

SISTER DISTRICT ACTION NETWORK

RATFKED - BOOK CLUB READER'S GUIDE**

Prepared by: Gaby Goldstein, SDAN Director of Research

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Hello Friends!

Sister District Action Network ('Sister District', more info at the end of this document) is delighted to kick off its book club! **If you haven't joined, please [sign up here](#) to vote on future books and keep in the loop with regard to book club events and information!**

Our inaugural book is Ratf**ked by David Daley. This reader's guide provides: A) discussion questions; B) additional reading suggestions; and C) facilitator's guide for folks who will be leading book discussions in person (highly recommended!).

Sister District held a 'Fireside Chat' with author David Daley on March 26 at 5 pm PT!

Here is the [link](#) to the Fireside Chat discussion.

A. Discussion Questions.

1. **The Big Picture – State Leg.** Why are state legislatures so important in terms of redistricting and, consequently, gerrymandering? Are they a good “bang for the buck” in terms of resources and reward?
2. **Why Is Gerrymandering Problematic?**
 - 2.1. **Distort Voters' Power.** How does partisan gerrymandering distort the power of each person's vote? What are some examples of this? What is “packing” and “cracking”?
 - 2.2. **More Extreme Congress.** How does gerrymandering make our federal Congress more extreme? Does this happen equally on the political left and the political right? If not, why not?
 - 2.3. **Republicans Win Unearned Presidencies.** How did gerrymandering, and the policies enacted by state legislatures elected under gerrymandered lines, help Trump win?

3. How Did We Get Here?

3.1. **The “Big Sort” and “Big Data.”** What is “The Big Sort” argument? How does Daley challenge this explanation of how we’ve ended up with so few competitive congressional districts? How is Big Data being used in politics, including redistricting? What are the pros and cons of using Big Data in politics?

3.2. **Unholy Alliances.** What was “The Unholy Alliance” and what was its impact on the demographic composition of congressional districts? Did the Democratic party take minority voters for granted in the South? Did the Unholy Alliance create a lasting disadvantage for Democrats in the South? What blame should the Dem party take for this, and similar, episodes of alliances between minorities and Republicans?

3.3. **Racial Gerrymandering.** How has racial gerrymandering by Republicans impacted redistricting? What are some examples of the mechanics of how this works?

3.4. **Dems & Media Asleep at the Wheel.** Daley lays out several ways in which the Dem party has historically overlooked the critical importance of districting in general, and state legislatures (and state Dem parties) too. He also argues the ‘elite political media’ has missed the point and misled the public about the current state of electoral competitiveness. What blame should the party take? How about Obama? The press?

3.5. **REDMAP.** What was REDMAP, and how did it work? How effective was it for Republicans?

4. Where Do We Go From Here?

4.1. **Independent Commissions.** Is there much leverage to change how districts are drawn at the federal level? If not, how about states? California, Arizona and Iowa have independent committees designed to draw these maps—and with differing results. To what degree do states’ context impact the best remedy to partisan gerrymandering? Are independent committees the best possible solution (i.e. any other plan would yield worse results in Arizona)?

4.2. **Ballot Initiatives & Constitutional Amendments.** How effective have ballot initiatives to change districting processes been in various states? Is this a strategy that Democrats (at the party or grassroots level) should pursue in other states?



4.3. **Non-Electoral Strategies.** To what degree can increasing voter turnout change the tides, even under gerrymandered maps? How is the impact of gerrymandering exacerbated by voter suppression and the laws that enable them? Is targeting voter suppression a lever to enact change that grassroots organizations and the Democratic party should be prioritizing? What about litigation – has it been successful in changing districting and should it be expanded as a strategy for getting fairer maps?

4.4. **Redistricting as a Non-Partisan Issue.** Could we (should we?) enlist allies among Republicans in efforts to create fair and transparent redistricting systems?

4.5. **Keeping the Public Interested.** Many people don't realize the power that state legislatures have over not only gerrymandering, but also voting rights and other critical issues. Daley argues the public *does* care about districting, but others disagree. How can your Sister District group educate others about what state legislatures do so that people can be more aware and motivated to vote in and advocate for down-ballot state races, and advocate for fairer maps?

