

Is Massachusetts Fertile Ground for Intensely Ideological Partisanship?¹

Jerold J. Duquette
Central Connecticut State University

Last spring I wrote a piece called “MASSPOLI#: Safe Harbor for Old School Pols & Politics” that began as follows: “American politics in 2018 is a hot mess. The Age of Trump will almost certainly be understood as a chaotic and terribly destructive time in American politics when our institutions were strained to the limit and democratic norms of conduct were shattered. Not so in Massachusetts, however.” Did the 2018 elections and aftermath alter the balance of power or standard operating procedures in Bay State politics?

The short answer is no. Despite a few surprises in the Democratic primaries, the 2018 elections in Massachusetts were establishment-friendly business-as-usual. Since then, the Republican governor has continued to enjoy good relations with Democrats on Beacon Hill and great public relations, despite a recent flair up with the newly elected Suffolk County District Attorney and the take-over of the Republican State Committee by Trump-supporting extremists.

The 2018 Elections in Massachusetts

In the run up to the 2018 midterm elections, the ongoing national political circus was just background noise to politicians and policymakers in the Bay State. While the rest of the country saw knock-down, drag-out partisan showdowns, a national referendum on Trump and Trumpism, Republican Charlie Baker remained the most popular governor in America with a Democratic challenger who never had a prayer of defeating him (Schoenberg 2018). The Mass GOP had no serious candidates for any other statewide offices or U.S. House seats and Senator Elizabeth Warren’s route to re-election was just as smooth as Baker’s. In late June, Governor Baker signed a so-called “grand bargain” avoiding several divisive policy showdowns on the 2018 ballot (Young 2018), but was not able to head off an initiative backed by the Massachusetts Nurses Association to impose nurse staffing ratios in Massachusetts hospitals and never even wasted his time trying to prevent a doomed right wing ballot measure calling for the repeal of a recently

enacted law protecting the rights of transgender people (“Massachusetts Question Three” 2018). This backroom deal with “special interests” wasn’t hidden from the public or the press. On the contrary, the governor and legislative leaders were quite proud of their handiwork and the public showed little sign of disapproval.

The only apparent reflections of the anti-establishment fervor that had swept far left party insurgents like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez past senior establishment Democratic incumbents were the upset victory of now U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley over longtime incumbent Michael Capuano (Levenson 2018) and primary losses by two of the Massachusetts House Speaker’s top lieutenants in the State House of Representatives (Murphy 2018). Compared to most of the rest of the country, however, the 2018 midterm election cycle in Massachusetts was noticeably tame in this regard. Conservative culture warriors in Massachusetts had only the doomed bids of ultra-conservative gadfly Scott Lively for the GOP gubernatorial nod and former Republican State Representative Geoff Diehl’s inept challenge to Elizabeth Warren. These two conservative provocateurs were easily dispatched by Governor Baker and Senator Warren, neither of whom actively campaigned against their challengers.

The real Trumpist/Tea Party political energy last fall was relegated to the support of the ballot measure to repeal the Transgender Public Accommodations Act signed into law by Governor Baker in 2016 (Bernhard 2016). With zero influence in the Corner Office or in the state legislature, social conservatives often try to go around Beacon Hill by putting hot button issues on the statewide ballot, a desperate end around that at least facilitates base conservative turnout for viable GOP candidates. A home grown right wing group calling itself “Keep MA Safe” took the lead on the anti-transgender ballot initiative, airing ads intended to frighten voters into thinking that trans-gender predators will use the law to prey on little girls in public

bathrooms. The measure's demise required only token organized opposition, and received relatively little media attention. Media efforts to link Bay State politics to the national mood largely passed up the pro-Trump/anti-transgender side show focusing instead on the Democratic primaries and Ayanna Pressley's place in the progressive insurgency of 2018.

