Political Erosion in "The Land of Steady Habits": Party Politics and Connecticut's 2018 Gubernatorial Election

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Introduction

As a follow up to my presentation at the 2018 and 2019 New England Political Science Association's Clyde McKee Memorial New England Politics Roundtable, this analysis offers an overview of Connecticut's 2018 gubernatorial election. Governor Ned Lamont spent over $16 million and won some 687,000 votes while over 710,000 voted for other candidates. Because of a shrinking and divided state Republican Party, GOP candidates were plentiful but combative against one another. At the same time, the weakened state party bosses sought for pathways to bring factions of their respective parties together. This piece highlights these dynamics, but it also suggests that a longstanding divided Connecticut GOP has allowed for statewide offices to remain in arguably united Democratic hands while an increasing number of voters are not affiliated with any political party.

Considering Governor Dan Malloy served two terms and had the nation's lowest gubernatorial polling ratings, recent history and common wisdom suggested that electing another Democratic governor would be unlikely. Even the Republican Governors Association identified Connecticut as the Republican Party's best chance of winning a governorship currently held by Democrats (Vigdor 2018g). Polling prior to the general election had the two major party candidates in a "virtual tie" (Blair and Keating 2018; Pazniokas 2018j)[1] or a "cliffhanger" (Vigdor 2018a). Beyond the outgoing administration, Ned Lamont was not the most popular candidate—even among Democratic voters. However, for Republicans, there were multiple and disputing candidates during the Donald Trump presidential era that led to their loss (Foderaro 2018a; Keating 2018b).[2] But it was more nuanced than these factors and this analysis traces Connecticut's problematic party politics that led to a Democratic gubernatorial victory.

Overview

While the Constitution State is known as the "land of steady habits," its voters faced tumultuous political and economic challenges as state civic pride has lessened.[3] Connecticut's economy remains one of the worst recovering state economies since the 2007 Great Recession (Connecticut Business and Industry Association 2018, Lurye 2018b). Repeated polls indicate that the state's economy was the number one issue concerning many voters as many large corporations—including Aetna and General Electric—were leaving the state ("A Curse" 2018). Various experts even suggested a number of its cities have yet to recover from the 1990s recession. Connecticut also has "a city problem—or specifically, lack of a major city" (Singer 2018a).

Beyond economic concerns, party affiliation politics has been a longstanding problem in Connecticut. Major registered party voters are near 60% (38% Democrat, 21% Republican) while a large share of registered voters remain third party or unaffiliated—not to be confused with the "Independent" Party line (Radelet 2018a, Satter 2004). Because the state has strong, if not complicated, closed primary elections where voters must declare party affiliation months in advance and few party loyalists support modern proposal reforms. Instead, the two major parties remain tied to decades old reforms to decentralize state committee power and weaken state party chairs. With the end of county government in 1959, party patronage lessened and once strong state party bosses allowed local committees to make various party decisions such as nominating and supporting various candidates. Gone then were infamous powerbroker state party chairs like Chairmen John Bailey (Democrat) and J. Henry Roraback (Republican). Thus, political parties have been on the decline for decades and patronage politics has subsided. Most importantly, the deal-making politics of candidate nominations for state offices has largely rested with local

committees (Satter 2004, chapter 4). This mid-century decentralization not only lessened strong-arm party bosses, but it also prevented state party chairs from haggling, assuaging and influencing various state candidates including gubernatorial ones. This can partly explain why modern state party chairs can rarely cut deals or prevent candidates from running for office and could explain why so many candidates ran for governor in 2018.[4]

Connecticut has third party options beyond the two major parties, including A Connecticut Party, Working Families Party, Socialist Party, Green Party and even an Independent Party; eventually Republican candidate Bob Stefanowski and other Republican statewide candidates did receive cross endorsements from the state's Independent Party following the August 2018 primary (Pazniokas 2018f). But third party voters make up single-digit percentages of registered voters and rarely make double-digit support in state elections, the exception being the 1990 election of former Republican US Senator and then Governor Lowell Weicker under A Connecticut Party. That gubernatorial election loss for the two major parties was partly due to the weakened state party system after a long period of strong state party bosses (Satter 2004).

Beyond party affiliations, Connecticut residents demographically are a very complex population. Its cities are overwhelmingly Democrat and minority while its rural areas are exceedingly Republican and White and the state's suburbs are largely unaffiliated White voters. In cities like New Haven and Hartford, local unions often control the issues. Politically and financially, numerous unions openly support specific candidates for their causes, whereas post-industrial cities like Bridgeport and Waterbury maintain strong mayor political machine city halls. In rural areas that were and to some degree remain industrial based economies like Naugatuck Valley and Connecticut River Valley, the Republican resurgence has been especially

popular in the last decade. Yet in suburbs like West Hartford (adjacent to Hartford), Hamden (outside New Haven), and Trumbull (near Bridgeport), they remain mostly unaffiliated voters but more than often Democratic leaning. These demographic considerations are essential for understanding Connecticut's statewide elections. While it appears to be easy to pinpoint elections to blue town versus red town voting habits, there is a more complex political calculus. Connecticut has been a hyper-home rule state with 169 municipalities with no formal county governance except for the state's court system. Connecticut residents are fiercely proud of individual municipal governance that yields to little regionally shared authorities, finances or resources. Provincial politics then becomes the norm in countless Connecticut municipalities as well as localized party structures (Wharton 2018, 150-51).

