Introduction

Studying Nationalization

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In 2021, state and local elections throughout the United States were sites of contention over issues that appear to have been generated at the national level in the last years of the Trump presidency. Candidates from Maine to Hawaii, and for offices from governor to school board, ran ads about “critical race theory” and pledged opposition to, or support for, mask mandates in schools. Notably, there were no campaigns for national offices in 2021. Nevertheless, national issues were thought to have predominated. So nationalized were these off-year elections that the first “lesson” identified in a Brookings Institution postelection analysis was that “All Politics Is No Longer Local” (Kamarck 2021).

The belief that American politics has become nationalized in recent decades is widely held. According to the conventional understanding of this phenomenon, politics at even the most local level is focused heavily on national issues and debates, and voters make decisions about state and local candidates based on their views of the national parties and presidential candidates. However, nationalization as a concept, and the process by which politics becomes nationalized, are not well understood. Too often, for example, the terms nationalization and polarization are used interchangeably, despite the fact that a political system could be nationalized but not polarized and vice versa.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the work that has been done on nationalization is concerned with voting behavior. As a result, we know very little about elite behavior and the degree to which—and the ways in which—
politicians are encouraging nationalized behavior among the voters. This book attempts to address this gap in our understanding of nationalization. Beyond introducing the motivation behind the book and defining the term *nationalization*, this chapter reviews the literature on the nationalization of American politics, describes the case study methodology we have employed, and provides some background on recent Pennsylvania electoral history.

**The Research Question**

Scholars agree that congressional and even state-level elections have become nationalized, but does that mean that congressional and state-level campaigns have become nationalized as well? If claims of nationalization are correct, and voters are selecting candidates up and down the ballot based on their views of the national parties and their presidential voting preferences, then down-ballot campaigns are likely to be affected. Have congressional and state-level campaigns rejected the notion that “all politics is local” and transformed their candidates into nationalized team players? Do these candidates focus on national issues and tie themselves to their presidential candidate?

The central question this book asks is whether campaigns at the congressional and state legislative levels show signs of nationalization, and if so, to what degree have they become nationalized? This overarching question gives rise to other questions: Do down-ballot candidates coordinate their messages and resources in order to run as part of a unified ticket? Are other entities, such as political parties and outside groups, nationalizing these down-ballot races? Are presidential campaigns working with congressional and state-level candidates to ensure a unified message? Are political parties tying together elections at different levels in an effort to create a single, coherent message for voters?

Given the widespread acceptance of the nationalization thesis, it is surprising that few scholars have examined the implications of the thesis for congressional and state-level candidates and their campaigns. In a highly nationalized political environment, one would expect congressional and state house candidates to adopt messages containing national themes. Do they? This book uses Pennsylvania as a case study to explore this question and to help us better understand how nationalization influences candidates and campaigns at the congressional and state levels.

**Nationalization Defined**

Nationalization has been the subject of quite a bit of research by scholars of comparative politics (see, for example, Jones and Mainwaring 2003; Cara-
However, the focus of such work is almost entirely on party systems and the extent to which they encourage “the replacement of local parties with national parties” or “homogenous electoral results of parties across sub-national units” (Lago and Montero 2014, 194). Lago and Montero (2014) note that, generally speaking, there are two dimensions to the concept of nationalization: dispersion and inflation. The first of these is concerned with “the extent to which parties receive similar levels of electoral support throughout the country,” and the second emphasizes “the extent to which the number of parties at some level of aggregation may be higher than the number of parties at another level of aggregation” (195). There are, of course, several ways to measure dispersion and inflation, but the details of the various measurements are beyond the scope of this review.

While still concerned with the nationalization of party systems, Morgenstern (2017) identifies a different pair of dimensions. For him, static nationalization accounts for “the degree of homogeneity in a party’s vote across a country at a particular point in time,” while dynamic nationalization is “the consistency in the change in a party’s vote in each district across time” (5, emphasis in original). This is similar to the distinction, discussed in the literature review below, that Claggett, Flanigan, and Zingale (1984) make between the convergence of a party’s level of support nationally and the uniformity of its electoral response to political forces from one time period to the next.

The comparative scholarship on nationalization relies exclusively on the electoral performance of the parties in a given system. That is, the evidence for nationalization is found in election results and the patterns of vote choice in the electorate. In The Increasingly United States, the most comprehensive treatment of the nationalization of American politics to date, Daniel Hopkins (2018) expands the conceptualization of nationalization. He recognizes that an essential element of nationalization is the “overlapping bases of political mobilization and division, with politics considered nationalized when voters face and make similar choices across the levels of government” (34–35). However, another critical aspect of nationalization, according to Hopkins, is “engagement, with mass politics considered more nationalized when citizens allocate disproportionate time and attention to the national level” (35).

In the conceptualizations that have been employed in scholarship to this point, nationalization is to be found in the behavior of citizens. In this book, we prefer a broader understanding of nationalization, one that can incorporate the actions of political elites, including candidates for office. Our conceptualization focuses on elite messaging and signaling. That is, we are
concerned with the way politicians, party operatives, and interest group activists frame politics for citizens.

We believe nationalized politics places an emphasis on ideology and partisanship, including appeals to negative partisanship, and it focuses on issues that are debated nationally, among presidential candidates, in Congress, and on cable news. Nationalized politics will not emphasize issues that are salient in only a specific state or locale, nor will it stress the performance of local or state government. In the campaign context, incumbency and unique candidate traits are local themes because they apply to particular candidates in particular areas.

We propose to operationalize this concept as follows:

- A piece of campaign communication (e.g., a television ad or a piece of direct mail) is *nationalized* to the extent that the words and images can be used for/against any candidate, anywhere in the country. Names could simply be changed and the remaining content would be the same.
- A piece of campaign communication is *localized* to the extent that the words and images can be used only for/against a specific candidate or in a particular locality. None of the content could be applied to another race (or more than a limited number of races) in exactly the same way.

This operationalization allows us to look for signs of nationalization in the actions of elites. As we see in the following review of the literature, the vast majority of the evidence in support of the nationalization thesis has been found, to this point, in mass political behavior. The extent to which elected officials and candidates are encouraging nationalization is an open question.

**Nationalization among Voters, Parties, and Candidates**

Research on the nationalization of politics in the United States began over sixty years ago. A review of that scholarship reveals some important insights into the changes that have occurred in American politics over that period of time. It also suggests that more research is needed to fully understand the process of nationalization.

**Voters**

This is not the first era in which American politics has been said to be nationalized. E. E. Schattschneider (1960) was perhaps the first scholar to posit a period of nationalization. For him, “a profound change in the agenda of
American politics” occurred in 1932, as Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal fundamentally altered the nature of government in the United States (88). The result, according to Schattschneider, was that elections after 1932 “substituted a national political alignment for an extreme sectional alignment everywhere in the country except the South” (89) and had become “dominated by factors that work on a national scale” (90). The evidence for this was increasingly competitive races in more parts of the country (again, outside the South).

