The Untilled Field of Field Campaigns

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This paper considers the challenges and opportunities of conducting a thick, qualitative study of a twenty-first century presidential ground campaign. Our goals in the study were to describe phenomena that are not commonly examined in most studies of field campaigns, namely (a) the purportedly transformative impact of the campaign on both individuals and collective contexts, (b) the holistic interaction of different strategic elements of the campaign, and (c) the processes the campaign used to develop citizen leadership to scale the campaign. We also consider the limitations of our approach, the reception of a book intended for both academic and practitioner audiences, and underexploited research agendas in the study of campaigns.

After any presidential campaign, there is an inevitable post-mortem period in which pundits, academics, and other commentators look retrospectively at the campaign to explain its outcomes. So often, these accounts focus on explaining the outcome itself: why did one campaign defeat the other? What role did economic conditions, campaign strategy, the ground game, technology, and other factors (if any) play? The stories emerging to explain the once-improbable success of the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns were no different. Most of those stories focused on the charismatic qualities of Barack Obama as a candidate, economic conditions, or the campaign's innovative use of technology, digital media, analytics, and big data to fuel their success. While all of these stories were important, we felt they were incomplete, particularly in the way they described the distinctiveness and impacts of the Obama campaign's ground game.

In 2014, we wrote a book examining the Obama campaign's field operations, which was published as *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*. Our book was a qualitative account of the evolution, structure, and leadership of the campaign's field operations. As such, it was—and is—an anomaly in the study of voter turnout.[1] Since the seminal work of Alan Gerber and Donald Green in the late 1990s and early 2000s, field experiments have dominated studies of voter turnout in political science. This focus on randomized, controlled trials has rightfully spread to the world of campaigning, such that campaign operatives now obsessively test mobilization strategies in an effort to optimize what some journalists have called "the science of voter turnout."

Why, then, did we want to write a thick, qualitative account of this phenomenon? There were several reasons. First, we wanted to describe the phenomenon itself, namely the processes the campaign used to recruit, develop, and manage 2.2 million volunteers, 30,000 neighborhood teams, and 10,000 team leaders who performed high-stakes work that most campaigns leave to paid staff. In painting this picture, we relied on extensive interviews with rank-and-file volunteers, leaders, and staff in the Obama campaign, as well as the experiences one of us, Elizabeth (Liz) McKenna, had as a field organizer and regional field director with the Obama campaign in 2008 and 2012, respectively.

Second, we wanted to describe the intentional, collective contexts the campaign created, which we argue made all of this work possible. Our hope was not to look at any one piece of the field program in isolation, but instead to examine the way all of the pieces interacted to create a dialectic that was more than the additive sum of its individual parts. For example, many existing stories neglected the question of what the campaign left behind. Instead of seeing campaigns only as slash-and-burn turnout operations, what remains the day after the ballots are cast?

We elaborate here our goals and processes in writing this book. In so doing, we argue that campaigns are more than just persuasion and turnout operations, which are the focus of much research in American politics. Instead, they are complex systems and organizations that have multiple impacts on civic and political life, and contain

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many unanswered questions about how they work. One emerging implication of this observation is that widening the scope of analysis when it comes to campaigns opens new avenues for research. Our conclusion gestures to some of the research topics that this expanded perspective affords.

We start by focusing more on the questions we think a book like ours can answer that other studies of voter turnout do not. We then reflect on the process of collecting the data, writing the book, and sharing it with the academic and non-academic audiences to whom we were speaking.

Political Mobilizing Revisited

The goal of any electoral campaign is to maximize votes in support of its candidate. The competitive nature of campaigning, and the scarcity of financial and other resources needed to run a campaign, creates incentives for campaign operatives to optimize their strategies for generating these votes. How can they most efficiently win the most votes where it matters most? In this context, there is good reason for the study and practice of campaigning and voter turnout to be scientized. Focusing on causal inference allows campaigns to pinpoint cost-effective strategies for achieving their goals, and for political scientists to develop richer understandings of what drives people to vote. It is no surprise, then, that field experiments have dominated the study of voter turnout.

