

Democrats battle for political power in historically Republican North Carolina

Alyse Knorr
Design Editor

Could traditionally red North Carolina be a swing state this election year? Democrats hope so.

Democratic campaign strategy is turning North Carolina into a battleground for the first time in more than 30 years. Instead of writing it off as a shoo-in Republican victory, Democrat Barack Obama's campaign is making a concerted effort to win the state — pouring more than \$2 million into television ads there, according to Marc Farinella, state campaign director.

"It's not such a big stretch to see Barack Obama win North Carolina," Farinella said in a press conference call Wednesday. "It is clearly a competitive state this year, and we can win here."

The last Democratic candidate to win North Carolina was Jimmy Carter in 1976. But recent polls have revealed consistent single-digit margins between Obama and Republican John McCain. McCain leads by four points, according to a SurveyUSA poll released Tuesday, but that's barely outside the poll's 3.9 percentage point margin of error.

"If Obama wins, it's a huge upset," said Mike Cobb, associate professor of political science at N.C. State University. "I don't think they're counting on it. I don't think they're expecting it. I think what in part is happening is that they are forcing McCain to spend time and resources in states where he otherwise wasn't expecting to do so."

Obama operates 16 campaign offices in North Carolina, Farinella said, compared with three for McCain, according to his campaign Web site. North Carolina Republican Party spokesman Brent Woodcox said nine more will open around the state this week and that the party is not taking

the state for granted.

Black voter turnout will be an important factor.

The 2006 Census reported a state black population of 21.7 percent, and Obama should pull 90 to 95 percent of that group's votes, said Hunter Bacot, Elon associate professor of political science.

Another possible upset looms at the Senate level, where Democratic challenger Kay Hagan is fighting Republican incumbent Elizabeth Dole for her Senate seat. While Andrew Taylor, associate professor of political science at N.C. State, said that Dole is still the clear favorite, Hagan is making a better-than-expected run.

A SurveyUSA poll released Tuesday showed Dole slightly ahead of Hagan, 46 to 41, seven points fewer than her lead in the July poll. The poll's margin of error is 3.9 percentage points.

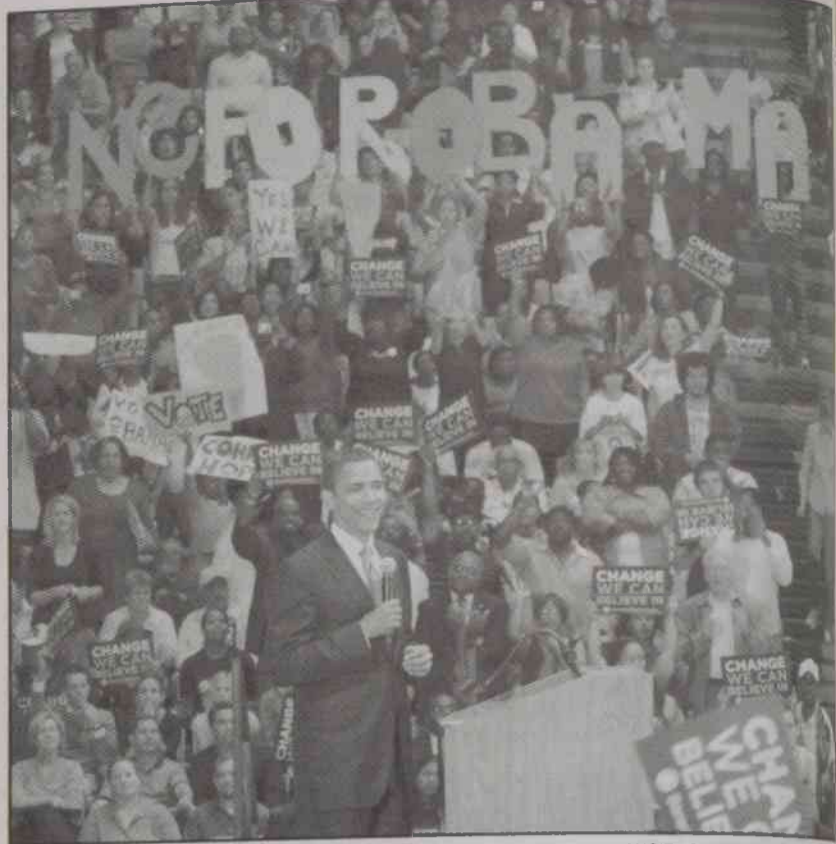
Hagan may be picking up on an anti-Republican sentiment sweeping the country.

"There's a growing partisan self-identification balance that's helping Democrats," Cobb said, noting that the trend is most clearly visible among people 28 and under. "Fewer people are calling themselves Republicans, even in the South."

A "post-Bush effect" has created a negative association with the word "Republican," Cobb said.

"There's no doubting that this is a tough environment for Republicans," Woodcox said. "Just by virtue of having an 'R' next to your name, you're going to have to run a very serious campaign to win."

Dole's campaign spokesman, Hogan Gidley, said Dole has supported the Republican agenda only when it directly benefited North Carolinians and has criticized the administration's mistakes



ANGIE LOVELACE | Photograph

When presidential hopeful Barack Obama visited UNC-Chapel Hill last spring he was greeted by a crowded room of supporters, many of which were students.

in Iraq and its attempted Medicaid cuts.

At the House level, all 13 North Carolina representatives are up for re-election, and Cobb said that, for the most part, the state's seven incumbent Democrats and six incumbent Republicans will keep their seats.

