Introduction

In the forty years between the 1968 and 2008 presidential elections the United States changed as a country and so did the way in which presidents are elected. The presidential election process became much more democratic over those years. In 1968 the nomination process was dominated by backroom politics; by 2008 the nomination process was one in which millions of people could vote for nominees through primaries and caucuses. In 1968 both major party nominees were white men; in 2008 an African American was the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, and a woman was the Republican Party's vice presidential nominee. In 1968 elections were funded by large, undisclosed donations; by 2008 both large and small donations were fully disclosed. In 1968 there were no presidential debates during the general election; by 2008 both presidential and vice presidential debates were an established part of the fall campaigns.

The election process also changed during the forty-year period. Election reforms made it easier for Americans to register to vote. Technological advances enabled campaign workers to more easily communicate among themselves and with potential voters, and supporters could more easily communicate with the campaigns. The American electorate itself became more diverse, with more women, young people, and minorities participating in the electoral process.

This book examines the democratization of the presidential election process through the metaphor of Grant Park. During the Democratic Convention in 1968, Chicago's Grant Park was the site of rioting (largely instigated by police action) by young people, many of whom were African Americans, shut out of the nomination process. Forty years later

thousands of Americans, many young and many African American, gathered in Grant Park in the early morning hours of November 3, 2008, to celebrate the election of the first African American president.

1968

Nineteen sixty-eight had been a tumultuous year for the Democratic Party. On March 31, two weeks after Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota had won 42 percent of the vote in the New Hampshire primary, President Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection. McCarthy had run as a candidate opposed to U.S. involvement in the war then raging in Vietnam. Just a day after McCarthy came close to beating President Johnson in the New Hampshire primary, New York senator Robert Kennedy, brother of the late President John F. Kennedy, entered the primaries. Kennedy secured the nomination after winning the California primary June 5, only to be struck down by an assassin's bullet later that night. Hubert Humphrey, President Johnson's vice president, then became the de facto nominee. Yet Humphrey had competed in no primaries or caucuses in 1968.

Humphrey's likely nomination, despite strong showings in the primaries by antiwar candidates McCarthy and Kennedy, caused considerable unrest among those opposing the Vietnam War. Antiwar sentiment had been rampant during the Democratic primary, and the frustration of the antiwar community boiled over outside the Democratic Convention, held at the International Amphitheater in downtown Chicago. The antiwar views were largely ignored by delegates inside the convention hall, but anger at the Democratic Party and its nominee raged outside the convention, as antiwar activists demonstrated in Grant Park. The images were stark: the delegates to the Democratic Convention, mostly white, middle-aged men, nominating a candidate who had not competed in the nomination process, while young people demonstrating against the war and the party's nominee were being teargassed, maced, and beaten in Grant Park and other areas of the city.

2008

Forty years and just over three months later, Grant Park was again the focus of attention. This time, however, those shut out of the convention

in 1968 were a big part of the tens of thousands celebrating the election of the first African American president in the history of the United States. Grant Park was not the scene of anger, frustration, and bitterness it had been in the summer of 1968 but rather a scene of celebration, hope, and inclusiveness. When President-elect Obama addressed the more than 125,000 people in the park just after midnight on election night, he looked out at a sea of faces—many of them similar to those who had been shut out of the nomination process forty years earlier.

This volume chronicles how the presidential election process and its three parts—the nomination, convention, and general election—changed between 1968 and 2008 and anticipates what the process might look like in 2012. The presidential route in 2008 was nothing like that in 1968, nor was it like those in 1976, or 1984, or 1992. The role of the nominating convention evolved (or, more accurately, devolved) between 1968 and 2008. The general election process, while still governed by the Electoral College, also changed in the forty-year interim.

Between 1968 and 2008

Following the 1968 convention the Democratic Party established a series of commissions that profoundly changed the way candidates were nominated. Hubert Humphrey had won the nomination in 1968 because the nomination process was largely controlled by state caucuses and conventions that allowed party insiders to control state delegations to the convention. Beginning in 1972 the nomination process gradually evolved from a convention-dominated one to one in which the majority of delegates are chosen in state primaries. Once the primary became the main vehicle for nominating delegates, the primary process itself changed, with more and more states electing to hold their primaries closer and closer to the start of the formal nomination process.