Even more precarious for Connecticut's party politics are the separate and various local party committees in so many municipalities. For the two major parties in Connecticut then, there are hundreds of Democratic and Republican "Town Committees" that make up the very grassroots of recruiting and financing candidates for state and local offices. No surprise then, this results in Balkanized politics among 169 municipalities. In addition, many of these committee members are more than often longtime party loyalists. This has implications for not only local politics but also for state politics since many local party town committee members serve as party delegates at their respective state party nomination conventions, state central party committees and campaign aides to numerous political candidates. This political party insular approach also leads to divisive if not confusing politics since candidates seeking state offices have to meet and remain in contact with so many local party committees and longtime party members (Satter 2004, 56-57).

For gubernatorial candidates then, visiting and remaining in contact with so many local party committees can be a harrowing feat. It often means state candidates have to announce early and seek support from local party committees several months in advance of their state party convention. A number of gubernatorial candidates, for example, purposely announced early like Democrats Dan Drew and Susan Bysiewicz and Republicans Prasad Srinivasan and Mark Boughton. While other candidates sought unorthodox approaches like Bob Stefanowski, Dave Stemerman and Joe Ganim as they petitioned to be in their party primary elections following their party conventions (Vigdor 2018e). Many candidates were current or former mayors and lawmakers while others were businessmen candidates running for public office for the very first time (Blair 2018b).

Finally, a more media centered interest was the outgoing governor's ratings versus the president's popularity. Since voter support for Malloy remained around 20 to 25 percent, many Republicans considered him and Democratic party candidates vulnerable. Even Democratic candidates recognized this concern and rarely had any public affiliation with Malloy. At the same time, Trump had very similar approval numbers across Connecticut. Countless candidate debates, articles and broadcast segments focused on the approval ratings of the governor versus the president and which gubernatorial candidate could gain support from Connecticut voters (Vigdor 2018l, Altimari 2018a, Cury 2018). Some, including campaign staff members themselves, said it was the election of "Ned Malloy versus Bob Trumpowski" following Stefanowski's primary win (Stuart 2018a). Yet, Republican candidates largely embraced Trump and publicly offered him an "A" in his presidential leadership and welcomed the president to campaign with them. Even the party's endorsed candidate, Mark Boughton, as Danbury's mayor supported illegal alien deportations (Vigdor 2018j), publicly gave the president an "A" even

though he wrote-in his dog over Donald Trump for president (McEnroe 2018, Pazniokas 2018a and 2018e.

Yet the most significant issue facing both parties remained internal politics. Political parties bring unique dynamics, quirks, histories and problems. This dynamic is not that unusual as numerous political scientists have offered how much of an issue longtime politics can pose for countless candidates. Alan Rosenthal, for example, examined party politics particularly in nearby states New York and New Jersey. Ego and petty politics are the norm for any political entity. But according to Rosenthal, how political organizations find pathways to address them is the most important aspect for operatives, politicos, and voters to advance their agendas between legislative and executive officials (Rosenthal 1990). For Connecticut Democrats, their party operation can be very divisive due to its heterogeneity. Beyond race, ethnicity and class distinctions, many of their leaders largely reflect their urban and suburban constituencies. But many of their delegates and local officials are overwhelmingly older compared to voters. Interestingly this aging dynamic is a concern that Republicans share with Democrats. Many Republican state and local officials are overwhelmingly older as well. But Republicans are also significantly White and from more rural or remote areas of the state.

Table 1. Political Party Pitfalls in Connecticut

Party challenges	**Demographic challenges**	**Institutional challenges**
Closed primary elections, state party nominating conventions	Older, Whiter party affiliated voters and candidates	Home rule, local party committees (no county or regionalized structure)
Majority unaffiliated voters (21% GOP, 38% Dems)	Largely self-funded or businessmen candidates	Political Action Committee (PACs) donors
Decentralized state party, weakened state party chairs and factional politics	Divided urban (largely Democratic), suburban (largely unaffiliated) and rural (largely Republican)	Public financing or Citizens Election Program (CEP)

Candidate Rundown

At the beginning of 2018, Democrats and Republicans initially had a significant number of gubernatorial candidates. A dozen candidates were on the Democratic side and 16 candidates among Republicans. Since both parties held their conventions in May and primary elections in August before November's 2018 general election, a number of these candidates had to begin their fundraising and ground game out early—in some cases in 2017 (Blair 2018a). Moreover, both major parties expected candidates to achieve at least 15 percent support from their respective delegates at their May convention to appear on the August primary ballot. Fifteen percent seemed like an achievable number, but considering the number of local party committees, number of delegates and number of candidates, it was difficult for gubernatorial campaigns to precisely calculate their odds. Besides, the higher number of candidates on the Republican side became an internal faction process (Vigdor 2018m). Meanwhile for Democrats many of their candidates either lacked the funding, name recognition or delegate support prior to their state party convention.

