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Varieties of Nationalism

Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor

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VARIETIES OF NATIONALISM

Communities, Narratives, Identities

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Abstract: Nationalism has long been a normatively and empirically contested concept, associated with democratic revolutions and public goods provision, but also with xenophobia, genocide, and wars. Moving beyond facile distinctions between "good" and "bad" nationalisms, the authors argue that nationalism is an empirically variegated ideology. Definitional disagreements, Eurocentric conceptualizations, and linear associations between ethnicity and nationalism have hampered our ability to synthesize insights. This Element proposes that nationalism can be broken down productively into parts based on three key questions: (1) Does a nation exist? (2) How do national narratives vary? (3) When do national narratives matter? The answers to these questions generate five dimensions along which nationalism varies: elite fragmentation and popular fragmentation of national communities; ascriptiveness and thickness of national narratives; and salience of national identities.

This Element also has a video abstract: Cambridge.org/Mylonas/Tudor_abstract

Keywords: nationalism, nations, narratives, identity, communities

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1 Why Another Nationalism Book?

> A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable." So, they sought it out, and when they found it, they groped about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said, "This being is like a thick snake." For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall." Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.
>
> *Tittha Sutha*, ancient Buddhist text (500 BCE)

> It may, indeed, be one of the tragic dimensions of human life that we can neither do without the political promulgation and institutionalization of "stories of peoplehood" nor can we hope to eradicate entirely their virulent potential.
>
> Rogers Smith (2003)

This Element is a guide for how to think about each country's unique experience with nationalism while also allowing for more general comparisons across varieties of nationalism. Nationalism is the most powerful political ideology of the modern age. Arising first in early modern Western Europe,[1] nationalism diffused slowly throughout the rest of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was nearly universally adopted by the twentieth century. Nationalism has been intrinsically linked with the horrors of World War II, but also the decolonization movements following World War II. Today, no other political doctrine commands such global popularity as that a people should be self-determined and sovereign. Nationalism has come to define modernity both by shaping the international system of nation-states and by regulating individual loyalty and solidarity within the confines of a nation.

Beyond structuring our inter*national* system and constituting national communities over the past two centuries,[2] nationalism has recently reshaped domestic politics in every corner of the globe. India's Narendra Modi swept to power in 2014 and 2019 through election campaigns explicitly touting Hindu nationalism, creating what is broadly understood to be a new dominant party system.[3] In 2016, Britain's then-prime minister, Theresa May, underscored the importance of national citizenship by arguing "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what 'citizenship' means."[4]

[1] Gorski 2000. [2] Mylonas and Kuo 2018; Jenne and Mylonas 2023.
[3] Chhibber and Verma 2018; Ziegfeld 2020; Dayal 2021.
[4] Bearak 2016. Other recent, relevant examples of the importance of nationalism include the independence referendums in Scotland and Catalonia as well as the ascendant anti-EU nationalist sentiment in Hungary and Poland.

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That same year, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States after promising in his campaign to "Make America Great Again" and put "America First."[5] In 2018, Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro invoked Trump's discourse, running a campaign to "make Brazil great again" that saw him win the presidency. And China's Xi Jinping has pushed for a Han-centric understanding of Chinese nationalism to consolidate his power to such a degree that he is widely considered the most powerful leader of the People's Republic of China since Mao Zedong.[6]

If Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" motto exemplified the global trend of reawakening nationalism as a campaigning force, the defeats of Trump and Bolsonaro do not obviate the nationalist trend. It suffices to remember that to defeat Trump, President Biden's efforts centered around reclaiming the definition of patriotism in the USA referring to "Build(ing) Back Better" and the "Battle for the Soul of the Nation."[7] While these nationalisms differ in important respects, there is little doubt that politicians overtly embracing nationalist rhetoric were an unanticipated political trend across the globe, a trend which flew in the face of Western liberals who expected and predicted that nationalism would die a natural death with "the end of history." [8]

