**Redistricting 2012-2020 Retrospective**

The Republican REDMAP strategy last decade in the states where they controlled the redistricting process is well known. Despite that, there are two heretofore unknown puzzles in the congressional elections 2012-2020:

1. The Republican advantage seen in 2012-2016 disappeared in 2018 and 2020, and
2. Democratic advantage in other states also increased significantly.

This is plain to see numerically in Table 1 and visually in Figure 1.

Table

Description automatically generated

Table 1: R/D Seat Advantage 2010-2020

Over the previous 2002-2010 cycle, R’s enjoyed a small average national net seat advantage of 3.2 seats, compared to what they should have won based on the two-party vote share. With REDMAP redistricting, the R advantage in states where they controlled the redistricting process more than doubled from 18.4 seats to 46.33 seats for 2012-2016 (first row in Table 1 & blue line in Figure 1). As a result, R’s enjoyed a new post-redistricting national advantage that averaged 21.67 seats (yellow line). This is REDMAP, in a nutshell.

Chart, line chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: R/D Seat Advantage 2010-2020

But these net changes substantially reversed in 2018-2020. R advantage in states they controlled declined an average of -10.83 seats favoring D's, and D advantage increased in other states an average of -9.83 seats. Together, in 2018 and 2020 the national net seat advantage averaged just -0.50 (i.e., was almost proportional). The first puzzle is why?

Like REDMAP but smaller, the average D advantage in other states in 2012-2016 also grew substantially over the previous decade: 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 advantage increased by half (-8.47 UE seats) in other states. The second puzzle is why?

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

**Data & Methodology**

This section describes the data and approach I used. More analysis follows in the next section.

Unearned Seats (UE)

This analysis uses the concept of unearned seats (UE). The UE for a state are the seats a party actually won in excess of the number of whole seats closest to proportional representation (PR) based on the two-party vote share for that state. By convention, UE seats favoring Republicans are positive, and UE favoring Democrats are negative (hereafter simply R’s and D’s).

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

Data

The election data supporting this analysis is the official data from the Clerk of the House with results for uncontested races imputed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Table 2 (see the Tables tab in the “US House (2012-20).xlsx” spreadsheet) 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.

I’ve sorted the states by their average UE for the 2012-16 to highlight four distinct groups:

* The first 14 states (Group R) produced large R-favoring UE seats – AL, AR, FL, GA, IN, MI, NC, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, and VA – Not surprisingly, 13 of the 14 maps were drawn by R-controlled redistricting processes.
* The next 16 states (also Group R) yielded smaller R-favoring UE seats, and they didn’t change much in 2018-2020 – 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.
* Next, three states (Group N) yielded proportional state delegations – CO, NM, and NV.
* The last 17 states (Group D) produced large UE seats favoring D’s – 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.

Organizing the data this way makes it easier to see & understand the puzzles.

**Details**

The section drills down into the data behind both puzzles.

Puzzle #1

The average UE seats for the first R group declined an average of -11.17 seats from the 2012-2016 average to the 2018-2020 average, with the bulk of the change (84%) coming from the five states listed in Table 3.

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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 3: 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. Why did three and two states, respectively, flip blue in 2018 and stay blue in 2020?

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

When you look at the changes to D-leaning states in 2018-2020, you see a similar pattern (Table 4). UE seats for the D group 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. Maps weren’t redrawn, I don’t think.

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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 4: Changes to states consistently favoring Democrats

These changes combined with those above yielded an average national net UI seats 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. The average D UE seats in 2012-2016 also substantially greater than the average over the previous decade: it increased 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 via REDMAP, D UE seats also increased by half (-8.47 UE seats) over the previous decade in other states.

Delaware had one at-large district that flipped, accounting for -1.6 seats. Two other big changes were California, which averaged -3.73 more UE seats in 2012-2016 despite the map being drawn by an independent commission, and Connecticut, which averaged -1.4 more UE seats in 2012-2016 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]

1. The official results, revised results, the code for imputing uncontested races, and a description of it are all in this GitHub repository: <https://github.com/alecramsay/ushouse>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)