Parallel to changes in the nominating process were changes in the financing of presidential elections. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (FECA) provided for voluntary, full public funding of the general election, and partial public funding of the nomination process, beginning with the 1976 presidential election. For a while the changes in the nomination process and the opportunity to receive partial public funding worked in tandem, allowing lesser known candidates to either win the

nomination (Jimmy Carter in 1976) or compete strongly for the nomination (Gary Hart in 1984). However, in 1992 the campaign funding process began to crumble with the influx of so-called soft money, and by 2008 the process that worked so well when it was first enacted was in shambles, with none of the first-tier candidates in either party accepting partial public funds during the nomination process, and one of the major party candidates—Barack Obama—rejecting public funds in the general election, the first time a major party nominee had done so since the enactment of FECA.

The role of the nominating conventions also changed. While still the formal mechanism for nominating the Democratic and Republican candidates for president, the evolving shifts in the nomination process meant that by 1988 the actual candidates for president were known well before the conventions took place. Even in 2008, with wide-open fields for both the Democratic and Republican nominations and the longest quest for the nomination since 1984 for the Democrats, both Barack Obama and John McCain had enough delegates to claim their respective party nominations three months before the conventions. The inevitability of the major party nominees led to a spiraling downward dance between the political parties and the broadcast media, where the media covered less and less of the conventions and the parties tried to make what was covered a way to connect to the electorate in the fall campaign. By 2008 the major broadcast and cable networks devoted only one hour of prime-time coverage to the conventions, so the parties had to fit into one hour each night what they had previously presented in three or four hours.

The years between 1968 and 2008 also saw changes in the general election. There was a gradual winnowing of states in which candidates seriously competed. States became labeled as red states (states strongly favoring Republican candidates), blue states (states strongly favoring Democratic candidates), and, eventually, purple states (states moving from red to blue or blue to red). Candidates competed in a dozen to two dozen so-called battleground states, which meant that some states, including those with the largest populations (California and New York, blue states, and Texas, a red state), saw virtually no campaign activity.

Presidential debates also once again became part of the general election. After the famous Nixon-Kennedy debates in 1960 no presidential candidates debated until 1976. Presidential debates gradually returned in

1976 and 1980, sponsored by the League of Women Voters. In 1987, in a move to institutionalize the debates, the Commission on Presidential Debates was created, and the commission has sponsored the debates since 1988. Debates are now expected between both the presidential and vice presidential candidates. While there is disagreement as to how important the debates are to the outcome of the election, they are watched by millions of Americans during each general election, and numerous memorable moments have come out of the debates in the last three decades.

Plan of the Book

The first four chapters of the book examine the changes in the presidential election process between 1968 and 2008. Chapter 1 examines the presidential campaign finance system. From 1976 until 1988 the system worked much as the drafters of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 hoped it would. One goal of the FECA was to eliminate the opportunity for wealthy contributors to contribute large amounts of money with little if any disclosure. Beginning in 1976 wealthy interests, be they individual or group, had much less opportunity to influence the nomination and general elections. Also, with its provisions for partial public funding, lesser known candidates had an opportunity to compete with better known candidates for the nomination. By 1992, however, large campaign contributions had crept back into the presidential election process in the form of soft money. By 2000 public funding of presidential elections began to erode when Republican candidate George W. Bush announced he would decline partial public funding in the nomination period.

Chapter 2 looks at changes in the presidential nomination process. The evolution of the process from a convention and caucus system in 1968 to a mainly primary system in 2008 is examined. The chapter also looks at the gradual change from a nomination process spread over three months to one in which the front-loading of primaries and caucuses meant that a candidate could lock up the party nomination early—in February or March. Differences between the Democratic and Republican nomination processes are also covered: delegates to the Democratic Convention are assigned proportionally within states, while the Republican Party allows a winner-take-all system, in which the candidate who wins a plurality of the votes in a state collects all of the state's delegates. The differences in

the two systems have important consequences for the outcomes of the nomination process.