The contemporary reawakening of nationalism in domestic politics is also linked to the rise of *economic* nationalism – policies seeking to delimit trade flows, champion national industry, and disengage from international economic cooperation. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in which nationalism played a key role,[9] global leaders largely accepted that "history"–or ideological competition between capitalist democracies and economically centralized autocracies – had ended and been replaced with the ideological consensus that capitalism, globalism, and liberal democracy had triumphed.[10] Economically, this meant that international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund pursued "Washington Consensus" policies – for example, market-determined exchange rates, trade liberalization, and fiscal discipline – that promoted globalization by opening up overseas markets to unfettered capital flows. Consequently, Latin America, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa witnessed more trade liberalization during the 1990s and early 2000s than any other point in modern history.[11] This changed during the 2010s, as the Washington Consensus was challenged by economic nationalism exemplified by Trump's trade war with China and by Britain's exodus from the European Union. Today, advanced and emerging

[5] Bhambra 2017; Goldstein and Hall 2017. For the trope see Levinger and Lytle 2001.
[6] Blackwill and Campbell 2016, Brown 2017. [7] Biden 2022. [8] Fukuyama 1989.
[9] Suny 1993; Beissinger 2002. [10] Boix 2019.
[11] See Williamson (2000) and Rodrik (2006). East Asian tigers notably liberalized earlier; see the World Bank Policy Research Report, *The East Asia Miracle* (1993).

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economies alike are moving toward policies of economic nationalism, albeit at different speeds.[12]

The 2020 outbreak of the global coronavirus pandemic only accentuated the nation-state's place as the primary site of policymaking.[13] A pandemic that paradoxically underscored the interconnected nature of our governments, economies, and environments caused government leaders to invoke national solidarity while announcing nation-specific measures to limit the spread of the pandemic, including border closures. The crisis' most consequential actor was the national state, with its broad array of economic, welfare and organizational powers. Even in the supranational European Union, the nearest embodiment of the nation-state's transcendence, border closures happened largely in an uncoordinated, state-led fashion. As the distribution of vaccines was the responsibility of nation-states and national health-care systems,[14] the coronavirus pandemic has forced a reassertion of the nation-state. As right-wing British nationalist Nigel Farage quipped early on in the pandemic, "we are all nationalists now."[15]

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also highlighted the enduring relevance (and empirical duality) of nationalism 'at the international level.' A critical cause for the invasion of Ukraine, as articulated by Vladimir Putin, was his understanding of Russian national identity that dictated the denial of a Ukrainian national identity:[16] "Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole . . . modern Ukraine is entirely the product of the Soviet era. We know and remember well that it was shaped – for a significant part – on the lands of historical Russia."[17] Putin cited Ukrainian state policies against the use of the Russian language in Ukraine, attempts of instilling anti-Russian sentiments, and the breakdown of relations between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches in justifying his invasion, suggesting that Ukrainian President Zelensky's goal was "forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, was comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us." His concluding statement underscored how relevant nationalism was to the war's motivation: "Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people." Putin's ascriptive understanding of Russianness is at the heart of his political actions.[18]

[12] De Bolle and Zettelmeyer 2019. [13] Bieber 2022; Mylonas and Whalley 2022.
[14] Kamradt-Scott 2020. [15] Farage 2020. [16] Kuzio 2016; Hill 2022. [17] Putin 2021.
[18] Hill and Stent 2022.

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But if Putin's concept of Russian nationhood motivated the war, Ukrainian nationalism has united the Ukrainian people in a more inclusive understanding of nationhood and spurred on the defense of the country's newfound democracy.[19] And it is for this reason that Ukrainian nationalism has been widely embraced throughout Europe and the United States, with cultural symbols such as the Eiffel Tower, Brandenburg Gate, London Eye, and the Empire State Building being lit up with the Ukrainian flag.

1.1 Addressing Five Problems in Nationalism Scholarship

Despite the growing importance of nationalism both domestically and internationally and a clear need for empirically driven assessments, scholars of nationalism are surprisingly inconsistent in their definitional and conceptual approaches. *The first problem we therefore hope to address is the paucity of definitional discussions of nationalism.* It is common practice among scholars of democracy to specify their own definition of democracy in relation to other scholarship at the outset of their research process.[20] In contrast to the democracy scholarship, nationalism scholars employ a broad range of definitions without engaging with or relating to one another's definitions. As Hutchinson and Smith aptly put it "perhaps the central difficulty in the study of nations and nationalism has been the problem of finding adequate and agreed definitions of the key concepts of nation and nationalism." (1994: 4).