Considering the number and various types of gubernatorial candidates, getting messaging out proved to be challenging. With nearly thirty candidates for Connecticut governor by spring of 2018 and a media divided among the New York, New Haven and Hartford markets, how would candidates get their names out there? With so many candidates, how would they stand apart from each other? Most importantly, why were there so many candidates? In the past, state party leaders (particularly party chairs) *were* the powerbrokers and gatekeepers for gubernatorial candidates. That changed fundamentally with the end of county government during the middle of the twentieth century and party bosses lost their significance with lessened patronage politics. With party bosses and state committees then being decentralized decades ago, a more recent

public policy phenomenon contributed to the larger number of gubernatorial candidates. Connecticut's public financing Citizen Election Program (CEP) also allowed for multiple candidates to fundraise from individual donors and not large Political Action Committees (PACs). It thereby allowed for more than usual candidates to run for governor as long as they met specific deadlines and requirements. As one of three Republican candidates receiving public financing, Steve Obsitnik did not receive state grant money until weeks before November's election due to the State Elections Enforcement Commission's (SEEC) lengthy donor investigations into FixCT coordinating campaign activities (Pazniokas 2018n and 2018o; Keating 2018e; Stuart 2018b). The commission also investigated Stemerman's campaign using out of state petition circulators (Vigdor 2018p).

The commission's public financing program was the result of former Governor John Rowland's campaign scandal and was supposed to prevent future corruption. To qualify, candidates accept smaller $5 to $100 donations and supporters fully disclose their names, occupations, and if they are a state contractor (Pazniokas 2018o). But CEP also led to more candidates since "free money, tax payer money—changed all that," according to a former state Republican chairman (Healy 2018). Many gubernatorial candidates filed for public financing with estimates nearing $30 million for 2018's election. There were more candidates running for office in 2019 than any other year and a record number of them filed for CEP grants (Stuart 2018c). "They're becoming even more strict than they have been in the past. I suspect everyone is gonna have the same issue. [The commission] got way more candidates than they ever expected," commented a campaign operative (Vigdor 2018r).

Beyond public financing, so many candidates ran for other reasons. The state's increasing debt included over a $2 billion deficit within two years, which would yield to tax increases

(Corcoran 2018) and finding new (if not unpopular) revenue sources like highway tolls and reforming state pensions (Phaneuf 2018b). The ongoing budgetary and deficit problems were the most significant issue facing voters and candidates alike, per countless polls including Quinnipiac and Sacred Heart Universities' polls (Munson 2018, Pazniokas 2018j, Dixon 2018, Keating 2018d). In addition, many gubernatorial candidates recognized that as a New England region, nearby states elected Republican candidates for governor. In fact, Connecticut and Rhode Island were ironically the only two remaining states with Democratic governors and 2018 was their gubernatorial election year.

So why and how did the Democrats consolidate their gubernatorial campaigns well ahead of the Republicans? First off, Ned Lamont—who would go onto to be the party's convention and primary election choice—already had the name recognition and financial support. He ran unsuccessfully in 2006 for the United States Senate against Joe Lieberman but he came to the campaign table with his family's money. Also among the candidates on the Democratic side, several mayors dropped out of the race due to their political issues (Dan Drew with a campaign scandal) and fundraising shortfalls (Jonathan Harris and Luke Bronin). While other candidates conceded to other statewide positions (Susan Bysiewicz for lieutenant governor and Dita Bhargava for treasurer). Still, others were long shot candidates who had never held elected office and had little name recognition or campaign money (Sean Connolly, Mark Stuart Greenstein, Jacey Wyatt). The last holdout candidate was a well-known convicted Bridgeport mayor (Joe Ganim) with successful retail politics approaches as he raised over $500,000 early on (Foderaro 2018b, Vigdor 2018h).