Donald Stokes’s (1965) early inquiry into nationalization began with the question “Where are the political actors whose performance is salient to the voter?” (63). As potential answers to that question, he noted that there are three sets of forces that might influence the voters’ choices, namely, those at the national, statewide, and local (or “constituency”) levels. In his initial analysis of the comparative impact of those forces on voting behavior in the 1950s, Stokes found that national factors explained 86% of the variance in turnout levels but just 32% of the variance in the two-party vote for the U.S. House, while district effects explained 49% of the House vote (75–78). Using a different methodological technique, however, Richard Katz (1973a) analyzed the House vote in the decade of the 1950s and found that the “American political system looks considerably more national, and less like a loose federation of unrelated local political systems, than Stokes’s analysis would lead one to expect” (825). Indeed, Katz found that national forces explained nearly 55% of the variance in the House vote while district-level forces explained just 26% of such variance (823). Furthermore, Democratic districts were more nationalized than Republican districts (with national factors accounting for at least 60% of the variance in Democratic districts), and competitive districts were more nationalized than noncompetitive ones (823–24).

In a subsequent study that extended the analysis back to the 1870s, Stokes (1967) found that the influence of local forces on voter turnout had declined steadily over time and reached a low point in the 1950s, while national forces began growing in influence after the first decade of the twentieth century and reached their peak in the 1950s (192–95). With respect to the impact of local forces on the party vote for the House, it began declining steadily after its peak in the 1920s, reaching a nadir in the 1950s (195–96). This implied an increase in the influence of national forces, although it could well have been state forces that superseded local ones. Although Stokes did not provide any evidence to settle the matter, Claggett, Flanigan, and Zingale (1984) would later do so using Stokes’s method. They examined the impact of local and national forces through the 1960s and found that after a slight increase in national influence between 1920 and 1940, the impact of national forces declined a bit and then leveled off in the 1950s and 1960s (79). Thus, for the period of time between 1860 and 1970, Claggett, Flanigan, and
Zingale describe the influence of national forces on the House vote as “erratic and low” (80).

Still, Claggett and colleagues noted that the nationalization thesis is appealing. “Surely,” they maintained, “improved communications, a national economy, national media, and nationwide campaigning by presidents for congressional candidates of their party ought to have produced more nationalized response by voters” (1984, 80). To explore that possibility, they examined two conceptualizations of the phenomenon in question. One such conceptualization treats nationalization as “convergence in the levels of partisan support across the nation” (80, emphasis in original). That is, when political behavior is becoming nationalized, different parts of the country begin to look similar in terms of their support for the two major parties. The second conceptualization views nationalization as “uniformity in the response of geographical units to the political forces in an election” (80, emphasis in original).

The analysis by Claggett, Flanigan, and Zingale (1984) differed in several ways from Stokes’s analysis, including the fact that they used county-level, rather than congressional district, data and substituted regional forces for state forces. Although they altered Stokes’s statistical model, Claggett, Flanigan, and Zingale still adopted a variance-components approach for their analysis of elections between 1842 and 1970. Their results indicated that for most of the twentieth century, national effects had roughly half the influence on voting in House races that local effects had (89). Indeed, they failed “to find any increase over the past 100 years in the nationalization of party voting in either a convergence in the levels of partisan support or in the uniformity of response” (89).

Extending such analysis to 1980, Kawato (1987) also sought to measure the influence of national factors in terms of the convergence and the movement (or response) of the electorate. His findings demonstrate that there “has never been a nationalization of the U.S. electorate in terms of convergence” (1245). Interestingly, the impact of district-level factors grew after 1940 and by 1980 were by far the most dominant force. In terms of the uniformity of response by the electorate to national forces, Kawato finds “a cyclical pattern . . . rather than the monotonic nationalization found in previous research” (1246). Specifically, he found minispikes in the impact of national forces in and around 1890 and 1940. Still, district-level factors were most influential throughout the time period under examination, and the impact of those factors grew tremendously after 1950.

In an attempt to avoid the shortcomings of previous studies that had examined nationalization in only one office, Vertz, Frendreis, and Gibson (1987) used variance-components analysis to isolate the influence of national, state, and local factors in presidential, U.S. Senate, gubernatorial, and
U.S. House races. Restricting their study to the period from 1962 to 1984, Vertz and colleagues found that national factors explained most of the variance (normalized variance of 0.56) around the mean Republican share of the two-party vote within counties. In U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races, however, state-level forces predominated (0.68 and 0.63, respectively). Finally, local factors explained most of the variance (0.64) in the vote for U.S. House during the period under examination (963). As the authors concluded, “The answer to the question whether the U.S. electorate is nationalized or not would seem to be, it depends” (964).

Based on analyses of voting behavior into the 1980s, then, there was little evidence of nationalization. What evidence did exist suggested that national forces had brief moments of prominence (e.g., around 1940) or were influential in presidential races but had relatively marginal impact elsewhere. Indeed, in House races, district-level factors predominated throughout the twentieth century and, perhaps, grew in influence after midcentury.

The latter conclusion coincides with a body of scholarship on congressional elections that showed an uptick in the electoral safety of incumbents beginning in the 1960s (Erikson 1971, 1972; Mayhew 1974; Alford and Hibbing 1981). There were many explanations for this increase in the incumbency advantage, but perhaps the most common claim was that incumbent-specific information (e.g., personal traits and voting records) had become more salient to voters than the incumbent’s party identification (see Ferejohn 1977; Nelson 1978–1979). Indeed, this was said to be a period in which the partisanship of voters was declining, campaigns were becoming candidate-centered, and split-ticket voting was on the rise (Wattenberg 1984). Incumbency, of course, is a district-level (or local) factor in congressional races. As such, the growing incumbency advantage strongly implied that national factors were declining in influence, at least in House elections.

More recently, Jacobson (2015a) and Erikson (2017) have shown that the incumbency advantage began to decline in the 1980s and 1990s and had fallen to 1950s levels by 2010 (82). Carson, Sievert, and Williamson (2020) corroborate that finding and show that, in the period from 1840 to 2016, the nationalization of elections influenced the degree to which congressional incumbents had an advantage over their opponents. Nationalization itself was, in the nineteenth century, a product of electoral procedures like the party-strip ballot, and in the twentieth century, a product of “voter choices and attitudes” (158).

Perhaps paramount among those choices and attitudes is the resurgent role in the late twentieth century of partisanship in voting decisions (Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). In particular, scholars note that partisanship exerts its influence through increasingly negative attitudes toward the opposing party and not necessarily warmer feel-
ings toward one’s own party, a phenomenon known as “negative partisan-
ship” (see Abramowitz and Webster 2016). Nevertheless, much of the work
on the nationalization of elections treats nationalization as nearly synony-
mous with partisan voting behavior. To determine whether elections have
been nationalized, one simply determines the extent to which aggregate
outcomes in down-ballot races are correlated with the presidential vote in
the state or district. Another way of putting this, following Brady, D’Onofrio,
and Fiorina (2000), is to treat “presidential vote coefficients [in regression
analyses] as indicators of nationalization, or the national component of the
vote” (138).