Even among nationalism's most-cited scholars, its definition varies widely, including an imagined community, an ideological movement, a state of mind, and collective action. While such definitions *can* be related to one another and while we do not need a single universal definition of nationalism, the lack of attention to definitions has led to widespread confusion. Indeed, Connor (1994: 91) writes that the term nationalism "is shrouded in ambiguity due to [scholars'] imprecise, inconsistent and often totally erroneous usage," while Tishkov (2000: 625–650) goes so far as to suggest eschewing the terms "nation" and "nationalism" altogether because they are conceptually meaningless. To remedy this widespread confusion, nationalism scholars need henceforth to situate their understanding of nationalism vis-à-vis established definitions and strive for definitional clarity at the outset of their research.

The conceptual and definitional confusion arises partly because nationalism scholarship spans the disciplines of history, anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology and partly because nationalism scholarship often

[19] Kulyk 2014; Zhuravlev and Ishchenko 2020; Onuch and Hale 2022.
[20] See for example, Coppedge 2002; Munck and Verkuilen 2002.

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relies on single case studies. Consequently, "subtypes" of nationalism have proliferated. This definitional disagreement is exacerbated by the fact some scholars study nationalism at the political unit level, others at the community level, while yet others at the individual level. Unsurprisingly then, much like the blind men who each describe the elephant based on the part they hold, such an approach has led to a dizzying proliferation of understandings of nationalism. Since nationalism scholars rarely devote substantial time to definitional clarity, cumulative scholarly knowledge remains necessarily sparse.

For example, a Google Scholar search for "nationalism" yields the following qualifiers of nationalism in the top 100 book/journal titles alone: affective, consumer, cosmopolitan, digital, imperial, irredentist, nostalgic, nativist, popular, resource, restorative, religious, tribal, and vaccine.[21] "Nationalism with adjectives" has become the norm.[22] Sometimes, the use of such qualifiers can helpfully move us down the ladder of conceptual abstraction – when the qualifying adjectives are used to emphasize contextually specific empirical patterns of nationalism. Yet, especially when these qualifiers are not clearly defined and justified in relation to other scholars' work, adding qualifiers can stretch the concept of nationalism so far that it loses analytical meaning.[23] More generally, nationalism scholarship that neither specifies its conceptual foundations nor delineates which dimension of nationalism is being observed or measured generates a medley of empirical findings that rarely advances our knowledge.[24] It is precisely because nationalism can vary across contexts and over time that we need a well-specified discussion of the dimensions along which national communities, national narratives, and national identities vary.[25]

Addressing such imprecision is also made difficult because, as we discuss in greater depth in Section 2, nationalism has three core attributes: (1) an intersubjective recognition and celebration of an imagined community as a locus of loyalty and solidarity, (2) a drive for sovereign self-rule over a distinct territory pursued by a significant segment of a group's elite, and (3) a repertoire of symbols and practices that embody the nation. These attributes are bundled

[21] Chang 1998; Ding and Hlavac 2017.

[22] During the 1990s, democracy was a similarly defined with respect to a hodgepodge of adjectives until Collier and Levitsky (1997) wrote their seminal article calling for conceptual clarity on the term. We pursue a similar aim with respect to nationalism.

[23] Sartori 1970.

[24] Abdelal et al. (2009) are an exception. In *Measuring Identity*, they emphasize two main dimensions of identity: content and contestation. The contestation dimension is similar to our fragmentation dimension. Their "content" dimension is analogous to our "ascriptiveness" dimension, except that they identify four types of content: constitutive norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models

[25] Barrington 1997.

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together since the intersubjective recognition and celebration of an imagined community is partly constituted by a shared repertoire of symbols, while the pursuit of sovereignty is often built on an awareness of belonging to this imagined community. Yet the precise characteristics defining membership in one national community in one case may be irrelevant in another case. Though a shared language, religion, ethnicity, and natural geographical borders can all be associated with particular understandings of nationhood, national narratives that lack each of these characteristics abound. As nations and nationalisms have a Wittgenstein-like "family resemblance" in which no one characteristic is essential,[26] aiming for Sartori-like precision in our conceptual understanding of nationalism may be futile. Definitions of nations and nationalism will necessarily remain broad.[27] But some conceptual clarity is possible and should be attempted – and that is our aim in *Varieties of Nationalism*.

