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### CHAPTER THREE

#### Colorado's Central Role in the 2008 Presidential Election Cycle

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The 2008 presidential nominations process was an unusual one for Colorado.<sup>1</sup> After years of holding largely ceremonial presidential caucuses and primaries in which the nominations had already been effectively decided, 2008 presented the state with a rare chance to be consequential. The nominations contests in both major political parties were far from settled, and the state's decision to join twenty other states in an early February election date had compelled candidates to devote campaign resources and candidate time to winning the delegates from the Centennial State.

The state's increasing importance in presidential nominations paralleled its rising significance in general elections. While recent presidential elections had elevated the stature of populous industrial states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida, evidence was mounting that the Mountain West was increasingly becoming the key to presidential elections, and Colorado was the key to the Mountain West. The state's importance in presidential elections was crystallized by national Democrats' decision to hold the 2008 presidential nominating convention in Denver.

The Democratic presidential caucuses, held in February 2008, proved highly competitive, with the candidates and their surrogates spending considerable time crisscrossing the state. The nomination process, however, revealed an even more interesting dimension in the weeks following the caucuses. During the complex translation of caucus-night votes into actual Democratic delegates, both major candidates—Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama—sought to make inroads in Colorado. Similarly, the state proved competitive in the general election as well, with both major campaigns devoting considerable resources and candidate time to wooing Colorado voters. In both contests, the campaigns' deployment of field offices proved important. To an extent not seen previously in the state's recent history, the presidential campaigns opened offices all across Colorado, dispatching volunteers to contact voters and distribute literature in both dense urban areas and sparsely populated rural regions.

This chapter examines several aspects of Colorado's role in the 2008 presidential selection process. It begins with a discussion of Colorado's increasing importance to both nominations and general national elections in recent years. It then examines the particularities of the caucus system in presidential nominations and the impact of this form of nomination contest on the 2008 race. From there, it turns to an examination of the power of field offices to affect election results, from efforts by the Clinton and Obama campaigns to increase their share of delegates after Colorado's presidential caucus to work by the Obama and McCain campaigns to win over voters from county to county. This study helps shed light on the power of the ground game to affect election results and also on the importance of the delegate selection process, which receives only sporadic attention from journalists and scholars. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the significant, if limited, effects of campaigns on election outcomes and a note on the role Colorado now plays in national politics.

### COLORADO AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Colorado proved its relevance to presidential elections very early in its history. It was granted statehood on August 1, 1876, with insufficient time to organize a statewide election for that year's presidential contest. The state legislature thus took on the task of selecting the state's three Electoral College members, all three of whom cast their votes for Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in an election he won by a single electoral vote.

It would be difficult for the state to be that consequential to the outcome of a presidential election again. Nonetheless, the state has received increasing attention from both major political parties throughout the past decade, in part because of demographic factors. Simply put, the state is growing. Colorado went from six to seven congressional districts after the 2000 census, and its population

grew by 17 percent between 2000 and 2010 (Hubbard 2009). The state's growing size alone makes it worthy of attention by presidential campaigns.

Also of note, however, is the fact that Colorado is increasingly competitive in statewide elections. For years, although moderate Democrats occasionally occupied the governor's mansion, the state was considered a safe haven for Republicans. Between 1952 and 2004, Colorado voted for a Democratic presidential candidate only twice. Republicans had also enjoyed control of the state legislature for decades. This began to change in 2004, when Democrats took over both state legislative bodies for the first time in forty years and Democrat Ken Salazar won the state's US Senate contest. This was followed by the victory of a Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 2006 and the state's other Senate seat going from red to blue in 2008. Meanwhile, Colorado's delegation to the US House of Representatives went from five Republicans and two Democrats in 2003 to five Democrats and two Republicans in 2009.

This sudden shift in state voting patterns is at least in part a result of national trends—the Republican Party grew steadily less popular during President George W. Bush's tenure—but also of regional ones. National Republicans' increasing cultural focus (fostered in part by the prominence of southern conservatives in that party's leadership) tended to alienate more libertarian-minded conservatives in the West.

Another cause of the state's shifting political stripes has been the reactions (or lack thereof) of the two political parties to recent campaign finance regulations. Several recent studies suggest that the Democrats have been quicker to develop alternative systems of channeling funds to preferred candidates and more adept at recruiting wealthy private benefactors (Loevy 2009; Masket 2010; Schrager and Witwer 2010). Finally, perhaps the most important cause of increased party competition in the state concerns demographics: more liberal residents of coastal states have been flocking to urban and suburban communities in the Denver metropolitan area (Masket 2009b; Perry 2003).

The national parties have recently been portraying Colorado as the key to the Mountain West, an area that is increasingly a battleground for the national political parties. Indeed, as the South has become increasingly Republican and the Northeast increasingly Democratic in recent decades, the West is one of the last areas to have real competition between the parties. As Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean said when the party decided to hold its 2008 convention in Denver: "There is no question that the West is important to the future of the Democratic Party. The recent Democratic gains in the West exemplify the principle that when we show up and ask for people's votes and talk about what we stand for, we can win in any part of the country" (quoted in AP 2008: A1). Dean concluded, "If we win the West, we will win the presidency" (quoted in Riccardi 2007).