Particular methodologies, however, lead researchers to focus on certain kinds of questions and, by extension, to neglect others. Most experimental studies of voter turnout study the effectiveness of particular tactics designed to increase turnout, or individual attributes that make turnout more likely.[2] While answering these questions is extremely beneficial, they leave out other kinds of questions. Some examples of questions that are less prominent in the experimental study of voter turnout include questions related to the organizational contexts that make specific individual interventions more or less effective, or questions about how the get out the vote (GOTV) tactics studied are nested within broader organizational strategies.[3] Moreover, the consensus in this literature suggests that repeated personal contact has a large positive effect on turnout. A logical question that follows from this finding —especially from the practical standpoint of campaign operatives—is how might a campaign amass enough committed volunteers to produce this kind of personal contact at scale?

To be clear, we are not arguing that quantitative studies are *unable* to study the phenomenon we are describing. Instead, the problem is that they are *unlikely* to study it. To develop a fuller understanding of how campaigns work, our view was that we needed *both* the experimental studies that dominate the study of voter turnout and also the kind of thick qualitative study that our book represented.

Our goal was not to tell a causal story, but to describe phenomena that often get lost in dominant descriptions of electoral campaigns in political science. We undertook the project believing that there are three distinct phenomena we could describe with our approach to studying the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns: (1) the purportedly transformative effect of the campaign on the volunteers who were part of it, as well as the communities in which they lived, which was part of the legacy of the campaign, (2) the interaction of the different strategic elements of the campaign, and (3) the way the campaign developed volunteer leadership to scale the tactical tools it used.

Going Beyond the Hard Metrics

First, what was the significance of the campaign beyond the things that are easy to count? As Alex Steele, a field organizer in Iowa in 2008 and a deputy field director in Colorado in 2012, said in an interview for our book, "We're organizing to win an election, but at the end of the day, you're going to want to leave behind stronger people and stronger communities than when you got there." For many people who were part of the Obama campaign, the magic of the campaign was not only that they won the election, but also that they did so in a way that strengthened their sense of their own agency, their communities, and our democracy. Although we did not have the data to test the causal effects of the campaign practices on vote share, we wanted to document the ways in which the on-the-ground volunteers sought to strengthen the functioning of democracy itself.

Consider the fact that campaigns, particularly high-profile campaigns in a presidential election, are complex systems that do much more than just generate votes. Directly and indirectly, they create and respond to broader political contexts that shape the experiences millions of people have of our political system. For many voters and non-voters for whom politics is a mere "sideshow in the circus of life,"[4] presidential campaigns are one of the few political processes that may capture their attention. In addition, at a more intensive level, campaigns mold the experiences of the volunteers and staff who work within them, creating organizational settings within which these individuals work. As such, campaigns can have ripple effects throughout our democracy that go beyond the vote, such as becoming a breeding ground for parties, advocacy organizations, and other democratic organizations who draw from the ranks of young people who pound the pavement on behalf of electoral campaigns to staff their own organizations. Campaigns, in other words, are complex systems with many potentially beneficial externalities.

To describe these externalities, we wanted to go beyond individualistic ways of understanding the high levels of activism characterizing the Obama campaigns. Most research on elections thinks about activism and engagement as an individual phenomena. These approaches underestimate the transformative effects of collective action, making it hard to capture the ways high-intensity participation in a campaign can transform ordinary citizens who get involved, and how their high-intensity participation can increase civic capacity.

In defending the origins of sociology, Emile Durkheim famously argued that to understand how society works, we have to understand the origins of collective representations within individual minds. These representations, he argued, are not merely the sum of individual thoughts; instead, they arise from and become external to group life. For Durkheim, it is man's capacity to forge moral links with other members of a community—rather than his response to what Mancur Olson called selective incentives—that gives rise to collective action and existence.[5] Yet in studying political phenomena, political scientists often treat collective political action as the sum of many individual actions. What we miss in studying collective action in an individualized way is the way in which participation in a purposeful group—which the Obama campaign institutionalized as neighborhood teams—seeks to make each individual action mean something more than a single voter contact recorded in a spreadsheet.