A second problem we seek to address is the conceptual confusion created by the putative link between nationalism and ethnicity. We argue that scholars of nationalism should henceforth firmly delink definitions of nationalism from ethnicity.[28] As Table 1 also shows, scholars are inconsistent about whether they definitionally link nationalism to ethnicity. Particularly because the concept of "ethnicity" can in some cases be taken to encompass race and caste, scholarly usage of the term has stretched well beyond common usage of the term.[29] Moreover, while nationalism *may* use ethnicity as its building block, there are clearly nations and nationalisms which do not build upon an ethnicity. Stipulating instead that nationalism is defined by an intersubjective recognition of a nation; the drive for sovereign self-rule over a distinct territory; and a repertoire of symbols brings the public usage of "nationalism" into alignment with contemporary scholarship, which shows that at least some nations have been created without emphasizing their links to a particular ethnic group. While some scholars will contend that nationalisms require ethnicity, such scholars should also specify their understanding of ethnicity, since the term is also subject to a wide range of contested meanings.[30]

A third problem we seek to address is the Eurocentric bias of mainstream nationalism scholarship. Classical scholars of nationalism, including Hans Kohn, John Breuilly, Ernest Gellner, Liah Greenfeld, and Anthony Smith,

[26] Wittgenstein 2001(1953). The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that entities that may be thought to be connected by one essential feature may be in fact connected by a series of overlapping similarities with no one feature being common to all of those entities.

[27] Sartori 1970. Giovanni Sartori was an Italian political scientist that highlighted the problem of concept misformation.

[28] For an excellent article on the lack of consensus on what ethnicity is, see Hale 2004.

[29] Green 2006. [30] Green 2006.

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Table 1 Commonly cited definitions of nationalism

Scholar	Definition of nationalism	Relationship to ethnicity?
Benedict Anderson (1983: 36, 6)	"[a] new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together" by constructing "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."	Not definitionally necessary.
Walker Connor (1994: xi)	"Nation connotes a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related. Nationalism connotes identification with and loyalty to one's nation as just defined."	Essential.
Ernest Gellner (1983: 1)	"[p]rimarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."	Not definitionally necessary.
Liah Greenfeld (1992: Back cover)	"Nationalism is a movement and a state of mind that brings together national identity, consciousness, and collectivities."	Not definitionally necessary, but empirically often linked.
Michael Hechter (2000: 7, 14)	"Collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit."[. . .] "Nations[. . .] constitute a subset of ethnic groups. They are territorially concentrated ethnic groups"	Essential.
Anthony Smith (1999: 18)	"Nationalism is a modern ideological movement, but also the expression of aspirations by various social groups to create, defend or maintain nations — their autonomy, unity and identity — by drawing on the cultural resources of pre-existing ethnic communities and categories."	Essential.

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mostly theorized in their canonical monographs of nationalism from cases in Europe and the Americas.[31] Yet, early European and American nationalisms do not represent the majority of today's nationalisms. European nation-states may have been the first to emerge and were certainly worthy of intensive study. But European nation-states are now outliers in the sense that most non-European states legitimating their authority through nationalism did not emerge after a protracted process of state-building, as was true of the canonical European cases of England and France. Many nation-states in the Americas were founded by what Anderson calls "creole pioneers" – colonists that staged rebellions against the imperial metropole mainly in reaction to their blocked social mobility at the imperial center.[32] While most nation-states of the world emerged through a distinctly twentieth-century process whereby Indigenous elites borrowed a language of nationalism to legitimize their power and ambitions to control former colonial states; when such elites embraced narratives of "we the people," they sometimes built national communities without introducing mass literacy, without having capacious states, and without relying on ethnic building blocks. Lisa Wedeen (2008), for instance, describes such a case in her book on Yemen. In this Element, by theorizing from a broad range of work that has examined the emergence of both European and postcolonial nationalisms, we provide a more robust orientation that we are confident applies to nationalisms across the globe.

