**Redistricting 2012-2020 Retrospective**

The story of REDMAP is well understood. What happened later in the decade is less well known and a puzzle.[[1]](#footnote-1)

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 what would be 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 above and beyond PR based on the vote share.

Data & Spreadsheet

TODO

The Big Picture Puzzle

In the decade before REDMAP, R’s averaged 18.4 UE seats per congressional election. At the same time D's averaged -15.6 UE seats. Hence, the national net was 3.2 UE seats favoring R's. (See pivot-by-state.xlsx / Change tab / Column I)

With the 2011 redistricting and REDMAP, however, R UE seats jumped to an average of 46.33 for 2012-2016 (blue line in Figure 1). D UE seats also increased but much less to -24.67 (gray line). Where did these -9.07 seats come from though?!? That’s a 58% increase. Hence, post-redistricting a new average national net of 21.67 seats favoring R's (yellow line). (Change tab / Column J) That REDMAP dramatically increased aggregate R advantage is broadly understood.

Chart, line chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: UE Seats 2010-2020

However, in 2018-2020 these changes substantially reversed. 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). (Columns K and L). The puzzle is why did this happen?

UE by Group (2012-16)

If you sort states by their average UE for the 2012-16 (as the Changes tab does), you see four distinct groups:

* Fourteen states that produced large R-favoring UE (Group R1) – 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. Together, those maps gave R’s an average of 31.67 UE seats in the 2012-16 elections. This is REDMAP, in a nutshell.
* Sixteen more states that yielded smaller R-favoring UI (Group R2) – 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. These maps gave R’s an average of another 14.67 UE seats in 2012-16.
* Three states that yielded proportional state delegations (Group N) – CO, NM, and NV.
* Seventeen states where UE favored 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. These maps gave D’s an average of -24.67 UE seats in 2012-16.

When you net those groups together, R’s enjoyed an average 21.67 UE seat national advantage in the first three congressional elections of last decade.

Changes by Group (2018-20)

The results for the 2018 and 2020 congressional elections are quite different though. UE for the R1 group declined an average of -11.17 seats with the bulk of the change (84%) coming from the five states listed in Table 1.

The first three changes are likely attributable to the maps being redrawn 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, R2, were much smaller, just 0.33 in aggregate.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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 1: Changes to states consistently favoring Republicans

When you look at the changes to D-leaning states, you see a similar pattern. UE for the D group increased an average of -9.83 seats in 2018-20, 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.

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

Table 2: Changes to states consistently favoring Democrats

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

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 UI seats are relative to the seats closest to PR. This begs the question: What happened in MI, VA, NJ, and CA? Similarly, what happened in all the other states more incrementally? Altogether they averaged another -6.5 UE favoring D’s (or 29% of the change relative to 2012-2016).

New Maps in 2021

TODO: Add the 2022 election for comparison with new maps.

[end]

1. I don’t fully understand it yet! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)