

9-1-2013

Bay State Politics in the Post-Scott Brown Era

Jerold J. Duquette

Central Connecticut State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/nejps>

Recommended Citation

Duquette, Jerold J. (2013) "Bay State Politics in the Post-Scott Brown Era," *New England Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 7: No. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/nejps/vol7/iss2/7>

This State Report is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Journal of Political Science by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Bay State Politics in the Post-Scott Brown Era

Jerold J. Duquette
Central Connecticut State University

The "Scott heard round the world" fired on January 19, 2010, gave new life to the idea that in charismatic, independent minded Republican candidates who run candidate-centered and Massachusetts-centric campaigns that steer clear of the national partisan political narrative can win statewide elections in Massachusetts. While Elizabeth Warren's defeat of Brown in 2012, Ed Markey's defeat of Gabriel Gomez in 2013, and Scott Brown's retreat to friendlier partisan climes this year have gone a long way to dispel this notion, Brown's influence this Republican playbook for statewide elections will apparently survive for at least one more election cycle.

The national partisan political narrative will be very hard to avoid in the 2014 race for the corner office in Massachusetts. Brown's longshot bid to win a trip back to the US Senate from New Hampshire in this fall's midterm election will have the unintended consequence of complicating the efforts of Republican Charlie Baker to win in his second try for the State's top job in 2014. By bringing the national Republicans' anti-Obamacare crusade to New Hampshire this year, Brown will make it harder for Baker to distance himself both from his national party's highly unpopular brand and from its increasingly discredited line of attack against the Affordable Care Act.

John Kerry made Scott Brown and helped bring national partisanship to state elections

Few seem to remember that the 2010 special election to fill the vacated US Senate seat of the late Ted Kennedy would never have happened if Kennedy's junior partner in the senate hadn't run for president in 2004. In the summer of 2004, the Massachusetts legislature changed the law that gave governors in the Commonwealth the power to fill vacancies in the state's U.S. Senate delegation. Like many other states, Bay State governors were empowered to name replacement senators that would serve out the remainder of the vacating senator's term. In order to prevent then Republican governor Mitt Romney from using this power to appoint a Republican to replace John Kerry following the 2004 presidential election, the veto-proof Democratic majorities on

Beacon Hill changed the law, requiring that any such vacancies be filled via a special election that must occur no sooner than 145 day or later than 160 days after the seat is officially vacated.

As we all know, this bit of overtly partisan brinksmanship didn't work out well for the state's Democrats because John Kerry lost the 2004 presidential election to incumbent George W. Bush. Five years later, Bay State Democrats were faced with the unintended consequences of their handiwork. Though the corner office was occupied by Democrat Deval Patrick in 2009, the 2004 law they passed to prevent Mitt Romney from appointing a Republican US Senator created a mandatory 145 day period, prior to the required special election, during which the Commonwealth would have only one U.S. Senator. The 2004 maneuver hadn't provided for the appointment of an interim senator to serve during the 145 days between the vacancy and the special election to fill it.

This oversight appeared to be quite consequential with the death of Senator Ted Kennedy in the fall of 2009 because for the 145-160 days prior to the special election to fill the vacancy, the Democratic US Senate majority would be reduced from 60 to 59, giving Republicans more opportunities to obstruct the Democrats legislative proposals, including President Obama's historic effort to reform the health insurance system. To avoid that difficulty, the state legislature again changed the law, granting then Democratic governor Deval Patrick the authority to appoint an interim senator to fill the vacancy for the 145 day period prior to the special election. With a promise not to be a candidate for the post in the upcoming special election, the Governor appointed Democratic Party elder statesman and Kennedy family confidant Paul Kirk.

The ability of the Democratically-controlled state legislature to openly enact procedures designed to disadvantage Republicans in 2004 and 2009 provided crystal clear evidence that Massachusetts was not friendly or fertile territory for Republican Party politics. It also provided Republican office seekers more fodder for their longstanding attack on the dangers of one-party rule in Massachusetts. Scott Brown's 2010 victory, no doubt, helped to bolster the perceived potency of this line of attack for Bay State Republicans. Feeling a wind at their backs, the Mass GOP went into the 2010 gubernatorial election with renewed confidence that Bay State voters didn't like entrenched partisanship.

