

**Excessive Spending, Divergent Advertising Strategies, and Bucking the National Trend:
The 2020 U.S. Senate Race in Maine**

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Abstract

In this article we examine the 2020 United States Senate election in Maine, the only Senate election in that year in which the winner was not running on the ticket of the presidential candidate who won the state. Political scientists have emphasized the nationalization of congressional elections in recent years; Maine defied that trend. Through an examination of the political messaging portrayed on a record amount of media advertising, we find that the conclusion that most congressional elections are run and won or lost on national issues masks significant local variation, variation that is important to an understanding of governing politics in Washington today.

Political scientists describing congressional elections in the late twentieth century centered their analysis on the incumbent advantage (e.g. Cain et al. 1987; Gelman and King 1990) and on the resultant ticket splitting. Some decried the outcomes of such elections because they did not allow citizens to demonstrate their reactions to the policies of those chosen to govern, drawing on the work of Walter Dean Burnham (1975). Did Ronald Reagan have a huge mandate to pursue his agenda after the 1980 election, when voters returned a Democratic House majority in the same election? Democratic Speaker Thomas P. (“Tip”) O’Neill’s famous aphorism that “All politics is local” was the mantra followed by his co-partisans who won reelection by responding to their constituents’ needs and desires, not by following national policy trends (Jacobson and Carson 2015).

However, in the twenty-first century political scientists who disagree in fundamental ways about why our politics has become so polarized agree that congressional elections have become nationalized. Merely serving one’s constituency no longer guarantees reelection. The incumbency advantage might still exist, but it is greatly reduced, and ticket splitting is now the exception not the norm (Fiorina 2016; Abramowitz 2010).

Table 1 shows the extent to which ticket-splitting no longer is a prime feature of congressional elections. Whereas once nearly one-quarter of Representatives won in districts carried by presidential candidates of the other party, in the last two cycles that number has been reduced to less than 10% in 2016 and less than 5% in 2020. More than one-third of Senators won in states carried by the other party’s candidate for president in 1992, when Bill Clinton first won the presidency. Yet, in a state carried by Donald Trump and no Democrats won in 2016, in 2020 Susan Collins was the only Republican elected in a state Joe Biden carried

Table 1 Ticket Splitting in Presidential Elections, 1992-2020

Year	Split Ticket	
	House Seats	Senate Seats
1992	103	13
1996	109	10
2000	85	10
2004	59	7
2008	83	7
2012	26	6
2016	35	0
2020	16	1
	(Golden)	(Collins)

Source: Walter 2021

In this article, we argue that the national trend recognized in political science literature and in journalistic accounts of recent trends may only serve as a partial explanation of the results of the 2020 election. Famously V. O. Key, Jr., in his seminal work on southern politics, argued that much was to be learned from looking at the outliers (Key 1949). Political scientists should not lose sight of that simple, non-technical advice. Key was one of the early practitioners of the empirical study of politics, albeit before sophisticated quantitative tools (much less computers) were available to students of politics. More than that, however, rereading Key reminds us how important understanding politics is to understanding political trends.

In the 2020 election, Maine was the outlier. Returning to Table 1, note that two of the few instances of ticket splitting occurred in Maine. We believe it is important to understand these outliers, particularly the case of Senator Susan Collins, and the conditions that may have caused these outcomes to stray from the norm. Collins, who was thought to be among the most endangered Republican incumbents, was the only Senate candidate to win in a state in which the presidential candidate of the Senator's party did not also win. An in depth look at the Maine 2020 Senate race can lead to a better understanding of the results of the 2020 elections throughout the nation and their implications for the future of American politics.

Literature Review

Political scientists have focused on the effects of campaigns and specific campaign tactics and strategies on electoral outcomes for decades. Two themes in that literature—the effect of political advertising, particularly negative advertising, as the dominant messaging means used by campaigns and the nationalization of congressional campaigns—are especially relevant as we examine the 2020 Maine Senate race. Each theme raises analytical questions as we look at this race; however, the literature also leaves open questions that studying this race helps to explore.

Scholars have long recognized that political advertising is most effective in setting the tone and articulating the message for an election campaign. With the rise in digital technology, it is important for any definition of relevant political advertising to encompass both television and digital media. Barnard and Kreiss (2013) define political advertising as media campaigns produced by political actors that (1) are discrete components of wider strategic communications efforts, (2) involve systematically evaluating progress toward defined goals through data, and (3) are conducted by a group of specialists recognized as such by their peers. This definition recognizes the increased reliance of campaigns on voter data to target issues more effectively to different subsets of voters over the internet.

