

The Increasingly United States

*How and Why American Political
Behavior Nationalized*

DANIEL J. HOPKINS

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Introduction

The Increasingly United States

Signed into law in 2010, the sweeping health care reform known as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, remained a major issue for candidates years later. And not simply for candidates running for the US House or Senate, where the legislation was drafted and where the law's repeal was undertaken in 2017. The health care law played a role even in races as removed from national politics as a 2014 retention election for the Tennessee State Supreme Court. There, three incumbent justices found themselves targeted by TV advertisements denouncing them because "they advanced Obamacare in Tennessee." The justices had not actually heard any cases related to the federal law. But they had appointed the state's attorney general, and he later chose not to join an anti-Obamacare lawsuit, providing ammunition to their opponents (Fuller 2014; Fox17 2014).

On their own, low-profile contests like a state supreme court retention election rarely attract much voter interest, so tying opponents to divisive national issues is a common campaign tactic. It is also one employed by both sides of contemporary US politics. In a 2013 special election to the Washington, DC, Council, one candidate found himself fending off attacks over his support of GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney (Craig 2013). One of his opponents even bothered to post a negative website headlined with a simple message: "Patrick Mara is a Republican." Mara responded by arguing that national allegiances are not relevant in a local race, and his campaign mailers urged voters to "vote your conscience, not your party." Despite high-profile endorsements, including the *Washington Post's* and the Sierra Club's, he failed to win the at-large seat in an overwhelmingly Democratic city.

From the candidates' vantage point, the rationale behind such attacks seems obvious. National politics is rife with people and issues that are evocative to voters. To say "Obamacare," "Mitt Romney," or "Donald Trump" is to cue a set of meaningful associations with the national parties, the social groups that support them, and the positions that they take. Contemporary state and local politics are presumed to be devoid of such symbols, meaning that national politics can serve as a ready benchmark against which to evaluate otherwise unknown state and local candidates.

It is not only candidates and campaign staffers who assume that today's electorate is nationalized. The discipline of political science has tracked American citizens' growing fixation with Washington, DC. In recent decades, scholarship on American political behavior has focused overwhelmingly on national politics, with much more limited research at the state and local levels. Berry and Howell (2007) report that fully 94 percent of articles on US elections in five leading political science journals between 1980 and 2000 focused on elections for federal offices (845). To ignore state and local politics is a costly omission, as it means ignoring the politics that elect the vast majority of officials in the United States as well as the policy areas where states and localities hold sway. States and localities account for forty-eight cents of every dollar of total government spending in the United States (Congressional Budget Office 2014; US Census Bureau 2016). They also incarcerate 87 percent of all prisoners nationwide (Carson 2015). But they are far from receiving corresponding levels of attention from political scientists.

Even those studies that do analyze states and localities frequently conceive of them as independent polities, more like ancient Athens than Athens, Georgia. It is also a mistake to treat state and local politics as independent and autonomous when many of the same voters, candidates, parties, and interest groups are politically active across multiple levels of the federal system simultaneously. Surely the fact that state and local electorates are drawn from the same population as the national electorate is politically consequential, as is the fact that they are frequently choosing between the same two political parties at different levels of government. The goal of this book is to stop taking today's highly nationalized political behavior for granted and instead make it a puzzle to be documented and explained.

In other realms of American life, nationalization is so apparent as to be indisputable. Consider retail. The United States has over thirty-five thousand cities and towns, and they vary tremendously in their size, geography,

and demographics. Yet, over the twentieth century, their storefronts came to look increasingly similar, as large chains like Walmart, Subway, and CVS replaced smaller, locally owned stores throughout the country (Rae 2003). In earlier generations, many purchases required local knowledge, since stores and their products varied from place to place. Today's chains offer the same products nationwide, often in the same parts of similarly designed stores. In important respects, the nationalization of American political behavior parallels the nationalization of retail. Just as an Egg McMuffin is the same in every McDonald's, America's two major political parties are increasingly perceived to offer the same choices throughout the country.

To understand today's nationalization, we need new concepts as well as new evidence, and this book aims to provide both. Conceptually, it distinguishes between two different ways in which political behavior can be nationalized. In the first, vote choices are nationalized when voters use the same criteria to choose candidates across the federal system. If voters' choices in state and local races echo those in national races, their voting is nationalized in this respect. On the second dimension, political behavior is nationalized when voters are engaged with and knowledgeable about national politics to the exclusion of state or local politics. This distinction proves important, as the two elements need not move in tandem. A Tennessee Supreme Court retention election, for instance, could in theory see high levels of engagement as the vote breaks down along national party lines, making it nationalized along one dimension but not the other.