On the left, progressive activists hoping to advance the ball on Bernie Sander's "revolution" invested considerable energy in a couple of U.S. House Democratic primaries before contributing to the defense of the Transgender Public Accommodations. No effort attracted more progressive activism than the very longshot primary challenge to Congressman Richard E. Neal. Tahirah Amatul-Waduda, a Springfield Attorney and member of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the Massachusetts Council of American-Islamic Relations, tried to make Neal the poster boy for the special interest-captured Democratic Establishment, a task that on paper at least was buoyed by Neal's place at the top of the list of incumbent congressmen receiving corporate PAC money. Amatul-Wadud's campaign followed the Ocasio-Cortez script as much as possible, but never presented a real threat to Neal's re-election. Because Ocasio-Cortez's New York primary victory was in June, while the Bay State's primaries were in September, Congressman Neal had plenty of time to shore up his campaign's myriad advantages and to minimize his challenger's efforts to frame him as an out-of-touch, corporate stooge, a framing that has been used by Republican challengers to no avail during the Neal's long House tenure.

Pressley's Win Reflects Generational Change, not Ideological Insurgency

In 2018, Massachusetts Democratic primary voters signaled that it was time to start updating their office holders with younger (but not inexperienced) professional politicians. The Democratic establishment isn't under attack in Massachusetts. It is being fortified for changing

times as the next generation of skilled political practitioners begins to take its place in high office. The upset victory of Ayanna Pressley over 10-term incumbent Mike Capuano has been shoehorned into the “progressive insurgency” narrative. Some astute observers have also acknowledged the “generational change” component of Pressley’s victory, but failed to clearly distinguish between the two (Weigel 2018).

Comparisons between Ayanna Pressley and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez were ubiquitous during the campaign, but Pressley’s victory was almost entirely about generational change not progressive purity or anti-establishment zeal. Unlike Representative Crowley in New York, Mike Capuano’s progressive bone fides were never in question. Ayanna Pressley is an ambitious career politician, not an anti-establishment insurgent. In my view, her election is an important marker of the relative stability of Massachusetts politics where, unlike in much of the rest of the country, voters remain comfortable with skilled political practitioners who understand both the design and operation of the policy making process while also recognizing that what political scientists call “descriptive representation” is both important and necessary for effective governance. Ayanna Pressley unseated Mike Capuano because she is a skilled professional politician willing and able to leverage the “politics of the moment” without missing a beat in the cultivation of support from establishment figures and groups (Cunningham 2018). While Capuano lined up many of Boston’s power players, including the mayor, Pressley too got big name support, including a strong endorsement from Attorney General Maura Healy. Pressley’s unique position between the establishment and anti-establishment was also reflected in Elizabeth Warren’s publicly stated neutrality in the Capuano-Pressley contest (Smith 2018). Ayanna Pressley didn’t have the burden of going against the Bay State’s highly individualistic and transactional political culture. She had the luxury of credibility with both progressive purists

desperate for an electoral breakthrough and with the state's political establishment and rank-and-file Democratic voters, who nod approvingly when Bay State pols burnish their political resumes on the stump.

The contrast between Pressley and Richie Neal challenger, Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, is quite instructive here. Amatul-Wadud's candidacy was part of the Bernie Sanders inspired ideological "insurgency" in the Democratic Party. While Pressley's candidacy exploited this insurgency, it was not of the insurgency. For Pressley, the energy created by ideological insurgency provided an opportunity for her to petition for early promotion in the Bay State's establishment friendly political system. In order to beat Mike Capuano as decisively as she did, Pressley had to earn the support of establishment friendly voters, which she did by signaling that rather than being an ideological thorn in the side of the state's congressional delegation, she would be a powerful voice capable of commanding wider support for both the party's policy agenda and institutional power on Capitol Hill.

The fate of Amatul-Wadud's campaign is a much better gauge of the health of the Sanders-inspired ideological insurgency in the Massachusetts Democratic Party. The dean of the state's Capitol Hill delegation easily dispatched the Springfield attorney and progressive activist, whose outsider, anti-establishment, anti-transactional politics campaign was able to rely only on the progressive energy of the ideological insurgency in the party.