There are a number of studies of aggregate election results that detect an
increase in nationalization. Some of this work finds the influence of the
presidential vote in U.S. House and Senate races to have increased in recent
decades (Brady, D’Onofrio, and Fiorina 2000; Abramowitz and Webster
2016; Abramowitz 2018, 62–69). In their study of state legislative races, Zing-
her and Richman (2019) find that presidential vote shares significantly influ-
ence the partisan balance in state legislatures, “particularly when (relatively)
national polarization is high” (1047).

Sievert and McKee (2019) found an increase since the 1980s in the effect
of the presidential vote on U.S. Senate and gubernatorial outcomes, although
the effect is larger on the former than the latter. Sievert and McKee also
examine the percentage of races won by the same party at the presidential
and Senate or gubernatorial levels. In 1980, the party that won the presiden-
tial contest in a state won just over 50% of the Senate contests and 44% of
gubernatorial races; by 2012, “these figures rose to approximately 84 percent
and 69 percent, respectively” (1062). However, when they analyzed election
results by region, they found that gubernatorial elections in the Midwest had
become denationalized over time, a finding they are quick to note does not
“strictly undermine the evidence of more nationalized gubernatorial elec-
tions,” particularly given the small number of cases (1067).

A few studies replace the presidential vote with another variable intend-
ed to capture national forces. Knotts and Ragusa (2016), for example, meas-
ure the effect of presidential approval on special elections to the U.S. House
from 1995 through 2014. They find approval’s influence to have grown
throughout the period, “with the 2002 midterm representing an important
juncture in the nationalization of special elections” (34). Similarly, Rogers
(2016) gauges the impact of presidential approval on the likelihood that state
legislators will attract challengers (as well as the impact of approval on voters’
decisions, as discussed below). Rogers finds that, controlling for state and
local conditions, legislators in the president’s party are more likely to attract
challengers, especially as the president’s approval rating drops (213–16).
Among the aggregate studies of nationalization, Bartels’s (1998) analysis of state-level presidential election results from 1868 to 1996 is unique. In it, he separates the impact of a partisan component “reflecting standing loyalties carrying over from previous elections” from national (and subnational) forces (277). He found that the relative influence of national and subnational forces had been balanced for much of the twentieth century. However, that balance had tipped “toward national forces at the beginning of the New Deal and in the most recent elections [i.e., the 1980s and 1990s] and toward sub-national forces during the racial sorting-out of the 1950s and ’60s” (285).

In their study of polarization in the mass public and among U.S. senators, Caughey, Dunham, and Warshaw (2018) compile a data set of hundreds of poll results (and over one million respondents) from 1946 to 2014. Rather than study individual attitudes, the authors examine partisan subconstituencies (i.e., Democrats and Republicans as groups of voters within states). They find that Democratic and Republican subconstituencies have become increasingly polarized on economic, racial, and social issues and that state differences within parties have largely disappeared, a process they refer to as “ideological nationalization” (141–42). Furthermore, they show that ideological nationalization has occurred both for state-party publics and for senators in all three policy domains and that “the nationalizing trends in the Senate and the mass public parallel each other closely throughout the period” (144).

Although most aggregate studies exploring nationalized voting behavior find evidence of nationalization, a few do not. Gimpel’s (1996) inquiry into autonomous state party systems, or “those where the local party coalitions are consistently different from national party coalitions” (3–4), found qualified support for nationalization. Comparing the mean presidential vote in a state with the state’s mean votes for U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor between 1914 and 1990, he found that subpresidential outcomes in eastern and midwestern states were more congruent with presidential voting than were those in western states, which were more autonomous. The reason for the differences, he explained, is that the issues over which the national parties spar “have less salience in western state politics than in the East and Midwest” (31).

Gimpel’s conclusion, that “the extent to which U.S. state politics is nationalized has been overblown,” should be considered in light of the fact that he was writing in the mid-1990s (1996, 23). It is quite possible that signs of emerging nationalization were on the verge of becoming apparent just as Gimpel’s study ended. Indeed, Renner’s (1999) reexamination of the congruence between presidential results and Senate and gubernatorial outcomes between 1986 and 1996 in the states Gimpel studied came to a different con-
clusion. Using factor analysis, Renner finds “more evidence of congruence than incongruence” and notes that in “both the northern and western states, a single dominant factor emerges that explains comparable percentages of the variance. There do not appear to be consistently different electoral planes along which state elections are fought” (130).

The results of a study by Kasuya and Moenius (2008) also cast doubt on claims of nationalization. Drawing on the comparative politics literature, they conceptualize nationalization as low levels of both “inflation” and “dispersion” within a party system. For Kasuya and Moenius, inflation is the degree to which party competition at the district level differs from party competition nationally. Obviously, the less the difference in levels of competition between districts and the nation as a whole, the lower the level of inflation. Dispersion is “the variation across districts of the extent of each districts’ [sic] contribution to national-level party system inflation.” (127). When all districts contribute to inflation equally, dispersion is low. Kasuya and Moenius apply these concepts to House elections from 1870 to 2002 and find “the American party system started from localization, and then became highly nationalized during the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, while more recent decades have seen more localized interparty competition” (133).

Similarly, in his study of party nationalization in dozens of countries around the world, Morgenstern (2017) found limited evidence for either static or dynamic nationalization in the United States. With respect to static nationalization (or the homogeneity of results across the country at a given point in time), Morgenstern found some variation over time but, in general, concluded that static nationalization in the United States is “very low” (97). For dynamic nationalization (or the consistency of change in party support across districts over time), the data suggest that this form of nationalization grew “from moderate levels in the 1950s to very high levels in the 1980s before falling back somewhat in the 1990s and 2000s” (97). “The take-away,” he maintains, “is still that the US parties have low DN, but there is evidence that localism is less severe than in earlier decades” (98).

Finally, Trounstine (2018) examined partisan representation at the local and national levels between 1990 and 2006. Nearly one-third of all county councils in the twelve states in her data set had partisan majorities that differed from the presidential majority in those counties. Trounstine considers the possibility that the number of representationally split counties has decreased over time and finds that it has done so. Furthermore, she finds that part of the explanation for representational splits is incomplete partisan realignment at the local level. Indeed, “the national vote did not become a better predictor of local seat shares over the course of [the] time series. It
appears that unlike the state and congressional levels, local realignment was not more prevalent during this period” (38).

Using individual-level data—specifically the votes cast by 6.6 million voters in South Carolina between 2010 and 2018—Kuriwaki (2020) also shows that behavior in local elections often differs from the behavior of the same voters in national races. Ticket-splitting, which is often identified as a sign that local forces carry more sway than national forces, has decreased quite dramatically in congressional elections in recent years. However, Kuriwaki shows that the percentage of voters who split their tickets in races below the national level and the statewide level is routinely in the double digits. Indeed, in the time period under examination, nearly one-fifth of voters in South Carolina voted for a county sheriff candidate from a different party than their choice for president (17).

