

POLS 30010
American Political Parties
18 January 2012

STATE PARTIES PAPER

Your assignment is to write an 8-page, double-spaced paper describing and analyzing the partisan politics of one American state as they relate to the 2008 presidential election. The state parties paper is **due in class at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 22nd**. *A half grade (5 points) will be deducted for each day your paper is late.* You must e-mail me (Wolbrecht.1@nd.edu) with the name of the state you will be studying by 5 p.m. on Monday, January 23rd. **You are required to follow the course Style Guide.** If you have questions about the assignment, arrange to meet with me or your TA as soon as possible.

Your paper should describe and analyze party politics in your state with regard to the 2008 presidential election. To do so, you should first discuss the relevant characteristics, recent political history, and present political context of your state. Then analyze the outcome of the 2008 Republican and Democratic presidential primaries or caucuses in your state. Finally, explain the outcome of the 2008 presidential general election in your state. **A good paper does not just provide information—it analyzes that information using the concepts discussed in class and in the reading.**

To repeat, your paper should cover the following topics:

- **Politically-relevant characteristics.** Provide a brief overview of the politically-relevant characteristics of your state. What is the demographic composition (e.g., race, ethnicity, occupation, education, income, location) of your state's population? What are the dominant interests (e.g., industries, groups, occupations)? Can you characterize the ideological bent or policy preferences/concerns of the state and/or of its region? Are there any other characteristics of the state and its residents that are important to understanding its politics? What do these characteristics mean for party politics?
- **Political history.** Provide a short description of partisan politics in your state over the last 20 years. Can you identify and describe any patterns, changes, or developments in support for parties and candidates? To what do you attribute stability or change?
- **Political context.** What are the nomination rules in your state (primary versus caucus, PR versus winner-takes-all, others)? Is the state dominated by one party or competitive? How do you know? (Information on party identification—Republicans, Democrats, Independents—in your state would be useful; try exit polls or registration data from the Secretary of State or Election Division). Are there any other significant or unique political characteristics of your state?
- **2008 presidential election.** Which Republican and Democratic candidates won the presidential nominating election in your state in 2008, and why? Who won the 2008 general election in your state, and why? (Any exit polls you might be able to find would be esp. useful here). In general, what strategies and tactics would you recommend to presidential candidates in your state? Why? A good answer will relate your explanations and recommendations to the characteristics, history, and context of your state, as well as to concepts discussed in class and in the reading.

The point of this paper is to use your investigation into the politics of one state to show your comprehension of the abstract theories and ideas discussed in class. Thus, the more you can relate the facts and information you are providing to ideas and concepts from class (lecture and reading), the better.

A few potential sources

The course web site (<http://www.nd.edu/~cwolbrec/POLS30010.html>) has links to a few internet sources that may be useful (but should not be the sum total of sources you employ). Some states require citizens to identify with a political party when registering, while others do not (Secretary of State or Election Division websites can be useful for information and data on voter registration). Sometimes major papers conduct exit polls. For battleground states in particular, the major polling websites (e.g., Pollster, FiveThirtyEight) may have links to state-specific polling and exit polls in their archives.