

Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez gives his victory speech Tuesday after defeating Raquel Regalado

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Carlos Gimenez wins re-election as Miami-Dade mayor

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Carlos Gimenez was re-elected as Miami-Dade mayor Tuesday night, securing another four years after campaigning as a skilled administrator who reduced tax rates, tamed government spending and chipped away at enduring problems facing Florida's largest county.

Running for a final term as mayor, Gimenez, 62, held a 12-point lead over school board member Raquel Regalado, 42, after 99 percent of the precincts reported results Tuesday evening. The lopsided victory, with Gimenez topping 56 percent to Regalado's 44 percent, positioned Gimenez as the dominant player in county politics this decade.

"Our message is one of the future," Gimenez told supporters gathered for a victory party in a ballroom at the Hilton Miami Airport Convention Center. "We are creating one of the great cities right before your eyes."

He did not mention Regalado in his remarks. Noting the strains of a campaign he had hoped would end with the August primary, Gimenez said he's eager to focus his full attention on running Miami-Dade and its \$7 billion budget.

"The cat's been away," he said. "But the cat's coming back."

The Cuban-born Republican took office in 2011, beating Hialeah's mayor in a hotly contested emergency election to replace Carlos Alvarez, whom voters had ousted in a recall. Gimenez won easy re-election in 2012. In 2016, he faced both Regalado and the proxy challenge from her father, Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado.

For his final re-election bid — the county charter limits any mayor to a pair of four-year terms — Gimenez, a former Miami city manager and county commissioner, delivered a message of steady leadership and competence, while portraying Regalado as inexperienced and reckless.

LIVE ELECTION RESULTS

Miami-Dade Mayor

Last Updated: November 09, 2016 - 02:30 AM EST
Miami Dade - 783 of 783 Precincts Reporting - 100%



Name	Votes	Vote %
✓ Gimenez, Carlos	474,911	56%
Regalado, Raquel	375,687	44%

Source: Miami-Dade County

In campaign ads and appearances, Gimenez touted his 2011 cut in property-tax rates, which reversed a hike under Alvarez and forced even more austerity onto a county budget already burdened by a collapse in real-estate values. With housing prices surging again, Gimenez ran on a theme of Miami-Dade having turned a corner under his tenure.

"I've kept my promises," he said before he voted Tuesday. "I've lowered the tax rate, created jobs, and now we need to solve our transportation problem."

Running her first countywide race, Regalado hinged her candidacy on voters seeing Gimenez as a failed mayor who favored the lobbyists, contractors and developers who were top donors to his re-election effort. He raised more than \$7 million.

"I respect democracy, and today I respect the will of the people, and the people have spoken and have decided to give Carlos Gimenez another four years," Regalado told supporters Tuesday at the Lady of Lebanon church in Little Havana. "I hope that this time around he considers the voters that voted against him and rethinks some of his priorities at county hall."

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THE REALITY IS THAT WE HAD A TREMENDOUS VICTORY TODAY.

Challenger Raquel Regalado

"The reality is that we had a tremendous victory today," Regalado said. "To come this close is nothing that we should be ashamed of."

Gimenez beat Regalado in Miami by about six points. He dominated in Miami-Dade's most affluent cities, running up margins of 30 points or more in Coral Gables, Key Biscayne and Palmetto Bay. Regalado's best showing came from Hispanic-heavy and working-class areas, with the two basically tied in Hialeah and Regalado holding threadbare leads in Medley and Sweetwater. Those were the only two cities showing Regalado advantages as Election Day drew to a close. Gimenez took Miami Gardens, the largest black-majority city in Florida, by more than 10 points.

Gimenez approached 2016 as a favorite for reelection, but also a mayor with vulnerabilities. A 2015 poll showed him finishing second behind undecided, and two county commissioners — Xavier Suarez and Jean Monestime — flirted with challenges, as did schools chief Alberto Carvalho. But when the qualifying deadline arrived at noon on June 21, the only elected official challenging Gimenez was Regalado.

The mayor had expected to win the seven-candidate primary outright but fell two points shy of crossing the 50 percent threshold needed to end the election on Aug. 30. He blamed a surprisingly strong showing by the lone black candidate in the seven-person field, Frederick Bryant. The retired teacher beat the mayor in a few African-American precincts, cutting into a voting block that had been a key source of strength for Gimenez in past mayoral races.

Although the runoff was an unwelcome surprise, the primary results still showed Gimenez the favorite. He took 48 percent of the vote to Regalado's 32 percent and only needed to win by one vote in the general.

His campaign team expressed confidence Gimenez would perform better with the black vote once Regalado was the other option, while continuing to run up wide margins in Miami-Dade's most affluent cities.

The campaign was particularly bitter, culminating in Regalado filing suit to disqualify Gimenez over a flubbed qualifying check filed in June. It had the wrong year in the date section, and a judge tossed the litigation Nov. 3 as misguided since Elections properly accepted a replacement before the qualifying deadline.

OUR MESSAGE IS ONE OF THE FUTURE

Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez

Gimenez officially begins his next term as Miami-Dade's nonpartisan mayor on Nov. 22, when he'll be sworn in along with the six county commissioners re-elected in August. They faced either token or zero opposition in their races, meaning Miami-Dade's elected leadership remains almost entirely intact. The exception is Joe Martinez, a Gimenez foe and former commissioner who retook his District 11 seat in the Aug. 30 primary after incumbent Juan C. Zapata abruptly left the race after the ballots were printed.

As his second four-year term begins, Gimenez faces a string of looming controversies, pending deals and ongoing challenges in a government that many saw shifting to a lower gear during the 2016 election year.

Miami-Dade remains ground zero for the nation's Zika fight. Soccer star David Beckham has yet to announce any progress in his bid to secure county land for a new stadium in Overtown. The approval process for a proposed retail theme park, billed as the largest mall in America, is expected to start in earnest next year. And after campaigning on an ambitious promise of bringing rapid transit to six corridors across the county, Gimenez will begin laying out the costs and logistical limits of that blueprint.

"There will be difficult choices," Daniella Levine Cava, a county commissioner who didn't endorse in the mayor's race, said of the transit plan. "Sometimes perfection is the enemy of the good. It may be possible to move quicker on something that is less than the ideal."

Gimenez was an early advocate of police body cameras, inserting them into Miami-Dade's budget months before civil-rights leaders began demanding them in the wake of an unarmed black teenager being shot dead by an officer in Ferguson, Missouri.

Gimenez also saw Uber as a winning issue, and his campaign materials highlighted Miami-Dade legalizing the ride-hailing services this year over the fierce objections of the taxi industry, which supported Regalado. And although payrolls in county government shrank under his tenure, Gimenez took credit for Miami-Dade's broader economic recovery after the recession.

The economic message resonated with Adriana Simon, a 43-year-old Republican who voted for Gimenez in Miami Lakes on Tuesday. "I admire how he sells Miami to the world," she said.

Miami Herald staff writers Monique Madan, Nicholas Nehamas and Chuck Rabin contributed to this report.