5-2012

Electioneering Across the Ages: Examining the Application and Implication of Media-Based Mobilization in American Presidential Campaigns Post-Radio

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IMPLICATION OF MEDIA-BASED MOBILIZATION IN AMERICAN

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS POST-RADIO

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Political Science)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2012

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ABSTRACT:

This work follows the evolution of media-based mobilization strategies employed by presidential candidates and their campaign teams. Assessing how this practice has changed over the centuries involves examining the technologies and philosophies that underlie specific mobilization methodologies. Part of the discussion is compiled from uncovering national newspaper articles printed around Election Day each year from 1980 to 2000. Another section explores more deeply the two presidential campaigns that have occurred since the turn of the millennium.

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CHAPTER I

Pundits and political scientists alike have long tried to characterize and comprehend the practice of voter mobilization by American presidential campaigns. Indubitably, these analysts have drawn conflicting conclusions about specific mobilization strategies—but they have also come to a consensus about the broader phenomenon itself: "different studies on different elections at different times using different methods have all found that political mobilization—variously labeled voter contact, get-out-the-vote (GOTV), or the voter canvass—matters" (Goldstein 2002). The forthcoming analysis assumes this assertion to be true. However, realizing *that* mobilization matters is not nearly as important as understanding *why* it matters and *how* it occurs.

Acquiring a complete understanding of voter mobilization and its implications entails tracing its dynamic continuation across nearly every single American presidential election. Much existing mobilization analysis is hindered by the tendency to examine campaign seasons in isolation. There is certainly value in evaluating a presidential campaign exclusively, but the worth of seriously considering how each is included in an evolution across the country's electoral history is arguably greater—providing a more holistic appreciation for these spectacles of American politics. Ignoring the connectedness of presidential campaigns creates a debilitating tunnel vision. As Jensen succinctly states in his 1969 analysis of campaign styles, "the usual practice of historians to treat elections as singular events within the context of political developments during a given decade has impeded the comparative study…of election campaigns throughout

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American history" (1969). Also undermined as a result of this analytic isolationism are the incessant efforts of campaign insiders, who are intensely aware of the importance in tracking the progression of tactics from season to season.

Persons within a given presidential campaign understandably recognize and honor the relevancy of those preceding it, because their professional lives depend on it. Their candidate's success, and in turn their own, is based in the ability to assess current conditions and adapt accordingly—often innovatively. Indeed, the environment surrounding each election cycle poses a unique set of circumstances and challenges, but historical awareness serves as a reliable guide of do's and don'ts. Ignorance of the implications and efficacy of mobilization strategies that others previously employed stifles the adaptability that is so vital to victory.

Many of the aspects prevalent in presidential campaigns today appear inherent—such as the self-promotion by candidates or the inundation of advertising—yet, they are actually prime examples of progressive adaptation and innovation from one presidential election to the next. In its infancy, the United States elected the president void of any campaigning, as Boller explains in his account of George Washington's ascent to the presidency. "Not particularly eager to become president, he was flattered to be chosen twice, without lifting a finger, by a unanimous vote of the presidential electors" (2004, p. 415). Undoubtedly, any White House hopeful in modern times would be foolish to mimic Washington's absolutely indifferent approach; the changes in the societal and political spheres since America's formative years have necessitated, and often facilitated, a candidate's campaign for president.

By the dawn of the 19th century the presidential election process was already undergoing major changes. Political parties, despite warnings against them by Washington in his farewell address, had grown increasingly powerful. Operating with newfound relevance and authority, the parties suddenly became gatekeepers on the path to the presidency. This new party-driven selection protocol, however, did not inspire, much less require, full-fledged campaigns just yet. "The parties chose the candidates and noisily promoted their cause, while the candidates themselves tried hard to stay discreetly in the background, carefully avoiding any appearance of self-serving electioneering" (Boller 2004, p. 415). It was considered bad form for a candidate to publically advocate for himself—a concept that might seem foreign to modern voters who have learned to expect it.

Political parties reigned presidential campaigns amidst their rise in the 1790s— but over the course of the next few election cycles, presidential candidates steadily increased their influence on pre-election decision-making. (To be sure, candidates still had to be tapped by their respective party before they earned any campaign clout.) Though their actions were simple – they would "confer with party workers" or "release letters to the press clarifying their views"- the impact was profound; the reins of the campaign, which had rested solely in the tight grasp of the party organizations, were now being shared with the candidate (Boller 2004, p. 415). As parties surrendered more of their campaign control, the prevalence of (and eventually tolerance for) self-promotion by presidential prospects increased manifold. Candidates no longer shied away from the public attention, they sought it out.

Cut free from the party puppet-strings by the mid-1800s, candidates directed their attention toward public appeal (away from partisanship appeasement) and campaigns passionately pursued a solitary goal: mobilizing votes. It was resoundingly clear to all political players at this point that "the success of a campaign at persuading and mobilizing key sectors of the electorate can be critical to the outcome of the election, with small marginal differences often representing the difference between victory and defeat" (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 152). New avenues of outreach were utilized as voter mobilization became paramount. The most fundamental of these activities were rallies, where candidates could address large audiences and build energetic allegiance in the electorate. "The basic strategy of the rally was the total mobilization of votes on election day by activation and reinforcement of party loyalty" (Jensen 1969). When these rallies first arrived on political stage they were exceptionally effective in energizing party armies.

Candidates saw how helpful rallies could be in rousing support, and many staged rally-like public speaking events on their own. The first candidate to fully embrace electioneering was masterful orator William Jennings Bryan, who embodied the new promotion-based philosophy of presidential campaigns. "By Bryan's time… 'front-porch campaigns' had become permissible," but were still resented by some; "in 1896, Bryan was lambasted as undignified for going on a barnstorming tour of the country" (Boller 2004, p. 415). That year, his opponent William McKinley hardly left his Canton, Ohio hometown and offered only "friendly little speeches" to assembled audiences. When McKinley eventually pummeled the Democrat at the polls, some thought that Bryan's campaigning style had met its embarrassing demise. But Bryan was not discouraged by

the loss—in fact, he may very well have been motivated by it; he pursued the presidency just as passionately for the second time in 1900. It was not until his third attempt, though, that full-fledged self-electioneering was universally accepted. "In 1908," writes Boller, "at long last the ban on stump-speaking came to an end. Bryan…seemed to be doing so well at the outset that Republican candidate William Howard Taft felt obliged to give speeches too" (2004, p. 416). Despite suffering a third defeat on Election Day, Bryan may have taken some comfort in knowing that his unfiltered, motivational, straight-to-the-voter style (sustained by stubborn perseverance) characteristically changed the way in which candidates communicated with citizens during the campaign. This change in the code of common campaign behavior may have injected more combativeness and back-and-forth banter into the process, but it served positive purposes as well. An arena for pre-election political dialogue and discussion had been built, where candidates could debate between themselves and directly communicate with the citizenry. "By this time it was deemed a presidential candidate's democratic duty to discuss his views openly and freely with voters… electioneering for the highest office in the land had finally become respectable" (Boller 2004, p. 416).

Even though campaigning for president was earning greater respect and acceptance in the eyes of everyday Americans, the craft itself still warranted significant refinement from within. As the societal (and subsequently political) landscape continued to change, so too did the appearance and approach of presidential campaigns. With advertising and consumerism steadily permeating the American culture, "candidates since 1912 have increasingly realized that they cannot win major elections simply by rallying a large army to combat the enemy. Monster rallies gave way to radio broadcasts that could

reach large, passive audiences" (Jensen 1969). With increased mobilization as motivation, campaigns took full advantage of early advances in these antiquated communication technologies. As radio proliferated throughout the population, presidential hopefuls took to the airwaves to make their case.

Though he did not use it in the context of a campaign, President Warren G. Harding was the first Commander in Chief to open up a channel of political communication via radio in 1921. Not surprisingly, candidates and their teams were quick to pick up on the promise of this spreading medium. Getting a campaign message to the public is obviously important, but constantly finding ways to get that message to the maximum number of people is understandably more critical. Thus, presidential campaign teams understood radio's ability to communicate, but they treasured it more for its unprecedented ability to distribute. "Radio had a direct effect on campaign style because it made the personal appearances of candidates less necessary. For the first time, candidates could become public personalities without campaigning around the country" (Trent & Friedenberg 2008). Precious time, energy, and resources were saved in the switch to radio, but above all it signaled a landmark shift in the public exposure power of campaigns.

Because of its exposure value, radio reigned supreme for several cycles—the medium still accounted for about fifty percent of the total advertising expenditures in the Eisenhower/Stevenson contest of 1952. And though it highlighted radio's lasting relevance and efficacy, the '52 race also represented the last in which radio and TV costs were equal; in subsequent elections television would dominate, so much so that in 2004

radio advertising amounted to a mere 7 percent of presidential campaign budgets (Trent & Friedenberg 2008).

With the advent of radio in the United States, media merchandising met voter mobilization—and the two concepts have been tightly intertwined ever since. Presidential campaigns quickly moved toward designing packaged, easily digestible products advertised to the public. Jensen (1969) defines the reality of campaigning for president in (what he has termed) the merchandising era of American elections: "successful campaigns require the candidates to advertise their personalities and their promises, much like rival merchants compete for shoppers by advertising the quality of their wares." In order to market its presidential product to a broader base of citizens and mobilize them to "buy" what it was selling, a campaign was forced to employ the tools of contemporary media. This marketing emphasis added a different dimension to radio campaigning; it was not just about delivering the candidate, but pitching him as well. Exposure and persuasion were driving principles behind this early mobilization, and radio's electoral relevance. Campaign insiders recognized that, in order maximize the mobilizing effects of message marketing, they would likely need outside expertise. Hill, in his piece *Political Campaigns and Madison Avenue: A Wavering Partnership*, outlines the integration of advertising professionals into American politics:

> The precise origins of advertising agency involvement in political campaigns are somewhat unclear, but it is well known that during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century some advertising and public relations professionals took leaves from their agencies and staffed campaign "press bureaus," the forerunners of today's advertising agents and political consultants. (1984)

Parties invited ad agencies into their campaigns hoping that their skills and experience would improve the effectiveness of media-based mobilization. The parties' faith was

rewarded, but their campaign control was simultaneously reduced as these advertising experts excelled in their new electoral roles. In other words, advertising outsiders were able to craft presidential campaigns much better than the parties themselves.

The success that came with incorporating professional admen opened the door for other non-party players. Beginning in the mid-1900s, political consultants started to join (and usually lead) candidates' teams. The parties' campaign control continued to shrivel with this introduction of outside professional assistance. In De Vries's (1989) eyes, this dissolution of party influence indicates inadaptability at the national organization level. The scholar contends that "a major reason—if not the only reason—for having campaign consultants is that political parties basically failed to do their job in a changing technological and social environment". Individual candidates began to realize that they could better their chances by employing innovative experts, rather than continue to rely on tired party protocol. "Where the parties once picked one or two agencies to direct the campaign...now the pattern seems to be characterized by candidates assembling their own volatile and everchanging entourage of independent political media professionals" (Hill 1984).

It should be noted that, although "professionalizing" may appear synonymous with "impersonalizing," campaign consultants were actually intent on creating an air of intimacy. For the most part, they have achieved that aim; "consultants have removed the party communications filter. Now candidates can go directly to the voters" (De Vries 1989). An open line of communication between a campaign and citizens is crucial, and undeniably more conducive, to mobilization in that it draws individuals into the process. Since the parties first called upon Madison Avenue agencies to market their candidates,

there has been steady professionalization of presidential campaigns. And, despite the fact that they are increasingly run by specialized elites, presidential campaigns are anchored on inclusivity.

Amidst the rise of campaign professionalization, an entirely new technology—one that would completely reorient and redefine presidential electioneering—was made available to candidates and their political consultants. Where radio **"brought the words of political leaders directly to the public at the very moment those words were being spoken, television went a step further and let the public not only hear but also see the politician"** (Allen 1987). Television, as revolutionary as it would prove in presidential races across time, caused little commotion when it entered the election equation in 1948. Its lackluster debut in United States politics occurred when "President Truman filmed just a single speech encouraging citizens to vote" (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 180). Of course, TV's impact was limited by the relative scarcity of the technology. But over the course of a single presidential term, the number of televisions in American households ballooned. Up from a measly 3 percent at the time of Truman's first ad, television ownership in American households hit 45 percent by the 1952 election just four years later. As the overall audience grew, so too did the pool of potential voters accessible to campaigns. Realizing the mobilization potential underlying television's mounting influence on American culture, "presidential campaign teams could ill-afford to ignore the medium" (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 180). James Campbell, in *The American Campaign*, summarizes the necessity and significance of television advertising by presidential campaigns:

> In a system that reaches out to those with only sporadic and marginal interest in politics, some show-business techniques and simplification have been necessary to get as much of the candidates' messages heard by as many voters as possible

and to build as much enthusiasm in the electorate for the candidate as possible". (2008, p. 201)

Like radio had before, but to a much larger extent, television made exposure efforts easier. This also relieved some of the campaigns' touring burdens, because personal appearances had been necessary to bring a candidate to the voters and spur mobilization. Judith Trent explains the cultural changes that TV ignited, and how they in turn altered presidential campaigning:

> Americans no longer gather in the streets to hear candidates; they gather at their television sets or where media assemble their attention. A candidate cannot storm the nation…although the candidate might go to one state or region in person…the reach of the individual campaigner doesn't add up to diddly-squat in votes. One minute or thirty seconds on the evening news will reach more people than ten months of barnstorming. (2008, pp. 81, 369)

While the apparatuses used to mobilize voters fluctuated with the tides of time and technology, the motivation to mobilize voters remained a constant catalyst of presidential campaigns.