Table 2. 2018 Connecticut's Democratic Gubernatorial Candidates

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Ned Lamont	Greenwich cable company entrepreneur	2006 US Senate Democrat nominee versus Joe Lieberman; received 80% support at the state convention and primary election; elected governor in 2018
Susan Bysiewicz	Middletown Democrat official and state official	Has been in state and local office for 40 years; joined Lamont's ticket as lieutenant governor and wins primary, general elections
Joe Ganim	Bridgeport mayor and lawyer	8 term mayor, almost 1998 gubernatorial candidate and convicted felon

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Table 3. Drop Down/Drop out Candidates

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Jonathan Harris	West Hartford former mayor and state senator	Dropped out due to fundraising shortfall; political centrist and lawyer
Luke Bronin	Hartford mayor and former aide to Governor Malloy	Dropped out as he was only in his first mayoral term; lobbied area towns for regionalization
Joe Connolly	Former state veterans official	Dropped out due to fundraising shortfall and name recognition
Dan Drew	Middletown mayor	Dropped out due to campaign scandal and was an early leading candidate
Dita Bhargava	Greenwich businesswoman	Dropped down to state treasurer candidate

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Table 4. Party Gadflies

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Guy Smith	Businessman	Former AmeriCares director
Jacey Wyatt	Branford candidate for multiple local, state offices	First transwoman to run for state office, dropped out before convention
Lee Whitnum	Candidate for multiple offices including Congress	Was dragged off debate stage, dropped out before convention
Mark Stewart Greenstein	Candidate for multiple offices	Campaign on bringing the NHL Whalers back; tried to petition after the primary

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Among the Democratic candidates, only a few were taken seriously by party officials and the media and this was partly because many saw them as future candidates for governor. This included popular but short term Mayors Jonathan Harris and Luke Bronin (Blair 2018b). Since their fundraising efforts fell short, they withdrew weeks before May's convention. Susan Bysiewicz and Joe Ganim were well known names but more so for their infamous reputations. Bysiewicz served in state government for decades including as Secretary of State but was not the most enthusiastic politico (Pazniokas 2018g) whereas Ganim had the most skillful retail politics but served seven years in prison for accepting bribes as Bridgeport mayor. (He recently was reelected after his jail sentence, but as a former lawyer remains disbarred and the state ruled against his receiving public campaign financing money.) So both candidates came with baggage, but many Democrats especially in urban areas petitioned Ganim for the primary election in August (Vigdor 2018i). Still, Lamont and Bysiewicz ran together and won overwhelmingly (80%) at the state party convention in May and received similar support in the primary. In other words, the Democrats remained united before the convention and onto the primary election (Pazniokas 2018m, Altimari 2018c).

Compared to the unity the Democrats increasingly displayed, state Republican officials and candidates remained openly divided. A dozen candidates for Democrats but Republicans remained increasingly divided among 16 candidates before May's state party convention. Several candidates even ran for statewide office prior to 2018 including Dave Walker (former lieutenant governor candidate), Tim Herbst (former state treasurer candidate), Mark Boughton (former gubernatorial and lieutenant governor candidate) and Peter Lumaj (former secretary of state candidate) (Ryser 2018). Other candidates announced early for notoriety or public financing purposes. This included Prasad Srinivasan, Mark Lauretti, and Michael Handler. Other

Republican gubernatorial candidates instead ran for other offices including Erin Stewart for lieutenant governor, Toni Boucher for State Senate and Joe Visconti for US Senate. Similar to Democrats, Republicans had several candidates whom few delegates took seriously as they never held public office and had little funding (Peter Thalheim, Scott Merrell and Eric Mastroianni).

Table 5. 2018 Connecticut's Republican Gubernatorial Candidates

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Mark Boughton	Danbury mayor	three time governor and lt. gov. candidate; 2018 party convention backed candidate
Tim Herbst	Trumbull First Selectman	Former state treasurer candidate
Steve Obsitnik	Westport businessman	Navy veteran, Siri inventor
Dave Stemerman	Greenwich businessman	Endorsed by *Hartford Courant,* petition primary candidate
Bob Stefanowski	Madison businessman	Bypassed convention, petitioned and won primary election

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Table 6. Unsuccessful Convention Candidates

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Peter Lumaj	Fairfield lawyer	Former attorney general candidate
Dave Walker	Ex-US Comptroller	Former lieutenant gov candidate
Mark Lauretti	Shelton mayor	13 term mayor
Prasad Srinivasan	Glastonbury State Rep. and doctor	First to announce candidacy
Michael Handler	New Canaan resident; Stamford city CFO	Former Mayor (Gov.) Malloy's CFO

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Table 7. Drop Down candidates

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Erin Stewart	New Britain mayor	Dropped down to lieutenant governor candidate and lost
Toni Boucher	Weston State Senator and businesswoman	Dropped down to run for state senate reelection and lost
Joe Visconti	Former West Hartford councilman, Trump CT campaign aide	Dropped down to run for US Senate and lost
Eric Mastroianni	Navy veteran	Dropped down for State Representative and lost

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Table 8. Party Gadflies

Leading candidates	Occupation	Brief bio/What happened?
Scott Merrell	Norwalk mayoral candidate	Known as "Rowayton's cowboy" gadfly
Peter Thalheim	Lawyer	Libertarian concerned about state pensions

