

## Mamdani's Victory—Analysis and Assessment

Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis and Max Schwartz | No. 2032 | August 26, 2025

In what may herald a broader transformation within the Democratic Party—and a shift that could raise concern in Israel—Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist, has won the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City. His victory makes him a strong favorite for November's general election. The current Democratic leadership still demonstrates a basic appreciation for Israel and a willingness to defend it from criticism—even when disagreeing with its policies—and will continue doing so for some time. Whether he wins the mayoralty or not, Mamdani represents a younger generation of candidates and voters who view Israel as a problematic, rogue actor and identify with the Palestinians. This evolving dynamic is likely to present Israel with mounting challenges as it seeks to rally American support for its policies and strategic interests.

### Background

On June 24, Zohran Mamdani secured the Democratic nomination for mayor of New York City, [winning almost 44% of the first round of voting and ultimately 56.4% in the final ranked-choice round](#). Mamdani entered the primaries as a political upstart, largely unknown outside of progressive circles. However, Mamdani's campaign quickly gained traction and thrust him into a virtual two-person race against former New York governor, Andrew Cuomo. Cuomo—who enjoyed stronger backing from the Democratic establishment—[routinely attacked Mamdani's record on Israel, making it a focal point of his campaign](#). Despite these attacks, Mamdani, who is a harsh critic of Israel, won the nomination handily, indicating shifting attitudes toward Israel within the Democratic Party.

As the Democratic nominee in a liberal stronghold, Mamdani enters as a clear frontrunner for November's general election, although he is not guaranteed to win. Usually, the party unites around the primary winner, but in Mamdani's case, reluctance persists. Democratic establishment figures in New York—including the party's two congressional leaders, Senator Chuck Schumer and Representative Hakeem Jeffries—have [withheld their endorsements](#). Aiding Mamdani is the fact that he is running against Andrew Cuomo (Independent), Eric Adams (Independent), and Curtis Sliwa (Republican), and the crowded field splits the anti-Mamdani vote. Additionally, each candidate has distinct weaknesses. Andrew Cuomo—now running as an independent—is a former three-time governor of New York who left the governorship amid allegations of sexual misconduct and has already lost to Mamdani in the primaries. Incumbent Mayor Eric Adams has seen his popularity plummet following federal corruption charges and a controversial decision by the Trump administration to dismiss the charges against him. Lastly, Curtis Sliwa, running as a Republican in liberal New York City, is a long shot.

Mamdani's coalition was [broad and diverse. He won significant support from white, Hispanic, Asian, middle-income, and upper-income voters](#). Cuomo, by contrast, performed best with

[lower-income and Black voters](#). Younger voters, though, were the key factor in Mamdani's victory. Voters above 65 typically command the highest share of votes in New York City primaries; however, Mamdani's candidacy flipped the script and drew younger voters at a higher rate than usual. Voters between the ages of 25 and 34 were, by far, the [largest voting bloc](#) in the primary, and Mamdani excelled with this group, [winning handily](#) in New York City's "younger" neighborhoods.

### **Mamdani's Views on Israel**

Mamdani is a 33-year-old state legislator from New York and a Democratic Socialist, part of the far-left progressive faction of the Democratic Party. [Born in Uganda to Indian Muslim parents, he moved to the United States at seven years old and spent his childhood in New York City](#). His parents are Mahmood Mamdani, a prominent anthropologist who teaches at Columbia University, and filmmaker Mira Nair. Mamdani attended [Bowdoin College](#), a small liberal arts school in Maine. In 2020, [Mamdani defeated a Democratic incumbent](#) to represent New York's 36th State Assembly district in Queens, a seat he has held ever since.