A fourth problem we address, related to Eurocentricism, are the strong normative biases in the literature on nationalism. One such bias comes from scholars' own contextually-specific experiences with nationalism. For instance, whereas thinkers from continental Europe, and especially Germany, tend to abjectly reject nationalism as a positive force, English thinkers tend to have more positive views of nationalism.[33] The majority of published scholarly works on nationalism are either normative treatises or empirical investigations of a single country's nationalism or nationalist episodes. Yet the broad range of empirical findings already suggest that nationalism is a Janus-faced phenomenon. And any argument suggesting that nationalism is likely to have *general* types of effects must invariably be built on comparative foundations, either across a broad geographical set of cases or over time. A consensus exists that

[31] Benedict Anderson is an exception as much of his work was on South East Asia.
[32] Anderson 1983, chapter 4.
[33] See for example, Jürgen Habermas 1976 as the preeminent German voice on nationalism and David Miller 1995 as the preeminent English voice on nationalism.

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"cross-national research is valuable, even indispensible for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations."[34]

Fifth, and finally, we hope to help balance the scholarly focus on the historical origins of nationalism by drawing our attention to systematic comparisons of nationalism's consequences at different levels: community, narrative, individual. Scholars have engaged in dialogue about the *comparative* consequences of nationalism. But a majority of classic works on nationalism are case studies and of those, mostly investigations into nationalism's origins. Particularly because there is such public and scholarly debate about nationalism's origins, much more work is needed to better understand nationalism's consequences. By providing a set of questions and dimensions along which nationalisms vary, we provide a framework for scholars hoping to undertake careful empirical comparative research into nationalism's consequences.

1.2 Our Framework: One Definition, Three Questions, and Five Dimensions

In *Varieties of Nationalism*, we provide a guide for how to think about nations and nationalism in general terms, allowing both for recognition of each country's particularities and broad comparisons across countries. Despite the fact that the term "nation" is etymologically derived from the Latin word *natio* – denoting birth or origin – we hold that nationalism is *not* necessarily linked to attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with descent or ethnicity.[35] We understand nationalism as an intersubjective awareness of an imagined community together with a meaningful degree of collective action to attain self-rule and full sovereignty over a particular territory for this community.[36]

To be clear, for a sentiment/identity to qualify as nationalism/nationalist, it *must* include an aspiration for sovereignty over a particular territory at least by a significant segment of elites or members of a community.[37] For example, Bavarian *nationalism* in Germany does not practically exist because there is no

[34] Kohn 1987. [35] Chandra 2006.

[36] In this book we focus primarily on two types of sovereignty: Westphalian sovereignty – referring to political organization based on the exclusion of external actors from authority structures within a given territory – and domestic sovereignty, which refers to the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of rulers to exercise control within it. For more on the concept of sovereignty, see Krasner 1999.

[37] Following Wimmer and Feinstein (2010), we identify nationalist movements as political organizations in which the membership is formally defined, the leadership roles are institutionalized, the representation of the relevant national community as a whole is claimed, and the goal is to achieve either independence or autonomy.

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significant segment of the population or elites that advocates for secession from the sovereign state of Germany. This does not mean that there is not awareness of a Bavarian identity, but because this identity is not associated with a drive for full sovereignty, it does not meet the criteria to be called "nationalist." Quebec or Québécois nationalism, by contrast, existed to such a degree throughout the 1980s and 1990s that two referenda for political independence from Canada were held, the latter of which came within a percentage point of attaining sovereignty. Kashmiri nationalism exists, with a substantial portion of elites seeking independence from India (and Pakistan). Comparisons between Scottish and Welsh nationalism are also relevant here, since substantial movements advocating political independence from the United Kingdom – a sovereign state – exist in the form of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru, respectively, though surveys establish that Plaid Cymru has less popular support than the SNP. Most states, especially federal ones, will have multiple political identities available for mobilization. But this does not mean that all political identities are national.[38] To do so, substantial organized interests must take the form of national movements seeking political sovereignty. We elaborate on this definition in the next section.