Source: "Who Wants" 2018

Ultimately at May's convention, Boughton and Herbst gained support from party delegates along with businessman Steve Obsitnik. So instead of having two candidates for primary voters to choose from like the Democrats, Republican delegates chose three leaving the convention—and very narrowly so because Boughton made a fractional percentage point over the 50% party backed candidacy requirement since voting had to take place three times from the convention floor. To make matters even more complicated, two additional businessmen sought the petition process for the August primary election and Mayor Mark Lauretti threatened to petition as well (Pazaniokas 2018h). David Stemerman proved unsuccessful at the convention, but received the *Hartford Courant*'s endorsement.[5] He did qualify for the primary by submitting double the required amount of nearly 10,000 signatures (Krasselt 2018d) as did Bob Stefanowski, who bypassed the convention process altogether (Vigdor 2018m). After spending nearly $2.5 million of his own money, Stefanowski gained name recognition by campaigning

against the state's unpopular income tax through highway billboard signs and television advertisements especially on local Fox channels (Stefanowski 2018, Vigdor 2018f). But he stressed that, "as a political outsider, I felt it was important to gain broad-based support from the 450,000 registered Republicans rather than relying on an outdated convention process that strongly favored career politicians" (Vigdor 2019a).

So while Democrats had two gubernatorial candidates (Lamont, Ganim) for the primary election in August, Republicans had a complicated gubernatorial ballot. Three Republican candidates were approved by delegates (Boughton, Herbst, Obsitnik), but two more qualified through their petitioning process (Stemerman, Stefanowski). So with Republicans making up 21 percent of Connecticut voters, closed primary loyalists would decide among five candidates in August. Republican primary voters chose Bob Stefanowski with 29 percent support and Joe Markley as lieutenant governor candidate. Therefore, some 70 percent of Republican voters did *not* support Stefanowski.

But the most significant problem facing both parties was getting the support of unaffiliated voters on their side especially after their respective party conventions in May 2018 and primary election in August 2018. Gaining favor among a sizable but disconnected voting population was critical to winning the gubernatorial election for either Lamont or Stefanowski. To complicate things further, there was petitioning candidate (and former Republican) businessman Oz Griebel. While his name recognition was notable among most business people around the Hartford area, beyond central Connecticut he was hardly recognizable. Still, he did gain some votes in the November election at 4% even though he polled higher in some polls (Ormseth 2018b).[6] Most unaffiliated voters still remained divided among the two major party candidates and since Connecticut leans Democrat, Lamont had a significant chance of winning

assuming Democrats and unaffiliated learning Democrats voted in higher numbers than in past elections. Still, the Malloy factor was an issue in various polls and Lamont often detached himself from the unpopular governor. For Stefanowski, any association with Trump helped him among many Republicans, but larger numbers of Republican leaning unaffiliated voters and few Democrats grew wary of his ties to the president (Keating 2018b). The day after the primary election, for example, Trump tweeted support for Stefanowski and the newly chosen Republican gubernatorial candidate embraced as opposed to challenging the president's support. Polls among independents and voters in general indicated concerns about Trump appearing to support Stefanowski. But Stefanowski chose not to distance himself from Trump. It must be remembered that unaffiliated and third party voters make up a large share of voters in Connecticut. Currying favor with these voters has been key in previous general elections. Most polls indicated a neck-and-neck race with Lamont leading narrowly at most by 6 percent (Keating 2018c; "New Sacred Heart Poll" 2018).

On election day, Lamont did gain the highest number of votes in Connecticut history, but he did *not* receive the majority of votes in the general election—over 687,000 compared to over 710,000 who voted for someone else. Ultimately, Stefanowski lost by 44,000 votes as Lamont carried Connecticut's largest cities. Many political scientists, including Professors Gary Rose and Ron Schurin, attributed an increase of registered voters who challenged Donald Trump's politics (Radelat 2018b, Dixon and Krasselt 2018). Interestingly, election day registration and registrar of voters' staff shortages delayed final results for weeks, particularly in cities with rain-soaked ballots jamming voting machines (Ormseth 2018c, Vigdor 2018s). Even Stefanowski did not concede until the morning after the election.

What Went Wrong and What's Next?

Essentially, Connecticut's gubernatorial race came down to businessmen versus mayors after the major party conventions and then businessman versus businessman after the primary election. The mayoral candidates, particularly on the Republican side, remained increasingly divided going into the November election. Their campaigns and supporters reflected the same division. It took months, for example, to have Mayors Boughton and Herbst connect with businessman Stefanowski let alone share resources and staff after the primary election. Lumaj did agree to support Stefanowski a month after the convention (Pazniokas 2018i), but Lauretti continued threatening to petition onto the primary and general elections as an independent candidate. For Democrats, Mayor Harris eventually worked with businessman Lamont's campaign especially since Harris was appointed political director.

