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Maine's Political Warriors: Senators Snowe and Collins, Congressional Moderates in a Partisan Era

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Moderates seem to be disappearing in Congress. Once a mainstay in American politics, ideological party outliers such as conservative “boll weevil” Democrats and “gypsy moth” Rockefeller Republicans are declining in numbers, imperiled by an increasingly partisan political environment. In general elections, moderate districts and states are most often the opposing party’s prime targets for electoral gains and it is in these districts that national vote party swings are most likely to produce partisan electoral turnover. Somewhat ironically, it is often those officeholders least likely to support a party’s agenda and exemplify its image who bear the brunt of voters’ frustrations. At the same time, moderate members must appease their parties’ base voters, activists, and donors. An increasing worry, moderates also must fend off potential ideologically-driven primary election challenges from the ideological base.

Still, recent parity between the parties and consequent small legislative majorities (the 111th Congress notwithstanding) have made moderates all the more important on Capitol Hill. They often occupy pivotal positions as “majority makers” in the legislative process. But even that influence comes with a price as congressional moderates frequently are confronted with difficult decisions and thrust into the limelight. Given these competing pressures and vexing problems, maintaining a moderate political career in the current partisan environment is no meager accomplishment. As one

Republican party leadership aide put it, congressional moderates are “warriors ... they come off with a soft veneer but they are political warriors.”¹

Two of the most pivotal “political warriors” in the contemporary Congress are Maine’s Senators Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins. Maine has a tradition of sending independent types who defy party leaders and challenge party orthodoxies to the United States Senate. Since the 1950s, Maine has had a strong orientation toward “bipartisan politics, and the political moderation it encouraged” (Palmer, Taylor and LiBrizzi 1992, 32). Furthermore, Maine’s political culture is oriented toward civility and cooperation. Negative advertising and any hint of corruption or dishonesty are quickly criticized in the media and citizen correspondence. With a population that displays strong civic involvement, politicians who do well exhibit calm, rational discourse and respect for other points of view. Besides prizing a particular style and process, this political culture incorporates certain policy tendencies: a libertarian streak when it comes to personal lives and a progressive view that government can serve the public good.² “The Maine electorate tends to view itself as independent and pragmatic. They like to believe they reach decisions based on good old Yankee common sense.”³ Maine’s political culture is moralistic (in Elazar’s analytical scheme) and thus is “community oriented,” with an orientation toward “the idea of the state as a commonwealth and the government as citizen-run” (Palmer, Taylor and LiBrizzi 1992, 9).

¹ Notably, this party leadership aide is no fan of his party’s moderate legislators; he admitted to “privately cheering” conservative candidates and ideological activists, like Club for Growth, who challenge and defeat moderate members. This interview and others cited throughout this article were conducted in 2007 and 2008 with congressional staff members close to moderate members of Congress as well as communications staff members of the Republican and Democratic congressional leadership. This research was conducted in connection with Doug Harris’ (2008) broader examination of party communications and its impact on congressional moderates.

² For instance, Maine adopted Dirigo Health in 2003 to subsidize health insurance for small businesses and the self-employed. In May 2009, the Maine legislature passed a same-sex marriage bill, the first U.S. legislative enactment of the sort without a previous court order. While Dirigo has not been as successful as its supporters hoped and the marriage bill was overturned in a November 2009 referendum, their passage and the prior existence of a domestic partner registry in the state illustrate the range of policy that can be achieved.

³ Mark Brewer quoted in Crary 2009.

Maine people esteem elected officials who were willing to go against their party's positions and tendencies. A key model is Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to be elected on her own to the U.S. House and Senate. She epitomized "moderate ideology and consensus coalition-building" (Potholm 2003, 19) but is most remembered for her "Declaration of Conscience" speech from the Senate floor in 1950. While Smith's speech criticized Democratic policies, she challenged Senator Joseph McCarthy and her own party, saying, "I don't want to see the Republican Party ride to political victory on the Four Horsemen of Calumny--Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry and Smear" (Smith 1950). Senator Smith and her characteristics are part of Maine's collective memory. For instance, a September 2009 letter in the *Bangor Daily News* used Smith's memory to exhort Maine's current senators to pass health reform legislation.

The country is in a crisis. People in physical agony won't go to a doctor because they can't afford to pay. Two Maine women can help remedy this situation. . . I invoke the name of Margaret Chase Smith, a leader who led from the Senate, a woman unafraid of controversy. Lead us out of the darkness, Susan and Olympia. Make us proud.⁴

Often seen in the same light as Senator Smith, Republican Senator William Cohen gained a reputation for independence by, among other things, voting for articles of impeachment against President Nixon while a member of the House Judiciary Committee and signing on to the largely Democratic report of the House-Senate committee to investigate the Iran-contra affair. Cohen buttressed this reputation by serving as Secretary of Defense for President Clinton.

Consistent with the state's tradition, Senators Collins and Snowe have occupied critically important places in the Senate throughout the Bush Administration and into the Obama Administration. As Chair of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Senator Collins played an important role in directing the activities of the Department of Homeland Security and the intelligence community as well as overseeing and reforming governmental response to Hurricane Katrina. Perhaps more

⁴ *Bangor Daily News*. 28 September 2009. Letters to the editor. www.bangordailynews.com/detail/122713.html.

importantly (certainly more frequently), Senator Snowe repeatedly exerts her influence on taxing matters, controlling the deficit, and social issues. On a debate over pay-as-you-go budgeting in 2004, Snowe was deemed the “linchpin” in whether or not the Bush Administration could avoid “paying for” extending its tax cuts (Taylor 2004, 897). Although both Collins and Snowe (along with Pennsylvania’s Arlen Specter) provided crucial support to President Obama’s Stimulus Bill early in 2009, the summer and fall 2009 debate on the Obama Administration’s health care reform has made clear that it is Snowe, Maine’s senior Senator, who is the “center of the political universe.”⁵

How have Snowe and Collins negotiated the difficulties of being “majority makers” in both the electoral and legislative contexts? How have they been so successful—compared to Christopher Shays, Lincoln Chafee, Jim Jeffords, and Arlen Specter—at maintaining political careers as northeastern Republicans? In what ways do Snowe and Collins follow similar political scripts and patterns? In what ways do they differ? This article examines the representational and legislative styles of Maine’s most recent “political warriors.” First, situating Snowe and Collins in a broader historical and theoretical context, we examine the special problems that confront all congressional moderates in the contemporary partisan era. Then, turning attention to Snowe and Collins specifically, we apply these general lessons to a deeper examination of how both have navigated these difficulties in representing Maine as well as how their legislative careers on Capitol Hill reflect the special difficulties confronting moderates.

Majority Makers: Congressional Moderates in a Polarized Era

Congressional moderates are “majority makers” in both an electoral and a legislative sense. Electorally, their seats tend to be the most vulnerable, representing “swing” districts and states most likely to determine legislative majorities. Legislatively, they are often the persuadable “center”—they are the swing votes—that determine policy passage or failure, particularly when the parties approach parity of

⁵ This was CNBC political reporter John Harwood’s assessment of Snowe’s importance in the health care debate. Harwood interview with Senator Olympia Snowe, September 17, 2009.

numbers in Congress.⁶ Thus, congressional moderates are in an ironic and difficult position in respect to both parties. In the eyes of the other party, congressional moderates represent often like-minded legislative allies whom they nevertheless target for electoral defeat. Within their own party, moderates represent those districts and states the party must win to build and maintain majority control of the chamber but their independence is a source of frequent frustration and occasional legislative defeat.

If it is true that most of America remains in the middle (Hartz 1955; Downs 1957, Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005), primary voters, campaign and issue activists, and donors are increasingly polarized exerting their own considerable pressure on officeholders (Masket 2009). As “political warriors,” congressional moderates increasingly must fight their electoral wars on these two fronts: winning in their centrist districts and states, on the one hand, while appeasing their parties’ increasingly extreme ideological base voters, activists, and donors, on the other hand. Even if they satisfy their party constituencies in their states or districts, they face pressures from congressional leaders, national activist groups, and, when there is a president from their own party, members of the administration.

Besides open seats, moderate districts are the opposing party’s prime targets for electoral gains. In preparing for the 2006 elections, for example, DCCC chairman Rahm Emanuel’s (D-IL) strategy began by recruiting challengers for and otherwise targeting Republicans in the “18 districts that preferred John Kerry for president in 2004 while simultaneously electing a Republican to the House.” These “Republican moderates bore a disproportionate brunt of the losses on Election Day” (Giroux 2006, 2983-7). In their hopes to recapture legislative majorities, Republicans have eyed Blue Dog and other moderate Democratic seats. Prior to 2008, one Republican leadership aide noted that there were 62 districts that Democrats control despite the fact that Bush won those districts in both 2000 and 2004 while there were only 8 remaining Republican controlled districts that Kerry won; as he put it, “We’ve got districts out there that are ours to get.”