While the literature has not conclusively identified the effectiveness of political advertisements in shifting voter preference, recent studies have indicated correlation between the two. For instance, Franz and Ridout (2010), investigating the effects of advertisements in the 2008 presidential election, found that a 1,000 ad advantage over a rival campaign corresponds to roughly 0.5 percent higher vote share in non-battleground states. Most work focusing on the effectiveness of political advertisements has studied presidential elections, begging the question of whether the same holds true for down ballot races. Presidential candidates enjoy vast coverage

from national media sources while the level of coverage afforded to Senators varies greatly and is, as a whole, significantly less than that of presidential candidates. Based on this disparity, one would expect political advertisements to be more effective in U. S. Senate campaigns than presidential campaigns. In a study focusing on 1996 Senate elections, Goldstein and Freedman (2000) found that both incumbent and challenger campaign advertisements did have an effect on voter preferences but that the effects were of equal magnitude in opposite directions. Ridout and Franz (2011) found that from 2000-2008 political advertising was more effective in moving senatorial votes than presidential votes.

The last decade in politics has been marked by a dramatic increase in the number and intensity of political attack ads. Motta and Fowler (2016) find that the majority of political ads aired on television are negative, amounting to more than 65% of total advertisements since 2006. This transformation can be attributed, at least in part, to legal changes in campaign finance rules. The 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), permitted corporate and union funding of political advertisements, something they were previously barred from doing (Garrett 2021). The impact of this decision was evident as soon as in the 2012 election cycle, which saw a dramatic increase in spending by outside groups (Franz 2013).

Although negative advertisements are frequently employed by campaigns and outside groups, the literature is divided on whether it is an effective campaign tactic or not. Some believe that the persuasive effect of attack advertisements is dependent on the type of messaging employed, where “uncivil and relevant negative messages” were found to be most effective (Fridkin and Kenney 2011). Other scholars claim that the position of the candidate producing the advertisements influences the ability to persuade voters, mainly asserting that attack advertisements are more effective when they come from a non-incumbent (Blackwell 2013). The

timing and character of the race may also determine the impact of attack ads. Fridkin and Kenney (2019) find that negative advertisements in Senate campaigns are most powerful when the race is competitive and when ads are aired in the final weeks before the election.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the group producing the negative advertisements can make it more persuasive for viewers. Past literature suggests that advertisements created by unknown independent groups are more convincing than those produced directly by candidates (Brooks and Murov 2012). One possible explanation for this relationship is that voters often do not associate candidates with attack ads sponsored by outside groups; this dissociation creates an incentive for candidates to allow independent groups to “do their dirty work” for them (Dowling and Wichowsky 2015). When a campaign chooses to go negative, however, there may be a backlash effect from the public, penalizing candidates for attacking the opponent (Brooks and Murov 2012).

Evidence also suggests that the increase in frequency of negative advertisements may impact voter turnout, but the literature is divided on which direction this impact goes. While some suggest that a high volume of attack advertisements can motivate voters to turn out (Goldstein and Freedman 2002; Niven 2006), others find that it actually shrinks the electorate (Ansolabehere et al. 1994; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Even further, some argue that negative campaigning has no effect on voter turnout (Krasno and Green 2008). The remaining literature on the topic finds that specific factors, such as the timing of the negative advertisements, determines the effect on voter turnout (Krupnikov 2014). Although the effect of negative advertisements on voter turnout is uncertain, previous literature seems to be in agreement that it produces negative consequences for the functioning of our democracy and public trust in our institutions (Lau et. al 2007).

Despite the abundance of literature on political advertisements and the rise of negative campaign tactics, there has been relatively little attention to the local or national focus of political advertising in congressional or senatorial campaigns. Yet in recent cycles political scientists who agree on little else have noted the trend toward nationalization of congressional politics (Fiorina 2016; Abramowitz 2010). As congressional politics have become more nationalized over the past decades, incumbent advantage has decreased (Jacobson 2015) replaced by growing party loyalty. Data from the American National Election Survey (ANES) supports this conclusion; the percentage of voters identifying as “Strong Partisans” reached 44% in the 2020 election, the highest mark in the history of the ANES.

