

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

November 5, 2024

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Dr. Michael Bitzer, Politics Dept Chair/Professor of Politics and History, Catawba College

by **Paul Bartholomy**

Dr. Michael Bitzer was welcomed to the stage of Charlotte Rotary with a room full of open eyes and ears ready to become better informed on the political landscape of our nation as well as our home state of North Carolina. With his wealth of knowledge and notable expertise accumulated from years of research and teaching, we were privileged to learn the unique political facts and insights that he had to share.

Dr. Bitzer explained how North Carolina is a battleground state and furthermore a “stuck and bipolar” state. It was noted that the key factor driving a lot of North Carolina politics these days is regionalism. “If you drive from any point in the state 45 minutes in any direction, you will feel as if you are in a very different state”. He explained that this regionalism has a huge component in helping us understand our state’s politics. Party identification is so evenly divided in our state, but when you split our state into the four varying regions of central cities, urban suburbs, surrounding suburban counties, and rural counties, you can see how party identification differs in these areas. The resulting combination though is a highly polarized and competitive state. He does not see this changing any time soon for North Carolina.

Various slides were displayed with interesting and sometimes shocking statistics in his presentation, which earned gasps and groans from a captivated audience on the subject of politics. He let us know that 4.5 out of 7.8 million North Carolinians voted early this year, which is a new record

for early in-person voting. Another new dynamic is that unaffiliated voters have a new and seemingly unexplainable large presence in early voting.

With Election Day finally upon us, he comically let us know “we have survived” up to this point. This general statement of relief is even more understandable after statistics were shared about how high negativity has been toward political opposition for both parties in this election. This type of polarization and tribalism is notably up from historical comparisons. Dr. Bitzer stated that if you consider the past, every election is different, but “this one confounds me”. If you are trying to get clues on a prediction, “the best prediction will be after 7:30 pm tonight”. When looking at the polls and considering the margin of error, it was nearly impossible to tell who was in the lead. You could almost flip a coin to make a prediction, “heads for Harris and tails for Trump”. We were left with the understanding that we would simply have to wait and see how it plays out.

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

With slides: <https://vimeo.com/1027986438>

Without slides: <https://vimeo.com/1026701315>

The presenter's introduction begins at approximately 22 minutes and 25 seconds.