Primary Election Day in Massachusetts made clear that the "change" that "can't wait" isn't about ideology. It's about effective representation, which increasingly requires accepting the power and influence of identity politics without surrendering the belief that effective representatives need knowledge of and experience in hard ball politics and policy making. In 2018, bringing up the next generation of skilled professional politicians to protect and advance

the state's interests means insuring that our public officials include qualified women and minority politicians whose experiences and perspectives will be an asset to the state in both elections and governance in the years to come.

Massachusetts voters effectively understand the importance of political professionalism in the inescapably transactional enterprise of public policy making. Mike Capuano was plenty progressive enough, but the political marketplace is changing in ways that require the recruitment of talented and committed progressive representatives who not only look like the future, but also have the high-level political experience and skills of the men they are pushing into retirement. As the *Globe's* Shirley Leung (2018) put it, "We've seen the future of Massachusetts politics, and it's female." The women rising to the top in Massachusetts politics are not outsiders or insurgents. They are very talented politicians willing and able to fight for more progressive public policies without indiscriminately attacking and discrediting the institutional and political norms of American politics. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has proven to be a pretty savvy pol in her own right, but she would not have defeated Richie Neal or Mike Capuano if her ticket to Capitol Hill had to be stamped in Massachusetts.

Governor Baker's Re-Election Was Never in Doubt

Charlie Baker's 2018 Democratic opponent suffered a fate that only he and his most passionate supporters thought avoidable. Like every Democrat challenging a sitting GOP governor in Massachusetts over the last several decades, Jay Gonzalez got the cold shoulder from Democrats on Beacon Hill. The lack of enthusiasm of Beacon Hill Democrats for their own party's gubernatorial aspirants is no secret in the state. Press reports and media commentary frequently highlight this seeming oddity. In 2018, one local columnist openly speculated about the possibility of Baker earning the Democratic nomination. In the age of Trump, with American

politics seemingly awash with harsh and unyielding partisanship the 2018 race for Massachusetts governor must have seemed other worldly to out-of-state observers. Much of the national coverage of Baker's political popularity attributed his no contest re-election to his sky high personal and job approval poll numbers, which is fair enough. But this commonsensical take neglects the power of the Democratically-controlled state legislature in Massachusetts to not only circumscribe the governor's policy making power, but also to damage his popularity and re-election prospects if they have the will to do so. Governor Baker isn't getting along with Democrats on Beacon Hill because he's popular; he's popular because he's getting along with Democrats on Beacon Hill.

Long-time close observers of Bay State politics see business as usual when a socially progressive, fiscally moderate, GOP governor who has a good working relationship with Democratic leaders on Beacon Hill cruises to re-election. Beacon Hill Democrats, who have long enjoyed veto-proof majorities in both legislative chambers, are perfectly happy to make deals with moderate Republican governors. It's often much easier to do so than to satisfy ideologically motivated progressives in their own party, a task made more (not less) unpleasant when the governor is a Democrat. Interest-based compromises are easier to broker when ideological purists are marginalized. Divided government in Massachusetts helps individualistic, transactional, establishment politicians avoid the no holds barred drama of moralistic, ideologically charged politics. A key reason why Democrats in the State House rarely face serious Republican opposition is that potential backers of GOP state legislative candidates in the state have little reason to prefer Republican representatives or senators. Social conservatism is bad for business, plain and simple.

Democratic leaders and rank-and-file legislators have always remained appropriately sensitive to the tax and regulatory interests of the state's business community. This leaves most GOP state legislative candidates overly dependent on socio-cultural conservative issues and bakers, making them more trouble than they are worth to pro-business interests in the state. The Bay State's Republican State Committee has long been a repository for conservative operatives and activists, though Governor Baker was able to install a moderate party chair in 2014. In 2018, the small but loud band of Trump-supporting conservatives in the state were able to elect one of their own to the state party committee chairmanship. The new chair, former State Representative Jim Lyons, wasted no time in reminding the state's business community why they shy away from GOP legislative candidates. In his latest Trumpist pronouncement he highlighted his anti-moderate shtick by accusing pro-choice Democrats of being supporters of "infanticide" (Ebbert 2019). Dominated by social and economic policy extremists, the Massachusetts GOP State Committee rallies the party's base for statewide candidates and policy proposals so Republican governors don't have to.