Having cursorily recounted the history of presidential campaigning from inception to television, it may be advantageous to take pause here and reflect on its import. Analyzing through Jensen's lens (which entails considering presidential campaigns in entirety rather than isolation) enables one to trace changes in mobilizing modus operandi more clearly over time. In this context it becomes apparent that all presidential campaigns occur in a continuous, progressive pattern. However, one must also acknowledge that circumstantial and characteristic differences do seem to divide this timeline into some distinct phases. Every so often, certain factors arise that fundamentally change the manner by which presidential campaigns mobilize the electorate. Rallies, radio, and television have all irreversibly altered the process in their own right.

As America prepares to hold its 56th presidential election, another seismic shift of strategy is in full swing. The onset of the Internet and the overarching digital age have modified campaign mobilization methods in powerful ways. In his *Presidential Elections*, Polsby captures this critical change:

> The personal mobilization of voters has undergone something of a resurgence in recent elections. For several decades, campaigns had increasingly relied on television to communicate the candidate's message and encourage voter support. Modern campaigns…have evolved into something qualitatively different from the pattern of the previous century. The communications technologies and strategies at the disposal of modern consultants that can help them sell their candidates have transformed the entire process of running for the nation's highest office.
> (2012, pp. 167, 190)

Indeed, television continues to play a pivotal role each election cycle, but a campaign's level of digital competence now stands to dictate whether it will flourish or fail. TV's waning omnipotence in the realm of voter mobilization methodology marks the latest phase change on the presidential campaign continuum—an era where the web trumps the airwaves. The Internet Age has facilitated and inspired another irrevocable transition in the use of media to mobilize.

This thesis will trace the trends and transformation of presidential campaign media-mobilization strategies in the post-radio era, examine the technologies that have induced and supported change, analyze the philosophies underlying Internet activity in recent election cycles, and ultimately ponder the future prospects of voter mobilization in America.

Perhaps the most captivating thing about the newest chapter in the chronology of presidential campaigns is the fact it is still being written. The technologies that characterize this period are in a stage of adolescence, which indicates that their true potential utility may have not yet been actualized. Again, Jensen's perceptiveness

reminds us that election seasons are not separate incidents. Thus, an appropriate launching point for a discussion of presidential campaign digitization should not begin at the phenomenon's origin. Instead, attention should first be given to campaigns previous. So to explore the intricacies of how this particular revolution came about and how it is elementally altering the nature of presidential races today, my focus will sharpen henceforth on a roughly thirty-year window that encompasses its existence entirely.

There seems no more fitting campaign cycle to start from than the one in 1980, for it represents the apex of television's influence on American presidential politics. To outline the downward slide of this medium toward relative inferiority (in terms of mobilizing), I will delve deeper into the two decades of elections since Ronald Reagan's first victory up until the new millennium. Relying on newspaper articles written amidst and shortly after these six respective campaign seasons, it is my aim to paint to a vivid picture of the shifts in media-based voter mobilization efforts. Specifically, I have scoured the archives of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Chicago Tribune* in search of articles written in a two-month window before and after each election in question. In all, hundreds upon hundreds of articles were reviewed, with dozens of them are cited in the following pages. Because the pieces I depend on were written within the context of specific campaigns, I trust that they offer the most candid and accurate accounts available.

As for the two campaign cycles that have transpired since Bush and Gore battled it out in 2000, they warrant more deliberate dissection due to their adoption and adaption of post-television tools. The successive campaigns of George W. Bush and Barack Obama exhibited not only an innovative Internet approach, but also a reorientation

towards the grassroots. It is no coincidence that web technology and grassroots philosophy rose simultaneously, for without the former the latter may never have been able to experience the resurgence it did. Chapters 3 and 4 will investigate the methodologies of Bush and Obama, respectively, on their quests for the presidency. Newspaper pieces will help form these discussions, too, but an emphasis on insider accounts on other materials serves to convey a more complete story. With a historical context already set by the discussion of presidential campaigns from 1980-2000, this in-depth inspection of the most two most recent ones will divulge the details of the ongoing media-mobilization metamorphosis.

After Bush 2004 and Obama 2008 campaigns have been duly dissected, I will be able to distinguish the differences between their specific styles and thus better determine what best mobilizes voters in a web-conscious world. An assessment of their successes and mistakes should also point towards the path that mobilization professionals will likely follow (or, in some circumstances deviate from) in the near future. Ideally, the totality of this work will help any reader better understand the progression, professionalization, and potential possibilities of an increasingly important political practice.

In the previous chapter, political science literature served as the foundation for an historical introduction to subject of presidential campaign mobilization strategy. The research used to assemble this chapter, on the other hand, relies exclusively on time-appropriate newspaper articles. Journalists tend to write in a more narrowed scope than political scholars, from within the context of campaigns, and discuss particular campaign developments in greater detail. The following is a collective synthesis of what journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune* wrote regarding presidential campaigns (and more specifically their media mobilization methods) from 1980-2000.

Strung together over two decades, this eclectic collection of articles fleshes out campaign media mobilization patterns and transformations that the introduction points to. Campaign mobilization strategies, like the technologies the employ, have not have remained stagnant over time. Television will dominate much of this discussion, but the steady, stealthy ascension of its successor is not overlooked.

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1980

Ronald Reagan's run in 1980 reinforced and reiterated television's mobilizing function in presidential campaigning. Over the course of thirty-plus years and eight elections, TV's utility and ubiquity had grown exponentially—as had its audience. Campaign professionals were continuously tweaking television-advertising techniques,

always trying to reach and stimulate the most possible voters. Ever since Truman's first-ever political commercial encouraging turnout, campaigns had relied on television as their catalyst to mobilization.

The Republican candidate in the 1980 race came to the table with a clear-cut advantage over his incumbent opponent in the television arena. Reagan was a Hollywood-groomed, camera-cozy politician who demanded very little TV training. Carter was at times quite the opposite—appearing every bit the common man he claimed to be when he tried to communicate on camera. Despite the Democrat's comparative ineptitude here, his camp knew that keeping Carter on-screen meant more opportunities to garner votes. Both candidates understood that exposure was a necessary precursor to mobilization, and that television was essential to maximizing exposure.

Reagan's press secretary Lyn Nofziger reflected on the relationship between television and presidential campaign outreach efforts at that time: "The fact is you're trying to get to the maximum number of people in a campaign," he said. "Each of the three networks has tremendously bigger circulation than any individual newspaper or magazine. The most effective thing we can do is put him on television whenever we can" (Raines 1980). The frankness of Mr. Nofziger's evaluation intimates a clear emphasis on candidate exposure over the airwaves. A *New York Times* piece depicting Vice-Presidential candidate George H.W. Bush's efforts to inspire the electorate further iterates this idea and demonstrates how catering to smaller-scale television markets helped broaden candidate coverage.

> Mr. Bush has stuck to a few simple campaign themes…he repeats these themes over and over again, aiming not at the national press but at local television stations that cover him at every stop. Mr. Bush's aides believe the strategy is paying off, giving the campaign the local impact needed to sway targeted voters. (Weinraub 1980)

This emerging edict of exposure in electioneering underlined the increasing abandonment of massive rallies as reliable mobilizers and sensible expenditures. With television's reach now extending to every corner of the country, it simply did not make fiscal or logistic sense to conduct large, isolated rallies. Verne Orr, a Reagan consultant, echoed that sentiment as his campaign embodied it. "'One cost that's extremely difficult to control is the expense involved in setting up a rally. That is one reason why big street meetings of days past are out this year. Small events with a dozen farmers or trade unionists staged for local television are in, and are relatively cheap'"(Dionne 1980). With the tool of television, campaigns could craft and distribute a rallying cry without ever holding a rally. The fate of radio has looked a lot like that of rallies' in recent years, just more drawn out. Radio still plays a small part in the pursuit of mobilizing voters, but it has been regarded as the inferior medium since television rose to succeed it.

Though the Carter and Reagan campaign teams operated with almost identical television-advertising budgets at $16 million each, the Reagan campaign outshone its counterpart in marketing its candidate. Of course, its superiority in this area was directly tied to its candidate's marketability—but this success cannot be attributed solely to Reagan's personal on-camera prowess. The campaign honored the existing customs of political television advertising and added its own adjustments aimed at enlarging and energizing the voter base. The Reagan team's aforementioned loyalty to local stations was one such innovation—but it was certainly not the only one.

Although Reagan was the only candidate to successfully communicate through localized media, he did not lose sight of the big picture; both Reagan and Carter understood that they could not possibly win without a well-orchestrated mass media strategy. Thus, purchasing time on network television—the broadest-stretching media technology available—became commonplace in presidential campaigns. Citizens tuned in as "national strategies…dominated the seventh week of the Presidential race, with each side playing for something that will drive them four or five points rather than trying the close states one by one" (Clymer 1980). By employing this far-reaching ad approach and easing away from the regionally constrained spot TV slots, a candidate's message could stretch deeper into the electorate.

As is made obvious by the content of national newspapers during the campaign season of 1980, candidates used various television tactics—locally and nationally—in attempts to expand and mobilize support.

1984

As it appeared on television screens across the United States, the campaign season preceding Election '84 looked a lot like that of '80. Ad strategies still centered around expanding exposure and in turn stimulating the citizenry. Pitted against an incumbent and epitomical media messenger, Walter Mondale's strategists tried desperately to counter the Reagan camp's airwave effectiveness. The President's reelection bid was bolstered by a commercial crusade that asked Americans to consider whether they were better off now than they had been when he was sworn into office four years before. The Reagan

campaign tried to answer that query for the public when it released the famous "Morning in America" spots.

> Media critics poked critically at those smooth ads, shot with soft-filtered lenses and gently lifting music, that showed Americans at work, building new homes, buying carpets for their present homes. But the public saw the ads as reminders of what they felt -- that things were indeed better, that America was in fact back. (Schram 1984)

Outsiders were not the only ones who had early doubts about this approach—there was significant internal debate, too, as to whether Reagan should desert convention with his commercials. Disputes over high production costs and conflicting philosophies threatened to keep this new brand of political ad out of American households. Eventually, though, the risk was deemed worth taking and this deviation from tradition proved pivotal for another Reagan victory. "Political advertising has traditionally been a rough art of hard-sell persuasion," wrote journalist Elisabeth Bumiller, and "few media advisers worth their billings would make a break from the kind of issue-and-debate spots that mark most campaigns." Reagan's advisers represented those few willing to step away from the status quo. They successfully "created a soft-sell campaign based on their view of the facts, a lot of market research and even more poignancy. The landmark spots of people smiling are what the president's campaign [was] all about: emotions, simplicity, repetition" (1984). The campaign's plan creatively used television's disseminative power to dispense an unconventional type of persuasion.

Fearful that citizens would be lulled into complacency (or, even worse, won over) by Reagan's feel-good operation, Mondale and company launched their own initiative. An overriding goal of Mondale's media offensive, as expressed by his insiders, was "to shake people out of their torpor" (Weinraub 1984). One of the campaign's commercials

featured a beleaguered elderly woman who tried to assure the American public that reality was not as rosy as Reagan's ads painted it. Another urged citizens to vote with the future, not the present, in mind. (Weinraub 1984) Mondale's ads encouraged activism in the way they directly challenged Reagan's.

As the obvious underdog, Mondale had to overcome an impediment to voting motivation amongst his potential supporters: doubt. Not doubt in the man's capacity to govern as chief executive, but in his ability to beat Reagan on Election Day. Acknowledging this palpable public uncertainty with more advertising, the Mondale campaign hoped to keep it from immobilizing voters. "Tuesday your vote does matter -- for all of us," one piece promised, "Do what's right." (Schram 1984)

The confidence Mondale tried to convey in his commercials, however baseless it may seem in retrospect, was probably sincere. He held an old-school mentality that may have skewed his perception of support. Refusing to believe that rallies had lost their mobilizing role, Mondale held several and put a lot of stock in their raucous attendance. Notice how hopeful he sounded fresh off a string of rallies:

> "There's something going on in this country and the pollsters aren't getting it," Mr. Mondale said in San Francisco on Saturday. "Nobody who's been with me for the last few days and has seen these crowds, seen their response, seen their enthusiasm, seen the intensity of their response and how they respond to these issues, no one who's been where I've been, can help but believe that there's something happening in this country." (Weinraub 1984)

History tells us there was something happening, just not in Mondale's favor. He drastically overestimated the rallies' aggregate impact on turnout, misinterpreting on-site enthusiasm as an indicator of widespread support. Apparently not everyone inside the campaign was surprised. An aide, who wisely asked not to be indentified, lamented

before the election: "it well may be that all our voters are actually turning out to be our crowds and that's it and we're going down to devastating defeat" (Weinraub 1984).

Mondale mistakenly put too much faith in the old-style rally's mobilizing faculty, but his campaign still put up a formidable fight on-screen. The total television expenditures for the campaign topped out at $23 million, compared to Reagan's hefty $30 million (Schram 1984). The decision by the Mondale camp to plunge funds into field resources handcuffed the advertising effort slightly, and represented a cost that Reagan '84 did not encounter. "Indeed, the year proved that in presidential politics, strong television messages could out-muscle traditional organization" (Schram 1984). Martin Schram's assessment spoke to the predominance and power of television, but also exposed a serious (and restrictive) disconnect between mass media and field organization in presidential campaigning.

Traditionally, mobilization agendas are not expressly stated by campaigns on the trail – though they can be implied through advertising efforts and overall message. The tone of this particular cycle did not follow tradition. Instead, "both candidates talked explicitly about turnout, Mr. Reagan warning against overconfidence, Mr. Mondale against overreliance on the polls" because, in the words of a *Washington Post* journalist, "turnout is a function of enthusiasm and suspense" ("The Battle for Turnout," 1984). An abundance or lack of confidence in a candidate's chances induces voting apathy, making these concepts dangerous immobilizers. In races where these ideas threaten to immobilize many, direct counteraction is taken. In the 1984 case, both candidates expressed how extremely critical it was for citizens to turn out on Election Day.