In providing a thick, qualitative description of the Obama campaign, we wanted to capture what volunteers, staff, and leaders actually did during the campaign itself, and how they understood the effects they were having on the individuals and communities who were part of the campaign. What were the collective representations and moral links that shaped participants' understanding of their own work, and the impact they were having on their democracy? Tocqueville argued that collective action is fundamental to the functioning of any democracy because it transforms people's interests and capacities from being individually oriented to being publicly, collectively oriented.[6] Through our book, we sought to document the link between the actions people took and how they understood their own transformations.

Putting the Pieces Together

Second, we wanted to understand how the different elements of the Obama field campaign interacted with each other. A big part of what community organizers do is create intentional, collective contexts that make certain kinds of activism more likely. Studies of the civil rights movement and other iconic social movements, for instance, document the way organizers make it not only possible but also probable that people who are traditionally marginalized in politics develop the courage and commitment to engage in risky political actions that challenge existing structures of power. Although the Obama campaign was not asking its volunteers to engage the same kind of risk, they were asking them to engage in more intensive activism than was common in twenty-first century politics. In importing tools of community organizing into electoral politics, how did they create the collective contexts that made that kind of commitment likely?

Our hunch in asking this question was not that any one tactical element of the campaign generated the commitment the campaign needed, but that it was the totality of all the elements working together. Our book provides an analysis of the different components of the Obama field model, describing how it developed over time (chapters 2 and 3), and going deep into the nuts and bolts of how it worked, including the way the campaign used relationships (chapter 4), neighborhood teams (chapter 5), and metrics (chapter 6) as building blocks for its campaign. Although we broke down the field model into its constituent parts for the purposes of exposition, one of the most important things we learned in studying the campaign was that each of these elements seemed to be more powerful because they interacted with each other.

Relationships, for example, formed a social core for the campaign. Nearly 75 percent of our interview respondents (53 people) attributed the long thankless hours they invested in the campaign to one or more of the relationships they forged with another volunteer. Many organizations can boast these kinds of relationships, but they often do not match the kind of instrumental outcomes the Obama campaign achieved. How was the campaign able to harness the power of the relationships to achieve tangible outcomes? We found that organizers' significant investment one-on-one relationship-building was a necessary precursor to structuring a neighborhood team, which only then could be held accountable to hard voter-contact metrics as a group. Metrics without relationships, or relationships without teams would not have been as effective.

Another example of what we learned about how the different aspects of the campaign interacted together had to do with the way the campaign developed people's sense of agency. Political scientists have long argued that agency is crucial to people's political behavior. With respect to political participation, political scientists have often conceptualized agency as efficacy, or the extent to which people feel like their participation matters. Some social psychologists, however, argue that agency is based on the combination of three innate needs: competence, relatedness, *and* autonomy.[7] People not only have to feel like their participation matters (competence or efficacy), they also have to have the autonomy, or space, to be able to act on their goals in relation with others. Understanding agency as being more than just efficacy and also conditional upon autonomy implies that agency has a structural component. It is not just about how campaigns and organizations make people feel about their work, but also about whether they create a structure that provides people with the space they need to act collectively with others on their goals.