We focus on the 2020 United States Senate campaign in Maine, an outlier to national trends in that cycle, to explore whether national or local issue focus influences the effectiveness of positive or negative political campaign advertisements. While we recognize that more goes into a political campaign than just political advertising, because the 2020 campaigns were contested during the pandemic, much less personal contact—from candidates, surrogates, or volunteers—influenced the result, according to most observers, than did the impact of the saturation advertising that dominated the race. Thus, we feel justified in emphasizing the role of political advertising, much of which was negative in nature, in affecting the outcome of the race.

The Maine 2020 Senate Race

The Maine 2020 Senate race, between four-term incumbent Republican Susan Collins and retiring (because of term limits) Democratic Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives Sara Gideon, was one of the most watched and most expensive races of the election cycle and the most expensive election campaign in Maine history.

The Democrats viewed Collins as one of the most vulnerable Republicans seeking re-election. Collins had been among the most popular Senators in her home state until the year before the election, when a series of controversial votes, her support for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh most significant among them, turned many Democratic and independent supporters against her. After her vote on Kavanaugh, \$4 million was raised in a GoFundMe campaign to go to whichever Democrat opposed her in the general election. Gideon, young, smart, and charismatic, seemed a perfect opponent.

The Republicans agreed that Collins was vulnerable and felt that keeping the seat was critical if they wanted to retain majority control of the Senate. They were committed to assuring that Collins had the resources to fight off the challenge. As Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) boasted, “Senator Collins will be well funded, I can assure you.” Indeed, both candidates were exceedingly well funded. Between them, the two candidates spent \$100 million on their campaigns. They spent more than \$44 million on television and digital advertising; in addition Political Action Committees (PACs) supporting one candidate or the other spent an additional \$110 million advertising in the race.

Sara Gideon won the June Democratic primary with more than 70% of the vote, besting two more liberal Democratic women. If there was a complaint against Gideon, it was that she was not progressive enough for some of the more liberal elements of the party. But she was seen as a potential winner, and the party came together behind her.

Collins was not challenged by any other Republicans. While some in the GOP felt that she was too moderate, a RINO (Republican In Name Only) who was not sufficiently in sync with President Trump (and Maine’s former governor, Paul LePage), none felt she was vulnerable in her own party.

Public polling after Labor Day predicted a close race, but Gideon was viewed as the favorite. There were ten public polls conducted and reported between Labor Day and the election. These polls were conducted by Colby College, Emerson College, Hart Research, the New York Times/Sienna, Quinnipiac, and Survey USA among others. Gideon led in every one of the polls. One poll, a Quinnipiac poll in mid-September, had Gideon up 12%. All of the others were within 1 to 6%, many within the margin of error. Gideon was viewed as the leader, but both sides felt this was going to be a close election.

Maine (until Alaska's recently changed law takes effect) is the only state to run federal elections under Ranked Choice Voting. Under this system, citizens rank all candidates on the ballot. If no candidate reaches a majority, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated and that candidate's votes are awarded to their second choice candidate. The process is repeated until a candidate reaches a majority. From viewing the polls—all of the polls—pundits did not think that either Collins or Gideon would achieve a majority on the first ballot. Most felt that supporters of the non-major party candidates would break for Gideon, essentially because they would have been voting against the incumbent.

In this article, we review the political advertising aired during this campaign. Before examining the course of the campaign, consider the result. Senator Collins was re-elected, polling over 51% of the vote; she polled 70,000 more votes than did Speaker Gideon, winning by 8.6%. The independent candidates together received only 6.4%. Therefore, Ranked Choice Voting did not come into play.

Hypotheses

Our hypotheses follow from the themes noted in the literature and from the analysis above.

H₁: The Democratic campaign focused on the national implications of this race.

The Democrats viewed this campaign as critical to regaining majority control of the Senate. The party made a national commitment to raise money for Gideon and to assist her in any way possible, including suggesting campaign aids with national experience.

H₂: The Republican campaign focused more on local issues.

While the Republicans were determined to assist Collins, they realized that her support for national Republican concerns, especially President Trump's tax cut and support for Justice Kavanaugh, were her biggest problems. As she had run successfully four times, they allowed her a good deal of leeway in devising her own strategy.

H₃: Much of the negative campaigning was done by political action committees and not the two parties.

This hypothesis follows from the literature on negative campaigning.

H₄: The locally focused negative advertising was more effective than the nationally focused attack ads.