In October 2024, Mamdani launched his campaign for mayor of New York City. In the primary, he focused his campaign on [issues of affordability in New York City](#) with many progressive proposals such as providing [free city buses, enabling city-owned grocery stores, expanding free childcare, and freezing rent for rent-stabilized apartments](#). Although his campaign mostly centered around kitchen-table issues, and while he may owe his electoral success in large measure to these issues, it is his views on Israel that have garnered the most attention and sparked widespread public debate. These views, while unconventional in mainstream American political circles, align with the policy preferences of the progressive-left circles to which Mamdani belongs, including the Democratic Socialists of America.

Mamdani is a frequent and harsh critic of Israel, with a history of negative statements toward the Jewish state and its policies. He founded Bowdoin College's [Students for Justice in Palestine \(SJP\) chapter](#) and is an outspoken supporter of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, telling voters that ["BDS is consistent with the core of my politics."](#) As an assemblyman, he promoted legislation to ban donations from New York to West Bank settlements and Israeli military units.

[On social media, the day after Hamas's October 7 attack](#), Mamdani expressed sorrow for the deaths of both Israelis and Palestinians, but he mostly focused on Israeli actions against the Palestinians. When asked about this in April 2025, he clarified that he condemns the killing of civilians and its celebration. Mamdani has routinely called Israel's military operation in Gaza a ["genocide"](#) and, in May, [declined to co-sponsor](#) a resolution in the State Assembly commemorating the Holocaust, claiming he has a general policy against adding his name to this type of public resolution. When asked if he supports Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, he has stated that [he supports its right to exist "as a state with equal rights."](#) Finally, he announced that [should he be elected as mayor, he would order the NYPD to arrest Prime Minister Netanyahu](#) based on the ICC warrant against him if the prime minister visited the city. While such an arrest is unlikely to fall within the mayor's authority, the statement indicated how far Mamdani is from the mainstream political approach to Israel within the US system.

The controversy that has generated the most media attention, though, is Mamdani's unwillingness to denounce the phrase ["globalize the intifada."](#) His explanation that the term signifies struggle and was even used by the Holocaust Museum in its Arabic translation of materials about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising angered many and was publicly denounced by the museum. More recently, Mamdani [softened his stance](#) by saying he will "discourage the use of the term," but this change in tone has done little to quiet the uproar caused by his earlier remarks.

[Polling by progressive firms](#) suggests that while for most of Mamdani's voters, domestic issues were crucial in their decision to support him, his positions on Israel not only did not hurt him but may have increased his voters' support for him. Perhaps more interestingly, heading into the general elections, [Mamdani is polling as the leading candidate among Jewish New Yorkers](#) in the four-person mayoral race, by [more than one polling firm](#).

### **Responses to Mamdani's Victory**

Mamdani's nomination was a significant victory for the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. In the lead-up to the primary, Mamdani received endorsements from national progressive figures like [Senator Bernie Sanders](#) and Congresswoman [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) (AOC). However, arguably the most consequential endorsement came from New York City Comptroller [Brad Lander](#). Mamdani's alliance with Lander, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the New York City government and a self-identified [liberal-Zionist](#), provided Mamdani with strong political cover against accusations of antisemitism. It also had practical significance, as Lander, who was also running in the primary election, encouraged his supporters to rank Mamdani as their second choice in the ranked-choice voting system. Andrew Cuomo, on the other hand, had the backing of some in the Democratic establishment and received endorsements from centrist Democratic figures like [former President Bill Clinton](#) and [former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg](#).

Since the primary, only [four of the twelve Democrats](#) representing New York City in the US Congress have endorsed Mamdani. Notably, [Hakeem Jeffries](#) and [Chuck Schumer](#), both New Yorkers and the Democratic leaders in the House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively, spoke with Mamdani but stopped short of endorsing him. Other Democratic leaders, such as Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, who is Jewish, have [criticized](#) Mamdani for failing to address antisemitic positions expressed by his supporters.

Most major Jewish organizations have chosen to remain silent. While Mamdani has received endorsements from anti-Zionist Jewish groups such as [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP), and Cuomo has gained support from numerous [Orthodox and Hasidic groups](#), mainstream Jewish organizations have mostly stayed on the sidelines.