This distinction between studying agency purely as a motivational construct and understanding its structural and collective dimensions became clear in our study of the way the Obama campaign developed its field model throughout the hard-fought primary battle between Obama and Hillary Clinton in 2008. As we document in our book, the Obama campaign delegated responsibilities to volunteers that usually go to paid staff partly because they had no other choice. As the underdog candidate, they were so focused on achieving wins in the early primary states, that they starved other states of staff resources. This scarcity forced the limited staff in those states to take a gamble and invest in their volunteers—a strategy that most previous campaigns considered high-risk and low-reward. Through this process, the campaign learned how to develop volunteers' sense of individual and collective agency so that unpaid supporters could do the work of paid staff. In some cases, our interviewees reported these effects outlasting the November election. Developing the agency of volunteers was not about any one tactic. Instead, it was the interaction of building social ties, creating structures to organize volunteers, delegating consequential outcomes, providing training and other support, and so on.

The Question of Scale

Third, and relatedly, we wanted to learn how the campaign developed volunteer leadership to scale the impact of the GOTV tactics it used. Liz's experience as an organizer on the campaign illustrates this process. She was hired to organize a rural bellwether county in northwest Ohio, covering five hundred square miles of turf. On a muggy day in June, fully five months before the election, she arrived in the county seat of Port Clinton. After a quick initiation, she was handed a list of 80 people identified by the campaign's analytics team as likely Obama supporters in the area. These were considered the low-hanging fruit of volunteer recruits. A small number of these 80 people actually answered their phone, and a not insignificant number had been misclassified as supporters, making for some awkward and at times vitriolic conversation. From the handful of people who agreed to meet with her from this initial recruitment list, Liz used a snowball recruitment method to then schedule nearly a hundred more one-on-one meetings and twenty-five house meetings with a mix of supporters and what the campaign called "persuadable" voters. This was textbook grassroots organizing. On the basis of this relational scaffolding, seven neighborhood teams—each with approximately a dozen regular team members—were born. On election day, the volunteer teams took charge of running all of the GOTV staging locations across the county, while Liz—like the 500 other field organizers across the state—sat in an unused law office doing nothing more than reporting the volunteers' canvassing numbers up the chain to headquarters in Columbus. This same process was repeated in all of Ohio's 88 counties, and in all of the swing states in which the campaign had deployed staff. Volunteers, not staff, ran GOTV operations on the most important day of the entire campaign.

The Obama campaign was able to recruit, develop, and deploy volunteer activists at a scale unmatched by previous campaigns. In doing so, they not only drew on previous research identifying core principles of effective GOTV efforts, they took them to scale in a new way. Part of the question we wanted to understand, then, was what the larger organizational and structural components were that made this possible. This point is related to the previous two points we made about the transformative impact of campaigns, and the interaction between different organizational and tactical elements. We wanted to focus particularly on it here, however, to draw attention to the organizational, strategic, and management questions embedded within it.

Part of what the Obama campaign achieved was to solve a problem that management scholars and scholars of organizational behavior have examined for years. In 2012, they had 2.2 million volunteers, 30,000 neighborhood teams, and 10,000 team leaders who all worked without pay. Alongside this volunteer structure, they had a massive paid staff structure, all of whom had to be recruited, trained, and effectively managed. Managing an organization of this size is not just about financial and technical resources but also about what management scholars call dynamic capabilities.[8] What were the strategic and organizational resources that allowed the campaign to manage all the moving parts? How did they take all the learning about both relational organizing and specific GOTV tactics and turn them into a many-thousand-person operation in a dozen swing states?

Organizations are complex and contingent amalgams of people and practices. Understanding how they work as full systems presents methodological challenges, given the difficulty of isolating the effect of any one variable on organizational outcomes.[9] Instead, many organizational behavior scholars ask if and how organizational actors are able to create the conditions that make certain outcomes more likely. To examine these conditions, we took the campaign as our unit of analysis, as opposed to looking at particular individuals or macro-structural forces.

Collecting the Data: Limits and Opportunities

Naturally, despite the advantages in taking this approach to our work, there were also limitations and particular challenges that we had to take into account. We do not want to rehearse all the debates about the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, or large-n versus small-n studies, which are well covered elsewhere.[10] Instead, we wanted to focus on the challenges related to working on the particular case of the Obama campaign.

