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Challenges await New York Mayor-Elect Bill de Blasio

By Sean Lengell

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Bill de Blasio says his landslide victory in the New York mayor's race proves that voters have chosen a "progressive path." But making good on promised reforms will be far trickier than his almost 50 percentage-point win.

He has portrayed his megalopolis as a "tale of two cities," where almost half its 8 million residents live at or near the poverty line and 400,000 are millionaires. The liberal Democrat says he will raise income taxes on New Yorkers who earn more than \$500,000 to fund universal pre-kindergarten and after-school programs.

But that plan requires approval from the politically split state legislature and Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo. And with the governor and legislature up for re-election next year, endorsing a "tax the rich" plan isn't at the top of their agenda.

De Blasio also has vowed to tamp down one of outgoing Mayor Michael Bloomberg's pet projects: the city's flourishing charter schools. The mayor-elect wants to reverse Bloomberg's policy of giving free rent in public buildings to most of the city's 183 charters, which receive public funding but are privately run.

But charters are popular, and he faces a backlash if he pushes hard against them.

Another signature campaign promise was to curb the police department's "stop-and-frisk" policy, which allows officers to stop and question pedestrians, and to frisk them for weapons and other contraband.

Bloomberg and police Commissioner Ray Kelly say the practice is a vital part of the city's anti-crime strategy and a major factor in an historic drop in violent crime rates. But because a vast majority of those stopped are black and Hispanic men, critics, including de Blasio, say the practice can lead to racial profiling.

U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin ordered New York police to change the policy, but a three-judge appeals court panel stayed her decision and pulled her from the case after she broke impartiality rules. De Blasio says he will drop the city's appeal when he takes office in January.

Critics of de Blasio fear a return to the New York of the early 1990s, the last time a Democrat — David Dinkins — was mayor and the city suffered from high taxes, a high crime rate, high debt and a shrinking employment base.

Douglas Muzzio of New York City's Baruch College said it would be impossible for de Blasio to make good on all his campaign promises.

"The bottom line is, he can't meet all those expectations, so you're already seeing some expectations dampening, because in some ways, DeBlasio, like Barack Obama, was a Rorschach test — people saw what they wanted to see to a certain extent and projected their own hopes and expectations and desires on him," Muzzio said.