Additional problematic differences included choosing lieutenant gubernatorial candidates on the gubernatorial tickets. While Bysiewicz joined Lamont before the Democratic convention, some 30% of voters supported Eva Bermudez Zimmerman for lieutenant governor as she was a younger and more progressive union leader. She had little candidate experience yet more young voters and people of color favored her in polls (Pazniokas 2018b). Bysiewicz lacked charisma, but she was a safe experienced choice. For the Republican ticket, the lieutenant governor's race was nearly as divisive as the gubernatorial one. With Erin Stewart dropping down from gubernatorial candidate to lieutenant governor candidate a day before May's convention, many delegates were left confused (Pazniokas 2018b). She entered the race late (Altimari 2018b)[7] and she often politicized that the Republican ticket was largely older, male and White (Vigdor 2018t, Pazniokas 2018d)[8] But Stewart did receive the *Hartford Courant*'s endorsement.[9] At the same time Darien First Selectman Jayme Stevenson and State Senator Joe Markley remained divided

as lieutenant governor candidates especially after publicly bruising debates with Stewart. While Markley was a recognizable name among many Connecticut Republicans, he was viewed by many including independents and the media as being an extremist as he was an early Tea Party and Trump supporter (Vigdor 2018q, Stuart 2018d). Even after Markley won the primary election, he often spoke against Stefanowski for relying on outside Connecticut campaign aides and outside money from the national Republican Governor's Association. No surprise then that the Republican gubernatorial and lieutenant governor candidates were rarely seen publicly together (Davis 2018).

Fundraising for both gubernatorial campaigns was anemic since both candidates chose not to use public financing, which could have been $15 million. Instead, Lamont and Stefanowski largely relied on their personal finances. In fact, Stefanowski "shamed" other Republican candidates like Boughton and Herbst for relying on $1.3 million each in public financing. At the same time both mayors reminded their supporters that Stefanowski was a previously registered Democrat who gave significant donations to Democratic politicians. Stemerman was also a former Democrat who donated significantly to Democratic campaigns, including Barack Obama's presidency. Even Herbst campaign fliers depicted the millionaire candidates as "two peas in a pod" and asked "who's the bigger Democrat: Stefanowski or Stemerman?" (Keating 2018a). Most of these feuds before the August primary came not only from their campaigns' social media but also from the press (Vigdor 2018b, Krasselt 2018e, Pazniokas 2018q). Some candidates even pledged that if elected, they would not raise taxes and consider contracting and consolidating state services. Competing campaigns often publicly heckled and booed other candidates from the same party (Kramer 2018, Krasselt 2018c).[10]

Ultimately Stefanowski finished first or second in all but five of Connecticut's municipalities with 29 percent of total Republican primary voters (Vigdor 2018f).

Following the bruising primary election, the general election proved to be only costlier. Lamont in fact outspent Stefanowski $16.5 million to $6.9 million (Griebel spent over $500,000). Stefanowski also relied on $7.5 million from the Republican Governor's Association (Vigdor 2018a, Skahill 2018) and spent the major share of his own money on campaign ads during the primary election. This led to a limited donor base then for Stefanowski for the general election. He also publicly stressed repealing the income tax, but offered little policy stances. In fact, other candidates agreed with his income tax repeal and incorporated it into their own platforms (Phaneuf 2018a and 2018b).

Since both major party candidates were never elected to statewide office prior to their primary election, their charisma politics drew concerns from pollsters, journalists and party loyalists. Lamont publicly used hokey phrases while Stefanowski often came across stiff at public gatherings. Since Stefanowski never ran for office before and relied on paid consultants, he interacted with specific journalists and excluded others as well as cancelled various media appearances ("Don't Disrespect" 2018). But millionaire candidates using their own fortune led to few donors for their campaigns as well. Even former Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Foley offered that many potential contributors often look elsewhere rather than at self-funders like Stefanowski and Lamont. He also offered that too many donors also look to federal elections for making donations and Connecticut's campaign laws discourage financial services industry employees from donating to state campaigns (Pazniokas 2018p).

Some observers also suggested that the formal and public party debates before the primary election and even at the convention added further division. There were several debates

organized by various media and organizations but their candidate requirements varied. Still, some early debates required candidates to have party endorsement after May's convention, while others relied on polls to determine whether candidates could appear on stage. Still, some debates led to little separation between the candidates on issues, but showed their personality differences (Krasselt 2018a). Most press accounts suggested that candidates' egos and zealousness got in the way on stage and on the campaign trail. Some candidates even attacked other candidates for avoiding their party conventions and debates. As one gubernatorial candidate suggested, "People need to know how to not take things so personally" (Altimari 2018d).