The Battle over Question One: Bedside Nurses versus Hospital Administrators

The very un-revolutionary center of political gravity in Massachusetts is clearly reflected in the way the state's politicians, activists, and organized interests use ballot initiatives and referenda as a tool in their ongoing interest-based relationship management efforts. When Governor Backer blessed the "grand bargain" that averted 2018 ballot measures calling for a \$15 minimum wage, a millionaire's tax, paid family and medical leave, and a state sales tax reduction, he didn't try to hide the fact that a deal had been struck between policy makers, progressive activists, and business groups that would require hard compromises all around, including his acceptance of tax increases after having promised to oppose any tax increases on

the campaign trail. Baker was never in any danger of suffering the fate of George H. W. Bush for having violated his “no new taxes” pledge because just as GOP governors provide political cover for Democrats on Beacon Hill, Democrats frequently return the favor for GOP governors. This type of “back room deal” is a regular feature of the legislative process on Beacon Hill that draws more respect than rage from Bay State voters. In Massachusetts engaging in “transactional” politics is not frowned upon by average voters. Deals struck between contending “special interests” and policy makers are generally understood as positive developments. In 2018, however, one back room deal could not be struck, though the two interest groups in the fight had been parties to a similar deal to avert a similar ballot initiative just four years earlier.

The Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) has spent decades squaring off with the Massachusetts Hospital Association (MHA) on Beacon Hill over labor-management and healthcare policy issues. In the run up to the 2014 elections, legislative leaders, the MNA, and MHA headed off a ballot question by hashing out an agreement to mandate nurse patient limits, or nurse staffing ratios, for nurses working in the state’s intensive care units. In 2018, The Mass Nurses Association sought to use the threat of a ballot initiative to expand the effort to reduce the number of patients the state’s nurses could be assigned at the same time for nurses outside of intensive care units. In 2018, Beacon Hill leaders and the Massachusetts Hospital Association chose to let the dispute go to the voters.

The battle over Question One on the 2018 Massachusetts state ballot shows how despite its reputation for liberal Democratic political hegemony, the Bay State is and has always been very establishment-friendly political terrain where insiders unite across partisan and ideological lines more often than they make common cause with ideologically compatible outsiders. Some have argued that the Democrats’ rock solid control of the state legislature for the last half century

has rendered Massachusetts a “one party” state. Others contend that the complete irrelevance of the state’s Republican Party (GOP governors have relied on campaign and candidate-centric electoral strategies) has made conventional intra-party divisions between “politicos” and policy “purists” in the state’s Democratic Party the only game in town, so to speak, and it’s a game that continues to look a lot like the Harlem Globetrotters versus the Washington Generals. Obviously, this makes comparisons to the national political scene, where partisan polarization and sorting has produced a very volatile and very competitive political environment, deeply problematic.

The debate on Question One, although quite heated and reported on extensively by state and local news media, turned out to be a blowout that decisively ratified the superior political influence of the state’s pro-business and anti-labor interests. Outspent ten to one by the Massachusetts Hospital Association, the Nurse’s Union knew it had an uphill fight on their hands. They were not prepared for the “divide and conquer” strategy on which the MHA spent record-breaking amounts to defeat Question One. The MHA’s strategy was effective, in part, because the state’s political news media framed the contest as a policy debate about a complex healthcare policy, not as a political battle between organized labor and wealthy management interests.

The MHA was able to hijack the media narrative on Question One by discrediting the Nurses Union’s framing of the issue as a battle between overworked nurses and greedy hospital executives. The MHA, with the help of insufficiently critical journalists and a fake nurses union, was able to sell the idea that many “nurses” actually opposed the nurse staffing ratios mandated in Question One. Early on, journalists were essentially tricked into giving this divided nurses narrative serious consideration by the Massachusetts chapter of the American Nurses Association (ANA), the members of which were vocally opposed to Question One. Reporters, many of whom

identified the ANA as a nurses union, took this as clear evidence that the nurses who would be effected were in fact divided on Question One.