⁶ For an extended discussion of these issues as applied to both Republican and Democratic outliers (Main Streeters and Blue Dogs), see Harris 2008.

Whereas general election campaigns are won in the center (particularly in outlier districts and states), it is at the ideological extremes that party nominations are won, money is raised, and campaigns activists and enthusiasm are found. And, as moderate as they are, many swing districts and states have not been spared the polarization at the elite, activist, and primary electorate level. National trends towards ideological polarization (and its national media support) are felt throughout the country and even, at least to some degree, in moderate, outlier districts and states. In interviews, staff of congressional moderates repeatedly note the difficulties of satisfying their moderate districts or states while simultaneously fending off pressure and criticism from ideological activists and groups who think them “RINOs” (Republicans in Name Only) and even “Bush Dogs.” If this is a general problem, two important recent developments in political activism—BCRA-inspired independent groups and the rise of internet blog communities—reinforce this tendency toward the extremes. One Main Street affiliated staffer observed, “there aren’t those 527s out there to protect moderates” and “moderates don’t read [blogs such as] Townhall or Red State or Daily Kos or MYDD.”

Often, congressional moderates fear a primary challenge where, as another Main Street-affiliated staffer put it, extreme “red meat” issues are likely to be most salient and the electorate is dominated by “rabid fanatics.” This, he believed, was the chief factor that explains the decline of moderates in the contemporary Congress:

Why are you seeing fewer and fewer moderates? It’s got to be the primaries ... Only the most conservative member wins the primary ... Both sides are putting up the most extreme candidates and ignoring most of the voters in the middle.

These difficulties have been exacerbated by recent organizational efforts to run more ideological primary opponents against congressional moderates. Activists, who are more likely than most voters to be at the ideological extremes, matter most in primary elections.⁷ Most notably, on the Republican side, the Club for Growth regularly

⁷ On the left, there is the “Working for Us PAC” <http://www.workingforuspac.org/>, accessed October 2, 2009. For an examination of the influence of activists and “informal party organizations” on intra-party nominations, see Masket 2009.

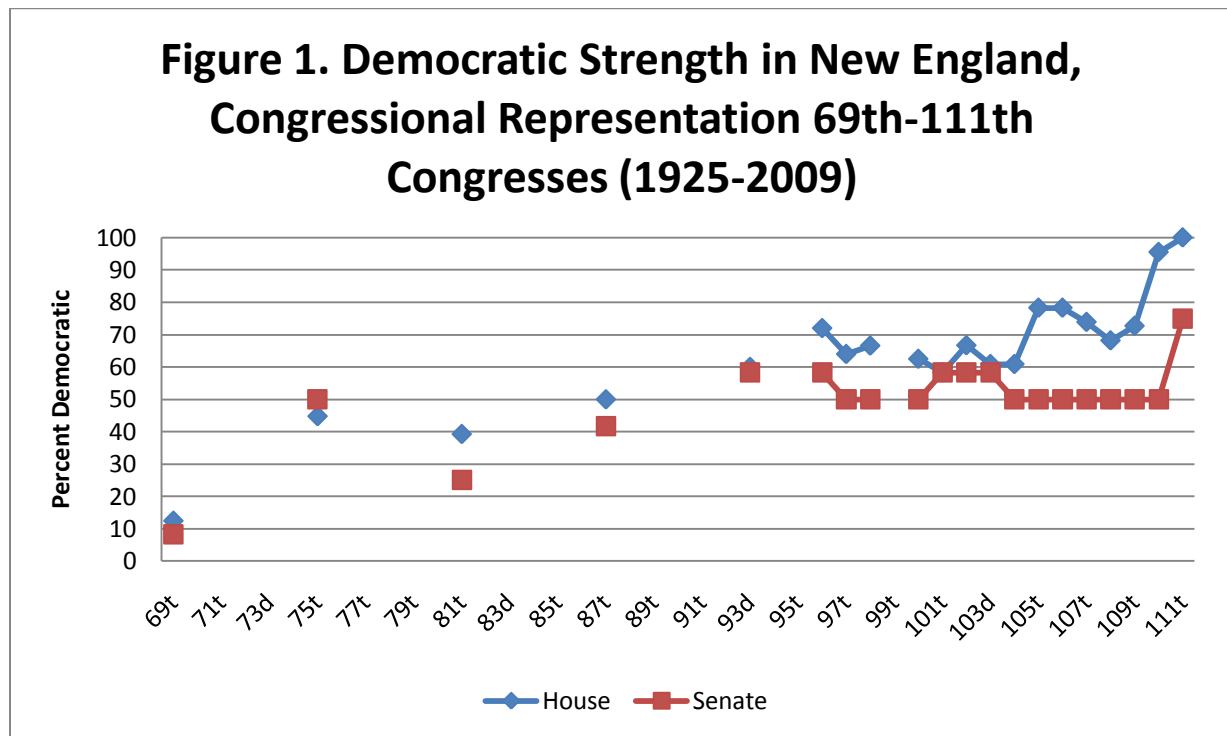
targets moderate Republicans for defeat in primary elections. To be sure, since at least Franklin Roosevelt's failed 1938 party purge effort, national party leaders have noted the potential party benefits to leveraging primaries. This is perhaps even more true in the contemporary partisan polarized environment. "Wield[ing] club," as one Republican leadership staffer put it, can be a potent source of party cohesion as members wishing to avoid such primary fights must take account of conservative principles when voting. Where they are active, Club for Growth typically gets the word out to excite activists as to which candidate is the "true conservative" and which is the RINO and, through an elaborate program of "bundling" campaign contributions, vastly outspends the handful of groups supporting moderate Republicans (Owens 2008).

In the recent past, Club for Growth has supported challengers to Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter in 2004 (and again in 2010 leading to Specter's switch to the Democratic Party), Rhode Island Senator Lincoln Chafee in 2006 as well as House members Joe Schwarz of Michigan and Wayne Gilchrest of Maryland. In each of these cases, Club for Growth supported a more conservative candidate's challenge to a Republican incumbent officeholder and, in each case (whether the challenge was successful or not), the Republican incumbent was replaced by a Democrat. For better or worse, Club for Growth often sees moderate Republicans, who potentially will defect on as many as half the roll calls, as the "biggest" enemy rather than Democrats most of whom are likely to vote against them much more often.

In Main Street circles, this is seen as dangerous politics for the GOP for several reasons. First, they claim that Club for Growth supports candidates who are less "electable" in the general election than Main Street Republicans. In those moderate districts and states where the party is most vulnerable to Democrats, Club for Growth supports those candidates least likely to appeal to the median voter. Second, they point out that competitive primaries drain important financial resources that could be used in the general election.⁸ Third, they claim that the mere threat of primary challenges can

⁸ Pointing out that these challenges repeatedly "force Republicans to spend all that money before the general," one Main Street-affiliated staffer argued that such ideological primary

force moderates to adopt issue stances that satisfy the base (e.g., on immigration or the Iraq War) making it harder to win the general election. Summing up the overall impact, one said, “Club for Growth eats its own ... If Chafee wasn’t going to be the Senator [from Rhode Island] then that wasn’t going to be a Republican seat.”



Source: Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin 2008, 28, 30.

Responding to these cross-pressures has proven difficult for many congressional moderates. Although other factors are at work, fighting both internal party disunity and in some of the most competitive general elections has led to a decline in party outliers. Once dominant in the south, Democrats now are on the losing side of what is roughly a 60-40 partisan split in the region. By the same token, the Republican hegemony in the northeast, particularly in New England, a situation that existed for so long in American politics, has given way to the virtual annihilation of the Republican Party in the region. Figure 1 charts the rise of Democratic strength in the six New

England fights were a “waste” of Republican money and, indeed, a financial “luxury” that Republicans can no longer afford given recent Democratic fundraising success.

England states from 10 percent of the House and Senate seats in 1925, to about (but still under) 50 percent during the New Deal, and to 100 percent of the House seats and 75 percent of the Senate seats in the 111th Congress. The long-term trends are clear. As one Main Street-affiliated staffer put it, "Republicans are getting run out of the Northeast;" and, another, blaming the Club for Growth specifically, echoed that Republicans were becoming "a regional party and not a national party." As Garrison Nelson put it just before the 2008 elections, "The Rockefeller Republicans? They're dead. These guys have been so banished. Chris Shays is walking around as a caucus of one" (Arsenault 2008). Several days later, that was a caucus of none in the House.