We know that Gideon had a lead throughout most of the campaign and that the race tightened in the last weeks. We do not have data to determine the cause of that tightening but we hypothesize that we will see a change in ad focus from Collins that correlates with her improving support numbers.

Data Summary

In order to test these hypotheses and to understand the surprising result, we relied on advertising data provided by AdImpact through their AdMo platform. AdMo, powered by TVEyes, uses a combination of human supervision and artificial intelligence to identify mentions of a particular topic. This is accomplished through the use of automated speech and image

recognition to comb through hours of footage and turn it into easily interpretable data. We focused on advertisements within Maine pertaining to the 2020 Senate Election aired between June 24, 2019 (the date on which Sara Gideon announced her candidacy) and November 2, 2020. Our database contains 382 unique advertisements aired by the two candidates' campaigns and outside groups. These advertisements totaled 2,062,644,395 impressions, defined as the number of times an ad was loaded onto a webpage, social media platform, or television source.¹ This means that, on average, a resident of Maine witnessed just under 1600 political advertisements over the course of the campaign or an average of just over three a day. These data were paired with spending data provided by AdImpact's Delta platform which reports advertising purchases directly from the media sources themselves.

Each advertisement was examined and labeled as "positive," "negative," "contrast," or "neutral." While positive and neutral categorizations are self-explanatory, we distinguish between negative and contrast advertisements based on whether the advertisement features one or both candidates. A contrast advertisement mentions one candidate in a negative light and the other in a more positive light, whereas a negative advertisement only mentions one candidate negatively. Additionally, each advertisement was also labeled "local" or "national," depending on whether or not the advertisement mentioned issues relevant to state affairs (such as the proposed Gas Tax) or national affairs (such as the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh).

Data Analysis

Our first cut at the data seeks to describe and then to compare the ads produced by Senator Collins and her allies with those produced by Speaker Gideon and her allies. Some analytical decisions were necessary in order to describe the advertising campaigns accurately. We had a choice of using unique ads, number of times each ad was aired, number of times each

ad was viewed, or the amount of money spent in airing each ad. We decided not to use unique ads because a unique ad aired a very small number of times would have a limited impact compared to another ad which was shown a large number of times. Part of that decision revolved around our understanding of the strategies regarding television advertising as opposed to digital advertising.

Table 2 Advertising Frequencies in the 2020 Maine Senate Election

	Total Spots	Total Impressions (thousands)
Gideon for ME Senate	47,936	462,656.57
Collins for ME Senate	29,463	103,184.09
Democratic Groups	52,074	1,239,230.05
Republican Groups	34,247	823,200.62

Source: Data from AdImpact

Table 3 Advertising Spending in the 2020 Maine Senate Election

Group	Digital Spending	Television Spending	Total Spending
Gideon for ME Senate	\$8,019,746	\$20,439,693	\$28,459,439
Collins for ME Senate	\$2,100,332	\$13,642,290	\$15,742,622
Democratic Groups	\$11,627,224	\$76,550,698	\$88,177,922
Republican Groups	\$6,996,693	\$61,420,829	\$68,417,522

Source: Data from AdImpact

Collins versus Gideon ads. Tables 2 and 3 examine the ads produced by the Collins campaign and groups supporting her candidacy and the Gideon campaign and groups supporting her; we first show the number of times each television ad was aired (spots), then look at the same ads in terms of the number of times each television ad was viewed or digital ad accessed (impressions), and finally show the amount of money each campaign spent on advertising. The obvious conclusion from these tables is that a massive amount of money was spent, that campaigns used many different ads in order to convey their messages, and that the airwaves in Maine and internet accessed by Mainers were saturated with advertising for the Senate race. The

advertising started early--the first ads were aired by the Gideon campaign on 24 June 2019—and reached a crescendo in the last weeks before the November election.

National versus Local Focus of the Messaging

Through careful viewing of all of the television and digital ads, we were able to characterize each as local or national based on the issues addressed by the advertisement. For instance, Gideon ads that talked about the importance of her election for the Democrats' chances of regaining control of the Senate was an ad with a national focus; a Collins ad decrying Gideon's service as State House Speaker was a locally focused ad. Not all ads fit neatly into these categories and we made the decision as a group on the final characterization of certain advertisements. Additionally, advertisements that could not fit into either national or local were labelled either as "Neutral" or as "Other."

