POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

# INTERPRETING THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Nelson chapters 3 (Pomper) and 7 (Mellow)

Wednesday, October 31 – Happy Halloween!

**Chapter 3 terms**: reasons why Obama’s mandate could be considered “decisive” (46); increases in turnout, specific groups that increased turnout; new geographic patterns in Electoral College; key demographic trends in 2008 voting (Tables 3-2 and 3-3); contrasts between the nominees; positives and negatives of the Palin nomination; role of the September economic collapse in determining the election outcome, different responses of the candidates; impact of the debates; strengths and innovations of Obama campaign; problems with organization and message of McCain campaign; importance of issues and traits to voter behavior (Table 3-7)

**Chapter 7 terms**: “the emerging Republican majority” concept of the late 1960s, the “emerging Democratic majority” concept of the early 2000s; ties between economic standing and 2008 voter behavior; advances of Obama/Democrats into “red states” in 2008; voting patterns of high-income Americans and Americans with advanced degrees; importance of Latino vote; trends favoring the Democrats

**NOTE: use both chapters to address today’s questions**

1. In a nutshell, why did Obama win, why did McCain lose? Be thorough in considering this question. Specific references to the many maps and tables presented here are called for (Table 3-2, for example).

2. List the pros and cons of choosing Sarah Palin as McCain’s running mate, then evaluate her impact on the election outcome.

3. Pomper reminds us in chapter 3 that there is no perfect campaign and no completely failed campaign. What did the Obama campaign do wrong/poorly, and what did the McCain campaign do right/well?

4. Why do both authors interpret the future of U.S. electoral politics as likely favorable toward the Democrats? Be specific in pointing to evidence from the tables presented in these chapters.

5. Given your answer to the previous question, from the perspective of early 2009, what was the best strategy for rebuilding the Republican Party in light of concerns about the Democrats developing an advantage among certain sets of voters?