



# New York After the Electoral Earthquake: Why Did Zohran Mamdani Win? And Who Actually Lost ?

By: Dr. Mohammed Hassan Saad

Director of the Worldview Institute for International  
Relations and Diplomacy



تأسس مركز حمورابي للبحوث والدراسات الإستراتيجية عام 2008 بمدينة بابل (الحلة)، وحصل على شهادة التسجيل من دائرة المنظمات غير الحكومية المرقمة 1Z71874 بتاريخ 2012/12/25، بوصفه مركزاً علمياً بحثياً يهتم بدراسة الموضوعات السياسية والاجتماعية، فضلاً عن الاهتمام بالقضايا والظواهر الراهنة والمحتملة في الشأن المحلي والإقليمي والدولي، ويتعامل مع باحثين من مختلف التخصصات داخل العراق وخارجه، وتحتضن بغداد المقر الرئيسي للمركز.

- لا يجوز إعادة نشر أي من هذه الأوراق البحثية إلا بموافقة المركز، وبالإمكان الاقتباس بشرط ذكر المصدر كاملاً.
- لا تعبر الآراء الواردة في الورقة البحثية عن الاتجاهات التي يتبناها المركز وإنما تعبر عن رأي كاتبها.
- حقوق الطبع والنشر محفوظة لمركز حمورابي للبحوث والدراسات الاستراتيجية.

## للتواصل

**مركز حمورابي**

للبحوث والدراسات الاستراتيجية

العراق - بغداد - الكرادة

+964 7810234002

hcrsiraq@yahoo.com

www.hcrsiraq.net





In the heart of New York- a city that defines itself not merely as a point on the map but as the center of the world- there occurred something akin to a political earthquake. A tremor that did not shake buildings, but unsettled the deeper structures that have long shaped the rhythm of life and power within it.

This city of finance, media, and lobbying networks- accustomed to dictating to others the very meaning of "success"- found itself facing a moment of reckoning: How could a young candidate, a democratic socialist of South Asian descent and Muslim faith, surge ahead of a political, media, and financial machine that has been entrenched for decades? This is a victory that cannot be measured by votes alone, but by the meaning carried within those votes. In every working-class neighborhood that cast its ballot for Mamdani, a dual message was being written: the first, that the city wants to be rewritten from the ground up-from the people who pay rent, not those who own the towers, and the second, that the era of cities governed by the logic of markets rather than the logic of justice has reached its ethical end. New York, long seen as a mirror of American capitalism in its most intense form, has begun to redefine itself as a laboratory for social justice -a city learning from itself and confronting its own shadow within the Democratic Party, within the media, and within the networks of the deep state that would prefer Mamdani to remain nothing more than a "temporary electoral phenomenon."

But this time, the quake, in my view, was too deep to be contained. What happened in New York is not merely an electoral win, it is a shift in the architecture of American political imagination. In essence, it marks a transition from a "city of capital" to a "city of meaning," from an elite that decides to a grassroots base that redefines the possible.

**And from here, the real question emerges:**

**Why did Zohran Mamdani win? And who actually lost in this battle-one that exceeded the boundaries of the city and struck at the very soul of the Democratic Party itself?**

## First: A Historic Moment in Urban Politics: When the Boundaries of the Possible Are Redefined

History is not always recorded because an event is massive, but sometimes because it is precise, grounded in people's needs, and capable of shifting the tone of political discourse rather than its volume. Zohran Mamdani's victory was not merely an electoral incident, it represented a redefinition of what can be termed the "political city" of the twenty-first century. It was, unmistakably, the moment in which New York -the capital of finance, public relations, and party influence -began to rediscover itself as a living social entity rather than an economic system managed from above. Mamdani did not enter history simply by being the first Muslim of South Asian descent to assume the position, but because he disrupted the entrenched hierarchy of political legitimacy -one that has long confined access to power to those who master the art of navigating party structures, conforming to lobbyist interests, and aligning with the orientations of the deep state, rather than those who excel at listening to the public.