## THE CAUCUS

The presidential nominating caucus, as practiced in Colorado and a dozen other states, is strikingly different from primary elections. Rather than casting a simple, secret ballot, participants in a caucus engage in a very public and communal form of politicking. Meeting at the precinct level, fellow partisans gather to proclaim their support for candidates and to debate the relative merits of their choices. In some cases, candidates who fail to meet a viability threshold are dropped, and caucus goers attempt to woo their supporters. The caucus typically lasts a minimum of ninety minutes and culminates with a vote for the various candidates. The vote counts are then aggregated at the state level and reported by the media, much as with primaries.

Unlike primaries, however, caucus contests are only the beginning of the process of assigning delegates to candidates. During the caucus, participants elect delegates to attend the next nominating event, usually a county convention that occurs some weeks later. Participants at that convention then elect delegates to another convention, usually held at the state or congressional district level, where participants elect national delegates. At each of these stages, candidate preference votes are held. The entire process usually takes several months, and the final tally of pledged delegates may differ significantly from the reported levels of candidate support on caucus night.

Colorado has not always picked presidential nominees in this fashion. State political leaders of both parties pushed the state to abandon the caucus system in favor of a presidential primary for the 1992 cycle, arguing that it would give more Coloradans a chance to participate in the nominee selection process (Gavin 1990). However, Colorado's primary votes never proved pivotal, and the state moved back to the caucus/convention system prior to the 2004 presidential election cycle, largely as a cost-saving measure (*Daily Camera* Staff 2003). Canceling the primary saved the state an estimated \$2.7 million that year, as caucuses are comparatively inexpensive to run and their costs are borne by the parties (*Daily Camera* staff).

In 2007, leaders of both parties rejected the idea of switching back to primaries—again because of cost considerations—but proposed moving the caucuses from their previous April date to February 5, the earliest date allowed in 2008 under the national parties' rules. The state's nominating contests would thus coincide with those of twenty other states in what became known as "Super Duper Tuesday" (Crummy 2007). If the early contests (Iowa and New Hampshire) proved indecisive, Colorado's choices could again become consequential.

The decision to hold a caucus in lieu of a primary is a consequential one for a state party. Caucuses are often praised for their participatory nature; instead of casting a private vote, people meet and debate with their neighbors, theoretically improving the quality of decisions and promoting the development

of social capital (Karlin 2008). Many observers, however, criticize caucuses for their inherent turnout biases. Because of the time commitment necessary to participate in a caucus, turnout tends to be much lower than for primaries and to preclude participation by poorer, less-educated people and by those who have difficulty leaving home at night, such as the elderly or parents of young children (Pearson 2008).

There is little doubt that the electorate in a primary is very different from that in a caucus (Marshall 1978; although see Hersh 2010). Not surprisingly, these differences tend to produce different voting outcomes. In 2008, for example, Barack Obama tended to do about 12 percentage points better in caucuses than he did in primaries. This is not solely a result of the fact that the Obama campaign devoted more campaign resources to the caucus states than the Clinton campaign did. Providing a convenient natural experiment, Texas has a peculiar nominating system in that the state holds a primary and a caucus on the same day. In the Democratic contest there, Hillary Rodham Clinton bested Obama in the primary by a vote of 52–48 but lost to Obama in the caucus 44–56. Similarly, in the early stages of the Republican nomination contest, while John McCain prevailed in the primaries, Mitt Romney dominated the caucus states. Back in 1984, Colorado senator Gary Hart was the darling of caucus states even while the primary states went overwhelmingly to the eventual Democratic nominee, Walter Mondale. As should be clear, the type of nominating system a state chooses can have a substantial impact on the party's eventual choice of a nominee.

The caucus is a fascinating venue for politics in the United States, but it is one that does not lend itself well to quantitative political research and has not been thoroughly studied by political scientists. Moreover, with the exception of Iowa's caucus, the media tend to devote little attention to these contests, suggesting that it might be a ripe venue for campaign influence. That is, given the low media environment and the relatively low turnout, a particularly well-organized campaign could make significant inroads in a caucus by packing the event with its supporters and training volunteers to exploit caucus rules. Yet we have little sense of whether campaigns attempt to influence caucus outcomes or, if they do, to what extent they succeed. Indeed, as the next section suggests, our entire understanding of the influence of local campaigns on election outcomes is extremely limited.

## THE GROUND GAME

Political pundits frequently laud successful campaigns for their ground games (see, for example, Jarmin 2008; Sherry 2008). This is certainly understandable—campaign offices and volunteers are measurable, tangible things, while the impact of an advertisement or a speech is much harder to quantify. Yet

claims of the effectiveness of campaign field organizations are rarely subjected to empirical scrutiny. To be sure, a number of important experimental research projects have tested the impact of fieldwork (Eldersveld 1956; Eldersveld and Dodge 1954; Gerber and Green 2000, 2005; Gosnell 1927; Imai 2005), suggesting that campaigns can substantially affect voters' perceptions about a campaign and their likelihood of voting. These various studies, however, all share a common limitation: they use nonpartisan campaign messages to try to affect voters. In an effort to avoid tainting the election on behalf of a particular candidate or party, scholars generally avoid using explicitly partisan messages in their field experiments (although see Nickerson, Friedrichs, and King 2006), making them notably dissimilar to much of the campaign activity that actually occurs within an election year.