Several other scholars have attempted to explore nationalization at the individual level. Born (2008), for example, used American National Election Study (ANES) data from 1980 through 2004 to show that among a range of national forces—including ideology, retrospective economic evaluations, and assessments of presidential candidates’ personal qualities—only party identification has become more determinative of voting for the House of Representatives. Recently, a number of studies of nationalized voting behavior have employed data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). Sievert and McKee (2019) rely on CCES data from 2008 to 2016 as well as exit poll data for the period 1990–1998 to gauge the level of same-party voting between presidential and subpresidential levels. They find that “voters in Senate elections not only exhibit high levels of partisan loyalty but also do so in an increasingly uniform manner” (1071). Voters in gubernatorial elections also show signs of increased partisan loyalty, although the changes over time are less pronounced and in some regions of the country (e.g., the Midwest) are hardly noticeable at all (1071–73). Rogers’s (2016) analysis of CCES data finds that state legislators’ electoral fates are largely connected to presidential approval. And Moskowitz (2021) relies on the CCES to show that local news coverage attenuates the nationalization of elections; that is, where there is more access to local news, there is more ticket-splitting.

Two scholars, relying on both aggregate and individual-level data, have done more than any others to advance the view that American politics has become nationalized in recent years. In a series of papers analyzing the last few election cycles, Jacobson (2015b; 2015c; 2017; 2019) shows that voting behavior, and thus election results, are increasingly influenced by national factors. “One simple measure of electoral nationalization,” explains Jacobson (2019) “is the standard deviation of the change in major-party vote share from the previous election across stable, contested districts; the smaller the
standard deviation, the more uniform the swing across districts, and thus the more nationalized the election” (23). In the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections, the standard deviation of the swing was 4.3, which Jacobson notes is less than half of the average standard deviation in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, Jacobson finds that the correlation of the House and Senate vote with the presidential vote is now routinely in the mid- to high-90% and high-80% range, respectively. This is a much higher correlation than in previous decades.

Among his varied evidence for nationalization, Hopkins (2018) demonstrates that presidential voting and gubernatorial voting have become increasingly related since the 1980s (42–51). He also shows that the home state advantage that presidential candidates have long been thought to enjoy began shrinking at about the time the correlation between presidential and gubernatorial voting began growing (53). The implication here is that national considerations (e.g., partisanship) have started to override more localized factors such as where a candidate calls home. In a chapter that draws on a range of evidence—including survey, internet search, campaign contribution, and voter turnout data—Hopkins provides further support for the conclusion that

Americans today are markedly more engaged with national and above all presidential politics than with state or local politics. And while there is evidence that Americans were more engaged with national politics than with state politics as far back as the late nineteenth century, it is also clear that the gap between national and subnational engagement has been growing in recent decades. . . . National politics—and above all the American presidency—seems to be the sun around which contemporary American political behavior revolves. (Hopkins 2018, 86)

This review of the literature provides fairly strong evidence for the thesis that American elections have become nationalized. There is, no doubt, evidence to the contrary, particularly when we look at elections for offices below the national and statewide levels. But the bulk of the scholarship, especially in more recent work, strongly suggests that national forces began to exert influence in the 1980s (if not earlier), grew more influential in the 1990s, and have, over the last two decades, become dominant.

However, all of the scholarship reviewed to this point focuses on voting behavior. The evidence for nationalization rests very heavily on the fact that voters have begun voting in similar ways for president and for Congress and, perhaps, for governor. Although an increase in partisan loyalty among voters is undoubtedly an essential element of nationalization, it is not the only
one. Surely, if elections have become nationalized, we should see evidence in the behavior of other political actors.

Political Parties

In the World War II era, the political parties in the United States were highly decentralized. That is, state and local parties were largely autonomous and often were run by party bosses at the state or municipal level. Indeed, as E. E. Schattschneider (1942) wrote at the time, above the state and local party machines, “there are visible only the transparent filaments of the ghost of a party” (163). V. O. Key (1958) echoed that conclusion a few years later when he noted that “more than a tinge of truth colors the observation that there are no national parties, only state and local parties” (361). Given the lack of a national element, Key referred to American parties as “more nearly confederative than federal in nature” (368). And Hugh Bone (1958) would end his study of the national party committees by noting, “To a considerable degree the strength, role, and effectiveness of the national party agencies will be determined by the attitude of the state and local organizations and how important the national party as an entity is to them” (239; see also Cotter and Hennessy 1964).

This lack of central authority in the parties prompted a committee of the American Political Science Association (APSA), chaired by Schattschneider, to issue a report in 1950 calling for the parties to become more “responsible.” That is, parties must offer voters a distinct choice so that the electorate can hold the party in power accountable for its actions, and parties must also recognize “that national, state and local party leaders have a common responsibility to the party membership” (APSA Committee on Political Parties 1950, 2). Among the recommendations the committee made were that national conventions should meet biennially and that a “party council” should be formed in each party to develop and enforce a national party agenda (5).6

No sooner had the APSA report been issued than Schattschneider (1956) himself recognized that increasing party competition in the post–World War II era was producing more robust party organizations in states that had previously been dominated by one party. The pressure to build stronger organizations, he maintained, was rooted initially in presidential elections (212). Indeed,

in a nationalized political system, local party organization is never a purely local matter . . . because national interests may be defeated by weak local organizations anywhere in the country—a state may be lost because some small-town organizations did not mobilize
their vote, and the country may be lost because a close state is lost (Schattschneider 1956, 213).

Few others noticed the changes taking place in the party organizations, although David (1956) documented signs of the increasingly “tight” organization at the national level (346). He also identified the 1954 midterm elections as the first in American history in which “both major parties were actively and simultaneously led by their titular heads [i.e., Eisenhower and Stevenson] in a mid-term campaign” (347).

If stronger, more centralized parties were beginning to emerge in the 1950s, their full development would take time and face setbacks. By the 1970s, numerous scholars were describing “party decomposition,” as Burnham (1970) called it. Volumes with titles like The Party’s Over (Broder 1971) and American Parties in Decline (Crotty and Jacobson 1980) began to appear. The work in this camp detailed the parties’ “inability . . . to sufficiently organize, represent, and compete” (Ladd 1978, xxi).

The basis of the “party decline” thesis, however, was not a deteriorating organizational capacity but the changing behavior of the American voter. Voters were becoming, so it was said, less partisan in their attitudes and behavior (among the vast literature on this topic, see Nie, Verba, and Petrocik [1976]). This led to, among other things, more candidate-centered decision-making and more split-ticket voting (Wattenberg 1991).

Parties exist, at least in part, to get politicians elected to office (Aldrich 1995). As such, we would expect parties to adapt to new circumstances like a decline in partisan voting behavior. Considerable evidence from the 1980s suggests that the parties were adapting at the very moment when some scholars were announcing their demise. Schlesinger (1985) heralded a “new American political party” that had become “more national in scope, more active, and with clear signs of greater linkage among its nuclei” (1162), a party nucleus being “the collective efforts to capture a single office” (1153). Herrnson (1988) showed that the national parties in the 1980s were “wealthier, more stable, better organized and better staffed than ever before” (121). Multiple studies by Cotter, Gibson, Bibby, and Huckshorn demonstrated the growing organizational strength of the parties between the 1960s and 1980s at the local (Gibson et al. 1985) and state (Bibby et al. 1983; Gibson et al. 1983) levels. These newly strengthened party organizations were bolstered by the development of stronger national party organizations and by the integration, or interdependence, of party organizations at all levels of government (Huckshorn et al. 1986; Cotter et al. 1989).