To measure the ebbs and flows of nationalization's two dimensions, this book presents a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative evidence drawn from all fifty states and the District of Columbia. It employs many surveys, some conducted decades ago for other purposes and others conducted in recent years exclusively for this book. To demonstrate how key factors interrelate, this book presents a series of survey experiments as well. It also considers varied election returns from gubernatorial and mayoral races, some dating back nearly a century.

Along the way, this book discusses examples as varied as concern about climate change among those living near the coasts, statements of American identity in nineteenth-century books, the shifting emphases of state party platforms, the expansion of local television news in the 1960s, and the 2016 election of Donald Trump. This book draws more heavily on state-level evidence than on local evidence, both because it is more readily available and because of localities' subordinate legal status in American federalism. Still, as the example of DC Council candidate Patrick Mara makes clear,

nationalization has implications at the local level, several of which are detailed in the paragraphs and chapters that follow.

Although the streams of evidence are many, the results are consistent. American political behavior has become substantially more nationalized along both its dimensions. Since the 1970s, gubernatorial voting and presidential voting have become increasingly indistinguishable. What is more, Americans' engagement with state and local politics has declined sharply, a trend that has unfolded more consistently over decades.

Why Nationalization Matters

Both of these nationalizing trends have profound implications for how voters are represented in contemporary American politics. In part, that is because today's nationalization stands in sharp contrast to some of the core assumptions made by the framers of the US Constitution. In their view, citizens' state-level loyalties were expected to be far stronger than those to the newborn nation (Levy 2006, 2007). In "Federalist 46," Madison gives voice to this belief, explaining that "many considerations . . . seem to place it beyond doubt that the first and most natural attachment of the people will be to the governments of their respective States" (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1788, 294). Hamilton provides a similar view in "Federalist 25," noting that "in any contest between the federal head and one of its members the people will be most apt to unite with their local government" (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1788, 163–64). The states had key advantages over the federal government in winning citizens' loyalties, as their purview included most of the issues that were familiar, local, and important to citizens' daily lives (Levy 2007). In fact, so strong were state-level loyalties that Hendrickson (2003) explains the US Constitution as a peace pact that averted conflict between separate countries.

At the time the US Constitution was written, the assumption that citizens' primary loyalties would lie with the more proximate state governments was uncontroversial. Although today's America spans a far greater area than did the America of 1787, the distances covered by the original thirteen states represented a more formidable barrier to imagining a singular, unified nation. In the late eighteenth century, the country's primary transportation system was horse, oxen, and wagon, and a traveler could expect to go no more than ten miles per day most of the year (Nettles 1962, 307). In fact, transportation in the new nation was sufficiently poor

that the Constitutional Convention was delayed for two weeks past its May 14 start to allow delegates time to brave mud-choked roads (Padula 2002, 44). Without broadcast media sources like radio or television, information traveled no faster than the horses and boats that carried it. Living before the Erie Canal, before transcontinental railroads or interstate highways, the framers held the reasonable expectation that political loyalties would wane over great distances.

The framers' assumptions about citizens' state-level loyalties are not merely of historical interest. Americans today have inherited the political institutions the framers crafted, institutions whose operation hinges partly on whether those foundational assumptions hold true today. Consider one of the innovations of the US Constitution, a federal system that divides sovereignty between the central and state governments (LaCroix 2010). Stable federal systems are necessarily the product of a careful balancing act in which neither the centrifugal forces of state-level disagreement nor the centralizing forces of pressing national problems dominate for long (Riker 1964; Derthick 2004; Greve 2012; Kollman 2013). In one analysis of federalism, Levy (2007) considers the problem of protecting subnational authority from centralization and ultimately concludes that federalism relies on strong emotional attachments between citizens and the subnational governments. In his words, the argument in the *Federalist Papers* "depends on the citizenry's natural loyalty and attachment to their states as against the federal center. That is, a prediction about the affective relationship citizens will have to states is built into the account of what will make the constitutional structure work" (464). For the framers, citizens' state-level loyalties were a critical counterweight to the centralizing tendencies inherent in a federal system. Understanding contemporary Americans' engagement with state-level politics will thus help us understand whether that counterweight continues to work as the framers envisioned (see also Pettys 2003; Young 2015).

