



## ELECTIONS

# First day of early voting in Miami-Dade brings lines, enthusiasm and a campus party

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October 22, 2018 02:32 PM  
Updated 29 minutes ago

Campus early voting returned to Florida Monday with a party at Miami Dade College, which was at the center of a partisan fight over more polling places catering to young people. The school welcomed students in patriotic costumes, an Uncle Sam stilt walker and dozens of voters waiting to cast some of the first in-person ballots of the 2018 general election in Florida's most vote-rich county.

"I just got out of class," Terrance Johnson, 25, said shortly before 11 a.m. as he left the portion of MDC's library converted into one of Miami-Dade County's 28 early voting sites.

He's a criminal-justice student with a full load of courses and also works full time at an air-charter company — representing the kind of working-class student that advocates said made MDC the perfect candidate for an early-voting site. Johnson said he hoped the campus voting site would encourage more students to participate in the 2018 election.

“The amount of youth that’s out there voting today is really low,” he said. “We need to get out and change that. Our vote has to count.”

Miami-Dade County initially turned down MDC President Eduardo Padrón’s request for early-voting sites on at least one of the school’s eight campuses after a federal judge this summer struck down Florida’s four-year ban on the use of colleges and universities as early-voting sites.

That initial decision was overruled by the County Commission in September, the signature win so far for an officially nonpartisan board that this summer flipped to majority Democrat with the election of Commissioner Eileen Higgins.

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If MDC North had the most festive launch of early voting in Miami-Dade, it may not have had the busiest. The county reported a 30-minute wait at the voting site at the Coral Gables library, the only location reporting a delay shortly after 1 p.m. The site suffered a brief power outage earlier in the day, but a breaker was flipped and normal operations resumed, said county elections spokeswoman Suzy Trutie. By 2 p.m., Coral Gables was listed as wait-free, but the North Dade library in Miami Gardens reported a 30-minute wait time. The early-voting site in Aventura also suffered a brief power outage and some early delays, but was reporting no waits by midday.

Trutie said the early-voting crowds come and go throughout the day. “I can assure you once work lets out, you’re going to have wait times,” she said.

Voting on Election Day has become increasingly less popular with the advent of early voting and mail-in ballots. In the 2016 presidential election, 12 percent of the votes had been cast by the time the first day of early voting ended. By the end of the first week of early voting, nearly a third of the votes were in, according to Elections Department statistics.



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By Christian Colón

“We expect that trend to continue,” said Mayor Carlos Gimenez, who supervises the Elections Department and resisted the campus-voting sites during the early days of the debate. “Not me. I’m a traditionalist. I will vote in my friendly neighborhood polling place about three blocks from my house. It’s actually gotten easier, since so many people are voting early.”





**Maya Kaufman**  
@mayakauf

Voters camped out last night to be the first to vote early today.  
Photo taken at 1:00 a.m. at Shenandoah Park. [@MiamiHerald](#)

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Outside the Shenandoah Library early voting site in Miami, the Andrew Gillum campaign recruited volunteers to camp out in order to snag the first voting slots Monday morning. Juan Cuba, an organizer for the Democrat's gubernatorial campaign, said about a dozen people slept in tents for the event. "I think we're going to make this a tradition," Cuba said.

Esteban Bovo, chairman of the Miami-Dade commission and a Republican, said he's seeing an energized GOP in Miami-Dade as former Republican congressman Ron DeSantis hits Gillum for being too far left for Florida.

"I was at an event yesterday, a rally. I think enthusiasm is high," Bovo said. "This question of socialism and socialist ideas plays really strong here."

The MDC site had lines of a dozen people or more at its busiest, but also had periods of no waiting to cast a ballot that for many county voters stretches to four pages, front and back, with state, county and city referendum questions to consider along with local, state and congressional contests.

Higgins joined fellow Democratic commissioners Barbara Jordan and Daniella Levine Cava for the MDC celebration at its North campus, the site pushed by the commissioners during a September vote. Gimenez, a Republican in a nonpartisan post, added his alma mater, MDC's Kendall campus. Days earlier, Gimenez had agreed to create just one campus early-voting site: Florida International University's western campus.

The FIU campus underperformed when it last had an early-voting site in 2014, and the Gimenez administration initially resisted expanding its early-voting plan after the July court decision in Tallahassee. At a ceremony outside the MDC North voting site, Gimenez thanked the commission for voting to add the location, which sits in the Democrat-heavy portion of the county north of Miami.

"I can see there is a tremendous amount of enthusiasm," the Cuban-born Gimenez said. "I come from a county where voting doesn't matter."

Padrón greeted Gimenez at the campus with a squad of students bearing signs thanking the mayor and commissioners for the site. "This is America at its best," Padrón said.

Dressed in red, white and blue headgear and tutus, the students chanted, "We are MDC" as Gimenez and the commissioners joined Padrón in a dance outside the library before heading inside for remarks. The school's shark mascot was there, along with library director Estrella Iglesias in dyed "blue wave" hair.

"I have blue nails, too," she said, "but I thought that was too much."

Early voting runs for two weeks, through Sunday, Nov. 4. For a list of early-voting locations, click here. All early-voting sites are open to any eligible voter in Miami-Dade, and they offer free parking. That includes the FIU and MDC sites. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

COMMENTS