



## Democrats gaining ground in Cabarrus this year

**In 2008, county adds more of them — and more unaffiliated voters — than Republicans**

By [Josh McCann](#) | Independent Tribune

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CONCORD - More Democrats and unaffiliated voters than Republicans have registered in Cabarrus County in 2008, according to Board of Elections figures.

Republicans still outnumber Democrats in the county, but this year's additions are cutting into the margin.

Through Oct. 12, more than 6,700 Democrats, 4,800 unaffiliated voters, 4,600 Republicans and 40 Libertarians have registered.

There are now about 39,000 Democrats, 43,500 Republicans, 24,500 unaffiliated voters and 55 Libertarians on Cabarrus' rolls.

The ranks of Cabarrus' unaffiliated voters have also surged since Democratic officials allowed them to vote in that party's primaries in 1996, said Linda Grist, director of the county's Board of Elections. The influx of Democrats runs counter to recent trends in the county, where Republicans have outnumbered Democrats since 1999.

Eric Heberlig, associate professor of political science at UNC Charlotte, attributed the increase in Democratic registrants to both vigorous voter registration efforts and "the Democratic tilt of the environment."

Heberlig said it's too early for Democrats to tell if Cabarrus is turning from a firmly Republican red to a more intermediate shade of purple.

"That may be a little hopeful, just because it's pretty solidly Republican territory to begin with," Heberlig said.

The electoral implications of the Democrats' recent rise are difficult to predict, primarily because new registrants generally don't always show up at the polls.

A similar number of new Democrats registered statewide in 2004, but the party still lost the state in that presidential campaign. North Carolina has not voted for a Democrat for president since 1976.

If it holds up on Election Day, Cabarrus' shift could trouble the campaign of incumbent U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes in a tight race against challenger Larry Kissell, Heberlig said.

Because Cabarrus and Stanly counties represent the Republican base of the 8th district, Heberlig said, any dent in Hayes' support there could pose a challenge.

Cabarrus' total of more than 16,000 new voters far exceeds previous totals, even for other presidential campaigns.

In all of 2004, for example, Cabarrus added a total of about 12,300 new voters.

"It's certainly much, much, much more than we've ever done," Grist said.

This time around, elections officials have seen several 60- and 70-year-olds who say they are voting for the first time, Grist said.

"They really are interested in this election," Grist said.

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