The extent to which political behavior is local or national in orientation also has the potential to influence political accountability by shaping the incentives that state and local officials face. Think about politics from a governor's vantage point. If voters are well informed about state politics and liable to vote differently in state and national elections, the threat of a general-election challenge is a real one. In that scenario, the governor has a significant incentive to deliver what voters—or at least a pivotal segment of them—want. But if voters are likely to back the same party as in presidential elections irrespective of the governor's platform or

performance, the governor's incentives change. When political behavior is nationalized, governors may well come to see their ambitions as tethered more closely to their status in the national party than their ability to cater to the state's median voter. If so, their actions in office might well reflect the wishes of the people most likely to advance their careers, whether they are activists, donors, or fellow partisans from other states.

In a similar vein, as political behavior becomes more nationalized, national issues may come to dominate state and even local political debates. For voters, that is not necessarily a bad thing—if they previously knew little about state and local politicians, knowing their stance on national issues provides a meaningful heuristic. Presumably, voters in Tennessee's 2014 Supreme Court elections had more actionable information after seeing ads linking some incumbents to health care reform. Nonetheless, those national issues have the potential to crowd out more local concerns. A national emphasis may also influence the political agenda, shifting voters' attention from tangible local issues to more symbolic national ones.

Even at the federal level, nationalization has consequences for political representation. Both houses of the US Congress elect their members through geographically defined districts. Since the earliest days of the United States, voters' places of residence have determined the constituencies in which they can vote. There are several reasons that a political system might opt for geographically based districts, and the notion that neighbors are likely to share political interests is just one of them (Rehfeld 2005). Still, in a political system that represents people based on where they live, nationalization can undercut each district's claim to have its own unique communities of interest.

That, in turn, has implications for governance and polarization. In recent years, scholars and pundits alike have become alarmed by the rise of political polarization among federal politicians and its impacts in a system that divides powers between the branches of the federal government (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). The divergence in policy preferences between congressional Democrats and Republicans has grown dramatically since the 1970s. Between 2011 and 2017, the collision between a White House controlled by Democrats and a House of Representatives controlled by Republicans led to a period of legislative gridlock punctuated by occasional high-stakes negotiations (Lee 2016; Mann and Ornstein 2016). And while this polarization and legislative gridlock have many causes (Barber and McCarty 2013), nationalized political behavior is an underappreciated one. When voters are national

in orientation, legislators have little incentive to bargain for benefits targeted to their constituents. Rather than asking, “How will this particular bill affect my district?” legislators in a nationalized polity come to ask, “Is my party for or against this bill?” That makes coalition building more difficult, as legislators all evaluate proposed legislation through the same partisan lens.

In short, nationalized political behavior has widespread implications for political representation. Nationalization is likely to influence everything from how campaigns are run to who wins elections and how politicians are held accountable for their actions in office. Its impacts stretch beyond the ballot box to the halls of our governments as well. Nationalized political behavior has the potential to foster elite-level political polarization and to create a disconnect between the issues voters face in their daily lives and those that dominate political debates. Our federalist division of authority and heavy use of geographic districting allow for the expression of varied local interests and issues. But if state and local politics focus on the same issues as national politics, contemporary America may not be taking full advantage of its political institutions.

How Can Politics Be Nationalized If Communities Differ?

A quick glance at recent maps of election outcomes seems to argue against nationalization, with states and towns differing dramatically in their support for the two major parties. Those differences appear to have hardened in recent years as more and more states and localities grow reliably Republican or Democratic (Hopkins 2017). In 2016, for instance, Hillary Clinton won 87 percent of the votes for president in New York’s Manhattan, while Donald Trump won 80 percent of the vote in Randall County in the Texas Panhandle. The very fact that calling Patrick Mara a Republican constituted an attack in Washington, DC, is evidence that political preferences vary greatly in different parts of the country. So we need to ask: Do such pervasive geographic differences refute the claim that contemporary US politics is nationally oriented?

No, in a word, although such objections do illustrate the value of defining nationalization precisely. One feature of nationalized political behavior is that it is oriented toward the national government and its divisions, to the near exclusion of the state or local levels. Still, how people engage in national politics is known to be related to various individual-level

factors, from their social class (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Gelman et al. 2008) and racial and ethnic backgrounds (Dawson 1994; Abrajano and Alvarez 2010) to their religious backgrounds and engagement (Kellstedt et al. 1996), age cohorts (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996), and other characteristics. People with different individual-level characteristics tend to live in different places, so a nationally oriented politics is fully compatible with significant differences in partisanship or political behavior across space. Even in a nationalized political system, places can and do differ markedly. But those differences are primarily due to *compositional differences* in who lives where rather than the *contextual effects* of living in specific places. When political attitudes and behavior are nationalized, similar people subject to similar information and mobilization efforts should respond in similar ways. The core issues that animate politics will be similar, too.

