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# GWU Political Science Professor Offers Non-Partisan Analysis of Presidential Campaigns

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Office of University  
Communications

October 21, 2016

## *Dr. Elizabeth Amato Shares Insights on Contested U.S. Presidential Elections*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Members of the media are processing various nuances of the final weeks of the campaigns of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and Republican candidate Donald Trump. One particular topic is garnering some unexpected attention and has a local political science expert reminding citizens of some important elections of the past.

Pundits have suggested that Trump showed weakness recently when he indicated he might contest the outcome of the election if he is defeated on Nov. 8. Dr. Elizabeth Amato is assistant professor of political science at Gardner-Webb, and shared information about several well-documented contested American presidential elections.

“It’s not at all unprecedented,” Amato explained. “It’s happened several times throughout American history. We’ve had what we might call troublesome elections.”

Citing presidential elections in 1824, 1860, 1876, and 2000, Amato discussed several unique events that ultimately influenced the outcome of the contests. “While contested elections are not unprecedented, every way the election has unfolded has been unique to that particular circumstance,” she shared. “In 1824, Andrew Jackson had the plurality [the number of votes cast for a candidate who receives more than any other but does not receive an absolute majority] of the votes. However, the election was thrown into the House of Representatives and through what Jackson later characterized as a ‘corrupt bargain,’ Henry Clay—the speaker of the House—put his support behind John Quincy Adams and Adams became president.”

A historically-dramatic election occurred in 1860, when several states succeeded from the union after Abraham Lincoln was elected president and the Civil War eventually broke out. Modern voters quickly recall the presidential election of 2000, in which Al Gore won the popular vote, but George W. Bush earned the electoral votes. The outcome of that election hung in the balance for weeks as votes in Florida were recounted.

“In this instance, the entire electoral votes of Florida were at stake, it was that close,” Amato reflected. “Without Florida’s electoral votes, it was not clear whether Bush or Gore had enough votes to win the election. It became a media circus. Eventually the courts got

involved, mainly trying to determine how to conduct the recount. That decision was ultimately made by the U.S. Supreme Court.”

Many believe a key reason Trump refused to acknowledge whether he would concede to his opponent if he does not win the election is because he believes the system itself has been corrupted. “When Trump references the election being rigged, he most often references the media being biased towards Hillary,” Amato assessed. “That may be so, but there’s nothing you can do about that. The media is the media. Trump would have to find examples of specific fraud, and it would have to make a difference in the [election] results.”

Amato has also shared insights about the validity of the polls and whether they can be fully trusted as an accurate gauge of the popular vote. Although many polls currently show Clinton with a six- to 10-point advantage over Trump, she believes it will be Nov. 8 before the country knows with certainty. “It’s still a close election, and it’s entirely possible that of all the polls out there, at least one would show Trump ahead,” she shared. “It’s still a relatively close race.”

Click below to listen to the full WGWG.org interview with Dr. Elizabeth Amato:

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*

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