

## WSJ Print Edition

*Mamdani's victory signals the rise of leftwing populism.*

# The People's Republic of New York City

The easy victory by Zohran Mamdani in Tuesday's Democratic mayoral primary marks a sharp left turn for New York City. But perhaps more important is that it signals the rise of leftwing economic populism as a leading alternative to the MAGA Republicans.

Democrats nationwide have been debating how to respond to their defeats in 2024, and the victory by the 33-year-old assemblyman is a triumph for the Bernie Sanders-Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez faction. Mr. Mamdani's 43.5% plus 11.3% for progressive Brad Lander gave the left a clear majority. Andrew Cuomo, the former Governor and establishment favorite, had a disappointing 36.4%.

This was the first round of a ranked-choice voting primary, but Mr. Mamdani's lead is large enough that he will be the Democratic standard bearer in November's general election. We keep hearing that ranked-choice voting will yield moderate candidates. But in practice it appears to magnify what primary elections already are: events for highly motivated partisans who closely follow politics.

Mr. Mamdani is charismatic and a fluent communicator on social media. He won easily among young progressives, while Mr. Cuomo carried the traditional Democrats on Manhattan's Upper West Side and eastern Queens. Mr. Mamdani's main theme is affordability, and it resonated in a city that is increasingly unaffordable for the middle-class.

The irony is that this "affordability crisis" is the result of failed Democratic governance. Rent control and eviction limits have caused landlords to take tens of thousands of apartments off the market. A higher minimum wage raised the cost of food and other basics, while rich union contracts keep transportation inefficient and costly. Climate bans and mandates have raised energy costs.

Mr. Mamdani's solution is more socialism. He wants even higher taxes on already overtaxed businesses and high earners (top city tax rate: 14.78%), government-run grocery stores, free bus rides, and a mandatory freeze on 43% of the city's rental units. These policies won't work, but they sound appealing to Democrats who don't think New York works now.

The November election could be crowded, with Mayor Eric Adams running as an independent and radio host Curtis Sliwa as the GOP nominee. Mr. Cuomo has left the door open to an independent run, but his best service would be to drop out. He is a spent political force who thought he could win with a famous name and being Mamdani-lite on pensions, the minimum wage and more.



If Mr. Cuomo stays in the race, he could divide the anti-Mamdani vote. The best chance to beat Mr. Mamdani is with a united-front campaign that rallies behind a single candidate, though even that is probably a long shot.

Mr. Mamdani declared himself on election night to be “a model for the Democratic Party,” and among the party base he may be. He echoes all of the leftwing social policies that hurt the party in 2024, and on Israel he sounds like Columbia University demonstrators. It's hard to believe the most Jewish city in America could elect a mayor who favors a boycott of Israel, but that is today's Democratic Party.

The populist left poses obvious problems for national Democrats who want to move the party back toward the middle. But Republicans would be wise not to gloat. If Trumponomics fails to deliver strong growth and gains in real incomes, the leftwing populists will be waiting as the main alternative.

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