The core argument we develop below is that more conceptual clarity around nationalism is needed and that this can be gained by breaking down nationalism into constituent parts based on three general questions: (1) Does a nation exist? (2) How do national narratives vary? (3) When do national narratives matter to individuals? These questions, which correspond to Sections 3, 4, and 5 respectively, meaningfully capture much of the comparative variation in nationalisms identified by different scholars. Confusion often ensues when scholars talk past each other *exactly because* they are addressing different questions within nationalism scholarship. National communities can have varied degrees of cohesion,[39] their national narratives come in great range of building blocks,[40] and these national identities can be more or less salient for different individuals or groups at any given point in time.[41] As Figure 1 indicates, situating nationalism scholarship with respect to these three questions can help scholars to overcome the muddled conceptual problems we identified above and describe the particularities of nationalisms across space and over time.

[38] Federalisms can varyingly accommodate national identities, see Amoretti and Bermeo 2004.
[39] Reeskens and Wright 2012. [40] Smith 2003; Aktürk 2012; Brand 2014.
[41] Charnysh et al. 2015; Wimmer 2018.

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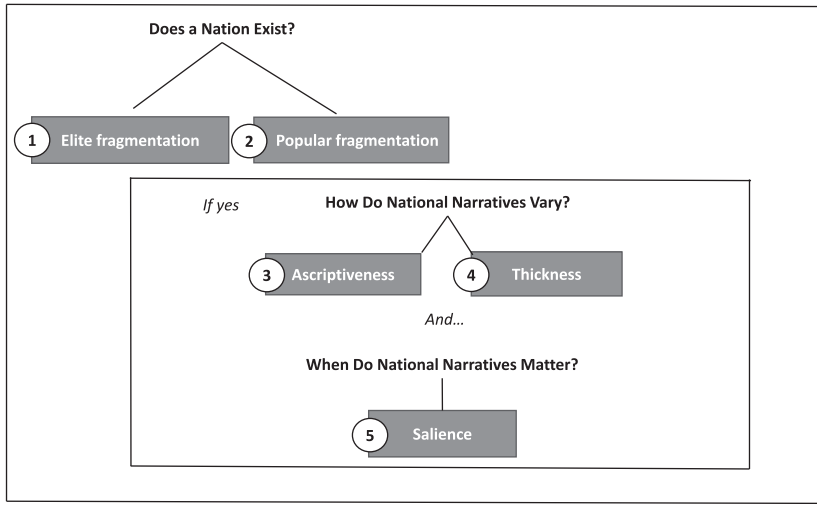


Figure 1 The five dimensions of nationalism

In *Varieties of Nationalism*, we argue that nationalism is a phenomenon which existing scholarship has already shown to vary, in response to our three questions, along five dimensions: *elite and popular fragmentation of national communities; ascriptiveness and thickness of national narratives; and salience of national identities*. Specifically, national communities can be characterized by *popular* and/or *elite fragmentation* – capturing the degree to which elites and popular definitions of the nation are commonly held or are alternatively fragmented. In turn, national communities are characterized by important variation in national narratives. Different understandings of nationhood or national narratives can vary by their *ascriptiveness* – or the degree to which national belonging is determined by purportedly inheritable categories such as race, ethnicity, or in some cases religion. The *thickness* of markers that define membership to a nation – ranging from relatively thin in the case of shared geographical borders to thicker overlapping cultural markers of ethnicity, language, and religion – is yet another way that national narratives may vary.[42] And finally, the *salience* of national identities relative to other sub- or supranational identities also varies (tending to rise around events such as wars, important national sports victories, and the death of a monarch).

[42] Note that the way we use the term "thickness" parts ways from Geertz's (1973) or Hale's (2004) understanding of "thick," that is, high levels of meaning. Geertz's conceptualization is closer to what we term "salience" of national identities. We use the term "thickness" to signify the richness of symbolism and the number of layers that a national narrative involves.

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Consider this writer chronicling the transformation of her national identity during the breakdown of Yugoslavia:[43]

> Being Croat has become my destiny. . . I am defined by my nationality, and by it alone. . . Along with millions of other Croats, I was pinned to the wall of nationhood – not only by outside pressure from Serbia and the Federal Army but by national homogenization within Croatia itself. That is what the war is doing to us, reducing us to one dimension: the Nation. The trouble with this nationhood, however, is that whereas before, I was defined by my education, my job, my ideas, my character – and, yes, my nationality too – now I feel stripped of all that. I am nobody because I am not a person anymore. I am one of 4.5 million Croats. . . I am not in a position to choose any longer. Nor, I think, is anyone else. . . something people cherished as a part of their cultural identity – an alternative to the all-embracing communism. . . – has become their political identity and turned into something like an ill-fitting shirt. You may feel the sleeves are too short, the collar too tight. You might not like the colour, and the cloth might itch. But there is no escape; there is nothing else to wear. One doesn't have to succumb voluntarily to this ideology of the nation – one is sucked into it. So right now, in the new state of Croatia, no one is allowed not to be a Croat.[44]