He rose from a locally grounded political base composed of volunteers and neighborhood residents -not from the channels of "big money" nor from the backrooms of tacit political alliances. In doing so, he confronted the "code of expertise," the "logic of hierarchical ascent," the dominance of lobbyist influence, and the grip of unrestrained capitalism that has rendered urban politics in the United States a closed field managed by an elite more concerned with controlling the narrative than governing the city itself.

New York -the city that has long defined itself as a laboratory of American civic life -voted for a program bold enough to place affordable housing, public transportation, and basic goods at the core of a new social contract. In other words, it voted for the proposition that justice is not a luxury in wealthy cities but a precondition for their sustainability. Accordingly, the mayor is no longer measured merely by his ability to attract investors or balance budgets, but by his capacity to redistribute the city itself -its spaces, its resources, and its public attention. The message was both clear and disruptive: citizens want the city to be governed, not its interests. They want a mayor who represents the lived realities of residents, not an intermediary between the people and the

system. For this reason, Mamdani's moment emerged as a foundational turning point in American urban politics -a moment in which political imagination is put to the test:

**Can a city as large as New York be governed by the principles of justice rather than the calculations of power?**

The ballot boxes responded: yes -and even if only for a moment, the boundaries of the possible have truly shifted.

Second: Three Socioeconomic Drivers of Victory: When the Program Prevails Over Propaganda  
Politics succeeds when it transforms from mere rhetoric into a tool of everyday life -this is precisely what Zohran Mamdani accomplished with remarkable proficiency. He enabled people to perceive politics not as an abstract symbolic system, but as an extension of their daily lived experience. While his opponents were absorbed in battles of signage, fearmongering, and financial leverage, his campaign focused on the precise engineering of the relationship between social pain and practical solutions. Thus, the program triumphed over propaganda, and concrete needs prevailed over empty slogans. His platform rested on three central pillars that can be summarized as follows:

### **A. The Economics of Daily Living**

Mamdani did not present an ideologically rigid program, rather, he offered a realistic map of everyday life: rent freezes, reduced public transportation costs, and expanded childcare support funded through progressive taxation targeting high rents and windfall incomes rather than the limited earnings of working families. He did what many politicians before him had not: he named the pain, then proposed a remedy for it. This approach moved his campaign from the corridors of theoretical discourse into the realities of neighborhoods -where "justice" ceased to be an abstract ethical term and became a housing policy, and where "dignity" was no longer a slogan but a bus that arrived on time.



### A. A Grassroots Machine Instead of a Donor Machine

In the face of a formidable arsenal of money and advertising, Mamdani chose a slower but more honest path -the path of the neighborhood, the building, and the open door. He relied on small donations from the very people he sought to represent, and on a large volunteer network working in alleys, streets, and small shops.

The presence of this grassroots base became his true asset -the human face of his campaign. When confronted with pressure from media outlets and major donors, the response emerged from the field: thousands of footsteps knocking on doors instead of thousands of dollars purchasing television airtime.

### B. Clear Ideological Positioning Without Evasion

At a time when American politics increasingly operates through calculated ambiguity, Mamdani chose to speak with principled clarity -on social justice, racial equity, and human rights, including an ethical position on Palestine. He neither softened his language nor resorted to “political cosmetics”, instead, he offered sincerity in an era dominated by obfuscation. Ironically, the very clarity that establishment actors warned would “alienate the median voter” produced the opposite effect. It reassured the public that what was said would indeed be implemented, allowing citizens to regain trust in politics as an ethical practice rather than a linguistic performance. Mamdani succeeded in merging moral clarity with organizational precision, combining a human-centered discourse with a technically grounded and realistic program. From this synthesis emerged a transformation: the shift of the city from a mass of voters into a community of citizens, and the shift of an electoral contest into an urban project that redefines who has the right to envision a just city.