To contend that American political behavior is nationalizing is not to argue for the death of distance or the irrelevance of geography. To the contrary, this book is motivated precisely by the fact that geography remains a powerful determinant of so many aspects of Americans' social and economic lives. The quality of schools, the danger of crime, the availability of jobs, the presence of pollution—all of these concerns affect some neighborhoods, municipalities, and regions far more than others (e.g., Sampson 2012; Chetty and Hendren 2015; Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2015). Americans living on one block can be served by dramatically different schools—or subject to dramatically different tax rates or crime threats—than their neighbors on adjoining blocks. So if today's political behavior is nationalized, it is also likely to be divorced from many of the local issues that Americans confront in our daily lives. Political nationalization is important not because it heralds the end of geography but because it complicates political representation on the many issues where geography continues to matter greatly in Americans' day-to-day lives.

Engines of Nationalization

What is behind today's nationalization of both vote choice and political engagement? Contemporary social science excels at examining the effects of a single, well-defined cause, such as the introduction of television. But our tools for identifying the varied causes of a single trend are

more limited, however important that trend might be. This constraint is especially pronounced when our interest is historical and our capacity to conduct experiments or ask new survey questions is limited. Still, while this book cannot quantify the relative importance of all the would-be explanations precisely, its second half does devote sustained attention to the potential causes of contemporary nationalization. It identifies separate pathways that explain the two facets of nationalization. One pathway highlights the role of the political parties, while the second emphasizes the interplay of Americans' identities and our changing media markets. At the same time, this book downplays other would-be causes, such as changes in residential mobility.

I turn first to nationalization's first dimension and to the question of why elections for state offices increasingly feel like reruns of the presidential election. As this book contends, the increasing alignment of national and state-level voting is to an important extent the product of a party and interest-group constellation that is funded nationally and that increasingly offers voters similar choices in all parts of the country. Political scientists have long argued that party cues allow voters to connect their own policy preferences with the choices on the ballot in a straightforward way (Campbell et al. 1960; Fiorina 1981; Popkin 1994). Here, I add the important caveat that those party cues are national ones. Contemporary state parties do not vary markedly in the platforms they offer voters, and even those differences that do exist do not appear to influence voters' perceptions or their votes. Today, party labels convey very similar meanings in jurisdictions across the country. In short, one proximate cause of nationalized vote choices is the increasingly similar options the parties offer across the nation (see also Hopkins and Schickler 2016).

What, then, explains why parties nationalize? Although that question is more peripheral to this project, prior research provides some potential answers. That research has highlighted three factors: the centralization of governmental authority (Chhibber and Kollman 2004), the decline of Democratic dominance in the South (Mickey 2015), and the increasing homogeneity of the American economy. In analyzing the United States, I do not find evidence of a straightforward link between any of these factors and nationalized vote choices—the trend lines simply don't align. For example, state and national vote choices became decoupled in the 1960s, at the very time that the flood of Great Society legislation was increasing the federal role in many policy areas traditionally handled by states and

localities. Still, the evidence presented here is quite compatible with claims of indirect connections, as each of these factors is likely to have influenced voters over time by shaping the parties' policy goals and platforms. This connection from the centralization of state authority, the decline of the one-party South, and economic convergence to nationalizing party brands and then ultimately to vote choices constitutes the first explanatory pathway emphasized here.

When explaining nationalization's second facet—the decline in state and local political engagement—our explanation shifts to the transformation of the US media market. Older media outlets tend to have audiences that are bounded geographically. Given the limits inherent in distributing a print newspaper, someone waking up in Oklahoma City in 1930 could not expect to read that day's *Los Angeles Times*. Those geographic limitations provided economic incentives for some media outlets to foreground state and local politics. In recent decades, as audiences shift away from print newspapers and local television news, they are also shifting away from the outlets most likely to provide extensive state and local coverage. These changes are especially likely to affect Americans' knowledge about and engagement with state and local politics, which is the second element of nationalization.

Yet today's strongly national orientation among voters is not simply a product of our changing media markets. Canada and the United Kingdom have seen similar shifts in their media markets without a concurrent nationalization of their political behavior, as the September 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and the continued success of the Parti Québécois in Quebec, Canada, vividly illustrate. In both places, there are powerful political movements seeking to break up the country. One critical difference between the United States and those countries relates to the structure of national and subnational identity.