Like many modern presidential campaigns, the Obama campaign was famously disciplined in managing the flow of information from the campaign to the public. As we first began considering the project, one of the big challenges we faced was in gaining access to the campaign itself. We had initially considered doing a project like this after the 2008 campaign, when Obama was able to generate a groundswell of activism unrivaled by any other campaign in modern history. At the time, however, Obama was just beginning his presidency and the prospect of a re-election campaign loomed on the horizon. In this context, we found it too difficult to gain access to campaign insiders who would (or could, due to strict edicts about not talking to the press or inquisitive outsiders) be candid with us about the strategic choices they made. It was not until the 2012 campaign was over, when the Obama team knew that they would not be engaged in another re-election effort, that we sensed a willingness to open up.

At that point, we opened conversations with Jeremy Bird, who had been the national field director of the 2012 Obama campaign, the general election director of Ohio in the 2008 campaign, and had held numerous other positions since the earliest days of Obama's candidacy. Both of us knew him in previous contexts (Liz had worked for him when he was the general election director in Ohio in 2008, and Hahrie knew him through common acquaintances). Bird also wanted to tell the story of the campaign, and was willing to work with us in part because of these pre-existing relationships. These relationships established a basis of trust that made him more willing to give us access to informants within the campaign.

With Bird's support, we were able to reach out to a wide range of volunteers and staff from the campaign to reflect with them about their experiences. We used multiple strategies to identify people to speak with so that we could interview a diverse set of people, who were not necessarily connected to Bird or each other, and who had all worked or volunteered on the campaign. Bird's support of the project was critical in encouraging people to open up to us. This was particularly true among the more senior staff we interviewed, who responded to us only when we indicated that we were connecting to them with Bird's support—but it was also true for a number of the campaign's foot soldiers, who felt more comfortable speaking with us knowing that many of the senior staff had already done so.

Even as we encouraged people to speak as candidly as possible to us (and drew on the Liz's ten months working as a staff member on the campaign), the question remained of what kind of biases our subjects had, and how that would bias the picture we were developing of the campaign. As we discuss in the book, we tried, as a result, to triangulate information whenever possible, so that we used multiple data sources of varying types—including region-level organizing data, training materials, and contemporaneous news coverage—to confirm information that we found.

A key distinction we made in our research, however, was that we were not trying to do an evaluation of the campaign, but instead trying to describe what the campaign actually did. What did they actually do to recruit, cultivate, and manage their sprawling network of volunteers, staff, and field offices? Thus, our goal in talking to people was to get them to describe their experiences to us, in as granular a way as possible. We began by asking them about the specific actions they took, and only later about what they thought about those actions. Because the interviews were semi-structured, most respondents offered commentary along the way, reflecting with us about what they thought worked and did not work—which we reported in the book. Nevertheless, we tried to be careful in describing the distinction between what the staff and volunteers did and how they then made meaning out of it.

One of the motivations for approaching the research in this way was to understand the extent to which the campaign succeeded in deploying similar versions of its electoral-organizing model in wildly variant political, demographic, and geographic contexts. We found strikingly consistent patterns across time and space that corresponded with what interviewees described as the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign. For example, the neighborhood teams that appeared to be the most effective were those that had consistent leaders, weekly rituals, and deep social ties that went beyond the bounds of everyday volunteer camaraderie. One volunteer in North Carolina explained:

> Let me give you an idea of my team: When they found out my husband was in the hospital—we had been talking that after Christmas we would all get together and have a sort of New Year's Party. . . . And so . . . my team members said to me, 'We will not have our party until you can go. We'll wait until your husband is home from the hospital so that you don't have to choose between going to the hospital and seeing your husband and going to the party."

Our interviews were replete with stories like these. Conversely, one of the most robust critiques of the organizational environment was the way in which voter contact and shift goals were sometimes misused to shame rather than inspire campaign staff and volunteers.