This chapter also looks at the prenomination process. As the nomination process became increasingly front-loaded and the campaign finance process began to erode, candidates began to plan for the nomination earlier and earlier, both organizationally and financially. Candidate George W. Bush's fundraising prowess in early 1999 drove almost all of his competitors out of the race that summer, before any votes were cast. Several candidates' quests for their party's 2008 nomination were well under way before the 2006 congressional elections had ended. Potential Republican candidates in 2012 began hiring staff in 2009, over three years before the election.

Chapter 3 looks at the changes in the role of the nominating conventions. Between 1968 and 2008 the role of conventions changed from being the culmination of the nomination process, when the actual nominees were decided, to being the kickoff of the general election. As media network coverage of the conventions dwindled from gavel-to-gavel coverage to just an hour of prime time coverage, the candidates and the parties had to rethink how best to present their messages not only to convention delegates but also to the general election audience.

Chapter 4 examines the general election process—the evolution of battleground states, the role of the debates, and the contentious and drawn-out battle in 2000. Between 1968 and 2008 the candidates moved from campaigning in all fifty states, as Richard Nixon famously claimed he would do in 1960, to campaigning only in so-called battleground states. Even before the Republican candidate was chosen in 1988, the Republican Party had decided that its candidate would campaign in only twenty-five states—the other twenty-five would receive no resources, no visits, no attention at all. This winnowing of states continued through 2008 and will continue through 2012. The states the Republican and Democratic candidates identify as battleground were remarkably similar in the 1990s and 2000 and 2004, though Barack Obama expanded the states in this category in 2008. This chapter also looks at the role of presidential debates, as discussed above, in the general election process. Finally, the chapter looks at the 2000 election, when five weeks transpired between Election Day and the day the new president was finally known.

Chapters 5 through 7 look at broader changes in the United States that affected presidential elections. Chapter 5 looks at the increasingly important role of technology in presidential campaigns. The technology available to campaigns in 2008 was unheard of in 1968. The changes between 2000 and 2004, and again between 2004 and 2008, affected the way campaigns were able to interact both internally with their organizations and externally with potential supporters. The Internet allowed campaign organizations to communicate much faster and less expensively and to reach volunteers, contributors, and potential voters through not only traditional campaign techniques but also new social media such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook.

Chapter 6 looks at changes in voting rules over the past two decades. Voting in presidential elections no longer occurs on just one Election Day. Registration and voting rules have been changed to allow absentee voting and, more important for turnout, no-excuse absentee voting, early in-person voting, and in some states, Election Day registration and voting. Registration no longer occurs just in election offices but can also be done at departments of motor vehicles and other state agencies. This chapter examines how changes in voting rules affect presidential election strategies, particularly in the most recent elections.

Chapter 7 looks at trends in voter engagement and the consequences of changing U.S. demographics. Following the 2010 census the United States saw increases in minority groups, particularly Latinos. These changes have implications for the presidential election in 2012, as both the Democratic and Republican parties court this increasingly important demographic group. Latinos will be particularly important in southwestern states and could change the calculation as to which states are considered battleground states. The 2004 and 2008 elections saw increased engagement by young people ages eighteen to twenty-nine, a traditionally low-turnout demographic group.

Chapter 8 looks forward to the 2012 election, studying the state of presidential elections going into the 2012 election cycle. Both the Republican and Democratic parties established commissions to examine the nomination process, and the recommendations of those commissions changed the rules for the nomination process in 2012. Public funding of presidential elections, a process all but obliterated in 2008, will likely

be extinct in 2012, and the bar for fundraising will be the one set by the Obama campaign in 2008. The 2010 census changed the Electoral College map, as some states picked up Electoral College votes and others lost them. This chapter examines how these factors might affect the 2012 presidential election.

Finally, chapter 9 draws some conclusions about the democratization of presidential elections in the forty-year span between the demonstrations in Grant Park in 1968 and the celebration forty years later. The chapter also looks at the democratization of presidential elections since the 2008 election.