Republican nominees for every statewide office in the fall of 2010 were easily dispatched by Democrats, despite having had the support of their popular champion Scott Brown who polls at the time consistently rated as the most popular public official in the state. This should have been a clear signal to the Mass GOP and the state's political pundits that Brown's election had not been the harbinger of change they thought it was. Brown himself failed to heed the lesson of the 2010 gubernatorial election. His strategy for re-election in 2012 remained solidly anchored in the spurious notion that Bay State voters wanted a bipartisan, independent-minded champion who would work to end partisan gridlock on Capitol Hill.

Warren and Markey Set the Record Straight

The realization that Brown's upset "special" election victory over Martha Coakley in 2010 was an anomaly and not a harbinger of a changing political landscape in the state was slow to emerge. Many in the Mass GOP and in the state and national news media stubbornly kept this fiction alive for three-and-a-half years, despite the fact that Brown's prospects for winning re-election to Ted Kennedy's US Senate seat were clearly very slim very early on.

Before the Democrats had even nominated Elizabeth Warren to be Brown's 2012 challenger, I laid out four broad reasons why he would lose the 2012 elections in a blog post at MassPoliticsProfs.com:

1) Senator Brown's election happened under "special" circumstances and virtually none of these circumstances will exist this time around.

The size and makeup of the Massachusetts electorate in December, 2010 will be quite different in 2012. Brown's exploitation of both Tea Party AND progressive anger at President Obama cannot be repeated this year. The TEA Party activists whose energy and GOTV efforts were key to Brown's victory have long since abandoned him and Bay State progressives will not be willing to express their dissatisfaction with Washington Democrats in 2012 the way they did in 2010, by staying home on Election Day. There is simply too much at stake. If anything, Warren will be the candidate benefitting from "movement" politics due to her links with the "occupy" movement, which despite vigorous TEA Party and Republican Party efforts and resources remains popular with Massachusetts voters.

The national anti-Obama/ anti-Democratic Party mood of early 2010 will be much less potent in 2012, especially in Massachusetts. If Brown's argument to the voters is that he's not a social or economic conservative, but rather a moderate so-called "Massachusetts Republican," then why would a statewide Massachusetts electorate that hasn't elected a moderate Republican in decades be compelled to do so now?

If the “Obama/Warren as left wing extremist” argument doesn’t fly in the Bay State, then the answer is that they would not be so compelled.

Brown has to create an extremist opponent to be marketable as a moderate Republican. There is no credible evidence that he can do so with his Democratic challenger or the White House at this point. His recent efforts to distance himself from Senate Republicans and ingratiate himself to anti-Wall Street voters does seem to illustrate Brown’s understanding that he needs to move left quickly and clearly to be competitive in the fall. Senator Brown is missing no opportunity to separate himself from his party nationally. His recent support for President Obama’s recess appointment to the consumer protection agency Elizabeth Warren designed, as well as his manufactured [dust up](#) with Newt Gingrich over the former Speaker’s views on the judiciary; illustrate Brown’s understanding of his ver precarious position.

2) Senator Brown, having only been in office for 22 months prior to his re-election bid, will not enjoy much in the way of incumbency advantage. While he is raising money hand over fist, the national significance of this race and the national stature of his Democratic challenger, as well as her centrality to the narrative that will animate the president’s own re-election campaign, will make her very competitive in fund raising. Also, Warren’s access to the statewide political resources and organization of Governor Patrick, Barack Obama, John Kerry, and even Hilary Clinton, will undoubtedly be more useful and cost effective than anything Senator Brown can muster. He cannot tout his influence in the Senate either without linking himself with Senate Republicans whose popularity in Massachusetts rivals that of famous serial killers. He can tout his power to check Democratic excess as a way to lure Bay State independents and conservative Democrats, but for every such voter he attracts with this approach, he’s likely to attract as much or more opposition from an electorate that has not complained about liberal excess in Obama’s Washington. Brown can’t realistically hope to ride a protest vote to re-election.

3) Despite what pundits have gushingly called his very impressive retail political skills, this election simply will not be determined by “local” politics or issues. Also, Elizabeth Warren has already proven that she’s no Martha Coakley. Warren’s own political skills appear quite formidable. There is little doubt that Brown and any Republicans hoping he can hold onto his seat are really regretting their opposition to Warren’s appointment to the new consumer protection agency at this point. When Charlie Baker put on his jeans and work boots and drove around the state in a pickup truck, independent voters did not follow because he had nothing tangible to offer them. In 2012, Brown may have the charm and the truck, but he doesn’t have the goods. In an off year contest he may have been able to leverage his usefulness to the state’s business interests into votes, but the size and diversity of the electorate in a presidential year greatly dilutes Brown’s prospects in this regard.

