

SWING

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operations in place that he could turn to in the general election."

That presence was gradually amped up as today approached, reaching fever pitch in the last several weeks.

The McCain campaign arrived later, and while it lagged at first, it has essentially matched the Obama campaign in the final weeks.

"He was not here as early as Obama. He took the state for granted early on," said UNC journalism professor Leroy Towns.

Despite the slow start, the McCain campaign is where it needs to be now, Woodcox said.

"It was going to be a tight race the whole time," he said. "The difficulty of getting our message out was a problem, but I think we're in a good place now."

A high-intensity presence was not enough to bring Obama virtually dead even with McCain, nor will it alone put Obama over the top tonight.

Instead, it's an amalgam of other factors, some that have been building for years.

The national political climate favors Democrats this year. Anti-Republican sentiment stemming from disapproval of the presidential administration is key.

That's what swept in Carter in 1976, Guillory said. Then it was the fallout of the Watergate scandal that gave the Democrat a boost.

"The country had been through a trauma. ... The country was ready to change," Guillory said.

Republican political consultant Carter Wrenn said anti-Bush sentiment is the key factor.

"That's created a national trend toward the Democrats this election," Wrenn said.

McCain has struggled to distance himself from the unpopular president.

"He's tried to say, 'I'm not George Bush.' It's a hard argument for a Republican candidate to make. I don't know if he can accomplish it," Wrenn said.

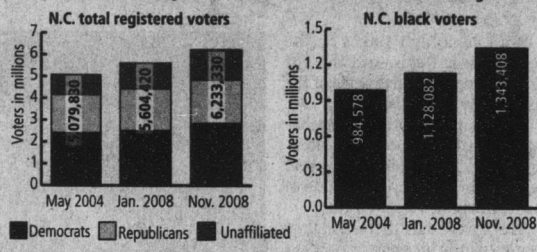
The faltering economy has given Obama something tangible to work with, but McCain's message of higher taxes with an Obama administration also has resonated with voters.

"The government seemed divided and uncertain about how to deal with the economic issues. The sudden change in the value of equity ... it changed the atmosphere," Guillory said.

"It overshadowed everything

Registered voters in North Carolina

Democratic and unaffiliated party identification increased since May 2004. Along with greater black voter registration, this trend made North Carolina a swing state.



SOURCE: NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF ELECTIONS

DTH/KRISTEN LONG

else, and Obama in comparison to McCain came across as steadier."

The Obama campaign capitalized on that perception.

"We had an opening in which (to) inform voters that John McCain shares the same exact economic policies as George Bush," said Paul Cox, communications director for Obama's N.C. campaign.

"The more we communicate that message, the more favorable Tar Heel voters were looking for Sen. Obama."

McCain's economic message of higher taxes in an Obama administration has energized his base.

North Carolina also has seen a slow but steady change in its demographics that could reach a critical point this year.

Economic diversification, urbanization and population growth have transformed the state's voting blocs.

"It's the change in the last few decades. ... We have new residents not tied to the political constructs. There's been a pool of persuadable voters and so it's a competitive two-party state," Guillory said.

Key demographic shifts include an influx of both whites and blacks from other states and a rapidly growing Latino population, Guillory said.

Obama's aggressive ad campaign and pervasive ground operations have sought to take advantage of the changes and to mobilize population blocs who have not turned out to vote in large numbers in the past.

"By expanding the electorate to include people who typically don't participate in the political process, he's given himself a significant advantage," said Jerry Meek, chairman of the N.C. Democratic Party.

Black voter registration has jumped from 19 percent in 2004 to 22 percent in 2008. That represents a demographic that trends heavily Democrat and is even more

likely to do so this year.

"If they continue to vote for Barack Obama in 90 to 92 percent of the vote, that's a pretty good vote," Towns said.

Not to be underestimated are Obama's personal popularity or the symbolism of a potential black president.

"Barack Obama — he's a historic figure as the first black candidate of a major party and his candidacy ignited both black voter participation as well as young voters — younger voters who looked for a new generation of leadership," Guillory said.

That magnetism has been disseminated through an ad campaign like nothing North Carolina has seen before — and one McCain was unable to compete with until the final stretch.

"It surpasses anything that's been done in the past. The real campaign has been waged on television and over the air," Towns said.

Looking back to May, it's difficult to pinpoint when exactly the state was brought into play.

"After the Democratic convention, they made an early stop in North Carolina. They took a measure of the state. They had some potential," Guillory said.

"I don't think any particular moment in the campaign turned the lights on for Obama in North Carolina. It was a progressive decision in the state, the more traction they gained."