In an effort to address this shortcoming, other scholars have focused on observational studies of campaign field organizations. Some of these are focused on campaign contact (Hillygus 2005; Kramer 1970; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Silver 2008; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995; although see Sides 2008), while others examine a wider range of ground game activities, including direct mail, telephone calls, and personal canvassing (e.g., Magleby, Monson, and Patterson 2007; Monson 2004).

The bulk of campaign studies are focused on general elections. A smaller subset of scholarly work examines the nominations stage of campaigns. Larry Bartels's (1988) examination of momentum and Marty Cohen and others' (2008) study of pre-primary endorsements have shed much light on this murkier area of American candidate selection, but they devote little attention to the study of actual primary and caucus campaign activity.

Only a handful of studies have delved into this area, with mixed findings. Lynn Vavreck and colleagues (2002), for example, found that fieldwork in the form of campaign contact has affected New Hampshire primary voters, boosting their ability to evaluate candidates and their affect toward them. Conversely, Barbara Trish's (1999) detailed study of the 1996 Iowa caucus found surprisingly modest and qualified effects of field organization in that contest. This finding was echoed in 2004 when *The New York Times* lauded the organizational superiority of Richard Gephardt's and Howard Dean's campaigns prior to the Iowa Democratic caucus, only to see those candidates lose to the less organized John Edwards and John Kerry in that contest (Cohen et al. 2008: 294; Purdum 2004: 1).

#### FROM CAUCUS TO CONVENTION

After the 2008 Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary, the Democratic presidential nomination contest very quickly boiled down to just two candidates:

Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton. As has been widely reported (Green 2008), the Clinton campaign chose a very targeted path to the Democratic nomination. It largely bypassed the caucus states, determining that it could effectively lock up the nomination by running strong in the early primaries. The Obama campaign, meanwhile, capitalized on its fundraising prowess to essentially compete everywhere; it sought to run up large delegate totals in the caucus states, since Clinton had largely ceded those, while limiting the size of Clinton's bounty of delegates in the primary states. (Notably, as Senator Clinton observed, the results of this competition would have been very different had the Democrats used winner-take-all delegate rules, as the Republicans do, rather than a more proportional system of delegate allocation. "If we had [the] same rules as the Republicans, I would be the nominee right now," she remarked in May [quoted in Broder 2008.]

The consequences of the two campaigns' strategic approaches could be seen in Colorado in the month before the state's February 5 caucuses. By the time of that contest, Obama had opened twelve field offices across the state, located in Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, El Paso, La Plata, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, San Miguel, and Weld Counties. Clinton, meanwhile, had established just one, in the capital city of Denver. Tyler Chafee, Clinton's state campaign director, derided the Obama approach as misguided: "Clearly, they've taken the Starbucks approach to the campaign . . . Pretty soon, they'll have one [office] on every corner" (quoted in Montero 2008).

It is difficult to say to what extent Obama's 12–1 advantage in campaign offices in Colorado translated into votes. However, the available evidence suggests at least a modest effect. A *Denver Post*/Mason-Dixon poll conducted two weeks prior to the caucus reported 34 percent of likely voters supporting Obama, 32 percent backing Clinton, and 17 percent in favor of John Edwards, with the rest undecided (Booth and Riley 2008). Obama ultimately bested Clinton in the state's caucus 67–33.<sup>2</sup> Of course, such a discrepancy may be explained by the biases associated with caucus participation, which favor younger, wealthier, more educated voters who were already supportive of Obama. Yet Obama tended to do only about 12 points better in caucuses than in primaries. If we make the somewhat risky assumption that the Edwards supporters and undecided voters in the January poll split their support evenly between the two leading candidates, then we can conjecture that Obama would have defeated Clinton 52–48 in a Colorado primary. (This is admittedly an unreliable prediction based on a single poll of likely voters.) Obama, however, won the caucus 67–33. That is a 15-point difference—3 points higher than we might expect from the use of a caucus alone.

We have somewhat better evidence that Obama's field offices helped boost participation in the caucus. Voter turnout in the 2008 caucuses vastly exceeded

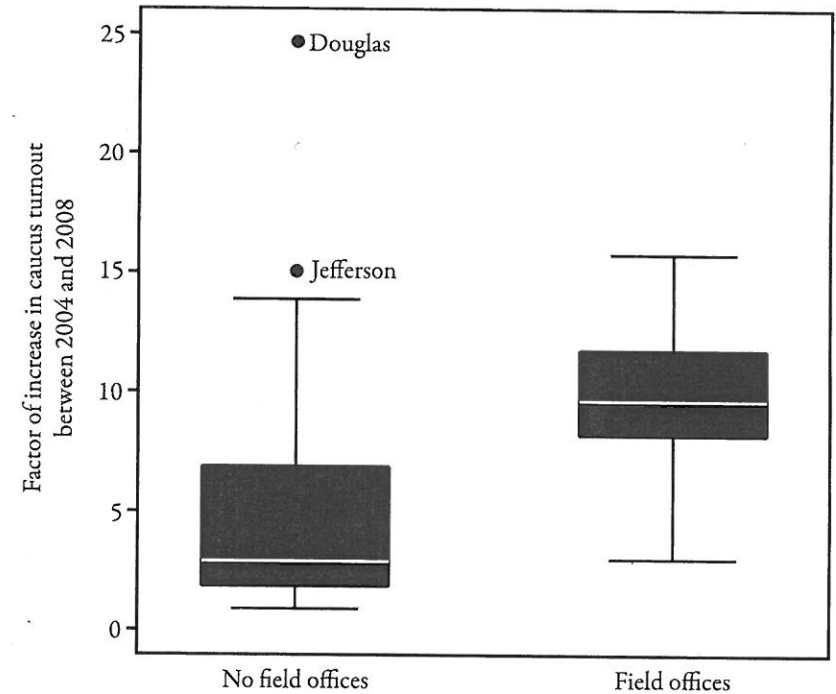
turnout four years earlier. Roughly 120,000 Coloradans participated in the state's Democratic caucuses in 2008, about eight times the number in 2004 (Riley 2008). This dramatic rise in turnout was attributable both to the competitive nature of the 2008 contest relative to 2004 and to Colorado's decision to move its contest to an earlier date (Kerry was all but assured of the 2004 nomination by the time Coloradans voted in April of that year).