4) What about Brown’s access to Romney organizational resources as well as possible coat tails? The election of a Romney/Brown ally to the Massachusetts state GOP chairmanship may have looked to some like good news for Senator Brown. For this to be true, however, Romney’s organizational resources and his coat tails must be electorally valuable commodities. In Massachusetts, Romney is not likely to be a value added factor for Brown, whose willingness to associate with the former governor and likely Republican nominee thus far may reflect his political inexperience or naiveté. The recent election of a Romney/Brown man to state GOP chairman has only served to harden the resolve of Massachusetts movement conservatives to purge the party of moderates. This is hardly the kind of grass roots passion Brown wants while running for re-election. Furthermore, the tone and trajectory of the ongoing fight for the Republican presidential nomination must be giving Brown’s campaign fits. The attacks on Mitt Romney’s business experience play right into both Warren’s and President Obama’s preferred narratives.¹

In his post 2012 election analysis UMass-Boston political scientist Maurice Cunningham, and fellow MassPoliticsProf, summed up what the state’s GOP and media pundits should have

¹ Duquette, Jerold. “Warren Will Win!” Last modified January 13, 2012. <http://www.masspoliticsprofs.com/2012/01/13/warren-will-win/>.

understood all along by reporting on the results of one exit poll question. Cunningham wrote, “How different is Massachusetts? One exit poll question asked voters if government should do more or if government is doing too much, and Warren won “should do more” with 76%; Brown won “doing too much” with 76%. But 53% of Massachusetts voters said government should do more, only 43% say it is doing too much... You won’t see those numbers too many other places.”²

The Mass GOP apparently missed the simple lesson of Professor Cunningham’s analysis, because less than a year later they got squarely behind a candidate billed as “the next Scott Brown.” In 2013, Gabriel Gomez, with the backing of the Mass GOP establishment, tried to reprise the “Scott Brown playbook” in his race against Ed Markey to fill out the remainder of John Kerry’s US Senate term following Kerry’s appointment as Secretary of State. The fact that the state’s GOP establishment supported the nomination of a young, good looking, Hispanic, former Navy Seal turned successful businessman over the more experienced, solidly conservative former U.S Attorney Michael Sullivan, was indicative of the degree to which Scott Brown’s victory in 2010 was misinterpreted by Bay State Republicans. Much of the media coverage of Gomez’s efforts on the campaign trail also reflected this misunderstanding. The race between Gomez and Markey was treated like a bone fide horse race, despite the fact that Scott Brown himself had been easily dispatched by the unabashedly progressive, first time candidate Elizabeth Warren just months before.

Wishful thinking Republicans and many media pundits were willing to prop up the fiction that Gomez could compete. The fact that the June election was, like Brown’s victorious election, a “special” election caused many to speculate that as such it would give the Republican a leg up thanks to the expectation of low turnout in special elections. Though intuitively plausible, this analysis was doubly flawed. The 2010 special election Brown won was not a low turnout election. Turnout on that wet January day actually exceeded the turnout of the 2006 statewide elections. Furthermore, there is no evidence to support the notion that Republicans benefit from lower turnout in Massachusetts elections.

² Cunningham, Maurice T. "Brown-Warren Post Mortem." Last modified November 8, 2012. <http://www.masspoliticsprofs.com/2012/11/08/brown-warren-post-mortem/>.

Unlike Brown in 2010, Gabriel Gomez did not have the benefit of a decidedly unfriendly national narrative for Democrats, the massive deployment of conservative, anti-Obamacare activism, or of a disaffected progressive base willing to sit on its hands as an expression of disappointment in both President Obama's failure to push for a more liberal health care law (specifically one with a "public option") and in the state's Democratic Party establishment for its longstanding aversion to policy progressivism. Martha Coakley, it should be remembered, was not the choice of Bay State progressive activists in 2010.

Without these fortuitous circumstances, Gomez's effort to be the "next Scott Brown" was not simply unproductive; it was actually quite counter-productive. Claiming to be an independent-minded, problem-solver willing to work across the aisle to end gridlock (as Brown did in his ill-fated 2012 race) greatly reduced conservative enthusiasm and turnout for Gomez in the June 25, 2013 contest. Like Brown in 2012, Gomez and the state GOP under-estimated the impact of the national partisan narrative and over-estimated the appeal of their politically moderate nominee. They had engineered a campaign directed at "swing voters" in what political scientists call a "base building" election. Their own assumption about lower turnouts in special elections (though flawed) should have led them to the realization that voters who do turnout when doing so requires more than the usual attentiveness to the process (such as an election in January or June) are much more likely to be high information voters with partisan leanings that make them poor targets for candidate-centered campaigns.