When the circumstances call for it, candidates will specifically encourage turnout in their communications with the public. Yet, with this in mind, it is important to realize that turnout is always being encouraged implicitly through campaign contact and advertising. Underlying each issue-centered or character-based ad is a campaign's hope that such communication will increase the chances of a citizen's ultimate mobilization. So, in addition to advocating against demobilizing forces, the '84 campaigns' "emphasis on positive messages indicated that both sides wanted to motivate their supporters and get as many of them as possible to vote" ("The Battle for Turnout," 1984).

Reagan's eventual retention of the presidency was due in part to his campaign's television efforts. But undoubtedly, Mondale's ineffectiveness on the airwaves contributed to Reagan's win as well. In fact, the second-place finisher seemed to have come to that very conclusion in the hours after the race was decided. Reflecting on the campaign, and in turn the state of media mobilization, Walter Mondale spoke bluntly in a post-election eulogy captured by Haynes Johnson (1984):

> "Modern politics requires television. I think you know I've never really warmed up to television, and in fairness to television, it's never really warmed up to me. I don't believe it's possible any more to run for president without the capacity to build confidence and communications every night".

Mondale's insights in the wake of his stinging second-place finish illustrate just how essential television had become not only to a presidential campaign's contact and communication, but victory as well; an inability to effectively communicate through this medium, by this point in American history, would automatically illegitimize any presidential aspirant.

Television had fully matured from "convenient trend" to "inescapable truth" and, as the following journalistic accounts will attest, would remain central to presidential

campaign strategies in all elections since. And though its presence has been steady in strategies generally, certain television sub-strategies have arisen as the medium has characteristically changed. The results collected from nationally relevant newspapers stand to relate the details of these developments—from cable, to satellite technology, to talk shows—and explain how they contribute to the ever-adapting campaign science of media-provoked mobilization.

1988

The customary campaign cacophony resurfaced again in 1988, when Vice-President George H.W. Bush looked to continue Republicans' White House run against ambitious Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. It should come as little surprise that both campaigns fully understood and embraced TV in their election strategies. "No candidate," wrote Peter Applebome of the *New York Times* in the final days of the '88 campaign season, "can consistently lose the ideological battle of the television commercials and the evening news and win an election."

The truth in Mr. Appelbome's declaration is undeniable. Every candidate had accepted TV, now every campaign was fighting to stay on its cutting edge. Interestingly, the Bush and Dukakis camps took separate paths.

Bush, upholding the philosophy he embodied as the vice-presidential candidate in the previous cycle, consciously accommodated local television stations at every turn. Again, this decision was calculated as the most conducive to achieving the campaign aims of exposure, communication, persuasion and–most critically—motivation to

actually, physically vote come Election Day. Hence, "local television news, watched by more people than network evening news, was probably more important than ever" (Oresekes). That was clearly the case with the Bush strategy, exemplified by a simple Oresekes' anecdote: "Although Vice President Bush turned down CBS News's request for an interview with Dan Rather, the candidate was interviewed via satellite on the CBS affiliate in Hartford." Their candidate as the frontrunner, the Bush campaign was content to employ this local affiliate strategy and compliment it with a fairly standard national ad campaign (though it was widely regarded as mean-spirited due to prevalent character attacks).

Lagging behind and finding that local station exposure could not possibly tip the scales in its favor, Dukakis's campaign made exhaustive use of the major networks get his message to Americans. The Governor's ensuing appearances indicated a clear contrast of strategy between the surging Bush and squirming Dukakis. He accepted Rather's invitation to be a guest on CBS News, but was not content with just a single showing. Dukakis completed a round tour of news studios—appearing with Tom Brokaw on NBC News, David Frost on the Fox Broadcasting Network, and Ted Koppel on ABC News's "Nightline." He even made a stop on CNN's "Larry King Live," pioneering a pattern of talk-show attendance that would perpetuate itself in future campaign seasons (Weinraub 1988).

The motivation behind this objective was to get the message out as quickly and expansively as possible, but it was a strange message that the Dukakis camp was pushing—one that was intended to mobilize citizens, but may have discouraged their eventual vote instead. Dukakis attacked (and simultaneously tried to divert support from)

the Bush campaign by playing the victim on the airwaves. It was a perverse approach—openly chastising the character of his opponent for chastising his own character—but a Dukakis campaign planner summed up this desperate logic to *Wall Street Journal* writer David Shribman in a pre-election interview. "We've got to reach as many voters as possible," the aide reasoned, "to point up the lies of the Bush campaign." Dukakis insiders elaborated on this all-out counterattack approach when conversing with Lloyd Grove, *Washington Post* journalist. "It will energize our base and reach out to undecided soft voters," assumed campaign manager Susan Estrich, emphasizing, "we need to give them a reason" (1988). Dukakis's camp may have been correct about a large base of undecideds—composed mostly of "Reagan Democrats" they hoped would return to the party—but his message did not seem to resonate, much less mobilize. Even though he initiated contact and continued communication through television networks, Dukakis's uninspiring message proved an obstacle to mobilizing support.

In his examination of the Dukakis campaign's strategy, presidential election veteran Bernard Weinraub asked experts about its intentions and effects. In reference to the saturation tactics the Dukakis team were using, a George Mason University Public Affairs professor reasoned: "the more you throw across their field of vision the better the chances" (1988). It is hard to argue against the importance of initial campaign-to-citizen communication in spurring mobilization, but it is easy to see that, as Dukakis demonstrated in the '88 season, such contact is certainly not a guarantor of voter action. The consensus was this: communication and contact is crucial, even essential, to mobilization. In the end, however significant each initial connection was, most campaign outreach efforts over the airwaves hinged on effective marketing. Author and government

professor Larry Sabato explained Dukakis's plight and the tangible aura of advertising. "It's too little too late," he said of the campaign's network blitz, "it's a good strategy anyway. The problem is that you have to have something to sell that the people want to buy. And his fundamental problem seems to be that people don't want to buy what Dukakis is selling" (Weinraub 1988).

Meanwhile, back at the White House, Vice President Bush tried not to make too much noise as the apparent favorite. Nevertheless, Dukakis's claims of less-than-positive campaigning by the Bush campaign did have some merit—the infamous Willie Horton ad stands out amongst several marketing ploys that harshly criticized the Governor. The piece, in colorful language, describes how the Governor granted weekend passes to a convicted murderer—who then kidnapped and killed additional victims on one such furlough ("Willie Horton 1988," 2008). Journalist Mary McGrory deemed it "the last phase of the brilliant, savage Bush strategy, which has been to drive down turnout from the majority" (1988). This maneuver of demobilizing the opposition has become an integral piece of presidential media strategies. Still, even as it tried to stifle turnout of its opposition, the Bush campaign did not neglect to mobilize its own base. Like Reagan had been in the 1984 campaign, Bush was obligated to actively combat complacency. "They could come back if we got lackadaisical, if we took the election for granted," Executive Director of the Republican Victory '88 Committee John Weaver told the *New York Times*, "but it's not going to happen. We've got them on the mat, but we've got to pin them there" (Applebome 1988).

If television was considered the knife that carved a new notch in the woodwork of campaign mobilization strategy around the mid-century mark, by 1984 it was seen as a

full-fledged Swiss Army Knife; TV had substantively changed from tool to toolbox. The Bush-Dukakis duel showed that individual campaigns frequently develop different strategies for using the medium and its many dimensions (i.e. advertising, local interviews, news show appearances). Contact and communication, with an infusion of persuasion, was still accomplished easiest through the television screen. Chasing the unattainable goal of maximizing mobilization, campaign professionals adapted once again.

1992

President George H.W. Bush had little time to bask in the afterglow of his '88 victory before aspirations of another triumph in November 1992 demanded campaign strategy re-visitation. In some respects, Bush—and most American presidents who seek a second-term amidst their first—never stopped campaigning all throughout his tenure. Candidate Bush hoped that his management of the country would secure public support, but his campaign consultants knew that management of television in the contest's final weeks could possibly be as influential as three years of presidential job performance.

The collective history of campaign discourse in national syndications pre-'93 reveals some trends and truths about television's sustained role in media mobilization. Among them: the propagation of television into almost every American household, the rapid and continuous advancement of TV technology (i.e. satellite and cable breakthroughs), the ever-expanding number of networks and local channels, the ability to target specific populations or geographic regions, the improved awareness and responsiveness of campaign teams, and even the absence of an effective alternative medium to help drive voter mobilization.

The newspaper commentary surrounding the 1992 presidential election—which explored not two but three candidates' strategies—continued the conversation about campaign media use. To be expected, the reviews were mixed. Steven Daley of the *Chicago Tribune* reflected positively on the race and its media methodologies. The United States, he wrote, "rewired its political system" in '92 by "plugging into cable television," thus enabling candidates to "come through unfiltered on talk shows, call-in shows…and make themselves available to the new multichannel universe" (1992). By this time, sixty percent of TV-watching households had cable connections and the major networks (namely the "Big 3" of ABC, CBS, and NBC) had been suffering from shrinking audiences for several consecutive years (Daley 1992). In his pre-election piece for the *Chicago Tribune*, Daley captured the context of cable in the culture. Citizens

> learned that only cable—CNN and C-Span—would provide gavel-to-gavel coverage of the national political conventions. They already were in the habit of watching these channels. Millions of Americans had watched Operation Desert Storm through the CNN lens. They had witnessed the collapse of communism, the ClarenceThomas-Anita Hill hearings, a host of earthquakes and natural disasters through cable, as the news-gathering influence of the broadcast networks receded. (Daley 1992)

To campaign professionals, who make their living from figuring out how to reach the most citizens, these statistics and cultural swings were clear indicators that cable had to be incorporated into their strategies.

Journalists like Daley seemed to perceive the marriage of presidential campaigns and cable television as a logical next step in an evolving strategy, but others saw it as a huge step backwards. No journalist offered a more succinct, or scathing, critique of the contest between President Bush and challenger Bill Clinton than Tom Shales, when he wrote that

dignity was one of the first victims of the 1992 presidential race as it was run on television, where all campaigns are now fought. The talkshowification of America continues apace; now the political process is conquered too. (1992)

The source of Shales's frustration here is just as much societal as it is political; he bemoans the reality that the presidential election process, like most other aspects of American life by the early 1990s, was dramatically affected by and increasingly filtered through television. Shales's aversion to this phenomenon was not based in stubborn traditionalism, but rather the legitimate concern that running campaigns on-screen oversimplifies and even distorts the way America picks its president. "Four years ago this didn't happen," he wrote, highlighting the hasty pace of technological, societal, and political change, "the scaling down and informalizing of everything hadn't gone quite so far" (Shales 1992).

Even the optimist Daley acknowledged that things were different this time around, when he recalled that the types of programs Bush and Dukakis "spurned" in 1988 were now regularly hosting candidates. "The men who would be president come January courted voters on 'Larry King Live,' 'Arsenio,' 'Good Morning America,' MTV" and even the Home Shopping Network. "The candidates went looking where the voters were" (Daley 1992). In the early going, President Bush continued to decline invitations to these shows as he had in his first campaign. Soon, though, the pressure to follow his opponents down this path was too great to ignore. Regardless of its positive or negative characterizations, cable was the newest media crutch of presidential campaigns.

Indeed, reaching mass audiences through nationally broadcast appearances was pivotal, but campaigns remained highly cognizant of the need for local-level television exposure as well. And, just as systematic changes within the medium were facilitating

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campaign contact countrywide, they too were allowing for improved regional efforts. In fact, some political journalists like Richard Berke felt that localization advancements were the story of the season. "They may call it the year of talk-show politics," read his piece in the *New York Times*, "but more accurately, 1992 is the year of satellite dish politics" (1992). Berke was onto something: statistics compiled by the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center at Columbia University show that half of all local TV stations in the United States "used satellite technologies to get live, exclusive interviews with Presidential candidates" in 1992, "a figure that more than doubled since the 1988 campaign" (1992).

Those in the Bush camp were already very familiar with the philosophy behind working with low-level media outlets, and had emphasized it in his first run. Exposure has always been driving principle of campaign activity on the airwaves, but the nature of exposure was altered dramatically with the introduction of satellite technology; whereas early television made it possible for campaigns to send blanket communications to the viewing public, cable, and later satellite, innovations allowed campaigns to contact very specific sections of the overall audience. Now, more than ever, presidential campaigns could directly target specific viewing audiences. Jeff Eller, Clinton's director of satellite operations, described it as a "major shift in how candidates deliver their message", explaining that "the idea is to make sure the campaign has a presence in these important markets, particularly if Mr. Clinton cannot get there himself. These are markets that we need to be seen in in order to move votes" (Berke 1992). For decades, advancements in communication technologies had been negating the necessity (and burdens) of campaign travel. Not surprisingly, campaigns preferred the more time- and energy-efficient idea of

beaming candidates through the TV screen rather than carting them across the country. "Satellite tours" (or "cattle calls" as they were known inside the campaigns) became a valuable tool for mobilization efforts, because they allowed for wide reaching, yet specifically targeted, campaign contact.

Satellite's unprecedented capability to pinpoint sectors of the electorate compelled presidential campaigns to rework their media mobilization strategies. And while the three candidates all used the technology, they used it in considerably different ways: the Bush campaign used it aggressively from the get-go to forge an unfiltered, local line of voter communication; Clinton's camp straddled the line between cable and satellite quite gracefully, using the latter to hone in on particular populations; and "independent candidate Ross Perot has drawn the most attention for using satellites as a substitute for conventional stumping" (Berke 1992). Though he was not a major-party candidate, Perot certainly became a major player in the presidential race almost exclusively through mass media.

The Texas-bred billionaire used satellite technology to bolster a campaign that was run on television. Elizabeth Kolbert and Kevin Sack, both writing for the *New York Times* in the last week of October 1992, tried to convey the magnitude of the independent's media expenditures. According to the Federal Elections Commission disclosures they reviewed, Perot spent $24 million on media exposure in the first two weeks of October alone (more than double the amount spent by either Bush or Clinton during that time), and another $11 million in the following ten days. A single hour-long spot that aired before Monday Night Football cost the campaign $940,000. "Since re-entering the Presidential race, Ross Perot has embarked on, week by week, the most

expensive political advertising campaign in the history of the country"(Kolbert & Sack 1992). Perot showed that a candidate could become relevant and even competitive through the use of television alone. Despite his ambitious exposure and contact efforts, Perot did not come close to mobilizing enough support.