In political science as well as psychology, a growing body of scholarship pays attention to the role of identities in shaping individuals' interactions with their social worlds. People think about themselves as members of varying social groups, and those attachments prove critical in explaining how they handle new information, the attitudes they adopt, and the actions they take (Zaller 1992; Taber and Lodge 2006; Achen and Bartels 2016). Two people might be categorized as identical based on demographic categories, for instance, and yet may differ dramatically in what they understand those categories to mean for their lives (Theiss-Morse 2009; Wong 2010; Schildkraut 2011, 2014). National and ethnic identities

are among the more enduring (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991), even as their political import can shift quite suddenly. Yet while Americans' regions, states, and communities of residence remain a component of their self-image, they are not very strong sources of identity, especially when compared with identities based on family roles, religion, or occupation. And more importantly, place-based identities are not very politicized in today's United States. One doesn't have to espouse particular political views to be a proud Rhode Islander or South Dakotan.

The strength of contemporary American identity, especially as compared to state- or local-level attachments, anchors the second explanation outlined in this book. Absent strong or politically charged attachments to their states and localities, Americans are not chronically engaged by subnational politics. If information about state and local politics is readily available, they will pick it up (see also Prior 2007). If state or local politics generate some unusual threat, residents may well mobilize in response (Dahl 1961; Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012). But in a transforming media market characterized by growing consumer choice, the structure of Americans' identities means that they are unlikely to go out of their way to seek out information about state or local politics. The interplay of Americans' identities and changes in media markets explains the declining engagement with state and local politics.

Certainly, this account of the causes of contemporary nationalization is not exhaustive. For one thing, the pathways identified here are conceived of as two separate tracks, but it is possible for them to intersect. As the media environment shifts, for example, so too does the capacity of the subnational parties to distinguish themselves. And while this book emphasizes how identities interact with the changing media environment to shape political information, it is also possible that in the long run, the media environment shapes identities.¹ To claim that three factors—the political parties, Americans' identities, and the changing media market—played critical, proximate roles in nationalizing our politics is not to say that they were the only factors at work.

Chapter Outline

This book is divided into two sections. The first seeks to define and describe trends in nationalization while the second identifies two causal pathways that partly explain it.

Trends in Nationalization

Above, we saw that nationalized political behavior is likely to have varied impacts on American politics. Chapter 2 (“Meanings of Nationalization, Past and Present”) expands that discussion by examining what nationalized voting behavior means for political representation. This project is not the first to take up questions of nationalization, so chapter 2 then details what we already know before fixing the term’s meaning for the remainder of the book. Occasional studies have considered political nationalization within the United States, but their focus has been principally on shifts in government, parties, or political institutions (Lunch 1987; Gimpel 1996; Paddock 2005; Klinghard 2010) and not on voter behavior. That said, a separate body of scholarship has uncovered a variety of trends that are clues of nationalization in American voters’ political behavior, from the declining incumbency advantage to the changing base of party activists. To date, though, we have not understood those observations within a single framework. We have seen them as isolated symptoms, not as evidence of a common diagnosis. After reviewing existing evidence on nationalization, we are then in a position to define its two elements.

Chapter 3 (“The Nationalization of American Elections, 1928–2016”) presents empirical evidence on the first aspect of nationalization, the alignment of national and subnational divisions. Specifically, it measures the level of nationalization in American voting behavior and partisanship over time, and it does so using a combination of county-level election returns and individual-level survey data. Writing in 1967, political scientist Donald Stokes saw the nationalization of American voting behavior as a steady trend, one he linked to ongoing changes in communications technology. Yet the chapter’s varied analyses provide a more nuanced and up-to-date picture. The analyses focus chiefly on gubernatorial elections, as governors are at once sufficiently visible and influential that it is plausible their elections could generate distinctive geographic patterns of political support.

The evidence shows that nationalization had been rising in the 1930s and 1940s, but it peaked and then declined in the 1960s and 1970s, precisely at the time Stokes was writing. Since around 1980, the nationalizing trend in gubernatorial elections has resumed and accelerated, a conclusion reinforced by analyses of individual-level survey data from exit polls and the American National Election Studies. In fact, by 2014, the relationship between presidential and gubernatorial county-level voting was almost perfect, meaning that returns in governors’ races could be predicted quite

accurately without knowing any state-specific information. As compared to the past, the present era is undeniably a nationalized one. But the nationalization of political divisions is not a secular trend, increasing inexorably as revolutions in communication and transportation reduce the connection between distance and information. Instead, it waxes and wanes in ways indicative of a more complex causal story. These patterns are further reinforced through analyses of partisan identification, presidential home-state advantages, and 2016 presidential election returns. In its conclusion, this chapter also outlines why nationalized vote choices have tended to advantage Republicans over Democrats in recent years.

