Obama victorious
Democrat’s re-election 'about guarding the change' In Florida and nation it was a polarized election: 'People are very fired up because they see what is at stake'

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Barack Obama swept to victory in 2008, riding an emotional wave of hope and history, to become the first black President of the United States.

His re-election Tuesday, Democrats said, was clinched by a well-organized ground battle energized by voters who were motivated in a different way.

“In 2008, it was history. In 2012, it’s personal,” said Tallahassee state Rep. Alan Williams. “In 2008, it was like the changing of the guard, in 2012, it’s about guarding the change. It’s about not going back.”

While Republicans said GOP nominee Mitt Romney had momentum going into the final days of the campaign, it was not enough to overcome Obama’s strategic get-out-the-vote effort, which focused on early and absentee voting as the key to victory.

“Not only was there passion, there was an added sense of urgency as well,” said Richard Junnier, head of the Leon County Democratic Executive Committee. “This was a must win.”

John Barry Ryan, a Florida State assistant political science professor, said during the campaign it was hard to gauge which party had the edge of enthusiasm.

“Certainly, Republicans wanted Obama to lose, but that does not necessarily mean that they loved Romney,” Ryan said. “Enthusiasm for Obama is down from where it was in 2008, but it was at such high levels at that point it had to go down. No president could have lived up to the hype associated with his 2008 candidacy.”
Tallahassee City Commissioner and Obama supporter Andrew Gillum said the passionate enthusiasm of 2008 was tempered by the challenges facing the country, but voters showed they still had Obama's back.

“What the president has shown us through his leadership is calm sobriety around the tough times that we face,” Gillum said.

The stakes were high for supporters on both sides. Kevin Wagner, an assistant professor of political science at Florida Atlantic University, pointed to a recent poll by Public Policy Polling that suggested 20 percent of people saw dire consequences if their candidate lost.

“This has been a very polarized election,” Wagner said. “Though, as a practical matter, the divisions in Congress probably make the role of the president a bit less than people anticipate. Appointments, especially judicial appointments, might be the biggest accomplishment going forward for the winner.”

Supreme Court appointments were a primary motivator for Matty Budesa, president of the Florida State College Democrats. While she conceded her party was in more defensive posture this election, she said passion remained high.

“People are very fired up because they see what is at stake,” said the 21-year-old from Cape Canaveral who cast her first presidential election vote. “It’s about what people can lose.”

In the last week, volunteers for Obama knocked on more than 300,000 doors in North Florida, Williams said. While Romney supporters could be seen holding signs on street corners, teams of Democrats walked neighborhoods, setting up staging areas in area homes and garages.

“You don’t see it everywhere and part of that is by design. The intensity and passion has translated into early voting and voting by absentee ballots,” Williams said. “We had a ground game in place that no one has seen the likes of. That made all the difference in the world.”

FSU professor of communication Davis Houck said Obama’s victory means that Republicans will not be able to continue blocking Obama’s economic reforms.
“Perhaps most importantly, it will force Republicans to acknowledge that the party of middle-upper income white America has come and gone. A major realignment in the party, one that can appeal to the growing diversity of the nation, will have to be reckoned with in both policy and personnel,” Houck said. “The party of Romney will likely have to give way to a party of (Sen. Marco) Rubio, even as it divests itself of Tea Party jingoism.”

While Democrats celebrated Obama’s victory into Wednesday morning, Gillum cautioned there remain many challenges ahead.

“The one thing the President can do in this next administration is to continue to level with the American people about what we all are going to have to sacrifice, because right after this election there is a fiscal cliff,” he said. “We’ve got to marry our passion with the realities that we are still facing.”