Although each politician navigates this difficult terrain differently (in part because they perceive differently which threat—from the center or from the extreme—is greatest), there are patterns to how moderates finesse their delicate positions. Sensing strength in numbers, they band together in overall efforts to re-brand themselves as a "different kind" of Democrat or Republican and, where possible, they "lay low" seeking to avoid making difficult decisions. Collectively, moderates in both parties have banded together in intra-party ideological caucuses—known as the Republican Main Street Partnership (RMSP) as well as the Blue Dog and New Democrat Coalition on the Democratic side—both to maximize their influence within their legislative parties and because membership in these centrist organizations allows members to distance themselves from their parties and "re-brand" themselves as "official" party outliers (Hammond 1997; Kolodny 1999). Shrinking in recent years, the Republican Main Street Partnership now has 42 House members and only three Senators: John McCain, Olympia Snowe, and Susan Collins.⁹ This "McCain and Maine" triumvirate was created when Arlen Specter left the Republican Party early in 2009.

Reflecting the dangers—either in antagonizing the right or alienating the center—in staking out a strong ideological position, the RMSP downplays ideology

⁹ Notably, Snowe's husband, former House member and Maine Governor John "Jock" McKernan, was an original participant and is past Chairman of the RMSP; www.republicanmainstreet.org/index.php/History and www.republicanmainstreet.org/index.php/ElectedMembers, accessed 9/28/09.

while emphasizing “pragmatic” politics and policy solutions. For example, the RMSP’s mission statement asserts the group’s “centrist values” and fiscal conservatism as it works to “Grow Our Party through a pragmatic approach to governing that reaches out to a broad base of Americans who share the Republican ideals of fiscal responsibility and limited government.”¹⁰ One RMSP-affiliated staff member indicated that there is a conscious effort for the whole organization to be less vocal on the kinds of social issues that separate many RMSP members from their base:

That doesn’t need to be how our organization needs to define its place in the party ... No longer is Main Street thought of as ... the pro-choice wing of the party ... [but to] think about pragmatic solutions, returning back to the big tent ... being fiscally conservative ... [strengthen] national defense and to really promote the economy.

Rather than asserting its own “moderate” national issues, the Tuesday Group (the predecessor organization to RMSP) “exercised considerable *negative* influence on the congressional agenda” by keeping the leadership from pushing “controversial proposals (normally regarding social issues)” (Kolodny 1999, 154). But as conservative Republicans stepped up their efforts to drive their agenda (as one Main Street staffer put it, to push “red meat issues that Northern Republican couldn’t support”), the RMSP had fewer victories and attention turned to figuring out how best to “manage” issues in the press, distance themselves from the party stance, and otherwise explain Republican bills to middle-of-the-road constituents back home.

Interestingly, where both the Blue Dogs and New Democrats consistently self-describe as “moderates,” the RMSP avoids the “moderate” ideological label instead describing itself as “fiscally conservative” and as “embracing the full spectrum of center-right ideologies and values.”¹¹ A Republican leadership aide (not affiliated with Main Street) echoed this sentiment saying, “We don’t even call it ‘moderate.’ We call it ‘suburban Republicans.’” Another interviewee contended that Rockefeller Republicans

¹⁰ “RMSP Mission,” Republican Main Street Partnership, www.republicanmainstreet.org/mission_temp/htm, accessed 5/21/2008.

¹¹ “Republican Main Street Partnership” website <http://www.republicanmainstreet.org/>, accessed 5/21/2008.

tended to win in the “diploma belt” where there were a lot of colleges. Indeed, Main Street-affiliated staffers were sensitive about ideological questions and some even bristled at the use of the term “moderate” in interviews. One argued that differing district and regional concerns trumped ideology:

I prefer ‘northern Republicans’ rather than ‘moderate.’ What makes you a moderate? Maybe you’re just a realist or a compromise person ... This has always been a problem for Main Street because there are ‘moderate’ members who are pro-life ... some ‘moderate’ members are pro-gun...

Whether they prefer the broader regional characterization of “northern Republicans” or the urban-suburban-rural distinction, it is crucial for moderate members to de-emphasize ideological questions because of the dangers on both sides.

This collective Main Street goal of de-emphasizing ideology and national issues is reflected, too, in the individual representational styles of moderate members. Responding to vulnerabilities on both sides, congressional moderates frequently adopt representational styles that personalize rather than partisanize elections and localize rather than nationalize issues. Blue Dogs, New Democrats and Main Street Republicans are all likely to stress their “independent” voices, their pragmatism, and their personal representation of the district. They emphasize, for example, casework and bringing federal dollars home to the district. Indeed, many are noted for superior attention to constituency service. When asked, for example, if “earmarks” were more important to moderate members, one Main Street-affiliated staffer responded, “Absolutely... you have to be able to prove that you are doing something for your district ... willing to put your district above party politics.”

More generally, outlier Democrats and Republicans consciously stay quiet on some issues and duck national controversies in favor of developing local approaches to issues and localizing congressional races more generally. Several staffers on both sides of the aisle talked of “avoiding” or “staying quiet” on such issues rather than risk criticism from one side or the other. To be sure, ducking controversy and distancing one’s self from the national party is all the more difficult in an era where party leaders

are themselves both more extreme and more publicly visible. Moreover, “laying low” is difficult, if not impossible, when public attention turns to congressional moderates because they are the swing vote “majority makers” in key, high profile legislative fights. Largely exemplifying these patterns, but deviating in important ways, Senators Snowe and Collins have been atypically successful congressional moderates due, in part, to Maine’s atypical electoral landscape.

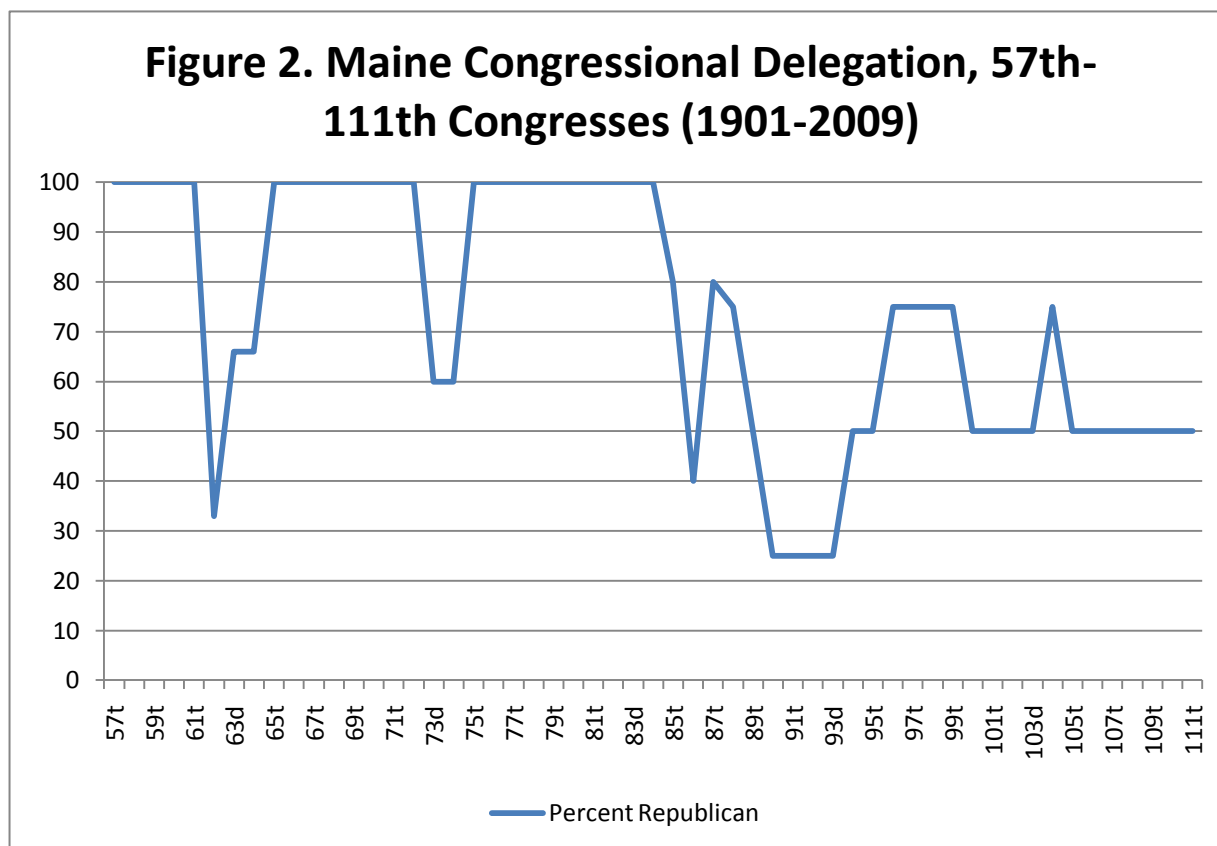
Maine’s Electoral Landscape

While Maine is a moderate, swing state now, it was a solidly Republican state after the Civil War until the 1950s. In the presidential election sweep of 1936, Maine and Vermont were the only two states to vote for Republican Alf Landon.¹² “The hopelessness of Maine Democrats was exhibited strikingly in 1948 by the fact that Republican candidates in half of the legislative districts faced no opposition whatsoever” (Palmer, Taylor and LiBrizzi 1992, 28). This partisan pattern was shattered with the election of Edmund Muskie to the governorship in 1954, after which Democrats were at par or ahead in elections and highly conservative Republicans have not won statewide office. Figure 2, which examines the partisan composition of Maine’s congressional delegation (House and Senate) since the beginning of the 20th century, illustrates these historical shifts. If Maine’s congressional delegation was predominantly Republican in the first half of the 20th century, the delegation generally has been evenly-split between the two parties since the mid-1950s.