The 1992 race pushed the limits of televised campaigning, but it exposed the mobilizing limitations as well; even the most expensive and extensive media exposure and contact efforts could not independently stimulate enough turnout to win a presidential election. This problem stemmed partly from the internal disconnect between activities on-screen and activities on the ground. Campaigns fought the ground war and air war as separate battles, doing the best they could with the tools (namely TV) they had available.

In the depths of the electronic underground, a radical new resource was being built that would help campaigns consolidate their air and ground efforts into a single mobilization movement.

1996

The tool that would totally restructure campaign mobilization in the new millennium made its awkward debut in 1996. The Internet at that point was uncharted political territory, but its social relevance (along with its overall size) was growing rapidly. As a testament to this escalation, David Hilzenrath reported that the number of total domain names had skyrocketed from 14,802 in 1994 to 724,862 in October '96 (1996). A telling anecdote from the year's first presidential debate indicates even further that, although the web was still largely an unexplored medium, candidates were including it in their strategies. "Bob Dole showed he was a 21st-century politician by capping his

closing statement with his campaign's Internet address: www.dolekemp96.org. Trouble is, he left out the last 'dot,' after '96,' rendering the address unusable" (Wines 1996). Despite the subtle gaffe, the campaign website received over two million hits in the next 24 hours. On the site, the campaign acknowledged that they were dealing with something fundamentally different; 16 years later the site still reads: "the openness and decentralized nature of the Internet demands a new approach to policy making that recognizes the unique characteristics of this new medium" ("Where Bob Dole Stands," 1996). Not to be outmaneuvered, the Clinton-Gore campaign established a web presence as well. Campaign teams, as always, were eager to employ any innovation that promised votes— even if they did not fully understand it. Internet campaigning in '96 was sloppy, but it had arrived nonetheless.

Dole's simple website plug might seem insignificant in the broadening spectrum of campaign media strategy, but the occasion drew much attention from journalists. In the opinion of *The Wall Street Journal*'s Jason Fry (1996), this simple incident had monumental campaigning implications.

> Mr. Dole's remarks provided ample evidence that the Internet's popularity is exploding. And the rush of visits to his campaigns site made it obvious that American Internet users comprise a demographic worth courting.

The sequence was fairly straightforward: as the Internet matured it became more useful and available to the everyday citizen, leading millions of Americans to sign online; vote-gathering professionals, highly aware of this mass migration, were obligated to pursue this new platform. Though its organizational potential was apparent, presidential campaigns used their early sites predominantly for communicative purposes. Basically, they were semi-interactive extensions of a campaign's identity on television—which

remained the fixture of media efforts. "It's not a fail-safe system, it's not as easy as getting a television signal into your house," confided Michael Riley, a pioneer of cyber-politics, "But we're getting better everyday" (Hilzenrath 1996).

Besides the interest that the Internet sparked, the race between President Clinton and Senator Robert Dole was mostly unexciting (partly because it was not perceived to be very close at all). The dullness of the contest was so potent that vote-mobilizers from both campaigns feared a shortage of motivation. Journalist Robin Toner (1996) summarized the plight:

> Democrats worry that President Clinton's comfortable lead in the polls will cause many would-be supporters to think he no longer needs their votes; Republicans fear that Bob Dole's troubled campaign will so dispirit many of the party faithful that they will simply stay home. This uncertainty has fueled the two parties' efforts to mobilize their voters.

In hopes of neutralizing the apathy factor, both campaigns re-centered their television strategies on turnout (a scenario reminiscent of the one that Reagan and Mondale encountered). As to be expected, they differed when it came to the details. The Clinton campaign followed convention by airing ads in the race's final days that overtly encouraged turnout. The more desperate Dole campaign put out ads that they hoped would not only remind people of Clinton's deficiencies, but inspire them to turn out. Because Dole's appeal was plummeting alongside his chances of victory, the campaign's media strategy underwent serious changes. Instead of continuing to try and sell their candidate, the campaign stressed the importance of getting to the polls. "I think it helps motivate Republicans to go vote," former Dole pollster Neil Newhouse said of this mobilization method, "If there is a lack of enthusiasm for the top of the ticket, then we've got to get them juiced up about this election" (Jacoby 1996). Even with this concerted

push, Dole could not make up enough ground—giving rise once again to the notion that campaigns could not (and should not) depend on television alone to mobilize. Fortunately, for professional campaigners and their candidates, the furious pace of turnover in communication technologies would help to fuel turnout in future elections.

2000

Four short years later, when Texas Governor George W. Bush opposed Vice President Al Gore, it was very evident that the Web had already woven its way deep into the fabric of American society. Like radio and television before it, the Internet was a medium whose public popularity paved the way for its political utility. History has shown that campaigns are eager, but not hasty, to employ communications innovations; before presidential campaigns will commit energy and resources to a medium, it must first prove significant across society. The use of the Internet by both campaigns in the 2000 race helped ignite a new age of presidential campaigning and new modes of voter mobilization.

When the Web rose, TV seemed destined to tumble. The prediction coming from many publications was that television would soon relinquish its title as that most reliable medium for presidential campaigns. "For all of their impact, televised political advertisements may have reached the limits of their power," wrote a *New York Times* journalist, "As new technologies allow viewers to remotely "zap" ads, and as voters are broken down into ever smaller demographic groupings…the Internet will grow" as an important part of the media mixture (Hanania 2000). Wayne Leslie also took notice of

such electoral trends. "New technologies," he declared, "have made campaigns more scientific, more sophisticated. Web masters never existed before; now they are a campaign staple" (2000). Writers at the *Wall Street Journal* could sense a shift as well, and prophesized about its import:

> Critics have generally decried the dearth of innovative uses of the Internet by national political campaigns, but experts suggest that by 2008, the medium likely will overshadow traditional broadcasting as the most effective method of fund-raising and organizing. "It really is going to re-nationalize our discussion because we're not so tied to the media markets that dominate us." (Simpson 2000)

Numbers may best illustrate just how swiftly the Internet rose to prevalence in Bush v. Gore (the election contest, not the resulting Supreme Court case). For instance, in 1999, the RNC spent a total of $150,000 on Internet efforts aimed at reclaiming the presidency. Internet expenses the very next year dwarfed that sum—totaling an incredible $5.7 million. The Republicans' list of supporter email addresses multiplied from a measly 17,000 in the summer of 1999 to 925,000 in October 2000. The Democrats' Web prowess was not as great, but their statistics—30 million email messages sent to 400,000 addresses from the convention to the beginning of October—were still impressive considering the Internet's meteoric rise since the 1996 election (Simpson 2000).

Any strategic advantage in such a closely projected election is magnified, especially in the area of mobilization. The tightness of this race made motivating voters the central theme down the homestretch. Author Tom Fiedler, who wrote a political almanac for the hotly contested state of Florida, communicates that point clearly. "For both campaigns, it's a mistake to continue to seek the independent or undecided voter," he told the *Washington Post*'s David Von Drehle (2000). "They need to turn all of their attention to mobilizing that part of the base that is already committed to them. The

question is not who's converted—it's who turns out". The campaigns behaved just as Fiedler described, using the Internet to execute what many political observers called the most intense get-out-the-vote efforts ever. "Though Internet efforts by campaigns have been to date only marginally successful in reaching the electorate, they could prove important in the tight presidential race" (Simpson 2000).

Candidate websites had become fixtures of presidential elections, and campaigns were experimenting with another instrument of the Internet. "E-mail will decide who is America's next president," predicted Jim Nicholson, chairman of the Republican National Committee (Simpson 2000). As allies of the Bush campaign, Nicholson and the RNC had better be confident that this media would make the difference—because so much funding was allocated for it. Glenn Simpson (2000) provides a glimpse into this enormous, yet intimate, electronic approach:

> Much of the GOP's recent spending went for Web ads reading: The future president wants to see you," urging voters to sign up for regular e-mail updates. The RNC's latest mailing, which went to nearly a million people this week, is from Colin Powell…and urges the GOP faithful to "Please be sure you, your family, and your friends and neighbors get out and vote."

Whereas early online campaigners essentially used the Internet to construct a digital brochure, this novel strategy treated the Internet as an engine for mobilization. Email was the first incarnation of that mentality, but as the Web inevitably expanded it would offer more mobilizing opportunities.

Even though the Web was ascending to challenge TV as the most widely used campaign media, the latter did quite not surrender its throne in this election cycle. And even though they had staying power, television tactics had not evolved very drastically since 1992: campaigns complimented candidate appearances on popular shows with

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target-audience advertising. *The Chicago Tribune*'s Michael Tackett (2000), shortly before Election Day 2000, showed that, just as they had been throughout the nineties, candidates "are evaluated as much for their performance on 'Live with Regis' or the 'Late Show with David Letterman' as they are for their performances in the debates". The shows themselves may have changed over the years, but the candidates' attendance was constant throughout. As these shows—and the national networks that hosted them—continued to give campaigns a countrywide impact, selective advertising techniques allowed candidates to communicate with isolated pockets of the population. "The Bush and Gore advertising campaigns have been so tactically selective that they are in essence regional rather than national efforts. The careful carving out of battleground markets has led to the television equivalent of hand-to-hand combat" (Marks 2000). This patchwork approach to television campaigning was powerful in places, but the medium's cumulative mobilizing strength was undeniably fading. Or, more accurately, its weakness as a mobilizing medium was becoming more and more obvious.

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The dissection of presidential campaign strategies within the twenty-year, six-election window that stretched from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush serves various purposes. The analysis reinforces the premise from which it originally sprung: each campaign is distinct from, but highly influenced by, all of those that have been run before it. To fully understand the inner-workings of a given presidential campaign, one must understand where it falls in the context of all others. In heeding Jensen's advice of inclusiveness, patterns become more clear and trends more traceable. One such trend, easy to follow in the articles of nationally renowned journalists, is the dynamic

development of the relationship between campaign media and voter mobilization. After examining the progression of this relationship (amidst the eras of radio, television, and now the Internet), it seems appropriate to draw at least some precursory conclusions about its import.

First, it is imperative to recognize that media does not progress uniformly in American society and American presidential campaigns; candidates and their teams are always cautious to adopt and invest in innovative media until it virtually saturates the population. Radio replaced rallies as the premier mobilizers only after the technology had become a staple in American homes. Likewise, campaign media teams later turned to TV when it surpassed radio on the scale of social relevance. The Internet has emerged as the latest (and inarguably most powerful) link in the chain of campaign media mobilization since its rapid, ubiquitous rise. With this transformation a larger trend becomes clear: technology influences society, which in turn dictates how campaigns communicate with the citizenry.

Acknowledging that the Internet now occupies the electoral media mountaintop is important, but further conclusions come from considering the course of its climb. When the Web arrived in campaign politics, its organizational and communicative strength exposed those weaknesses in the various media employed before it. Radio and television are structurally and characteristically different from the Internet in that they promote very little audience interaction or participation. Instead, the strategic emphasis in those arenas has been on exposure and persuasion. Barriers within these technologies have kept either from becoming powerful mobilizers—barriers that the Internet emphatically broke through. Unlike radio or television, which operate as one-way streets, the Web enables a

free exchange of information and by its nature is participatory. It can be said with conviction that the "openness and decentralized nature of the Internet" (as Bob Dole's campaign website read) redefined and realigned voter mobilization-via-media.

In many ways, the Internet helped foster a philosophy that for several consecutive cycles had been growing more prevalent in presidential campaigning. It was a philosophy that underscored the value of local and low-level activities, the importance of giving individuals a sense of efficacy, and the power of participation. Without the Web at their disposable, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton all used TV to pursue a more localized, personal approach at times. It was effective, but extremely small scale—especially when compared to what replaced it. The Internet emerged as a digital embodiment of this grassroots philosophy with universal reach. This newly forged campaign bond between the Web and a grassroots attitude has only been fortified with time; media strategies observable in the second and third elections of the new millennia prove that devolution of power to the people facilitates mobilization much better than campaign centralization.

In the chapters to come, these trends will be tracked and their ongoing implications will be analyzed. The Bush campaign in 2004 and the Obama campaign in 2008 will be given special attention because, by improving upon their Internet attacks, they perpetuated a grassroots philosophy that reenergized and reconfigured voter mobilization.

CHAPTER III

The content of the foregoing chapters helps to contextualize the campaign that is addressed in this section: Bush/Cheney 2004. Up until this point in the discussion, the emphasis has been on the collective development of political media mobilization across various elections; the intricacies of individual campaign strategies have not been examined in exhaustive detail. The 2004 American presidential election represents an ideal place to finally dig in. Archived newspapers articles will continue to be helpful, but this in-depth assessment warrants the use of multiple resources. Insider accounts, panel discussions, statistical studies, and scholarly pieces from political science journals all stand to show just how monumental 2004 was in terms of voter mobilization through media.

Before divulging the details of the Bush team's strategy, it is essential to remember that any presidential campaign's media plan reflects, and is at least somewhat dictated by, the character of the American culture at a given time. Garrett Graff, a Howard Dean campaign disciple, hammers home that point in his book *The First Campaign* (2007), explaining that the digital age has changed the way in which individuals communicate and obtain information. In order to be effective, presidential campaigns must adapt to this arrangement.

