

MEAGHAN WINTER



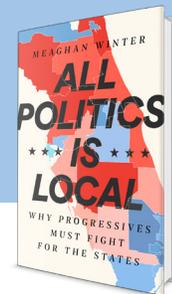
# ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL



WHY PROGRESSIVES  
MUST FIGHT  
FOR THE STATES

# ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

by Meaghan Winter



## READING GROUP GUIDE

- 1 For years the Democratic Party has operated under the assumption that the federal government is the most meaningful venue for social and political reforms; recently, however, this thinking has begun to change. Rich Templin, political director of the Florida AFL-CIO, stated that “the state level is everything,” further arguing that “everything that has a negative impact on people’s lives happens on the state level.” Do you agree? How have local or state laws have affected you?
- 2 In the first chapter, Winter observes that there are built-in incentives for corporate donors to give to Republican candidates, perpetuating the power imbalance between the right and the left. Having read Winter’s book, what is your largest takeaway about campaign financing, organization funding, and the role that donors play in elections? How do you think such deep-rooted issues might be addressed by progressives?
- 3 Rob Stein, founder of the Democracy Alliance, said that there is an “honest tension” between the role of social movements and electoral campaigns because the electoral camp needs to be disciplined and realistic about what can win in a particular district, and the movement camp often pushes back against the electoral strategists’ decisions. Do you agree with Stein? If so, how do you see that tension playing out in your hometown or state? Do the two camps antagonize or complement each other?
- 4 In Chapter Six, Winter documents the work of New Era organizers and the setbacks they face, revealing that they frequently try to bring the same bills to the Senate and House floors year after year. Winter tells us that the idea that failure is part of the process is a “central tenet of organizing.” How do you think political organizers can keep from being discouraged in the face of frequent failure?
- 5 Colorado State Representative Leslie Herod frequently seeks out partners across the aisle to collaborate with. Herod said that in committees she always tries “to sit next to a Democrat on one side, a Republican on the other” in order to understand the full range of perspectives on any given issue. What do you think the role of collaboration and multiple perspectives should be in politics? Do you think it matters more in some states than others? Which ones?
- 6 Zenia Perez, a Florida political operative, believes that the issue of climate change has the potential to unite Floridians across partisan lines. What issues cut across partisan lines where you live? How do you think more people could be organized to take action around these issues?
- 7 What are the political organizations in your area? Have you been involved with any of them? Are there any you’d like to get more involved with?
- 8 Erika Grohoski Peralta, an organizer with WIN Justice in Florida, said that showing up to state capitols changes the person who shows up—and that is the first step toward structural change. Has political involvement changed you? Was there a particular event or moment that changed you? Did you recognize that change at the time?
- 9 What aspect of Winter’s book impacted you the most? What passage or story stands out to you? In what ways did the book change your thinking about US politics?



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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### 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

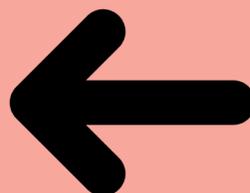
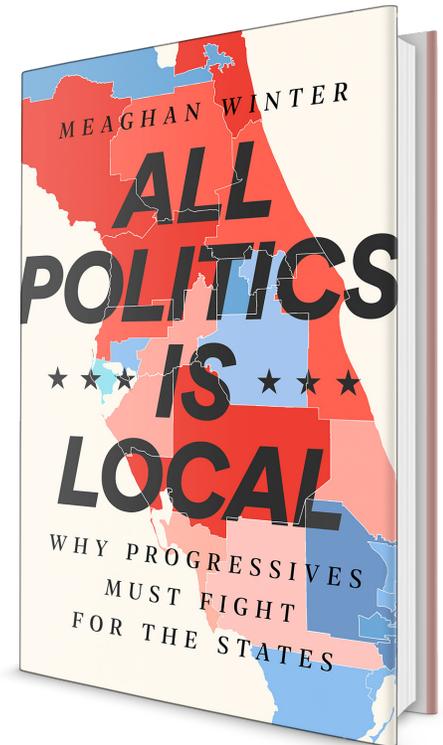
Winning in the states allows a political party to sustain power long-term. That is especially true now, ahead of redistricting in 2021. In a majority of states, state lawmakers will draw the districts that the political parties will compete in for the next decade. Republicans have more trifectas than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



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