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# GWU Professor Dr. Ben Gaskins Examines Statistical Dead Heat for Oval Office

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Office of University Communications

October 23, 2012

## *Presidential Election Targets North Carolina Voters*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – With just days before Americans head to the polls for the 2012 Presidential Election, North Carolina voters are sorting through the rhetoric and propaganda in an attempt to determine how to choose between Republican nominee Governor Mitt Romney and Democratic incumbent President Barack Obama.

Gardner-Webb University Political Science Professor Dr. Ben Gaskins knows a thing or two about campaign strategies. He teaches his students how to get to the heart of the issues at hand and then use the information gleaned to make an educated decision. With the floundering economy and desperate need for job creation, Gaskins questions the candidates' actual ability to make an immediate difference.

"The ability of either Romney or Obama being able to change policy and radically increase the number of jobs that exist is very little," Gaskins shared. "The problems are a lot more systemic than tax policy or workforce development. Despite what they are saying, there's not much either can do about public sector job loss."

President Obama points to the continual growth in the private sector and the establishment of millions of jobs. Governor Romney's message focuses on the tremendous loss of public sector jobs and lackluster investment in the private sector. With the national unemployment rate hovering at near eight percent, Gaskins feels that is a real challenge for Obama to overcome. "Historically speaking, I don't think any president [since Franklin Roosevelt] has gotten re-elected with unemployment above eight percent," he said. "Eight percent is a huge psychological barrier. If it's below eight percent, it makes people feel like we're going in the right direction. But it still may be too high for Obama to get re-elected."

The unemployment report for October 2012 will be released on Nov. 2, just four days before the general election. An improvement from September's 7.8 percent rate would bode well for President Obama, but might not be enough. The Romney campaign continues to focus on what he calls Obama's "ineffective" economic stimulus; while the message of the Obama camp is that the economy was much worse than anyone realized and progress takes time.

One subject that seems to have disappeared from the landscape of political discussion is the housing collapse. "One of the reasons the Clinton years were so prosperous was because of the housing boom," Gaskins stated. "When the housing bubble burst, critics of Obama said that his economic stimulus should not have been about aid to states, or tax cuts, or spending

on so-called 'shovel-ready' projects. They believe it should have been aid to homeowners, which would have helped stabilize the tax base and been a much better long-term growth strategy." The result of the housing collapse has been tremendous losses to local governments and states, leaving them little choice but to either raise taxes or lay off public workers.

"Getting that stabilized, getting people into houses that are currently empty is a huge part of the economic recovery," Gaskins said. "Neither candidate is really addressing this. Neither Obama nor Romney have a strong plan—as far as I can tell—about what they are going to do about housing."

If the final debate showed Americans anything, it was that both candidates share much of the same ideals with regard to foreign policy. "Foreign policy is not going to play a huge role in this election. It should, but truthfully, both Obama and Romney are pretty much on the same page when it comes to foreign policy," Gaskins offered. "I think the main difference between the candidates is tone and semantics rather than substantive policy differences."

While there are many other issues being argued back and forth, one truth that cannot be disputed is that North Carolina will play a huge role in the outcome of this election. "North Carolina is blessed and cursed to be a swing state. We're blessed in that we'll see the candidates far more often than many of our neighboring states," Gaskins claimed. "We'll get more attention, our needs and our policy issues will get addressed far more than if we were not a swing state."

However, Gaskins feels a negative aspect of living in a battleground state is that citizens are being flooded with political ads from the Romney campaign, the Obama campaign, and from Super PACs (Political Action Committees). "This is the first presidential campaign in which Super PACs are playing a huge role," he said. "These are groups of policy-minded individuals, corporations, or labor unions who can raise unlimited amounts of money and spend unlimited amounts of money on behalf of candidates and causes. Because we are considered a swing state, we'll get many more independent expenditures and we'll be inundated with ads; but we'll also get a chance to see the candidates up close."

In such a tight race, every vote counts, and North Carolina voters can be sure of one thing: the results of this election could hinge on the votes of the Tarheel state, among a few others. "If Romney can get North Carolina, that will go a long way to helping him get a majority in the electoral college," Gaskins explained. "If Obama gets North Carolina, it's basically over, he's got the thing wrapped up, because if he gets North Carolina, he'll probably get some of the other swing states as well."

Gaskins continued, "So in many ways, as North Carolina goes, so goes the election, especially in an election that is this close. Both candidates desperately need North Carolina, and are spending a lot of money and attention trying to get it."



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/s5dUqF8CaLk>

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