In chapter 4 (“Staying Home When It’s Close to Home”), I consider the second element of nationalized political behavior, citizen engagement across the levels of the federal system. The chapter also charts how that engagement has varied over time. There are reasons to think—as the framers of the Constitution did—that local and state governments would win the loyalties of the citizens over the more remote federal government. Local politics frequently means face-to-face politics, and it addresses tangible issues that are likely to have a direct bearing on voters’ lives (Fischel 2001; Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012). But, as this chapter shows, Americans today are primarily engaged with national and above all presidential politics. The evidence is extensive: contemporary Americans’ disproportionate engagement with federal politics is evident in their knowledge, descriptions of politicians, web searches, campaign contributions, and turnout decisions.

There are ongoing debates about whether Americans know enough to fulfill their democratic responsibilities in national elections. But however one assesses knowledge about national politics, knowledge about state and local politics is markedly lower. Chapter 4 also brings to light what I term the “presidential paradox.” At the same time that voters express their disproportionate interest in the federal government, they acknowledge that mayors and governors can have more influence on their day-to-day lives. This effect is especially pronounced when asking about the president as a person, suggesting that the overwhelming media attention on the US presidency might be one factor behind the disproportionate interest in national politics. The fact that the president is a single individual may also help personalize politics and so attract citizens’ interest.

The conception of nationalization advanced in this book focuses partly on the alignment between national and subnational divisions in voting behavior. To conclude that today’s electorate is nationalized, we thus need to consider the dogs that didn’t bark—the many state and local issues that

could have given rise to indigenous political conflict in a less nationalized system. Precisely because such issues are typically of interest in only some parts of the country, they are not frequently included in nationally representative surveys. Indeed, prior studies of the effects of local context have focused overwhelmingly on just a handful of factors, such as the ethnic and racial diversity of the community or the state of the local economy.

Chapter 5 (“Local Contexts in a Nationalized Age”) takes up the task of studying a variety of political issues with disparate spatial impacts, issues that have the potential to give rise to distinctive, localized political divisions. The issues it considers vary markedly, from nuclear power and economic inequality to immigration, defense spending, and federal lands. Yet the analyses uncover a fact common to many of them: once we account for political partisanship, Americans’ political attitudes are not strongly correlated with attributes of their communities. Americans living near federal lands are no more opposed to the federal government than people living elsewhere, just as Americans who live on an ocean coast are only imperceptibly more concerned about climate change. In the contemporary United States, once we know basic demographic facts about an individual, knowing her place of residence adds little to our understanding of a variety of political attitudes. The consistency of that pattern reflects the imprint of a nationalized political system, one in which citizens react not to local interests but to national symbols.

To be sure, there are some local conditions that show meaningful and consistent associations with political attitudes, just as the extensive research on local contextual effects would lead us to expect. But ironically, the issues that do show disparate spatial patterns prove to be those salient in national politics, such as immigration, crime, or the economy. Far from being an alternative grounds of political division, local issues appear to become politically meaningful precisely when citizens can use national debates to understand and politicize them. All politics is decidedly not local.

Explanations of Nationalization

The book’s sixth chapter (“Explaining Nationalization”) inaugurates its second section focusing on the potential causes of nationalization. This chapter briefly summarizes a range of potential explanations of nationalization, from economic transformations and geographic mobility to changes in US media markets or political parties. The chapter then outlines the two causal pathways that are our focus here. The first emphasizes how shifting

party platforms and brands lead to highly nationalized voting patterns, possibly as a long-term consequence of changes in state authority. The second details how Americans' identities and the changing media environment produce low knowledge of and engagement with state and local politics.

In chapter 7 ("*E Pluribus Duo*"), I take up the political parties, the first proximate cause emphasized here. Are they heterogeneous national coalitions, with state parties enjoying considerable leeway to tune their platforms and strategies to the state context? Or are they unified and nationalized parties in which the parties differ little from state to state? Both depictions are ideal types, but this chapter uses various data sources to demonstrate that the state parties themselves, and especially as voters perceive them, have increasingly come to mirror their national counterparts. In particular, it employs automated analyses of state party platforms to extend our view back to World War I. As the evidence makes clear, state party platforms have less state-specific content over time.