### Third: The “Counter-Alliance”: When Fear Converges and Its Effectiveness Collapses

In every genuine political contest, fear tends to assemble before hope does. And as Zohran Mamdani began to approach victory, the coalition of fear mobilized with all its components:

financial media outlets, pro-(Israel)\* lobbying networks, segments of the traditional Democratic Party establishment, and the Republican Party, which viewed his candidacy as a symbolic threat to its narrative of the “disciplined city.”

Yet, despite its breadth, this coalition fell into a dual predicament: an excess of messaging and an absence of truth. It orchestrated a highly coordinated fear campaign against Mamdani and deployed every familiar tool used to undermine progressive candidates -portraying him as “radical,” questioning his patriotism, insinuating “foreign ties,” and ultimately weaponizing the issue of (Israel) and Gaza to erode his moral credibility. But these instruments -long effective in triggering voters’ instinctive anxieties -collided this time with a new civic consciousness that has been forming in urban America since the 2020 protests. For New York voters no longer viewed “progressives” as a threat but as an opportunity to repair a city increasingly governed by corporate logic rather than the needs of its residents. Pro-(Israel) lobbying groups bet heavily on demonizing Mamdani for his principled stance on Gaza. Yet the graphic scenes of mass civilian casualties circulating across media and activist networks rendered this fear-mongering machinery obsolete in the face of an overwhelming wave of humanitarian empathy.

Urban American voters came to understand that solidarity with victims is not antithetical to “security,” but rather its ethical foundation. In this context, moral conviction transformed into deliberate electoral behavior -not a fleeting sentiment. As for the Republican Party and former President Trump, they attempted to use a progressive victory in New York to intimidate other blue cities. Their threats to cut federal support or restrict funding failed to frighten anyone; instead, they reinforced a sense of urban dignity and made voting for Mamdani an act of civic resistance against punitive populism.

A further barrier was the “deep state” within the Democratic Party itself-networks embedded in administrative layers, institutions, and capital-linked interests. These actors did not want to see a young candidate like Mamdani succeed, fearing his win would become a precedent inspiring other city and proving that grassroots mobilization can defeat institutional financing. They

\* For the sake of scientific integrity and the necessities of accurate translation, the word “Israel” has been retained. This does not imply the center’s recognition of it, and what is written represents the author’s opinion and ideas.

responded with silent obstruction: lukewarm support, hesitant media coverage, and subtle messaging about his “lack of readiness.”

But the urban base that emerged from the waves of 2018, 2020, and 2024 was no longer tameable. It had learned that its power lies in organization rather than authorization, in mobilization rather than permission. Thus, the “counter-alliance” collapsed before the coherence of one simple yet transformative idea: political legitimacy is not granted from above; it is built from below -and fear, regardless of its sources, disintegrates when confronted by a living reality determined to change. Fear converged from every direction, but it fell apart in the face of a rare urban moment: a moment when citizens recognized that what frightens the elite is not street disorder, but justice when it is genuinely enacted.

Forth: How Was the Coalition Defeated? When the Civic Base Outperforms the Manufactured Security Narrative

The counter- coalition did not fall because of organizational weakness, but because it confronted a reality no longer willing to accept the old narratives. In recent years, urban consciousness in New York has shifted profoundly: citizens no longer internalize “danger” as a pretext for preserving concentrated power, nor do they view “security” as an excuse for starving public services or marginalizing communities.

Voters increasingly recognize that genuine security is not measured by the number of street cameras but by the number of families able to live with dignity, move freely, and access healthcare without fear of financial ruin.

