

## McCain, Obama Seek to Pick Off Marginal Voters From Opposite Party

by Cristina Corbin  
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Will Bower is a co-founder of PUMA, a coalition of Democratic bloggers opposed to Barack Obama. (FNC)

James McConaha is, by all appearances, a faithful Democrat — a former appointee under President Bill Clinton who aggressively campaigned for Al Gore and John Kerry during their White House runs. But when he casts his vote in the presidential election this November, it will be for John McCain.

John Martin, a staunch Republican who once voted against former New York Gov. George Pataki because he was not conservative enough, has founded a grassroots organization supporting Barack Obama.

Both men are part of breakaway groups of Democrats and Republicans who have found appeal in the opposition candidate. But as McCain and Obama try to win voters from the other side, questions abound over whether their numbers will be great enough to matter.

A Gallup poll released July 8 shows that 22 percent of “conservative Democrats” questioned said they prefer McCain, while 11 percent of “liberal and moderate Republicans” indicated support for Obama.

“I think it’s a relatively small group and very hard to say at this point whether their number will count,” Stephen Wayne, former president of Presidency Research, said of the Democrats supporting McCain.

For McConaha, co-chair of “Citizens for McCain,” a New Hampshire-based grassroots organization headed by Joe Lieberman to recruit Democrats and independents for McCain, the Arizona senator’s appeal rests on two factors: patriotism, as evidenced by his military record, and experience as a lawmaker since 1982.

“He’s really been tested,” McConaha said, comparing McCain’s military service record with that of John Kerry.

Other Democratic voters like Valery Mitchell, also a member of the grassroots organization, cited McCain's maverick approach to politics as reason to back him.

"His appeal is that he marches to his own drummer," Mitchell said. "I don't think he's anything like George Bush. He's sort of like a vice president who does his own thing."

"We all are agreed on one thing that we're not going to be supporting Obama," said Will Bower, co-founder of PUMA, a network of Democratic bloggers who oppose Barack Obama's nomination. "A lot of us will vote for John McCain."

Political experts describe the "McCain Democrats" as conservatives and moderates within their party who are most influenced by issues of patriotism, national security, immigration and the environment.

These voters are not the Reagan Democrats of 1980 and 1984 who swung their support from Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale to Ronald Reagan. In fact, the McCain supporters interviewed by FOXNews.com said they voted against Reagan and believe McCain's appeal is different.

"These voters are people who are older, rather than younger, people who have less education, rather than more education, and people who make issues of law and order and national security very important," Wayne said.

While Reagan touted his economic policies to win over conservative Democrats, McCain has relied mainly on issues of national security, supporters note.

McConaha and Mitchell said they are working to find Democrats who feel comfortable coming forward publicly to rally support for McCain — and the campaign claims that such outreach efforts are working.

"There are strong indications that John McCain's message of reform, prosperity, and peace is resonating not only with Republicans, but with Democrats and independents in key states," McCain's spokesman Tucker Bounds told FOXNews.com.

Bounds cited McCain's newly introduced Lexington project — an energy plan aimed at ending U.S. dependency on foreign oil — and his staunch support of the Second Amendment as examples of the senator's appeal to some Democrats.

Last week, the McCain campaign released a 60-second commercial meant to both underscore McCain's life as a prisoner of war in Vietnam and evoke feelings of patriotism.

"John McCain, shot down, bayoneted, tortured. ... His philosophy: Before party, polls and self, America. A maverick," says the ad, which runs on television stations in Washington, D.C., and is expected to be broadcasted in a number of swing states.

But political observers say McCain faces a major risk in aggressively courting traditional Democratic voters - one that might not be worth taking if he is to secure the presidency.

"The more that John McCain goes after left-wing independents and Democrats on policy ground, the more he will alienate his Republican conservative base," said Christopher C. Hull, adjunct professor of government at Georgetown University.

“He is caught in a sense that George Bush in 2000 and 2004 was not,” Hull said. “He doesn’t have the instinctive trust of the base that allows him to reach out without being repudiated.”

Hull added that if McCain is to peel away Democrats from Obama, he must raise serious questions over the Illinois senator’s loyalty and experience.

“Where there are already questions in Democrats’ minds about Obama’s patriotism, John McCain can get them, and where there are questions about Obama’s experience, John McCain can get them,” Hull said. “But I am skeptical in the end that they’ll turn to McCain in this kind of year.”

Obama has already attempted to counter such efforts by defending his patriotism during a recent speech in Independence, Mo., and striving to win over Republicans once loyal to Bush.

“We’re changing the battleground field in this election,” Nick Shapiro, an Obama campaign spokesman, told FOXNews.com. “We’re aggressively campaigning in states that are traditionally Republican strongholds.”

And the emergence of grassroots organizations like “Republicans for Barack Obama” might be evidence that his message is resonating with some conservative voters.

“Obama is a pragmatic leader who works to bridge differences among people of different political viewpoints,” said John Martin, co-founder of the group.

“While both Democrats and Republicans have spent the last 15 years using wedge issues to mobilize the fringes of their parties, Barack has already worked across the aisle in making government better at serving the public good,” Martin said.

Wayne said Obama’s latest initiative to expand federal assistance to religious social service groups could appeal to some on the right.

“I do think Obama has a reasonable case to make for Evangelicals,” Wayne said. “But a greater question will be whether or not those Evangelicals even turn out to vote.”

Republican pollster Steve Lombardo added that Obama appeals to some conservatives, particularly those displeased with President Bush, because he built his platform on messages of change in policy.

“You’ve got a very dissatisfied electorate and a president with a 25 percent approval rating,” Lombardo said. “To some extent these Republicans are voting for Obama, but to a greater extent it’s because they’re voting against George Bush and it’s hurting John McCain. They want change.”

Lombardo added that, historically, more people call themselves conservative Democrats than liberal Republicans. But both candidates should continue to woo opposition and independent voters.

“The broader you’re constituency, the better. This is not a base election,” he said. “It really is about courting the middle and the other side. How independents go in this election will determine who the next president is.”