

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

by Meaghan Winter

WHY THE STATES MATTER

1 STATES HAVE TREMENDOUS POWER

States write their own laws concerning the most important issues of our time, from healthcare to climate change. Because state lawmakers can exert so much control, Republicans and conservatives have chosen to push their agenda through the states. As Stacey Abrams put it: “Most of the seismic shifts in social policy occur on the state level. The erosion of the social safety net started with Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin; he was the architect of welfare reform. Mass incarceration started with Ronald Reagan in California. ‘Stand your ground’ started with Jeb Bush in Florida. Jim Crow never had a single federal law. It was all state law.”

2 THE JUDICIARY IS REMADE; MORE RADICAL STATE LAWS, IF PASSED, WILL STAND

The partisan makeup of state legislatures is even more consequential now that Republicans have appointed unprecedented numbers of judges, many of whom are openly ideological, to circuit and federal courts. The Supreme Court has a conservative majority. Those courts will almost certainly uphold what were once fringe state bills, thereby changing the national legal framework.

3 STATE POWER IS RECURSIVE

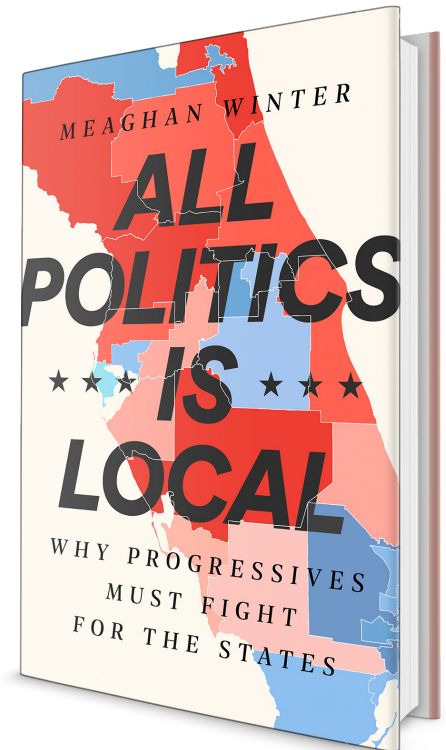
Winning in the states allows a political party to sustain power long-term. That is especially true now, ahead of redistricting in 2021. In a majority of states, state lawmakers will draw the districts that the political parties will compete in for the next decade. Republicans have more trifectas than Democrats. Democrats must win more legislatures to regain national power.

4 STATE GOVT AND ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE TRAINING GROUNDS FOR LOCAL TALENT

States are a pipeline for national leadership. Barack Obama, for example, first served in the Illinois Senate.

5 SUSTAINED LOCAL POLITICAL WORK IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A BURST OF ATTENTION RIGHT BEFORE A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

When state leaders and activists talk about their ideas all year, they change the culture of their hometowns in a way that presidential campaign staffers who parachute in cannot. Political organizers are now pushing for sustained programs that work in the states all year, not just for national elections. This is where our political conversation is headed.



THIS BOOK EXPLORES HOW:

- Foundations and Democratic donors thwart progressive change
- Emotional issues like abortion and guns are fought on the state level
- Secretive, transactional state deals block action on climate change and more
- An ascendant generation of Colorado state lawmakers telegraph a way forward for Democrats and progressives nationwide

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