On the presidential level, Maine now “seems reliably Democratic” (Todd and Gawiser 2009, 202), with Democratic candidates carrying the state in every presidential race from 1992 on (the last five races), a time during which Democrats won the presidency three times and the majority of the national popular vote four times. However, in the same period, Republican Senators Snowe and Collins won every senatorial contest, once with a plurality and the five other times with majorities over

¹² Before this time, Maine, which held its general election in September rather than November, was viewed as an electoral harbinger, as expressed in the phrase, “As Maine goes, so goes the nation. Afterwards an observer said, “As Maine goes, so goes Vermont.” See *Time* 1957.

55%. Snowe did especially well, winning with 60% in 1994, 69% in 2000, and 74% in 2006. Snowe's increasing margins have come as she has been able to scare off strong challengers and to attract voters across ideological and partisan lines. In the 2006 election, Snowe captured the votes of 56% of Democrats, 74% of Independents, and 96% of Republicans; 49% of liberals and 79% of moderates voted for Snowe.¹³



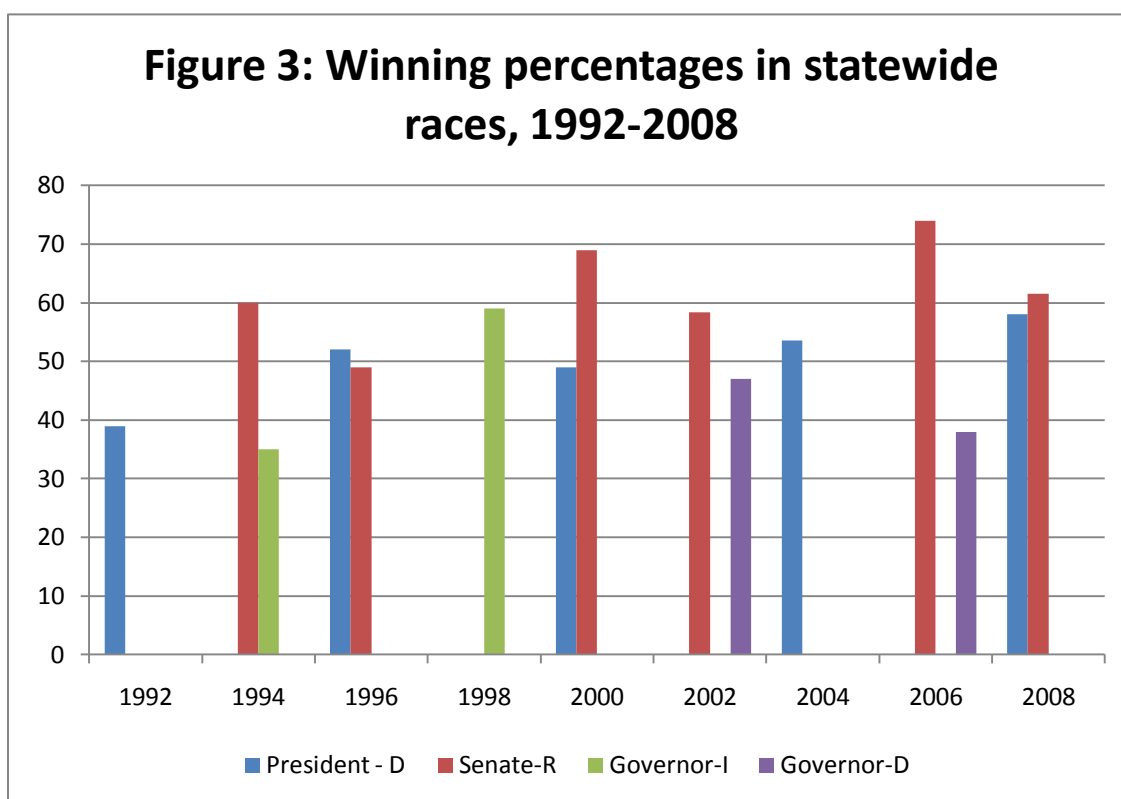
Source: Congressional Biographical Directory (<http://bioguide.congress.gov>), compiled by author.

More broadly, Maine voters' tendency to split their tickets can be seen in Figure 3, which includes the percentage of the vote won by winning candidates in state-wide races from 1992 to 2008.¹⁴ Remarkably, there is no single case during this period when

¹³ See www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/ME/S/01/epolls.0.html In terms of ideology, the poll found that 26% of Maine voters considered themselves liberal, 48% moderate, and 26% conservative.

¹⁴ Several decades earlier, this pattern was facilitated by the elimination of the so-called "big box" which had enabled voters to vote a straight-party line. Potholm (2003, 64) contends that this ballot design "had helped the Democrats build on their election success of 1954 and expand the Muskie revolution to its full potential" and its end opened the door to Republican

candidates from the same party won two state-wide offices in a single year. As Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and then Barack Obama won all four of Maine's electoral votes in 1996, 2000, and 2008, Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe were winning Senate seats. The same pattern of ticket-splitting held true for years when a governor was elected. In 1994, Independent Angus King captured the governor's office as Senator Snowe won her race and Democratic Governor John Baldacci won in 2002 and 2006 as Senators Collins and Snowe prevailed. This clear pattern of ticket-splitting was reflected in 2008 exit poll data, which found that 38% of Obama voters voted for Senator Collins.¹⁵



Source: Data obtained from the Maine Secretary of State, Division of Corporations, Elections and Commissions. <http://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/prior1st.htm>

candidates making inroads into typically Democratic populations, such as Franco-Americans. At the same time, elimination of the big box aided Democrats in winning rural, previously Republican state legislative races (Potholm 2003, 93).

¹⁵ See <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=MEP00p2> The same poll found that 44% of respondents considered themselves to be moderates, 27% liberal, and 29% conservative.

In this context, moderate candidates do well, as do independent and third party candidates. Ross Perot came in second in Maine in the 1992 presidential race and in both 1992 and 1996 had his best congressional district results in the nation in Maine's second congressional district. Angus King served as the second independent Governor in Maine's history after winning a narrow victory in 1994; King won convincingly in 1998. Governor King was able to recreate the same coalition of "small-town Republican votes and urban Democratic votes from the Franco American areas of Maine" that had brought independent Governor James Longely to the Blaine House (Potholm 2003, 206). The willingness of Mainers to vote for non-major party candidates can also be seen in the numerous races where the winning candidate received less than fifty percent of the vote; between 1992-2008, this happened in three of the four gubernatorial races and in six of the fifteen state-wide races. In the 2006 Governors' race, three candidates not from the major parties won a combined 31.7%, less than the 38% received by Governor Baldacci but more than the 30.3% won by his Republican opponent, Chandler Woodcock.

While strong partisans are typically more ideologically extreme, Snowe and Collins have benefitted from the relatively moderate nature of the Republican electorate. Maine's Republicans reflect the mold of traditional New England, Lincoln Republicans and the state's civil, highly participatory political culture. A rare case when a strong conservative won a state-wide Republican primary, the 2006 gubernatorial race shows the peril of nominating a conservative. Chandler Woodcock, a social conservative, won the nomination with 38.6% of the vote in a field with two moderates (including Peter Mills, who many analysts believed would have won the governorship if he had secured the nomination) and, as noted above, could only capture about three in ten votes in the general election. Woodcock's stances on abortion and whether state law should prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and positions on teaching creationism in the schools put him at variance with the state's pro-choice, fairly secular voters. In contrast, Snowe and Collins are both pro-choice. Since becoming incumbents, neither has drawn a primary challenge. Their popularity

with general election electorates may have also played a part in squelching potential challengers. Furthermore, their place as moderate senators whose votes can be critical has raised their national profiles. Their national reputations and the attention it garners them raises their status in a state that is proud of having generated leaders such as Senators Smith, Muskie, Cohen and Mitchell.

