

Bloomberg's riding the trend, but will it go far enough?

Trends matter. They're not everything, and they're sometimes wrong. But those who ignore them, especially in the heat of a political campaign, do so at their peril.

And today, in the closing three days of the race for mayor, the trends are all in Mike Bloomberg's favor.

Despite a Quinnipiac poll that had Bloomberg trailing Mark Green by 16 percentage points about 10 days ago, I recently compared the two campaigns' competing strategies and wrote that Bloomberg was coming on fast.

Well, what was a budding

gale last week has become a full-blown hurricane. The latest Marist College poll has Green's lead down to four points, with 12% undecided.

More important, those familiar with the private polls of both campaigns say the race is even tighter — and with money to burn, Bloomberg's nightly survey operation is more sophisticated, more timely and larger in sample size than any other public or private poll in recent memory.

The Bloomberg numbers, which a key Green operative concedes are "probably not far from the mark," have Green in

front by just two points.

Whichever survey you like, the race today appears to be within the margin of error, and Green has been losing ground steadily.

He could still win, especially since New York Democrats have a 5-4-1 registration advantage over Republicans, but the phrase that best describes the race today is that Dan Rather favorite, "tight as a uck."

In brief, here's what's happening.

■ Bloomberg's backing among Latino voters is surging, a trend likely to continue as the Bloombergs publicize yesterday's Daily News story about the involvement of Green supporters in highlighting Freddy Ferrer's ties to the Rev. Al Sharpton.

That effort, during the closing days of last month's Democratic runoff, was targeted at Jewish voters, many of whom revile Sharpton.

Green has consistently de-

nied that he or anyone who works for him was behind the flyers and phone calls that emphasized the Ferrer-Sharpton connection. But Green's denials are now in doubt, and Bloomberg will surely seek to fuel the controversy before Tuesday's election.

■ Green maintains a healthy lead among African-American voters, but the question for him is whether they'll vote in the numbers he needs. If black leaders offended by The News' reportage urge African-Americans to stay home, Green could be doomed.

■ The Marist poll has Green

leading among Latino and Jewish voters — the inverse of Bloomberg's poll — but Marist's director, Lee Miringoff, frankly admits that Bloomberg's sample size was twice the Marist survey's and tallied more recently.

■ Green has borrowed heavily for a flight of last-minute TV spots, but Bloomberg has been drastically outspending his rival all along, and the Bloomberg buy will continue to dwarf anything Green can manage.

Of the many ads Bloomberg's aired, the campaign's focus groups show that the most effective is the 60-second spot featuring Mayor Giuliani's endorsement.

"Rudy's support came late," says a Bloomberg adviser. "But we're making the most of it. By the time we're through, I'd bet that huge numbers of voters will be able to recite it by heart."

Paying his way
Few will be surprised if the final accounting shows that Bloomberg spent close to \$60 million of his own money — the most, by far, for any local race in U.S. history.

Many believe that in big, sophisticated New York, with its educated electorate and famously aggressive press corps, even obscene amounts of private spending can't guarantee victory.

Should Bloomberg win, it will be tempting to scuttle that con-

cell. But there's another key consideration:

Despite the early raves, Green has run a disappointing, essentially defensive campaign predicated on his inevitability. It might fail simply because Green was unable to convince voters that he's up to handling what he and everyone else calls the second-toughest job in America.



MICHAEL KRAMER

CITY_21MC100_011832347