What they didn't know was that the American Nurses Association is not a nurses union. I wrote the following about this issue at the time: "Nurses unions are split on the initiative. The Massachusetts Nurses Association has endorsed it. The larger American Nurses Association opposes it" (Thys 2018). This line in a recent news story about Senator Warren's support of nurse staffing ratios and Question One caught my eye. To me, this was an incredibly counter-intuitive claim. Are nurse's unions really "split" on Question One? Is the American Nurses Association "larger" than the Mass Nurses Association? Is it even a union?

The reporter who wrote the story clearly came to share my confusion and, after a conversation with me about it, corrected the record in his online piece to the following: "Nurses disagree on the initiative. The Massachusetts Nurses Association has endorsed it. The American Nurses Association of Massachusetts opposes it." The corrected formulation is certainly accurate, but it doesn't help clear up at least two implicit mischaracterizations. First, unlike the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), neither the American Nurses Association (ANA) nor its Massachusetts chapter (i.e. the nurse's organization that opposes Question One) are unions. They do not represent members in collective bargaining. Also, the ANA-Massachusetts (ANA-M) is not larger than the Massachusetts Nurses Association. It appears to have 1000-2000 members, while the MNA has more than 20,000 dues paying members. Of the nurses that would be impacted directly by Question One, more than 70% are represented by labor unions that have endorsed Question One. So the above claim, despite correction, still leaves readers to assume that the two organizations both represent the nurses impacted by Question One and that the "American" organization is larger than the "Massachusetts" organization.

Am I splitting hairs? Maybe, but given the fact that opponents of Question One are portraying themselves as representing the interests and opinions of laborers in what looks to me like a pretty conventional labor—management disagreement, I think some clarity on the exact role, function, and membership of the American Nurses Association of Massachusetts, which bills itself as “the voice” of Massachusetts nurses, is called for. I think such clarity would go a long way toward understanding just how “split” the state’s nurses are on Question One. Voters deserve to know which nurses are for it and which are against it, and why. It also seems to me that an important detail about the two nurse’s associations making headlines on both sides of this issue is not getting enough press attention, namely that the MNA, the state’s largest nurse’s union, separated itself years ago from the American Nurses Association (which was and is *not* a union) because of the ANA’s perceived anti-labor and pro-management posture.

When you cut through the opponents’ efforts to muddy the water, the “split” among the state’s nurses on this issue looks pretty unsurprising. Unionized bedside nurses appear to be solidly supportive of Question One. Others, such as nurse-managers and nurse educators, and non-unionized bedside nurses may very well be split on the issue, but to date no one has adequately probed that divide. In other words, the nurses most impacted by Question One who are protected by their unions from management coercion are, just as one would expect, supportive of a law that would prevent their employers from assigning them too many patients at one time, while some unclear number or proportion of non-unionized and/or non-bedside nurses are not supportive of Question One.

This simple, logical assessment of the interests and identities of the two sides on Question One is bolstered by simply “following the money!” Only a tiny fraction of the money behind the “No on One” campaign comes from working nurses. The lion’s share comes from the

Massachusetts Hospital Association, individual hospitals, and other pro-management groups.

The organization claiming to be the voice of the state's nurses, the ANA-Massachusetts has put up less than \$500 of the \$10 million plus raised by opponents. By contrast, the state's leading nurse's union, the MNA, has provided more than \$2 million of the \$5 million plus raised by the "Yes on One" committee.

The substantive merits of nurse staffing ratios are well above my pay grade, but the ways and means of ballot initiative campaigns are right up my alley. The opponents of Question One (understandably) do not think average voters would agree with them on the substance of the matter and (also understandably) expect average Massachusetts voters would side with nurses if proponents of Question One succeed in framing the issue as a David versus Goliath battle between overworked bedside nurses and profit hungry hospitals and well-financed trade associations. Therefore, the tactic of confusing voters into thinking that the nurses who know best and who have the power to make their voices heard are opposed or are at least "split" on Question One is a "no brainer" for the hired guns working for the Mass Hospital Association's cause this fall.