Following the pattern of congressional moderates, both Snowe and Collins stress their independence and connections to their constituents. Estimating their press releases, one moderate Republican staffer said that “two a week are on policy; eight a week are on what they do for Maine.” The 2008 Senate campaign included an ad by the Collins campaign labeling the senator as, “Susan Collins, an independent voice for Maine.” One moderate Republican staffer said that Snowe, “Fits Maine. Absolutely ... she keeps getting re-elected ... she’s found a sweet spot.” This staffer added that, “Susan Collins has tried to adopt that model ... [though she has been] less successful.” Still, even if Snowe appears the stronger of the two, both have a strength in Maine that would be hard for many other Republicans to match. As one moderate Republican staffer put it, “For Maine ... the Snowe brand and the Collins brand are much stronger than the Republican brand.”

Given the Maine electoral landscape, the attempts of national conservative groups to move these Maine senators to the right were both ill-advised and evinced a lack of familiarity with the political terrain. In 2003, for example, the Club for Growth targeted Snowe (along with Ohio Senator George Voinovich) for signing “a pledge to oppose any tax cut greater than \$350 billion” and ultimately holding “firm against intense White House pressure to increase the number to at least \$550 billion” (Mann and Ornstein 2006, 136). Blaming Snowe and Voinovich for limiting the scope of the Bush Administration’s 2003 tax policies, and at a time when the national Republican base was particularly anti-French, CFG ran a television advertisement comparing Snowe and Voinovich’s opposition to expanded tax cuts to Jacques Chirac’s French government opposing the Bush Administration’s effort to go to war in Iraq. One moderate Republican staffer claimed that it “boomeranged” on CFG both because

Snowe “is stubborn” (“she put her foot down and that was that,” the staffer said) and because a large proportion of Maine’s “population is of French or French-Canadian heritage.” In the face of Club for Growth’s miscalculated criticisms, Snowe asserted:

I find these ads disheartening and dismaying, because it resorts to, you know, I think, political polarization and partisanship. I am proud if somebody calls me a Franco-Republican, to be honest with you. I think that's -- I take that as a moment of pride for me, because I grew up in the Franco-American community in Lewiston and Auburn. And I certainly resent the fact that anybody would question my patriotism when it comes to supporting the war in Iraq (Woodruff 2003).

Not only were such efforts inapt given Maine’s demography, but they also accentuated the Mainer’s independent streak, which would only enhance Snowe’s status in the state.

Maine’s Franco-American population, estimated as between a quarter and a third of the state is a critical swing vote. This segment of the population has historic grievances for how it was treated by English Protestants and Irish Catholics, with continuing resentments for the repression of the French language and culture and a sense that others had seen them as second-class citizens. The Maine Franco population has been largely working class and, while a crucial part of the electorate, had not elected a self-identified Franco to federal office until the 2002 election of Mike Michaud as a House member for the second congressional district.

Maine’s political demography is also affected by what is often termed the “two Maines,” the split between the more urban, better educated, and liberal southern portion of the state, along with the midcoast region, and the more rural, older, poorer and conservative parts of the state, which roughly tracks with the two congressional districts. To win state-wide, a candidate must have name recognition and appeal in both districts. Given Maine’s lack of state-wide offices compared to other states and its multiple local newspapers and commercial broadcast media, it is difficult to make oneself known over the entire state.¹⁶ Population growth has been slow in Maine and it is the oldest and whitest state in the country. Growth and increasing diversity has been

¹⁶ James Melcher (October 2009) – Personal communication.

centered in the southern, more liberal part of the state. Maine's older population and the tendency for Maine people to stay in the state over multiple generations help preserve the state's overall culture, including its political traditions of civility and moderation in the face of national partisan trends.

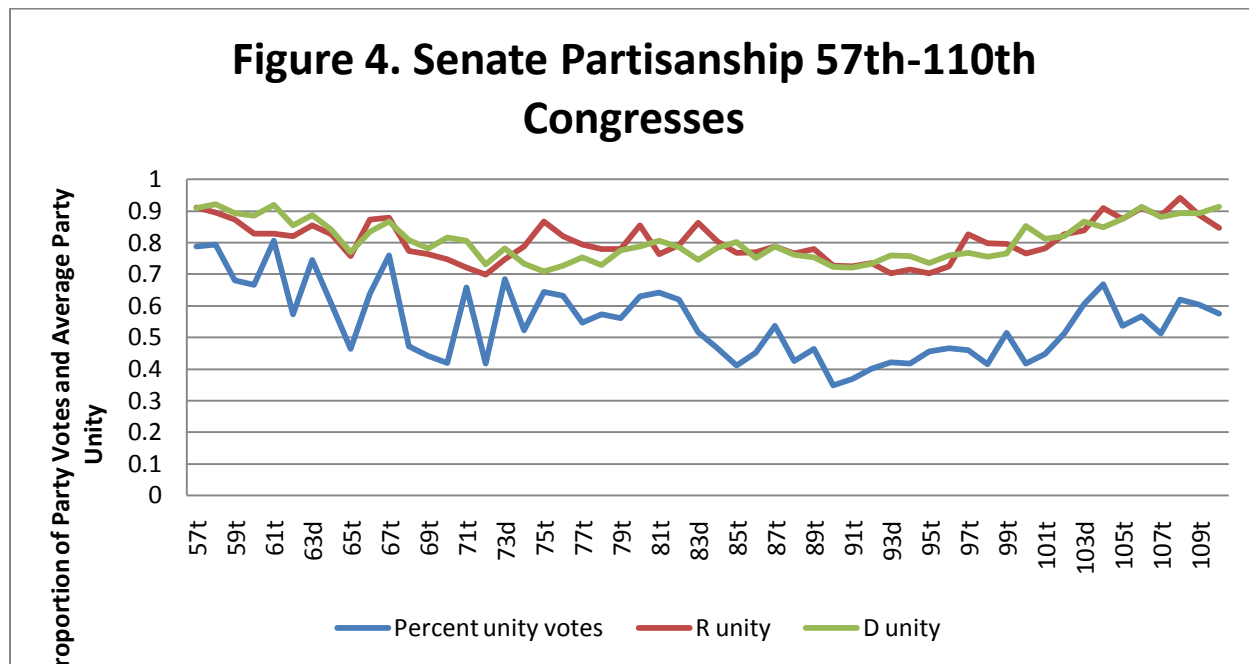
Senators Snowe and Collins represent a state that has traditions at variance with trends in the national Republican party and one in which population growth is occurring in the most left-leaning of the state's regions while the more conservative region is aging and its population is declining. This combination of state and national trends accentuate their positions as centrists in the context of national politics and center-right politicians in Maine.

Representing Maine in Washington: Snowe and Collins on Capitol Hill

First elected to the Senate in 1994 and 1996, respectively, in the 111th Congress, Senators Snowe and Collins are 35th and 45th, respectively, in terms of overall Senate seniority and are 13th and 17th among Senate Republicans. As a result, both are well-placed in terms of committee assignments: Snowe is on the Select Committee on Intelligence, the Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation, as well as the Senate Finance Committee; and Collins is the Ranking member on the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs as well as a member of the influential Appropriations Committee. Moreover, the two repeatedly have demonstrated the political ability necessary to accrue and wield personal influence in the Senate despite their status as party and ideological outliers in a Senate increasingly polarized on party lines.

Both came to the Senate in an era of high partisanship. Although the Senate tends to be less partisan than the House, the rise of partisanship in American has revealed itself in Senate roll call voting as well. Figure 4 traces the decline and resurgence of Senate partisanship—both in terms of the percentage of floor votes that are party votes (that is, where at least 50 percent of one party votes against at least 50 percent of the other party) and in terms of the average levels of intra-party unity on such party votes—since the 1970s. Despite the growth of partisanship nationally,