> The technological advances and the cultural changes that are globalizing the world are reshaping the ways we interact with our elected officials and candidates—and them with us. The people in this tech-savvy new generation…yearn for relevant leadership. They expect politics to talk to them, because in today's culture everything else does. (p. 12)

Ever since the inception of the Internet, media technologies have been advancing at a breakneck pace—with the overhaul of conventional campaigning in tow. In its earliest form, the Internet was an animal that campaigns tended to avoid partly because it was difficult to understand. In fact, when the Internet entered campaign conversations as far back as the mid-eighties, even the most privy of election insiders were clueless to its form and function. "Democratic strategist Bob Beckel recalls hearing [eventual Dean media manager Joe] Trippi talking about how the internet would change politics during a panel discussion after the 1984 campaign," wrote Graff. As Beckel tells it, he "turned to Trippi and said, 'Joe, I don't have any idea what you're talking about.' The internet in that era barely existed, and Beckel's response was hardly unique" (2007, p. 42). But now that America has fully familiarized itself with the medium, candidates and their cohorts embrace it wholeheartedly. The analysis that follows will illustrate how and why the Web went from irrelevant to essential and omnipresent by examining its central role in the Bush 2004 campaign.

There is a common credence that surrounds American presidential campaigns: as soon as one ends, the next begins. When one carefully considers George W. Bush's second campaign, however, it is hard to tell where his first concluded; the 2004 effort was largely a seamless continuation and extension of the Bush 2000 campaign, especially in regard to its Internet activity and mobilization methodology. A comprehensive Web strategy was key in helping Bush win round one, and even though it represented the most elaborate, efficacious use of the Internet by a campaign to that date, the strategy required some revision for round two.

Karl Rove, who is hailed as the mastermind behind Bush's Internet initiatives, was pleased with the outcome of the 2000 race, but hardly content with its closeness. He "had been caught by surprise in 2000 when a seemingly solid win turned into a popular vote loss" and was dead-set on widening the gap the second time around (Thomas 2001, p. 189). For that reason, "Rove had never stopped campaigning since the 2000 squeaker. From the moment he walked into the White House in 2001, he had been building the Republican base" (Thomas 2001, p. 189). But how, exactly, was Rove using the Internet to bolster the president's 2004 reelection bid? To answer that question, a brief recapitulation of the Bush 2000 strategy is necessary.

The architect himself provided a succinct assessment when he participated in a post-election question-and-answer panel composed of campaign professionals (including several from Gore's team). When asked how the Internet fit into the Bush mobilization strategy, Rove explained that the campaign "used the Web for a wide variety of purposes," and one of its main aims online was to "expand the number of people on [its] Web list" (Jamieson 2000, p. 193). This digital inventory of identified supporters was built by two separate but cooperative online efforts—one through the Bush campaign itself and one through the Republican National Committee (RNC). The campaign-constructed list, which numbered nearly half-a-million email addresses by November, enabled the campaign to easily "communicate with [supporters] and to generate activity" (Jamieson 2000, p. 193). Rove reveled in email's ability to secure and motivate supporters. "It was a very active recruitment avenue for us," he said of the Internet and, more specifically, email, "It helped us recruit literally tens of thousands of volunteers" (Jamieson 2000, p. 193). In the chase for votes, volunteers are invaluable—their worth

extends beyond their own vote because they represent the potential to stimulate many more.

The campaign Web list was impressive in its own right, but it was dwarfed when Rove collaborated with the RNC to compile an additional list of email addresses in an endgame effort dubbed "E-Champions." This six-week scheme closed out the Bush 2000 campaign and undoubtedly enhanced its chances. This email-based effort, which started with contacting previous supporters, "was an attempt to generate a series of activities, including sending them material to register all their family members, sending them volunteer materials, sending them things they could send to their own email list" (Jamieson 2000, p. 193-194). This innovative "attempt" quickly became an incredible success; "E-Champions" accumulated an astounding 1.1 million new email addresses for the Bush campaign, but its significance is not merely numerical. Rove's undertaking exhibited that email could indeed be a powerful mobilizer of support. "It was enormously successful," he recollected, sounding slightly surprised himself, "The number of new volunteers who showed up in our headquarters because somebody sent them email was just extraordinary" (Jamieson 2000, p. 194).

The questioner who originally asked Rove how his campaign used the Internet had prefaced his inquiry by proclaiming that "the general book on the Web this year is that except in isolated fund-raising areas, it was pretty disappointing as a political tool" (Jamieson 2000, p. 193). Rove's response discredited this misconception that the Internet's function was limited to fund-raising; the election veteran's answer clearly demonstrates that the Web's effectiveness in 2000 was multifaceted.

At the most fundamental level, the Internet allowed the Bush campaign to contact and regularly correspond with an incredible number of people. Traditionally, presidential campaigns used television to communicate with citizens—but citizens could not exactly use TV to correspond with the campaign. The Internet, on the contrary, stretches past simple contact and connects the campaign-citizen circle by facilitating a free-flow of information and inspiration. "For decades, the dominance of mass media have inculcated a sense of spectatorship among the citizenry. The internet has the potential to include more voices in the campaign dialogue" (Pew Research Center, 2004). In ways that the one-way medium of television never could, the Web lets presidential campaigns equip citizens with materials that facilitate supportive activity; from voter registration forms to volunteering invitations, the Bush campaign was empowering the electorate while eliminating barriers to mobilization.

Perhaps just as innovative, and important, as the campaign's particular tactics was the overarching aura of inclusiveness that emanated from Bush's Internet activity. Nationwide campaigns of elections past, run primarily on television, induced participation to a much lesser degree; the medium was not conducive to audience interaction, thus citizen involvement through TV began and ended with the casting of a ballot. Of course, this is not the case in the world of the Web. Candidates are no longer content with accruing individual vote commitments (nor should they be), because the Internet lets candidates easily encourage and enable supporters to secure votes outside of their own. This virtual call-to-arms, where everyday supporters are enlisted by the campaign, outfits citizens with a sense of influence and efficacy that cannot be

underestimated. Rove certainly understood the significance of that sense and saw how the

Internet could help create it.

> "I mean you are sitting there with a little laptop that has more computing power
> on your lap than the Manhattan Project had in all of its far-flung apparatus," he
> once said, "Suddenly, you have a sense of power. You can find things, move
> things, manipulate things. It gives you a sense of your relevance and your power
> and your influence, and diminishes that of all big things, whether it's a big
> company, a big union, or big government."   (Graff 2007, p. 48)

When a person feels like he is an integral part of a campaign, and can make a tangible

impact on its outcome, he will be more invested in its success and infinitely more likely

to actively advocate for its candidate. Usually, when presidential campaigns expand their

national scope, they grow increasingly impersonal. Yet with the Web, the Bush team

extended its reach *and* maintained an air of intimacy.

A remarkable upsurge in Republican turnout stands to support both the notion that

Rove's Internet strategy substantially spurred mobilization and the conviction that the

Web in 2000 offered campaigns much more than it ever had before. The campaign chief,

whose obsession with statistics is well documented, closed his panel speech by

expressing the enormity of this increase.

> This election involved an astonishing event for modern American presidential
> politics, and that is that George W. Bush won with a swing of 11.3 million votes.
> That is to say, 11.3 million more Americans voted for the Republican ticket in the
> year 2000 than had voted for the Republican ticket four years earlier.
> (Jamieson 2000, p. 203-204)

While the entire influx cannot be attributed to the campaign's online and email initiatives,

the Bush team's intensive Internet efforts undeniably boosted turnout. Rove's fresh,

effectual approach toward Internet campaigning finally legitimized the Web as a

mobilization engine.

Most campaign professionals would have probably relaxed after a win and admired their work, but Karl Rove is not most campaign professionals. The mobilization machine he designed, though strong in 2000, had not come close to reaching its true potential power. Speaking before the American Enterprise Institute in 2001, he "forecast his plan to retune the machine" and addressed the fact that the Bush campaign "failed to marshal as much support among the base as [it] should have" (Moore 2007. p 79). Even though the Internet and its accoutrements (i.e. websites and email) helped propel Bush toward the presidency in 2000, Rove realized that a stronger, slightly refined Web strategy would be essential to the President's reelection. The Bush camp "had lost the popular vote in 2000, and if the game stayed the same, they knew they'd likely lose the 2004 election, even though they had the White House. The Republicans needed more votes" (Graff 2007, p. 58). Now that the framework was already laid, Rove and company could tinker with the tactics for 2004. The way Rove saw it, "victory offered redemption for a host of sins" (Moore 2007, p. 79).

The Bush reelection crew meticulously (and immediately) studied the 2000 electoral data, in the hopes that understanding its implications would help them correct their missteps and perfect their successes for 2004. One of the campaign's most influential post-win conclusions, which modified Bush's online methods, asserted that America was closely divided along party lines. "Rove was convinced that long before Election Day 2004, most voters had already made up their mind" and because the sliver of persuadable voters in the electorate was continually shrinking as such polarization prevailed, "the reelection was about rallying the base" (Moore 2007, p. 80). Rove and company's new mobilization mindset: appeal to and build the loyal Republican base.

One needs to look no further than Bush's campaign budget sheets to find evidence of this attitudinal shift; Matthew Dowd, who moved over from the RNC in 2001 to become a chief Bush strategist, told biographer James Moore: "All campaigns are about persuading new voters and motivating true believers. In 2000, we spent 75 percent of our resources on persuasion. In 2004, we spent 75 percent of all resources on motivation" (2007, p. 81). Persuasion entails luring uncommitted voters, while motivation involves shoring up turnout amongst established and likely supporters; each campaign must decide how it will balance these two ideas as part of its mobilization strategy.

Ken Mehlman, whose authority in the Bush 2004 campaign was essentially equal to Rove's, was one of the strategists who endorsed motivating the faithful over persuading the undecided. He was also one of the few who understood how to best implement this idea in an age of amorphous media. Mehlman talked about how to meld party motivation with newly emerging communication channels.

> We needed a plan to try to expand the electorate and particularly expand our part of the electorate." The tactics building for 2004 would include the whole range of tools at the Republicans' fingertips, "We now live in a world where the old ways of communicating—the traditional buying ads on three channels, doing some robo calls, and doing some paid mail as a voter contact program—are insufficient. What we learned and what we concluded was that…our mail and our phones needed to be supplemented by a huge volunteer effort. The thing we got out of it was that the contact that is both personal and from a credible source is most effective. That informed…how you built your ground organization, and how you reached new voters. (Graff 2007, p. 58-59)

This simple snippet from Mehlman is loaded with revelations about what the Bush strategy of 2004 would stress: enlarging the Republican electorate, adapting to new methods of communication, developing an effective volunteer network, emphasizing person-to-person contact, and building a stronger organization at the grassroots. The Internet became the driving force behind the pursuit all of these goals.

One cannot fully comprehend the sudden predominance of Internet-fueled political mobilization without recognizing why the preceding medium played a reduced role in the Bush 2004 strategy. Television, as an instrument of exposure, remains a crucial component of presidential campaigns, but campaign professionals in recent cycles have substantially modernized their advertising approach on the airwaves. The Bush camp realized that with the new millennium "the television landscape was shifting and… it was at a disadvantage—Democrats watched more TV than Republicans, so more of the GOP dollar was being wasted. They realized that by better targeting their dollars, they could better reach the narrow segment of the population they were actually interested in" (Graff 2007, p. 59). Along with contacting the base that it had established for 2000 through the Internet, the campaign in 2004 used TV to reach out to people (not already on a email list) who were prone to vote for Bush. This strategic shift toward more efficient and efficacious airwave advertising could not have occurred without the assistance of innovative, and incredibly comprehensive, targeting tools. Explained Dowd,

> We took voter files and marketing files and combined them…Using a firm called
> TargetPoint to conduct surveys and collate information, the Bush campaign
> created a massive database in which three dozen characteristics were overlaid to I
> dentify millions of potential voters, including what magazines they read, what TV
> shows they watch, where they live, what activities they prefer, what they buy, and
> how they vote. (Moore 2007, p. 85)

With this unparalleled mass of information available to it, the Bush team was able to identify, find, and communicate with those citizens who were probable supporters. Before these extensive databases arrived, campaigns were forced to target voters based only on their voting history—which handicapped its ability to identify potential new voters. The advancements in voter targeting reformed the art of political television

advertising, all while working toward the campaign's greater goal of growing the base.

The adaptable strategist Matthew Dowd elaborates in James Moore's *The Architect*,

> "in advertising, we approached it differently because we had information and data that could tell you Republicans and independents in a market were watching this TV show or that show"…in 2000, the Bush campaign didn't buy TV ads on cable. In 2004, it spent $25 million on cable, which allowed it to reach specific target audiences. (2007, p. 85)

So while it is not entirely inaccurate to say that television's aggregate role has been *reduced* in recent election seasons, *streamlined* is probably a more appropriate term.

Obviously, the established political advertising environment was affected by these new targeting technologies of the digital age. At this juncture in American electoral history, many perceived experts were predicting that the Web would become the next battleground for candidate advertising. But, as senior Pew research consultant Michael Cornfield told the *Washington Post*'s Brian Faler (2004) in an October interview, Internet-based campaigning advertising "is the dog that didn't bark." In other words, "the presidential ad war online is beginning to look more like a skirmish." Cornfield's conclusion stemmed from the Pew Internet & American Life Project study that he conducted, which closely monitored Bush and Kerry's online advertising expenditures. The study showed that, while Internet-ad budgets were much larger than they were in 2000, still only $1.8 million combined was committed to the cause in 2004. What is most interesting about these findings is that the candidates were by no means avoiding the Internet entirely; campaigns utilized the Web in several ways, but explicit advertising was not one of them. The negligible Web-ad expenses "seemed modest compared with the campaigns' efforts in other areas of online politicking, such as Internet fundraising, e-

mail and voter profiling. 'The experimentation which we see in so many other areas of the Internet is just not going on here,' Cornfield said" (Faler 2004).

It is difficult to pinpoint what, exactly, has made online advertising so unattractive to campaign professionals in the early going. It is safe to assume, however, that presidential campaigns were hesitant in part because they had not yet fully adjusted to operating on a platform as open-ended and user-controlled as the Internet. The Bush campaign understood this unique structure and was able to "recognize that online, no one has to watch anything, listen to anything, or read anything that doesn't grab their attention. No longer can they just put a thirty-second ad on television and be assured that everyone watching TV will see it" (Graff 2007, p. 251). Whereas political advertising on television was a vital piece of past presidential campaign mobilization strategies, the act of putting ads up on the Internet was minor (almost non-existent) part in the Bush team's mobilization machinery. This widespread campaign cautiousness to commit significant resources for online advertising follows the pattern that has been established and addressed in the earlier chapters: presidential professionals are sensibly reluctant to adopt any new exposure tool until it proves socially relevant and electorally productive. It will be interesting to follow this progression in future contests as the practice matures, but overt political advertising, at least in the 2004 cycle, continued to be a television-driven endeavor.

