Floridians have been barraged with TV ads. The signs have been sprouting like kudzu on lawns and roadsides. And now, with polls showing Florida's 29 electoral voters tantalizingly within reach for President Barack Obama or Republican challenger Mitt Romney, both candidates are lavishing their most valuable commodity – their time – on the Sunshine State.

With the candidates effectively tied in Florida, the Obama and Romney forces hope that one final burst of excitement -- either from someone who attends a rally and gushes about it to friends and family, or the exposure that comes from local coverage -- could nudge wavering voters to actually show up and vote.

More than 3 million already have. In South Florida, as many as half the votes in the 2012 election could be cast before the polls open at 7 a.m. Tuesday. The candidates and their supporters are doing everything they can to drag out every last vote.

"It looks like another down-to-the-wire race," said Kevin Wagner, a political scientist at Florida Atlantic University. "I don't think there are a lot of undecideds. It's going to come down to which side is more effective at getting their voters to come out in higher numbers. That makes for a divisive election and a divided government after the election."

The polls show the deep divisions in the Florida electorate. A Quinnipiac University/New York Times/CBS News poll of likely voters released last week showed 48 percent for Obama and 47 percent for Romney. At week's end, the RealClearPolitics average of Florida polls showed Romney with 49 percent and Obama with 48 percent.

"Everything Obama stands for, I'm against. Like giving money from wealthy people to people who are lazy and don't want to work," said Tommy James, 72, of Plantation, a retired English teacher at South Plantation High School. Romney's "a good person. I don't think Obama's a good person. He's a wolf in sheep's clothing."

But Lynn Russell, 67, of Boca Raton, a retired security supervisor, said Obama's difficulties stem from his predecessor, Republican George W. Bush. "He has done a good job," she said. "He's kept things from going down when I think he inherited a bad situation."

Orient Previl, 39, a Plantation real estate agent and computer network engineer, had some misgivings about Obama's performance on the economy. What he termed Romney's "inconsistency and his extremism on social issues" convinced him to vote for the president's re-election. "I don't trust neither of them," he said. "It's the lesser of two evils."
In such a tight race, neither side wants to wake up on Wednesday morning lamenting any missed opportunities, especially in Florida, the nation's biggest swing state that awards more than 10 percent of the 270 electoral votes required to win the presidency.

That's why Obama's last Florida stop of the 2012 campaign is Sunday in Broward County. High Democratic turnout in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties is essential for him. If he doesn't run up a large margin in South Florida, he has no chance of overcoming Republican votes elsewhere in the state.

The region's importance also explains why First Lady Michelle Obama campaigned in Miami on Thursday and why former President Bill Clinton was in Lake Worth on Friday. Both surrogates also made other stops throughout the state.

Romney's last big push was Wednesday. After both sides took a timeout due to the devastation caused by Superstorm Sandy, Romney devoted his first day back on the campaign trail to a three-stop blitz of the state, including an appearance in Coral Gables. At two of the stops he was accompanied by two popular Florida Republicans, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio and former Gov. Jeb Bush.

On Saturday, vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan planned to campaign in Panama City.

In such a close contest, every region and demographic group is critical. The Interstate 4 corridor in the central Florida is the swing region of the state. The Obama campaign hopes it can make inroads among Florida's growing number of Hispanics, many of whom have registered as Democrats since the 2008 election. And the Romney campaign is hoping it can peel away Jewish voters from their traditional allegiance to the Democratic Party with an aggressive effort to paint Obama as insufficiently supportive of Israel.

Democrats are counting on extensive voter registration and a get-out-the-vote drive to help revive the spirit of 2008 when Obama won Florida with 51 percent of the vote, boosted by African-Americans, Hispanics and younger voters. He and Bill Clinton (in 1996) were the only Democrats to win the state in the past eight presidential elections.

The tight contest also explains the advertising onslaught. A report issued Friday by the Wesleyan Media Project, which tracks campaign advertising, found three of the nation's top nine media markets in terms of the number of presidential ads from Oct. 22 to 29 were in Florida: Orlando (No. 3), Tampa (5), and Miami (9).

"I sense a lot of excitement. Our students will be even more ready to vote than I've seen them in a while," said Anna Eskamani, 22, a graduate student in Orlando who says she and fellow college Democrats registered 11,000 students at the University of Central Florida. They have been forming carpools to bring students to early-voting locations.

Eskamani said students have been inspired to vote Democratic because of the new health-care law, which allows adult children up to age 26 to remain on their parents' insurance plans, and by Romney's vow to cut funding for PBS shows like Sesame Street. "We all grew up watching PBS," she said. "It's something we can relate to."
With so many people voting early, last week's big Florida push by Romney could prove as valuable as Obama's Sunday stop.

There's a dizzying volume of spin emanating from both campaigns. "There's no Romney momentum in the battleground states," Obama campaign manager Jim Messina said last week. "We're going to go into Election Day with a very healthy margin."

In a Romney campaign conference call, political director Rich Beeson offered this take: "They clearly are in a bad place going into Election Day in Florida."

Joan Buckley, an Oakland Park Republican who likes the tea party but considers herself an independent, said she has no idea which side's predictions are correct.

"I don't know how anything's going to turn out," she said. "I'm just hoping for the best and saying my prayers."

_Staff writers Brittany Wallman and Ben Wolford contributed to this report._