



Mamdani's Message: America's Largest City Can Be Affordable

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By Robert Weiner and Ingrid Lang

Zohran Mamdani has been getting an enormous amount of attention as the Democratic nominee for Mayor of New York City, and the way he presents himself. He is the cover of the latest Time Magazine, has constant interviews on the television networks, and even half-hour features with panelists breaking down what his significance is.

That level of coverage shows how quickly Mamdani has become a candidate reshaping the city's political conversation -and possibly the nation's.

Even former New York Mayor Bill de Blasio acknowledged Mamdani's appeal. Speaking to MSNBC, de Blasio said Mamdani "*does a better job*" explaining a vision than he himself once did, with passion and succinctness. Few New Yorkers had Zohran Mamdani on their short list for mayor just one year ago. Now Trump wants to pull Adams out and may give his immigration lackey a job. The New York Times is reporting that Adams may indeed drop out. But with only single digits, that may not change the race's complexion.

Mamdani draws nearly a million followers on TikTok with a message put into one word: affordability.

Affordability is more than a slogan to Mamdani. To the fast-rising politician, it is the lived experience of a city where rent eats half a paycheck, groceries climb by the week, and the dream of raising a family feels increasingly out of reach. Mamdani's rise shows that New Yorkers are gravitating toward a candidate who speaks plainly about affordability in the basics in a three plank platform: rent freezes, free buses, and free childcare. These planks are simple, tangible, and touch almost everyone. [Trump's sweeping economic changes](#) with serious cutbacks across the country only make them more relevant.

What his critics feel is too ambitious, voters seem to recognize as the bare minimum. Polls show that most New Yorkers are [unsatisfied](#) with the direction of the city, and that is the real pulse of this election: not whether Mamdani is "too left," but whether New Yorkers believe affordability should be a right, not a privilege.

With only about two months until the mayoral election on November 4, the latest polls from The New York Times show [Mamdani holding a lead](#) in the general election for mayor of New York City. But the race is far from sealed. [A new poll](#) released on August 27 by Tulchin

Research complicates the story. For the first time, in a head-to-head matchup between Mamdani and Cuomo, Cuomo would lead: 51% to 41%. That finding breaks with months of surveys showing Mamdani in the lead and signals that while his affordability agenda has captured the public of New York, doubts remain about whether he can deliver. However, the lead is now widening again. The latest polls show Mamdani 42-26 over Cuomo with all current candidates in.



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Cuomo's numbers aren't about bold ideas for the city the way that Mamdani's numbers are. They're about name recognition and nostalgia in a city that can be hesitant to change. His vision still feels vague, especially next to Mamdani's clear and simple message of affordability. This race could be about contrast – whether New Yorkers want a city where affordability is treated as a right, or whether they fall back on a familiar face despite all the baggage. More important Cuomo's head-to-head option only exists if the other candidates step aside.

In an [interview](#) with CBS News, a Mamdani spokesperson said:

“Everybody knows that Andrew Cuomo is Donald Trump’s choice candidate for mayor—they share the same billionaire donors, colluded on the race, and Trump himself said the two have ‘always gotten along.’”

Cuomo has openly welcomed Trump’s support, sharing donors with him and expressing hope that the former president will help him win. That may boost his numbers in the latest head-to-head poll. The New Yorkers will have to choose between a candidate trying to make the city livable again for ordinary people, and one whose biggest bet is that Trump can help him get what he wants, should the other candidates step aside.

Critics have also attacked Mamdani’s identity, accusing him of antisemitism or even promoting Palestinian issues. To these criticisms, Mamdani has pushed back clearly. He is emphasizing that he has been and will continue meeting regularly with Jewish groups and will expand hate-crime prevention funding tenfold.

As November 4 approaches, Mamdani’s lead in the polls makes him the clear frontrunner. But even if the race tightens, his candidacy has already shifted the conversation. That shift matters beyond New York. If Mamdani wins, his agenda will test whether a major U.S. city can treat affordability as a public good. If he loses, his rise still proves that a clear and unapologetic anti-poverty message can mobilize people across age, class, and neighborhood lines. Either way, the pulse of New York politics is affordability, and Zohran Mamdani is the candidate who has put it there. Democrats and the country are watching closely — and learning..

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