The databases of personal information that allowed the 2004 campaign to more efficiently target its advertising through TV did not just affect the campaign's methodology toward one medium—Bush 2004's Internet ideology benefited from, and was significantly modified by, the newly acquired cache of citizen information. Ken

Mehlman described the resultant impact on Internet strategy to Graff, "we ran an untraditional campaign," he told the author. "We used new media effectively, we used data to identify voters" (2007, p. 60). The info databases that Mehlman and the Bush team utilized delivered them an additional one: "we built a 1.4-million volunteer database so that teachers knocked on the doors of teachers to talk about education. That's far more effective than any television ad" (Graff 2007, p. 60). Combining its massive email address book with its extremely thorough hoard of information, the campaign was able to activate its volunteers in a more competent fashion. "We were able to develop an exact kind of consumer model…to predict how people vote – not based on where they live but how they live," Mehlman boasted in a *New York Times* post-election reflection piece, "That was critically important to our success" (Nagourney 2004).

As the Bush manager's quote shows, the breakthroughs in data accumulation greatly improved the quality of Bush's campaign contact. Armed with an arsenal of telling, almost intrusive statistics, the campaign could literally deliver volunteers to speak personally with people whose support they could probably win. Political mobilization specialists have long agreed upon the superior value of in-person campaign communication, but they have also bemoaned the wasted energy and resources that this particular type of contact expends reaching out to citizens who are most unlikely to support their candidate. "Research by renowned political scientists Alan Gerber and Donald Green has demonstrated that [in-person contact] is by far the most effective at increasing voter turnout, though it is also the mostly costly" (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 191). An anecdote that appeared in an October 2004 *Chicago Tribune* article further exhibits the advantages of adopting a personalized mobilization attack; Journalist Jeff Zeleny

(2004) relayed the tale of one campaign activist who told him, "I can spend more time with someone than a 30-second commercial. They can slam the door in my face, but that's harder than changing the channel." Indeed, De Vries (1989) recaptures a most striking illustration of this political philosophy's applicatory merit, when he summons the words spoken by Quintus Cicero circa 70 BC:

> More and more-over seek out and discover men in every district, make acquaintance with them, solicit them, make them promises, take care that they canvass for you in their neighborhood and become as it were candidates for themselves for your city.

Clearly, this brand of mobilization is nothing new. What *is* new, though, are the tools being used to execute it. The widespread person-to-person contact mission that Bush's email-built army carried out fused the philosophy of in-person motivation with extensive voter info and an elaborate volunteer network. In addition to electronically urging its supporters to become active in the campaign's targeted canvassing venture, the Bush team chiefs strongly encouraged voters to actively advocate within their social circles. "Rove would do this both by energizing these voters to turn out and using creative ways to get them to tap into their own networks to expand the base" (Allen 2004). This new emphasis aligned perfectly with a number of the campaign's aforementioned goals; the effort advanced the cause of building the loyal Bush base and channeled the organizational ability of the Web, but most importantly it made mobilization more personal by cultivating it at the grassroots.

It was the Internet, in tandem with some micro-targeted television, which facilitated the Bush campaign's reorientation toward individualizing appeals and reenergizing the Republican grassroots. Zeleny's (2004) piece goes on to proclaim that as Bush and other candidates "increasingly use the Internet as a political organizing tool,

both sides have resorted to interactive gimmickry to try to build their grassroots ground game." In the past, a campaign's citizen contacting capability was inhibited by the absence of technology that political mobilizers enjoy today. But now that campaigns can communicate with and characterize a broader swath of the electorate, their ground games have grown more ambitious. Gimpel, writing for *The Journal of Politics* in 2007, noticed this transition: "Along with air wars that take place in the battleground states, party contacting (the ground war) has become an increasingly important component of the modern campaign" (p. 788). Polsby even argues, quite convincingly, that "this reemphasis of the ground game may be partially responsible for the rise in voter turnout in the elections after 1996" (2012, p. 190). The campaign had impressed with its ability to build an enormous volunteer base at the grassroots and on the ground with the assistance of email and the Internet. The network, though massive, would be worthless to Bush if his specialists did not successfully stimulate its members.

The high-minded leaders of President Bush's reelection bid recognized the value of enabling and expanding the electorate at the lowest level, yet it quickly became clear that they did not want to give their supporters too much strategic sway. Rove and the rest of "The Breakfast Club" (as Bush's campaign pseudo-cabinet was affectionately termed by the founder himself), deliberately retained decision-making authority and imposed a strict structure in their grassroots strategy as to ensure that local manifestations of the national campaign—though encouraged to implement the ground game—did not deviate from the presidential posse's plan. Put simply, the campaign wanted to keep empowering its far-reaching volunteer militia without allowing their inexperience or ingenuity to override instructions from the top. Shortly, the detrimental repercussions of forcing this

top-down mentality upon an organization based around bottom-up activity will be addressed—but before passing judgment to that degree it behooves one to give the Bush grassroots strategy a closer inspection.

The campaign's control center believed that constant and quality communication with their GOTV operatives on the ground levels would eliminate the risk of missteps or misunderstandings by Bush's backers in the field. After its erection for the 2000 election, the Bush mobilization "machine had become a sprawling empire, with its various far-flung fiefdoms that had to be tended to"(Thomas 2004, p.189). The campaign felt that it could not risk disorder in its prized, but premature, field organization. Eliminating that risk meant enforcing downward order. Writing for *Newsweek*'s 2004 election expose, Evan Thomas shows just how stringent the strategists were. Remarking on Rove,

> Everyone reported to him; even local GOP bosses checked with him before making a move," and his electoral entourage, "To enforce the strict, top down command structure on the volunteer army in the field, Mehlman's top two deputies, held a 10-hour teleconference with state and local officials every Saturday. (2004, pp. 30, 170)

The Breakfast Club cannot really be faulted for their desire of absolute control, because their "netroots" strategy was taking them into uncharted electoral territory; no campaign before had used the Web as an engine of grassroots energy, so Bush 2004 did not have any precedent to reflect back on when it was determining how much autonomy to grant individuals in using the Internet. Thus, they trusted themselves over their volunteers and determined that victory could be achieved through a vice-grip-tight chain of command. "A common assumption of presidential campaign leaders," muses Beck (1997), "is that they can organize local areas by sending in their own team to run the campaign. It is a cardinal rule of politics that grass-roots campaign activity requires organization. And

only to a limited degree can this organization be imported from the outside." So though the Bush team's desire to have total top-down control is understandable, it may have been misguided and even seems to conflict with grassroots growth.

Despite all of its strategic decisions that have been questioned in retrospect, the Bush campaign's netroots effort deserves a great deal of credit for pioneering email and Internet electioneering with an emphasis on the ground game. The 2004 Bush campaign represents a determined attempt to integrate low-level activity with top-level methodology. Beck (1997) states, and Bush's campaign shows, that even though "grass-roots activities are naturally thought to reflect local conditions and local choices...local activities can become integral parts of a national campaign when they are conducted in accordance with a coordinated national campaign strategy." Rove, Mehlman, and Dowd, the major molders of President Bush's mobilization masterpiece, crafted a campaign that—because of the intrinsically inclusive media technologies it utilized—could grow, motivate, and involve its grassroots support all while keeping it contained within firm strategic parameters. Above all, Thomas (2004) reiterates that "discipline was key: Rove set up a reporting system designed to hold accountable party bosses and volunteers alike. He created the mystique of an all-seeing, all-knowing boss of bosses" (p. 31).

Again, it easy to doubt some of The Breakfast Club's specific mobilizing decisions as time and technology advance ever-rapidly, but one must not ignore the fact that "Bush's field operation in 2004 was, at the time, widely considered the most effective in decades, setting standards for data collection, voter targeting, and coordination of staff and volunteer activities (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 191). Rowman & Littlefield (2006), too, concluded that the "ground-war strategy from the outset of

President Bush's first term…was the most effective grassroots effort in memory (xiii). An analysis of Obama's mobilization methods in the upcoming chapter will demonstrate an exponentially more sophisticated and complex use of the Web, yet the Bush team still excelled in the electoral environment of its own time. Trent & Freidenberg's *Political Campaign Communication* (2008), provides turnout statistics to support the claim that Bush 2004's grassroots, person-to-person mobilizing methods were exceptionally rewarding (even if their superiority was eventually surpassed).

> GOTV efforts are largely matters of interpersonal communication. They   place a premium on interpersonal contact, rather than on persuasive media advertising," Bush's Web-powered "Republicans were significantly more successful at increasing their turnout than were the Democrats. President Bush won 23 percent more votes in 2004 than he did in 2000. His vote total increased from 50 million in 2000 to 63 million in 2004. (p. 345)

In comparison to preceding and contemporary presidential campaigns, Bush 2004 was able to adopt Internet innovations and adapt them to achieve its grassroots goals. This is an admirable accomplishment in any era, but especially so in an age where progress is incessant. The extremely swift (and debatably instantaneous) pace of advancement in online technologies is something that presidential campaigning experts never experienced with the relatively one-dimensional mediums of radio and television, and is punctuated by the reality that mobilization activities only occur on a quadrennial basis. By the time Obama had courted the Democratic nomination, his Brain Trust had access to Internet tools that were either sharpened by campaign professionals since 2004 or otherwise unavailable to Bush staffers during his second bid.

Before Obama's mobilization efforts bore their fruit in the in the fall of 2008, however, uncertainties and unanswered questions still swirled around the prospects of Internet voter mobilization post-Bush. Henry Copeland, founder of blogads.com, spoke

with Graff in 2007, mere months before Obama's behemoth grassroots mobilization brigade manifested itself. Copeland acknowledged the potency of a ground-game, Web-run philosophy like the one Bush worked towards, "We're still just at the early stage of understanding what happens when you shift from a hierarchal society to a conversation-based one. The network is so much more powerful than this top-down stuff" (p. 253). Copeland expected the fusion of Web technology and grassroots tactics to take some time to solidify after Bush 2004 pioneered the practice. He did not

> "have high hopes for the 2008 campaigns, as they compete[d] on a playing field so transformed that few truly understand the implications of the first campaigns in the digital era." Saying, even, "there's an astonishing level of cluelessness." He believed "that it might be ten years before a campaign truly adopt[ed] the internet and the power it can deliver." (p. 253).

One cannot sincerely fault Copeland for assuming that netroots campaigning would remain in its adolescence for many elections to come; although he could have showed more foresightedness in his hypothesis with regard to the torrid progress of Internet technologies, no one could have forecast the perfect storm that Obama's voter mobilization strategy sparked the very next election.

In the pages of Chapter 4 ahead, further research will relay details of the latest, and by all accounts greatest, materialization of the media-mobilization evolution.

CHAPTER IV

Few campaign cycles have been as nationally captivating as the one that commanded America's attention in 2008. Even fewer have featured a candidate as magnetic as Barack Obama. None have been as successful in using media to mobilize voters. While Obama's campaign handlers were aware of their candidate's natural (sometimes supernatural) appeal, they were certainly not too naïve to believe that their candidate could win simply with charisma. Thus, the up-and-coming Senator "anchored his presidential ambitions in his background as a bottom-up community organizer and in his belief that two people together are exponentially more powerful than two people alone" (Scherer 2009). This chapter breaks down both the philosophy of Obama's attack and the media weaponry it used to implement it.

One of the earliest references to the same localized, low-level thinking that Obama embraced was alluded to in a *Salt Lake Herald* article more than a century before it was built into his campaign's framework. A political organizer for Theodore Roosevelt, when asked about his candidate's election strategy, said that the campaign would be calling upon "the old soldiers of each state to work up sentiment." Adding, "Roosevelt and Torrance clubs will be organized in every locality. We will begin at the grass roots." (1903). Technology and society are far-removed from their early nineteenth-century forms, when Roosevelt worked to rouse local allegiance and action, but the value of a grassroots emphasis has persisted throughout. All presidential candidates, from William Jennings Bryan to George W. Bush, simply could not ignore the import of coordinating groundswell support. "Obama's organizational efforts, in fact, were modeled on the

techniques that Republicans had pioneered in 2004. Just as the Bush-Cheney campaign strengthened the Republican base, so the Obama-Biden organization followed a more inclusive strategy" (Milkis & Rhodes 2009, pp. 1,8). Execution of an effective ground game has always been important to campaign professionals, but it has not always been so painless; as was stressed in the previous pages, radically improved and entirely new media utensils ushered in a resurgence of presidential grassroots mobilization strategy. This chapter inspects how Obama 2008 gracefully merged a time-honored philosophy with a groundbreaking infrastructure to produce the most prolific voter mobilization crusade in presidential history.

From the outset, Obama's strategists were both adaptable and innovative. They were not tied into a traditional tunnel vision that can often handcuff presidential campaigns, a mindset summed up by David Plouffe, manager of Obama for America:

> We're a grassroots campaign; we're going to make decisions in the interest of our candidacy; we're not going through the old dusty Democratic general election playbook. I think we would have been much less successful if we had become an institutional candidacy. (Jamieson 2008, p. 38)

Plouffe's rhetoric, while accurate, makes the Obama campaign's grassroots reemphasis appear wholly revolutionary. In reality, the team took many of its ground game cues from another non-traditional politician who was already attempting to master the grassroots craft in the Internet Age.