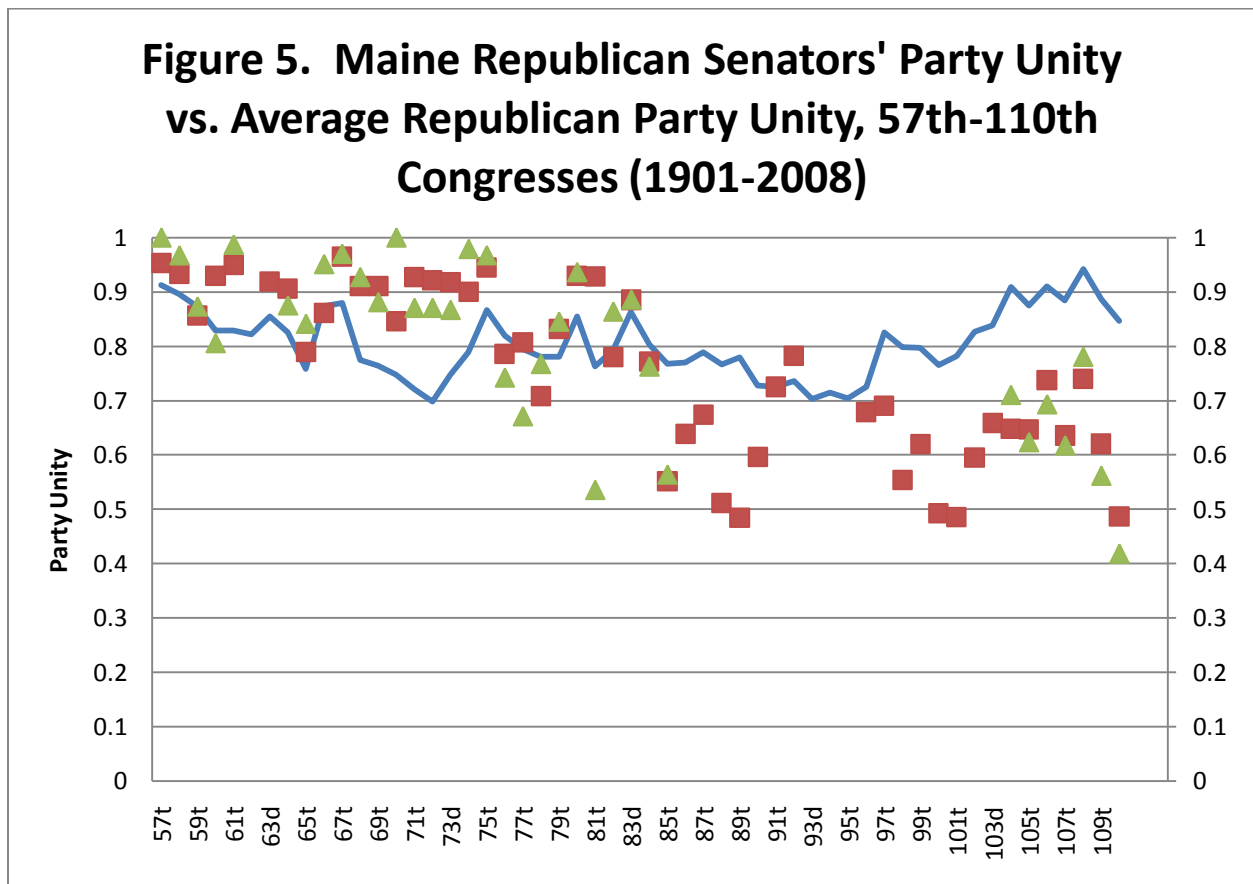
Snowe and Collins are, as we have noted, exemplary of an independent and outstanding tradition in Maine in terms of their ideologies, legislative style, and Senate influence.



Source: Data obtained from Keith Poole’s Voteview website, <http://voteview.ucsd.edu/>, accessed September 26, 2009.

Still, it is worth noting that Maine’s independent tradition did not always produce partisan outliers. Indeed, there is some evidence that the outlier status of Maine’s Republican Senators is of a relatively recent vintage and has as much to do with overall transformations in national party politics as it does with Maine’s unique political history and culture. Examining levels of party unity – the percentage of time a Senator votes with his or her party on party votes – we find that Maine Senators have not consistently been party outliers at least across both parties and in broad historical scope. First, the reputed independent streak seems to have missed Maine’s Democratic Senators who generally have shown more party unity than is the average for the Democratic Party nationally. Of Maine’s five Democratic Senators in the 20th century – Charles Fletcher Johnson, Obadiah Gardner, Edmund Muskie, William Hathaway, and

George Mitchell—only Gardner and Johnson (in the 1910s) exhibited less than average party unity in any given Congress. Of Maine’s most prominent Democratic Senators, Muskie and Mitchell we find that, if nothing else, Muskie’s national leadership ambitions and Mitchell’s actual leadership position led both to be considerably more supportive of Democratic positions on party division votes than was the norm of their parties when they served.



Source: Party Unity figures, both average Republican Unity and individual Maine Republican Senators’ unity scores, were obtained from Keith Poole’s Voteview website, <http://voteview.ucsd.edu/>, accessed September 26, 2009.

Second, if Maine’s “independence” has been confined to its Senate Republicans, the change seems to be more a phenomenon developed since the second half of the 20th century than a more general historical-cultural disposition. Figure 5 charts the average Republican unity score over time (the solid line) and plots the party unity scores for

Maine's Republican Senators since the beginning of the 20th century. From 1901 until the New Deal, Maine's Republican Senators exhibited more party unity than the norm and it was not until the 76th Congress (1939-1940) that Maine's Republicans started to fall below average party unity. This was also true for the early 1940s but again Maine's independent streak receded until the election of Margaret Chase Smith in 1948. With Smith and with Republican Senators Cohen, Snowe, and Collins behind her, Maine's Republican Senators' party unity scores declined and their outlier status solidified. And, as partisanship—both the number of party votes and the levels on intra-party unity on those votes—increased in the 1980s and 1990s, Maine's Republican Senators' unity scores hovered typically between 40 and 70 percent. During the 110th Congress, when average Republican Party unity was 84.6 percent, Senators Snowe and Collins supported the party on only 41.8 and 48.7 percent of the party votes, respectively.

In historical scope, it seems clear that something significant has changed. Maine Republicans—and white New England, more generally—was once one of the most reliable Republican constituencies in the nation and its Senators were more, rather than less, likely to unite behind the party on division votes. Why did this trend give way? Did Maine start sending less conservative members to the Senate? Or, did the Republican Party change and leave Maine and the rest of New England behind? To be sure, Maine's independent streak is strong, but Senator Snowe's recent observation that the Republican Party has left her seems a better explanation of the overall trends toward even more pronounced outlier status for Maine's Republican Senators.

In the contemporary Senate, where individualism reigns and each Senator possesses a great deal of personal influence, outlier status is itself a source of influence.¹⁷ Not to discount the importance of their committee assignments and seniority, it seems that both Snowe and Collins gained stature during the Bush years primarily due to their status as swing votes in an evenly divided Senate. Both have won important policy gains at the margins. The potential that they would defect

¹⁷ On the historical development and contemporary impact of individualism in the Senate, see Sinclair 1989, 2006.

allowed them to hold out for legislative concessions on, in Collins' case, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the reorganization of the intelligence community and, in Snowe's case, a myriad of issues including Bush tax cut proposals, welfare policies, a home heating assistance program popular in the colder northeast (LIHEAP), and "pay-as-you-go" budgeting. Indeed, Snowe also occupied a pivotal position in the critically important Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over the tax legislation so important during the Bush years as well as a jurisdictional piece of, among many other things, health care reform which is a centerpiece of President Obama's legislative agenda (Taylor 2003). Reflecting on both her pivotal influence in committee and on the floor, one staffer to a moderate Republican said of Snowe's influence during the early Bush years, "When Republicans were in the majority for all of those years, Snowe and others were swing votes ... [it was understood that] every tax bill and welfare bill had to go through her because all the Democrats would vote against it."

Even as Democratic gains in both 2006 and 2008 made the Senate less "evenly divided," Snowe and Collins retain a special place among Barack Obama's favorite Republican Senators. If both were at or near the 50 plus one "majority making" mark during the Bush years, large Democratic gains in 2006 and 2008 put them in perhaps an even more strategic position at a time when the Administration has signaled its preference for bipartisanship and congressional Republicans indicate their willingness to delay legislation, including through the filibuster. Examining the spatial location of Senators returning to the 111th Congress, political scientist Jonathan Woon (2009, 331) predicted that "the new filibuster pivot in the 111th Senate is likely to be either Arlen Specter or Olympia Snowe (possibly Susan Collins)."¹⁸ Of course, these three Republicans—at or near the "filibuster pivot"—wielded their clout early in Obama's

¹⁸ The importance of occupying this "filibuster pivot" point was accentuated in the vote on the stimulus bill. Hulse (2009) wrote, "But now it comes as Republicans are much more vulnerable, holding just 41 seats, and knowing that the loss of Ms. Collins and Ms. Snowe deprives them of what little power they retain to block Democratic legislation," "Maine Senators Break with Republican Party on Stimulus."

Administration. Describing Snowe and Collins' influence on Obama's stimulus bill in February 2009, Carl Hulse (2009) of the *New York Times* wrote:

On one of the biggest bills ever to confront lawmakers, the two senators, surviving members of the vanishing breed of New England Republicans, are wielding outsize power. Along with Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, the third Republican who broke from the pack and provided a crucial vote for initial passage on Tuesday, the two Mainers find themselves holding virtual veto control over the legislation as it enters crucial negotiations between the House and Senate.

These Senate moderates are influential not only because they frequently make a majority or could help to invoke cloture, but also because enlisting them in a coalition allows Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid greater leeway and flexibility to "excuse" moderate Democrats from supporting the party. Of course, members don't vote on every measure in the same ideological line time after time. For Democratic leaders, garnering the support of Snowe or Collins on a particular measure means that they may be able to forego asking Senators Pryor, Lincoln, Landrieu or some other conservative Democrat to take a tough vote.