Yet the rise in turnout was not evenly distributed across Colorado's counties. Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of the increase in turnout in the Democratic presidential caucuses between 2004 and 2008 in counties both with and without Obama or Clinton field offices. (The increase is measured as a factor. For example, 969 Democrats showed up for the caucuses in Jefferson County in 2004, and 14,563 Democrats showed up in the same county four years later. Thus turnout increased there by a factor of 15.) The two distributions are strikingly different. In counties without field offices, caucus participation increased by an average factor of 5. The increase was twice that in counties with field offices. This difference is statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ), even when controlling for growth in county population between the two election cycles.

Another area in which field offices seemed to matter was in the translation of those caucus-night votes into delegates. As mentioned previously, precinct caucus attendees send delegates to the county conventions (held several weeks later), where those delegates select people to attend state- or district-level conventions, where those delegates elect national delegates. Much of this selection occurs with little media attention and among people without great political experience or stature. This underreported feature of caucus states is actually a venue for considerable activity by campaigns (Marshall 2008). In 1984, according to Democratic strategist Tad Devine, Gary Hart actually lost a number of delegates he thought he had won at caucuses when those delegates flipped their support to Walter Mondale at state conventions (Hennessey and Ohlemacher 2008).

A similar sort of delegate flipping occurred in Colorado in 2008. Again, the night of the state's caucus, Obama received 67 percent of the vote to Clinton's 33 percent. Caucus attendees then elected delegates to the county conventions, which elected delegates to the state convention, held in Colorado Springs in May. Of the approximately 6,000 state convention delegates, only 63 percent were pledged to Obama, and 36 percent were pledged to Clinton. (The remaining 1 percent were uncommitted.) Somehow, Clinton had modestly increased her share of delegates above that which would be predicted from her caucus-night performance.

This shift in delegates may have been a function of the nature of each candidate's supporters. Clinton drew much of her support from longstanding Democratic Party activists who were familiar with the party system in the state

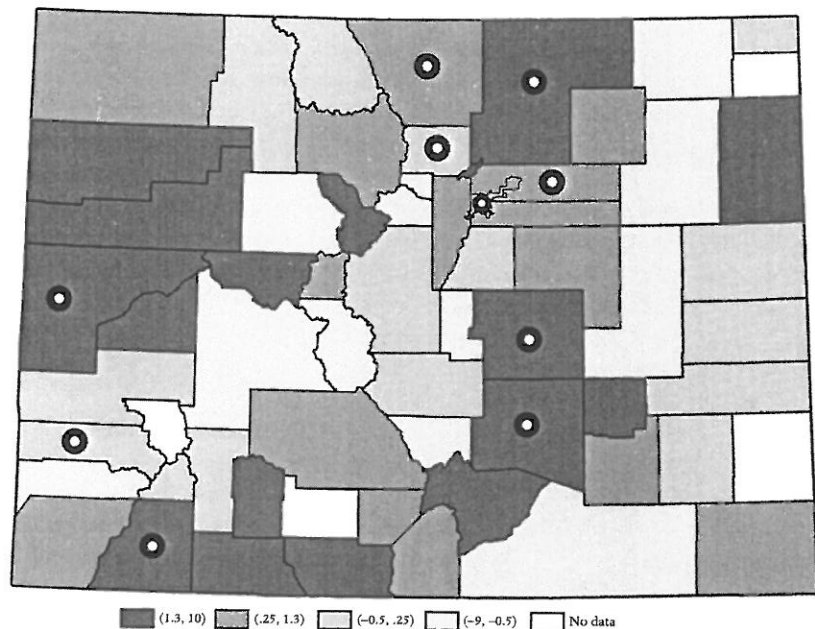


3.1. Distribution of voter turnout increase between 2004 and 2008, by county. Note: Data on caucus turnout provided by the Colorado Democratic Party. Results for ten counties were not available for 2004, so those counties were excluded from the analysis.

and understood that the multi-tiered delegate selection system required attendance at multiple conventions months apart. The core Obama activists, meanwhile, were relatively new to the political process and might not have been aware of these details (Marshall 2008).

