

DISCUSSION PAPER

Mamdani for Change: Lessons for Pakistan

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Mamdani's victory is the victory of immigrants, it is the victory of South Asian Muslim community, and it is the victory of the democratic socialists who want to live in an affordable New York City. Zohran Mamdani became the first-ever South Asian mayor of New York in the history of United States of America. His historic win as New York City's first Muslim mayor marks more than a political milestone; it is a cultural and moral statement about beginning an era of fear and division. His refusal to apologise for who he is, a Muslim, South Asian, immigrant, and democratic socialist, was not defiance for its own sake. It was a declaration that integrity and faith can coexist with leadership in the modern world, as highlighted by Faisal Kutty in his article, Mamdani's Win: Lesson in Moral Leadership and Representation, The Express Tribune, 2025. Mamdani's victory speech was personal and political. It spoke to a generation raised under the shadow of 9/11, where Muslim identity has been scrutinised, politicized, and too often, vilified. For decades, Muslim Americans have been told to integrate by erasing difference, to participate by muting faith, and to succeed by staying silent about injustice. Zohran's victory is a testament to resilience, constant belief and determination to this cause. His victory gives us lessons that nothing can stop you either President is calling your cause a "choice between communism and common sense" or 20 billionaires pulling out their checkbooks to stop mamdani from becoming mayor of United States most populous city as published by Oliver O'Connell in one of their article Trump says it's 'communism or common sense' after democrat Mamdani wins NYC mayoral election, BBC, 2025 and by Rebecca schneid in her article The billionaires who failed to stop Zohran mamdani, and how much they spent, TIME, 2025.

As reported by Maria Tsvetkova in Reuters in one of her articles, the surge in voters was driven by a wave of young voters, newcomers to the city, first-time voters, and renters. According to NBC News exit polls, many of them were galvanised by the 34-year-old Mamdani's proposals to lower the cost of living in the most populous U.S. City and perhaps the most expensive. "Just the idea that someone young and new can try new ideas and bring new policies into the city was inspiring to me," said Michael Darby, a 26-year-old bartender and actor, after voting in

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Brooklyn. Mamdani won four out of five boroughs, cementing the lead he established with his surprise victory in the June primary, when he knocked off Cuomo. Faisal Kutty argues in his article Mamdani's win: lesson in moral leadership and representation written in The Express Tribune in November 2025, that Zohran Mamdani may be the mayor of one city but his message travels far beyond its borders: that justice is not a western ideal or an ideal one; it is a human one. His success challenges both Islamophobes who fear Muslim power and Muslim leaders who misuse it. In his refusal to apologise, he has done something remarkable: he has made faith visible again—not as a threat, but as a bridge between conviction and compassion. The Nation, in its article "Lesson Leadership from Mamdani's Victory in November 2025," lks about the visionary and ambitious leader rewriting the political history of New York City. An individual neither backed by billionaires nor born into a political dynasty, he was defamed during his campaign, labelled a communist lunatic, inexperienced, a democratic socialist, and an immigrant. Despite all the hostility, the opposition that tried to bring him down now sees him as New York City's first-ever South Asian Muslim mayor at just 34 years old. The lesson in leadership from Mamdani's triumph is clear: a leader who focuses on the everyday problems of common citizens, and dares to address core economic crises such as housing and rental issues, the cost of living, wage inequality, and unfair tax distribution, becomes a true democratic representative of the people. His victory offers timeless lessons for Pakistan and Pakistani youth to focus on local government infrastructure and their individual responsibility in highlighting the key local problems of Pakistan and proposing key policy frameworks, where our political culture remains dominated by personalities rather than policies. Mamdani's rise in New York reflects a new world order in which people support causes and have the power to transform systems. As highlighted by Sartaj Khan in his article in The Friday Times published on November 10, 2025, politically, Mamdani's victory sends a powerful message at home and abroad. Despite being branded a "communist" by former President Donald Trump, who even threatened to cut federal funds as Mamdani's popularity surged, the new mayor's triumph reflects a revival of progressive politics in the United States. It also resonates internationally, symbolising the capacity of diverse, working-class, immigrant communities to forge political unity in the face of polarization. For Karachiites, Mamdani's rise holds for their own city, another sprawling, multi-ethnic metropolis facing complex civic challenges. New York's experience shows that addressing urban problems requires collective action, inclusive representation, and a shared civic vision that transcends ethnicity and religion. The lesson is clear: cities thrive when diversity becomes a source of strength. Karachiites are facing shortages of water, electricity outages and load shedding, and a lack of basic facilities such as

health, education, transport, and leisure. Pakistanis can learn to lead with sheer determination and belief in order to have their cities better equipped with essential needs and answer the common people rather than the elites. We need to work with unity, engagement, and consultation rather than division, grudges, and ethnic differences.

In USA TODAY, Eduardo Cuevas suggests that it's a dramatic shift from moderate Mayor Eric Adams, who won just four years ago, and a flashback to Adams progressive predecessors, Bill de Blasio, who ran on economic inequality."New York is accustomed to a pendulum swing," Christina Geer, a political science professor at Fordham University and co-host of the political podcast "FAQ NYC", told USA TODAY. He further said, this is the time to be bold,' this is the time to try something new, because, clearly, whatever we have been doing is not working, right?'. Leading up to the June Democratic primary, the former governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral, from a storied democratic dynasty, was the prohibitive favorite to replace Adams, whose tenure had become mired in corruption scandals. However, as de Blasio did twelve years earlier, Mamdani identified the growing crisis of unaffordability as his city's most pressing problem and grabbed attention, especially from the young and online, by promising to address it. As highlighted by EconomicLens in their article According to a report by The New York Times report, Mamdani's grassroots strategy and inclusive messaging helped him win over neighborhoods traditionally overlooked by political elites. "His journey proves that with the right strategy, a clear message, and relentless perseverance, anyone can rise to make a difference. Zohran Mamdani is a true example of leadership that empowers communities." Lessons for Pakistan: Mamdani's reliance on volunteers and door-to-door campaigning shows that Pakistan's parties could benefit from genuine community engagement rather than elite patronage. At 34, Mamdani demonstrates the potential of young leaders. Pakistan's political culture often sidelines the youth in favour of dynastic heirs. Pakistan can empower its youth to gain maximum outcomes. His unapologetic embrace of identity highlights the need for Pakistan to normalise diversity in politics, including that of religious and ethnic minorities. His use of social media platforms suggests that Pakistan's parties must modernise their outreach beyond traditional rallies. Mamdani's rise without billionaire backing or a family dynasty shows that merit-based leadership can succeed.

Zohran Mamdani's 2025 victory as New York City's youngest and first South Asian Muslim mayor was not just political upset but a demonstration of grassroots power, minority representation, and digital age campaigning. His success in winning 1,036,051 votes (50.4%) against Andrew Cuomo's 854,995(41.6%) and Curtis Sliwa's 146,137(7.1%), with a turnout of 39.9% from 5.1 million registered voters, as reported by NBC News, shows how progressive,

community-driven politics can triumph over dynastic and establishment figures. For Pakistan, the lesson is clear: empower the youth, embrace diversity, modernise campaigning, and prioritise grassroots engagement over elite patronage. Mamdani's victory illustrates that authentic leadership, grassroots energy, and inclusive representation can reshape politics, even in polarised societies. For Pakistan, the lesson is to break free from dynastic dominance, empower the youth, and embrace diversity because the future belongs to leaders who build trust from the ground up.

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