

# Poll: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama in tight race for N.C. votes

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It is an exciting time for North Carolina voters. For the first time in decades, they have a say in the Democratic primary for president.

A WRAL news poll released Wednesday shows Barack Obama's double-digit lead over Hillary Clinton among Tar heel Democrats is eroding.

Mason-Dixon Polling & Research Inc. surveyed 400 likely Democratic voters Monday and Tuesday. The results show Obama with a 7 point lead over Clinton, with 9 percent undecided. The poll has a margin of error of 5 percentage points.

“Right or wrong, it's the Wright phenomenon for Obama,” said David McLennan, a political science professor at Peace College.

McLennan said Obama's former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, is dragging down the Illinois senator. Wright has made comments such as suggesting that the AIDS virus was invented by the government to destroy "people of color."

“It is a media-driven story. Wright is very controversial. He makes controversial statements. He gets people fired up, but it's not one of the top issues in the polls,” McLennan said.

When asked what issues matter most to North Carolinians, 51 percent said jobs and the economy; 14 percent said the Iraq war, and health care followed those.

As the candidates make their last-minute push toward Tuesday's primary, the question will be which one can carve into the other's core group of constituents.

Obama scores well with voters under age 35, while Clinton edges him out with voters over 50.

Where there is no competition is race. Eighty-seven percent of African Americans plan to vote for Obama, while 62 percent of whites said they will vote for Clinton. There has been very little evidence suggesting either candidate can cut into those numbers before Tuesday.

“I don't think it's about advertising. I don't think it's about personal appearances. I think it really, it's who's energized to come out on Election Day,” McLennan said.

Voters gave Clinton the edge in dealing with the economy, Obama with the war in Iraq.

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