |
| **Total** | **-6.67** | of -9.83 seats |

Table 3: Changes to states consistently favoring Democrats

When you look at the changes to D-leaning states in 2018-2020, you see a similar pattern (Table 3). UE for the D group (negatively) increased an average of -9.83 seats, and much of that change (68%) came from changes the two states shown in Table 2. What happened in NJ and CA is not clear to me.

Regardless, these changes combined with those above yielded an average national net UI of just -0.50, i.e., almost proportional (Table 1).

Again, this change can’t be attributed to the relatively high two-party D vote shares in the 2018 and 2020 elections of 53.54% and 51.08, respectively, because UE seats are relative to the seats closest to PR. This begs the question: What happened in MI and VA? I don’t think the Republican-drawn maps were redrawn. What happened in NJ and CA? CA has an independent commission. Similarly, what happened in all the other states more incrementally? Why did results in 2018 and 2020 shift so significantly in favor of D’s *beyond the two-party vote share?*

Puzzle #2

Redistricting last decade was significantly more polarized than the previous one. REDMAP would have had worse net effects if it hadn’t been. Average D UE in 2012-2016 also substantially greater than over the previous decade: it increased (negatively) from an average of -16.2 seats in 2002-2010 to an average of -24.67 for 2012-2018. IOW, at the same time that R’s dramatically increased their advantage in the states they controlled, D UE increased by half (-8.47 UE seats) over the previous decade in other states. The second puzzle is why?

Delaware had a single at-large district that flipped, accounting for -1.6 seats. Two other big changes were California, which averaged -3.73 more UE seats despite the map being drawn by an independent commission, and Connecticut, which averaged -1.4 more UE seats despite the map being drawn by a state court. Only Illinois’ increase of an average of -1.93 UE seats is perhaps easy to explain because the map was drawn by Democrats.

[end]