



## **Nursing Massive Lead, de Blasio Plays It Safe on the Trail**

**Bill de Blasio's run-out-the-clock strategy is a dramatic shift from the nonstop stumping of his populist primary campaign, which propelled him to a commanding Sept. 10 primary victory**

**By Jon Schuppe**

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With less than a week left in New York's mayoral race, Democrat Bill de Blasio did something unusual: he announced that he was headed to the Bronx to stump for votes.

De Blasio, who is tending a massive lead over Republican Joseph Lhota, had just taken some heat in their final debate for not doing much public campaigning in any of the outer boroughs besides Brooklyn, where he lives. His sudden appearance in the Bronx caused a bit of a stir.

Standing under the elevated Fordham Road subway station, de Blasio said the visit had been planned in advance and reflected his refusal to take anything for granted.

“We are running like we’re behind,” he said.

But the reality — the part the public sees, at least — is the opposite. For weeks, De Blasio, 52, has been running like a man with everything to lose, largely avoiding unscripted, retail-style forays into the streets.

Public opinion polls indicate de Blasio could win Nov. 5 by a margin not seen in nearly three decades. So he has limited his public campaign schedule to a short roster of controlled events — rallies, speeches, endorsement announcements, meetings — in which hardly anything unexpected happens.

This makes sense. Because when you’ve got a lead like de Blasio has, spontaneity is your enemy. It raises the opportunity for encounters in which you might talk too loosely, lose your cool, say something you regret.

“Clearly, once you’ve got this huge lead you become really, really risk averse,” said **Douglas Muzzio, a public affairs professor at Baruch College**. “The more you’re in public, the more likely you’ll make a mistake.”

The strategy is a dramatic shift from the nonstop stumping of de Blasio’s aggressively populist primary campaign, which propelled him from fourth place in early summer to a commanding Sept. 10 victory.

De Blasio’s rise marks a sharp leftward shift for New York, which has spent the last 12 years under Michael Bloomberg, a billionaire former Republican.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Massachusetts, de Blasio is a career political operative. He worked as a union organizer and advocated on behalf of Nicaragua’s Sandinista government in the 1980s before joining David Dinkins’ 1989 mayoral campaign. In 1997, he became an aide in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under secretary Andrew Cuomo, who is now New York’s governor.

De Blasio managed Hillary Clinton’s successful 2000 campaign for U.S. Senate, then won a seat on the city council, representing a swath of brownstone Brooklyn. In 2009, he was elected as the city’s public advocate, a position he will hold for a few more weeks.

He announced his campaign for mayor in January, and went on to beat a crowded Democratic primary field with enough votes to avoid a runoff.

In the general election, polls have consistently showed de Blasio leading Lhota by 40 percentage points.

With his base still enthusiastic (and Lhota unable to gather much momentum), de Blasio has the luxury of attending to less visible activities, like developing ads, engineering field operations, preparing get-out-the-vote efforts.

He can also amass a huge campaign war chest to finance an Election Day victory, but dissuade prospective competitors in the future.

“It’s smart from a strategic standpoint, but for the chattering classes it’s boring,” Muzzio said. “We want more action and more mistakes and more gaffes and more conflict. But he wants to win.”

A sense of inevitability, and caution, seems to have permeated de Blasio's campaign. Although talk has shifted to the size of de Blasio's victory, he answers questions about it with a demure smile. He often prefaces his remarks with the phrase, "If the people choose me."

"I feel blessed every day, I really do," de Blasio told reporters at a late October event billed as a protest against layoffs at Long Island College Hospital.

Lately, de Blasio has been getting asked if he's worried that the New Yorkers he's won over would grow complacent, and not bother to vote.

He doesn't look worried, but he says he is.

"We are hard-charging this now, pushing every button we've got and we're not taking anything lightly," de Blasio said during his Thursday stop in the Bronx.

Political experts say there really is no downside to de Blasio's run-out-the-clock strategy.

"It's a week away from the election and the polls are pretty clear," Democratic strategist Hank Sheinkopf said. "If the polls were inaccurate then you'd see a very different campaign. So you won't see any speeches where he can be quoted out of context, and you won't see anything that occurs that can't be controlled."

One criticism of that approach is that it risks feeding a perception that de Blasio is not paying enough attention to ordinary New Yorkers — particularly those who don't live in Manhattan or Brooklyn. A review of his public campaign events since the primary shows just a half dozen or so in the Bronx, Queens and Staten Island.

De Blasio was asked about that in the candidates' final debate on Wednesday. He didn't offer an explanation, but said he was running on a platform that prioritizes the "people in the outer boroughs who haven't gotten what they need."

A day later, on Halloween afternoon, he was on Fordham Road, people cramming to be near the presumptive next mayor.

He moved slowly, bending his 6-foot-5-inch frame to bring himself to their level. He shook hands, posed for pictures and shared hugs. Some seemed star-struck. One man was moved to tears. "It's the first time I shake my hand with someone as important as him," he said.

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. walked alongside de Blasio. "It's Halloween! He's already dressed as the mayor!" Diaz shouted.

De Blasio kept walking, and smiling.