On the other hand, the Clinton campaign may have had a far more aggressive post-caucus campaign in some states than the Obama team did. There is limited evidence that the Clinton campaign had paid operatives in several states with multi-tiered delegate selection systems whose mission was to flip pledged Obama delegates, win over unaffiliated delegates, and ensure that Obama delegates who failed to show up were replaced with Clinton-leaning alternates (Bowers 2008).

No direct information is available on how either the Clinton or the Obama post-caucus strategy was executed. However, we do know that throughout this time, Clinton maintained only one campaign office, located in Denver. Thus we would expect that any effects of this post-caucus activity would be the most

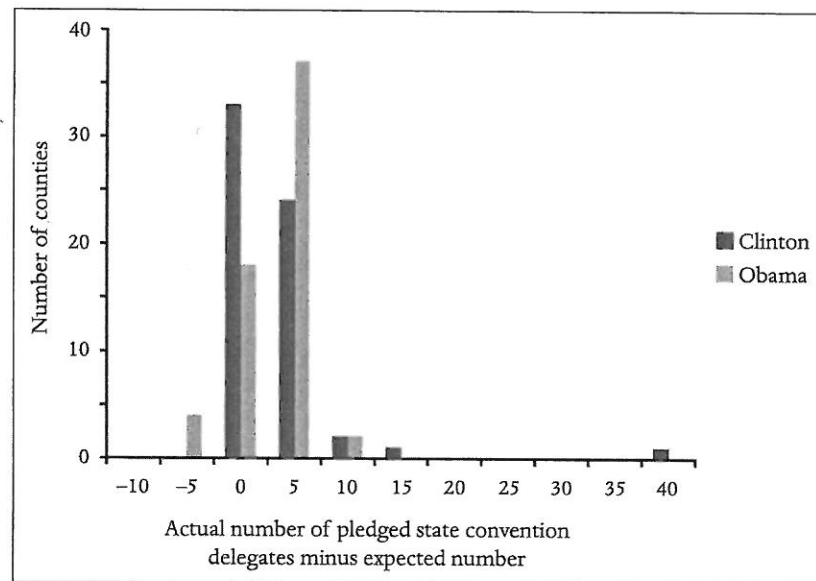


3.2. Map of post-caucus Obama delegate gains and locations of Obama field offices, 2008. Note: Darker-shaded counties are those in which Obama's post-caucus delegate gains were greater. Hollow circles indicate counties with Obama field offices.

concentrated in Denver or in the suburban counties immediately surrounding it. Conversely, the Obama campaign's twelve field offices were scattered throughout the state (although they were concentrated in the counties surrounding the state's major cities—Denver, Colorado Springs, Boulder, Pueblo, Fort Collins, Durango, and Grand Junction).

This presents an opportunity to examine an effect of field offices: were post-caucus delegate gains more concentrated in counties where the two campaigns maintained staff? I examine this question by calculating an expected share of state convention delegates from each county. This was calculated by determining the share of the total vote each candidate received on caucus night and multiplying that figure by the total number of delegates each county sent to the state convention.<sup>3</sup> Then I simply subtracted this expected number of delegates from the actual number of state delegates each candidate brought to the state convention.<sup>4</sup> I term the resulting number the candidate's "post-caucus delegate gains."

Figure 3.2 shows a map of Colorado's counties, with the location of Obama field offices at the time of the precinct caucuses indicated by solid dots. (Counties

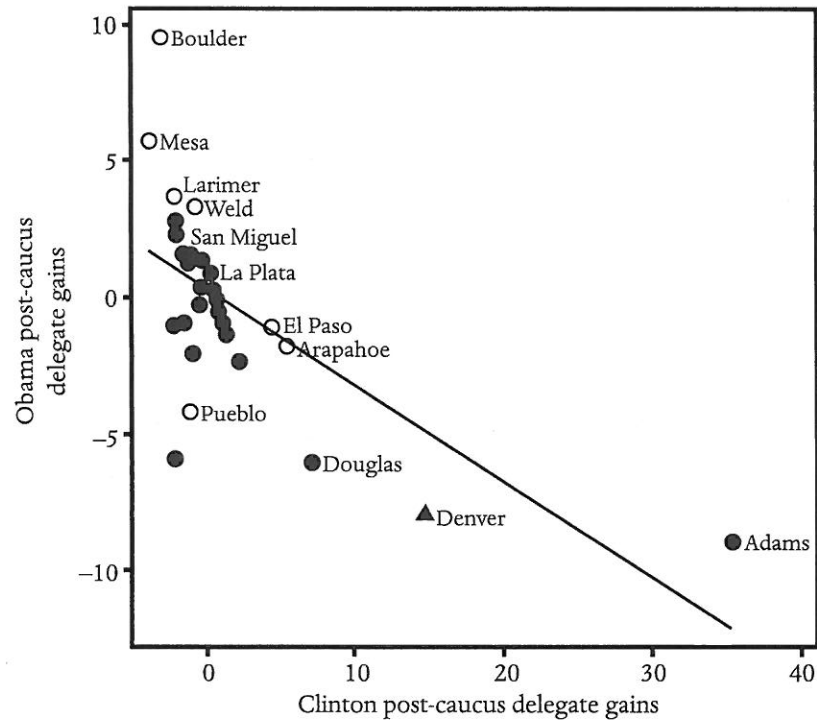


3.3. Obama and Clinton post-caucus delegate gains, 2008, histogram

with multiple Obama offices still receive only one dot.) The counties are color-coded such that darker-shaded counties are those in which Obama's post-caucus delegate gains were greater. While there is not a perfect correlation between post-caucus delegate gains and the location of field offices, the geographic pattern suggests such a relationship.