First in his capacity as a presidential candidate in 2004 and then as the Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman thereafter, Howard Dean passionately pursued party-building support from the bottom-up. When Dean ran for president, he based his efforts on two interrelated premises: the collective power of people and the

collaborative capabilities of the Internet. Although his bid is often overlooked (or otherwise reduced to a single shrieking sound byte), Dean deserves recognition for running one of the very first Web-centered mobilization campaigns. Its website's organizational and communicative strength was so great that by November "more than 180,000 people had signed up for some 2,000 presidential meetups around the country". Frantically branching off of Dean's site

> groups, like cells growing, split again and again as they got too large for their venue. Ordinary citizens stepped up to lead their meetup since the national campaigns organization could never hope to staff so many events. The phenomenon was growing too fast in too many places ever to be controlled by a central campaign. It was a new model for politics: people not waiting for leadership but instead taking the initiative for change and organizing themselves. (Graff 2007, p. 71)

Professional mobilizers marveled at the duplicative powers of Dean's decentralization. Though the volume of involvement recruited by the Dean campaign does seem somewhat insignificant when pitted against the Obama camp's enlisted support, the latter may have never even deemed a grassroots strategy worthwhile if not for the former's 2004 successes. Moreover, Obama would have faced a much more daunting task if Dean had not continued to preach the grassroots principles even after his defeat.

At the helm of the DNC, Dean continued his ground war commitment with his 50-state strategy. This plot underscored the need to establish party strength at all levels in all states. Initially, the idea to build up the entire party across the entire country drew criticism from the convention-minded; Democratic dissenters who were wary of its worth challenged the philosophy behind the all-state strategy and grassroots campaigning—but those who saw its promise early would laugh last in the end. Despite all the internal disputes, there were certainly those Democrats who recognized Dean's enterprise as

potentially powerful and subscribed to it wholeheartedly. The Obama campaign represented an extremely bright pocket of these partisans.

The Chairman watched from the wings as "Obama took the foundation that Dean himself dug in 2004—the small-dollar Internet fundraising and the DNC's 50-state strategy—and erected a powerful political infrastructure" (Liasson 2008). Democratic Party strength had steadily solidified across America under Dean's direction, so much so that Obama's operation was able to launch from a fairly solid (though still-forming) grassroots foundation. The campaign tirelessly strived to broaden and deepen its base. Rather than pump assets and devote concentration solely to contentious states, the campaign plan aimed to leave no area untouched as "both red states and blue states got attention" (Kamarck 2006, p. 2). It would be well worth it, Obama's team reasoned, to erect the pyramid of voter support from the bottom up (as Dean did) and not the other way around. Plouffe recounts in Kathleen Jamieson's *Electing the President* that the decision early on to emulate the failed politicians' ground game attack was not a popular one.

> I can't tell you how many people said, "You guys are out of your mind. You need to retrench into Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan, and give up this ridiculous quest for these other states". Just calm down. We know what we're doing here. This strategy makes sense. We want to stretch the playing field. (2008, p. 41)

Doubters abounding, Obama and company pushed back the edges of conventional campaign boundaries. They conducted their 50-state mission with their minds set on a 50 percent benchmark. Plouffe, in his own book the *Audacity to Win*, wrote about the campaign's bold 50/50 format. "We won 2008 by taking the map apart state by state, district by district, looking for 50 percent his wherever we could. Finding 50 percent is

the North Star of winning campaigns, and most activities and decisions should flow from that" (2010, p. 407). Indeed, Obama for America's mobilization activities and decisions descended directly from its all-state, all-level impetus. The campaign's strength, consequently, ascended from the bottom up.

Again, even a cursory review of American electoral history indicates that Obama's 2008 grassroots attitude was no novel approach—and his insiders knew that. But they also understood that there was an opportunity to freshen up the philosophy with the help of some untested tools and revamped accountability system. Refitting the olden grassroots fundamentals into a modern mold was the champion achievement of Obama's campaign, made most possible by the Web. Kamarck observed, and the campaign proved, that "the internet allows for the return of old fashioned political organizing" (2006, p. 4). Explaining the nature of the beast his team had created, national field organizer Jon Carson confided to a panel discussion audience after the election:

> The idea that a neighbor knocking on a voter's door was a good thing had been around for a while. The highly structured, accountable system we put in place for our volunteers was nothing new either. What was new was the scale on which we were able to do it and the accountability. (Jamieson 2008, p. 42)

On its face, the strategy looked a lot like Bush's from the cycle before. Internally, though, the authoritative environments could not have been more different.

The last chapter demonstrated that even though Bush 2004 used a bottom-up framework, it was strictly regulated from the top-down. This type of approach to the system, says Johnston (2008), "relies on traditional political operatives/insiders exerting their considerable influence and expending their considerable resources". From above, orders are allocated down a ladder that individuals are kept from climbing. It is a backwards system "tightly controlled from the top, and does less to encourage (and may

actually discourage) independent action by supporters" (Johnston 2008). The restrictiveness of the top-down technique on its most essential participants becomes even more obvious in light of Obama 2008.

The vagueness of "up" and "down" vernacular fades with the anecdotal evidence. Zach Exley, for his *Huffington Post* piece, interviewed a veteran volunteer who had intimate experiences with both approaches. Patrick Frank first recalls his encounter with the top-down methodology while working on a gubernatorial campaign: "We were reliable volunteers and we were putting in serious hours. I felt like we should have been leaders, but that never happened. They said, 'Do your call lists, knock on doors—let us do the thinking'"(Exley 2008). This so accurately captures of the mentality held by coordinators of these campaigns; keeping responsibilities minimal, authority centralized, and supporters low in a systematic hierarchy all seem staples of this strategy. In some past instances, volunteers and responsibilities never progressed past the initial stages of contact due to disorganization via centralization. The Kerry 2004 campaign, for example, "got a lot of volunteer interest – so much so that [people] would fill out a form on the website and nobody would get back to them--there was no way for them to take that action directly" (Franklin-Hodge, 2009).

Compare Frank's initial recollection with a reflection on his bottom-up experience:

> On the Obama campaign, when I see people like me and   my friends used to be, we turn them around and say, "Well hey, here's how to be a community organizer. Let me help you be a community organizer". And then they   go out and they get people to be their coordinators. And then we tell those new coordinators, "Build   yourself a team and be organizers too." There's no end to it. (Exley 2008)

His account is littered with language that exudes the bottom-up philosophy. Whereas top-down makes use of few, central leaders to do the grunt work, the duties are spread so wide and deep in a bottom-up arrangement that there results in little grunting at all. It was much easier, with the foundation of communication and information, for any one supporter to "coordinate...[and] have direct access to important people inside the campaign so they understand that they are a valuable part of the organization" (Franklin-Hodge 2009). By building a system that appreciated and supported its most essential pieces, bottom-up tactics start with a solid base that only strengthens as it grows.

Above all, the Internet was most integral to channeling Obama's swelling grassroots intensity. The team knew they could not possibly conduct all the networking and organizing on its own, so it solicited the help of Blue State Digital, (BSD) a marketing firm that relies heavily on the use of innovative Internet technology. With this partnership, the campaign aimed to mimic and foster the established grassroots undercurrent. Obama for America knew

> They needed to build an unprecedented community outreach program. They knew that online activism and online community-building would be paramount as the race heated up and they needed a platform that would power all of these and more. ("Blue State Digital" 2010)

The cooperative venture quickly launched Obama's central website, which served as an instrument of distinct advantage. It was the campaign nerve center of communication, organization, information, motivation, and activation.

MyBarackObama.com was founded when the Senator from Illinois was still battling for his party's nomination. The site instantly acted as a catalyst of recruitment and outlet for involvement. Early feedback from the campaign's Internet centerpiece was encouraging, mainly because it was fulfilling the base-broadening ambitions that

characterize grassroots endeavors. Supporters flocked to myBO (as it became affectionately named), creating an excess of 2 million user profiles, registering more than 13 million emails, and submitting over 400,000 blog entries. "The Obama campaign used internet networking techniques and old-fashioned recruiting…to develop its own massive grass-roots organization" (Milkis & Rhodes 2009, p. 8). The degree of website participation was staggering and allowed its specific tools to shine.

Amongst the most profitable utensils from the get-go was one designed to help citizens find local Obama organizations. By simply entering their current location and contact information into a form on myBO, individual activists could locate groups in their area and receive helpful correspondence from the campaign. Originally, the idea focused more on organizing support, but it soon became apparent that imposing digital structure upon their volunteer network was doing just as much to build support. Through this setup, over 45,000 autonomous Obama for America volunteer groups were birthed on myBO, most morphing into very successful quasi-campaigns in their own right. "People had started to create their own campaign organizations…and in many places had gone so far as to actually get office space and open up unofficial campaign offices unbeknownst to the [national] campaign" (Franklin-Hodge 2009). The reach of the campaign was growing almost organically as activists were able to erect subservient structures that welcomed those at the lowest levels. What resulted was a campaign of campaigns, driven by the growing pool of participants. These fanatic factions arranged over 75,000 offline events on myBO.com, and "the vast majority of these were not official campaign events-- these were things like debate-watch parties, or flyering where they might go out and distribute Obama flyers" (Franklin-Hodge 2009). The site had successfully turned users

into advocates—but most significant was the fact that these advocates were multiplying with the constant recruitment of friends, family, and other community members. The Obama campaign, atop a wave of miniature operations taking root across the country and on the Web, was expanding its reach almost exponentially. The campaign was a witness to and benefactor of the "great power and creative energy in self-organization, to be sure", but also knew it had "to be channeled toward specific forms for it to blossom" (Johnson 2001, p. 119).

The seeds that had been sown so widespread through use of the website were starting to sprout new entities semi-independent of any central involvement. Supporters took full advantage of the simple but innovative networking, communicating, and coordinating powers available on the website—and appreciated that the Obama campaign was making conversation possible. "They became more involved in the campaign not because the campaign connected with them, but because the campaign helped them connect with other people" (Franklin-Hodge 2009). As the grassroots mantra insinuates, rigid and impersonal communication does not meld well with a participant-oriented arrangement. Rather, "research demonstrates that the higher quality the contact is, the more effective the stimulus to vote" and "among the most effective mobilization techniques is in-person contact by a peer" (Crotty, p. 115). MyBO made possible such communication on an unparalleled scale. Both online and on the streets, writes Crotty, "Obama's campaign organization emphasized peer-to-peer contacts to mobilize his supporters" (2009, p. 116).

Look, for instance, at the campaign's Neighbor-to-Neighbor program. In an effort to activate and assemble Obama support, the campaign designed "a new online contact

tool that allows you to find lists of voters either in your community or in key battleground states. It's… about real people contacting real people" ("myBO" 2009). With a few clicks activists would be well on their way to expanding the base vote by vote through personal and purposive contact. Also equipping volunteers with campaign-provided maps, flyers, and scripts, Neighbor-to-Neighbor spawned a tsunami of foot soldier support. Its dual function of stimulating supporters and securing support was a pivotal piece in the campaign's grassroots puzzle. This decentralization showed its value in the 6.1 million knocks and phone calls (approximately 3 million of which occurred in the final four days before the election) it directly stimulated (Franklin-Hodge, 2009). One of BSD's brightest minds, Jascha Franklin-Hodge (2009), raved about the Website's worth. Thanks to "a tool like this," he said, "being able to tap into the distributed power of all these people wanting to do something, and the ability to do field organizing at Internet scale, really made a difference in this election."

As was touched upon in the last chapter, any local expression of a presidential campaign is going to require a certain degree of direction and instruction from the outside. Obama's campaign chiefs were mindful of managerial mistakes that many presidential teams had made in the past when it came to aiding lower-level efforts. Where others, although well-intentioned, essentially infiltrated local campaigns, Obama 2008 consciously opted to carefully integrate national campaign officials into operations already on the ground. Soon after they grasped the enormity of their movement, they started "parachuting professional organizers…into the existing grassroots volunteer group organization that had come about by virtue of the tools that the campaign was providing online" (Franklin-Hodge, 2009). The introduction of valuable leaders with valuable

skills into the still-developing framework of community-level campaigning served only to reinforce its strength and scope. These inserted experts trained and trusted their volunteers, teaching them how to arrange a phone bank or effectively communicate the Obama's message while knocking on doors. The imports themselves had graduated from "'Camp Obamas' that trained 3,000 of the campaign's grassroots leaders in 2008" (Dickinson 2012). The Obama team kept all of its players in the game— educated as well as informed; they made a rewarding choice to keep everyday supporters up-to-date on the inner-workings of the massive mobilization mechanism. Writes Plouffe (2010),

> later in the campaign we sent these state-of-the-race-memos directly to our supporters via email. We received a hugely positive response later in the campaign we sent these state-of-the-race-memos directly to our supporters via email. We received a hugely positive response. The hundres of emails we sent out…were a healthy mix of pure information, requests for organizational help, [and] local and statewide e-mails" (pp. 83, 236).

The more Obama's campaign used Internet tools to diffuse and redistribute its central authority, the more its masses multiplied. Mobilizing insiders grew giddy as "people suddenly started to understand that it's not just about 'me and a massive organization', it's about 'me and a whole lot of other people' and that's what's making this thing work" (Franklin-Hodge 2009).

The Obama establishment improved upon the digital precedents set by President Bush during his campaign in respect to email and websites, but its mastery of a newly emerging Internet media form is what truly separated Obama's mobilization offensive from all others. "Social networking sites are as old as the internet. But whereas in the 2004 election, sites like Friendster and ORkut.com had the field almost to themselves, by 2008 MySpace and Facebook had grown to encompass tens of millions of users (Graff 2007, p. 257). As this Graff excerpt insinuates, between Bush's second win and Obama's

first run, social networking site membership exploded as the intriguing new tool furiously pervaded American culture. Bush 2004 had tried to get supporters to "tap into their own networks and expand the base" but without the luxury and structure of social networking sites that made such "tapping in" easy and instant (Allen 2004). Polsby (2012) relates the two campaigns' similar mindsets:

> Believing that contact by friends, neighbors coworkers and fellow parishioners was more likely to stimulate a wavering voter's electoral participation than a knock at the door by a stranger, both the 2004 Bush campaign and the 2008 Obama campaign places particular emphasis on voter mobilization through preexisting networks. (p. 191)

With the onset of social media, this networking methodology was given form. The Obama campaign wisely chose to intertwine all of it activities with this sensation, understanding it was not just a fad but functional means of base building. A medley of social networking mediums were employed alongside the predominant Facebook, including YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, Digg, BlackPlanet, LinkedIn, AsianAve, MiGente, and Glee. By all accounts, myBarackObama.com was even a social network in its own right. The power these sites had to attract, arrange, and organize supplementary support structures can be attributed to the collaborative character of their make-up. To best exploit these new areas of resource, the campaign tailored their social networking approach toward participatory action, not just community.