One exception could lie in the 8th District, where Democratic challenger Larry Kissell could swipe a seat from Republican incumbent Robin Hayes.

Bacot pointed out that Kissell lost by just 329 votes in 2006.

A Public Policy poll released July 8 showed Hayes leading Kissell 43 to 36 percent, which means Hayes is slightly ahead, based on the poll's 4.2 percentage point margin of error.

But Hayes' approval stood at only 38 percent a possible plus for Kissell.

Cobb said Democratic candidates like Kissell and Hagan could benefit from Obama's campaign.

"You typically have coattails where, as a new president takes over, members of his party tend to be advantaged

at the congressional level and then trickling down to state races as well," Cobb said.

This effect is not about conversion, Cobb said, but turnout. If voters head to the polls to vote for one party's presidential candidate, they may vote down the ticket for that party's state candidates as well.

Changing state demographics could also help Democrats.

In the past 10 to 15 years North Carolina has seen an influx of out-of-state immigrants with more moderate political views than the traditionally conservative native population, Bacot said. Cobb noted growing urban populations in areas such as Raleigh and Charlotte.

"As the state becomes less southern, it makes it much more likely that if there is a crack in the unified South, it will come from a state like North Carolina," Cobb said.

Administration striking down on tailgating with stricter enforcement on current rules

Andie Diemer
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The tennis courts. Linder Hall. Lighthouse. Brown & Co.

Elon welcomed many new physical changes to campus this summer, but the latest change being implemented isn't a building or a restaurant or a road. The university has decided to more strictly enforce and slightly alter current tailgating procedures for the 2008 football season.

Assistant Dean of Students Jodean Schmiederer said the changes are being reinforced in an effort to provide a more family-friendly and respectful environment, primarily in the Harper Center parking lot.

After a campus-wide committee met and discussed some issues regarding tailgating in past seasons, Assistant Vice President for Student Life, Jana Lynn Patterson, said they decided that a few individuals behaviors have become too extreme. Alcohol was mostly to blame.

"It had become a problem with many people in the community," she said.

The committee made a recommendation to the vice president, who accepted their recommendations. According to Schmiederer and Patterson, these include:

—Moving the hub of student tailgating to the center of Harper parking lot. While the lot location won't change, it will open up for easier access to people walking back and forth between Rhodes Stadium and the central part of campus.

—Holding students to more accountable standards. There will be at least two

team captains for every tailgate, more depending on the size of the group. They will have to ensure every student drinking is over 21 and that only beer and wine are being consumed.

—Student's behavior will be monitored to ensure it is consistent with the Student Code of Conduct.

—Learn and receive feedback.

Before a team captain will be allotted a spot they must submit a request eight days before the game and attend a session taught by Student Activity Staff. The captains establish a relationship for communication between the students and the administration.

"I think that there were some changes that were necessary, but I think the school will find a lot of tension or problems."

During tailgating the university staff will document behavior so they will be able to conduct a follow-up meeting on Monday or Tuesday after the game. Here, the team captains will meet with the Student Activity Staff and talk about anything from what could be improved in their section to how to handle any problems that arose.

—Increased staffing. More professional staff, students and police will be monitoring the games. While Elon doesn't hire ALE to make an appearance, they have the right to be on the premise, checking students' identifications.

—Stricter closing times. Currently

the administration is considering whether firing off a cannon inside Rhodes Stadium 30 minutes prior to the start of the game as a signal for everyone to wrap-up their tailgating. They want groups inside, watching the game. If they don't adhere they will no longer be able to participate in tailgating activities.

—Increasing total-tailgate time.

Students will now be allowed to come to the lot and start tailgating when it opens at 2:30 p.m.

Schmiederer said she hopes the student body understands the university's goal to continue to keep it a very vibrant and energetic yet respectful tailgating

—Junior Patrick McCabe

environment.

"There were probably unofficial tailgate captains anyways" Schmiederer said. "But this more formalizes that relationship so we have better communication."

Junior Patrick McCabe will be an acting team captain for his fraternity for the upcoming season. He said around eight members of his chapter will be attending training so someone will always be available to be a team captain.

"I think that there were some changes that were necessary, but I think the school will find a lot of tension or problems because it's been a tradition

for so long at Elon and it's something that people really look forward to," McCabe said. "I'm not the biggest fan of the changes, but I want to see if it can make things better."

McCabe said in years past a lot of students don't want to go to the games and instead go to the tailgate and then leave to continue partying.

"I think [getting kids to the games is] the schools intention, but I don't think they're going about it the right way," he said. "We need stronger athletics. It needs to be more about athletics and less about the social scene."

He understands the administration's efforts and hopes the new regulations will keep tailgating safer and keep students from endangering themselves. But, he finds it a little confusing that the administration will now be closely monitoring what he considers to be an individual organization function.

"The bigger change will be that groups will have to be more accountable and be willing to be more accountable. Just reinforcing [the rules] up front is where a lot of that 'change' is coming from," Patterson said. "It's not the big, radical change in the policy, it's really just helping to clarify the policies that were pretty much already in place."

She said several students were part of the recommendation committee seemed in-tune with the pre-existing issues and extreme behaviors that were negatively reflecting on Elon's behavior as a whole.

"If you're old enough to consume alcohol and do so, we just want to make sure it's in a manner that is not inconsistent with good behavior," Patterson said.