Figure 3.3 displays a histogram of the two candidates' post-caucus delegate gains by county. In this figure, positive numbers indicate that the candidate received a greater number of pledged delegates to the state convention than would have been expected given his or her share of the caucus vote in that county. Unsurprisingly, the two distributions hover close to zero, indicating that in the vast majority of counties, the candidates received almost exactly their expected shares of delegates. However, the Obama distribution is centralized, while the Clinton distribution skews somewhat to the right. In one county (Denver) Clinton received fifteen more delegates than expected, and in another (Adams, a Denver suburb) she received thirty-five more than expected.

Since there were no counties in which Obama lost potential delegates to the extent that Clinton gained them, a tentative conclusion from this figure is that her delegates came from the ranks of the uncommitted rather than from his supporters. However, figure 3.4 undermines this conclusion. This scatterplot reveals a strong and statistically significant ( $p \leq .001$ ) negative relationship



3.4. Obama and Clinton post-caucus delegate gains, 2008, scatter-plot. Note: Hollow dots indicate counties in which Obama staffed a field office prior to the February 5 caucus. Solid dots are counties with no field offices prior to February 5. The triangle (Denver) is the one county in which both campaigns staffed field offices. Counties of interest are labeled.

between Clinton’s and Obama’s post-caucus delegate gains. (This high level of statistical significance remains even if the high-leverage points of Denver and Adams Counties are removed from the calculation.) It also shows that Obama’s delegate gains hovered around zero overall, while Clinton’s were almost entirely positive.

This means that Clinton tended, on average, to pick up more delegates after the caucus than Obama did and that her gains came largely at his expense. The counties where she made her strongest gains in delegates were all counties in which Obama lost them, while Obama’s delegate gains were made largely without any penalty to Clinton.

Another lesson from this figure can be seen in the location of campaign offices. Hollow dots indicate counties in which Obama had staffed a field office

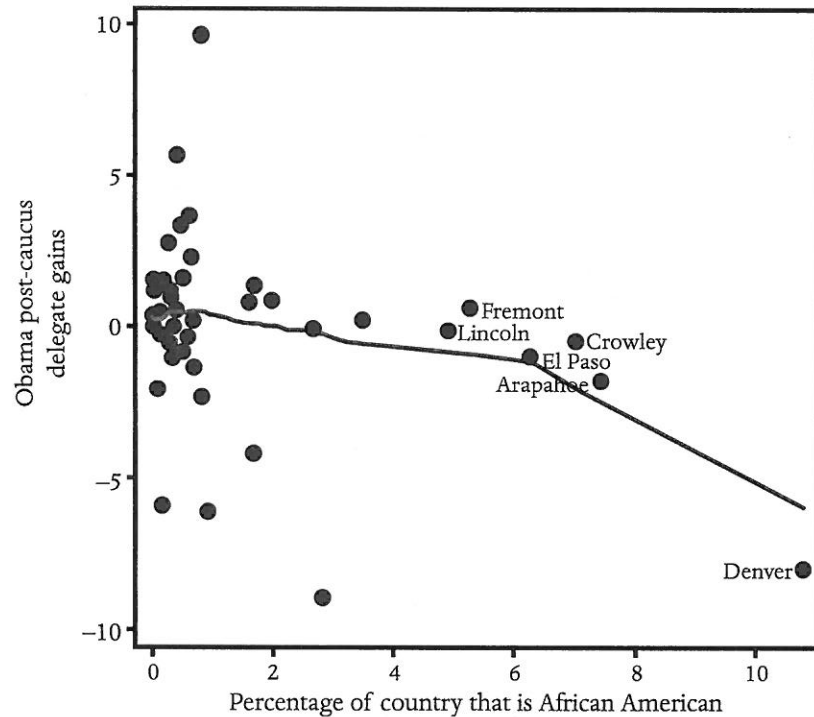
TABLE 3.1. Variables predicting post-caucus increases in Colorado state convention delegates pledged to Obama

Variable	Coefficient
Obama county field office	3.837* (1.286)
Log of number of registered Democrats	-0.459 (0.501)
Percent urban	0.483 (1.627)
Percent with college degree	-5.963 (5.408)
Percent making more than \$75,000	1.107 (6.583)
Percent African American	-59.99* (17.31)
Percent Latino	-4.939 (4.123)
Percent Evangelical	-4.189 (3.773)
Percent Catholic	-1.411 (2.913)
Constant	9.455 (4.990)
Observations	60
R-squared	0.315

Note: Cell entries are ordinary least squares coefficients. Standard errors appear in parentheses. Statistical significance is indicated by an asterisk (\* p < 0.01).

prior to the caucus. The triangle (Denver) marks the one county in which both campaigns had field offices. As can be seen, counties with Obama field offices (and without Clinton offices) tended to have more Obama delegate gains than those without. Notably, all the Obama field office counties are on or above the trend line, and most are well above zero. It appears that having an uncontested Obama office in the county is positively correlated with Obama’s post-caucus delegate gains.