Matthew Fraser (2008), of *U.S. News*, followed Obama's social networking strategy from start to finish in what he has deemed America's first "Facebook Election." His words define the coalescence of social media and presidential campaign strategy. Under the inclusive umbrella of social networking,

> campaigning shifts from old-style political machines toward the horizontal dynamics of online social networks. A perfect medium for genuine grass-roots

political movements, [social media] is transforming the power dynamics of politics. There are no barriers to entry on sites like Facebook…power is diffused because everybody can participate.

David Carr's article in the *New York Times* further iterates this point, when he writes that, "by bolting together social networking applications under the banner of a movement, they created an unforeseen force to organize locally…and get out the vote". Unquestionably, the 2008 Obama campaign benefited immensely from blazing the path of politically oriented social networking.

With its willingness to stray boldly from electoral tradition, the campaign displayed the most necessary attribute of successful presidential bids today and always: adaptability. From its infancy forward, the Obama team recognized the promise of decentralization in founding solid launching ground. Focusing on the power of participants, they built a broad base that was so bottom-up oriented that it actually began to organize itself. Perceiving this pattern, the Obama coordinators reacted appropriately by filtering information and resources to fuel these pseudo-campaigns locally. As they fed the fire of community-level campaigns, they looked to enhance their networking capacity by incorporating the increasingly ubiquitous social media instrument. These diffused Web structures assisted the expansion of support and the initiation of action.

So, though Obama was undoubtedly one of the most intriguing, non-traditional individuals ever to seek out the White House, his unconventional campaign outshined its rock star candidate in the end. The 2008 Obama team mastered the young craft of funneling grassroots passion through media, old and new. What remains to be seen, and mused over in the following conclusion, is whether or not future campaigns (including Obama's in 2012) will be able to achieve the same effectiveness.

<u>CHAPTER V</u>

This work is being bound but five months before the presidential election of 2012. From a strategic analysis standpoint, the incidental timing of its publication has both benefits and drawbacks. In one respect, four years of separation between the initiation of Obama-Biden's media mobilization onslaught allows one ample time to figure how it fits into the unending presidential campaign progression—and how it emphatically sticks out. On the other hand, tracing mobilization across two centuries of elections only to cut the discussion short on the cusp of its newest (and likely most complex) development teases those eager to see where the path leads next. Alas, there is no campaign crystal ball—in its stead we depend on precedent to hint at what the future holds for voter mobilization through media. And if presidential campaign history has taught us to expect anything in the 2012 season, it is change.

The practice, which only shows itself once a quadrennium, has endured a dynamic evolution. While some specific strategies and philosophies of mobilization remain fundamentally unchanged from one Election Day to the next, each individual campaign effort is distinct from—though undeniably influenced by—every other. When pursuing the presidency, successful candidates and their teams must be familiar not only with the electoral past but the societal present; mobilizing professionals, whose hands are always full, need to keep two fingers on the pulse of the American culture. In order to maximize mobilization in any presidential election, "campaigns need to link up with the way people are living their lives, that way people who want to help out can get information in stride" (Polsby et al. 2012, p. 405)

Since the first true presidential election in 1792, media technologies and techniques used for linking citizens to campaigns have varied in form and effectiveness. The fluctuation of any technology's application in a campaign's mobilization strategy depends directly on its current function and position in society. We have seen where, in some instances, candidates resist a new technology until its level of social penetration is too powerful to neglect any longer. Such resistance was rampant when the "undignified" medium of television first appeared—that is until the fad became an everyday fixation of American families. At other points on the presidential election continuum, campaigns recognized the promise of certain media technologies before they could plausibly be implemented. Karl Rove and Joe Trippi realized the Internet's mobilizing potential decades before it debuted in presidential campaigning, but they also knew that it would only prove profitable when America was solidly online. Whether they are intellectually ahead of the game or stubbornly behind the eight ball, campaigns are always cautious and culturally conscious when choosing which media tools to use.

Simple logic and monetary math discourages campaign mobilizers from being too creative when it comes to media; valuable energy and resources can be wasted if election teams pursue routes that do not adequately reach the population. Exposure is a driving principle behind all campaign media activity, but before the Web arrived exposure was *the* driving principle. Rallies, as vehicles of public access and appeal, were nudged aside when radio displayed its extraordinary reach. Along with exposure, radio enabled campaigns to regularly contact and communicate with the electorate like never before. This technology established a rapport between candidates and the common man that simply could not have existed beforehand. The introduction of radio changed the way in

which candidates courted support and left mobilizers ready to pounce on any other advancement that could help them feasibly forge a channel of communication with the citizenry.

Television built upon the premise that radio laid with the recorded word, promising to improve candidate exposure and campaign communication by delivering presidential audio *and* video to the public. As the mass medium matured it became deeply engrained in the American lifestyle, and before long TV would be seen as the strongest technological ally of presidential campaigns. The propagation of television across the population afforded candidates a sense of intimacy with the electorate that rallies and radio could not create. Indeed, TV improved the quality of early campaign communications, broadened the accessible audience, and completely altered the mobilization methodology.

Even as TV's novelty wore away, the nation's fascination with the medium did not fade. So, as to be expected, its use by campaigns did not wane either; election teams understood that contact and communication could occur most easily with TV, so they copiously employed its power. The predominance of the medium in society, and subsequently in presidential campaigns, reconfigured the way Americans received electoral information and the way candidates distributed it. In the merchandising era, elections came to be about "selling" a product to consumers and less about establishing a substantive connection with voters—more emphasis was put on encouraging turnout than facilitating it. However, it may not necessarily be fair to fault campaign managers for the lack of meaningful interaction during TV's uncontested tenure. The medium itself may have been less open to user participation than the actual election teams.

It is much easier to criticize the rigidity of television having experienced the Internet, for its rise revealed what was missing from the media mobilization equation prior to its arrival. There is no doubt that television worked wonders for campaign teams in terms of expanding awareness and delivering messages to citizens. It can even be asserted that the changes TV induced helped campaigns grow enthusiasm for their candidates. Schram (1984) upheld that notion, writing "that in presidential politics, strong television could out-muscle traditional organization." But as far as enabling supporters to actively participate, TV's structure was simply not conducive to involvement beyond the casting of a ballot. Supporters felt included to a point, but because they could not react and interact through the medium, their actual level of connection was minimal. Again, the detriment of this disconnect did not become glaringly obvious until the digital age, where interactivity and participation are defining features of media technology. Instead of "out-muscling" the conventional ground game, campaigns could now design a cooperative effort with media to inject energy and activity into it.

The campaigning transformations provoked by the Web, though swift, were not instantaneous. In its infancy, campaigns used the Internet in much the same way it utilized radio and television—exposure and one-way communication were paramount. Soon, though, as campaign professionals began to more accurately perceive its form, they redefined its electoral function. Candidate websites sprung up online and personalized email drew more people into the electorate, but more importantly these advances allowed campaigns to organize and then activate their support. Like TV had in the early 1900s, the Internet was able to reach out to—and inform—exponentially larger audiences. Unlike television, though, the Web, by the nature of its structure, invited citizens to

participate in the campaign process beyond their own vote. Jim Messina, manager of Obama for America 2012, sums up the state of television in the Internet Age quite concisely:

> Changing the electorate and making it better for you, that's a big chunk of business. You don't do that if you're taking all of your money and putting it on TV. Both sides are going to have beautiful TV ads, and everyone is going to spend millions of dollars. But we're going to win this on the ground, person-to-person, volunteers talking to voters about the issues. (Dickinson 2012)

An individual sitting at his or her computer desk could tap into the campaign's nerve center, correspond with higher-ups, contribute to dialogue, stay in the information loop, and keep current with campaign developments. If a potential voter takes the time to interact with the campaign in these types of ways, candidates can confidently assume that they have won that person's vote. More and more, though, campaign media outside the realm of television has focused on inspiring and enabling already secured supporters to mobilize others. Rove, especially leading up to the 2004 election, bombarded his army with emails that achieved both of those aims—they exuded encouragement but also equipped recipients with vital registration forms or volunteer information. Email permitted professionals access to the inboxes and the everyday lives of their constituents.

Early campaign webpages helped inspire and enable as well. They consolidated the strength of widespread support by providing a platform for congregation, conversation, and information dissemination. In most of the campaign's communications with the citizenry through the site and elsewhere, they would urge each person to become active advocates for their candidates and not just confirmed supporters. At the easiest level, this entailed talking to families, friends, co-workers and other acquaintances about voting for the candidate. These actions might seem insignificant, but they pay definite

dividends; campaign professionals and political scientists have come to discover that person-to-person communication is the most advantageous to mobilization. "GOTV or Get Out The Vote efforts are a vital part of every campaign. But they have changed in recent elections…interpersonal communication is becoming more and more widely recognized as the key to a successful effort" (Trent & Freidenberg 2008, p. 345). Email and standard websites made this brand of contact electronically possible, but another online technology has evolved—one that is literally based on the concept interpersonal communication.

When discussing the not-yet-defined role of social networking sites in presidential campaigning, it is important to see that long before these technologies existed in the American culture, campaigns had been increasingly pushing the electorate to tap into their existing "social networks". Finally, a medium emerged that could harness the power of the person-to-person, grassroots philosophy and whose structure mirrored it. Garrett Graff (2007) warned that online social networking's greatest strength might be its electoral undoing.

> The truth is that few political elites in the country are comfortable with the new power being exercised online through blogs, social-networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, grassroots multimedia endeavors like YouTube…Politicians and their high-paid strategists have good reason to be wary. The game of politics no longer belongs solely to the professionals…it is clear that this election belongs to ordinary voters in ways that no election has in half a century. To succeed a candidate needs to be willing to let go of the reins and put trust in the voters. (pp. 250, 253)

Obama, an anomaly in so many ways, embraced social networking media and the diffusion of power to his people. This approach worked exceptionally well for the 2008 campaign, and embodied the simultaneous resurgence of interpersonal and grassroots mobilizing efforts. Though many campaign professionals may fear the diffusive power of

innovative Internet technologies, as Graff insinuates, Obama's success could very well alter their outlooks.

Whether future campaigns employ social networking sites and their accompanying bottom-up methodology to the extent witnessed in 2008 is yet to be determined, but there is no doubt that presidential elections teams will continue to pursue people at the grassroots and try to getting them talking to each other. "People may have lost trust in many of our institutions," writes David Plouffe (2012), "but they still trust the people they live with, the people in their communities, and we as campaigners need to access that trust" (p.407). Obama's historic victory will surely entice other campaign teams to mimic his online and on-the-ground strategy, but those followers should notice that his managers are making some necessary revisions the second time around.

Displaying the adaptability and societal awareness that marks the most successful presidential campaigns, they have adjusted their strategy according the current circumstances.

> That [2008] effort, despite its groundbreaking integration of social media…was far from perfect. Outwardly, the campaign looked like "a very smooth, corporate exercise," Plouffe told *Rolling Stone* in an April 2012 article. "In reality, it functioned more like a MASH unit day-to-day." For all the grassroots enthusiasm, the campaign was unable to impose a coordinated, hierarchical structure on the freewheeling, self-organized efforts that sprang up."

Fresh off the 2008 election it looked like flipping the system (from top-down to bottom-up control) could lead to maximal mobilization, but the above reflection indicates everything was not as orderly as it seemed. It is safe to assume that campaign teams henceforth will try to strike an effective balance between surrendering authority and dissolving it amongst the electorate. The 2004 Bush campaign held tightly onto the steering wheel, and at times the Obama 2008 team gave up so much control that it looked

like a backseat driver in its own vehicle. More than likely, presidential campaigns will continue to utilize the growing number of Internet tools but choose to impose firm control upon the organizations they build; the grassroots, person-person philosophy should continue to drive mobilization operations and so should the media structures that uphold them today. The bottom-up mechanisms and mentality will remain, but campaigns are sure to impress stricter top-down organizational control so localized activities function in conjunction with the grander plan but still maintain their unparalleled mobilizing power.

Throughout this analysis, the progression of voter mobilization has often been depicted linearly because it mimics the movement of time and direction of media development. However, while time and technology march steadily forward, the philosophies driving voter mobilization appear to have come full circle. The impetus behind rallies was building energetic support while connecting with the electorate through direct communication. Yet as radio arrived and enabled mass message distribution, presidential campaigns progressively became much less personal. More people were reached, but the bond between candidates and citizens grew less substantive. Television only compounded this impersonal approach when it lured election teams to condense their candidates into marketable packages. Just when the American public seemed to be reluctantly accepting that presidential campaigns would always reflect the ideals of consumerism, the Internet delivered electoral politics back to the people. These campaigns today reflect the premise that supported rallies in the nation's early history: unfiltered candidate-to-citizen communication, expanding the campaign's reach, building and extending enthusiasm across the electorate, and forging meaningful relationships with voters.

In the digital era, "more than individual candidates losing, it was their old, creaky, top-down methods of organizing and winning campaigns that was shown to be obsolete"(Trippi 2009). Recent success on these complex endeavors signifies a real change in the way candidates will begin to collect, organize, and activate their constituencies. The inarguable effectiveness of a bottom-up, decentralized campaign attitude, coupled with the rising influence and sophistication of social media, should prove too promising for future presidential hopefuls—and their professional mobilizers— to discount.

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