Against this emerging awareness, the media, party, and security apparatus attempted to resurrect an artificial narrative -claiming that Mamdani’s victory would make the city less safe and that “progressives” lack the competence required to manage complex urban systems. Yet the public response was decisive: those who live in the city understand what truly makes it safe. It is not more patrols but more justice -not cuts to transportation and housing budgets but investments in people before infrastructure. This shift reflects the transformation of civic consciousness from ideological affiliation to assessments grounded in everyday lived experience. It also sets the stage



for understanding the concrete drivers behind Mamdani's victory, which can be summarized as follows:

### **A.A Civic Identity That Outpaces National Ideology**

New York voters did not support Mamdani because of his alignment with a particular faction or party, but because they perceived him as a civic leader capable of governing the city according to the logic of its residents rather than the logic of Washington. The vote transcended the traditional Democratic -Republican divide and reflected a new civic awareness that views municipal governance as a laboratory for everyday justice rather than a battleground for national symbolic conflicts.

### **B.Daily Realities Outweigh Alarmist Political Culture**

When rent consumes half of one's income, public transportation becomes a daily burden, and healthcare remains a privilege rather than a right, fear-driven narratives about the "red threat" or "chaotic leftism" lose all relevance. Mamdani did not wage a battle over identity; he waged a battle over lived experience. By anchoring his campaign in the concrete details of daily life, he inverted the politics of fear -transforming economic discourse into a tool that disarmed his opponents, who could not answer one simple question: How are people supposed to live?

### **C. Empathy for Gaza Becomes Electoral Behavior**

For the first time in New York's political history, moral conviction transitioned from the streets into the ballot box. Hundreds of thousands who marched against the war recognized in Mamdani not merely a sympathetic politician but a representative of their ethical commitments. Efforts to criminalize solidarity failed, and "Gaza" shifted from a political liability to an ethical compass that reshaped the city's understanding of freedom. Voters understood that a leader who stands with the oppressed abroad is unlikely to remain silent about the oppressed in the Bronx, Queens, or Brooklyn. Accordingly, the narrative of manufactured security collapsed before a new legitimacy rooted in trust and civic participation.

In clear terms, the civic base prevailed because it grounded its notion of security in justice rather than fear. The old alliances faltered because they realized -too late -that cities are not governed by rhetoric but by the meaning everyday life affords their residents. In this sense, Mamdani's victory was not merely an electoral win; it was a moment of profound exposure -revealing that the true threat was never the "new left," but the stagnation that had long concealed itself behind the language of "security" to protect entrenched privileges from change.

### **Fifth: Governing New York: A Difficult Yet Achievable Agenda**

When Zohran Mamdani stepped onto the stage after the announcement of his victory, he knew he was not inheriting a city, but a deeply imbalanced equation between justice and power. In New York, as in most major metropolitan centers, the challenge goes far beyond the day-to-day administration of public affairs. It is, in essence, an effort to reengineer the social contract between the local state and its residents. This is not merely a battle over legislation -it is a battle over visions: How can a city considered the global capital of finance, media, and culture redefine success not through wealth, but through justice?

Mamdani understands that the path ahead is far from smooth. He faces an entrenched and rigid bureaucracy, a predatory real-estate economy, and financial interests intertwined with politics at every corner of the city's governance. Yet he enters this arena with something his predecessors lacked: a popular mandate born out of a collective sense of suffocation-captured poignantly by a voter in Queens who told a local newspaper, "We're not asking for a miracle, just for the city to be run as if the people who live in it are human." Based on this context, Mamdani's agenda can be distilled into the following pillars:

#### **1. Housing as a Right, Not a Commodity**

At the core of Mamdani's platform lies the issue of affordable housing. Despite spending billions on luxury glass towers, the city suffers from a severe shelter crisis, with homelessness rising at unprecedented rates.

Mamdani proposes a radical -yet increasingly popular -idea among young people and the shrinking middle class: converting certain unoccupied properties owned by investment funds into socially managed housing under transparent civic oversight.

To many, this may seem idealistic, but for a growing segment of New Yorkers, the “free market” has simply left them without a home.

## **2 .Public Transit as an Instrument of Justice**

It is no exaggeration to say that Mamdani’s plan to expand the public transit network is more than an infrastructure project -it is a philosophy of citizenship. In his view, transportation is not merely a means of mobility but a democratic indicator of who has the right to move.