By the time John Kerry's seat was in play, Bay State Democrats had more than learned the lessons of 2010. The party establishment learned that because of the highly partisan national narrative, US Senate races are about turning out Democrats and progressives, not about attracting moderate voters with a centrist nominee. The longtime preference of the Democratic establishment for more moderate statewide candidates was due to confusion about the difference between gubernatorial and US Senate elections in the state. Though both are statewide contests, the context of US Senate races can be quite different than that of gubernatorial elections, where the national partisan narrative isn't necessarily relevant. It's understandable that Democrats conflated their approaches to these two types of statewide races since Republicans had not

nominated a competitive US Senate candidate in four decades, but have been very successful in contests for the corner office.

Democratic Congressman Stephen Lynch, however, seemed to have missed the memo. Lynch, a hard scrabble, former iron worker from “Southie,” who had actually voted against the Affordable Care Act made a bid for Kerry’s seat in the spring of 2013. Lynch and the Mass GOP were essentially on the same page. Unfortunately for both, it wasn’t just the wrong page, it was the wrong book. Lynch attacked Markey as “too liberal” and thereby as unelectable in the state that sent Scott Brown to Washington in 2010. Like several media pundits, Lynch made the mistake of attributing Warren’s 2012 victory to President Obama’s coattails. Without Obama at the top of the ticket to help turnout liberals, Lynch assumed, voters looking for moderation and independence would hold sway at the polls in the June special election to replace Kerry. He saw his “independence” on Obamacare as a general election asset, and tried to convince Democratic primary voters to think strategically at the polls. Neither the Democratic establishment nor the party’s progressive wing was responsive to this argument. Both backed the solidly progressive Congressman Ed Markey very early and very strongly. Lynch was easily dispatched on Primary Election Day. The media and the GOP tried to play up the attraction of Lynch supporters to Gomez in the general election, but the South Boston Democrat’s paltry numbers in the primary made clear the absurdity of that story line.

The false narrative bolstered by Brown’s 2010 upset (as applied to US Senate races) was effectively pronounced dead at the Mass GOPs 2014 convention in March. At the annual GOP conclave, held in Boston University’s Agganis Arena, nobody in the party or the press was talking about Scott Brown, or the prospect of mounting a credible challenge to Senator Markey in November. Former Wellesley Selectman, Brian Kerr, will face Markey in the 2014 midterm election. His speech from the convention podium was barely audible above the din of the assembled GOP activists and insiders. The Massachusetts Republican Party appears to have returned to its pre-Scott Brown assumptions about US Senate elections in the state, which is to say, they have no plans to waste time, energy, or money on them. Instead, the Mass GOP in 2014 will return to a singular focus on the race for governor. Its 2014 candidates for US Senate, state treasurer, state attorney general, state auditor, and secretary of state are all lambs to the slaughter.

The 2014 Race for Governor: Brown is gone, but not forgotten

While the "Scott Brown playbook" never made sense in Massachusetts US senate elections, it has been helpful for Republicans running for Governor in the state. In order to reclaim the corner office for the Mass GOP after eight years of Democratic control the 2014 Republican nominee has to affect a nonpartisan, independent pose, as well as a focus on state-based issues. The last thing a Republican gubernatorial candidate wants is a partisan campaign narrative that reminds Bay State voters of his or her connection to the highly toxic national "Republican" brand.

The ability of presumptive GOP nominee, Charlie Baker, to downplay his party membership, however, will be complicated by Scott Brown's very high profile comeback tour in New Hampshire's 2014 US Senate race. Ironically, Brown's 2014 senate campaign will not employ the "Scott Brown playbook" that failed him in Massachusetts. Instead of trying to downplay the national partisan narrative, Brown will be running on it. He has already telegraphed his plan to run against "Obamacare" in New Hampshire, and to label incumbent Jeanne Shaheen an "Obamacare Democrat." While the wisdom of this tactical shift is debatable for Brown's 2014 chances, it's quite clear that it is not going to be helpful to his fellow Republican Charlie Baker. Unfortunately for Baker, New Hampshire's US Senate race is sure to be big news in Massachusetts, not only because of Brown's recent migration, but also because the Granite state shares media markets with its neighbor to the south. A Brown v. Shaheen contest will be on full display in Eastern Massachusetts media, both the paid and free variety. Any hope of distracting Bay State voters from the antics of national Republicans will be greatly diminished.