A regression analysis confirms this. Table 3.1 shows a regression of Obama’s post-caucus delegate increases on a dummy variable charting whether each county had an Obama field office at the time of the caucus. A host of county control variables was included to ensure that these results are not a function of demographic features of the county populations. County size was controlled for using the log of the number of registered Democrats in each county. Variables were included for the percentages of the county that are urban, are college edu-



3.5. Obama post-caucus delegate gains by African American percentage of the population, 2008

cated, make more than \$75,000 per year, are African American, are Latino, identify as Evangelical Christian, and are Catholic.

The field office variable is both substantively and statistically ( $p \leq .01$ ) significant, suggesting that in every county in which Obama had opened a field office, he garnered roughly four additional state convention delegates. (These results hold even if Denver, the one county with a presence by both campaigns, is removed from the analysis.) Given that he had offices in ten counties, this translates to an additional forty state convention delegates.

Interestingly, the only control variable that reaches statistical significance is the percentage of the county that is African American. The coefficient is negative, suggesting that the counties with the largest numbers of African Americans produced delegates who were less likely to stay with Obama over the course of the multi-tiered process. This relationship is spelled out graphically in figure 3.5. Although Denver is obviously a high-leverage data point, the coefficient is borderline statistically significant ( $p = .051$ ) even without that county.<sup>5</sup>

While this section merely charts evidence from one state and from just one stage of a presidential nomination campaign, it suggests an important role for campaign organization. In a part of the campaign that was largely out of the public spotlight—the conversion of caucus votes to delegates—having a field office nearby made a difference. Those county-level offices seemed to give the campaigns a greater ability to affect the county delegate selection process. The Clinton team did this effectively in Denver and neighboring Adams County, while the Obama team did this (on a somewhat smaller scale) in the ten counties where it had established a staff presence.

### THE GENERAL ELECTION

For the general election contest, Senator Obama's financial resources allowed him to dramatically expand his field offices in Colorado and many other states. By the time of the November election, he had established field offices in 27 of Colorado's 64 counties. By contrast, McCain only had 11 offices in the state, and John Kerry had only established 9 four years earlier (Masket 2009a). This advantage in field offices was typical across the battleground states; in 11 competitive states,<sup>6</sup> Obama established offices in 43 percent of counties compared to McCain's 18 percent.

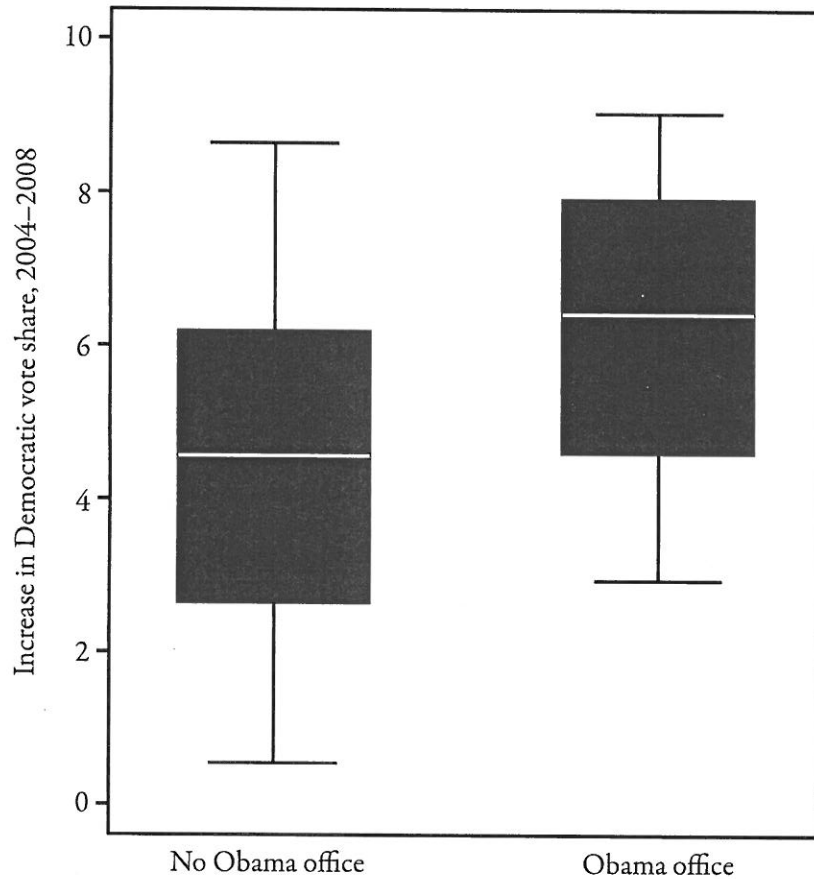
As it had during the nomination stage of the election cycle, the Obama campaign's use of field offices substantially affected the vote in the Colorado general election. These findings are explained more elaborately in a companion piece to this one (Masket 2009a). To summarize, the results suggested that the establishment of an Obama field office in Colorado in 2008 was associated with roughly 2 additional percentage points in the Democrats' presidential vote share in that county. As demonstrated in figure 3.6, in Colorado counties without Obama field offices, the Democratic presidential vote share increased by roughly 4.5 percent between 2004 and 2008; that figure was 6.3 percent in counties with an Obama field office. No county with an Obama field office had less than a 3 percent increase in the Democratic vote between 2004 and 2008.