He aims to reduce commuting costs and connect marginalized neighborhoods to major subway lines, reintegrating the “geographical periphery” into the city’s political and economic core.

## **3 .A People-First Economy**

Mamdani does not advance a charitable notion of “poverty alleviation.” Instead, he calls for a real redistribution of local wealth through a more equitable progressive tax system and direct investment in small and cooperative enterprises. His project aims to liberate the city from a speculative capitalist model and shift it toward a civic economy grounded in participation.

## **4. The Moral Stance as a Political Lever**

In a world where the line between ethics and politics grows increasingly blurred, Mamdani insists that justice is indivisible. A leader who defends the rights of Harlem’s residents cannot remain silent about atrocities in Gaza. This principled ethical approach grants him rare moral capital, even as it exposes him to constant confrontation with conservative media, external lobbying groups, and entrenched political interests. Yet he continues to wager that honesty, in an age of performative politics, may be more powerful than any well-funded campaign. Mamdani’s agenda is not easy -but it is not impossible either. He is operating within a new philosophy of urban governance: that city administration should serve as an instrument of justice, not a mechanism for managing decline; and that the success of a mayor should be measured not by investment volume, but by whether residents feel seen and heard.



He may not fulfill every promise he has made. But more importantly, he has reopened a question that political elites tried long to bury: Can a major capitalist city be governed through a framework of human justice?

Mamdani's victory has not yet provided the answer. But it has made the question possible -and that alone, in an era of political paralysis, is an achievement not to be underestimated.

### **Sixth: Beyond Mamdani: From Event to Model**

Every transient political victory carries within it the potential either to become a historical model or to be consumed by the noise of the moment. Zohran Mamdani's victory is not merely the conclusion of an electoral contest; it marks the beginning of an intellectual and ethical test in one of the world's most symbolic cities. From the moment he took the stage, he was not celebrated as an individual fulfilling a personal ambition, but as a symbol of an entire generation redefining "political success" outside the traditional frameworks of money, media, and institutional loyalty. Mamdani broke the old spell: the assumption that the path to power necessarily runs through prior approval from donors and hidden party networks. He entered the political scene through a door that had not existed before -the door of the people -and, from there, redefined the notion of legitimacy. Legitimacy is not granted from above, it is built from below. It is not measured by acceptance in the press or in corridors of influence, but by the authenticity of one's connection to the civic base.

Yet his victory did not come without adversaries. The deep state within the Democratic Party, with its entrenched bureaucracy, institutional caution, and suspicion of progressive discourse, openly bristled at his rise. Mamdani does not merely threaten individual positions of power, he challenges the philosophy of governance itself. He shifts the center of gravity from elites to citizens, from tactical calculations to ethical stances. For this reason, entrenched forces now seek to "contain" him within the constraints of daily administration, burdening him with the bureaucratic minutiae that have exhausted previous mayors. What sets Mamdani apart is that he does not perceive governance as a transactional management of the feasible, but as a laboratory for expanding what is possible. If sustained and successful, this experiment could mark a turning point in urban American consciousness and serve as a model demonstrating that a city can be

socialist in justice, capitalist in innovation, and humane in principle. Even if it fails, his attempt will leave a mark, reminding citizens that someone dared to govern with moral courage in an era where ethics is often treated as a liability.

Mamdani has not promised the citizens a utopia, but something simpler and deeper: a city just enough for its people to feel that they are part of its story. In a world where cities grow ever larger and meaning diminishes, this alone constitutes a complete revolution of significance. New York, long a mirror of the United States, may now become its conscience. Should Mamdani succeed, he will not merely have won an office, he will have inaugurated a new era of urban politics -an era in which success is measured by the humanity of power, not its dominance. Only then will it be said that New York -the city that once exported wealth -has begun to export meaning.