Another challenge that we faced in working on the book had to do with timing. We were not able to begin working on it until the 2012 campaign ended, because we did not have Bird's buy-in until he was able to step back from the pace of the campaign itself. Until that happened, we were not sure whether the project would be able to take off. Once we garnered his support in the weeks following the end of the 2012 campaign, however, we began working on it almost immediately, to capture people's experiences before too much time passed. Thus, the weeks and months immediately following the end of the campaign were hectic for us, as we sought to engage Bird's support, and then reach out to a wide range of people to interview.

In some ways, this compressed timeline worked in our favor, however, because it created an urgency around the start of the project that persisted throughout its duration. A number of post-hoc analyses were emerging about the campaign, and we did not want ours to be too far behind. We knew, of course, that we would not be able to catch the wave of immediate post-election analyses that always emerge, but we wanted our story to come out soon enough to shape the narratives and lessons people drew retrospectively about the Obama campaign. Thus, we set a goal of trying to get the book out before the next round of midterm elections in 2014. Even though we missed this goal by a few months (the book was released in January of 2015), we still strove to complete the project with more alacrity than most academic projects. Doing so required the goodwill of a number of people, including the interviewees, people from within the campaign from whom we needed to obtain data, and colleagues and reviewers in the discipline who provided feedback on drafts of the manuscript with greater speed than usual.

The Response

Because of the unusual nature of the book in campaign studies, we were unsure how the book would be received in both academic and non-academic communities. The widespread success of research like Green and Gerber's *Get Out the Vote* book and the development of organizations like the Analyst Institute created a culture of testing among GOTV organizations that made our qualitative account of the campaign unusual even for practitioners. We will let readers adjudicate for themselves what the reception of the book has been in political science and sociology circles and will not address that topic here. We focus instead on what the reception has been like in non-academic communities, given the efforts we made to position the book as a crossover between academic and practitioner communities.

Our first glimpse into the reaction to our book came on January 24, 2015, a few weeks after the book was released. Patrick Ruffini, who had been the webmaster for the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign, the digital director for the Republican National Committee from 2005–2007, and a Republican strategist, began "live-tweeting" the book as he read it: "Will be tweeting some highlights from Groundbreakers, a book on the Obama field operation by Elizabeth McKenna and @hahriehan," he wrote. Throughout that day, and part of the next, he tweeted snippets of the book that he found interesting, sharing what he thought were important lessons from our analysis with his community of over 25,000 followers on Twitter. Sometimes he would take pictures of passages from the book that he found relevant, and post them with comment, such as the quote from Bird's foreword to the book: "The truth is that there is no shortcut, no silver bullet, and no special sauce to building a winning campaign in the 21st century"—"Amen@jeremybird," Ruffini tweeted. Other times, Ruffini would tweet facts that he found interesting from the book: "One field staffer called 700 voters in a day. Instead of a pat on the back, he was criticized for not recruiting volunteers instead."

As academics, we can confidently say that something that we thought would never happen to one of our books is that someone would "live-tweet" it, providing a minute-by-minute chronicle of his thoughts as he read the book, and reducing key lessons from the book into 140 characters or less. Ruffini's tweets helped the book's sales rise on Amazon ("If you want to read the book yourself, and I recommend you do, here is the Amazon link: http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/ . . ." Ruffini tweeted) and created a community of readers on both sides of the partisan spectrum. Our book had a more natural audience among readers on the left, in part because many of the volunteers and staff who we interviewed for the book helped publicize the book in their own circles. Our instinct, however, was that the lessons from the Obama campaign were not restricted to organizations working on one side of the ideological spectrum. Instead, part of what we learned in studying the campaign was that campaign insiders tried to draw on universal lessons learned from management and community-organizing studies from a wide range of sectors and issue areas that emerged from organizations and campaigns.