4.6. **Learning from REDMAP.** What can Democrats learn from the REDMAP story going into the 2018 election season and beyond? Daley notes that Democrats tend to fight yesterday's battles. Is the Democrats' answer to REDMAP more of this? If so, what is an alternative? How can Democrats capitalize on the moment?

B. **Additional Reading List.**

The State of Redistricting Legislation (Late January 2018 Edition), Brennan Center for Justice: <https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/state-redistricting-litigation>

Eric Holder op-ed: Gerrymandering Has Broken Our Democracy:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/10/03/eric-holder-redistricting-has-broken-our-democracy-the-supreme-court-should-help-fix-it/?utm_term=.f3a9b01aa09d

John Oliver segment on gerrymandering:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-4dllmaodQ>

Video op-ed: Katie Fahey, founder of Voters Not Politicians (Michigan ballot initiative on gerrymandering)
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/opinion/michigan-gerrymandering-fair-voting.html>

Podcasts and videos from FiveThirtyEight.com about gerrymandering:
<http://fivethirtyeight.com/tag/the-gerrymandering-project/>

C. **Facilitator's Guide.**

Main Themes

1. **WHY SHOULD WE FOCUS ON STATE LEGISLATURES?**

● **States Elections = High ROI.**

- State elections “might not be the sexy elections to invest in...but..they often provided the best value. Donations that would be a mere drop in the bucket to a presidential or Senate candidate might make all the difference at the local level. And policy outcomes...could actually be influenced in state capitals -- unlike in gridlocked Washington DC.” (xiv)
- In CT, Republican Linda McMahon spent \$100 million on two losing Senate bids in 2010 and 2012. For less than a third, “REDMAP locked in control of half of Congress until at least 2020. (xxi)
- States legislatures in many states draw both congressional district lines as well as state legislative district lines. These districting decisions have long term consequences both within the state as well as nationally. Republicans have spent decades taking over state legislatures to be able to control redistricting and advantage their party. Democrats are tardy to the party.

2. **WHY IS GERRYMANDERING PROBLEMATIC?**

● **Gerrymandering Dilutes Democratic Voting Power - Packing & Cracking.**

- America is the only major democracy in the world that allows politicians to “pick their own voters” by drawing their own district lines. (xxvi)
- Nationwide, 1.4 million more Americans cast their votes for Democratic U.S. House candidates than Republican candidates” but because of partisan gerrymandering by Republican-controlled state legislatures, “Republicans came away with a 33-seat advantage” in the U.S. House of Representatives. (xxii)
- In 2012 in Pennsylvania: **Democratic House candidates won 51% of the vote, but Democratic House candidates won only 28% of the seats.** (23)
- This happens by “packing” and “cracking.” Republicans draw district lines to “pack” as many Democratic voters as possible into the smallest number of districts possible. “You want Democrats to win a **small** number of seats with a **high** percentage of the votes” and Republicans to win a **large** number of seats with winning but **not excessive** majorities. (24)
- Example: PA - in 2012, the 5 Democrats who won congressional seats won with an average of 76% of the vote; the 13 Republicans won with an average of 54%. (24)