It is important to note that party adaptation took different forms in the two parties (Cotter and Bibby 1980). The Democrats underwent a process of “reform” that focused on party rules and procedures, such as delegate selec-
tion, while the Republicans engaged in “renewal” of the party’s organization-
al capacities. Democratic reform was provoked by the party’s contentious
1968 national convention and was an attempt to address demands that the
party’s presidential nomination process be more representative of its rank-
and-file supporters (Shafer 1983). However, this procedural reform was fol-
lowed several years later by a renewal effort in the Democratic Party akin to
the organizational transformation of the Republicans in the 1970s (Herrn-
son 1996). That transformation was prompted by the competitive disadvan-
tage the GOP faced in the mid-twentieth century (Conway 1983), and it led
to the creation of what many have called a “service party” capable of provid-
ing campaign assistance to Republican candidates around the country (Bibby
1979; Conley 2013). The Democrats’ party renewal project was similarly
triggered by electoral considerations following President Carter’s unsuccess-
ful reelection bid (Herrnson 1996).

By the 1980s, then, both parties had centralized resource allocation and
campaign support, as well as quite a bit of authority (e.g., over delegate selec-
tion rules), in their national committees (including the House and Senate campaign committees). Nevertheless, the process of nationalization was far
from complete (Bibby 1986). As Esptein (1982) put it, “Despite the substan-
tial nationalizing responses of the parties . . . their confederative structures
have been modified rather than destroyed” (102). Several studies of the
Democratic Party indicated that the party had obviously centralized in or-
ganizational and procedural terms, but was not capable of dictating presiden-
tial nominations, setting party policy, or enforcing party discipline (Hitlin
and Jackson 1979; Longley 1980). Jackson and Hitlin (1981) showed that
while in 1976 there was widespread support among Democratic national
convention delegates for the reforms the party had recently made, there was
also resistance to further centralization of power in the national party. As
they concluded, “The old confederation is now gone and the new federal
structure of the party would seem to be secure” (285).

Paddock’s (1990; 1991) analyses of both parties’ national and state plat-
forms from 1956 to 1980 found that, despite the nationalization of many
party functions during this period, the parties remained decentralized in
terms of policy positions. However, in his examination of state party plat-
forms from 1918 to 2014, Hopkins (2018) concluded, “Until around 1960,
knowing what state a platform came from was critical in knowing the topics
it was likely to highlight” (159). At that point, the parties’ state platforms began
to look more uniform throughout the country. Today, “there is increasingly
a single national agenda to which the various state parties are responding.
Far more than in the past, the state parties now shift their gaze in unison,
from education to terrorism or gay marriage as national politics dictate”
(159). In their extension of Hopkins’s analysis through 2017, Hopkins, Schick-
ler, and Azizi (2020) maintained that in the period after 1990, it has become “clear that cross-state differences in topic usage are declining,” which is “consistent with the nationalization of the political agenda, as many states have increasingly given similar attention to a range of high-profile topics” (20).

Despite this nationalization of the parties’ policy agendas, the parties have recently been described as “hollow.” According to Schlozman and Rosenfeld (2019), the parties are “neither organizationally robust beyond their roles raising money nor meaningfully felt as a real, tangible presence in the lives of voters or in the work of engaged activists” (121). Even the nationalized policy agenda may not be the result of the parties actively centralizing their programs. As Schlozman and Rosenfeld see it, “In place of programmatic formal parties are polarized networks of interest and advocacy groups, drawing on research and expertise from higher education and think tanks” (135). The result is “platform-by-proxy” (135), whereby the “platform-drafting process serves principally to gauge different factions’ relative institutional clout within the party” (136). Nor can the parties control presidential nominations. Although there was a period of roughly twenty years (starting in 1980) when the party establishment was able to steer the nomination to its preferred candidate (Cohen et al. 2008), it now appears that such coordination is beyond the capacity of party insiders (Cohen et al. 2016).

Ultimately, while the parties are more nationalized (or centralized) than they were in the mid-twentieth century, they are far from fully nationalized entities. Their ability to establish a policy agenda—and, more importantly, to enforce it—and to influence nominations is limited. Still, they play a critical role in the campaigns of their candidates.

Candidates and Their Campaigns

Given the length and expense of American political campaigns, and the attention paid to them in the media, it is surprising that they have not been the focus of much nationalization scholarship. It seems natural to ask if campaigns have been nationalized. But very little research asks that question, and scholars interested in nationalization have largely ignored the role that campaigns play in advancing (or hindering) the process of nationalization.

To our knowledge, only two recent studies directly explore the role of national issues in subnational campaigns. Holliday’s (2020) study of 93 presidential and 312 gubernatorial election debates from 2000 to 2018 attempts to determine how much gubernatorial candidates focus on state, as opposed to national, issues and whether the focus has changed over time. He finds little evidence that gubernatorial campaigns are nationalized or that they are becoming more nationalized over time. “On the whole,” Holliday maintains,
gubernatorial candidates still talk about issues relevant to the state and have done so at about the same rate for the past two decades. While certain national topics do seem to find their way into gubernatorial campaigns, the share of time spent debating them is relatively small, and the degree to which such nationalized topics do come up is only weakly associated with subsequent nationalization of election results. (Holliday 2020, 15–16)

Of course, Holliday’s data extends back only to 2000, but it is unlikely that gubernatorial campaigns were more nationalized before 2000 than they have been recently.

Down-ballot candidates in presidential election years have a strategic choice to make, namely, whether to tie oneself to the top of the ticket. Doing so, of course, is a way of nationalizing the campaign. That may be especially true when the candidate at the top of the ticket is unusually controversial. Liu and Jacobson (2018) examined Republican congressional candidates’ embrace of Donald Trump in 2016 to understand both the decision to support Trump (or not) and the effects of that decision. They found that candidates in competitive districts were significantly less likely to support Trump than candidates in either safe Republican districts or safe Democratic districts. Women and incumbents were somewhat less likely to support Trump, but women incumbents were significantly less likely to do so. Interestingly, a candidate’s decision to embrace Trump’s candidacy or distance themselves from it had no noticeable effect on their electoral performance (because partisanship influenced the vote up and down the ballot).11

Just How Nationalized Is American Politics?

We are left with something of a blurry picture with respect to the nationalization of American politics. At the level of the electorate, there is abundant evidence that voting behavior has become nationalized. Of course, the voting patterns we have seen in recent years (e.g., a decline in split-ticket voting) may well be, as Morris Fiorina has long argued, the result of a constrained set of choices given to voters—at all levels of government, the choice is virtually always between a left-of-center Democrat and a right-of-center Republican (see, for example, Fiorina [2017]). Nevertheless, the rise of negative partisanship suggests a change in the attitudes of voters such that they increasingly view one party favorably and the other, at all levels of government, as unacceptable.