Tomorrow's voter turnout will be the referendum on the Obama campaign's mobilization — and the McCain campaign's efforts to counter Obama's gains.

"There's not much they can do now ... There's no time for a new proposal. It's just trying to get people mobilized," Guillory said.

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GOVERNOR

FROM PAGE 1

Treasurer Richard Moore — tarnished her candidacy.

"There were a lot of negative ads run in the campaign, so most of Moore's voting base is skeptical of Perdue — that's left a lot of voters wide open for McCrory to capture," said former UNC political science professor Thad Beyle.

McCrory faced a four-way primary race, winning roughly 46 percent of the vote — nine points ahead of N.C. Sen. Fred Smith, R-Johnston.

Another opponent, former N.C. Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr, said McCrory's primary opponents didn't expect such a strong challenge.

"There was a pool of voters that knew him, had confidence in him, and he was able to raise a substantial amount of money in a short amount of time because of the Charlotte financial base — none of us were expecting that," Orr said.

The general election had a record number of TV debates between Perdue and McCrory, and later, Libertarian Mike Munger. Perdue missed some of the debates, while McCrory attended each.

Salisbury attorney Bill Graham,

who ran in the Republican primary, said that as McCrory became better known, more voters turned to him.

"There have been some lingering concerns about folks from rural areas about whether the 'big city mayor' will be able to serve their needs, but as he has been introduced further across the state — especially in the east — he's been appealing more and more to voters," he said.

Beyle also attributed close polling to a geographical division of voters.

"Perdue's a strong woman from the east part of the state, McCrory's a strong man from the west part — there's a line somewhere between their voter bases down the middle of the state," he said.

If elected, McCrory will have to deal with a Democratic legislative majority that his policies may conflict with, Rand said.

"He's causing Democrats in general a little concern — and more voters are realizing that his policies will face a lot of opposition," Rand said.

Carrboro Mayor Mark Chilton, a Democrat who endorsed McCrory, said McCrory has drawn support from longtime progressive voters.

"McCrory represents a change — much like Obama — and that resonates with me, and that reso-

nates with a lot of people that you wouldn't expect."

Perdue has tried to tie McCrory to President Bush, which has hurt other Republican candidates around the country. Bush attended a fundraiser on McCrory's behalf in the summer.

Beyle said it would be difficult at this point for McCrory to find anything more to attack Perdue on.

"She started the race with a lot of baggage from Raleigh, and lost some voters to McCrory that supported Moore, and also her failure to appear in more debates definitely hurt her, but there just isn't anything left to damage her campaign," Beyle said.

What's uncertain is whether McCrory will capture enough Democrats, whether Perdue will convince voters she isn't part of corruption in Raleigh and whether Munger pulls Republicans from McCrory.

"Both candidates have run some very aggressive campaigns, both candidates are pretty typical of the party, both are strong candidates and stand to break some sort of historical trend, and the race has brought out many more voters than we normally see," Beyle said.

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YOUTH

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steer grassroots movements, campaigned for their candidates and utilized new media.

UNC Young Democrats alone have registered about 9,000 voters this past year, a mix of residence changes and new voters.

"Our generation realizes that we really have arguably the most at stake in this election, I really believe that," said Vivek Chilukuri, co-president of UNC Young Democrats.

Nationwide Gallup polls of the 18 to 29 age bracket conducted Oct. 27 to Nov. 2 reflected a Democratic advantage this year — 63 percent of those voters said they prefer Obama.

"Students have been moved to action. They've been given a candidate who advocates, who is on their side on these issues — a new face and new leadership for their generation," Chilukuri said.

Polls of students in North Carolina and at UNC specifically bear that out — 62 percent statewide said they were voting for Obama. At UNC, that same poll showed Obama favored even more — 67 percent to McCain's 23 percent.

"I think Obama especially has

created a connection with a lot of voters. He's done what MTV has failed to do," said first-year Greg Becker. "He's made it hip to go vote, the cool thing to do."

With polls showing the candidates neck-and-neck in North Carolina on the eve of Election Day and 18- to 25-year-olds representing 11 percent of the state's electorate, a hard break among youth voters for one candidate could decide the state's 15 electoral votes.

Almost half of young voters nationwide define themselves as independents, making them a key target for both campaigns, according to a study of youth voters by Harvard University's Institute of Politics.

Obama might have success with young voters because he represents a potential transfer of leadership from an older generation to a younger generation, Guillory said.

Both candidates have attempted to make inroads into this demographic, especially through the use of new media. They have used e-mail, blogs and social networking sites to rally supporters and coordinate grassroots action.