It is worth remembering, though, that if occupying this "majority making" position gives them added influence in Washington, it can be hard to escape the political difficulties associated with repeatedly being in such a position. Pressure from the White House, staunch criticism from the base, and suspicion from within the party conference combine with heightened media scrutiny and frequent hope and disappointment from the other party to make a moderate's Senate life consistently high-pressure and potentially personally isolating. After casting a vote for the Obama Stimulus Bill, Senator Collins said, "I hope that there will be fewer cases where I am in the middle... I enjoy shaping legislation and helping to affect the outcome of major issues, but it is a difficult position to be in, without a doubt" (Hulse 2009).

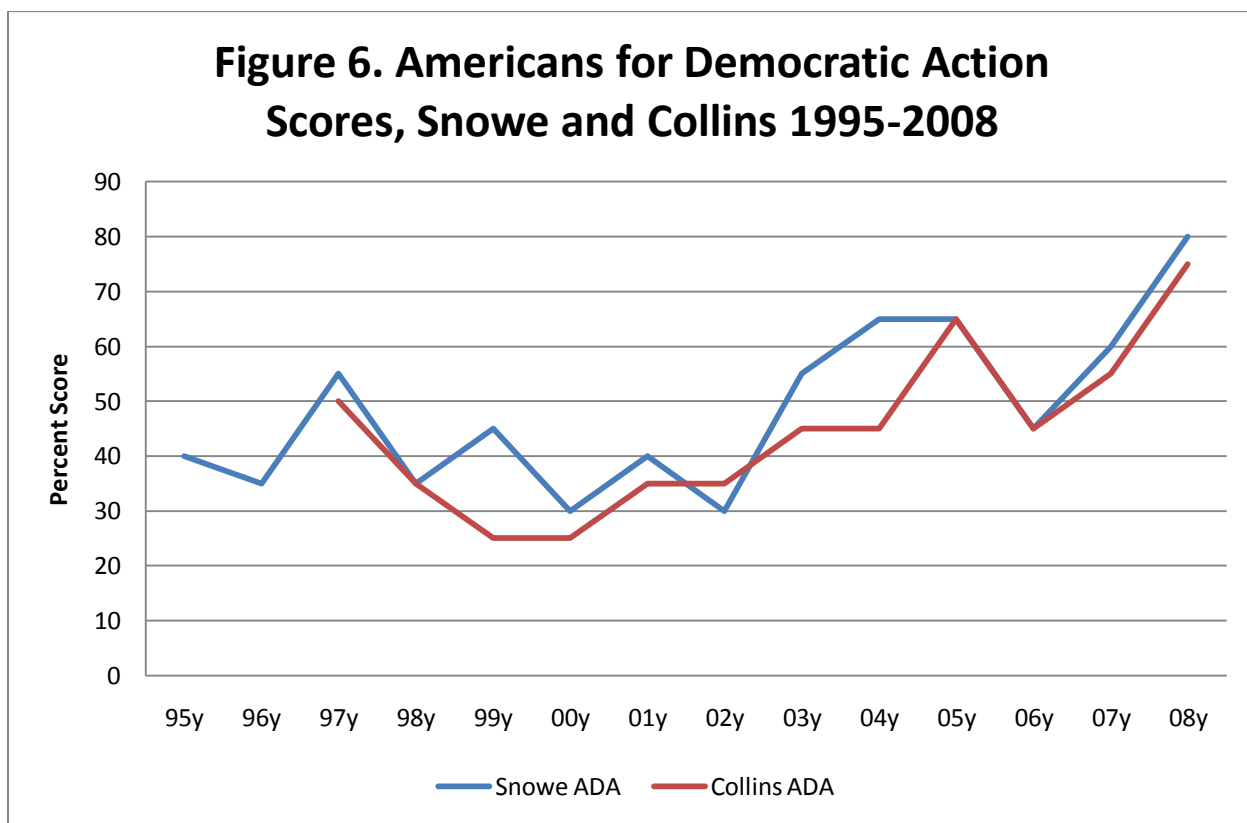
Given these similar sources of political influence as well as their more general similarities (both are ideologically moderate Republican women first elected to the Senate in the mid-1990s) there is a tendency – at least outside of Maine – to think of and

refer to Snowe and Collins as interchangeable; one reporter, noted, for example, that “For years ... [they] have been treated as conjoined political twins” (Issenberg 2008). To be sure, moderates generally perceive a political advantage in “banding” together in groups. One observer of moderate Republicans said that on those occasions when Snowe and Collins do break from the party, they tend to “break together ... It’s easier for them to make that work. It’s easier for them to do that.”

Still, this typical pattern of travelling in pairs can make those places where they disagree—even at the margins—all the more salient. For instance, Senator Snowe voted against the second major tax cut of the George W. Bush administration, while Senator Collins voted for it. Other differences are in 2004 votes on Paygo, when Collins was criticized by the *Portland Press Herald* for not having as strong a position as Snowe (Taylor and Schatz 2004, 962). As of the fall of 2009, Senator Collins seemed unwilling to vote for any health reform legislation of the sort that may come to the Senate floor, while Senator Snowe was seen as the most likely of all Republican senators to vote for a bill. Collins opposed a public option, while Snowe expressed support for a trigger mechanism. (At the same time, the senators’ positions on a public option are unlike those of most Democratic senators and to the right of Maine voters and physicians; see Zimmerman 2009; McDermott 2009).

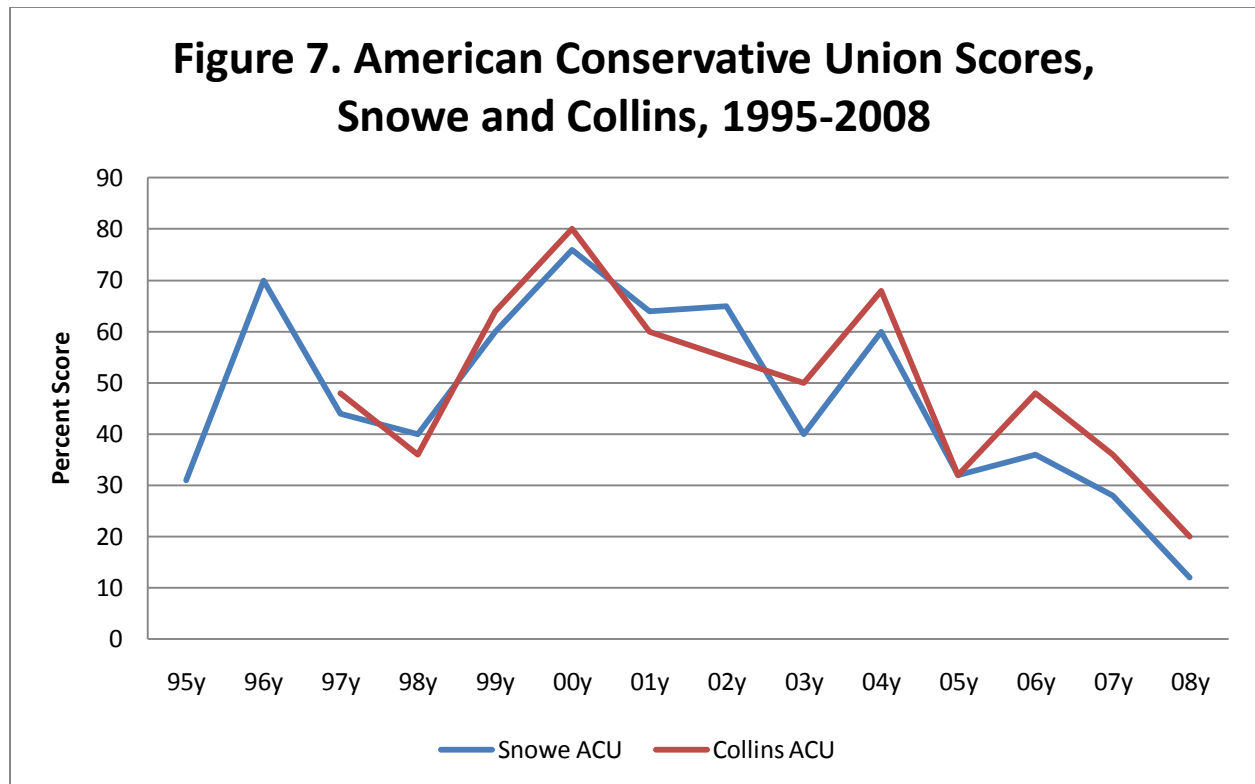
More generally, there are important differences between the two in issue emphasis and some differences in ideology. Ideologically, Snowe is to the left of Collins. For decades, Americans for Democratic Action and the American Conservative Union have issued liberal and conservative scorecards, respectively. Although these scores subject the definition of liberalism and conservatism to a handful of roll call votes and to the internal politics of ADA and ACU, respectively, they nevertheless offer a valuable metric for charting how in step individual legislators are with these prominent liberal and conservative organizations. Figures 6 and 7 chart Snowe’s and Collins’ ADA and ACU scores since each began in the Senate. By both measures, Snowe appears slightly more liberal/less conservative than Collins, though the two Senators track closely. Still, the most salient patterns are the trends over time and both are moving in

the same direction relative to these organizations. Whereas both were the most conservative/least liberal in the 106th Congress (1999-2000), throughout the Bush years, as the Republicans moved to the right, Snowe and Collins increasingly found themselves at once on the outs with the ACU and in better favor with the ADA. Although ADA and ACU scores are not directly comparable (the ADA and ACU organizations select different roll call votes to calculate their scores), it is at least nominally significant that Snowe consistently has had higher ADA than ACU scores since 2003. And, the same generally has been true for Collins since 2005.¹⁹ Increasingly out of step with the national Republican Party and national conservatism more generally, Maine's two Senators seem to fit the mold of a dwindling breed of Republicans from the northeast.