Stefanowski already had an uphill battle in an overwhelmingly Democratic state. But among a smaller and divided Republican base with 30 percent of Republican supporters, it proved very difficult to unite a Republican base for the general election within a couple of months. Most importantly, Stefanowski relied little on local party committees and many party insiders resented his candidacy since he bypassed the state convention. Even at May's party convention, his supporters and staff had their supporters' passes confiscated by state party staff (as they were not a registered campaign at the convention), but his campaign had the most well attended convention reception. Further criticism came from other state candidates and party officials that Stefanowski chose party outsiders from other states and not local operatives to run his campaign (Vigdor 2018f). This included campaign aides from Virginia and Kentucky but few from New England. Publicly, Stefanowski would speak stoically. But in smaller groups he was relatable to many potential voters. However, the most significant issue facing Stefanowski's campaign was fundraising beyond the August primary. As a business executive who never ran for office (and missed voting in several recent elections), Stefanowski relied largely on his own money and little on actual campaign fundraising. Criticism about the campaign's media

strategies also became a concern as staff worked with specific press outlets and received a significant share of campaign money from the Republican Governors' Association (Vigdor 2018g and 2018k).

Criticism also remained an issue for Ned Lamont's campaign. While he was a local elected public official in the early 1980s and lost a statewide race in 2006, he relied mostly on self-financing as he spent $16.5 million. Being a businessman from a wealthy Greenwich family, many found him to be quirky as he was known for his antiquated expressions and statements. Most Democrats were not enthusiastic about his candidacy and some supported Ganim until the primary. While Ganim was a convicted felon mayor who was reelected in 2016, Democrat primary voters only gave him 20 percent support. Still, Lamont gained the backing of the party early on before Stefanowski. Unlike Stefanowski, Lamont gained unions' support and the Democratic Party successful ground game was overwhelming especially in urban areas. Meanwhile Stefanowski's largely out of state campaign aides and small Republican base remained very divided going into the November election. But, Stefanowski admitted that choosing local campaign aides often meant relying on longtime operatives who were already tapped by other campaigns and offered little talent. Instead, he suggested the party find better pathways of training and developing new and fresher operatives than relying on party loyalists. Yet Lamont had an early advantage uniting the party as he learned from his 2006 senatorial race how to do so. Connecticut Democratic leaders early on elected a new chair and vice chair at the beginning of 2019. In fact, longtime operative and former New Haven alderman Nick Balletto did not seek another term as former Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman was chosen by the newly elected governor along with New Haven lawyer Erick Russell as vice chair. Even after his primary win, Lamont hit the trail immediately afterwards whereas Stefanowski lagged behind

since he tried to find pathways to unite the party behind him even at his headquarters with post-primary election meetings (Pazniokas 2018l, Vigdor 2018c).

Still, the larger concern Republicans like Stefanowski faced over Lamont and Democrats was more related to internal party fighting. Opponents, like Tim Herbst, were outspoken against the divisions within the party from convention to primary to general election. He and others also criticized that Democrats' ground game since it was far larger and more organized than the Republicans' (Herbst 2018a and 2018b). But this was nothing new for Connecticut Republicans as they often challenged partnerships with Democrat campaigns and organized labor unions. But Herbst was outspoken about the state party and said that primary voters had an "insatiable appetite for wealthy, self-funding outsider candidates." A divided party among so many candidates only added to the disunity among a smaller number of registered Republicans and among wary unaffiliated Republican leaning voters. An outdated convention process, election day registration issues, delays in public financing and an increasing number of women (particularly in suburbs) added to ongoing Republican Party issues (Krasselt 2018b).

Beyond internal party fighting, the Trump effect cannot be overlooked as his popularity ratings were unusually low in Connecticut compared to national polls. Nearly all the Republican candidates (including Stefanowski) publicly supported the president. For unaffiliated voters and any Democratic voters supportive of someone like Stefanowski, it proved difficult for many of them to support a Republican ticket. A number of party operatives and insiders have debated this concern and will continue to do so well beyond the 2018 election and into the 2020 presidential race and 2022 gubernatorial election. But Malloy's approval ratings were just as problematic at 23 percent versus Trump's 39 percent (Keating 2018b). Trump might have been a concern, but it came down to addressing longtime turf wars and egos as well as growing and reforming the state

Republican Party. Gubernatorial candidate Erin Stewart, for example, as mayor of a city where Democrats outnumber Republicans six to one, offers some perspective on future party strategies. "In New Britain, I don't win without Democrats or unaffiliates supporting me. I think the Republican Party has to wake up and realize they may be need to take that same strategy…We let this election be a referendum on Donald Trump and I think that's what it proved to be" (Krasselt 2018b).

Therefore, the future of the Connecticut Republican party remains uncertain. The Trump effect has led some, including various party officials, to no longer be affiliated with the state Republican Party (London 2018) while others threaten to leave Connecticut altogether (Lurye 2018a). With Trump's ongoing effect and internal party politics—even General Assembly leaders' divisions—what reforms will help address Republicans in the future? Many have suggested open primary or caucus elections; doing away with conventions but allowing direct primaries; internally reviewing state party related concerns; consolidating local committees; revising convention rules; changing headquarters and state committee members (Burke 2018). Some offer that the party will remain divided for some time because of "two-party entitlement" and "party bureaucrats" preventing reforms and allowing bigger egos to railroad future candidates (Cowgill 2018). For both state major parties though, the convention process has been considered antiquated as Connecticut is one of 11 states that continue the practice. State party conventions have also allowed for numerous gubernatorial candidates to petition and avoid the formal party nomination process altogether. With a large and increasing number of unaffiliated voters, "political party organizations in Connecticut have sunken into relative insignificance," Judge Robert Satter rightfully predicted over a decade ago. "They provide the banner under which campaigns are conducted, but not the message or the energy of the campaigns. Those are

supplied by the candidates themselves, who fashion their own political strategy and raise their own funds to finance their runs" (Satter 2004).