How are we to conceptualize and measure this seismic change from Yugoslavian to Croatian nationalism? Before assessing any change, the *first* question is whether a Yugoslav (literally meaning south Slav) national community existed? Such an identity did exist, because research instantiated that elites and popular voices understood, identified with, and (to varying degrees) promoted a Yugoslav national identity. Moreover, some Yugoslavs did identify with Yugoslavia as their primary national identity by the 1980s.[45] Thus, there was some *popular* and *elite consensus* around the existence of a Yugoslav national identity.

The *second* question is what is the content of Yugoslavia's founding narrative of peoplehood? Yugoslavia as a country came into existence in the twentieth century following World War I and the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. It was initially called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, but King Aleksandar changed the name into Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the start of 1929. Its founding moment came about because of Slovenian and Croatian fears of Italian domination, coupled with the long-lasting desire of Serbian intellectuals and high ranking officers to unite all the Serbs into a single state, which led to the unification of the South Slavs.[46] The interwar years involved a series of efforts by Serbia's political leaders to turn the new kingdom into a centralized state under Serbian hegemony. Following World War

[43] Banac 1984. [44] Drakulic 1993: 50–52. [45] Kukic 2019.
[46] Mylonas 2012: 154; Malešević 2019: Chapter 8.

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II, Josip Broz Tito was the chief architect of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The post– World War II Yugoslav national narrative was a capacious identity that encompassed a range of national and ethnic identities.[47] Yugoslavia was a multinational federation comprised of several nationalities with equal rights, but Tito was also nurturing a supranational Yugoslav identity.[48] In sum then, at the time that Slavenka Drakulić was writing the quote above, Yugoslav nationalism was *thinly defined and layered over multiple nationalities and generally it was not ascriptively defined*.

Finally, the *third* question relates to the salience of the Yugoslav national identity. Surveys show that the salience of Yugoslav national identity appeared to be relatively low before the breakout of the civil wars during Yugoslavia's disintegration,[49] after which time the salience of ethnocultural definitions of the nation rose.[50] *The salience of the Yugoslav national identity was relatively low and remained low, while the salience of ethnoculturally defined national identities in the country (i.e., Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, etc.) rose during and after the 1990s Yugoslav wars.*[51]

Through the process of conflict, Yugoslavian nationalism saw greater *elite* and *popular fragmentation*, though sorting out cause and consequence remains tricky.[52] A less *ascriptive* Yugoslav national narrative was replaced by more ascriptive national identities, as *ethnic* belonging became the most prominent determinant of group membership in former Yugoslavia. And undoubtedly the writer above suggested the growing *salience* of her national Croatian identity. In short, this moment in history reflected a change in *all* facets of Yugoslav nationalism – changes that most theoretical discussions of nationalism do not clearly disentangle.

Yet other moments of history may involve a change in just one dimension of nationalism. The advent of World War II in Europe, for example, witnessed the rising salience of the French national identity relative to other identities in the country through a well-known "rally around the flag" effect, even as the degree of elite and popular fragmentation of the French national community or the ascriptiveness or thickness of the French national narrative remained unchanged. In the last decade, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, India's national narrative has become both more ascriptive (practically equated with Hinduism) and more salient (since the government repeatedly invokes this definition of the nation).[53] Nationalism scholars should clearly identify which part of nationalism they are studying as well as which dimension(s) they are focusing on.

[47] Ramet 1992; Wachtel 1998; Sekulić 2004.
[48] For more on how ethno-national identities were seen as the building blocks of the Yugoslav political project, see Malešević 2002.
[49] Sekulić et al. 1994. [50] Dyrstad 2012; Kukic 2019. [51] Baker 2015. [52] Somer 2001.
[53] Tudor 2018, 2023.