Further examination of these voting patterns in other battleground states showed that the field office effect was determinative of the outcome in three states: Florida, Indiana, and North Carolina. Had voters contacted by the local Obama office decided instead to vote for McCain, those states would have gone Republican, bringing their fifty-three Electoral College votes with them. The research found no comparable effect for the McCain campaign's offices.

### DISCUSSION

As the evidence presented in this chapter suggests, the establishment of a local field office by a presidential campaign can yield substantial dividends for a candi-





3.6. Democratic vote share increase in Colorado counties between 2004 and 2008. Note: Reproduced from Masket 2009.

date. During the nominations stage of the campaign discussed here, the location of field offices was related to increases in both candidate delegate shares and voter turnout. In Colorado, Senator Clinton increased her share of pledged state convention delegates in the areas immediately surrounding her one campaign office in Denver. Meanwhile, Senator Obama made some delegate gains of his own in smaller counties where he had established offices. In the general election stage, it appears that a judicious deployment of field offices helped Obama gain a few percentage points of the vote, although not enough to be determinative in Colorado.

When analyzing any campaign effect, it is worth asking whether that effect matters. The post-caucus battle for delegates appears to have mattered very little in the case described here. Yes, Hillary Rodham Clinton managed to increase her share of pledged delegates at the Colorado state convention by 3 percentage points. The real payoff for her, however, would have been to have actually increased her share of national delegates, and, at least in Colorado, that did not happen. On caucus night, Obama received 67.3 percent of the Obama + Clinton vote. If we used that percentage to predict Obama's share of the 48 pledged national delegates who would go to the August convention, we would have expected him to control 32 of those delegates. In the end, he got 31. On top of that, all of the alternates who went to the national convention were pledged Obama supporters. So Clinton's post-caucus campaign managed to flip 1 delegate at best. Even if that had happened in all the caucus states, it would not have come close to changing the outcome of the nomination race. While I do not have actual figures on how much money and personnel Clinton invested in Colorado after the caucus, it is hard to believe that it was a better investment of the campaign's efforts than such activity would have been prior to the caucus.

That said, it is not difficult to envision a scenario in which such post-caucus jockeying for delegates is pivotal. Delegate selection methods are not expected to be perfectly representative of party voters' will, but given the criticism caucuses have received for their small and skewed participation (Pearson 2008), the possibility that the results of a caucus could be essentially reversed by post-caucus machinations is cause for reflection. As officials in both major parties consider reforms to produce better nominees and to honor the participation and preferences of their rank-and-file voters, the poorly understood events that occur between a caucus and a convention merit more attention and study.

In the general election, although Obama's deployment of field offices in Colorado was associated with a larger vote share increase over Kerry's from four years earlier, Obama won the state by roughly 8 percentage points—a much larger spread than any field office effect. The field office effect did appear to be determinative in three other states, however. The implication is that campaign efforts *can* change the outcome of a race, although they seldom actually do so. Usually, the effect is a matter of a percentage point or two, and few elections are decided by such a close margin. Still, as any veteran of the 2000 presidential election will attest, close elections do happen, and the effects of those elections may be felt for years or decades.

The results of the 2008 elections in Colorado appeared to vindicate Howard Dean's claims about both the importance of the West and the payoff that can come from simply asking people to vote. At least for the near term, the national parties are continuing to focus on Colorado. Both parties fought fiercely during

the 2010 US Senate race in Colorado. Senator Michael Bennet (D) was narrowly reelected in a race that featured some of the highest outside spending in the country. It is difficult to foresee political patterns further into the future, but all signs suggest that Colorado will continue to be a competitive battleground between the major parties.

## NOTES

1. The author thanks David Ciepley, Sunshine Hillygus, John Sides, Wayne Steger, Jing Sun, Nancy Wadsworth, and the students in his spring 2008 state and local politics class for their valuable comments, suggestions, and insights.

2. Edwards dropped out of the race a few days prior to the caucus.

3. Three counties—Jackson, Pitkin, and Rio Blanco—did not make their Democratic state caucus delegate information available and were thus excluded from this analysis. Broomfield County was also excluded because of a lack of demographic information.

4. Obviously, this measure is sensitive to the size of counties. For example, Obama won 77 percent of the caucus vote in Hinsdale County (population 790) but only 75 percent of the county's state delegates, not because of any serious delegate poaching effort but because the county only sent four delegates to the state convention. The calculated discrepancy in the actual number of delegates versus the predicted number in such a county is therefore negligible.

5. There are a number of interpretations of this unexpected finding that counties with large numbers of African Americans produced delegates who were less likely to stick with Obama throughout the selection process. African Americans may be disproportionately likely to hold working-class jobs and may possess lower levels of political information, all of which would suggest lower attendance rates at multiple political conventions. Or, African American political activists may have been reacting to their experiences with black presidential candidates (specifically, Jesse Jackson) and been more likely than whites to expect their candidate to lose. One should probably not make too much of this finding, however, since a considerable ecological inference problem is at work here. Since the unit of analysis is the county rather than the individual voter, and since Colorado's African American community is concentrated in just a few counties (roughly a third of the state's African Americans live in Denver alone), it is difficult to be sure that what we are seeing here actually reflects the actions and preferences of African American Democratic voters.

6. Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

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