Following Mamdani's victory, numerous Republican officials criticized him for his views, background, and perceived influence within the Democratic Party. President Donald Trump issued multiple statements, labeling Mamdani a ["Communist lunatic"](#) and questioning whether he is a [legal US citizen](#). Congressman Andy Ogles took it a step further, referring to Mamdani as ["little muhammad"](#) (sic) and [urging Attorney General Pam Bondi to deport him](#). Other Republicans used Mamdani's victory as an opportunity to portray the entire Democratic Party as far-left. Vice President JD Vance sarcastically congratulated Mamdani as the ["new](#)

[leader of the Democratic Party](#),” while New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik exclaimed that Mamdani would be the “[most effective foil for Republicans nationally](#).”

### **Assessment**

Mamdani’s victory rests on several unique conditions. He benefited from running in a decidedly Democratic city against a weak candidate, in favorable conditions for anti-establishment candidates, and especially those seen as strongly oppositional to the Trump administration. However, his election cannot be dismissed as a complete outlier; it reflects broader changes occurring in the Democratic Party regarding Israel.

Mamdani represents an emerging faction within the party that is younger, more politically active, more critical of Israel, and increasingly aligned with the Palestinian cause. Candidates like Mamdani are gaining ground amid the dissatisfaction among younger voters with the Democratic Party’s existing leadership. As progressive candidates run for political office, many are increasingly unwilling to accept the Democratic Party’s traditional stance on Israel. Just a few years ago, positions like those voiced by Mamdani would have made winning a race like this nearly impossible; now the only question is whether his positions on Israel had no effect or actually contributed to his victory. Although for candidates like Mamdani, views on Israel might not be the main campaign message, such views are unlikely to hold them back as they replace existing leaders.

This trend corresponds to public opinion data. Several recent surveys [indicate](#) that American public support for Israel has declined over the past several years. A March 2025 survey by the Pew Research Center found growing negative sentiment toward Israel among members of both the Democratic and Republican Parties and across nearly all age groups compared to 2022. Older Republicans have shifted less, but even in this group, views of Israel have worsened. A [Gallup survey published in July](#) recorded the lowest level of support for Israel (46%) in the 25 years of tracking this measure, alongside the highest level of support for Palestinians (33%), which was also unprecedented. Among Democrats, 59% expressed greater sympathy for Palestinians, compared to 21% for Israel. [The Gallup poll also found](#) that while support for Israel’s military action in Gaza remains high among Republicans, it is very low among Democrats and Independents. By age, only 9% of Americans between 18 and 34 approve of Israel’s actions in Gaza. In short, Democrats and younger Americans of both parties increasingly view Israel in a negative light.

This turn of events poses a major challenge for Israel. Assuming Israel continues on its current policy track, views among these groups are unlikely to change significantly. As a result, if and when Democrats return to power in Washington, Israel is almost certain to encounter a less friendly environment. Discussions of aid restrictions will become more common, and diplomatic backing may come at a higher cost. Even the current Democratic leadership, which identifies as strongly committed to Israel and its security, has been responsive to these shifts, as shown by a letter on July 29, 2025, signed by 40 Democratic senators criticizing Israel’s handling of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Lastly, the trends reflected in Mamdani’s victory have significant implications for the American Jewish community. By most accounts, Mamdani himself is not antisemitic. However, his views on Israel create a space for those who are antisemitic to express their hatred of Jews in

politically acceptable terms. For American Jews who support Israel, his rise is another manifestation of the growing tension within the Jewish community, which overwhelmingly supports the Democratic Party but is divided over Israel. Over time, this tension could force American Jews to choose between their support for Israel and their political identity. This, in turn, might make it more difficult for some Jews, particularly strong supporters of Israel, to remain within the Democratic Party, further weakening Israel's bipartisan support.

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