In the months following Ruffini's tweets, we found that the book traveled across many boundaries, finding readers amongst campaigners, community organizers, and activists in the United States and abroad. In addition to being of interest to the many volunteers and staff who were part of the campaign itself, our book seemed to have most resonance among people and organizations interested in building an activist base, regardless of sector or issue area. These were the people most interested in understanding how to unpack the nuts and bolts of a campaign they had only observed from afar. We were invited to speak at a wide range of organizations, from grassroots, community-based organizations, to foundations interested in better understanding how to invest in organizations that can effectively engage the grassroots, to organizations like NationBuilder that support campaigners and organizers on the ground. Politicos abroad interested in learning from examples in the United States asked us to speak to them about our work, taking us to places like Sydney, Ottawa, and London.

Despite this positive response among a community of campaigners and activists, we found that there was more limited appetite for our work in the mainstream media or the broader community of campaign consultants.[11] Our book had been published within the trade arm of Oxford University Press, which meant that the publisher had a publicist focused on getting word about the book out into a broader audience. We worked with this publicist and others to try to place stories about the book in the mainstream media to only limited success. The book's argument about the importance of the Obama campaign's innovations around developing and unleashing a volunteer army did not seem to resonate with editors who were more interested in stories about technology, data, ideology, or other parts of the campaign. To be sure, a big part of our limited success in placing stories about the book in broader media was our own fault; undoubtedly we could have done a better job writing short pieces for popular audiences, and timing those pieces with the news cycle. In addition to our own failings, however, we also felt that part of the resistance we met had to do with the way our book ran counter to the dominant narratives about what the unique aspects of the Obama campaign were. News outlets like novel ideas, but those novel ideas have to fit within prevailing assumptions about how the world works. Somehow our story about the campaign seemed to run counter to the mental models many editors had. Often, we would send stories to the editors only to get the response, "Interesting piece, but wasn't technology a big part of the story?"

Conclusion

Our book was largely silent on the concerns that constitute the focus of most research on campaigns and elections. The seemingly strange choice to avoid talking about vote margins in a book about a campaign rendered our study relatively unique in the broader research. Although it was unique in this sense, our book only covers a fraction of the analytical terrain that falls outside of turnout studies. On the contrary, we have argued that campaigns represent an underexploited field of research in American politics. As election seasons grow ever longer, so too does the list of research topics in need of study—by both quantitative and qualitative researchers—from questions on constituency-building, leadership development, volunteer management, strategic capacity, the relationship between organizing and mobilizing, online and offline tactics, and the effect of insurgent grassroots campaigns on formal party structure, to name just a few.

As Paul Pierson has observed, most political scientists see the interface between politicians and voters as "the heart of politics." This focus has oriented the discipline toward "a restricted set of immediately observable micro-level phenomena."[12] Others expand on this and other recent critiques of methodological individualism and point to the contributions that qualitative research agendas offer for the field of political communication.[13]

Our hope was that by writing a different kind of book, we could draw attention to a different set of questions about campaigns. Our interest in studying the ways in which a unique organizational configuration—the political campaign—was able to generate power at the individual and organizational level in a way that is not commonly explored. In writing *Groundbreakers*, we sought to do more than provide an analysis of the inner-workings of one historic campaign, though the book also serves this purpose. We also hoped to provide an account of the conditions under which ordinary people experienced shared power—a precious and rare phenomenon in American politics.

Notes

1 A notable recent exception to this trend towards solely quantitative studies of voter turnout is Nielsen 2012.
2 See Green Gerber 2008, and Nickerson and Feller. 2008. for summaries of this literature.
3 See David Karpf's forthcoming book on digital petitions for an argument about why understanding the organizational context and strategies underlying specific tactics designed to increase participation matters.
4 Dahl 2005.
5 Durkheim 2008.
6 Tocqueville, 2002 [1863], p. 61.
7 See, e.g., Ryan and Deci 2000.
8 Teece 2007.
9 Hackman 2002.
10 E.g., Collier and Elman 2008. Also see Goertz and Mahoney 2012.
11 Sheingate 2016. Walker. 2014.
12 Pierson 2015.
13 Karpf et al. 2015.

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