At the elite level, there is far less evidence that politics has become nationalized. Power within the political parties is undoubtedly more centralized in the national committees today than it was in the past, but those
committees, nonetheless, appear “hollow” in many respects. Unfortunately, there are so few studies of candidates and their campaigns that we know very little about how nationalized campaign efforts have become.

The assumption, of course, is that those representing—or hoping to represent—states and local districts must have nationalized their appeals in recent years. Otherwise, what is the source of the nationalized behavior of the voters? While it is probably safe to assume that elites have contributed to nationalization at least to some extent, precisely how they have done so, and in what venues, has yet to be established. It could be, for example, that the rhetoric of governing differs in important ways from the rhetoric of campaigning, and that one but not the other has become nationalized.

To better understand the role of political elites in the process of nationalization, we believe campaigns are a good place to start. Media attention focuses on elections every two years and the electoral arena is highly partisan. If political elites are communicating national themes to voters, one would expect those themes to show up in campaigns.

**Case Study Selection and Methods**

If American elections have become nationalized, we should see clear signs of nationalization in the campaigns of candidates running in congressional and state-level races, but to date no one has studied these campaigns in that context. This work begins by accepting the premise that the electorate is indeed becoming more nationalized, which allows us to turn our focus toward the campaigns themselves. If electoral behavior suggests that voters conceive of congressional and state-level elections in nationalized terms, then down-ballot candidates and their campaigns either are structured in such a way as to present voters with nationalized choices, or these candidates and campaigns simply do not matter and voters are ignoring them in order to transform congressional and state legislative races into nationalized elections. While it may be tempting to assume that down-ballot candidates are nationalizing their campaigns, this work specifically examines whether and/or to what extent that is true and, in doing so, explores a component of nationalization that until now has been generally ignored by scholars: nationalization from the perspective of the candidates and their campaigns.

Because there is currently no theory of how nationalization operates in campaigns and there are very few studies that even consider nationalization in a campaign context, our approach is to observe numerous campaigns, guided by an overarching research question instead of engaging in any tests of specific hypotheses. We expect that this inductive approach will allow for theorizing and hypothesis development in future work. Our study is therefore exploratory and intended to generate findings that can later be turned
into hypotheses to develop a theory of nationalization within the context of local campaigns.

Our work provides new insight into how candidates and campaigns operate in a nationalized environment, as well as examining these candidates and campaigns from a new and, we believe, better perspective. In addition to providing a comparative analysis of campaigns and elections for one particular office (e.g., congressional races), we also provide a vertical analysis of the potential reciprocal influences of simultaneous elections at the presidential, congressional, and state legislative levels in a given location (specifically, within congressional districts). We know of no previous study, for example, that has examined the impact of a presidential or U.S. House campaign on the strategies employed by state legislative candidates. The very idea of nationalization suggests that a vertical approach is essential in order to capture the potential nationalizing forces at work in down-ballot races. If congressional and state-level campaigns are part of larger nationalized forces, the only way to capture these influences would be to examine these elections within a wider context. In other words, an examination of statewide or congressional elections in isolation could miss the connections between elections at different levels—the very connections that make nationalization possible.

We begin our analysis of the 2020 Pennsylvania election cycle in Chapter 2, with an analysis of the presidential, congressional, and state legislative races throughout the state. Chapters 3 through 8 then provide case studies of six congressional districts. Using the congressional district as the unit of analysis, scholars selected because of their proximity to and knowledge of campaigns and elections in their geographic areas offer “nested” studies of campaigns and elections within their congressional districts. Each case examines the presidential, congressional, and state house legislative district races taking place within the boundaries of the congressional district. Consequently, each case can examine how races were conducted up and down the ballot and within the context of the other elections happening simultaneously. This approach provides us with analyses of elections at the state, congressional, and presidential levels and also with a more complete understanding of how state and congressional elections operate within the context of a broader general election environment.

The six congressional districts were selected based on competitiveness, partisanship, population density, incumbency, and geography. The goal was to have a wide variety of cases, from competitive to safe, liberal to conservative, urban to suburban to rural, including Democratic and Republican incumbents and elections in every part of the state. Nested within each congressional district are analyses of two state house legislative races. House races were selected to provide a similar variety of cases. See Table 1.1.
Our study does not include U.S. Senate or Pennsylvania state senate elections because, in the 2020 election cycle, there were no U.S. Senate races in Pennsylvania and the limited number of Pennsylvania state senate elections made comparisons across races difficult. In Pennsylvania, half of the fifty senate districts are up for election each election cycle. In 2020, only odd-numbered senate seats were being contested and thus the number of races that our study could have included was limited. In addition, although the Pennsylvania Supreme Court redrew Pennsylvania’s congressional districts in 2018, state legislative districts were generally not affected. As a result, state legislative districts often do not follow congressional district lines. In practical terms for our study, this meant that some congressional districts did not have any state senate races being contested in 2020, others had only one state senate race (and some of these were not competitive or lacked a challenger), and for others the state senate districts were not nested within a single congressional district. Therefore, we decided to include two state house races in each congressional district, rather than have some state senate races mixed in with a majority of state house races.

We selected our chapter authors and matched them with their congressional districts in early 2020, but state house races were not selected until after the June 2nd primary election in order to ensure that all selected races had credible Democratic and Republican candidates and that we had a good mix of different types of races. Each of the chapters, using a Pennsylvania
congressional district as the unit of analysis, simultaneously tracks presidential, congressional, and state legislative campaigns in an effort to provide unique insights into three different types of elections, while also exploring the potential localization and/or nationalization of elections at these different levels.

The goal of each case study is the same: to determine the degree to which U.S. House of Representatives campaigns and state legislative campaigns were nationalized with respect to resources, messaging, strategy, and tactics, and to examine how much coordination and incidental compatibility took place between campaigns at the presidential, congressional, and state legislative levels. Our case study authors closely monitored the presidential, congressional, and state legislative races and gathered data by interviewing political elites, tracking campaign communications (via media, social media, and direct mail), and attending campaign events and candidate debates. We were greatly assisted by AdImpact, a firm specializing in campaign media data analytics, which provided us with a list of every media ad buy (radio, cable, and TV) for every presidential, congressional, and state legislative race in real time. AdImpact was also able to provide the actual ads and a transcript of every TV ad aired for all presidential, congressional, and state legislative races in Pennsylvania.

Before going into the field, the case study authors were all given the same rubric to use when looking for nationalizing factors. According to the rubric,

- Nationalization in speeches, campaign communications, and so on emphasizes ideology and partisanship and is less likely to emphasize incumbency, unique candidate traits, local issues, and government services.
- When local topics and candidate characteristics are discussed in nationalized campaigns, they are framed symbolically to reflect national debates.
- Nationalized races emphasize negative partisanship.
- A piece of campaign communication (e.g., a television ad or a piece of direct mail) is nationalized to the extent that the words and images can be used for or against any candidate, anywhere in the country. Names could simply be changed and the remaining content would be the same.
- A piece of campaign communication is localized to the extent that the words and images can be used for or against only a specific candidate or a particular locality. None of the content can be applied to another race (or to more than a very limited number of races) in exactly the same way.
While each case study examined the presidential, congressional, and state races using the same data collection techniques and the same operationalized definition of nationalization, the authors did not share their findings with one another until after they had completed their analysis because we did not want any single case to influence the findings in any other case. It was important for our study that each case operated independently from the others.

