Patchwork Nation
To Graciela,
and Dad, Mom,
and Sarah
Preface and Acknowledgments

American politics is not just national politics. State and local governments offer us the opportunity to study political variations that cannot be understood by focusing on national political institutions. To the extent that national politics is an aggregation of interests that are locally defined, states and localities add to what we must study in order to understand Congress, the presidency, the national parties, national elections, and the courts. Of course, states and localities are also worth studying in their own right. As the eminent political scientist V. O. Key Jr. once put it, “The size of their populations and the magnitude of their operations make many of our states quite as important political units as many of the independent nations of the world” (1956, v).

The study of state and local political institutions and behavior has sometimes been hampered by the absence of relevant information and the difficulties of comparing diverse political systems. Frequently these challenges have resulted in the production of volumes in which the chapters written on individual jurisdictions do not permit comparison. In Patchwork Nation we try to meet that challenge by using a common outline for each of our chapters along with an analytic framework that will enhance comparability. We show that states are unique electoral battlegrounds, but we need to develop systematic methods for coping on a comparative basis with the political characteristics that make states both distinct from and similar to other states. This was the approach developed by Key, from whom we take our inspiration.

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This book presents original data analysis and makes creative use of techniques not yet widely used in political science. But we work to keep our treatment nontechnical, and we confine finer details to appendixes. If by taking some risks with the data analysis, we have planted some seeds that will lead to more and better work in this area, we will have accomplished our main goal.

We thank our families for their support and endurance through the regular frustrations that arose during the undertaking. On balance, however, this book was a great pleasure to write, and we look forward to the next opportunity to collaborate. Finally, we want to give credit to God for granting us the opportunity to pursue our research interests in this manner. There are many talented people who never get the chance to realize such goals, and we feel blessed and fortunate to number among those who have achieved something so substantial.