Before the 2006 and 2008 Senate elections, many Republican incumbents distanced themselves from their party. This strategy was reflected not just in their rhetoric but also in their votes in the Senate. In 2006, then Senator Mike DeWine (R) voted with the Republican president on fewer than half of the party-line votes during his last year in office, down from 82% the year before. In 2008, DeWine tied his seat to the Democratic challenger, current Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown. In Minnesota, former Senator norm Coleman. Nonetheless, these data could reflect more positive senator's support of primary elections and fundraising (Moran, 2008).

PARTY LOYALTY AND ELECTORAL COMPETITIVENESS IN THE U.S. SENATE

Senators can be more than just members of political parties. In some cases, they choose to distance themselves from party leadership and the party platform. This behavior can be attributed to personal factors such as ambition and ideological beliefs, as well as strategic considerations such as campaign finance and electoral competitiveness. In this section, I will examine the relationship between senators’ voting behavior and electoral competitiveness. Studies have shown that senators facing competitive elections are more likely to vote against their party than those in safe seats (Harris, 1993). However, the extent to which senators’ voting behavior changes in competitive races has not been well-documented.

Senators’ voting behavior is influenced by a variety of factors, including their personal beliefs, the preferences of their constituents, and the competitive nature of their election. In competitive races, senators may be more likely to vote against their party or to support unpopular votes in order to win the election. This phenomenon is known as the “risky strategy.” Studies have shown that senators in competitive races are more likely to take extreme positions, such as supporting unpopular votes or challenging their party’s leadership (Harris, 1993).

In this project, I compared senators’ voting records during their reelection campaigns with those of the same senators in safe seats. I hypothesized that senators facing competitive elections would be less likely to vote with their party than those in safe seats. I have collected data on senators’ voting records for each election from 1996 to 2008. I compared mean party unity scores of the group of senators running for reelection in each election year with those not running for reelection. Senators not running included both senators who have served full terms and those who were not even serving in the Senate during those years. I have computed the percentage of these votes during a given year in which that senator voted with his/her party. In 5 of 7 elections, Republican senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Republicans not running for reelection. In 4 of 7 elections, Democratic senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Democrats not running for reelection. In 6 of 7 elections, the decline among senators in competitive races is greater.

Results

In a test of this hypothesis, senators for re-election should have lower party unity scores on average compared to senators not up for re-election. Method

I have compared mean party unity scores of the group of senators running for reelection in each election year with those not running for reelection. Senators not running included both senators who have served full terms and those who were not even serving in the Senate during those years. I have computed the percentage of these votes during a given year in which that senator voted with his/her party. In 5 of 7 elections, Republican senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Republicans not running for reelection. In 4 of 7 elections, Democratic senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Democrats not running for reelection. In 6 of 7 elections, the decline among senators in competitive races is greater.

Conclusion

Senators up for re-election should have lower party unity scores on average compared to senators not up for re-election. Method

I have compared mean party unity scores of the group of senators running for reelection in each election year with those not running for reelection. Senators not running included both senators who have served full terms and those who were not even serving in the Senate during those years. I have computed the percentage of these votes during a given year in which that senator voted with his/her party. In 5 of 7 elections, Republican senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Republicans not running for reelection. In 4 of 7 elections, Democratic senators running for reelection had lower party unity scores on average than Democrats not running for reelection. In 6 of 7 elections, the decline among senators in competitive races is greater.

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