Charlie Baker's effort to carefully exploit complications with and anxiety about the implementation of the Affordable Care Act have and will be dealt a serious blow by Brown's effort to ride his opposition to "Obamacare" back to the US Senate from New Hampshire. Baker intends to frame his opposition to Obamacare in very Massachusetts-centric ways. He wants nothing to do with the ham-fisted, substance free attacks on the president's singular legislative achievement. Instead, Baker hopes to rally voters around the notion that Massachusetts' own healthcare reform is being negatively impacted by the one-size-fits-all regulatory meddling of the

Affordable Care Act. In other words, for Baker the issue is effective administration, not socialism or robbing millions of quality healthcare choices. With Brown beating the anti-Obamacare drum in full view of Eastern Mass voters, however, Baker will have difficulty controlling the tenor of the issue's discussion in his own race.

Meanwhile, the Mass Dems have three candidates competing for their party's gubernatorial nod. The candidate who lost that fateful race to Scott Brown in 2010 was easily re-elected Attorney General of Massachusetts the following fall and is now a front runner for the 2014 Democratic nomination for governor. Her most viable challenger is former Democratic National Committee Chairman and current state treasurer, Steve Grossman. Also running is former Obama Administration Medicare & Medicaid chief Don Berwick, who has emerged as the champion of a single-payer healthcare system in Massachusetts. While Coakley and Grossman are undoubtedly best positioned to compete for the party's nod on primary election day, Berwick has become the clear representative of the progressive activist wing of the party, the very folks whose lack of enthusiasm with the party establishment's nominee to replace Ted Kennedy in 2010 contributed to Brown's victory at the polls. Healthcare reform was one of the most important policy issues to Senator Kennedy. He fought hard for it for decades and hoped to see his efforts rewarded by President Obama's efforts. When Democrats bypassed more progressive candidates, like Congressman Mike Capuano, in the 2010 special election to fill Kennedy's seat, choosing instead a more centrist state attorney-general, Martha Coakley, the same progressives now lining up behind Don Berwick and his call for a single-payer system in Massachusetts were nonplused, to put it mildly.

The nomination of Martha Coakley's by the Democrats would no doubt help bolster the distracting narrative created by Brown's bid to unseat New Hampshire Senator Jeanne Shaheen. The media would surely be unable to resist the temptation to exploit the drama of both the 2010 special election combatants seeking "redemption" in 2014. It's not clear, however, if running against the candidate beaten by Brown would be better or worse than the alternative for Republican Charlie Baker's prospects of victory. Coakley is the sitting state attorney general and as such has and is forced to take what are sometimes politically dicey positions on salient issues. Coakley's Democratic rival, Steve Grossman, is the state treasurer, a perch with much more

political upside than downside presently. He's also a highly successful businessman, who unlike Coakley, cannot be characterized as a career politician or as someone who doesn't understand the "real world" of business and job creation, which is an irresistible narrative for Republicans running for the state's corner office. Nevertheless, as of this writing Grossman trails Coakley by double-digits in the polls and the political media has all but counted the State Treasurer out, increasingly treating Coakley as the presumptive nominee.³

The narrative that proved false in Massachusetts US Senate elections continues to be "conventional wisdom" in gubernatorial races, namely that despite clear liberal leanings in federal elections, Massachusetts voters are willing to "split" their "tickets" by supporting Republican gubernatorial candidates in the same elections at which they send Democratic legislators to both Beacon Hill and Capitol Hill. Recently elected Republican governors Weld, Cellucci, and Romney all relied on minimizing their party's label and emphasizing their private sector, executive credentials, and bipartisan problem solver profiles in order to attract "ticket-splitting" voters at the polls. All three also made rhetorical use of the perception of one party Democratic rule on Beacon Hill by selling themselves as necessary checks on an entrenched and even corrupt Democratic Party. Ironically, all three also benefitted from the existence of Democratic supermajorities in both chambers of the state legislature. Not only did this situation set up the checks and balances pitch for Republican aspirants to the corner office, it also reduced the incentive for powerful Beacon Hill Democrats to go all in to help elect Democratic governors. Without fear of losing control of the legislative agenda, Democrats in the legislature are much less likely to waste too much capital (political or financial) on gubernatorial races. In fact, thanks to these veto-proof majorities, many Democratic legislators are happy to have a Republican governor to kick around now and then. Unfortunately for Baker, powerful Democrats in the legislature cannot take an arms-length approach to the governor's race if it becomes a highly charged partisan affair.