Bay State journalists didn't look closely enough at exactly who would benefit and who wouldn't benefit from nurse staffing ratios, instead they tried to sort out the technical merits of the proposal. Many seemed to think that the distinction between a bedside nurse (labor) and a nurse-supervisor (management) was not relevant to a storyline focused on a divide among "nurses" on Question One. It was as if the opponents' line of attack was technically true and therefore unassailable. It certainly is true that the MNA failed to anticipate this rhetorical sleight of hand by the state's hospital administrations and their lobbyists, the MHA and AMA, but given the Nurses Union's severe resource disadvantage it should have been quite clear to the press that

opponents could afford much better political consulting than proponents, and that the union's mistake in no way exempted journalists from correctly identifying the actors and interests on both sides of the issue. The plight of local journalists and outlets in a hyper-competitive media marketplace undoubtedly played a large part in what I see as a serious failure to accurately inform voters about Question One.

At the end of the day, on what was actually a straight forward labor-management dispute in one of the bluest states in the Union, Question One opponents were able to re-frame the issue as a complex and complicated healthcare policy debate about a reform so controversial that even many of its intended beneficiaries couldn't support it.

Did this bitter and expensive ballot fight expose and thereby endanger the unfair advantages of powerful special interests at the Statehouse? Absolutely not. None of the political tactics described above ever made it into mainstream media coverage and the losers at the ballot, the Nurses Union, have not cried foul for fear of weakening further their bargaining position with Beacon Hill policy makers. With the exception of doomed socially conservative measures, the use of ballot initiatives by organized interests in Massachusetts is not based on opposition to "backroom deals" between the state's policy makers and interest groups. It is understood rather as a card played by groups who think they have a good enough hand to win. The MNA won nurse staffing ratios for Intensive Care Unit nurses by threatening a ballot initiative in 2014. In 2018, they overplayed their hand. Despite having lost big, the Massachusetts Nurses Association isn't willing to break up the game.

Has 2019 Brought Signs That the State's Establishment-Friendly Politics Are in Danger?

Newly elected Suffolk County District Attorney Rachel Rollins has definitely ruffled some feathers at the Statehouse. Despite her very clear focus on serious criminal justice reforms

in her successful campaign for office last year, it seems that Governor Baker expected Rollins to “go along to get along.” In keeping with his practice of sending public officials notes when he disagrees with their policy pronouncements, the governor had his Secretary of Public Safety inform D.A. Rollins that her memo listing 15 non-violent offenses that she would not prosecute could create problems for the police.

The D.A.s policy memorandum was perfectly in keeping with her campaign promises and when faced with the governor’s critical feedback Rollins took the opportunity to publicly illustrate her perspective on the state’s establishment-friendly brand of politics. She publicly called the governor out for questioning her prosecutorial policy choices by reminding the public of the fact that the governor’s own son was not prosecuted despite being charged with sexual assault last summer. Rollins’ point was clear: Prosecutorial discretion is not just for cases involving the sons and daughters of the powerful. Using the listed low-level, non-violent charges for leverage over poor and minority suspects will not be allowed on D.A. Rollins’ watch.

Is Rollins the harbinger of a more ideologically aggressive political style in Massachusetts? According to *Boston Globe* (2019) reporting, a “recent county-level study conducted by *PredictWise* in collaboration with *The Atlantic*” found that “... Massachusetts counties appear to be among the most prejudiced against the political ‘other’” in the country. According to the *Globe*, the study’s authors concluded that “the most politically intolerant Americans...tend to be whiter, more highly educated, older, more urban, and more partisan.” The study suggests that the county that elected Rachel Rollins may be the most politically intolerant in the nation. Does Rollins’ election reflect the increasing salience of this hatred in Massachusetts politics? Will her “take no prisoners” style embolden other progressive politicians to aggressively challenge the establishment-friendly status quo? It is too soon to tell for sure, but

given that District Attorney's count on Beacon Hill leaders for their annual budgets, it is likely that Rollins will have to be very selective and careful about expressing her most progressive instincts publicly.