Why Pennsylvania?

These case studies are situated within Pennsylvania not only because it is the state where we live but also because many of the patterns of nationalization and polarization evident across the United States during the past few decades are also evident within the Keystone State. Notably, Pennsylvania’s mix of urban and rural communities, its relatively large share of white, working-class voters, and changes to its manufacturing base mirror important voting groups and economic changes that have helped drive these patterns of nationalization and polarization across the United States. Pennsylvania also happens to be a swing state that typically includes competitive congressional races. A state that is expected to have competitive races up and down the ballot with a mix of economic and demographic representation is a good place to begin trying to understand whether and how parties, campaigns, and interest groups cooperate and communicate with voters. This section—“Why Pennsylvania?”—provides background information about the changes that have taken place in Pennsylvania since the end of the twentieth century.

Pennsylvania has been a vigorously contested swing state for decades, and it was designated by many media outlets and political commentators as a vital swing state heading into 2020. President Trump’s 2016 victory in Pennsylvania appeared to change the state’s recent statewide electoral habits, which were favorable to Democrats, but the 2018 midterm results raised questions about the durability of the president’s electoral coalition. The 2018 midterms showed that voters in Trump counties, although equally motivated to vote in 2018 compared to 2016, were less monolithically supportive of Republican candidates, while the voters residing in the counties that Hillary Clinton won in 2016 were much more supportive of Democrats in 2018. The divergent results of 2016 and 2018 made Pennsylvania a priority for both campaigns in 2020.

Despite having a Democratic voter registration advantage from 1960 to 2000, the state had a Republican bias in electoral contests—Democrats won only 46% of statewide elections in the state during this time period (Treadway 2005). In fact, the Republicans’ electoral success in this era made some
people doubt that the state’s voter registration statistics reflected the actual partisan disposition of the state’s voters (Yost 2003).

Democrats performed better statewide between 2000 and 2018, winning five of six presidential races, four of five gubernatorial races, and three of seven Senate races. In total, Democrats won most (70%) statewide elections from 2000 to 2018, while Republicans controlled the majority of seats in congressional (eight of ten elections, one tie), state house (eight of ten), and state senate (ten of ten) elections. The state’s partisan competitiveness is demonstrated by the 2016 presidential election: Republican Donald Trump carried the state, while all three state row offices—Attorney General, Auditor General, and Treasurer—were won by Democrats.

**Social and Economic Change Since 2000**

The social and economic changes underlying political change in Pennsylvania reveal a stressed and economically struggling state. The state had relatively slow population growth, growing only 4.1% since 2000, with virtually every noncore and micropolitan county in the state experiencing population declines after 2001.

Median household income declined in the state, although income change tended to differ regionally. The median household income was $58,820 (in inflation-adjusted dollars) in 2000 and was $56,951 in 2018. Also, the poverty rate increased, from 11.0% to 13.1%. Income changes are notably different depending on the county, and most counties in small metros earned below the state median. It also seems that the smaller counties that showed growth in median household income are located in areas that have benefited from the shale gas boom in the state. This relationship may explain at least some of the movement toward Republican registration in southwestern Pennsylvania, as Republican policies are often more industry-friendly.

Manufacturing employment was 16.0% in 2000 and had fallen to 11.9% by 2017. Every county in Pennsylvania experienced a decline in manufacturing employment, although reliance on that sector differs considerably across the state. The loss of manufacturing jobs is frequently mentioned as one of the causes of white working-class anxiety.

More state residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2018 (30.1%) than in 2000 (22.4%). Only five counties, Allegheny, Bucks, Centre, Chester, and Montgomery, show college attainment among more than 40% of adults.

The state is a bit more diverse than it was at the turn of the century: 84.1% of the population identified as white alone in 2000 compared to 77.3% white alone today. Still, most counties in the state are overwhelmingly white. These social and economic changes have produced clear divides between the state’s rural communities and its urban and suburban areas. These di-
vergent geographic realities in part underlie the emergent political trends that have made the state increasingly competitive.

Changes to the Pennsylvania Electorate in the Twenty-first Century

Pennsylvania voters normally cast a larger share of their votes, about two percentage points more on average since 1960, for Democratic presidential candidates compared to the nation as a whole, although this advantage has steadily declined since 2004. Donald Trump’s performance in Pennsylvania in 2016 narrowly exceeded his performance nationally. One revealing feature of Pennsylvania elections during this time is that the Democratic presidential candidates have carried fewer of the state’s 67 counties, despite winning eleven of the fifteen presidential elections. From 1960 to 2016, Democrats won an average of 18.6 counties; from 2000 to 2016 they won an average of 14.6 counties (Cook 2020).

Voter Registration

The geographic distribution of Pennsylvania’s registered voters and their corresponding electoral preferences have changed noticeably, and in some cases profoundly, during the first twenty years of the twenty-first century. Democratic registration has grown from 3.5 million to 4.05 million, or 15.3%. Republican registration has grown from 3.1 million to 3.2 million, or 5.2%. The Democrats’ registration advantage by 2018 was 819,573 voters. The largest counties have a larger share of registered Democrats, and the smaller counties almost invariably have fewer registered Democrats. These changes seem to reflect pronounced geographic and demographic patterns—Democratic growth is in the southeast, while the southwest shows the greatest Democratic loss.

Although these changes are regional, they also reflect the uneven economic growth associated with population density and proximity to dense urban metro areas (Kolko 2019). Simply put, the rate of economic growth has diverged for urban and rural counties. Sizable Democratic defections have occurred in the large fringe metro outside of Pittsburgh, while sizable Democratic gains are seen in the large fringe metro outside of Philadelphia. Virtually every small metro, micropolitan, and noncore county has seen Democratic defections and increasingly large Republican registration advantages.