From the time of the first rumors of her candidacy, Speaker Gideon was the favorite of the Democratic establishment, including those in Washington who saw her as having the best chance of unseating Senator Collins. Gideon's campaign gained prominence as the anti-Collins campaign, especially after Collins' vote to confirm Justice Kavanaugh. National money fueled her campaign; some key members of her campaign staff came from outside of Maine. Thus, we hypothesized that her campaign would have a national focus.

The focus of Collins' campaign was less clear at the beginning. She has gained a great deal of renown as the most moderate Republican Senator, a designation she proudly acknowledges whenever the chance arises; her frequent appearances on national television highlight her influence in Washington. However, emphasizing her reputation as a moderate, she also has stressed her independence from Republicans in Washington, especially from President Trump. In addition, her appeal as a native of Aroostook County has always been among her most

effective trait. Because President Trump is less popular in Maine than in the nation, we hypothesized that Collins’ campaign would focus on local issues rather than national. Tables 4-6 show that to be the case. Whether one looks at the number of times an advertisement was viewed, aired, or the money spent, Collins’ media message was more locally focused than nationally, and Gideon’s was more nationally focused than locally.

Table 4 Local vs. National Advertising by Candidates in the 2020 Maine Senate Election

	Gideon for ME Senate	Collins for ME Senate
Local Impressions	39%	59%
National Impressions	61%	41%
N=	565,383,427	346,756,945
Local Spots	45%	57%
National Spots	55%	43%
N=	44,905	28,670

Source: Data from AdImpact

Table 5 Local vs. National Advertising by Outside Groups in the 2020 Maine Senate Elections

	Democratic Groups	Republican Groups
Local Impressions	32%	61%
National Impressions	68%	39%
N=	664,440,060	310,287,616
Local Spots	31%	64%
National Spots	69%	36%
N=	100,010	63,710

Source: Data from AdImpact

Table 6: Spending on Local vs. National Advertising in the 2020 Maine Senate Election

	Democratic Groups	Republican Groups
Local Spending	28%	68%
National Spending	72%	32%
N=	664,440,060	310,287,616

Source: Data from AdImpact

Negative Advertising

Maine is known for relatively clean political campaigns--at least the state was until recent years. A nastier politics was ushered in by the 2010 and 2014 campaigns of former governor Paul LePage, who once described himself as “Trump before Trump.” LePage’s brand of no-holds-barred politics has been copied in some state campaigns, but not in others. Mainers frequently express distaste for this brand of politics, though it has been as successful in Maine as elsewhere.

Candidates in federal campaigns often have the chance to deflect blame for negative politics by staying above the fray and letting those campaigning on their behalf carry the brunt of the negative messaging. We hypothesized that such would be the case in the Maine Senate race. However, Table 7 shows that this hypothesis was only partially true. While outside groups’ messaging was largely negative, the two campaigns ran their share of negative advertisements as well.

Table 7 Negative Advertisements in the 2020 Maine Senate Election

	Impressions	Spots
Gideon for ME Senate	19.2%	12.9%
Collins for ME Senate	8.4%	5.1%
Democratic Groups	44.6%	59.6%
Republican Groups	27.8%	22.4%
N=	824,264,986	87,148

Source: Data from AdImpact

Explaining the Variation

Finally, we wanted to see the relationships among the variables we have examined. To test our hypotheses further, we estimate the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \textit{Locality} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1\textit{Republican} + \beta_2\textit{Neg} + \beta_3\textit{Digital} + \beta_4Q_2 + \beta_5Q_3 + \beta_6Q_4 + \\
 & \beta_7\textit{LogImpressions} + \beta_8\textit{DaysAired} + e_i
 \end{aligned}$$

The dependent variable, Locality, is a binary variable measuring whether the ad was local or national in scope (for local ads, Locality = 1). All other variables, besides Total-Impressions and Days-Aired follow a similar format. This equation tests our hypotheses that the party affiliation, tone, and the timing of an ad affected the locality of the ad. The time variables: Q₂, Q₃, and Q₄ control for when the ad was aired over the course of the election. Including this factor allows us to test whether more local ads were run as the race heated up. This regression was run twice, once for outside groups and once for the candidates' campaigns. Doing so allows us to test our hypotheses for both groups. The tables below show the results of the regression. Because our dependent variable was binary, we rely upon the marginal effects of the logistic regressions taken at the mean values, denoted in column 4, to test our hypotheses.