The state's Trump-embolden conservative culture warriors' take-over of the Massachusetts Republican Party's State Committee in 2019 should also be closely monitored for signs that the state's political culture is changing. Though very easily dispatched by Democrats up and down the ballot in 2018, the State's Trump-loving Republicans were able to take the reins of the Mass GOP away from Governor Baker's hand-picked leaders. Because Republican gubernatorial candidates build their own campaign infrastructure and the Mass GOP's efforts to win legislative seats have long been feeble to the point of irrelevance, it's likely that Governor Baker didn't get too upset about the Trumpification of the state committee. However, especially in light of the study mentioned above, the increased intensity of Mass GOP rhetoric under the leadership of Trump's 2016 Massachusetts campaign chairman should not be taken too lightly, Constant media blasts about the state's Democrats supporting "infanticide" and other absurdities should not go unchallenged simply because they are highly unlikely to bear electoral fruit.

Conclusion

Incumbent politicians on Beacon Hill tend to get along as well or better with fellow incumbents of both parties as with unelected fellow party members. Massachusetts politics, despite or maybe because of, its reputation as a one party state, has long been more of an insider versus outsider than a left versus right affair. Nonpartisan local elections in Massachusetts may play a role in the maintenance of incumbent-friendly politics. The state's liberal allowance of ballot initiatives and referenda may also help channel ideological partisanship away from campaigns for office and the conventional legislative process. The question that has to be

persistently asked is: Can Massachusetts' political culture and institutions continue to resist the influence of the deep cultural tribalism that has facilitated partisan sorting and ideological polarization in Washington and in state capitols across America?

I am cautiously optimistic that it can. It isn't really news that cultural, racial, and ethnic prejudices are as strong in Massachusetts as anywhere else. It may be unclear to many that Massachusetts politicians are as economically moderate as they are, but it didn't take fans openly hurling racial epithets at a visiting player in Fenway Park to alert Bay Staters to the fact that we are at least as racist as every other state (Drellich 2017). In Washington, D. C., and in red states, Republicans have been able to exploit these prejudices because powerful economic actors and influential religious leaders either contributed to the effort or calculated that the costs of opposing it would be too high.

In Massachusetts, the most influential economic elites and religious leaders continue to see social conservatism in politics as a non-starter, as fundamentally bad for business and inconsistent with moral/cultural values. Average Massachusetts voters, for their part, are showing no signs of change when it comes to their individualistic perceptions of politics. As long as the state's voters and influential elites want elected officials' to be their agents in openly transactional politics, the Trumpism that has taken over the Republican Party will not be able to transform Massachusetts politics. The potential of confrontational progressive politics to change the character of the state's politics is greater, but far less dangerous because while economic considerations and individualistic political incentives counsel opposition to social conservatism, they counsel accommodation with politically popular progressive social justice reform in the Bay State.

It's early yet, but so far none of the three Massachusetts politicians who have thrown their hats into the 2020 presidential ring (Elizabeth Warren, Seth Moulton, and Bill Weld) are likely to become the darlings of extremists or insurgents of any stripe. All three, in fact, reflect an appreciation for both policy and politics and seem to understand the virtue of not letting either one swallow up the other. The fact that, despite this balanced perspective, all three look to be longshots for their party's nomination may well be the clearest indication that Massachusetts remains at least somewhat insulated from the anti-establishment and anti-politics demagoguery propelling the 2020 aspirations of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders.