Even if Connecticut Democrats appeared unified, the state has pressing economic and budgetary concerns. Lamont inherited a significant deficit in a precarious business environment. Connecticut has ranked as one of the worst states for business and Lamont and a newly elected General Assembly will have to tackle these ongoing and future concerns. If comparative state governance is a possible measure for Connecticut, one can look to nearby New Jersey where another wealthy businessman was recently elected governor. Similar to Lamont, Governor Phil Murphy won his election using his wealth to finance his campaign and tried to consolidate the state's Democratic Party base. Like Connecticut's General Assembly, New Jersey's state legislature is also majority Democratic. So both state governments on paper have unified governance so resolving their respective state budgets, economies and policies should not be a problem. However, this is hardly the case in the Garden State as Murphy is faced with internal party battling between regional party bosses and lawmaker leaders challenging his early leadership. Some Democratic leaders have reportedly called the New Jersey Democratic governor "Phony Phil" as he responded that he does not "pay much attention to middle school drama" (Mulshine 2019, Johnson 2019).

Will Lamont face similar internal party battles like New Jersey's governor? Likely. Although New Jersey's party bosses are politically strong and regionally divided, Connecticut party leaders differ fundamentally in style and approach. The Constitution State allowed for home rule to flourish after 1959, leaving behind the strong party powerbroker chairs of the past. This has left much of the decision-making and nominating to the local party committees and decentralized state party chairs' power. Governors like Lamont then must navigate a very

divided but highly localized political terrain. Beyond its party politics, Connecticut's General Assembly operates as a hybrid seasonal legislature and being familiar with so many lawmakers and egos will be challenging especially for someone new to state government. Malloy hardly connected with many state lawmakers as a former city mayor. Similar to the former governor, Lamont is facing unfamiliar terrain. Like Murphy, Lamont is new to the state legislative process and politics. This is not to say that Lamont will not have a chance at resolving many of the state's issues. But his relations with the General Assembly may require unorthodox approaches as the legislative institution is a new entity to him and he will have to rely on previous and current lawmakers to help address Connecticut's budgetary issues. Connecticut's Democratic Party may ride on this honeymoon unity period so long as the state Republican Party remains divided.

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[1] Lamont lead Stefanowski 47 to 43 percent with petitioning candidate Oz Griebel at 7 percent. Similar results were reveled in the Hearst/Sacred Heart University poll as well: 40 percent for Stefanowski and 37.6 percent for Lamont and 9 percent for Griebel (Dixon 2018).

[2] "There's negative economic growth, urban poverty, multibillion-dollar budget deficits and the flight of corporations to other states" (Foderaro 2018a).

[3] "Listen to certain local and state officials. They sound like Connecticut residents are stuck in purgatory...If we all do our part, the Land of Steady Habits, which has been steadily hating itself for the last few decades, can finally begin to make this great state a little bit better than it is today" (Levatan 2018).

[4] Beyond Satter's (2004) chapter 3, Connecticut Republican Chairman J.R. Romano has suggested that state party chair power has lessened and prevented him from negotiating candidates to run or not run for public office.

[5] "The five candidates are similar in many ways, but the few differences are telling. While most of them would represent Republicans' best interests broadly, David Stemerman holds to Republican principles while offering a clear, realistic and workable vision for the future" ("Best Bet" 2018).

[6] For almost a month, polls had Griebel anywhere from 5% to 11%.

[7] Don Stacom (2018) states that "her detractors say she's too inexperienced and too young…Supporters see her as a fresh voice who could appeal to young voters, women, minorities and moderate Democrats…"

[8] Beyond Stewart making public comments about the state party, even columnists like Colin McEnroe (2018) stated "The Republicans state convention still looks like small Scandinavian town that was taken over by the people who make Dockers. They just can't seem to do anything about that. Their idea of diversity is two white guys with different food allergies."

[9] "If a Republican wins the governor's race in November, he will need a deal-making, politically savvy and battle-hardened ally in the halls of the legislative office building. Erin Stewart can be that ally" ("Erin Stewart for Republican" 2018).

[10] "'They wanted to fight,' said [state Republican Party Chairman JR] Romano, who demanded an apology from labor union members supporting Lamont. 'It was way over the top. They wanted to intimidate and bully'" (Vigdor 2018o).