Charlie Baker has made clear that he will be employing this formula in 2014 even though it failed to get him across the finish line in his first race for the office just four years ago. Though

³ Duquette, Jerold. "Grossman's free media miscalculation." Last modified July 18, 2014. <http://www.masspoliticsprofs.com/2014/07/18/grossmans-free-media-miscalculation/>

Scott Brown's anti-Obamacare campaign in New Hampshire isn't going very well, there is still plenty of media attention being focused on national Republicans' irrational opposition to the Affordable Care Act. A recent 2-1 decision by a three-judge panel from the DC Circuit Court of Appeals (two G.W. Bush nominees and one Carter nominee), which would deprive millions of Americans of the tax credits made available by the Affordable Care Act, is getting quite a bit of media attention. The fact that the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals handed down a ruling that directly contradicted the DC Circuit decision on the very same day only adds to the drama of the issue and the incentive for the media to play up the story. This ongoing media attention to the transparently partisan and irrational interpretation of the Affordable Care Act by two Bush-appointed judges on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals will undoubtedly complicate Charlie Baker's efforts to avoid national partisanship and attract ticket splitting voters in the fall.⁴

The US Supreme Court's recent decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores* will also likely hamper Baker's efforts to distract Bay State voters from the national partisan political narrative. In this case, the High Court found for the plaintiff, creating a corporate right of religious freedom by ruling that forcing Hobby Lobby to pay for contraceptive care in their employees' health insurance packages, which is required under the Affordable Care Act, is unconstitutional. Both the majority and dissenting opinions in this extremely controversial 5-4 ruling are rife with material that Massachusetts Democrats can use to raise the partisan blood pressures of voters this fall.

The unleashing of super PACs and elimination of aggregate limits on individual political donations caused by the Court's decisions in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) and *McCutcheon v. FEC* (2014) will only make it more difficult for gubernatorial candidates and campaigns to distinguish themselves and their issues from the polarized national left-right narrative.⁵ One of the keys to the kind of ticket-splitting that made it easier for Republican gubernatorial campaigns to win in Massachusetts has been the ability to get their fair share of media attention, as well as the ability to use their resources to micro-target likely voters with direct (or narrowcast) appeals.

⁴ Pear, Robert. "Court rulings differ on key component of health care law." *The Boston Globe* (Washington), July 22, 2014. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2014/07/22/federal-appeals-court-delivers-serious-setback-obama-health-care-law/6JWytvlmQMOlwITyndC2NJ/story.html>.

⁵ Brennan Center for Justice. "McCutcheon v. FEC." Brennan Center for Justice. Last modified April 2, 2014. <http://www.brennancenter.org/legal-work/mccutcheon-v-fec>.

Because there is only so much airtime to buy, the rush of additional money made possible by *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* will eventually dilute even the direct messaging and social media environments where well financed gubernatorial nominees may heretofore have been able to distinguish themselves and their efforts. If “all politics is national” now, then Republican gubernatorial candidates in blue states and Democratic gubernatorial candidates in red states are going to have to come up with some awfully innovative strategies for setting themselves apart.

With two term Democratic governor Deval Patrick choosing not to seek a third term, the 2014 governor’s race could be a good test of the theory that Bay State voters are less partisan in contests for the state’s corner office and that they favor what some have called an extra layer of “checks and balances.” Unfortunately for Baker, there is reason to suspect that with or without Scott Brown’s unwelcome distraction and the ongoing court battles over Obamacare this fall, Massachusetts voters are not going to be in a ticket-splitting mood. Voters across the nation are increasingly shying away from “ticket-splitting” at the polls, according to research published by Georgetown University political scientist Dan Hopkins that points to the increasing nationalization of gubernatorial elections, especially those that coincide with federal midterm elections.⁶

Can Republican Charlie Baker buck the trend toward a nationalized partisan narrative in his race for Governor? Can he focus Bay State voters on himself and his opponent; on the state’s wasteful and corrupt one-party rule, and on the need for competent administration and political checks and balances at the Statehouse? Or, were the easy victories of Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey signals that the days of viable statewide Republican candidates in Massachusetts are numbered? These questions and many more about the state of politics in the “Post-Scott Brown Era” may very well be answered at the polls on November 4, 2014.

⁶ FiveThirtyEight. "All Politics Is Presidential." Last modified March 17, 2014. <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/all-politics-is-presidential/>.