Table 8a Locality Regressed on Predictors Using OLS and Logit in the 2020 Maine Senate Election, Advertising from Outside Groups

Independent Variables	OLS Estimates	Logit Estimates	Odds Ratio	Marginal Effects
Republican	0.483*** (0.0316)	2.394*** (0.195)	10.96*** (2.141)	0.414*** (0.0203)
Negative	0.123*** (0.0331)	0.593*** (0.191)	1.809*** (0.346)	0.103*** (0.0324)
Digital	-0.00624 (0.0758)	-0.0813 (0.273)	0.922 (0.251)	-0.0141 (0.0472)
Q₂	0.254*** (0.0758)	2.220*** (0.625)	9.210*** (5.761)	0.384*** (0.106)
Q₃	0.248*** (0.0620)	2.092*** (0.565)	8.101*** (4.579)	0.362*** (0.0957)
Q₄	0.218*** (0.0572)	1.875*** (0.547)	6.519*** (3.567)	0.324*** (0.0930)
Total Impressions	3.00x10 ⁻⁹ (9.67x10 ⁻⁹)	2.39x10 ⁻⁸ (5.34x10 ⁻⁸)	1.00x10 ⁻⁸ (5.34x10 ⁻⁸)	4.13x10 ⁻⁹ (9.23x10 ⁻⁹)
Days Aired	9.0x10 ⁻⁴ (10.0x10 ⁻⁴)	5.02x10 ⁻³ (5.81x10 ⁻³)	5.00x10 ⁻³ (5.84x10 ⁻³)	8.68x10 ⁻⁴ (10.00x10 ⁻⁴)
Constant	-0.165** (0.0748)	-4.132*** (0.612)	0.0161*** (0.00983)	
Observations	836	836	836	836
	R ² = 0.258			

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10
 Source: Data from AdImpact
 Standard Errors in parentheses

Beginning with the results for outside groups, our model accounted for 26% of the variation between the characteristics of an ad and whether or not it was local. As we hypothesized, party affiliation was statistically significant with ads being run by Republican groups being eleven times more likely to be local when compared to Democratic groups. Significance was also found in the tone of ads. Negative ads were almost twice as likely to be focused on local issues. Additionally, timing of an ad was also significant. Ads aired after the first quarter of the election (27 October 2019) were more likely to be local. Interestingly, the ads aired by outside groups in the final quarter of the election between July 3rd and Election Day were comparably *less* local than the previous two quarters.

Table 8b Locality Regressed on Predictors Using OLS and Logit in the 2020 Maine Senate Election, Candidate Ads

Independent Variables	OLS Estimates	Logit Estimates	Odds Ratio	Marginal Effects
Republican	0.171*** (0.0351)	0.704*** (0.151)	2.021*** (0.306)	0.164*** (0.0335)
Negative	0.0568 (0.0406)	0.235 (0.171)	1.265 (0.217)	0.0549 (0.0398)
Digital	-0.0579 (0.0490)	-0.355 (0.243)	0.701 (0.170)	-0.0829 (0.0565)
Q ₂	0.0930 (0.102)	0.438 (0.467)	1.550 (0.724)	0.102 (0.109)
Q ₃	0.222** (0.0888)	0.992** (0.410)	2.698** (1.106)	0.232** (0.0946)
Q ₄	0.198** (0.0837)	0.898** (0.391)	2.454** (0.958)	0.210** (0.0902)
Total Impressions	3.92x10 ⁻⁹ (5.31x10 ⁻⁹)	-5.78x10 ⁻⁸ (4.98x10 ⁻⁸)	1.00x10 ⁻⁸ (4.98x10 ⁻⁸)	-1.35x10 ⁻⁸ (1.16x10 ⁻⁸)
Days Aired	21.0x10 ^{-4**} (9.26x10 ⁻⁴)	10.8x10 ^{-3**} (4.79x10 ⁻³)	10.11** (4.84x10 ⁻³)	2.52x10 ^{-3**} (1.11x10 ⁻³)
Constant	0.173* (0.101)	-1.310*** (0.612)	0.270*** (0.130)	
Observations	832	832	832	832
	R ² = 0.050			

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Source: Data from AdImpact
Standard Errors in parentheses

When looking only at the two candidates' campaigns, our model did significantly worse, only accounting for 5% of the variation between locality and other attributes. This is most likely due to the fact that the differences between the two campaigns were not as stark as the differences between various groups. Regardless, the only variable with significance was still partisanship with ads run by the Collins campaign were twice as likely to be local-oriented than those run by the Gideon campaign. Unlike the outside groups, the tone of the ads did not have any effect on locality, indicating that the two campaigns likely tailored both positive and negative ads towards local issues.