References

- Bernhard, Meg. 2016. "Governor Baker Signs Transgender Bill into Law." *The Boston Globe*, 8 July. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/07/08/baker-signs-transgender-bill/xvWZhgReudbWc8XdFBflkM/story.html> (30 October 2019).
- Cunningham, Maurice. 2018. "Capuano and Pressley: Party Purity vs. Heretical Reality." *WGBH*, 9 March. <http://blogs.wgbh.org/masspoliticsprofs/2018/3/9/capuano-and-pressley-policy-pragmatism-and-purity/> (30 October 2019).
- Drellich, Evan. 2017. "Adam Jones Says Fenway Park Fans Used Racist Terms, Threw Peanut Bag at Him." *NBC Sports Boston*, 2 May. <https://www.nbcsports.com/boston/boston-red-sox/adam-jones-says-fenway-park-fans-used-racist-terms-threw-peanut-bag-him> (30 October 2019).
- Ebbert, Stephanie. 2019. "Mass. GOP Accuses Abortion Rights Activists of Supporting 'Infanticide'." *The Boston Globe*, 1 April. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/04/01/mass-gop-accuses-abortion-rights-activists-supporting-infanticide/G14V7HVNoY9rwwcaSVyJ8H/story.html> (30 October 2019).
- Leung, Shirley. 2018. "We've Seen the Future of Massachusetts Politics, and It's Female." *The Boston Globe*, 5 September. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/09/05/seen-future-massachusetts-politics-and-female/zTXPcnUBPhIox0sLUNCryJ/story.html> (30 October 2018).
- Levenson, Michael. 2018. "'Are You Ready to Bring Change to Washington?' Pressley Stuns Capuano on Historic Night." *The Boston Globe*, 4 September. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2018/09/04/capuano-pressley-count->

experience-support-win-primary/BexLGYivjWMnvw4jaYTC1N/story.html (30 October 2019).

“Massachusetts Question Three, Gender Identity Anti-Discrimination Veto Referendum.” 2018. *Ballotpedia*. https://ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts_Question_3,_Gender_Identity_Anti-Discrimination_Veto_Referendum_%282018%29 (30 October 2019).

Matheson, Abbi. 2019. “Could Suffolk County Be the Most ‘Politically Intolerant’ County in the US? One Study Seems to Think So.” *The Boston Globe*, 6 March. https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/03/06/could-suffolk-county-most-politically-intolerant-county-one-study-seems-think/GjCduNDX5RTmZUw22oqbON/story.html?event=event25&fbclid=IwAR0N0Ktq37cjkX_SeM7xOx_vncFk_OMRU1FqK-Pm3cLbd0AqFiWXIajXvQ (30 October 2019).

Murphy, Matt. 2018. “Voters Oust High-Ranking Mass. Reps. Sanches and Rushing.” *WBUR*, 4 September. <https://www.wbur.org/news/2018/09/04/reps-sanchez-rushing-ousted> (30 October 2019).

Schoenberg, Shira. 2018. “Poll: Mass. Gov. Charlie Baker Remains Nation’s Most Popular Governor.” *Mass Live*, 12 April. https://www.masslive.com/politics/2018/04/poll_gov_charlie_baker_remains.html (30 October 2019).

Smith, Jennifer. 2018. “Sen. Warren Neutral—for the Moment—on Capuano v. Pressley.” *Dorchester Reporter*, 6 February. <https://www.dotnews.com/2018/7th-congressional-race-warren-stakes-neutral-ground-between-pressley> (30 October 2019).

Thys, Fred. 2018. "Sen. Warren Endorses Ballot Initiative on Patient-to-Nurse Ratios." *WBUR*, 25 September.

<http://commonhealth384.rssing.com/browser.php?indx=28281405&item=344> (30 October 2019).

Weigel, David. 2018. "'Change Can't Wait': Massachusetts Democrat Michael E. Capuano Ousted in Primary." *Washington Post*, 3 September.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/massachusetts-primaries-voters-to-settle-democratic-party-brawls/2018/09/03/40beb4b2-afaa-11e8-a20b-5f4f84429666_story.html (30 October 2019).

Young, Colin A. 2018. "Baker Signs 'Grand Bargain' Bill to Avert Ballot Initiatives." *WGBH News*, 28 June. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2018/06/28/baker-signs-grand-bargain-bill-to-avert-ballot-initiatives> (30 October 2019).

¹ A previous version of this paper was published as a blog at <http://www.masspoliticsprofs.org/2019/05/14/mass-politics-after-the-2018-elections-still-safe-harbor-for-old-school-pols-politics/>.