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These five dimensions of nationalism meaningfully capture the major ways in which scholars have approached nationalism to date. While we cannot preclude the possibility that future research will uncover additional consequential dimensions of variance, existing scholarship both instantiates that nationalisms vary along these five dimensions and employs such variance to explain important phenomena in political science such as state capacity, political violence, immigration and asylum policies, regime outcomes, and public goods provision.

Much like scholars of regime types are asked to delineate their definitions and types of democracy so that scholarship can be conceptually cumulative,[54] scholars of nationalism should lay out their conceptual definitions and empirical measurements of nationalism. Considering the different dimensions along which national communities and their national narratives vary is a first step in an integrated empirical examination of the elephant that is nationalism.

1.3 A Road Map

The broad aim of this Element is to encourage scholars studying nationalism to carefully relate their research questions to these major dimensions of nationalism. To be sure, there are many dimensions of nationalism that may matter for outcomes which we do not discuss, just as elephants may have many physical dimensions. Yet we have included here the dimensions of nationalism that scholars have found to consistently vary over time and across regions in ways that have critical consequences. For if researchers are to arrive at a rigorous empirical evaluation of nationalism's variegated origins and effects, the dimensions along which national communities, narratives, and identities vary must be defined and operationalized in a clear, consistent manner. Much like the different parts of the blind man's elephant, nationalism can assume immensely different shapes.

The remainder of the Element is structured as follows: Section 2 distills what we know about nationalism's origins, presents key definitions, and delineates its relationship with other major ideologies. In Section 3, we argue that when national imagined communities emerge, their survival critically hinges upon two dimensions: elite and popular fragmentation. We also discuss how variation along these dimensions affects a range of important societal outcomes ranging from state capacity and political violence to democracy and public goods provision. In Section 4, we turn our focus on how national narratives vary along the two dimensions of ascriptiveness and thickness, and how these dimensions of variance map onto consequential political outcomes.

[54] Collier and Levitsky 1997.

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In Section 5, we turn our attention at the individual level and how national identities can vary in their salience. Section 6 draws upon the insights of disciplines as diverse as history, political science, sociology, philosophy, psychology, and evolutionary biology to supplement our understanding of nationalism. Section 7 concludes with a call for a more explicitly comparative and cumulative research agenda.

2 What We Already Know about Nationalism

A century ago, the world was comprised of fewer than sixty countries and a motley assortment of kingdoms, city-states, and empires. Today, nearly 200 countries have almost entirely replaced these older political units. The nationalist revolution represents the largest political transformation in modern history. A wide range of political forms morphed into the preeminent political actor of our age – a state representing or claiming to represent a nation.[55] Even amidst the powerful new forces of globalization and digital connectivity, the state – more often than not legitimated through the ideology of nationalism – remains our most consequential actor for addressing the world's pressing policy challenges, from inequality and poverty to climate change, war, and global pandemics.

Despite the continued relevance of nationalism as a key organizing political principle, the study of nationalism is still comparatively sparse and dispersed in political science. Figure 2 measures the frequency of words in English-language books since 1800 and shows that the mention of the term "democracy" is at least twice as popular as "nationalism," and the term "political parties" almost four times as prevalent as "nationalism."

Yet there is little doubt that nationalism is as important as these other concepts, for the states which lie at the heart of our world system are ultimately

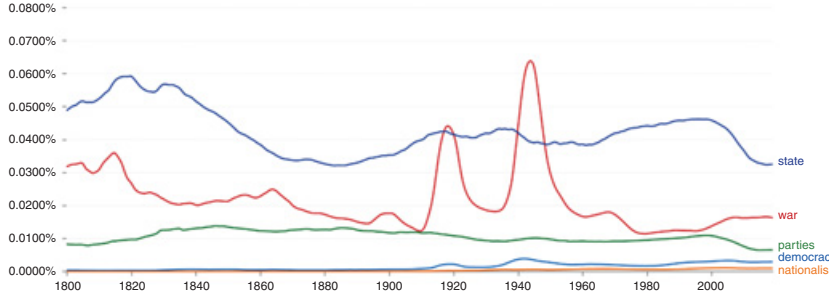


Figure 2 Frequency of "nationalism" and other terms in books, 1800 to 2019

[55] Spruyt (1994).

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