Looking at the interactive effects between the significant variables tells a similar story. Republican-affiliated national ads had a mean score of 0.28 (from a scale of 0 being positive and 1 being negative). Comparatively, Republican-affiliated local ads had a mean score of 0.59, indicating that they were significantly more negative than the national ads. On the other hand, Democratic ads had the opposite effect. Democrat-affiliated local ads had a score of .30, lower than the Republican score. In terms of national ads, Democratic ads had a mean score of .592, significantly more negative than Republican national ads. These results reflect the two different strategies used by the campaigns in targeting negative advertisements. The Republicans felt as though Gideon's history within Maine was ripe for criticism and in turn focused their negative ads on local issues such as Gideon's gas tax proposal. Meanwhile Democrats felt as though Collins was most vulnerable from a criticism standpoint on national issues relating to tax breaks and the Kavanaugh nomination and chose to focus their negative advertising on those issues.

Discussion

Our goal, of course, was to understand why the election turned out as it did, as the result defied the odds and the apparent national trend. After all, Senator Collins was the only

Republican United States Senate candidate in 2020 to win in a state carried by Joe Biden, and no Democrats won in a state carried by Donald Trump. That is, the Senate election in Maine defied the trend of nationalized congressional elections.

Our hypothesis is that Collins' local focus, particularly negative ads with a local focus, were more effective than was Gideon's nationally focused campaign. To test this point we would have needed survey data that showed which ads were most effective in moving voters. Ideally we would have polls from before an ad aired and after to compare. Alternatively, we could look at voters' reactions to various ads, either in surveys or experiments. Unfortunately, none of those data exists.

None of the public surveys serves our purpose because they were not run frequently enough to give a before-an-ad and after-an-ad response. To the best of our knowledge, no one, including the campaigns, did the kind of analysis we seek. What we do know, however, is that Gideon peaked more than a month out from the election and that both campaigns think that the race narrowed significantly as it drew to a close. (As the election approached, both campaigns believed the final result would be determined by using Ranked Choice Voting; we do not believe any polling by anyone had Collins in the lead, much less winning a majority.)

We also know that the Democratic campaign ads against Collins continued to focus on national themes—her votes on Kavanaugh and for Trump's tax cut, her taking campaign money from the pharmaceutical industry, the pivotal nature of the Maine seat for control of the Senate—while the Collins' campaign focused on local issues.

We want to highlight three Collins' themes. The first set of ads stressed that Gideon was not a true Mainer, that she was from away and “out of touch with Maine and the real situations... especially in the rural areas” (Collins for Maine 2021b). The second was an extremely negative

ad focusing on Gideon’s lack of action, when she was Speaker of the House, against a Democratic legislator accused of sexual misconduct, claiming she “turned a blind eye to Bates... to keep Bates’ vote” in the legislature (NRSC 2021).

The third was a series of advertisements featuring Bill Green, a long-time television journalist who retired in 2019 after nearly 30 years as a statewide television figure. Using his appeal as a long-time Mainer who emanated local values, Green’s ads rebutted Gideon’s attacks on Collins and questioned Gideon’s out-of-state values in so doing, stating “I’m turned off by all the ads attacking my friend Susan Collins” (Collins for Maine 2021a). These ads simultaneously served three purposes—to stress that Collins was a true Mainer and Gideon was not, to rebut Gideon’s attacks on Collins as not consistent with the Susan Collins that Mainers who know her well, had come to trust, and to attack Gideon as the one running a negative campaign (without mentioning the negativity of Collins’ ads, of course). We do not have quantitative evidence that these ads were successful, but the Collins campaign obviously thought so, as they cut various versions of them and ran them right up until the election. Local media thought so, evidenced by the fact that Green’s former station aired disclaimers that he was not speaking for them or in any official capacity. Some local journalists were concerned that, by appearing in partisan ads, Green hurt the credibility of all journalists. The Gideon campaign also feared that they were effective, but they did not air a direct response to any of these attacks. Their strategy remained fixed on stressing the importance of the campaign nationally and on questioning whether Collins still reflected Maine values. That strategy obviously did not prove to be successful.

