

October 29, 2005

By Pouring It On, Bloomberg Risks Talk of Overkill

By [JIM RUTENBERG](#) and [PATRICK D. HEALY](#)

Television commercials promoting his candidacy are running not only in English, but are also coming out in Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Hindi and Urdu. New Yorkers are being bombarded with hundreds of thousands of phone calls from [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#), Beverly Sills and Oscar de la Renta promoting his re-election. And thousands of volunteers will be knocking on doors from Staten Island to the Bronx urging people to vote.

The aggressiveness of Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg's](#) re-election drive, even as he surges in the polls, has intensified to the point where it is perplexing to some supporters. They worry his operation will alienate Democrats who are poised to vote for him but may come to see his spending as overkill and his campaign as bullying his Democratic opponent, [Fernando Ferrer](#).

"It's particularly troubling when an incumbent who has so many advantages finds it necessary" to spend so much, said City Councilwoman Eva S. Moskowitz, a Democrat who said she had endorsed Mr. Bloomberg earlier this month in spite of his spending because of his record as mayor. "This is a lot of money."

In the spring of 2001, New York magazine quoted Mr. Bloomberg as saying he could not envision spending \$30 million on his campaign that year because "At some point you start to look obscene." He went on to spend \$75 million, saying he had to do so to introduce himself to a city that did not know him.

Theories for Mr. Bloomberg's take-no-prisoners approach abound: The mayor has a billionaire's taste and is spending big on his campaign just as he has spent big on art or vacation homes; the mayor comes from Wall Street and is, in essence, building on his momentum; the mayor is seeking a mandate for a second term.

Mr. Bloomberg's aides say all of that misses the point: victory is by no means assured. He is still running as a Republican in a Democratic city, they say, and for all of his advantages the Democrats still have control of the city's electoral machinery and experience working the streets during elections. And, aides say, the mayor remembers only too clearly how at this stage during his 2001 race polls showed his Democratic challenger, [Mark Green](#), leading him by a similarly wide margin.

"The lesson is, never to take your eye off the prize," said William T. Cunningham, a senior campaign adviser to the mayor.

Filings released yesterday show that Mr. Bloomberg's advertising spending has tripled in just the past three weeks, an intensity that is sure to increase in the 10 days running up to the Nov. 8 election. Not only will New Yorkers have a hard time avoiding a barrage of ads, mailings and Bloomberg volunteers, but political aides and state Republicans are also gearing up for the big day. They are dispatching a 1,000-person security operation to the polls on Election Day, fearful of fraud.

The mayor's campaign said canvassers had already knocked on 600,000 doors and the campaign had played host to 13,000 older voters at breakfasts throughout the city.

The effort has gone to almost comical extremes. Mr. Bloomberg has learned to say, "Together, we'll do even more" in nearly a half-dozen Asian languages for the television spots. But Democrats say it has also taken a more sinister tone, with the Bloomberg campaign relentlessly exposing and mocking every one of what they call Mr. Ferrer's missteps and flip-flops in the news media. The mayor's campaign strategy was one of overwhelming force from the start, built on the theory that with no natural base of support he would have to essentially spend whatever necessary to create his own base in what was certain to be a close race.

Even with polls showing the mayor with a lead of 27 percentage points over Mr. Ferrer, aides were in disbelief when asked why they were not diminishing the intensity of their campaign. They say it was his intense spending and campaigning that led to his recent surge in the polls and it would make no sense to let up just before Election Day.

In February, a couple of months before Mr. Bloomberg began his advertising drive, a New York Times poll found that 43 percent of New Yorkers approved of the job he was doing. Nearly \$30 million worth of advertising later, the latest New York Times poll, released yesterday, found 67 percent now approve of the job he is doing.

If there is one thing both campaigns agree on - and there may be just one - it is that what polls show and what happens on Election Day are likely two different things.

Bill Lynch, a Democratic political strategist working as an informal adviser to Mr. Ferrer, said that he believed polls were overstating Mr. Bloomberg's support among black and Latino New Yorkers, and underestimating that of Mr. Ferrer.

Mr. Lynch said he believed pollsters were certainly missing the 166,000 poor and minority voters he helped register to vote as part of a multimillion-dollar voter registration drive in the city for last year's presidential election. And he said minority voters will be far more excited about voting for Mr. Ferrer, who would be the first mayor of Puerto Rican descent in city history, than they and others will be about voting for Mr. Bloomberg, whose popularity was at record lows just two years ago in polls.

"I think the fear they have is a possible low turnout, and low turnout could wind up working in Freddy Ferrer's favor," Mr. Lynch said, "particularly if people who are strong Bloomberg supporters believe he is going to win anyway and don't come out."

Mr. Bloomberg's campaign advisers do not disagree, and can point to Mr. Lynch - who was former Mayor [David N. Dinkins](#)' top Democratic strategist - as just one of several advisers to Mr. Ferrer who knows his way around New York City voting districts.

"The infrastructure of the Democratic party, as they bring out their votes, is not trivial," said Mitchell L. Moss, a professor of public policy at New York University and an informal adviser to Mr. Bloomberg. "Through this city are clubs, which are ongoing Democratic organizations, which will distribute palm cards and go door-to-door and bring their people out."

As a counter-measure, officials with the Bloomberg campaign and the state Republican Party plan to send 1,000 lawyers, volunteers, operatives and off-duty corrections officers to the polls on Nov. 8 to watch for any evidence of ballot tampering, illegal voting or other attempts at fraud. This effort is expected to cost more than \$500,000, and is being underwritten in part by Mr. Bloomberg through a recent personal donation to the state party, according to one Republican who is familiar with the effort. Campaign officials would not reveal the amount of the donation; Mr. Bloomberg gave more than \$850,000 for a similar effort and other expenses in the 2001 race.

John Haggerty, a campaign adviser, and James Ortenzio, the state party finance chairman, are helping to

oversee the so-called ballot security operation and the training of the monitors, whose chief duty is to report any suspicious activity. Monitors will be assigned to polling stations citywide, although the Republican familiar with the effort conceded that most monitors will work at polls in pro-Ferrer parts of the city, such as the Bronx.

On Thursday, however, in a letter given to The Times by a Democrat, the state Democratic Party asked Mayor Bloomberg to discontinue the ballot security program. The chairman of the state party, Herman D. Farrell Jr., argued in the letter that the security effort in 2001 "was widely viewed as an effort to intimidate or suppress voters in neighborhoods containing likely Democratic voters for your opponent" - particularly, party officials added, black, Hispanic and non-English speaking voters.

A Bloomberg campaign spokesman said the mayor's office had not received the letter by yesterday evening, but he issued a statement from Terence Tolbert, a senior adviser to the campaign, saying Republicans and Democrats conduct the same activities to monitor polls on Election Day. "This letter, if in fact it was ever sent to the mayor, is both insulting and counterintuitive," said Mr. Tolbert.

Mr. Bloomberg's spending has certainly tarnished him among the good government advocates whom he has tried to court. He argued that by using his own fortune he is eliminating the influence of moneyed interests on his mayoralty.

"We've remained concerned over why he needs to continue to spend so much money when he enjoys such broad support," said Dick Dadey, executive director of Citizens Union, which nevertheless endorsed Mr. Bloomberg. "We strongly support him, but against an under-funded opponent it is too much spending when the case has already been made well for his re-election."