- Example: NC - the 3 Democratic congressional districts have Cook Partisan Voting Index (PVI) scores of D+19 - 26; the 10 Republican districts have PVIs of R+8-13. (34)
 - Example: MI - in 2014, the 5 Dems who won congressional seats won with an average of 69.9% of the vote; the 9 Republicans won with with avg. 57.7% (64)
 - Example: OH - in 2012, Dems got more votes than GOP candidates for state house, but “Republicans commanded a 60-39 supermajority of seats, *despite getting less support at the ballot box.*” (86) In 2006, Republicans took 61% of the seats with just 47% of the vote. (93)
 - Example: FL - in 2008, Obama carried the state but only 10 of FL’s congressional districts, while McCain won 15. (122)
 - Example: WI – in 2012, Dem assembly candidates got 174,000 more votes than Republican assembly candidates, but Republicans won 60% of the seats. (139)
 - In other words, you “pack” Democrats into a small number of districts, and “crack” the rest of the Democrats in the area across a number of Republican-leaning districts to dilute the power of Dems’ votes.
- **Gerrymandering Makes Federal Congress More Extreme -- At Least on the Right.**
State legislatures that draw gerrymandered district lines make our federal Congress more extreme -- at least on the right.
 - When districts are competitive, “members of Congress pay more attention to the middle, to independents and to the other side.” (40) When districts are not competitive, there’s no incentive for congresspeople to pay attention to the middle -- where most voters actually are -- and instead their only concern is not being eaten alive by someone even more extreme.
 - When districts are uncompetitive, “reaching out, working together, finding honest compromise -- the process of governing -- became the only thing that might make them vulnerable, to a primary challenge from someone calling them not partisan enough.” (47) See also: pg 96-97; 157; 209-210.
 - **But, importantly, this only seems true for Republicans.** Certainly Republicans feel threatened by challenges from more-right wing Republicans. But when asked if Democratic congresspeople ever feel worried about challenges from even more *left*-leaning Democrats, the “immediate and dismissive” answer from former Dem Congressman Price is “Never.” (50)
 - The result is the **middle is left behind -- but that’s where most Americans are.** 2014 Pew Center poll on partisanship -- majority of Americans want the two parties to work together and find common ground. “The majority do not have uniformly conservative or liberal views...yet many of those in the center remain on the edges of the political playing field.” (108)
 - Daley: “The problem with our politics is not that all of us are more partisan, or The Big Sort. It’s that we have been sorted -- rtfucked -- into districts where the middle does not matter, where the contest only comes down to the most ideological and rancorous on either side. Because the Republicans drew the

majority of the lines, there are more rancorous Republicans than Democrats...it's Republicans who have become more rigid and less willing to search for common ground.” (109)

- Political scientist Theda Skocpol tracks the “Koch effect” that has pushed House Republicans to the right, particularly since 2010. How far to the right? The 2010 House “took the biggest leap to the far right in recorded quantitative measurements of the kind that political scientists use to track legislators’ positions.” (199)
- **Gerrymandering Helps Republicans Win Unearned Presidencies**. Clinton won the popular vote by almost 3 million. How did Trump win? “There is a direct line between crooked district boundaries drawn by Republicans after 2010 and their ability to win tight elections, dominate the states and capture the Electoral College, often from the minority.” (225)
 - Example: NC - Between 2012-2016, Republican supermajority (elected with gerrymandered maps they authored) eliminated a week of early voting, ended same day registration, eliminated pre-registration of high school students, and introduced tough voter ID laws. African American early voting fell 9%. Trump carried the state by 3%. This is how statewide gerrymandering contributed to Trump swiping an Electoral College victory. (228)
 - Example: WI - in 2016, “more than 300,000 registered voters...did not have the ID required under new laws passed by the state’s GOP supermajority.” Trump won the state by just 27,000 votes. (229)
 - In general, Democratic turnout drops by about 7.7% in general elections when strict voter ID laws are in place. (231)

3. HOW DID WE “GET HERE”?

- **“The Big Sort”?** Are uncompetitive districts just a result of where people live? An influential book that argued that Americans had “sorted ourselves into increasingly homogenous and ‘ideologically inbred’ communities.” Polarized politics and district lines weren’t the fault of gerrymandering, but the result of Americans’ “propensity to cluster” around likeminded people. (xxiii)
 - A main theme of Daley’s book is to challenge the sufficiency of **The Big Sort theory** and instead offers an institutionalist account. Americans are not more polarized in their views (Pew research supports this) -- it really is the gerrymandering of district lines by Republican-controlled state legislatures, powered by sophisticated map-making technology, that has caused the occurrence of uncompetitive congressional races and the partisan rancour in Congress.
 - “Everybody assumes that it’s sorting, the Big Sort, and that demographics are driving this” said Chuck Todd. “But the fact of the matter is they’re not looking at

the lines. Big Data has ruined American politics.... Big Data has given you the tools to not have to coalition-build. We don't do political persuasion anymore. If you have competitive districts, you force political persuasion." (xxv)