Conclusion

Our goal in this paper was to explore the 2020 Senate race in Maine, not just because it was interesting in and of itself, which it was, but rather because it was an outlier. Senator Susan

Collins was the only Senate candidate to win in any state in which the presidential candidate of the Senator's party did not also win. The decline in ticket-splitting has been presented as evidence that the United States is moving toward a more parliamentary form of government, with voters supporting the party of their presidential candidate for the House and Senate as well. Congressional politics was becoming nationalized—except in Maine. Not only did Collins win handily, while President Biden carried the state, but Democratic Congressman Jarod Golden won in the second congressional district, a district easily carried by Donald Trump.

In a sense, we are not surprised to see the result in Maine. Maine has long had a reputation for parochial politics. Senator Angus King is not the only candidate “from away” who has won statewide office, but he is exceptional. Collins’ ads featuring a local celebrity noting disapprovingly that Gideon does not share Maine values resurrected an old line of attack that has often been part of Maine politics. Maine candidates with long family ties to the state—especially if they speak with an exaggerated Down East accent—have never hesitated to point out their roots, highlighting that heritage with great pride, emphasized pointedly if their opponent was “from away.”

However, political scientists would argue that that level of parochial politics is disappearing, that for federal office citizens have been voting for party, based on national appeal. Our finding is that Maine politics—at least in 2020—explicitly bucked that trend. Not only did the voters support Susan Collins, but they also did so in response to an intensely local-focused campaign that she waged against an opponent intent on stressing the national importance of the race.

Sara Gideon was doing quite well early in the race, when her message was that Collins’ votes had been against the opinion of most Mainers—“She’s not for you anymore,” was the

tagline for her ads. But when she turned to more personal attacks on Collins—for taking money from the pharmaceutical industry, for example—and when those ads themselves were attacked as not reflecting the Susan Collins that Mainers know—Gideon was less successful. In addition, there is no evidence that Mainers, especially moderate Republican and independent voters on whom Collins had long depended, were persuaded that they should vote for a candidate in order to unseat Mitch McConnell as Majority Leader. We believe that in this race the Collins camp's decision to emphasize her local ties, local issues, and local concerns about Gideon, especially in comparison to the Gideon campaign's continued emphasis on national issues (and lack of response to Collins' ads) determined the outcome.

Is there a broader lesson from this analysis of an outlier campaign? V.O. Key taught us that you examine the outlier in order to better understand the norm. In a number of 2020 Senate races that we have looked at—and in all likelihood in the fifteen House races in addition to Golden's in which the House winner's presidential candidate did not prevail—individual candidates did much better than one would have predicted had national politics dominated their races. We think quickly of Senators Ernst (IA), Kelly (AZ), and Tillis (NC), each of whom won in states carried by their party's presidential candidate, but each of whom polled much more strongly than predictions suggested. They were not outliers from the trend political scientists have noted, but others factors were in play. Examining those factors will lead to a tempered conclusion. Congressional politics have become more nationalized, except when they are not.

This suggestion that the national trend noted over the last decades might be more evident in some areas than others has important implications for national politics. As we revise this article, Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) is thwarting the Democrats' plan for a large infrastructure bill. Why? Despite all of the Machiavellian explanations from national pundits, the reason

appears evident to us. Manchin is a West Virginia Democrat; that is a very different breed from the progressive ideologues driving the Democratic national agenda. Senator Krysten Sinema (D-AZ) is a moderate Arizona Democrat; she too has her own views of what policies should be adopted—and they reflect her assessment of the views of her constituents.

In an era of politics in which the division between the parties is close but the gap between party positions is wide, in an era of polarized parties each with the ability to thwart the agenda of the other, the moderates play a key role. Those moderates—Collins and Manchin, Synema and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)—and the few others willing to stake out positions between partisan hardlines have all been elected by voters who do not reflect the policies of their national parties. Because they understand that if they run again they will be judged on local issues and their own positions, not national issues, they consequently represent their constituents' views, not those of national party leaders. Their role is critical in the governing politics of the Biden years. The lesson from the Maine Senate race in 2020 has important implications beyond those for future elections.

Politics remains interesting because in the final analysis, success in political campaigns is more art than science. National political strategists ignore the diversity in our political landscape at their peril. We as political scientists, examining national trends, would be wise to be modest in our projections and humble in our conclusions, because that maxim about politics remains so true.

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¹ The television impressions for every advertisement were calculated using Gross Rating Points (GRP), which is used by media companies as a proxy for views. This was then multiplied by the television market size of a particular area to arrive at impressions.