Preface

This book is about how the 2008 federal general elections were financed and conducted. When my proposal to study 2008 was funded, I did not know that the election would be such a dramatic departure from past elections. It was the first election in which a major party nominee did not accept the general election public funding, and there was a surge in individual contributions with an unusually large number of individuals contributing less than $200 in the aggregate to any one candidate or party committee. Also, in a departure from the actions of prior Democratic nominees, Barack Obama invested heavily in the "ground game" of personal voter contacting, field offices, and voter mobilization. While the broad theme of the 2008 Obama campaign was about change in public policy, this book looks at what did and did not change in 2008 in the financing and conduct of campaigns.

Using the same methodology from the five previous elections, the book's research team tracked how money was raised and spent by candidates, party committees, and interest groups in competitive electoral environments. Such a comprehensive approach is necessary to the understanding of the role and interplay of the multiple players involved in campaign finance and electioneering. A focus on the candidates alone fails to consider the substantial activity of the political party committees and interest groups. The approach of this study is to look at all campaign activity, regardless of its source, and to assess the impact of spending, taking into account its source.

It is clear from past studies that campaign spending and electioneering are greatest in competitive environments. I selected five states that offered competitive contests for the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, or both and that were competitive in the presidential general election contest (see Appendix A). Some of the states selected also afforded opportunities to track the impact of the 2008 campaign on African Americans and Hispanics, two populations of particular interest in 2008. All five states had been part of prior studies in this series, offering the additional advantage of allowing a comparison between campaign finance and electioneering over time. Careful observation of the campaign, including visiting events, campaign offices, and the like, is one of the ways that elections are monitored. In this study I was fortunate to be able to visit four of the five states between Labor Day and Election Day. On these visits I not only coordinated activity with the researchers conducting the study in each state but also conducted interviews with campaign officials and visited campaign offices. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to see democracy in action. In light of the significance of voter registration and mobilization in 2008, this study integrates these questions into the case studies and features a chapter by two established authorities on voter turnout. These experts participated in the ongoing communication among investigators about the dynamics of the election cycle as

they were developing and provided a national perspective on the questions of turnout and other forms of participation.

The legal and regulatory environment of federal elections has undergone substantial change since the latter half of the 1990s. Between 1996 and 2002, campaign spending by interest groups through "issue advocacy" and by political parties through soft money grew dramatically in competitive contests. Passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) in 2002 banned soft money and defined interest group electioneering more narrowly than had previous legislation or court decisions. BCRA also increased contribution limits for individuals giving money to candidates and political party committees and indexed those limits to inflation.

Court decisions and rulings by the Federal Election Commission since BCRA have broadened the electioneering communications provision and struck down other facets of BCRA, but the soft money ban remained in force for 2008. One aim of the research in this study is to inform future legislative and judicial decisions in this dynamic policy area. For this reason, the research team conducted on-the-record interviews with key campaign participants and observers. The study draws heavily from these interviews and from published accounts of the 2008 election.

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which also funded studies of the five previous cycles. I am grateful for the support of Michael G. Caudell-Feagan, Deputy Director, and Carolyn Race, Manager of Operations, at the Pew Center on the States. I also thank Pew Charitable Trusts President and Chief Executive Officer Rebecca W. Rimel for her interest in this work. The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University provided space and collegial support for this research undertaking. I am grateful to Director Kelly Patterson for his leadership and friendship.

Integral to the research strategy for the book is involving experienced scholars with a keen interest in campaigns and elections who are located in the states and congressional districts being studied. Over the dozen years that I have conducted these studies, I have had the good fortune to work with 141 scholars who have gathered and analyzed data in a collaborative manner. Together we have monitored one or more contests at the state-wide level in 22 states and in 52 congressional districts, often more than once. Their perspective, informed by their knowledge of their corresponding states, their interviews with participants in the contests, and other varied data that they collected, has enhanced this book and its predecessors. In the synthesis and summary across the case studies comes a greater richness of understanding than is possible when an election is studied only at the local or the national level or in only one state. This kind of work requires a willingness to cooperate and collaborate. Scholars are often accustomed to working in relative isolation from one another. But this was not the course of action taken here.

Another important aspect of this research is its reliance on interviews with major participants on all sides of the contests and with informed observers. Key participants have given generously of their time by granting interviews and often by providing additional data on their activities or perspectives. A listing of the individuals and their professional roles in the election and the dates of the inter-

views is provided in Appendix B. I have learned a lot from these interviews, and I am grateful for the willingness of these individuals to participate in the research. Many interviewees provided copies of the ads or mailings prepared by their affiliates in the races under study. These items supplement the reconnaissance networks set up in each contest to collect political mail and e-mail and to track personal contacting carried out by telephone and in person. Researchers in each contest built a reconnaissance network designed to tap into a wide range of groups and across both major parties. In 2008, as in the past, I invited Brigham Young University alumni in the state to forward their political mail. An unusual feature of this book and these studies is its incorporation of non-television communication into the research design.

The research team gathered data from two different sources on television advertising spending. The researchers studying each contest gathered data from television and radio stations on advertising purchased by candidates, party committees, or groups. At the same time the team acquired for the sample states the estimates of television advertising expenditures by all participants from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG). I am especially grateful to Evan Tracey, President of TNS Media/CMAG, for his assistance in providing the data and insights into the meaning of changes in spending over time.

A beginning point for a book such as this is the body of data provided by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Special thanks go to Bob Biersack, Special Assistant to the Staff Director for Data Integration, and Paul Clark, Disclosure Systems Analyst, of the FEC. Both Bob and Paul are political scientists who have gone the extra mile to assist in this research. For this project, as she has for others, Stephanie Perry Curtis produced the tables of FEC data and provided key oversight of the data set of campaign communications developed in cooperation with all of the case study authors and their research assistants and reconnaissance networks. Stephanie has been knowledgeable, careful, and wonderful to work with.

Over the course of this project, Kaeli McCall, Jill Vaughn, and Brad Jones worked as research associates. They helped gather data for the key sampling decisions; oriented the researchers once the sample was decided; scheduled interviews for me to conduct in Washington, D.C., and by telephone; and generally assisted on the project. Hilary Hendricks provided a helpful edit of the entire manuscript. During my visits to Washington to conduct interviews, I was a visitor at the American Political Science Association Centennial Center for Political Science and Public Affairs, where I had the benefit of invaluable access to a computer and work space between interviews and in the evenings. I thank Robert Hauck, Deputy Director; Allison Desrosiers, Development and Programs Assistant; and the staff at APSA for their hospitality and assistance.

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