Parties' positions and voters' perceptions of those positions need not be the same (Lenz 2013), so chapter 7 then shifts from actual records of party positions to voters' perceptions of the parties. Analyzing a 2014 GfK survey conducted on a population-based sample, I show that the contemporary state parties are perceived with a bit less clarity than their national counterparts—but in almost identical terms. The chapter demonstrates that very few voters have different partisan identifications at different levels of government, further undermining the capacity of state or local politics to sustain divisions that are not animated nationally. It also shows that even those differences in actual state party positioning that scholars do detect are not reflected in gubernatorial voting: by 2006, there was essentially no advantage to gubernatorial candidates when their state party had taken more moderate positions in the outgoing legislative session.

Yet shifts within the parties are not as well matched to explain the second face of nationalization, Americans' declining engagement in state and local politics relative to national politics. For that, I turn to two factors operating in tandem: the structure of Americans' loyalties and the changing ways in which they get political information.

How federalism operates hinges on citizens' relative connections to the different levels of government and thus on their identities (Riker 1964; Levy 2006, 2007; Kollman 2013; Young 2015). Yet assessments of contemporary Americans' geographic identities and their connections to the different levels of government have been few and far between (but see Wong 2010; Young 2015). In chapter 8 ("*Sweet Home America*"), I consider the role of

place-based identities in American politics. Using a database of books, I show that statements of state-level identity have declined relative to statements of American identity since the 1960s. Even today, many Americans feel attached to their place of residence. Yet they report far stronger connections to their family and to America as a whole, making those identities more fertile ground for political mobilization. What's more, among their various spatially defined communities, Americans' strongest connections are to their neighborhoods and not to more explicitly political units, such as their towns, cities, or states. The content of these place-based identities is not usually political, a fact that further undermines state and local identities as a potential bedrock for durable political engagement.

Contemporary Americans' identities are unlikely to motivate them to seek out information about state and local politics when that information isn't readily available. That observation makes the structure of the information environment critical. Accordingly, I then turn to the changing media market in chapter 9 ("The Declining Audience for State and Local News and Its Impacts"). Over American history, the primary sources of political information have shifted repeatedly, as pamphlets, newspapers, and radio have been joined and in some instances replaced by broadcast television, cable television, and the Internet. Researchers have devoted considerable attention to how such changes in the media market might influence the partisan and ideological slant of the news available to Americans. But these changes are also likely to have profound influences on the available information about state and local government, as the shift in media technologies since 1900 has generally been away from media outlets with audiences that are bounded in space. Given limits in their distribution and dissemination, print newspapers have significant incentives to specialize in the news of a given spatially defined community. Local television stations do as well, although the strength of the incentive depends on the fit between their broadcast area and local political jurisdictions. For Internet and cable news outlets, that is far less true. Yet despite the likely impact of the shifting media environment on the balance of information about different levels of the federal system, the topic has received little scholarly attention.

Existing technologies surely influence the information available to citizens, but the relationship between a medium of mass communication and its content is by no means deterministic. Media outlets' relative attention to the different levels of government needs to be analyzed, not assumed. Accordingly, chapter 8's empirical analysis begins by using automated content analyses to identify the levels of attention to state and local politics since 1920. For two big-city newspaper outlets—the *Chicago Tribune*

and the *Los Angeles Times*—it shows that state politics has long been an overlooked topic, even in the more spatially oriented media environment of years past. For the period since the 1980s, digital archives provide access to far more media content, enabling the analysis of fifty-one of the largest American newspapers. Those analyses reinforce the core conclusion that state-level politics receives markedly less attention than local politics, which itself is neglected relative to national politics. There is some noteworthy spatial variation, with newspapers in state capitals providing more state-level coverage than their counterparts elsewhere. Somewhat unexpectedly, analyses of select local television transcripts in the post-2006 period indicate that even in recent years, local television news has given significant attention to state politics and government.

Chapter 9 also considers what these trends have meant for audiences. While there has not been a notable decline in the relative coverage of state and local politics *within* a given medium of communication, there have been critical shifts in the relative sizes of audiences *across* the different types of media since around 1990, with newspaper readership and local television viewership declining as the audiences for Internet-based news and cable television have grown. Put differently, spatially bounded media sources are losing their audiences, and so citizens are likely to be losing information about state and local politics.