- **The Unholy Alliance**. Did an 'unholy alliance' between black Southern Democrats and Republicans contribute to the trajectory of Republican power? What blame should the mainline Democratic party take for this?
 - In the 1990s, RNC legal counsel tasked with "fixing the Republicans' redistricting problem" (Dems had controlled the House for decades at this point.)
 - The solution was to use the Voting Rights Act to create majority-minority African American seats in the South. "Work closely with minority groups to encourage candidates to run. Then pack as many Democratic voters as possible inside the lines, bleaching the surrounding districts whiter and more Republican, thus segregating congressional representation while increasing the number of African Americans in Congress." (xvi)
 - Early 80's: Amendments to reauthorization of Voting Rights Act and Supreme Court case *Thornburg v. Gingles*, which mandated the opportunity for minorities to "elect representatives of their choice" in states with a pattern of racial-block voting. Lee Atwater (later chair of RNC) realized that "**majority-minority seats would help make every surrounding seat more Republican.**" (35)
 - Ginsberg, RNC's counsel working with Atwater, realized that white Southern Dems had dominated redistricting since the Civil War, creating underrepresentation for two groups: **Republicans and minority voters. So he built an "unholy alliance"** between the two groups.
 - This "changed the face of the South and the Democratic Party, and set the Republicans on a course to control the House for a generation or more." (36)
 - The outcome: black Dems worked with Republicans to draw lines that benefitted them both. **But Republicans ended up with the long-term advantage.** African Americans increased representation by finally winning a few congressional seats created for them, while Republican seats grew "rapidly in numbers." (36)
 - They teamed up for litigation, and shared resources, including redistricting software. (36) Long-term negative effects on the ability of Democrats to win elections in the South.

- **Racial Gerrymandering**. How has racial gerrymandering impacted redistricting? There are numerous examples of Republicans explicitly drawing district lines to pack communities of color into the smallest number of districts possible, to minimize the impact of their votes.
 - North Carolina: Bipartisan racial gerrymandering via 'unholy alliance,' see above. In the REDMAP era, redistricting proceeded "along two paths: one very public and the other behind closed doors." Republican operatives drew the lines in secret to "segregate African American voters" in a few districts, concede them to Democrats, and take all the rest. (45) Litigation later revealed the rouse and



- found clearly that “race was the legislature’s paramount concern” when drawing the lines. (48)
- Texas: After 2010 census, state gained new Congressional seats due largely to Hispanic population growth, but Republicans created new seats that advantaged the GOP. As in Wisconsin as well, GOP created districts that “looked Hispanic but voted Republican.” (113)
 - Wisconsin: Republicans “wanted to pack as many Hispanic voters as they could into Milwaukee’s districts, therefore bleaching surrounding districts whiter and more Republican.” (143) They worked behind the scenes to get “conservative Hispanic leaders to support the plans at public hearings” (144) harking back to the ‘unholy alliance’ between Republicans and black Democrats in the South.
- **Dems “Whistled Past the Graveyard”** While Dems were jubilant after Obama was elected in 2008, the party then proceeded to fall asleep at the wheel for anything lower ballot. By 2014, GOP controlled 32 of 50 governorships (+10 since 2009); 33 of 49 state Houses and 35 of 49 state senates (x2 since 2009). Dems had lost 816 state leg seats than before Obama took office. (98)
 - Party should have been thinking about redistricting in 2008, but they just weren’t. They “used Obama’s landslide...to run up a hue majority in *Congress. Democrats neglected the states. The party planned for nothing. Redistricting...never seemed to cross the mind of the Dem leadership or strategists.*” Steve Israel, former chair of DCCC, calls this “a catastrophic strategic mistake.” (102)
 - Israel: “The Republicans have always been better than the Democrats at playing the long game. And they played the long game in two fundamental ways. Number one, on the judicial side...The second long game was on redistricting.” (103)
 - Israel argues that districting is too obscure to be of interest to the public. (104)
 - Martin Frost & John Tanner were Congressmen who tried to keep redistricting on the public and party agenda, but were largely unable to.
 - Three times, Tanner proposed legislation requiring bipartisan redistricting commissions. He couldn’t even get a hearing -- even when Dems controlled Congress. (107)
 - Frost: “What was going on in the House was not a priority for the DNC. The DNC was a presidential committee. The RNC saw things differently. They financed what Ginsburg did. Democrats never really understood this.” (116)
 - **The Obama Factor.** Daley makes the argument that some (not all) of this mess properly lies at the foot of President Obama. It was his DNC that was asleep at the wheel (and, although Daley doesn’t discuss it, his DNC that underfed state Democratic parties and left the DNC in crippling debt. See: Donna Brazile). (244)
 - Obama had the message backward, when he suggested the solution to gridlock in DC was to make it hard for Republicans to win elections. But that was backwards: it’s the Republican mapmakers who have made it hard for the voters to affect elections. (202)