"You don't go to young people with direct mail and calls, you go to young people where they are which is online," said Jon Gould, a

junior at Harvard involved with the university's youth voter study.

Obama has been a step ahead technologically, Gould said, citing his text message campaign that allows voters to register to receive messages from the campaign.

The pressing issues of this campaign have also grabbed young voters' attention.

Regardless of political affiliation, 53 percent identified the economy as their primary concern, up from just 5 percent one year ago, the Harvard study found.

"We're the ones graduating soon and entering the workforce," said junior Griffin Kenemer. "It's true that we're the next generation and we want to be involved with what happens."

The nation is perennially expecting the youth vote that doesn't materialize, said Brent Woodcox, communications director for the N.C. Republican Party. But in an election that has engaged the whole population youth voters are no exception.

"They want to know what kind of country they can be in and what kind of state they're going to be in down the road."

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SENATOR

FROM PAGE 1

The first DSCC ad was the best and most effective in the nation, Towns said.

The ad featured two elderly men on a porch, criticizing Dole's effectiveness as senator and record of voting with the Bush administration.

Early on it seemed unlikely that the N.C. Democratic Party could provide a challenger — most thought of Dole as invincible, Neal said.

Mainstream prominent Democrats declined to run — Gov. Mike Easley was rumored to be one — and in the beginning, Neal was the only candidate, Towns said.

Neal, the first openly gay candidate for statewide office, made the Democratic Party nervous, Towns speculated. Once Hagan announced her candidacy, the Democratic Party establishment threw its support behind her.

Since then, Hagan has gathered significant support by portraying herself as more attuned to the needs of the state.

"She's going to come back to North Carolina and spend time with people. Folks want to know the people representing them," said Colleen Flanagan, a Hagan campaign spokeswoman.

North Carolina is looking for change, she said.

"She's going to tell people, 'You're right, we're going in the wrong direction. Here are my ideas to turn it around.'"

Dole has spent most of her campaign reminding voters of her senatorial accomplishments and her national legislative record.

"She's going to remind people of what she has been able to do. She's had clout and effectiveness from day one to go over there and fight for North Carolina," said Hogan Gidley, spokesman for the Dole campaign. "She's been able to accomplish more in her first term than most have."

Dole has highlighted her opposition to the Bush administration's immigration plan and cuts in Medicaid benefits, her role in keeping military bases open in the state and support for the state's tobacco industry, Gidley said.

"People know her. People like her," Gidley said.

Most of Dole's political career has been based in Washington. She first served in the Nixon administration in the 1960s and later assumed Cabinet positions in the Reagan and H.W. Bush administrations. She also was president of the American Red Cross.

Dole sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1999 and was

elected to the U.S. Senate in 2002.

In contrast, Hagan has been in politics since 1998, when she was first elected to the N.C. Senate. She served for five years as a chairwoman of the committee that handles the state budget, beginning in 2003.

John Hood, president and chairman of the John Locke Foundation, a conservative think tank based in Raleigh, said Dole's problem could be summed up with two names: President Bush and Chuck Schumer, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee chairman and a New York senator.

"Bush is a drag on all the Republican candidates," Hood said.

And Schumer singled out Dole early on because she appeared to be a vulnerable Republican in a swing state, Hood said.

Towns said the Dole campaign has since found some money of its own in the last few weeks, but negative ads might be too late.

In one of those last-minute ads, which began running at the end of October, Dole accuses Hagan of tak-

ing campaign contributions from a PAC called "Godless Americans."

The ad may have backfired — it drew considerable condemnation from many of the state's newspapers and the public.

"The ad is misleading in that it tries to make a voice in the end of it seem like Kay Hagan's. It has the potential to be a detriment to Elizabeth Dole," Towns said. "The point could have been made very differently."

The Hagan campaign has managed to come from far behind in only a few months, but earlier projections could swing either way based on voter turnout today.

"Erskine Bowles (Dole's 2002 opponent) said you can't beat her because she's Florence Nightingale," Neal said. "Well, the wind has blown Florence Nightingale's cap off. She can't run from her record, and Kay has exploited that extremely well."

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HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3 12:30-2:45 6:00-7:15 9:30

HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY 11:03-10:10 10:20-9:35

PRIDE AND GLORY 1:20-4:15 7:00-9:45

BODY OF LIES 1:15-4:00 7:10-9:45

THE DUTCHESS 1:25-4:10 7:05-9:40

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Adm. Tix on Sale QUANTUM OF SOLACE (PG-13) *

Adm. Tix on Sale BOLT (PG) *

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORN (R) - ID REQ'D (125 425) 730

HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY (PG-13) (115 415) 720

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