Source: Data obtained from the Americans for Democratic Action website <http://www.adaction.org/>, accessed September 26, 2009. Compiled by Author.

¹⁹ There was only one exception for Collins since 2005: in 2006, she received a 45 from ADA and a 48 from ACU.



Data obtained from the American Conservative Union's website www.acuratings.org.

When Arlen Specter left the Republican party in April 2009, Senator Snowe (2009) penned a *New York Times* op-ed entitled, "We Didn't Have to Lose Arlen Specter," where she observed that "being a Republican moderate sometimes feels like being a cast member of "Survivor" – you are presented with multiple challenges, and you often get the distinct feeling that you're no longer welcome in the tribe." Indeed, Snowe has watched as several of her moderate Republican colleagues have come and gone in the 15 years since she came to the Senate. When Snowe entered the Senate after the 1994 elections, she was not alone in the moderate wing of her party, nor was she the most "liberal" Republican in the Senate. Indeed, in a Republican conference of 54, there were five Republicans ranked to her left: Jim Jeffords of Vermont, Mark Hatfield of Oregon, Bill Cohen of Maine, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, and John Chafee of Rhode

Island.²⁰ Adding John Chafee's son, Lincoln Chafee, who succeeded his father in 1999 provides an exhaustive list of the Republican Senators with whom Snowe has served that were to her left in any particular Congress.²¹

With Collins slightly to her right (the DW-NOMINATE data confirms the impression given by ADA and ACU scores), Snowe steadily moved to her current position as the leftward-most Republican Senator. Collins is now second only to Snowe on this count. Of course, their "movement" here was not their own so much as it was due to attrition (retirement and death) and the electoral defeat of other Republican moderates in the partisan political environment. Indeed, examining how Snowe moved from the sixth most moderate member of the Republican Conference in the 104th Congress to the most moderate in the 110th Congress reveals the fates of many moderate Republicans in New England and beyond.

First, the rearguard of an older party system, many moderates are simply getting older and, like Hatfield or John Chafee, they retire or die in office. Second, congressional moderates lose re-election for many of the reasons confronting party outliers that are mentioned above. Both Arlen Specter and Lincoln Chafee experienced challenges from the right. Although both withstood Club for Growth-supported challenges in primary elections, both were weakened by them and Chafee lost a close general election in 2006. Third, given the pressures inherent in their cross-pressured positions, many moderate members of Congress leave their party and some switch parties altogether. Jim Jeffords' switch in 2001 gave Democrats control of the Senate. And, fearing a primary election re-match against Pat Toomey, Arlen Specter bolted the Republican Party in advance of his 2010 reelection bid.

²⁰ This is measured using Keith Poole's DW-NOMINATE scores which analyze patterns of roll call voting to determine a left-to-right spatial positioning score for every member of Congress; see <http://voteview.com/DWNL.htm>, accessed September 26, 2009.

²¹ Again, these figures are DW-NOMINATE scores at <http://voteview.com/DWNL.htm>, accessed September 26, 2009.

Table 1. Senate Republicans to the Left of Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, 104th-110th Congresses

	<u>Congress</u> 104 th	105 th	106 th	107 th	108 th	109 th	110 th
<i>Senators to the Left of Snowe</i>	Jeffords Hatfield Cohen Specter J. Chafee	Jeffords Specter J. Chafee	L. Chafee Jeffords	L. Chafee Jeffords	L. Chafee	L. Chafee	
<i>Senators to the Left of Collins Snowe</i>	----	Jeffords Specter J. Chafee Snowe	L. Chafee Jeffords Snowe Specter J. Chafee	L. Chafee Jeffords Snowe Specter	L. Chafee Snowe Specter	L. Chafee Snowe	

Spatial positioning as measured by DW-NOMINATE scores. Note that John Chafee died during the 106th Congress and was replaced by Lincoln Chafee. Although Arlen Specter left the Republican Party during the 111th Congress, DW-NOMINATE had him positioned to the right of Snowe and Collins by the 109th Congress.

Table 2. Moderate Republican Senators, 104th-111th Congresses

Senator	Career Fate
Senator John Chafee (Rhode Island)	Died in office
Senator Lincoln Chafee (Rhode Island)	Challenged from the right by Club for Growth-supported candidate, 2006 Defeated in general election, 2006
Senator Bill Cohen (Maine)	Retired, 1996 Joined Clinton Administration as Secretary of Defense, 1997
Senator Mark Hatfield (Oregon)	Retired, 1996
Senator Jim Jeffords (Vermont)	Switched parties, 107 th Congress
Senator Arlen Specter (Pennsylvania)	Challenged from the right by Club for Growth-supported candidate, 2004 Prospective challenge from Club for Growth-supported candidate, 2010 Switched parties, 111 th Congress

For her part, Olympia Snowe has sought to forestall these changes in efforts to maintain Republican majorities. Upon hearing from Jim Jeffords that he was “thinking seriously” about switching parties, Snowe “immediately put through a very alarmed call to White House Chief of Staff Andy Card” (Daschle 2003, 70). And, as is cited above, when Specter switched, Snowe went public with advice as to how Republicans could have avoided Specter’s defection. Others arguably also left the party if with less drama and some needed qualification. One could argue, too, that Bill Cohen, still nominally a Republican, basically switched parties when he joined the Clinton Administration as Secretary of Defense. And, Lincoln Chafee, who survived a 2006 Club for Growth challenge only to lose in the general election that year, endorsed Barack Obama in February 2008 and is running for Governor of Rhode Island as an Independent (Isenstadt 2009). Mirroring the defection of Southern Democrats to the

Republican Party,²² this does, however, seem the fate of many northeastern Republicans. Jeffords and Specter clearly left and became Democrats whereas Cohen and Chafee followed a similar course, though perhaps each is worthy of an asterisk.

The Future of Republican Moderates and Maine's Political Warriors

Amidst the decline of GOP moderates, Senators Snowe and Collins have done far more than to stay alive politically. Neither has been primaried since they became senatorial incumbents. Furthermore, some of the qualities associated with areas that elect Republican moderates – suburban locales and the “diploma belt” simply do not apply to Maine. Maine's levels of higher education are low compared to other New England states. And while there are suburbs and colleges in the state, it is also a place of small towns and rural areas. One element of their success and ability to prevail against national tides appears to be embedded in Maine's political culture, which eschews negative appeals and promotes pragmatic approaches, and is a defining element of a certain Maine exceptionalism.

At the same time, the situation of these two senators shows the limits of party discipline and the weakness of American political parties. With significant support from their electoral constituencies, the Republican caucus, Republican leaders in the Senate, and activist groups lack tools to compel them to comply with national party policies and goals. Although Senators Snowe and Collins may face some discomfort when they take divergent positions from most in their party, their party's leadership generally recognizes that they need their votes in certain situations.

If Snowe or Collins were to face problems in the future, it may not come from the right but the left. On what basis a credible challenge could be mounted is not clear. However, if they should appear to be too far to the right in the Maine context over some significant period of time, this could provide an opening for a Democratic challenger. Also, there would need to be a high-profile issue that was salient at election time and

²² Prominent examples of former Democrats among Republican ranks include Phil Gramm of Texas, Richard Shelby of Alabama, Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, Billy Tauzin of Louisiana, and, of course, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.

where voters saw the senator as out of touch. But, as Tom Allen, the challenger of Senator Collins in 2008 demonstrated, it is a tough order to unseat a relatively moderate senator in Maine, even when the political tides are moving leftward, funds and volunteer efforts are plentiful, and the argument can be made that the popular presidential candidate could use additional support in the U.S. Senate. At the minimum, a successful challenge to Senators Snowe or Collins would need to overcome the strong (although not unreserved) tendency for Mainers to support incumbents, and would have to be able to deliver these criticisms without appearing too negative and with the ability to connect with voters, including those in the second congressional district. Such possibilities are mere hypotheticals. Meanwhile, these political warriors endure as members of an endangered club, the moderate northeastern Republican.

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