- The Obama years ended “with the Democratic party hollowed out nationwide.” Dems lost 919 state legislative seats under Obama’s presidency, and turned over 27 of the state chambers they held in 2008. (243) This didn’t happen because voters didn’t like Obama’s policies - it happened because of Republican gerrymandering.
- Obama speaks eloquently but obliquely. He’s started the NDRC with Eric Holder to tackle gerrymandering, but he’s not direct enough. If he’s going to capture the public’s attention and lead, he’s going to need to bring the fire. **“If they can’t get angry about this, maybe they’re too bloodless to lead the fight.”** (251)
- **The Media Gets it Wrong.** Daley argues that the political press has done a terrible job of covering gerrymandering, districting, and the true causes for our partisan strife. In 2016, “the elite political press might have been the only people who actually believed the House was in play and that electoral competition was alive and well.” (236) This shapes the national narrative in important ways, and has hindered general knowledge of the challenges we face.
- **REDMAP.** And then of course, there’s REDMAP. Chris Jankowski - Republican strategist at RSLC (Republican State Leadership Committee) who helped orchestrate 2010 Republican strategy REDMAP (Redistricting Majority Project) to take over state legislatures and thus control redistricting in important states across the country.
 - Elections in “zero years” matter more than most, because per the Constitution, every state redraws its district lines every ten years, after the Census. (xiv)
 - Karl Rove: “These are state legislative races that will determine who redraws congressional district lines after this year’s census, a process that could determine which party controls upwards of 20 [congressional] seats and whether many other seats will be competitive.” (xvii)
 - Jankowski raised \$30 million for REDMAP in 2010, compared to \$10 million invested in state legislative races by DLCC (5). Republicans won ~700 seats.
 - Jankowski: “We weren’t selling access anymore. *We were selling an outcome and an impact on the political system.*” (6)
 - The RSLC was actually inspired by its Democratic counterpart, the DLCC. Jankowski was impressed with the idea behind the DLCC, and decided the GOP needed one. DLCC was a small scale effort compared to what Jankowski wanted the RSLC to be.
 - It worked. In 2010 REDMAP delivered an “avalanche of campaign cash” to Republicans running for state seats all over the country. Democrats were caught by surprise.
 - But it didn’t end there -- RSLC needed to ensure that its newly elected majorities stayed in power. So they retained “seasoned redistricting experts” made available “at no cost” to Republican-controlled state legislatures to provide “technical advice... when crafting new legislative and Congressional boundaries.” (43)

4. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- **Independent Commissions.** Some states have established nonpartisan commissions.
 - Iowa is the “redistricting unicorn” – its nonpartisan Legislative Service Agency draws the state’s legislative and congressional lines. The Agency is trusted by the legislature. It seems to work: Since 2000, “Iowa has had more competitive congressional races than Texas, California and Florida combined, despite having a fraction of the number of seats.” (149) They use Maptitude, *but don’t load in any political data*. But they can do this because the state is over 90% white. It’s almost entirely homogeneous, so the need to ensure minority representation is essentially irrelevant. This makes the process more straightforward than in more diverse states.
 - Arizona passed a ballot initiative to take district line-making out of the legislature’s hands, and established the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission. The state had, as Ruth Bader Ginsburg later noted, a “background of recurring redistricting turmoil” in part due to long bias against Hispanic voters and Native Americans. (164) Voters backed the initiative 56%; the 5 person Commission would include 2 Dems, 2 Repubs, and an independent Chair. But the Commission became infected by partisanship and closed-door maneuvering, and in the end the district lines didn’t end up super competitive. (172)
- **Ballot Initiatives and Constitutional Amendments.**
 - In 2010, Florida voters passed two constitutional amendments (‘Fair Districts’) with 63% of the vote and significant bipartisan support. (120)
 - In 2015, Ohio voters approved (with 71% of the vote) a ballot initiative to expand the state’s apportionment board and give the minority party a larger role in the process of drawing state legislative districts. (193)
 - In 2016, Maine voters approved a ballot initiative to change winner-takes-all elections to a ranked-choice/instant runoff system for state and congressional races. (194)
- **Multi-Pronged Solutions.** We need electoral AND non-electoral strategies to increase voter participation. The Republicans have long understood this. Some of their non-electoral strategies include creating a separate media and news ecosystem, as well as pushing increasingly restrictive voting laws (e.g. cutbacks in early voting, more complicated voter registration processes, closing polling stations). (213)
- **Daley’s Theory to Detect and Destroy Ratf**king.**
 - 1) Dems need to win a ‘seat at the table’ for redistricting in 2020, and then offer a permanent gerrymandering disarmament plan. E.g., Dems could propose a national, nonpartisan redistricting plan that kicked in after a ‘critical number’ of states passed it. (217)



- 2) Independent commissions, whether partisan or non-partisan, are not a panacea. The devil's in the details.
 - 3) Redistricting reform IS politically popular, no matter how much politicians howl about how it's not. When they hit the ballot, as they have in CA, AZ, FL, and OH, they win with double digit, bipartisan support margins. (218)
 - 4) Courts have a valuable role to play. Courts can and do recognize and remedy racial gerrymandering, and they could do the same for partisan ones (maybe with the efficiency gap argument).
 - 5) Voters need to get angry and turn out -- including at midterms. **“Fair representation is a civil rights issue and a democratic rights issue.”** (219)
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- **Republicans are Ready.** Unlike REDMAP, which caught Dems by surprise, the GOP is ready for Dems to try to run the same play. As of 2015, RSLC had committed \$125 million to a three-cycle REDMAP 2020 plan. That's twice what Dems hope to raise (119).
 - Dems can't just fight last year's war. There's some hope that the DLCC may be better funded and that Dems understand they can't just copy REDMAP.
 - We need to focus on states, not on the House. We should also focus on the 5 governor's races in 2018 where those officials will have veto rights over new maps. “While new progressive groups like Swing Left imagine riding anti-Trump energy to a blue House in 2018, that's not the most likely path.” (255)
 - Note too that gains Dems made in 2017 often came in places where new maps had been drawn recently (Florida and Virginia). Dems “didn't flip these seats; they won with fair maps.” (258) Dems shouldn't mistake these wins as an indication of their broader ability to win under gerrymandered maps.
 - On the Republican side, their focus in sustaining REDMAP is on nominating the right Republicans rather than defeating Democrats. (265) They're aware of the problem they've created with extreme Republicans. Whether they actually have a plan to combat that is yet to be seen...
 - And of course, they're still focused on the states. Jankowski: **“Our definition of a wave election doesn't have anything to do with congressional seats. It has to do with net gain and control of state legislatures.”** (271)

Sister District Action Network (SDAN) is a 501(c)(4) organization that primarily focuses on nonpartisan education and advocacy on civic engagement issues. Specifically, SDAN aims to:

- *Educate voters on the importance of state and local elections;*
- *Train new leaders interested in becoming community activists;*
- *Conduct research in partnership with nonprofit and academic partners to test new methods to increase civic engagement and voter participation;*
- *Disseminate best practices for voter engagement and civic participation.*

SDAN is affiliated with the Sister District Project, but it is a separate legal entity.