POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

# THE PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCESS IN 2008

Nelson chapters 1 (Nelson) and 2 (Burden)

Monday, October 29

**Chapter 1 terms**: constitutional qualifications for the presidency, reasons why the Constitution includes qualifications for the presidency and other offices; four ways that ‘barriers’ to being president were broken from 1960 through 2008; career backgrounds of previous presidents, reasons why particular careers help establish a candidate’s presidential credentials; how religion affected Romney in 2008; why Giuliani could not maintain his initial advantage in the Republican field; how age influenced voters’ views of McCain; shifts in African American support for the Democratic candidates; Hillary Clinton’s gender-based strategic choices; why Obama’s campaign early on sought to attract white voters in order to attract black voters; why Obama won the Democratic nomination

**Chapter 2 terms**: unique features of the 2008 elections; rules reforms that affected 2008 nomination race; front loading, invisible primary; controversy over timing of Florida and Michigan primaries; Super Tuesday; key players in the Republican nomination battle, their strengths and weaknesses (Giuliani, McCain, Romney, Huckabee, Fred Thompson), why no front runner emerged, Giuliani’s poor strategic choices, reasons why Huckabee and then McCain started to win primaries; why McCain won the nomination; key players in the Democratic nomination battle, their strengths and weaknesses (Clinton, Obama, Edwards), why Iowa results were so important, Clinton comeback win in New Hampshire, Super Tuesday outcome, why Obama began to pull ahead but not enough to finish off Clinton for months; role of superdelegates in determining Democratic nomination outcome; Jeremiah Wright controversy, Obama’s handling of it; why Obama won the nomination; changed understanding of “momentum” due to 2008; advantages of a long nomination season; tensions between states and national party organizations

1.1. Why did the Framers establish qualifications for the office of President? Are any of these qualifications worth re-thinking (in other words, changing, adding, or eliminating) today?

1.2. Nelson discusses the merits of different political offices and career paths as stepping stones to the presidency: vice president, senator, governor, mayor, military leader. Considering this discussion, what are the likely pros and cons (in terms of gaining public support) for a potential presidential candidate who has NOT held elective office or a high military position?

1.3 Nelson discusses several personal characteristics that arose as important factors in 2008: race, gender, age, and religion. The U.S. has now elected an African American president, and of course Hillary Clinton or Sarah Palin would have broken the gender barrier in the executive branch had either ended up on the winning ticket. Should we draw general lessons from 2008 about what factors either matter or don’t matter when Americans vote for president – for example, have we broken the race and gender barriers forever – or could any of these factors remain barriers in a future election with different people running?

2.1. Summarize the key reasons why these 2008 candidates achieved their outcomes, winning or losing their party’s presidential nomination:

Republicans: John McCain, Rudy Giuliani, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Fred Thompson

Democrats: Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John Edwards

2.2. What was different or unique about the 2008 nomination battles, according to Burden in this chapter? How did the different/unique facets of the race affect the final outcome?

2.3. Is there an alternate scenario in which Hillary Clinton could have completed her comeback from Iowa and taken the nomination from Obama? What would have had to happen differently for this to occur?

2.4. Is there an alternate scenario in which any other Republican might have emerged as the party’s nominee instead of McCain? Did the Republicans have a candidate who could have been more ‘electable’ versus Obama (and if so, who and why)?

X. Add your question here….