The change in registration by urban-rural classification appears in Table 1.2. Most of the Democrats’ statewide voter registration advantage comes from the state’s two large central metros; Philadelphia and Allegheny Coun-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Classification</th>
<th>Democratic Registration 2018</th>
<th>Republican Registration 2018</th>
<th>Total Registration 2018</th>
<th>Democratic Registration 1998</th>
<th>Republican Registration 1998</th>
<th>Total Registration 1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large central metro</td>
<td>1,340,367</td>
<td>376,003</td>
<td>1,970,091</td>
<td>1,246,994</td>
<td>444,872</td>
<td>1,821,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large fringe metro</td>
<td>1,128,646</td>
<td>1,040,494</td>
<td>2,542,553</td>
<td>876,382</td>
<td>1,054,957</td>
<td>2,165,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium metro</td>
<td>1,016,429</td>
<td>989,347</td>
<td>2,365,964</td>
<td>815,859</td>
<td>865,171</td>
<td>1,868,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small metro</td>
<td>267,451</td>
<td>353,844</td>
<td>73,436</td>
<td>238,154</td>
<td>288,904</td>
<td>589,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micropolitan</td>
<td>218,714</td>
<td>330,360</td>
<td>626,753</td>
<td>244,333</td>
<td>298,415</td>
<td>585,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncore</td>
<td>80,540</td>
<td>142,526</td>
<td>253,250</td>
<td>93,248</td>
<td>119,980</td>
<td>228,441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled and created by the authors using data downloaded from the Pennsylvania Department of State. Available at https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/OtherServices/Events/VotingElectionStatistics/Pages/VotingElectionStatistics.aspx.
ty provide a 964,364-vote Democratic advantage, while the three smallest county categories give Republicans a 260,025-vote advantage. The state’s battlefield is in the large fringe and medium metros, where neither party has a sizable advantage: Democrats had 2,145,075 voters and Republicans had 2,029,841 voters.

Voting Patterns

Voters’ preferences follow the aforementioned voter registration patterns. Many counties, particularly in the southwest, demonstrate a linear and consistent trend away from Democratic presidential candidates in the state’s presidential elections since 2000. Specifically, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, and Washington Counties have shown a steady decline in the votes they provide Democratic candidates, moving from providing a majority of their votes to Democratic candidates to providing a majority of their votes for Republicans. Prior to 2000, Beaver, Fayette, Greene, and Washington Counties were among the top ten most Democratic counties in the state (Treadway 2005).

Compared to Al Gore in 2000, Hillary Clinton in 2016 had no real advantage in vote share in the large central metros, while she lost a large number of votes in the next two largest metro categories. A defining feature of the 2016 presidential election in Pennsylvania was the way that voter turnout and the expected performance of the major-party candidates changed compared to prior elections. In 2016, according to Yost, Redman, and Thompson (2017), “counties with more working-class voters turned out in greater numbers and gave less support to Democratic candidates than in previous elections, while areas that should have been supportive of Democrats had lower turnout and offered little change in support.” The counties that President Trump won in 2016 represented about 47% of voters, and Hillary Clinton won only one-third of the vote in those counties.

Figure 1.1 provides a direct comparison of Clinton and Gore vote share by county. Viewing Hillary Clinton’s county vote share in relation to Al Gore’s county vote share confirms the Democrats’ sizable loss of support in the large fringe metros of southwestern Pennsylvania during the first part of this century and underscores a lack of significant gains elsewhere to offset those losses.

Comparing changes in the returns for Governor Tom Wolf and U.S. Senator Bob Casey in their past two elections helps further clarify how voting patterns are changing at the county level. A third of the state’s counties gave Governor Wolf a smaller share of the vote in 2018 than in his 2014 campaign, with double-digit declines in rural counties and strong gains in a half dozen
suburban counties (Yost and Redman, in press). Senator Casey saw declines in counties located in northeastern Pennsylvania, and his greatest gains were, like those of Governor Wolf, in suburban counties. The changes in these two races show how the state has reorganized itself in the Trump era (Figure 1.2): The northeast seems to be moving away from Democrats and the southeast seems to be moving toward them.

**The Realignment of Partisanship and Ideology**

The data on party registration and voting over the past twenty years show how voting patterns in the state have changed. There are numerous reasons for these changing preferences, but no political change has been more consequential to state politics than the sorting of the state’s voters into more ideologically consistent partisans. Figure 1.3 shows how the ideological composition of partisans has changed among Pennsylvania’s registered voters.

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**Figure 1.1** Change in Democratic vote, 2000 and 2016 presidential elections. The diagonal line represents no change in vote share; counties below the line gave a smaller share of their vote to Hillary Clinton compared to Al Gore. The labeled counties had a decline of 15% or more in their Democratic vote share. Black dots are counties won by Hillary Clinton in 2016. (Compiled and created by the authors using data downloaded from the Pennsylvania Department of State.)
between 2000 and 2018. Liberals are now more likely to identify as Democratic than they were in 2000, while conservatives are even more likely to identify as Republican today than in the past. This partisan realignment in Pennsylvania is consistent with patterns identified nationally and in other states (Abramowitz 2018).

This chapter has highlighted the central questions of our study, defined *nationalization*, and provided an overview of the scholarly literature. In addition, it has explained how the case studies are structured and why we situated them in Pennsylvania. Chapter 2 provides a statewide overview of the level of nationalization in presidential, congressional, and state legislative races. This aggregate-level analysis not only presents a context for our case studies but also establishes baseline measures of nationalization in Pennsylvania. The case study chapters that follow allow for an in-depth analysis of how nationalization played out in individual congressional and state legislative races. The concluding chapter ties together the aggregate-level analysis from Chapter 2 and the individual-level case studies. Because our understanding of nationalization’s role in down-ballot races is limited, this work is large-
ly exploratory in nature; our goal is to produce generalizable conclusions that can be tested empirically in future work.

NOTES

1. We should note that we do not consider the role of the media in this review because we are interested in actors who make decisions that are explicitly political. For scholarship that examines nationalization and the media, see Hopkins (2018, Chapter 9) and Moskowitz (2021).

2. Quite a few years earlier, in a review of Austin Ranney’s *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government*, Schattschneider (1954) had noted the “nationalization of party alignments since 1932” (153).


4. Although the view that members of Congress had become less vulnerable in the 1960s and 1970s was widely held, there were those who challenged that conclusion (see, for example, Jacobson [1987]; see also Ansolabehere, Brady, and Fiorina [1992] in response to Jacobson).

5. See Gimpel (1999) for a response to Renner’s analysis.

6. For a complete treatment of the APSA’s report, see Chapter 1 of Rosenfeld (2018).

7. The distinction between party reform and party renewal can be found in Conley (2013), among others.
8. Gavin (2012) argues that the GOP’s renewal efforts of the 1970s had roots as far back as the New Deal era, when the party initiated institutional changes in response to devastating losses in the 1930s.

9. See also Azari (2016), who has described the present era as one of “weak parties and strong partisanship.”

10. There are a number of studies of nationalized campaigning in the comparative politics literature. To give just one example, Hijino and Ishima (2021) coin the term *cross-level electoral appeals* (or CLEAs) and identify factors that lead to more frequent CLEAs in Japanese local elections.

11. Schoenberger’s (1969) study of Republican House candidates’ decisions to endorse Barry Goldwater in 1964 examined only the effects of those decisions and not the factors that influenced them in the first place.

12. See, for example, the FiveThirtyEight forecast that showed Pennsylvania as the key tipping-point state (available at https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2020-election-forecast/) and this analysis from the Washington Post (available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/01/here-are-states-which-have-been-most-likely-deliver-presidency/).

13. The state’s population was 12,281,054 in 2000 (Table DP-1) and 12,790,505 in 2017 according to the 2013–2017 ACS 5-Year Population Estimates (Table S0501).


16. We compare 2000 to 2016 because neither race included an incumbent.

**REFERENCES**


