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Eager for an Edge

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As gap narrows, candidates push for every vote

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With the mayor's race unexpectedly a dead heat, Michael Bloomberg and Mark Green crisscrossed three boroughs to ask black, Jewish and Latino voters to support them on Election Day.

At two black churches in Manhattan and Jamaica, Republican Bloomberg was politely applauded after reading a biblical verse advising "unity" among people. Bloomberg also stumped for Jewish votes in Borough Park, Coney Island and Forest Hills, sometimes with former Mayor Ed Koch and Gov. George Pataki in tow.

In further fallout from the Democratic runoff between Green and Fernando Ferrer, Bloomberg also received endorsements from two Latino politicians from the Bronx. The Rev. Ruben Diaz Sr., a councilman-elect from the Bronx, said the city "needs a person that unifies."





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It was an all-Brooklyn day for Green, a strategic stronghold that was key to his success in the Democratic primary and runoff.

With polls showing a statistically even race — Green told one crowd yesterday that "the race couldn't be closer" — Green strongly urged people to vote tomorrow. He blasted Bloomberg in Borough Park as an out-of-touch businessman who "disrespects women and schoolchildren of communities of color."

Accompanied by former Mayor David Dinkins, Green visited four churches in predominantly black East New York, Brownsville and Bedford Stuyvesant. At St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Green raised concerns about Bloomberg's lack of government experience. "Would Joe Torre send a pitcher who has never pitched before to the mound for Game 7 of the World Series?" he asked.

At the church, a Bloomberg supporter handed out a magazine with Bloomberg on the cover and with an insert of an Amsterdam News editorial endorsing Bloomberg. Controversial invective about Green being helped by "his Jewish mafia" to defeat Ferrer in the Democratic runoff had been excised.

At the Bethel Gospel Tabernacle church in Jamaica, Bloomberg sat motionless as gleeful parishioners around him erupted in song and prayer. Bloomberg exhorted the crowd to vote tomorrow. "I'm optimistic," he said.

In the early evening, Bloomberg was greeted enthusiastically at the Central Queens YM & YWHA in Forest Hills, where he was introduced by Koch and Pataki.

In a new ad, Bloomberg is accused of supporting prayer in public schools, based on remarks he made in July. Bloomberg has backed away from those remarks.

"Mark said that I was in favor of saying the Lord's Prayer in school. That wasn't true," Bloomberg told WABC-AM/770 yesterday. "I was asked, did we have prayer in the school when I was growing up in elementary school, and did I think it was valuable, and I said, 'Yes, it was.'"

In July, Bloomberg, who is Jewish, told reporters that he benefited from saying the Lord's Prayer as a child. He also said it would be "an excellent idea" for public schools to offer a moment of silence.

Staff writer Bobby Cuza contributed to this story.

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