After documenting these facts, chapter 9 examines their political implications. Using survey data, it shows that people's knowledge about state politics is strongly associated with their sources of news. People whose primary news sources have significant state and local content are more likely to know their governor or to name in-state representatives and US senators than other citizens. The chapter then substantiates the claim that these changes in the media environment are a *cause* of declining state and local political engagement. To do so, it uses the leverage afforded by the varied relationships between state capitals and TV's designated market areas (DMAs). In the 1960s and 1970s, living in a state capital DMA increased gubernatorial turnout, while living in a DMA dominated by another state had the opposite effect. Such patterns are expected: local television news became a major source of political information in the 1960s (Prior 2006, 2007). Yet these effects are much more muted after around 1990, as local TV news lost viewers to cable news and then the Internet. Where people live—and the amount of information local television provides about state politics as a result—is no longer as influential on their participation in gubernatorial elections as it was thirty years ago. These case studies make the underlying causal claim credible: as news audiences move to

cable television and the Internet, the effects of their access to television coverage about state politics have declined. In theory, the Internet has the potential to vastly increase the local news available to Americans—local news from any part of the country is but a few computer keystrokes away. In actuality, that potential goes largely unused, as new media outlets serve to concentrate attention on a small number of national news sources (Hindman 2009).

The Consequences of Nationalization

The nationalization of American retail is inscribed on our landscape, visible to any passerby. The nationalization of our politics is at once less easily observed and yet potentially more consequential. In fact, the breadth of nationalization's impacts is part of what makes the topic so important, as it touches on many of the core questions of contemporary politics and political science. If voters' political information and behaviors are primarily oriented toward national politics, and if political agendas are set nationally, those facts have implications for elections and accountability in state and local politics. Similarly, enquiring about citizens' relationship to particular subnational spaces and polities clearly speaks to questions about representation and the role of spatially defined legislative districts. Studying the changing role of space in American political behavior might also illuminate aspects of voter decision making, party strategy, party organization, and campaign finance. These research questions are related to still more general questions posed by social theorists, such as the impact of the size of the political community (e.g., Dahl and Tufte 1973), changing communications technology, the transforming economy, or geographic mobility on political behaviors and identities.

On a more prosaic note, nationalization has implications for key features of contemporary US politics. It might explain why in 2014, during a period of relatively even and fiercely contested partisan competition nationally, thirty-six of the fifty states had unified party control of their statehouses, a fraction higher than it had been in six decades (Nagourney 2014). Certainly, nationalization is a critical part of the explanation for contemporary Republican dominance in many statehouses and the US House of Representatives: even among parties with roughly equal levels of strength nationally, it advantages parties with majority support in many jurisdictions over those whose support is more spatially concentrated (Chen and Rodden 2013; Jacobson 2015; Abramowitz and Webster 2016). Similar factors

help explain how Donald Trump won the presidency in November 2016 while losing the popular vote by more than 2 percentage points.

In nationalized eras, it is also plausible that the political agenda will be set nationally and will be outside the control of state or local actors. The risk, then, is of a mismatch between the political system's relentless focus on national issues and the important decisions made at the state and local levels. It was that mismatch that Republican Patrick Mara pointed to when arguing for his election to the DC Council.

Among the many potential consequences of nationalized political behavior, this book's conclusion highlights two. First, nationalized political behavior has important implications for representation and accountability in state and local politics. States and localities make critical decisions across a broad array of policy areas, ranging from what is taught in their schools and how land can be developed to who can marry and what constitutes a crime. Yet in a nationalized polity, many votes cast for governors, state legislators, and even sometimes mayors are cast with an eye toward the candidates' alignment in national politics (see also Rogers 2016, 2017). Such voting patterns have the potential to dampen the electoral connection between voters and officials, as state and local officials may come to believe they are insulated from the threat of losing at the ballot box.

Second, the conclusion details how nationalized political behavior can foster polarization and gridlock in federal policy making. Even at the federal level, nationalized political behavior is likely to change politicians' incentives in ways that make it harder to build legislative coalitions. In a less nationalized political system, any given bill will raise idiosyncratic trade-offs for individual legislators. A conservative legislator's large uninsured population might push her to back an expansion of health insurance while a liberal legislator from an area with low-performing schools might back vouchers. Yet as politics becomes more nationalized, legislation's local impacts have come to matter less than its partisan hue. It's why even congressional Democrats with many elderly constituents opposed prescription drug coverage in 2003 and why Republican governors with high numbers of uninsured residents turned down the Medicaid expansion that was part of the Affordable Care Act. In a nationalized era, the costs of defying one's constituents pale in comparison to the costs of defying one's national party. Put differently, nationalized political behavior is a critical but overlooked ingredient in today's political polarization.